

Fact-Sheet on Migrant Integration

A. Introduction

Migrant integration is essential to effective and comprehensive migration management approaches. It intersects with a number of other major policy areas, including human rights protection and non-discrimination, employment policy, national security, social stability, public health, education, citizenship and development. Policies and strategies to support the social, economic and cultural inclusion of migrants in their new environment in countries of destination and to educate receiving communities on the potential contributions of newcomers can reinforce the positive effects of migration.

Though permanent migration remains significant, international migration today is increasingly temporary, short-term, circular and multidirectional. As this trend continues, countries that were once relatively unaffected by migration are seeing this phenomenon as a major challenge, highlighting the need for migrant integration efforts to be flexible and responsive to each different situation. The current global economic crisis and its impact on both origin and host countries is complicating even more, the already difficult challenges everyone is facing on migrant integration.

B. Key Findings and Observations

The process of migrant integration can sometimes generate some degree of public anxiety and at times fear, especially during periods of economic downturn. With unemployment persisting in many countries, migrants are sometimes perceived as competitors for jobs, exerting downward pressure on salaries, and as a burden on the welfare system. However, experiences thus far suggest that these perceptions are largely unfounded. Not only do migrants tend to concentrate in just a few sectors such as

construction, domestic services, and health care, but also these sectors tend to be those in which there is a deficit in the local job market, so that migrants most often fill jobs unfilled by the local population. However, negative perceptions can be deeply entrenched and are best dispelled through planned and sustained efforts.

Based on its recent experiences in implementing migrant integration projects in many parts of the world, IOM has found the following interventions useful and effective:

- a) Dissemination of information in home countries on the rights and obligations of migrants;
- b) Pre-departure / cultural orientation to travel-ready migrants to facilitate their adjustment to life in a new country;
- c) Provision of advice and counseling related to services available to migrants in the host country, for example, through migrant resource centres (MRCs)¹; and
- d) Provision of vocational and language training to reinforce their skills.

In addition, awareness-raising in host countries on the cultural profile of the newcomers and highlighting their potential contribution to the host society, improves the perception and acceptance of the migrants by receiving communities and reduces the risks of discrimination and xenophobia.

C. Dimensions of Migrant Integration

Migrant integration involves a number of dimensions; these are, economic, social, cultural,

¹ MRCs are community-based “one-stop-shop” centers that provide migrants a place to receive assistance, get information, and meet with others. They cater to immediate and longer term needs of migrants to facilitate successful integration into their local community and enable them to reach their full potential.

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political and legal. Ideally, migrants should be integrated in all these dimensions. However, not all host countries are willing and / or able to support migrants in all these. This also varies depending on the status of the migrants in the host country. While much discussion of integration focuses on ensuring migrants' ability to be gainfully employed and contribute to the local economy, more than this is required if migrants are to be full participants in their host society. And while some aspects of integration may only be relevant to settled migrants, such as certain political rights associated with nationality, other aspects, especially as they relate to migrants present in the territory on a temporary basis, require attention.

D. Challenges

Some challenges policy makers and practitioners faced regarding migrant integration:

- What type or level of integration measures need to be provided for temporary / circular migrants? Should there be integration measures for irregular migrants?
- How to best manage migration and integration in a manner that ensures maximum benefits both for the individual and the society?
- How to ensure a socio-economic and political environment supportive of the effective incorporation of migrants into the host society?
- How can the risks of alienation and marginalization of migrants in receiving societies be reduced and how to avoid negative impacts on national security?

E. Migrant Integration Stakeholders

The responsibility for migrant integration rests with many actors: migrants themselves, origin and host countries, public and private institutions and communities. The experiences of

individual migrants are a valuable source of information to aid understanding of the challenges of integration and for developing effective strategies to address these challenges.

Within governments, action is necessary at all levels – national, regional, municipal and local. Migrant integration requires an inclusive approach. Migration requires not only a “whole of government approach” but a “whole of society approach.” The private sector and civil society in general can offer valuable assistance and ideas to facilitate migrant integration. Institutions at the local community level where nationals and non-nationals most often interact, such as schools, marketplaces and banks, are often in the best position to assess and address the particular needs of the community and migrants. Non-state actors therefore complement the efforts of governments owing to their grass roots presence to engage and assist migrants in their daily lives.

F. Conclusion

Migration does not end with the arrival of a migrant in a foreign country. Migration brings change that impacts on the lives and well being of both migrants and host societies. How to manage such change to the mutual benefit of all is one of the biggest challenges for governments today. It is expected that the challenge will grow with the rising global movement of persons, particularly temporary migration and rapid changes in global labour markets as well as demographic pressures.

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