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# Institutionalising a cross-sectional policy area? Ministerial competences for migrant integration in EU member states

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## ABSTRACT

Migrant integration is a cross-sectional policy issue and its governance involves a network of actors operating on different regional and government levels. Its emergence as a distinct policy area in many European democracies has reinvigorated the role of state actors, particularly at the national level. National governments face a growing need to coordinate formerly disparate domestic integration measures, yet they are also encouraged by increasing activities and resources that have evolved at the EU level. From an institutional perspective, this spread of both norms and resources is likely to result in the emergence of new governmental actors assigned with these tasks. Yet, little scholarly attention has so far been dedicated to the comparison of ministerial competences for migrant integration across Europe and their relation to integration policies. The paper addresses this gap in a comparative study, presenting data on the ministerial competences in 27 EU member states and Switzerland between 2010 and 2014 and linking them to data on migrant integration policies using the MIPEX dataset. The findings show no general European trend towards top-level institutionalisation and instead reveal substantial differences between Western and Eastern European democracies associated with the respective patterns of integration policies.

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## 1. Introduction: migrant integration and the state

Migrant integration is a multi-dimensional process presenting a challenge to its scholarly conception (Ager and Strang 2008; Freeman 2004; Joppke and Morawska 2003; Wets 2006). For political scientists, one of the most crucial questions is about the locus of collective regulation and the agents driving it. In European scholarly tradition, ‘integration’ has epistemologically been tied to a ‘nation-state-society’ paradigm, that is, to a perception that links social entities to the modern state. It implies that integration policy is mainly about what ‘the state can do’ in terms of top-down measures that draw ideational and legal boundaries, set integration standards, facilitate incorporation, grant segmented rights, etc. (Favell 2005, 42–3). When in the twentieth century Europe the solidifying territorial states increasingly took on what formerly was – and in some regards still remains – managed by cities, local authorities and private charity organisations (Entzinger and

Scholten 2014), they fostered the state's role in developing national regulations for the admission and integration of non-national population (Borkert and Penninx 2011, 8). Although supra-national regulations increasingly curtail some of the state's autonomy in regulating migration and integration, national models have prevailed as the dominant lens through which both politicians and researchers approach these questions (Geddes and Scholten 2013, 1).

However, despite this state-centric tradition, there has been little comparative analysis of the primary government actors responsible at the national level for the development and coordination of national migrant integration policies. Rather, it has long been accepted that few European states actually had ministries or portfolios specifically assigned with this task (Favell 2005, 43). Moreover, for a long time integration was – and in many cases still is – organised as a cross-sectional agenda by a variety of state actors (including it more or less systematically into their ministerial agendas) (Peters 1998, 296). This fact has also hampered the perception of integration policy as an autonomous policy area rather than as an add-on to migration management and to the ministerial actors coordinating it. However, in recent years, demands for integrated approaches have become more vocal, reflecting the multiple dimensions of integration and the need for specialised government bodies capable of implementing cohesive national integration policies (Joppke 2007; Martinello 2006; Oltmer 2003). National governments not only face pressure from growing ethnic and social diversity, but they are also encouraged by increasing activities and resources for integration measures that have evolved at the EU level in response to common challenges (Carmel and Paul 2013). From an institutional perspective, this spread of both norms and resources is likely to result in the emergence of new governmental actors assigned with these tasks (Peters 2012).

The following paper addresses this research gap in a comparative study of integration competences across the EU. It first investigates whether top-level institutionalisation of autonomous ministerial actors or rather the retention of low-key institutional attachments is the prevailing pattern across Europe. To this end the paper presents data from an analysis of ministerial competences in 27 EU member states and Switzerland over a five-year period, from 2010 to 2014. Based on document analysis and expert interviews, it provides information on the type and hierachic level of the main government actor for integration policy as well as on the ministerial portfolio to which that actor is annexed. The findings reveal substantial differences between Western and Eastern European democracies. While the former are characterised by an increasing dynamic in reorganising ministerial competences for integration, the latter feature more continuity in institutional solutions, yet refrain from upgrading the ministerial status of integration. In a second step, the paper links these findings to the patterns of migrant integration policy in each of the member states analysed. Using data from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), it demonstrates that there is a positive relation between the level of ministerial institutionalisation and the expansion of migrant integration policies.

## **2. The role of institutional arrangements: ministerial competences and migrant integration policy-making**

How do government institutions matter for integration policy-making? An institutional perspective to migrant integration can approach this question along different analytical



dimensions, focusing either on the governmental actor (i.e. the relevant agent, their motives and rationales in establishing new modes of governance), on the specific norms (e.g. laws, informal regulations, benchmarks, etc.) created by the actor or on the conditions that provide the context (governmental or non-governmental) in which these attempts occur, succeed or fail (Peters 2012, 60–63). Of these different analytical dimensions, political research on migrant integration has largely focused on the norms dimension, that is, integration policies and their implementation in legislature (Huddleston et al. 2011; Martiniello 2006; Zincone, Penninx, and Borkert 2011). The role of the government bodies responsible for integration politics and their role in shaping migrant integration policies have received less attention. However, with Sainsbury (2012), it can be argued that the ‘policy venue that is in charge’, that is, the government actor that represents the ‘authoritative site of decision’, matters for integration policy-making, in particular two key characteristics: the hierarchic level and type of the venue on the one hand, the context provided by the venue’s portfolio on the other. These characteristics also prevail in the few political studies on national integration policy that look more closely at the role of ministerial competences. Among them, two research strands can be roughly distinguished: one considering institutional designs as the outcome of specific political conditions, and another in which the institutional dimension is treated as an explanatory factor for policy-making and policy output.

## ***2.1. Drivers and contexts of institutionalisation***

Starting with the first strand, the underlying question is why we should expect institutionalisation of new and more powerful government actors in the area of migrant integration in the first place? Institutionalisation broadly refers to ‘the process through which institutions are not only created, but are consolidated over time’ (Smith 2003, 624). It is also used more narrowly by public administration research to refer to certain changes in organisational structures (Koning 2015), such as to the establishment of new competences or the formation of new authorities in response to pressures for innovation (Schout and Pereyra 2011; Stromquist 1998). These pressures can result from different sources according to scholarly literature.

An obvious factor would be demographic changes that challenge states to alter their institutional framework in order to cope with these population pressures. As scholars traditionally point out, among many Western European states systematic institutional changes in the area of migrant integration started only by the 1980s and were owed to shifting immigration patterns after the end of the guestworker era (Desiderio and Weinar 2014). But while these general population patterns obviously are important, they fail to explain why many states continue to keep institutional competences for migration and integration at the bottom of the executive hierarchy. It indicates that, rather than general increases in immigration, more specific national patterns of ethnic diversity, religious diversity, disproportional immigrant unemployment, etc. could be more decisive in stimulating governments to create and/or upgrade ministerial competences for migrant integration.

Another line of argument points to partisan interests as being the main drivers for institutional change with regard to both, the hierarchic level on which competences are established as well as the ministerial portfolio to which these competences are annexed.

Marthalier's (2008) analysis of the French Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development (MIIINDS) under Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency is exemplary for this research strand. She argues that the reorganisation of ministerial competences was primarily a result of party political reasoning, translating ideological preferences and priorities into institutional designs of government. Referring to the MIIINDS, she illustrates that the ministry has been instrumental in implementing a more restrictive agenda already established in Sarkozy's previous terms as Minister for the Interior. In this perspective, the institutional allocation of competences for migrant integration is a functional consequence of a government's ideological character as well as its main policy agenda and, eventually, a means to achieving the desired policy outputs.

A further impulse for the study of institutionalisation has come from literature on 'Europeanisation' (Faist and Ette 2007; Geddes and Scholten 2013; Joppke 2007; Rosenow 2009) as a form of '(a) construction, (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms' (Bulmer and Radaelli 2004, 4) across member states. Despite being considered a 'soft' policy area, largely processed through intergovernmental consensus and the open method of coordination (Borkert and Penninx 2011, 10), the increasing activities in migrant integration policy at the EU level since the late 1990s<sup>1</sup> provide a considerable stimulus for national governments. One in which we would expect them not only to implement integration plans and policies at the national level – which many countries have done in recent years – but also to increasingly establish top-level governmental bodies vested with the authority to coordinate these efforts.

In light of these various drivers that increase the likelihood of institutional upgrades of migrant integration competences, this paper's first aim is to give a comprehensive overview on the status quo of dominant national policy venues. It does so by responding to two descriptive research questions:

- (1) what *type of ministerial actors* (ministry, minister of state, state secretary, junior minister, sub-department and external agency) carries the main competence for migrant integration policy across European national governments (RQ1)?
- (2) to which (*line*) *ministerial portfolio* (e.g. ministries of the interior, ministries of labour, etc.) is the main ministerial actor for migrant integration policy annexed (RQ2)?

So far, little comparative evidence is available on the institutional landscape of national government responsibilities in the area of migrant integration. One exception is a project conducted by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), collecting data on European Union countries' ministries holding the responsibility to coordinate migration and integration policy as of April 2010. It demonstrates that among the then 27 EU-countries, only 7 featured a government department explicitly tasked with – or even created for – governing immigrant integration (Denmark, Finland, France, Luxemburg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). In the other countries, the main responsibility for the coordination of national government policies was subordinated to ministries with other primary denominations, such as ministries for the interior, for labour and social affairs, for justice or for culture (Crage, Hughes, and Mohanty 2010). However, as these findings are just a snapshot they ignore the dynamics shaping the ministerial reassessments and whether there is change over time. The present paper seeks to



build on these results by conducting a comparative study that expands the time frame of analysis, yet maintaining a broad selection of countries in the study sample.

## **2.2. Institutions shaping policies**

Especially in the context of nascent policy areas with little tradition of regulation, institutionalisation can instigate changes in the way these policy matters are recognised, defined and processed (Dorado 2005). Accordingly, another strand of literature treats institutions as an explanatory factor, arguing that governmental settings have an impact on the way integration policy is processed and on the outputs that are produced.

As mentioned, Sainsbury's (2012, 249–253) specifies two aspects in which the institutional arrangements of the dominant 'policy venue' are crucial for immigrant rights:

First, the degree of centralisation of authority, that is, whether competences are concentrated within one main ministerial body or evenly dispersed over several government actors. Decentralised competences (e.g. without inter-ministerial coordination or with an inter-ministerial committee of merely mediating character) have traditionally been prominent in the organisation of cross-sectional policy matters such as migrant integration, more or less intended. Benton, McCarthy, and Collett (2015) and Scholten, Entzinger, and Penninx (2015) describe this approach as a form of 'mainstreaming' in integration policy-making. While to a certain degree, mainstreaming governance across levels and departments is inevitable in a cross-sectional policy area such as integration and has certain advantages (e.g. flexibility in elaborating solutions, accountability of each department), there are also critical remarks to decentralised arrangements. They are often criticised for their ineffective departmentalism and for their 'contradictory effects on immigrant rights' (Sainsbury 2012, 249). They also lack the institutional power to control implementation and cannot generate the public visibility that is provided by a specialised ministerial body designated for this task, which is why horizontal integration and 'joined-up government' have become prominent slogans since the 1990s to ensure more effective and active policy-making (6 2004; Bakvis and Juillet 2004; Peters 1998, 2006). The integration of competences under a single roof is usually tied to a more prominent position on the top level of the institutional hierarchy (e.g. a special ministry or ministerial representative). Here, the critique is rather that of inflexibility and of line ministries shifting their responsibilities to the main ministerial actor.

In light of these conflicting arguments, this paper investigates whether any relation between the degree of top-level centralisation on the one hand and the expansion of integration policies vis-à-vis immigrants on the other hand can be found (RQ3). Based on the arguments above, we expect the presence of top-level government institutions with main competences for integration to correlate positively with more expansive integration policies (H1).

Another dimension that is considered important for the evaluation of institutional arrangements is the context provided by the responsible venue's portfolio: Are competences assigned to a government ministry explicitly created for migration and integration matters, or subordinated to existing line ministries? According to a number of scholars, the professional disposition provided by different ministerial contexts is likely to influence the work of executive players. Sainsbury generally suggests that, where the ministries of the interior have become the dominant policy venue for integration, this has largely led to

more restrictive immigrant rights, whereas if the main authority has rested with the ministries for labour and social affairs, immigrant's social rights have improved. Some authors have argued that this might be related to the fact that ministries of interior usually are responsible for the aliens branch of the police, for admission policies and for asylum procedures, hence for competences that naturally imply the need to enforce restrictions, rejections and penalties on various types of immigrants. For example, Huysmans (2000, 757) stresses the way in which ministries of the interior have contributed to an increasing 'securitisation' of the discourse on the regulation of migration and integration. He points to the professional disposition of police and home affairs staff who approach the regulation of migration above all as a security concern, thereby defining which aspects of migration and integration are considered problematic and in need of political regulation. Buonfino (2004, 47) goes even further, arguing that these institutional dispositions can be amalgamated with broader hegemonic socio-political discourses, as was the case when the professional securitisation of ministries of the interior met with the general claims for securitisation in the early post-9/11 years – a pattern that has maintained until today (Lazaridis and Wadia 2015).

Using these arguments as a point of departure, this paper investigates whether any form of relation between the ministerial portfolio of the policy venue carrying the main competence for integration on the one hand and the expansion of integration policies on the other hand can be identified (RQ4). In line with the above-mentioned authors, we expect more restrictive integration policies vis-à-vis immigrants if main competences reside with the ministry of interior in contrast to more expansive integration policies if they reside with the ministry of labour or with an autonomous department/agency (H2).

### **3. Study design and data base**

This study aims at identifying the allocation of main ministerial competences for migrant integration in Europe and their relation to national integration policies vis-à-vis migrants. As we are interested in the spread of institutional competencies among EU member states, the study's working definition of 'migrant integration' is based on the EU's 'Common Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals' to which all members have formally agreed. It defines migrant integration as a cross-sectional policy area commissioned to strengthen a two-way process of frequent interaction between residents and immigrants as well as their descendants on the basis of European values, focusing in particular on immigrant employment, educational integration, political participation, non-discriminatory access to public institutions and private goods as well as immigrants' acquisition of basic knowledge about the host society (European Commission 2005). In this definition, policies and institutions tailored for specific autochthonous minorities are not considered if they are not part of a broader approach to integration of old and new ethnic minorities alike.

Building on Crage, Hughes, and Mohanty (2010), the analysis compares 27 EU member states, plus Switzerland, examining the diffusion of top-level ministerial actors for integration competences across these countries. Only the national level of the executive branch is taken into consideration and for each country only the main government institution responsible for the coordination of migrant integration policy is identified (acknowledging that in many cases a wide range of other government departments are

involved, yet not all of them are the key authority).<sup>2</sup> Given the ongoing changes in national government coalitions, the study tracks the development of ministerial competences over a five-year-period from 2010 to 2014.

To analyse the type and hierachic level of the main ministerial actor, we distinguish between three different levels of institutionalisation, from the highest to the lowest level in the ministerial hierarchy:

Hierarchy	Type of institutional competence
High	Government ministries explicitly denominated for integration policy, as the most visible form of institutionalisation at the executive top-level
	Junior ministers, state secretaries or ministers of state specifically denominated for integration policy but subject to another minister's authority
Low	Less pronounced executive bodies (such as ministerial sub-departments, agencies, etc.) charged with the coordination of integration policy but sub-ordinated to the executive structure of existing ministries, thus with the least visibility

In order to identify the policy context in which migrant integration is embedded, this paper records the portfolio of the government department that hosts the main ministerial actor charged with integration competences (if the main competence is not vested in a ministry specifically dedicated to migrant integration). This leaves us with the following set of most common ministerial contexts:

Ministerial context of the main ministerial actor for migrant integration				
Ministries denominated for immigration and integration	Ministerial competences linked or subordinated to ...			
	Ministries of the interior	Ministries of labour and social affairs	Ministries of justice	Other

The study draws on a variety of sources: Above all we collected official self-descriptions by national governments provided on their websites, in information brochures or in ministerial reports on migration and integration; second, we analysed the database of the European Commission's Website for Integration as well as information provided by the National Contact Points for Integration and compared it with the findings from our study of official ministerial documents; thirdly, we included information gained from academic publications on countries' institutional history in migrant integration management (for a list of references, see: [online supplementary material](#)). For the final verification, an expert survey was launched asking country experts in each country to verify and complement the findings of the investigation (see Acknowledgements). Based on this multi-tiered approach, the findings of this study should display a high degree of external validity.

In a third step, this paper links these findings to empirical data on integration policies in Europe, as provided by the MIPEX. In relating ministerial competences to policies for migrant integration, we investigate whether our assumption of a positive relation between higher competences and a more expansive framework of policies can be confirmed. Since 2004 the MIPEX has been measuring the expansion of integration policies in European Union Member States as well as in a number of non-EU countries. It uses an unweighted accumulative index compiled by several policy indicators to evaluate migrants' legal and political opportunities for participation in society. For our examination period (2010–2014), raw data on 148 indicators in 7 dimensions of integration are available (permanent residence, labour market inclusion, family reunion of foreign citizens, access to nationality, political participation, anti-discrimination and education). The

MIPEX might have been criticised for different reasons – for example, for its normative framework, measuring policies only with regard to whether they promote immigrants' 'social integration in practice' (a nexus that itself is often hard to test empirically); for reliability problems that arise at the deeper level (dimensions) of the dataset partly owed to an oversized set of variables. However, it nonetheless provides the most encompassing comparative database on integration policies to rely on. Thus, this paper is not interested in measuring the social 'outcomes' of policy (i.e. whether immigrants are and/or feel effectively integrated) but rather in the 'output' (i.e. institutional arrangements, legal regulations, subsidies, projects, etc.) created by policy-makers and how they are related to the governmental framework in which they emerge (Hollifield 1986; Lahav and Guiraudon 2006).

#### **4. The institutional locus of migrant integration policy: empirical findings from 28 European governments**

Migrant integration policy is not only considered a cross-sectional political agenda, as an emerging policy area its institutional locus is also less entrenched than that of policy areas with a longer tradition. Therefore, the institutional assignment of migrant integration competences is usually contested in the process of government formation. In a comparison of EU member states' patterns of centralisation, location and dynamics, some characteristics stand out prominently.

##### **4.1. Top-level institutionalisation of ministerial competences**

Historically speaking, the first European countries to install top-level ministerial representatives for integration were Sweden and Portugal (1996), Spain (2000), Latvia and the Netherlands (2002), Germany (2005), Finland and Ireland (2007), all of them introducing either state secretaries, ministers of state or high commissioners tasked with coordinating government integration policy. The first ministries specifically denominated for integration policy emerged in Denmark (2001), Luxembourg (2004), Sweden (2006), France and Spain (2008), though in the majority of cases this was only a temporary solution. Given these first examples of ministerial institutionalisation, the key question is whether this pattern continued to spread to other European countries in recent years (RQ1). As demonstrated by the geographic dispersion of cases shown in Figure 1, the study's findings provide no confirmation of such a general tendency.

*East-West-antagonism.* As the figure shows, there is a complete absence of Eastern European democracies from those countries that established a top-level ministerial actor for migrant integration at any point throughout the examination period 2010–2014. Although there was one example prior to 2010,<sup>3</sup> the issue is still not granted a prominent institutional status among Eastern European governments. On the other hand, the findings demonstrate a widespread disposition among Western European democracies to put migrant integration at the top of their ministerial hierarchy. The vast majority of governments in the old EU-15 has experimented with either a specialised ministry or another form of specialised ministerial actor (junior minister, minister of state and state secretary), assigned with a mandate for migrant integration at least once between 2010 and 2014. This includes countries from different geographical regions and with different experiences of

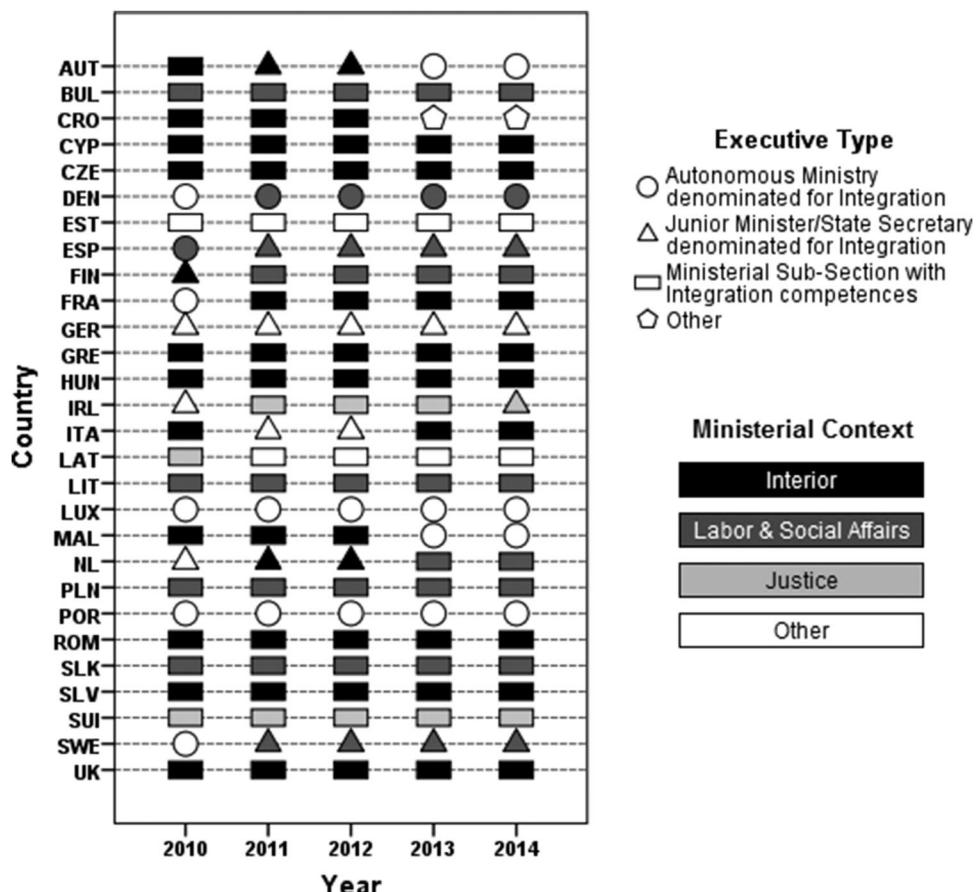


**Figure 1.** Occurrences of top-level institutionlisation of migrant integration between 2010 and 2014.

Note: The figure documents any occurrence of top-level institutionalisation of migrant integration (in a ministry, state secretary, junior minister, etc. denominated for migrant integration policy) between 2010 and 2014. \*Switzerland is highlighted because in 2014, the federal government decided to denominate a State Secretariat for Migration, which did not come into office until 2015 (i.e. outside of this study's examination period). \*\*Because of the multi-level structure of its federal government, Belgian integration policy differs substantially across the three territorial regions (i.e. Flemish, Wallon and Brussels region) (Adam and Jacobs 2013; Boone 2012). Therefore, the country was excluded from our analysis of the primary ministerial actor for national integration policy. Graphic source: CIA World Fact Book (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>)

immigration, from Scandinavian (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Sweden) to Central European (e.g. Austria, Germany, Luxembourg) or Southern European countries (e.g. France, Italy, Portugal or Spain). The only exceptions to this Western European pattern are the UK and Greece, both maintaining their subordination of integration competences to traditional line ministries. The same is true for the non-EU country Switzerland, which features only a limited number of executive departments as a result of the 'magic formula' of proportional representation in the Swiss Federal Council.<sup>4</sup>

*Dynamics of (re-)assignments.* Even though in Western Europe a willingness to upgrade the ministerial level of migrant integration can be identified, if we focus on the dynamics over the whole period, as illustrated in Figure 2, this conclusion is only partly confirmed: Instead of a growing trend, over the last five years the patterns rather show constantly changing ministerial responsibilities and, ultimately, even a slight decrease in the



**Figure 2.** Main ministerial competence for migrant integration – executive type and ministerial context.

Note: To identify the dynamics of change, in years with changing institutional competences, the new ministerial actor was coded, regardless of when the shift occurred. Exceptions to this coding rule were only made for France, Latvia, the Netherlands and Sweden in 2010. For these data points the previous denomination was coded while the new assignment was coded in the following year.

number of top-level ministerial actors tasked with designing and coordinating national integration strategies. In 2010, 10 of the 28 observed countries still either featured a dedicated ministry, a junior minister, a state secretary or a comparable government actor vested with the coordination of a national integration policy (Denmark, Finland, France, Germany,<sup>5</sup> Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and Spain). By 2014, this number had dropped to only nine countries, with a core of countries that continuously maintain a top-level ministerial actor, while a couple of other countries either joined (Austria, Malta) or exited (Finland, France, Italy and the Netherlands) this group.

*Explaining discrepancies.* Ministerial institutionalisation of migrant integration is no mainstream practice across all EU member states, since roughly a third of all countries vests a specialised top-level ministerial actor with this responsibility, all of them situated in Western Europe. The absence of Eastern European countries might be related to a number of plausible reasons: While an immediate explanation could be Eastern Europe's lack of significant immigration numbers (having for the most part turned into

emigration countries after 1989), this does not conform to the developments in recent years, in which Eastern European countries also have experienced increases in immigration (and thus a potentially stronger need to invest in migrant integration policies). Others have argued that conceptions of nationhood are more ethnically defined among Eastern European population in contrast to a more civic understanding in Western Europe (Ariely 2013), but also that the public perception of immigrants as a group threat is comparatively higher in Eastern Europe (Schlueter, Meuleman, and Davidov 2013) – which could explain the hesitancy for institutional upgrades designed to promote migrant integration. An alternative explanation to this clear East-West gap might be found in the different institutional legacies of old and young democracies, with the former probably being more open to adapting their ministerial assignments. Moreover, the smaller number of government departments in younger democracies arguably keeps emerging policy areas such as migrant integration from being assigned to a specialised ministerial portfolio.

But even among Western European democracies top-level institutionalisation is not all-encompassing, as we find dynamics in both directions (i.e. upgrades as well as downgrades of previous top-level actors). In fact, model countries (such as Finland, France, Italy or the Netherlands) have replaced their respective ministries/ministers with less prominent, subsections in their ministerial architecture. This finding leads to two conclusions: On the one hand, as ministerial portfolios generally remain a bargaining chip in the process of coalition formation, competences of less established policy areas – such as integration – in particular can become sacrificed. On the other hand, partisan interests can be another driver for reassessments, if government parties and coalitions change.

#### **4.2. Institutional contexts: relating migrant integration to government portfolios**

In contrast to the type and level of the main institutional competence, several authors point to the importance of the policy context for integration policy-making.

*Ministries of Interior.* As Figure 2 illustrates, ministries of the interior (home offices) provide the most common ministerial context for migrant integration policy in Europe. More than a third of the countries in this study vest their ministries of the interior – or ministerial actors subordinated to them – with the authority to design and coordinate migrant integration policy (11 countries in 2010, still 9 in 2014). Interestingly, here we find no distinct geographical pattern as old Western European democracies (e.g. France, Italy, UK), belong to this group as do younger Western democracies (e.g. Greece, Cyprus) or Eastern European democracies (e.g. Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Czech Republic). In many of these cases, this pattern has historical reasons related to previous executive paths: Initially, the integration agenda often emerged within the regimes of migration management commonly operated by ministries of the interior. Another plausible explanation for the dominance of interior ministries is that they often maintain the closest relationships to local authorities and thus are most qualified to be the primary national counterpart for these local actors who are of particular importance in the area of integration.

*Ministries of Labour.* Among EU member states there is only one ministerial alternative of equal importance: A bundle of countries vests their ministries of labour and social

affairs with the main authority for the coordination of national integration policies. This group of countries is actually growing in size, as the five respective countries in 2010 (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Spain) has had been joined by four more Western European countries by 2014 (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden), finally equalling the number of countries with responsibility vested in the ministry of the interior. Yet for the countries featuring ministries of labour and social affairs as main authorities there is less of a historical explanation of institutional paths. The majority of these countries are either young democracies with little tradition of migrant integration policy at the national level or they have shifted the competences into this direction only recently. Where assignments to ministries of labour have changed only recently (e.g. Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands), partisan interests are obvious, since Social Democrats and Labour parties have been mainly responsible for these reassessments. In countries with a longer tradition of vesting ministries of labour with integration competences, the assignment either is owed to long-standing dominance of Social Democrats in government whose assignments have not yet been altered by their successors (Spain) or to the fact that the issue is of low salience and therefore remains only a sub-departmental annex (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia).

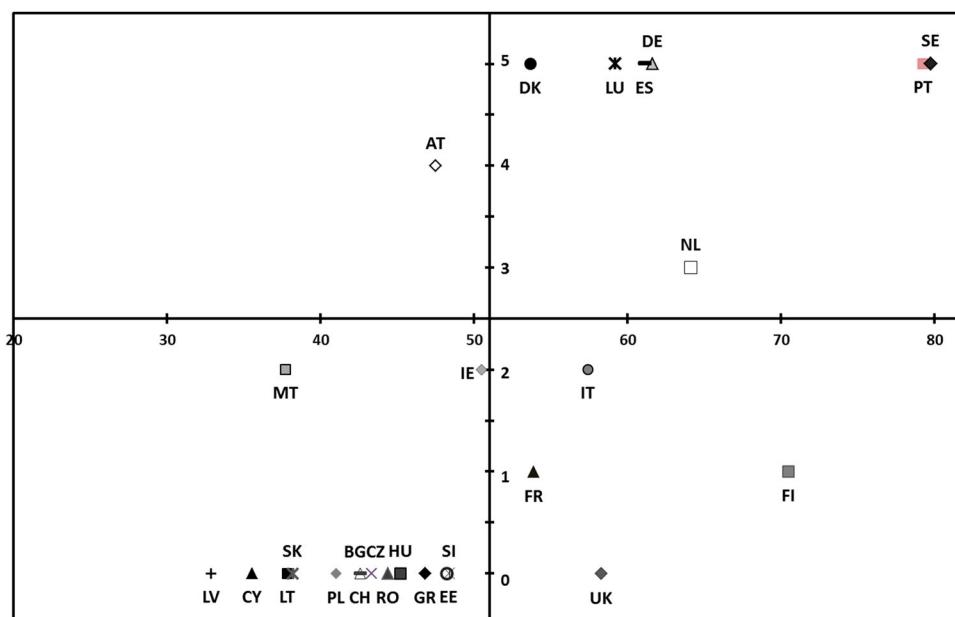
*Other ministerial contexts.* Beyond these two main ministerial contexts, other affiliations to line ministries are rather the exception: Ministries of justice (such as in Ireland, Switzerland or pre-2011 Latvia), ministries of culture (such as in Estonia and post-2011 Latvia), or individual outliers (such as the Luxembourgian Ministry of Family and Integration and the Dutch Ministry of Public Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment in 2010 or the Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and the Maltese Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties since 2013) are mostly owed to the particular country settings at that time rather than to any systematic cross-country trend. A final alternative, though, is the complete separation of competences from any line ministerial authority by classing dedicated ministerial actors directly with the Prime Minister's office or the Chancellery. In these particular cases, such as in Germany and Portugal or in Italy (between 2011 and 2012), inter-ministerial coordination is an explicit target, which generally is an indicator for the autonomous institutional value the government ascribes to migrant integration.

*Stability of contexts.* In contrast to alterations of the type and level of dominant executive venues, the dynamics of ministerial contexts over time reveal considerable stability. Only in 9 of the 28 cases has the policy context of the responsible ministry completely changed between 2010 and 2014 (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden), again mostly located in Western Europe, while patterns are more continuous in Eastern European countries. The majority of countries, though, did not reconfigure the ministerial context for migrant integration policy over the last five years – either because a specialised government institution had already been established earlier (such as in Germany, Luxembourg, Spain or Portugal) or because management of the issue is left to ministerial sub-sections, which is most common in Eastern European member states, less so among Western European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and the UK).

### 4.3. Relating institutionalisation and integration policy

Are institutional arrangements related to the public policy outputs on migrant integration? In order to tackle this question, we linked our findings to empirical data on integration policies in Europe, as provided by the MIPEX (Huddleston et al. 2011; Niessen, Huddleston, and Citron 2007). Based on our discussion of scholarly literature, we hypothesised that higher levels of ministerial competences for migrant integration correlate positively with a more expansive set of integration policies as assessed by the MIPEX (H1). Figure 3 plots the countries in our sample on a two-dimensional scatter plot with the x-scale indicating the integration policy score according to MIPEX and the y-scale the country's years with a top-level ministerial actor between 2010 and 2014. Based on our assumption, countries should be located in either the lower left quadrant (low degree of institutionalisation and below-average scores for migrant integration policies) or the upper right quadrant (high degree of institutionalisation and above-average scores for migrant integration policies). As a matter of fact, the scatter plot shows that the majority of countries in our sample adhere to this expected pattern.

Most notably, all Eastern European countries are located in the lower left quadrant. They not only lack top-level actors for migrant integration, but they also score below average on the expansion of their migrant integration policies – a first indication of the relation between institutional arrangements and policy. It is supported by the non-EU member state Switzerland, as well as by a couple of Southern European countries like



**Figure 3.** Expansiveness of integration policy (x) and years with top-level ministerial actor for integration (y) – country average scores, 2010–2014.

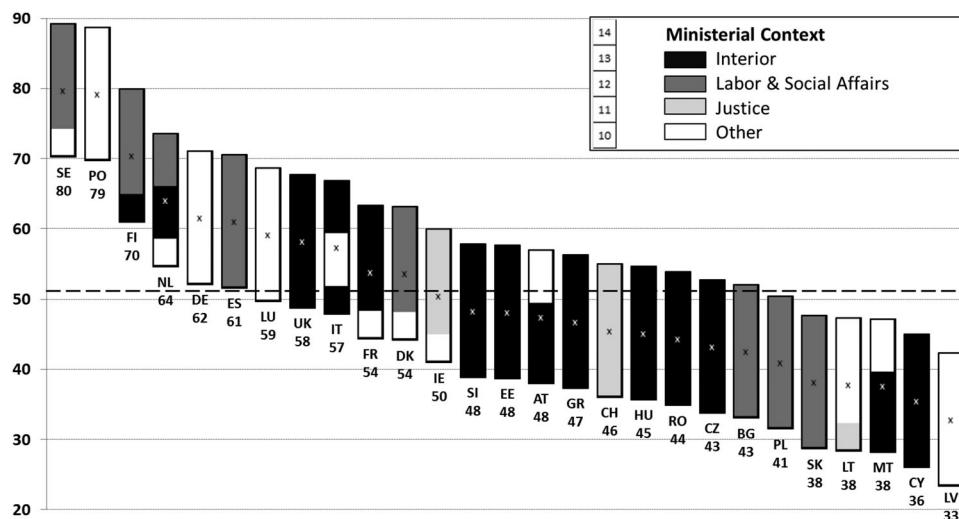
Note: On the x-scale, we have the five-year-mean MIPEX score from 2010 to 2014 for each country (min: 0, max: 100), on the y-scale the number of years with a top-level ministerial actor (either a junior minister, a state secretary or an autonomous ministry for integration) for each country between 2010 and 2014 (min: 0, max: 5). Axes intersect at empirical (x: 51) and theoretical (y: 2.5) mean values.

Greece and Cyprus, but also Malta (where despite a recent upgrade of ministerial competences, integration policies have remained quite restrictive until 2014). In Ireland, changing ministerial assignments in recent years indicate some sort of reluctance to a permanent upgrade of integration competences.

Further proof is provided by various Western European countries located in the upper right quadrant, such as Sweden, Portugal, Germany, Spain, Luxemburg and Denmark. Here, a top-level ministerial actor is associated with above-average scores for migrant integration policies. With some reservations, the Netherlands and Finland could also be included in this group: Although they recently downgraded the ministerial level for integration competences (and so score lower on the  $y$ -axis), their long-standing history of top-level ministerial actors prior to our examination period rather supports the relation between ministerial competence and policy. In sum, 22 out of the 26 analysed countries confirm a positive relation between ministerial institutionalisation of integration competences and the expansion of integration policies (H1).

The four remaining outliers (France, Italy, the UK and Austria) indicate some heterogeneity among Western European countries. Trying to explain potential reasons for these deviations might help to understand the factors surrounding the association between ministerial competence and policy. Austria has long refused to acknowledge its character as a country of immigration and the need for top-level ministerial actors, which helps to explain why the recent upgrade of competences has not yet materialised in higher MIPEX-scores – here, the factor ‘time’ seems to play a role (Gruber and Rosenberger 2016, 2017). In a similar vein, Italy and France are examples of countries that have experimented with top-level ministerial actors only for a short period of time, and have returned to sub-departmental solutions during our examination period. Considering the relative continuity of their integration policies between 2007 and 2014 according to the MIPEX framework (ITA: from 64 to 62; FRA: from 56 to 57), the institutional upgrades might have been too brief here to have a lasting effect on the policy conditions for integration. Another argument can be derived from Marthaler’s conclusion that in France the ministerial upgrade rather served the interests of a restrictive integration agenda. This might have contributed to the stagnation of French MIPEX-scores and show, that institutionalisation can also have an opposite effect. However, so far the French example is the only one in which institutional upgrades have provably halted (or even reversed), the trend towards more expansive integration policies. The most extreme outlier is the UK, where there is no history of an autonomous ministerial actor, yet the country still ranks among the most expansive integration policy regimes – a finding that might be related to the UK’s legacy of a multiculturalist empire and its respective policy heritage (Joppke 1996). Thus, while expansive integration policies clearly can also emerge without top-level institutions, the latter evidently provide a vital catalyst if governments want to improve their policy outputs – whereas governments that do not consider the issue important won’t go for institutional upgrades in the first place. Taken together, the four outliers indicate the stickiness of legislative paths and the impression that institutional upgrades need a longer time frame to effect policy changes than they do in other regards, such as with discursive shifts.

Although common in scholarly literature, for the hypothesised relation between ministerial context and integration policy, there is little evidence: this study’s findings cannot confirm a more restrictive effect caused by ministries of the interior compared to ministries of labour and social affairs (H2). As Figure 4 demonstrates, countries with ministries



**Figure 4.** Expansiveness of integration policy (bar position) and ministerial context (bar colours), Country average scores, 2010–2014.

Note: The centre position of the bars (x) indicates the five-year-mean MIPEX score from 2010 to 2014 for each country (min: 0, max: 100). Within these bars, the ministerial context of the mainly responsible government actor (either a ministry of the interior, of labour and social affairs, of culture or other forms) is indicated by different colours, from 2010 (bottom) up until 2014 (top). The dotted line indicates the mean MIPEX score (51) across all countries in this figure.

of the interior as the predominant ministerial context rank above (the Netherlands, the UK, Italy, France) as well as below (Slovenia, Estonia, Austria, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, Malta and Cyprus) the cross-country average. The same is true for countries where ministries of labour and social affairs are the mainly responsible government actor: While Sweden, Spain or Denmark feature clearly above-average policies with regard to migrant integration, Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia are examples of countries with below-average policies. But also countries with other ministerial contexts (Portugal, Germany, Luxemburg, Lithuania and Latvia) are distributed across the whole spectrum of MIPEX-scores. These patterns indicate that the context provided by the ministerial portfolio plays less of a role in shaping policy than expected, leading us to abandon H2.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings generated by this study provide disparate evidence for ministerial institutionalisation of migrant integration across EU member states. Despite growing migrant mobility and notwithstanding increased intergovernmental exchange in the EU as well as expanding resources provided by EU funds, so far there is no comprehensive tendency towards specialised ministerial actors for migrant integration at the top levels of European governments. To be more specific, while most EU member states have developed national action plans for integration, only a limited number of these states went so far as to establish new and/or dedicated ministerial portfolios. However, as the findings demonstrate, there is a geographical divide to this pattern: Eastern European democracies have maintained migrant integration competences as a sub-departmental annex to one of their

traditional ministerial portfolios, mostly ministries of the interior or labour and social affairs, often pursuing institutional paths they have already set with the ministerial competences for immigration control. Among Western European democracies there is indeed a widespread willingness to upgrade the ministerial relevance of migrant integration, granting it more institutional visibility and power. But even here the institutionalisation of top-level ministerial actors is no comprehensively expanding trend. Rather, it seems that while in recent years, many countries have experimented with an institutional upgrade, only a handful of them actually stick to such a design for a longer period of time.

These developments are important to monitor because this study also documents that there is indeed evidence that more prominent and more powerful ministerial players go along with an expansion of migrant integration policies, not in the sense of causality but in obvious correlation. Different ministerial contexts provided by ministries of the interior as opposed to ministries of labour and social affairs, however, seem to be less closely related to the patterns of integration policy outputs. Which conclusions can be drawn from these findings? On a general level, the different patterns in ministerial competences across European governments strongly underline the need to look at institutions and their country contexts in order to understand the conditions for national migrant integration policy. Different institutional designs indeed relate to not only the status of the integration policy-making but also to the policy outputs produced. However, this general conclusion needs to be qualified in three regards:

First, in order to understand the empirical gap between Eastern and Western democracies, we are reminded to closely consider the *national context of institutionalisation* (Collett 2011). Different institutional cultures might help to explain why older democracies are more prone to institutional innovations in emerging policy areas than consolidating democracies. Another context-related argument must be made with regard to the different patterns of immigration between Western and Eastern European democracies and public opinion about ethnic diversity. The EU's member states 'are at very different stages in their immigration history' (Benton, McCarthy, and Collett 2015, 5): Many Western European democracies have been countries of immigration for quite some time, whereas Eastern European countries have only recently started to face large-scale immigration.

Second, the apparent dynamics in the ministerial allocation of migrant integration indicate that the *nature of the policy matter* influences the way in which it can become centralised and/or repositioned on an executive scale. The cross-sectional nature of migrant integration policy clearly separates it from traditional issues with a more bounded nature (e.g. labour, security, agriculture, environment, etc.), probably hampering its institutional autonomy despite being one of the biggest social challenges in the twenty-first century Europe. Moreover, as a comparatively young policy subject, migrant integration still has to earn some of its executive relevance, making its ministerial institutionalisation more reliant on contextual conditions than that of well-established policy areas and demanding a longer time frame for institutional changes to become reflected by changing integration policies.

Thirdly, the dynamics revealed by this study serve as a hint that institutional choices are intrinsically tied to the intentions of policy-makers how to (re-)design national integration policy and that they influence one another. Partisan interests as well as coalition bargaining obviously shape the decisions for specific ministerial arrangements and therefore need

to be evaluated in the specific national context on a permanent basis in order to explain the dynamics of change observed by this study.

In sum, these macro-findings suggest a deeper look into those national cases where an upgrade of migrant integration competences has occurred in order to gain a better understanding of the rationales and reasons that lead to either their persistence or their ephemerality. Ultimately, this would help to clarify the ways in which certain institutional designs at the national level in European member states can become a tool to optimise policies in what is going to remain a highly politicised policy area for years to come.

## Notes

1. To name just a few relevant steps in this regard: the establishment of National Contact Points, Common Basic Principles, the Common Agenda for Integration, the European Integration Fund or the European Integration Forum. Moreover, a number of relevant Council Directives have been promoted since then (Goeman 2008; Mulcahy 2009).
2. Because of the multi-level-structure of its federal government, Belgian integration policy differs substantially across the three territorial regions (i.e. Flemish, Wallon and Brussels region) (Adam and Jacobs 2013; Boone 2012). Therefore, the country was excluded from our analysis.
3. In 2002, the Latvian government installed a ‘Secretariat for Social Integration Affairs’ and a Special Assignment Minister focused on the development of minority policies. The Integration Secretariat was absorbed by the new ‘Ministry for Children, Families and Social Integration Affairs’ in 2009, and eventually became annexed to the ‘Ministry of Culture’ in 2010 (Muiznieks and Rozenvalds 2012, 211–212).
4. In the meantime, also the Swiss government has agreed that the Federal Office for Migration will be upgraded into a State Secretariat, thus raising the institutional importance of migration and integration.
5. In Germany, two government authorities share the main responsibility. The Ministry of the Interior (and its Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, BAMF) are the main administrative context, however, they are accompanied by a specialized Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration situated in the Federal Chancellery.

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