

Changing Perceptions and Security Challenges Related to Descendants of Immigrants in France

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The perception of descendants of French immigrants by mainstream society and policymakers and the nature of the country's security challenges have significantly changed in recent decades. This study explores these changes and analyses their impact on France's social cohesion and security environment. The situation of the group concerned (who are often referred to, mistakenly, as second and third-generation immigrants) is particular since they were born in France (and, in many cases, already have French nationality). However, they often face discrimination, exclusion and social prejudice.

During the research, I meticulously analysed the results of empirical studies on this topic in the French and international literature.

The study is based on the comprehensive analysis of the former and actual French laws, analyses and studies, and the careful analysis of statistical data provided by the French Government.

In the second half of the 20th century, immigrants typically arrived in France for economic and employment purposes, but their descendants faced a very different situation. In many cases, they start from a disadvantaged and marginalised position. In recent years, public attitudes towards the descendants of immigrants have been in transition, mainly due to the media, political discourse and current international events.

Security challenges include the potential for radicalisation (which may stem from a sense of “belonging nowhere”, as in many cases they do not feel French and have few ties to their parent's country of origin) and an increase in certain types of crime, particularly (but not exclusively) concentrated in the peripheral areas of large cities. These problems are often the result of economic and social exclusion, different educational and labour market opportunities and other (often misunderstood) cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: France, immigration, descendants, security

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Introduction

The increasing arrival of people and groups with cultural characteristics not common in Western Europe is a major issue in the political arena and the social and everyday life of almost all European countries. Furthermore, France, because of its particular geographical and historical characteristics and its role on the international stage, is particularly exposed not only to the challenges posed by the recently arrived immigrants but also to the relatively new dilemmas posed by people who have been living in the country for some time, and many of whom are already nationals. Not only does France have to contend with a relatively stable year-on-year influx of recent immigrants due to its attractive economic and social characteristics, but also with a large number of multigenerational descendants of immigrants, partly due to its colonial past. It is important to distinguish between these two categories of persons since recent immigrants have entirely different backgrounds and motivations and face completely different problems from those who may not have had the experience of migrating, the decision to migrate and, in many cases, have already acquired French nationality.

The generation whose parents' arrival the country was prepared for, the labour market, the factories and the state welcomed them with open arms, as the events and changes in the world created a desperate need for labour. Their children, widely assumed to be in a much easier position, face many problems in their daily lives and their integration into society. On the one hand, the jobs mentioned above are generally not equipped to provide livelihoods and jobs for the new generations, and they may also face rejection from the host society (to some extent due to past and recent events). This generation is searching for itself, as they have not experienced migration, have not been involved in the decision to migrate and therefore may not identify with it. They are often confronted with the fact that they no longer feel like they belong in the "sending" country, but they also do not feel like they belong in the "receiving" country, France. In extreme cases, this typical case of "between two chairs under the bench" can lead to the radicalisation of one part of the generation concerned.

In this paper, I will present statistics on immigrants and their descendants, and then I will discuss the role that migration has played in France's daily life and political scene through the example of historical changes and altering legislation. I will then analyse the current situation of descendants of immigrants and first-generation immigrants and the challenges they face in France. Through these examples, I will demonstrate why the descendants' situation radically differs from the previous generation's and how this discrepancy can lead to radicalisation in some extreme cases.

In the language of numbers

In order to understand the issues and problems that arise, I think it is important to clarify some basic concepts that I will use in this paper.

An immigrant is a person who was born abroad as a foreign national and is currently living in France. Therefore, we do not include citizens born abroad as French nationals.

However, it should be noted that, by definition, a person born abroad as a foreigner who acquires French nationality remains an immigrant.

Second-generation immigrants (*descendant d'immigrés de deuxième génération*), or descendants of immigrants, are defined as people born in France to at least one parent who is not a French citizen. It does not include people who arrived in France as children with their parents.

Third-generation immigrants (*descendant d'immigrés de troisième génération*) are citizens born in France with at least one grandparent who is an immigrant, i.e. not born in the country.

A person without an immigrant background (*personne sans ascendance migratoire*) is a person who is neither an immigrant nor a descendant of an immigrant, who was not born in an overseas territory of France or who is not a descendant of such a person.²

In order to understand the situation and difficulties of the descendants of immigrants in France, it is necessary to look at the migration processes affecting the country and the composition and characteristics of the immigrant population.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (*Institut national de statistique et des études économiques, INSEE*), the first census in modern French history to include citizenship data in the census questionnaires was the 1851 census.

From this, it is clear that the motivation, composition and intensity of migration to France are constantly changing and in flux. While in the 1800s, economic reasons dominated, with Swiss, northern Italian and Belgian immigrants predominating, after the Second World War, the labour motive became dominant, which to some extent alleviated the pressure on the French labour market resulting from demographic problems and the loss of life in the World War. Subsequently, until the 1973 oil crisis, migration for family reunification was the dominant form. However, the crisis forced France, like many other countries, to suspend its immigration and family reunification programmes. The enlargement of the European Union and the economic crisis of 2008–2009 have also brought marked changes in immigration figures, as has the 2011 'Arab Spring' and the Covid–19 pandemic.³

France, due to its former colonial status, has received large numbers of immigrants from the Maghreb⁴ and former colonial countries, not only in the past but also nowadays. Nothing shows this better than the fact that in 1975, of the 3.4 million registered foreigners, some 710,000 were of Algerian origin, and the latest figures show that this trend has continued, with 47.5% of the approximately 7 million foreigners coming from Africa, 12.7% from Algeria, 12% from Morocco and 4.5% from Tunisia.

However, the proportion of immigrants in the French population is increasing not only in numbers but also in proportion, from 5% in 1946 and 7.4% in 1975 to 10.3% in 2021. New arrivals are 200,000 per year, which illustrates the impact of globalisation and the growing propensity for mobility, the increasing spread of the internet and

² INSEE 2023a.

³ HAMILTON et al. 2004.

⁴ Geopolitically, the Maghreb region includes Morocco, Western Sahara, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

telecommunications, and the historical and geographical links mentioned earlier on international mobility.⁵

France is one of the few countries in Western Europe where population growth is relatively slow but steady due to several factors, in addition to the arrival of immigrants and birth rates. According to statistics, there is one emigrant for every four immigrants in the country, most of whom leave the country because they have completed their studies, expired their fixed-term employment contract or retired and then returned to their country of origin. In terms of fertility rates, one in five births belongs to an immigrant mother (around 143,000 out of 760,000), and while the average fertility rate in France is 1.88, the average for 'native' French is 1.77 and the average for immigrants is 2.6 (with some differences, of course, such as 2.5 for immigrants from the Maghreb and 3.3 for immigrants from other African countries).⁶

It is also noteworthy that around a third of French people live in a neighbourhood where the proportion of immigrants exceeds 10% and that more than half of the Algerian immigrants (56%) live in the Saint-Denis district (suburbs) of Paris, which is also widely considered to be a hotbed of segregation.

Descendants of immigrants in society

In line with the above, the statistics show that not only is the proportion of immigrants in relation to the total population increasing (1968: 3.2%; 1990: 4.2%; 2011: 5.6%; 2021: 6.9%) but also in parallel and as a consequence, the descendants of immigrants are becoming increasingly numerous in French society (2005: 4.2%; 2011: 6.5%; 2021: 7.3%). Since the early 2000s, the composition of the immigrant population has been steadily diversifying, with an increasing number of countries of origin. It should be noted, however, that 41% of the new arrivals in 2019 came from an African country, 33% from Europe (the right of free movement and residence within the EU facilitates their migration) and 15% from Asia.

It is an interesting fact, although not unexpected, given the historical background, that around 80% of the descendants of immigrants over 50 have European ancestors since the trend at the time their parents arrived in France (before the 1973 oil crisis) was migration from European countries. By contrast, in the under-18s, only 16% of those concerned have parents of European origin, 41% from the Maghreb and 20% from other African countries. For those with European ancestry, the number of conflicts and problems arising from cultural differences is much lower, as they come from almost the same cultural background and from a society with almost the same composition and expectations.

Contrary to what was previously assumed, 57% of the descendants of immigrants have only one immigrant parent (the other being a French national), and these are typically parents who decided to migrate at a young age before starting a family, as the older the newcomer, the more likely they are to arrive, the more likely it is that the parents will

⁵ INSEE 2022.

⁶ INSEE 2023b.

meet before the journey, in which case both parents of the offspring are immigrants (this is the reason why this proportion is reversed for Turks, 65% of descendants have both parents who are immigrants).

Around 10.2% of the under-60s are third-generation immigrants (4.8 million people), but less than 1% have all four grandparents who were immigrants. Those in this category typically (90%) have European ancestry (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese), but the proportion of people under 18 with African ancestry is rising rapidly.

The spatial distribution of immigrants and their descendants is uneven, with a strong over-representation of these groups in urban agglomerations, particularly in the Île-de-France region and around Lyon and Marseille.

Although around 10% of the French society is made up of immigrants, the figure is 20% in the Paris region and around 32% in Saint-Denis. Moreover, cities and regions close to the borders tend to have a higher proportion of immigrants, and it is noteworthy that 23 départements have half of the French population, while 13 départements have half of the immigrant population, which underlines the concerns about the inequality of territorial distribution, as the concentration of immigrants in smaller areas can be a source of many problems (such as social integration and similar issues). The spatial distribution of descendants also follows this pattern, as they remain in their parents' environment due to the strong ties with their parents: around half of the descendants are concentrated in 12 counties.⁷

The political focus on immigration issues in France

With immigration being so central to French life, it is important to consider how policy addresses the challenges and problems immigrants pose. There is a general perception that the French political elite is dismissive of immigration and migration. However, a closer look reveals that the situation is far from clear-cut, as it depends to a large extent on who is leading the country.

Legislation

Although the first accurate data series on immigration issues is only found in the 1851 census, looking at French data, the phenomenon itself dates back much earlier. However, migration processes are invariably adaptive, reflecting the social, economic and global political changes at the time. It is for this reason that, while in the second half of the 1800s, migrants, mostly from Europe, were mainly motivated by economic reasons to change their place of residence, in the period between the two world wars, migration for employment became increasingly dominant to compensate for the serious demographic and labour market problems, and was gradually replaced by migration for family reunification in the later years (late 1960s, 1970s).⁸

⁷ INSEE 2023c.

⁸ HAMILTON et al. 2004.

One of the tasks of the country's political system is to keep abreast of changes and to adapt the legal and legislative environment to changing circumstances. This was no different in France in the case of immigration, where the dynamic changes in immigration legislation since the 1980s have been witnessed, and it is worth examining how the focus and target audience of the legislation has changed over the years in light of changes in migration processes.

The Pasqua laws of 1986 and 1993 affected foreign students studying in France (they were not allowed to work in the country after graduation), families (the waiting time for family reunification applications increased), non-French spouses of French citizens (they could not obtain a permanent residence permit, if they had not resided or arrived in the country in accordance with the legal conditions prior to the marriage), and the descendants of immigrants born in France (tightened the conditions for obtaining French nationality).⁹ This law was repealed by the 1998 Guigou law,¹⁰ which again allowed the children of foreign parents to acquire French nationality on reaching the age of majority, provided certain conditions were met. The descendants of immigrants were also (partially) covered by the Chévenement law,¹¹ which institutionalised the 'brain drain' since it was intended to facilitate the employment of highly qualified workers and graduates. The 2003¹² and 2006¹³ laws, which were named after Nicolas Sarkozy, then President of the Republic and Minister of the Interior, further tightened the rules by introducing a 'selective immigration policy', to the detriment of less well-off immigrants, and by reducing the number of asylum seekers.

Nicolas Sarkozy was first confronted with the challenges posed by migrants as Minister of the Interior, notably in the context of the 2005 riots in France. He called people living in cheap public housing (*habitation à loyer modéré*, HLM) in the suburbs a mob, adding to existing tensions. Sarkozy also took a firm stance on migration during his presidency of the Republic, as he was responsible for the so-called 'selective immigration policy' ('immigration choisie'), which meant that only economically and socially useful immigrants were welcome and encouraged by the French state.¹⁴

Presidential election campaigns

The presidential elections of the Republic were and are also heavily influenced by immigration issues; in the 2002 elections, Jean-Marie Le Pen,¹⁵ for example, would have taken his usual radical line, including excluding people from the labour market who are immigrants or have an immigrant background and banning migration for family reunification

⁹ Loi n° 86-1025 du 9 septembre 1986 relative aux conditions d'entrée et de séjour des étrangers en France; Loi n° 93-1027 du 24 août 1993 relative à la maîtrise de l'immigration et aux conditions d'entrée, d'accueil et de séjour des étrangers en France.

¹⁰ Loi n° 98-170 du 16 mars 1998 relative à la nationalité.

¹¹ Loi n° 98-349 du 11 mai 1998 relative à l'entrée et au séjour des étrangers en France et au droit d'asile.

¹² Loi n° 2003-1119 du 26 novembre 2003 relative à la maîtrise de l'immigration, au séjour des étrangers en France et à la nationalité.

¹³ Loi n° 2006-911 du 24 juillet 2006 relative à l'immigration et à l'intégration.

¹⁴ HARZOUNE 2022.

¹⁵ LE PEN 2002.

altogether. Jaques Chirac¹⁶ strongly focused on abolishing “ghettos”. At the same time, French society was so shocked that Le Pen, who held extreme right-wing views, had made it to the second round that Chirac became President of the Republic with an unprecedented unity, winning 82% of the vote.

Twenty years later, Marine Le Pen¹⁷ and Emmanuel Macron¹⁸ reached the second round of the elections, where ideas on migration issues were also put forward. Both candidates, although with different emphases, stressed the need to reform the Schengen system and rationalise deportations, as well as the reform of the asylum system and illegal migration.

It is clear from the programmes that French politics is constantly trying to keep abreast of events and changes on the international scene. However, the dynamic and specific nature of the situation means that it can only do so with some delay. For example, a comprehensive reform of the asylum system and a reform of the French residence permit system are long overdue. However, world events continue to challenge the immigration systems of France and almost all countries, so these reforms are being delayed and are still to come.

Generational differences, challenges

However, what receives little or no attention today, both in politics and in social dialogue, is the integration of immigrants’ descendants, the promotion of their integration and the problems related to this. This is a group of people who have not experienced the difficulties of migration, who have not had to decide to leave their home country or country of origin (because they were either very young or not alive at the time) and who have not had to face the difficult conditions in their country of origin. Why should the French State pay more attention to integrating the descendants of immigrants?

This is necessary for a number of reasons: for example, the fact that these people have not participated in emigration in practice can easily lead them to feel that they no longer have a strong connection with their country of origin, that they no longer feel they belong there (despite their parents’ efforts to preserve traditions), and that in France (although they often have citizenship) they feel like outsiders, whether because of their skin colour, their origin or their place of residence. The fact that immigrants and their descendants very often live in suburban housing estates where their numbers increase over time, thus creating – even if unknowingly and unintentionally – a form of spatial segregation may also be a major factor in this process. As a result, because they will, after a while, have neither the opportunity nor the desire, the possibility and frequency of contact with French society will be considerably reduced, which will become a counterproductive process so that if the descendant wants to integrate, he or she may not be able to, because he or she will be rejected by society in some way, which will make him or her subsequently make no

¹⁶ CHIRAC 2002.

¹⁷ LE PEN 2017.

¹⁸ MACRON 2022.

attempt to contact and integrate. This situation is also actual in reverse, as the majority society, drawing on its previous bad experiences, closes ranks and adopts a negative attitude, which can further increase the negative attitudes on both sides and, in extreme cases, lead to the radicalisation of the descendants concerned. It is also worth looking at attitudes towards immigrants and their descendants to better understand this process. As a complete spectrum analysis covering all areas is impossible due to the study's limitations, I have chosen to focus on the labour market, education, living standards and the challenges of generational differences.

The present part of the study draws on the annual opinion poll “France – new fractures” (“Fractures françaises”) carried out by the IPSOS polling company, where attitudes and perceptions of immigrants and their descendants have been prominent for several years (even before the 2015 migration crisis);¹⁹ on the other hand, the regular publication (most recently at the end of March 2023) by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) on the situation and difficulties of immigrants and their descendants.²⁰

General perception of immigrants and their descendants

It should be emphasised, however, that the perception of immigrants depends on many factors (geographical area, education, political views, etc.) and that there is no clear social consensus on immigration issues in France today, which shows that migration and immigration issues are more subjective.

In the aforementioned annual poll, immigration issues have been consistently ranked around 4–5 in the list of public issues of most concern to the French for several years, closely behind concerns about crime, purchasing power and the environment and ahead of fears about terrorism.

The survey highlights the social prejudices against immigrants mentioned earlier, with 66% of respondents in the 2022 survey saying there are too many foreigners in the country and 61% saying there are enough workers in the country without immigrants. It is an interesting proportion in light of the so-called 3D jobs.²¹ Immigrants or people with an immigrant background are the main occupants of these jobs, and “native” French people are reluctant to take on these types of jobs.

55% of the respondents believe that immigrants do not do enough to integrate effectively. In the face of such social rejection, looking at the following statistics is interesting.

Immigrants, in general, find it harder to get into higher-skilled jobs and are about twice as likely to be unemployed as “French by birth”.²²

Because of the mixed attitudes towards immigrants and their descendants mentioned above, these groups often face problems affecting their daily lives. It is not possible to

¹⁹ TEINTURIER et al. 2022.

²⁰ INSEE 2023c.

²¹ Dirty, Dangerous, Demeaning.

²² TEINTURIER et al. 2022.

generalise, since, as mentioned earlier in this study, descendants of European, African or Asian descent may face different problems and challenges, and the nature of these depends to a large extent on social, economic and societal relations. All these factors can play a role in pushing immigrants and descendants towards exclusion.

- labour market difficulties
- economic – financial situation
- health problems
- education-related issues
- discrimination and integration problems

Labour market situation

Around 80% of immigrant men are active in the labour market (compared to 76% of men from non-migrant backgrounds) and 62% of women (70%). This figure varies considerably by the sending country, with only 45% of women from Turkey and the Middle East, as well as the Maghreb, for example. These differences may be partly due to different educational backgrounds and societal cultural differences (e.g. different roles for women).

For descendants, the situation is slightly different, with 64% of women and 70% of men, on average 67% of those concerned, active in the labour market. It is also interesting to note that those with only one immigrant parent are more likely to be active in the labour market than those with both immigrant parents.

Slightly less active participation in the labour market may be due to language differences (since, in many cases, in the home micro-communities, people use their mother tongue, French may be marginalised, which may even hinder their progress in the labour market), discrimination (because of their origin or even their skin colour), different motivation (doubts about their chances of success), or even different socio-economic circumstances.

Due to their different labour market situation, descendants can often face a sense of “otherness”, of not being accepted, of rejection, which can even trigger a counter-productive process.²³

Economic and financial situation

While the average annual income of French nationals is around €26,170, immigrants have a much lower annual income (€20,520), and their descendants bring home moderately lower average wages (€23,150) but higher than their parents' incomes. An important point to note is that while 15% of people without an immigrant background live below the poverty line, this proportion is very high for immigrants (32%) but also very significant for their descendants, at around 21.7%. It is striking that while around 59% of people from a non-migrant background live in owner-occupied housing, 32% of immigrants and 46% of their descendants do so. However, there is also a significant difference between descendants and immigrants, with 13% of those from the Sahel living in owner-occupied

²³ INSEE 2023c.

housing compared to 61% of those from the South Asian region. It is also important to note that one in four immigrants live in an overcrowded dwelling, while the proportion is more moderate for their descendants (one in eight). Overall, the financial situation of descendants shows an improvement compared to that of their parents but still remains below that of non-migrants. As descendants, through their parents, start from a poorer financial position, it is more difficult for them to secure adequate living conditions, which, given the environment around them, can be a source of further frustration.²⁴

Health problems and education

11% of women and 10% of men self-report poor or very poor health, which is a cause for concern in itself and almost alarming compared to those from a non-migrant background (7%). This figure can only partly be explained by age (immigrants from Europe tend to be older and, therefore, more likely to develop certain diseases). In many cases, it can also be linked to prevention and barriers to access to healthcare. The mental health of the citizens concerned also raises serious questions, with relatively high rates of mental/psychological problems, striking for humanitarian migrants at 45% and significant for non-humanitarian migrants at 31%.

Perhaps most striking in case of education is the differentiation by country of origin/sending country. On average, they have a similar level of education as non-migrants, and in some countries, they can be much higher than the proportion of graduates (40%): 53% for non-EU European countries and 62% for Middle Eastern countries (and much lower for Maghreb countries).²⁵

Discrimination

In 2019–2020, 34–40% of immigrants from each African (non-Maghreb) region and 41–46% of their descendants reported that they had experienced discrimination and were not treated equally in the past five years. In the Maghreb countries, descendants also reported higher rates of discrimination (33% and 25%, respectively), compared to 29% for those with two immigrant parents and 20% for those with one immigrant parent. They said that the most common grounds for discrimination were origin, nationality or different skin colour, especially when looking for a job, in public transport or in everyday life.²⁶

When radicalisation takes shape

Of course, the existence of these factors does not automatically mean that the descendants concerned will become radicalised. However, it can be observed that the worse social situation, economic circumstances, discrimination and social exclusion of people from

²⁴ INSEE 2023c.

²⁵ INSEE 2023c.

²⁶ INSEE 2023c.

a migrant background are all factors that can contribute to the extremism of the attitudes of these people.

Discrimination and integration difficulties also play an important role in this process because if a young person sees that he or she is trying to integrate but is constantly rejected by the host society or is disadvantaged because of his or her origin or colour, whether in the labour market or public administration, the feedback is that it is not worth trying. After a while, the host society sees that he or she does not want to integrate, which becomes a self-perpetuating process. Another important factor in the shift towards extremes is that the descendants have not experienced the act of migration themselves and have not been actively involved in the decision-making process or the act of migration, and this can lead to an identity crisis, as they no longer want to/are no longer (so much) able to relate to their parents' country, and they do not feel that they belong to France, where they have problems integrating.

Social and cultural segregation may also be strongly influenced by the housing conditions described above, as many people still live primarily in the suburbs, with a high proportion of immigrants (due to financial problems, which may lead to social segregation). Experiences of disadvantages in the education system, language barriers, everyday difficulties and discrimination can often result in a feeling of not belonging to the community. In some cases, these facts can also result in descendants feeling that their culture and religion are not given the respect they deserve, and this feeling can be exacerbated if racism and anti-Islamic sentiments prevail in the micro-environment around them.

In recent times, a number of events and terrorist attacks have brought firstly the radicalisation of immigrants and then of their descendants back to the forefront of social and political discourse. Many people have assumed that the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks in Western Europe since 2015 have all been immigrants, but the data shows quite the opposite. The vast majority of perpetrators were either already French (or from another Western European country) or dual nationals. Of the perpetrators of successful, unsuccessful or foiled terrorist attacks between 2015 and 2021, 78% were French (French or dual) nationals.²⁷

What can France do?

Following the terrorist attacks in 2015, a severe constitutional debate has been launched on the extension of the deprivation of French nationality. According to the then President of the Republic, Francois Hollande: "The consequence of deprivation of nationality should not be to render the person concerned stateless, but it is necessary to create the conditions for depriving the perpetrators of crimes and terrorist acts against the fundamental interests of the Nation of their French nationality, even if they were born French, only if they also hold the nationality of another country." The idea is that dual nationals who acquired their French nationality more than 15 years ago or French by birth who have acquired the nationality of another country in the meantime could be deprived of

²⁷ PEZET 2021.

their French nationality. This measure would have been possible only in case of serious offences against the state or terrorist acts, but the fact that a French citizen by birth could have been deprived of his nationality whipped up such a furore that the President of the Republic withdrew his proposal.

There are many doubts about the possibility of depriving a person of French nationality, but the law allows applying this legal instrument under certain conditions. This sanction is only available for acts committed before the acquisition of French nationality or within 15 years of the acquisition of French nationality which are contrary to the fundamental interests of the French nation or for terrorist acts and is currently only applicable to persons who have acquired French nationality (by marriage or naturalisation).

Removal from the country is an option for those who are radicalised and commit serious crimes against the state, but recent events (not by a descendant but by a first-generation immigrant) have shown that this process is far from smooth in France. In October 2022, Dahbia B., an Algerian national, murdered a 12-year-old French girl in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. The woman (who had a number of mental health problems that had never been treated, including access to healthcare) had entered the country in 2016 on a regular residence permit for study purposes and only came to the attention of the police in 2018 as a victim of domestic violence. In 2022, it was discovered that she was already in France irregularly and without a legal basis, and the competent authority ordered her to leave the country (*ordonnance de quitter le territoire français*, OQTF), but she did not do so. There has been much criticism of the French authorities in this case that these OQTF decisions are not – and are not being – enforced effectively enough, and the case has also shown that this process needs to be further improved.²⁸

One option could be to tighten and strengthen screening and vetting for national security purposes and to monitor more closely those who are on the radar screen, as the terrorist attacks since 2015 have involved a large number of planners and perpetrators who were already known to the authorities.

Summary

As the above shows, immigrants and their descendants play a vital role in the life of France, whether in terms of the labour market (skills shortages, filling 3D jobs), demographics (the ageing population, the arrival, settlement and childbearing of immigrants at a younger age can have a beneficial effect on Western European societies), or from a cultural point of view (the fact that immigrants contribute to social diversity is undeniable). However, the specific characteristics of these people must be borne in mind, which may contribute to their more extreme orientation. Their role in the labour market, their more modest housing, livelihood and health opportunities compared to people without an immigrant background, and the fact that they have to deal with discrimination and integration difficulties regularly are all factors which not only constitute obstacles in their daily lives but also make integration more complex and can also trigger a process of segregation.

²⁸ France 24 2022.

It is already proven that additional programmes are required to help immigrants integrate; greater attention should be paid to the situation of their descendants, whose possible radicalisation could pose a serious security risk for France. It can manifest at a micro level when problems arise in the local community, regardless of whether there is an increase in certain types of crime or priority cases for the country or even the international community. Although the study has not been given sufficient space in this paper due to space constraints, I think it is important to stress that immigrants and their descendants positively impact the life and functioning of a country, in addition to the risks and problems they pose. I believe it is important to implement programs and measures that promote integration and reduce the tendency toward extremism. These initiatives can benefit not only descendants and their families but also society as a whole.

This would, of course, be complementary to the process that the French State is currently pursuing to address security risks, as it is impossible to create a secure environment without prevention.

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