

International Migration

Integration and Social Cohesion

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Migration plays a critical role in promoting sustainable development, benefiting both migrants and their host communities. However, for migration to have a truly positive impact, it is essential that migrants are effectively integrated into their new societies. Without proper integration, migrants may face marginalization, limiting their access to education, jobs, and social participation, which increases their vulnerability.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has made migration a key global issue, acknowledging the positive impact of migrants on development and highlighting the need for international cooperation to ensure safe, orderly, and inclusive migration. The Agenda advocates for equal access to essential services such as health, education, and decent work for all, regardless of migrant status. It also stresses the importance of cultural diversity, non-discrimination, and violence prevention.

While there are no specific international laws on migrant integration, existing human rights laws protect migrants' rights and guide effective integration policies.

As of 2024, the landscape of migration is

We declare our profound solidarity with, and support for, the millions of people in different parts of the world who, for reasons beyond their control, are forced to uproot themselves and their families from their homes.

We will consider facilitating opportunities for safe, orderly and regular migration, including, as appropriate, employment creation, labour mobility at all skills levels, circular migration, family reunification and education -related opportunities.

We will pay particular attention to the application of minimum labour standards for migrant workers regardless of their status, recruitment and other migration-related costs, remittance flows, transfers of skills and knowledge and the creation of employment opportunities for young people.

Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

Extract of Integration and Social Cohesion: Key Elements for Reaping Benefits of Migration, Position Paper, IOM.

shaped by a mix of voluntary movements, such as labor migration, and involuntary displacements, driven by conflict, persecution, environmental changes, and economic disparities. The interplay of these factors highlights both the opportunities and challenges that migration presents today.

Key Challenges in Contemporary Migration

Human Rights Concerns: Migrants, especially those in irregular situations or forced displacement, often face significant human rights challenges. These include exploitation, abuse, limited access to legal protections, and poor living conditions. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, gender-based violence, and other forms of exploitation.

Policy and Governance: The governance of migration at both national and international levels remains complex and often fragmented. While some countries have adopted more inclusive and comprehensive migration policies, others have moved towards more restrictive approaches. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted in 2018, represents a significant step towards international cooperation, but its implementation varies widely across countries.

Economic Impacts: While migration can bring significant economic benefits, including addressing labor shortages and contributing to innovation, it also poses challenges. These include pressure on public services, housing, and infrastructure in host countries, particularly when large numbers of migrants arrive over a short period.

Health and Well-being: The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities of migrant populations, who often face barriers to healthcare access, live in crowded conditions, and work in essential but low-paid sectors. Ensuring that migrants have access to healthcare and social protection is critical for their well-being and for public health in general.

Global Trends in Migration

Growing Migrant Population: The number of international migrants continues to rise, with the United Nations estimating that there are over 280 million migrants globally. This increase is driven by various factors,

including globalization, improved transportation, and the growing disparities between countries in terms of economic opportunities, political stability, and environmental conditions.

Forced Displacement: Forced migration is at an all-time high, with conflicts, persecution, and human rights violations being primary drivers. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), over 100 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide. This includes refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Major crises in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, and South Sudan have contributed to these high numbers, along with new conflicts such as in Ukraine.

Climate-Induced Migration: Environmental factors, particularly those related to climate change, are increasingly influencing migration patterns. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and prolonged droughts are forcing people to leave their homes. Regions like the Pacific Islands, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia are particularly vulnerable. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, climate change could displace up to 216 million people within their own countries, emphasizing the need for adaptive migration policies.

Labor Migration: Labor migration remains a significant aspect of global migration. Many people move to countries with better economic opportunities, particularly from developing to developed nations. Regions like the Middle East, Europe, and North America continue to attract migrant workers, particularly in sectors like construction, healthcare, and agriculture. Remittances sent by migrants play a crucial role in supporting the economies of their home countries, with global remittances reaching around \$540 billion in recent years.

Irregular Migration and Border Control: Irregular migration, involving unauthorized crossings or overstays, is a growing challenge for many countries. In response, many nations have tightened border controls, increased surveillance, and implemented stricter immigration policies. However, these measures often lead to more dangerous migration routes and have significant humanitarian implications. Regions like the Mediterranean, the US-Mexico border, and Southeast Asia have become focal points of irregular migration, with thousands risking

their lives in search of safety or better opportunities.

Integration and Social Cohesion Challenges: As migration increases, so do the challenges of integrating migrants into host societies. Issues like xenophobia, discrimination, and social exclusion are prominent in many countries. The rise of nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments in several regions, particularly in Europe and North America, has led to stricter immigration policies and sometimes hostile environments for migrants. Successful integration requires robust policies that promote social cohesion, equal access to services, and recognition of migrants' contributions to society. But, although there is growing recognition of the importance of integration and social cohesion, debates persist about what successful integration looks like and how to achieve it, particularly regarding the definitions of "integration" and "social cohesion."

Social Cohesion and Integration

A lack of a clear, unified definition of social cohesion complicates efforts to measure it effectively. Researchers often use indicators like trust and adherence to social norms, assuming these reflect high levels of social cohesion. Trust is typically measured alongside social capital indicators like association memberships and political participation. However, some argue that focusing on trust alone is insufficient, as it is more affected by diversity than other aspects of social cohesion. Additionally, many studies overlook the importance of direct social contact between neighbors in diverse communities, which is vital for building and maintaining cohesion. This oversight means that "contact theory"—the idea that increased interaction between different ethnic groups reduces prejudice and fosters cooperation—is rarely tested directly.

Research from the US suggests a negative correlation between diversity and social cohesion, particularly regarding trust. Studies indicate that in more diverse neighborhoods, people tend to trust each other less and are less involved in their communities. However, evidence from Europe and the UK presents a more nuanced picture. While some studies align with US findings, others suggest that factors like income inequality and economic deprivation play a more significant role in determining social cohesion than diversity

alone. The role of contact between different groups is crucial in moderating the relationship between diversity and social cohesion. Studies emphasize the importance of distinguishing between positive and negative interactions in diverse settings. For example, Laurence and Bentley (2017) found that in diverse communities, both positive and negative inter-group contacts increase, potentially leading to polarized attitudes. Therefore, creating spaces that facilitate positive interactions, such as community centers, is essential for fostering social cohesion in diverse communities.

Integration is a complex process that varies depending on a country's approach, ranging from assimilation to multiculturalism, and is influenced by the type and purpose of migration. Effective integration fosters stable, inclusive societies but requires significant political, social, and financial investment. Successful integration involves coordinated efforts across various sectors, partnerships with stakeholders, and clear expectations for both migrants and host communities. Preparing local communities, ensuring access to services, and considering gender-sensitive approaches are crucial to addressing challenges faced by migrants, including discrimination and xenophobia.

As migration increases, managing the changing dynamics within societies becomes increasingly important. Building public trust in migration and integration policies requires open dialogue, transparency, and accurate information. Local communities play a vital role in integration, so new ways to involve them from the outset are necessary. While positive campaigns exist, exploring new strategies is crucial. Enhancing data collection and analysis is key to countering myths about migration, reducing xenophobia, and fostering meaningful integration. All host countries should monitor integration and discrimination indicators to measure progress effectively.

Although approaches to integration differ across countries, several effective practices are already in place. A key commitment of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants is combating xenophobia and discrimination against migrants, regardless of their status, which is crucial for successful integration. Governments can implement these protections through awareness campaigns and training for law enforcement and local authorities.

Practical Steps to Improve Integration

Labor Market Access and Financial Inclusion:

- Gather data on migrants' skills and qualifications to better job matching.
- Establish resource centers to assist migrants with services like registration, job opportunities, and legal advice.
- Offer early financial training to help migrants integrate economically.
- Improve recognition of foreign qualifications and involve employers in understanding their value.
- Create partnerships to address labor shortages and match migrants with job opportunities.
- Promote professional development through internships, training, and job programs.
- Ensure migrant women have access to job training, childcare, and support for self-employment.

Access to Education:

- Provide tailored education and language training to meet migrants' needs.
- Develop online resources for language training.
- Enhance services for unaccompanied migrant children, focusing on education and social development.
- Integrate migrants into public services, utilizing those familiar with their cultures as mediators.

Health:

- Create policies to ensure equal access to health services for migrants, promoting social cohesion and public health.
- Train health staff to support migrants with culturally sensitive care.
- Address barriers like xenophobia to improve migrants' access to health services.
- Provide psychosocial support to address migrants' mental and physical health challenges, with training for local professionals.

Civic and Political Participation:

- Develop systems for granting legal identity to migrants, allowing access to services and financial transactions.
- Establish consultation mechanisms to include migrants in political discussions.
- Create spaces for intercultural and interfaith dialogue between migrants and host communities.
- Provide civic education with the involvement of local authorities and migrant organizations.
- Support online communication to inform migrants about their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in host countries.

Family Reunification:

- Minimize waiting times for appointments and visa processing to avoid prolonging family separation, with expedited processes for vulnerable cases.
- Reduce fees and financial obstacles for migrants in vulnerable situations.
- Facilitate access to consulates and visa application centers, particularly in locations with limited or no consular presence.
- Ensure that biometric data collection and DNA testing are affordable, secure, and respect the rights and privacy of family members.
- Provide streamlined document-related services to help family members obtain necessary documents for their applications.
- Train staff to communicate in different languages and offer gender-sensitive, child-friendly support.
- Offer travel assistance to migrants in vulnerable situations, including unaccompanied minors and those requiring medical support.
- These steps are essential to ensuring that migrants are not only welcomed into their new communities but are also able to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.