

# Editorial



Gert G. Wagner,  
Research Director  
Social Risk Management, asks:  
"Why are Germans  
so concerned about Immigration?"

*The expected immigration from the Eastern European accession countries to the EU is a concern in all Western European societies, and especially in Germany. The DIW Berlin has estimated an expected net influx of about 2.5 million Eastern European immigrants up to 2030. They will represent about 3% of the population in Germany. Will this be a new experience for people living in Germany?*

*Recent census data for the United States of America show a share of foreign-born Americans of about 10%. This is the highest share since the 1930s. Compared with this number in a traditional immigration country, the share of foreign-born people in contemporary Germany, which considers itself as a non-immigration country, is a real surprise: according to the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a survey conducted by the DIW, the share is about 10% in Germany as a whole. Because immigrants are concentrated in Western Germany, the share there is even higher: 12%. Among children (up to age 16) the share of immigrants and foreigners is 20% in Germany (23% in Western Germany). Given this reality, it is a real surprise that there are so many concerns about the potential influx from Eastern Europe, which will not have a significant additional effect over and above the already high level. However, not only the high unemployment rate of the immigrants in Germany but also some basic demographic figures show that Germany has problems in integrating immigrants into society. According to SOEP data (for 1999), about 30% of all immigrants believe that they do not speak good German, and 10% believe they speak it rather badly. In the age bracket of 21 up to 30 years the share of weak German-speakers is smaller, but still significant, at about 20%.*

*It makes sense to control immigration as much as possible and also to improve the language proficiency of those who have entered the country – regardless of their citizenship and their reason for immigration. But it is an illusion to believe that we can perfectly control immigration in the sense that only those immigrants will come who not only meet perfectly the qualification requirements of the German economy, but also know the German language quite well. However, the empirical evidence shows that German society has enough experience to deal with it. Hence, there is no reason to be concerned about the expected influx from eastern Europe.*