



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

Integration of Migrants

Workshop Summary 84th Council Session, 2-4 December 2002

Overview

The workshop on integration took place on December 3, in the framework of the 84th Session of the IOM Council. During the informal discussion between delegates and experts on concepts, challenges and solutions for integration of migrants in host countries, similarities and differences in opinions were expressed.

While the emphasis put on specific topics by the participants displayed a slight differentiation of priorities depending on whether a country is predominantly a country of origin or a country of destination, there were no major points of disagreement, nor open controversies. In particular, the workshop generated agreement among participants on the following topics:

- Integration is a two-way, *long-term process*.
- Economic integration is an essential first step.
- *Cooperation* between host and home country is required.
- Migrants should be supported in maintaining *links with their home countries* / cultures.
- It is the *responsibility of host country governments*: to develop a pro-active, comprehensive approach; to offer assistance to migrants; to trigger and promote a public discussion; to help the society understand the benefits/positive aspects of migration; to prevent/fight discrimination.
- It is the *responsibility of home country governments*: to assist migrants maintaining their links to the home culture; to develop programmes that promote orderly migration; to assist migrants in legal, financial and orientation matters upon return.
- It is the *responsibility of migrants*: to actively integrate; to respect the laws of the host country; to assist the host society in understanding their culture.
- It is the responsibility / *role of the media*: to change their current outlook, which presents migration predominantly as a threat.
- An *active public discourse* is the only means to find/define common values.

The issue of dual citizenship showed that host societies are currently at the beginning of a transformation process, which touches upon the very identity of society. Therefore, integration policies can be expected to change in a step-by-step approach, in parallel with the development within, i.e. readiness of host societies.

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Several open questions remained:

- Is the option of dual citizenship desirable?
- Is it necessary to change social identification patterns that are based on single culture definitions?
- How can governments and societies successfully respond to circular migration?

In conclusion, there was broad agreement that a pre-condition for any successful integration approach is that it be a voluntary process and provides the migrants with a feeling of ownership. Only if they feel useful to the host society will they undertake a real effort to integrate.

Summary of the discussion

What is integration, and why is it wanted? The participants agreed that successful integration programmes are determined by how well migrants participate in the social, economic and political life of the host community. To measure this, objective factors such as the level of education, the level of salary, and participation in civil society organizations on the one hand, and subjective factors such as “well-being” and psychological distress on the other can be applied.

Integration is a continuous, long-term, two-way process. It’s success depends in large part on the nature of the response of the host community to foreigners. Simultaneously, however, it depends on the individual choice of the migrant as to how much s/he wants to participate in the life of the host community.

Most delegates agreed that in times of growing migration flows, every country has to address integration issues. A particular challenge is that many national identities are still built on the basis of mono-cultural, mono-ethnic ideas. This explains the fact that today more and more people vote in favor of parties that try to reinforce this kind of nation building. In this context, the catalogue of key-instruments against discrimination established by the *Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance* was brought to the attention of the participants.

The dialogue within a society is, according to many delegates, of utmost importance. In order to find a common denominator it is necessary to make the public discourse revolve around common values, and to explore the limits of the host society as well as of the migrants. An important key to positively influencing the public dialogue would be to review and rewrite those parts of a country’s history that obscure positive past contributions of migrants.

The participants underlined the importance of economic integration as a basis for social and political integration. Further pre-conditions for successful integration are favorable public opinion and image of migrants presented by the media, the motivation of the host community, and the feeling of ownership conveyed to the migrants. Most participants similarly acknowledged the importance of acquiring the language of the host society, while the practice of obligatory language courses was viewed as controversial.

Special attention was given to gender issues. Even though tolerance is important, there is a fine line between cultural sensitivity and tolerance of violence towards women. The challenge is to strike a balance between accepting different values and preventing families from disintegrating.

In order to address the challenges of integration in a comprehensive way, open and transparent cooperation between countries of destination and countries of origin is needed. Delegates highlighted the importance of cultural dialogue while rejecting the thesis of a “clash of civilizations”. A “double-belonging” in terms of identity as well as in terms of citizenship is only achievable through continuous dialogue and investment from both sides. In this context, it is indispensable for migrants to keep their links to the home culture. Consequently, host societies should not require migrants to assimilate.

Some delegates were especially concerned about the fact that migrants are often required to entirely adapt to their host country’s value system, which seriously limits their religious and cultural practices, and subsequently leads to loss of identity. Furthermore, a necessary distinction is to be made between migrants of the first generation on the one hand, and migrants of the second and third generation on the other. The latter are stronger hit by the problem of losing their link to the culture of origin.

Various practices of naturalization were discussed. The practice to “reward” migrants with citizenship at the end of a successful integration process was compared with the one that uses citizenship as an instrument to facilitate integration. Adherents to the first practice argued that citizenship requires full integration as a precondition, whereas others were of the opinion that naturalization is an intrinsic part of integration, the latter being a life-long process.

Finally, IOM was encouraged by delegates to study continuously successful examples of integration and to draw lessons from these experiences. Many participants in the workshop expressed their hope that the workshop would be only the beginning of a continuous and fruitful dialogue on integration.

◆ A comprehensive analysis of the workshop themes will be published in the coming months.