

## Germany mulls calls for integration ministry



[\*There may be a better way to handle integration\*](#)

**As Germany's future governing parties hammer out a new coalition agreement, calls mount for them to create a ministry for integration. Experts and immigrants warn of a crucial opportunity that will otherwise be wasted.**

Germany's conservative Christian Democrats have already ruled out the creation of a ministry for integration. Wolfgang Bosbach, deputy head of the party's parliamentary group, on Wednesday said that "the issue is off the table. Integration does not take place in legal ordinances, but in real life."

But it's a controversial subject in the current coalition talks between Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Free Democrats (FDP). Integration experts and, above all, the immigrant community have long called for a federal ministry for integration and migration.

### **Integration crucial to society**



*Bildunterschrift:* [\*Germany can't fail in its integration efforts, experts say\*](#)

"Integration is the central issue of the social policy of the future - it's what makes or breaks the future of German society. If the country fails in its efforts towards a successful integration policy, then we'll be left with a huge problem to deal with in the future," Klaus Bade, chairman of the Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration and a professor at the University of Osnabrueck told Deutsche Welle.

Currently, Germany only has a commissioner for integration, whose powers are very limited. Essentially, the job is to engage in discussion and debate, to pitch ideas and to suggest new laws. But the power to actually draft legislation, introduce it to the cabinet and the parliament lies with the existing ministries.

This means that the integration commissioner is entirely at the mercy of cabinet ministers, who decide for themselves whether or not to take up any of the suggestions coming from her.

"The current model doesn't give any actual authority to Commissioner Maria Boehmer," Kenan Kolat, chairman of the Turkish Community in Germany told Deutsche Welle.

"Education, work, integration courses or German courses are all fields where Boehmer doesn't get the say she should have. Sure, she can talk and give advice, but all the actual work is in the ministries - usually in the interior ministry. And Boehmer doesn't have any influence whatsoever."



*Bildunterschrift: [Kolat says the interior ministry is the wrong place to deal with integration](#)*

### **Carrots rather than sticks**

As an example, Kolat cites the current debate over "immigration courses," which are essentially German language courses for migrants. Some influential Christian Democrats have been pushing for a tougher stance on those who fail to attend the courses, suggesting welfare benefits are scaled down for immigrants who can't find work because of their poor German language skills.

"This approach basically says: you have to take the course, and if you don't, we'll punish you," Kolat warns. "Currently the responsibility for those courses lies with the interior ministry, and that's just the way they approach this."

"If this were the responsibility of a ministry for integration, the whole issue could be tackled differently - with incentives rather than punishment. If, for instance, you did well in learning the language, it could be made easier to get a residence permit or eventually German citizenship," he says.



*Bildunterschrift: [Boehmer is in favor of a proper ministry](#)*

A ministry for integration could make a big difference when immigrants try to have degrees obtained in their home countries recognized in Germany. Boehmer had initiated legislation that would have made it easier to recognize professional training from abroad.

But the bill was then passed on to the various ministries that had a stake in it - education, interior and labor - for examination. In the end, the labor ministry put a stop to it, and the suggestion never even made it to the cabinet, let alone to parliament.

### **Integration crucial to Germany**

The alternative to creating a ministry for integration is to give more authority to the commissioner.

While this would be an important step forward, it's still not an ideal solution, says Klaus Bade, pointing out that a number of European countries, such as France, the Netherlands and Sweden, already have integration ministries. Several of Germany's states have also created such ministries.

"On the national level, it's still the interior ministry that deals with most questions of integration," Bade says. "Yet the main task of the interior ministry is dealing with security threats - but integration is the exact opposite of a threat to security. It's crucial to the future of Germany."

Author: Andreas Illmer

Editor: Nancy Isenson