



International Organization for Migration (IOM)



Integration of Migrants

The IOM approach

March 2003

Introduction

Integration is today an essential aspect of effective migration management. It addresses the challenges of how migrants settle into their new host community, how they are received by that community, and how they can maintain links to their home culture, if desired. It is an important indicator of the success of immigration programs, and can actively contribute to their continuing integrity.

Integration policies can help promote cohesive, inclusive and tolerant societies, where immigrant populations can live in harmony with the local population. Failure to promote tolerance and understanding in a mixed community can feed discrimination and social exclusion, eventually giving rise to racism and xenophobia. Socio-economic and political disaffection among migrant communities could breed social violence, or at least create conditions conducive to recruitment to asocial actions.

Where there is instability both between new and established communities, or among them, this can have serious repercussions at the social, economic and political levels for host Governments, and by extension for the bilateral relations between countries of migrant origin and destination.

Integration is a two-way process of adaptation by migrants and receiving societies at a number of levels: economic, social, cultural and political. The success of integration depends on the willingness and commitment of foreigners to adapt to their new environment, but also on the preparedness of host communities to accept newcomers and their families.

There are no international legal provisions specific to integration, hence the approaches can vary from country to country. International human rights law, however, does enshrine principles relating to equality of economic, social and cultural rights, and the granting of civil and political rights and freedom from discrimination and xenophobia. This is the



platform of rights and principles on which integration policies can be built.

IOM supports Government efforts in this regard, by sharing their knowledge and experience across a range of tried models, and working with Governments, NGOs and migrant communities to establish workable institutional structures and practices. Through the promotion and facilitation of cooperative approaches between countries of origin and destination, IOM intends to pursue its objective to manage migration in a comprehensive and sustainable way.

The present paper outlines the IOM approach to integration and offers an overview of its activities in the field. A broader analysis of challenges and responses in the field of integration can be found in a companion document entitled “Integration – Challenges for policy-makers”.¹

Due to the unique context in which integration should be considered in post-emergency situations this paper does not deal with that context. Instead, it focuses on integration in post-resettlement situations, and labour migration (documented and undocumented) schemes and other such types of movements.

Similarly, the paper does not deal with issues related to the re-integration of migrants into their own society of origin. This theme is best addressed in the context of Assisted Voluntary Returns. IOM considers that reintegration assistance is critically important in facilitating returns for all parties - the migrants and host and origin countries.

¹ This policy paper summarizes the results of the workshop on integration during the 84th Council of the IOM in December 2002.



Policies at the National Level

The approaches adopted by states hosting immigrants have varied and evolved significantly over time. They usually accord with the way Governments view the questions of national identity and cultural diversity, and seek to ensure social stability and well-being for their residents.

Current policies range from a *laissez faire* approach to a highly centralised and government-regulated one; with community/ethnic groups, NGOs and the private sector playing a variety of roles within these schemes. Most governments have some legislation to address discrimination and xenophobia; and some traditional immigrant-receiving states have active policies to ensure equal access to mainstream services, and well functioning ethnic affairs strategies to support ethnic communities in their cultural and other activities.

Four general approaches can be identified to date - assimilation, segregation, integration and multiculturalism. These determine and characterise the way migrants and receiving communities interact, adapt and adjust to each other. With the exception of the segregation model, they tend to focus on permanent migrants.

Assimilation is based on the notion that migrants will become full citizens, similar to the receiving/native population, sharing common civic values with them. It is usually a one-sided process of adaptation and absorption in which migrants adopt the language, norms and behaviour of the receiving society without a reciprocal process by the latter.

Integration, on the other hand, entails a two-way process of mutual accommodation between migrants and receiving population, in which these two groups not only accept but also contribute to a common culture. At the same time, while people of different cultures learn from each other's culture, each individual or cultural group retains some sense of cultural heritage and diversity.

The model of **multiculturalism** recognises that migrants settling into host communities remain distinguishable from the majority population with regard to language, culture and social behaviour, without jeopardising national identity. They derive their identity from different cultural traditions, while embracing the ideal of tolerance for other ways of life. *Multiculturalism* differs from *integration* and *assimilation* in that equal rights and opportunities are granted to migrants without requiring them to give up other cultural affiliations.

In the **segregation** model, migrants are not expected to integrate into the culture of the host society. This approach is often applied to temporary migrants. The temporary nature of the immigration system leads to granting migrants limited social rights, and even excludes them from some aspects of daily social life in the receiving communities.

Regardless of the model pursued, there are some basic proven keys to integration success, such as education and language, which can enhance access to employment, education, cultural activities and other essential elements of local life. Governments, communities and private actors all play a critical role in supporting and furthering the interactive process between migrants and native populations. Promoting a positive image of migrants in the host society is another essential element of a successful integration strategy.

Demographic Trends and Globalisation

A number of countries, particularly in Europe, are confronted with ageing populations and the challenge of maintaining a sufficient workforce, where there is no corresponding increase in birth-rates. Labour shortages are having an impact on economic growth, development and the



ability of States to safeguard the viability of the pension and social security systems. Where there are noticeable labour market needs, migrants can fill a gap and help maintain or expand productivity levels. Thus increasingly, countries have abandoned traditional «zero-immigration» policies and are reviewing their approach to immigration.

As globalisation creates more opportunities for labour migrants, and barriers to their mobility are lowered, greater attention will need to be given to their socio-economic integration in their host country.

National security

Increased security concerns in the aftermath of September 11 have changed the international migration environment. Most governments are reacting to the events by strengthening border control and enhancing national security measures. Some are tightening the conditions under which migrants may become an integral part of the host communities, including, in some instances, prolonging the time period for migrants to qualify for permanent residence or citizenship.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the importance of integration for minimising the incidence of social alienation and the involvement of minority groups in activities against their own host society. The significance of community education for combating cultural stereotyping and prejudices towards migrant communities is increasingly acknowledged. Comprehensive approaches that offer legal migration opportunities, and include effective integration measures, can also help reduce the incidence of irregular migration.

Thus more and more Governments are looking for ways to balance stricter national security measures with more effective approaches to integration.

International Cooperation

The migration process operates along a continuum; and countries of origin can also play a critical role in this process. Experience shows that the effectiveness of integration can be enhanced, when the process already begins in the country of origin prior to emigration. Cooperation and partnerships between countries of origin and host countries can promote better understanding of the issues that could both create or dissipate social tensions. The support of countries of origin in this process is important, particularly in relation to second and third generations of migrants who are often in search of an original culture.

Countries of origin can help foster the integration of their nationals in the host countries by establishing conditions conducive for the diaspora to maintain close links with their home country and contribute to its development. These could include measures to facilitate the transfer of remittances and leverage their usefulness in the home country, stronger trade links, cultural exchanges, transfer of know-how, bilateral agreements on the portability of retirement benefits or avoidance of double taxation, as well as dual citizenship.

At the same time, host countries can provide a stable and supportive environment for migrants, that enables them to be productive economic forces both for their host community and the community in the home country. This could include, e.g., the easing of visa conditions for migrants and their families, allowing them to travel without forfeiting their right of residence in the host country, work rights for family members, early granting of citizenship, and favourable banking arrangements to permit easy transfer of remittances. These and other measures to support migrants' economic, social and political integration could be complemented by the removal of administrative barriers regulating free movement.



Some immigrant-receiving states already factor integration considerations into the selection criteria for skilled/qualified applicants; and recruit persons on the basis of points acquired for e.g. their qualifications, age, linguistic skills, connections with the country etc. This approach facilitates longer term integration planning, which in turn can aid the evolution from temporary to permanent status, if necessary, in the host country.

IOM's Approach to Integration

IOM operates on the principle that for migration to be sustainable, and to contribute to the security, stability and prosperity of societies, governments should give high priority to settlement and integration policies and practices. The Organization has supported this objective through a number of initiatives over the years.

IOM is concerned to draw from the best practices developed by governments and build on those for the benefit of all governments interested in ensuring cohesion through diversity of peoples, cultures, ethnicities and religions. As stated in IOM's Constitution, one of the purposes and functions of the Organization is:

To provide, at the request of and in agreement with the States concerned, migration services such as recruitment, selection, processing, language training, orientation activities, medical examination, placement, activities facilitating reception and integration, advisory services on migration questions, and other assistance as is in accord with the aims of the Organization¹;

IOM uses appropriate means and occasions to stimulate awareness of the contributions migrants can and do make, the difficulties they often face, and the rights to which they are entitled both as human beings and migrants. IOM also sees the need to help clarify with migrants their lawful obligations to the States

offering them admission.”²

Policy developments in recent years reflect the critical need for adequate and effective policies and measures to ensure the integration of migrants in host countries. Policy responses tend to vary as they take into consideration the specific socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of societies in host countries as well as the divergent characteristics and origins of migrants in these societies.

Existing integration policies tend to focus primarily on permanent migrants. The successful integration of migrants and their families is nevertheless equally important for temporary or short-term migrants. In either case, social exclusion and discrimination could lead to the alienation of migrant communities from their host society with all the undesirable effects this can entail.

Integration of temporary migrants acquires significance in light of the increase in this form of migration in today's globalization context. In this context, it is important to ensure official and public awareness in order to promote appropriate response by countries hosting temporary migrants such as labour migrants. Even if their migration is not envisaged to reach an integration phase by definition, it is important to highlight to governments, communities and individuals how assisting these migrants in adapting to a new reality and access to basic services will result in benefits to the host communities.

It is IOM's belief that the principle of equality of rights and obligations should be a common denominator for all integration policy and practice. Governments need to build on this for migrants' education as well as equal access to employment opportunities, health and other public services, enhanced migrant participation in civic society, and access to citizenship, including dual citizenship.

¹ Constitution of the International Organization for Migration

² IOM Strategic Planning: Toward the Twenty-first Century, MC/1842, May 1995



IOM's Integration Activities

IOM has for decades been implementing programs in support of the integration of migrants in traditional immigration countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA. Services provided within the frame of these programs include language training, cultural orientation, travel documentation and transport assistance, health assessment, pre-departure treatment or counselling for certain health conditions, medical escorts and post-arrival referrals to facilitate integration.

These activities have expanded in recent years to address the wider spectrum of integration needs of both migrants and receiving societies, as well as some governments' increasing preference to factor integration into their overall policies on migration.

Research

IOM conducts research that provides an overview and analysis of international experience in the field of immigration legislation and practice, including integration. It has also collected information to permit comparison of migratory flows and the treatment of migrants in selected regional and sub-regional migration environments.

International fora

IOM also provides an international forum for discussion of integration policies, and facilitates exchange of information and sharing of experiences of actors involved in integration schemes at national and international levels.

Information campaigns

IOM's geographic coverage has widened in recent years to include new immigration countries in Western Europe that are transforming themselves into multiethnic and multicultural societies. Information campaigns have been carried out to fight discrimination and increase public awareness on the contributions that migrants make in receiving societies.

At the same time, information dissemination

projects target migrants themselves, both to empower them and raise awareness of their rights and obligations vis-à-vis- receiving countries.

Migrant Information Centres (MIC)

Migrant Information Centres offer another approach of using information for the benefits of migrants. These are readily accessible centres for any migrant requiring practical information and referrals on all practical aspects of daily life, rights and obligations, and how to access mainstream social services and support mechanisms offered by the host government, NGOs and international organizations. Through such facilities, migrants can benefit from vocational training and skills upgrading with a view to facilitating labour insertion and economic integration.

Technical support

IOM extends technical support to government officials and other practitioners working with migrants through training, advisory services and other capacity building means.

Migration health projects

IOM carries out migration health projects aimed at facilitating integration and providing services to address the health needs - physical and mental - of migrants and host communities. Research activities continue to identify barriers migrants are confronted with when attempting to access general health services. Furthermore, psycho-social support has been provided to migrants in an effort to help them overcome the difficulties of adapting to a new social environment and life-style.

However, one of IOM's most direct operational contributions to integration of migrants is through the health education, counselling, diagnosis, treatment services for a variety of health conditions at the pre-departure stage. The health information systems used by IOM to document these conditions are directly linked with the host countries' health authorities to enable appropriate post-arrival referral and to facilitate follow-up during the integration phase.



At a different level, IOM's research and policy advocacy activities continue to identify and overcome barriers migrants are confronted with when attempting to access general health services in various host countries.

A short description of projects IOM has been implementing in the field of Integration is provided in Annex 1.

The aim is to provide them with accurate information on migration legislation and practices in the host state, share information on the level of integration of their nationals, identify best practices, and constraints on integration. Exchange of experts can also be organised.

Training of migrant associations and community leaders can enhance their capacity to tap into community resources available to them.

Strengthening Future Integration Actions

Based on the experience and practice acquired in these programs, the following measures can further strengthen the efforts of Governments in promoting integration of migrants.

Research

Research activities that focus on current integration practices from national, regional and/or local perspectives and best practices to assist migrants and other minority groups in the social, labour, cultural and other aspects of integration. These could include the elaboration of indicators of successful/effective integration.

These could be accompanied by research to better assess the expectations, motivations, needs and difficulties encountered by migrants in their integration process. Labour market surveys with a view to assess job placement conditions and social integration prospects should also be considered.

Information & Referral Services

Information is indispensable to encouraging the

active inclusion of migrants and minority groups in social life.

Migrant Resource Centres could, for example, be a useful "one-stop shop" for concise, practical, up-to-date information on all aspects of daily life, rights and obligations, as well as useful contacts for services provided to migrants and minority groups, including language training and cultural orientation, psycho-social assistance, and referral services for those trained with available job opportunities. The centres can also provide ready venues for interviewing applicants and offering vocational training and counselling to those selected for immigration.

"Immigrants Information Agencies" staffed by migrant journalists can also operate under the Centres' umbrella.

Awareness Raising & Education

Information campaigns are a useful tool in countering discrimination and social exclusion. In host countries, they strive to promote the positive image of migrants and to highlight their contributions to the host society. Their target audience could be extended to include, in addition to the general public, specific groups (i.e. civil servants) that come into contact with and provide services to migrants and minority populations.

Young people should also be targeted, as they have a primary role to play in facilitating social inclusion of migrants and minority groups. They are a particularly receptive group when it comes to tackling discrimination and especially in fighting racism and xenophobia, and can often be more sympathetic to the concept of a multi-cultural society.

Targeting them can promote the development of intercultural understanding and a sense of solidarity.

To this effect, *training modules and courses* on issues related to multi-ethnic societies, human rights etc are important to accompany awareness raising measures.



Exchanges and training activities for youth in countries with migrant and minority populations can enhance intercultural dialogue and understanding and stimulate active citizenship and democratic participation. Such initiatives could also help reinforcing co-operation at local level between grass-roots organizations and local authorities.

In countries of origin, awareness raising activities will serve as a means of empowering migrants through better knowledge about their rights and obligations towards the country where they will reside.

Forum Activities

Such activities provide a platform to exchange information and share lessons learned and good practices, both internally and internationally among government officials, local community representatives, employer associations, migrant associations and minority groups, youth groups etc.

Through dialogue, all parties can share their concerns and interests and work towards finding common ground and solutions.

The active participation of representatives from countries of origin is essential in view of the role they can play in supporting their nationals in the integration process abroad.

Orientation & Training activities

These schemes target public officials dealing with migrants i.e. police, labour health staff, social workers, and cultural mediators, as well as officials from migrants' countries of origin.

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Training of migrant associations and community leaders can enhance their capacity to tap into community resources available to them.

Psychosocial orientation and support modules can also complement traditional orientation activities.

¹ Constitution of the International Organization for Migration

² IOM Strategic Planning: Toward the Twenty-first Century, MC/1842, May 1995

