Integration and Inclusion of Migrants and People with a Migrant Background

IOM Contribution to the EU Public Consultation

21st of October 2020
Introduction

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) welcomes the European Commission’s invitation to contribute to the public consultation relating to its forthcoming Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion. IOM is hopeful that the new Action Plan will further strengthen the EU’s integration policy and dynamize EU Member States’ national efforts to promote the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with migrant backgrounds. As the leading international organization in the field of migration, IOM’s submission to this public consultation outlines our views on what a comprehensive integration policy framework would entail for the European context with the view of fostering sustainable and resilient societies, in which migratory processes and migrants’ integration benefit all.

European societies have become increasingly heterogeneous, composed of diverse populations – including native-born citizens, first-, second- and third-generation migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and migrant workers. Migration, with the diversity that it brings to societies, has significant potential for contributing to the well-being of migrants and of their host communities; notably through the varied skillsets, and experiences migrants bring with them and the positive effects of cultural exchange on societies. In addition, migrants can also make positive contributions to European economies. For migration processes to indeed be beneficial in this way, migration governance actors must ensure that migrants and people with a migrant background are successfully integrated into society and included in its social services and processes. To that end, stakeholders are to adopt a holistic, multi-stakeholder, whole-of-society approach which incorporates short, mid- and long-term goals and considerations; and which takes into account the diversity of migrant profiles and complexities of integration processes.

In fact, and despite Europe’s diversity, migrants and people with a migrant background, consistently experience lower educational and health outcomes, are disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment or poor working conditions when employed, continue to face barriers in accessing basic services and are often subject to discrimination and xenophobic behaviours. All of these factors combined perpetuate social inequalities, bar migrants from reaching their full potential and lead to the underutilization of migrants’ skills and contribution to their host society. The COVID-19 pandemic which has further exacerbated these pre-existing inequalities, has also impacted migrants’ mental and physical wellbeing, excluded them from accessing services, and has enhanced their exposure to xenophobia – all of which further hinder migrants’ successful integration into their host society.

In a pandemic context, European societies as a whole are at increased risk of becoming socially fragmented and polarized, especially in light of shrinking economic resources. Social integration is therefore no longer just migrant-specific but a whole-of-society concern, which needs to be duly considered in the EU’s approach to integration. Integration measures need to be closely integrated into Europe’s socio-economic recovery plans to ensure that migrants are not left behind and be given the opportunity to contribute to Europe’s recovery. Against this backdrop, IOM believes that well-managed integration policy and programming will empower migrants and their host societies in reaching full inclusion and contributing to overall economic prosperity and social cohesion.
IOM’s Integration Policy Approach

Migrant integration empowers migrants to realize their full inclusion in society and promotes positive relations across diverse groups, thereby contributing to diverse yet inclusive and cohesive societies. IOM recognizes that successful integration is a dynamic, multifaceted process that is:

- Multidimensional – depending on multiple factors encompassing equitable access to resources and opportunities as well as respectful relations.
- Multi-directional – involving mutual adjustments by migrants and societies in which they settle.
- Inclusive of the whole-of-society – recognizing that both migrants and affected communities have a role to play in the process and a shared sense of responsibility to make integration work.
- Context specific – requiring a tailored approach to migrants’ characteristics, multiple identities and specific needs arising in particular contexts.

Key considerations for the new Action Plan

The development of a new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion provides a renewed opportunity for the EU and its Member States to reframe an integration policy framework that addresses the ongoing and emerging integration challenges faced by migrants and their host societies for the next coming years. To that end, IOM invites the Commission to consider the following:

Addressing integration along the migration continuum

Integration is a long-term process set in motion along the migration continuum. Providing support to migrants and their receiving communities at the earliest possible moment in the migration process, and adequately linking pre-departure and post-arrival integration measures, are essential features of their successful integration into host societies. Strengthened linkages between pre- and post-arrival integration support enables improved planning of integration for migrants and communities concerned. On the migrant side, this may include pre-departure orientation training programmes to manage their expectations early on, improve their knowledge of their prospective host society and empower them with the skills needed to smoothly transition into their new community. Integration support made available to migrants upon arrival is indeed likely to be more effective when it continues an integration process that started prior to departure. On the community side, early interventions may include pre-arrival awareness raising on migrant populations, training of service providers, local authorities, education actors, volunteer networks and mentors, or employer services as well as the establishment of virtual platforms to connect communities with prospective migrants to anticipate social interactions.

Strengthening multi-sectoral and multi-level governance response

Migrant integration and inclusion require a policy and programmatic response that spans across policy areas and relies on sound synergies and linkages with broader social inclusion processes. As such, IOM underscores the need for an EU
Action Plan which considers migrants’ integration needs across all relevant sectors – including education, health, housing, employment and civil liberties – and which holistically considers these in the context of migrants’ integration outcomes. Fostering stronger and better coordination mechanisms both horizontally – between different sectors of government – and vertically – between central and local levels of governance – is essential.

**Fostering community engagement and innovative partnerships**

Encouraging communities to feel they have a stake in receiving newcomers is an important dimension of social cohesion and can help mitigate feelings of loss of control that often lie at the root of resistance to embrace new community members. Including migrants in the design and creation process of integration programmes is also necessary to ensure their views are fully taken into consideration in integration needs responses.

Innovative partnerships among different stakeholders are also important in delivering a comprehensive integration response and bridging existing siloes that may arise from mono-stakeholder action. Partnering with NGOs and the private sector, for example, can help ensure that key services are accessible to communities with which it may be difficult for government actors and public service providers to build the necessary level of trust. Meanwhile, collaborating with businesses can open up new ways to sustain services through alternative financing models and potentially help tap into the particular expertise that the private sector can bring.

**Promoting a balanced approach to targeted and mainstream service provision**

Strengthening equitable access to services is key to ensuring that no migrants are left behind, particularly in a pandemic era where needs have increased – including in the health and psychosocial health realms. Migrants’ adequate access to basic services is instrumental to ensure they can fulfil their potential, achieve wellbeing and contribute to host countries as healthy and productive workers and members of their communities at large.

In the context of the COVID-19 induced health crisis, basic services were strained and online service delivery alternatives were implemented in the EU. Scarcity of public resources and pressure on existing services in the face of an unplanned crisis combined with migrants’ sometimes lack of digital access and already-challenged integration prospects, have led to worse integration outcomes for migrants – including migrant children lagging behind in school. To avoid a scenario whereby migrants fall through the cracks of public service delivery, furthering their unequal access to essential services, adequate structures and services at local level which streamline migrant specific needs and vulnerabilities in an inclusive and holistic manner are important in facilitating migrants’ safe, full and non-discriminatory access to basic services.

Mainstreaming integration service provision into the general services available to all of society can be an effective means of making service provision more responsive to the needs of migrants. While the mainstreaming approach is recommended for adapting general services to increased diversity within broader population, it can however produce gaps in expertise and service provision for migrant groups with specific needs – in terms of accessibility, entitlement and quality. IOM therefore supports a balanced approach to mainstreaming and targeted support of migrants, following the principle of ‘mainstreaming where possible, targeting where necessary.’
While migrants share general common needs in view of their integration, the intersectionality of migrant identities and specific vulnerability factors generate a series of specific needs that ought to be addressed in an inclusive and targeted manner. As such, IOM would welcome an Action Plan that underscores the importance of streamlining the specific needs of unaccompanied minor children (UMC), migrant women, LGBTQI migrants, migrants with disabilities, and other categories of migrants with particular needs, into integration policies and programmes. To that end, data collection and disaggregation, by sex, age, and disability, is a prerequisite to understand vulnerability profiles, address inequalities and build a picture of how multiple disadvantages reinforce discrimination and exclusion. Adopting an intersectional approach and make greater use of disaggregated data is critical for appropriate targeting of interventions and ensuring the more vulnerable groups are not left behind.

Countering xenophobia and stigmatization

Xenophobia, marginalization and discrimination against migrants impede them from fulfilling themselves fully; and poses serious risks to the cohesion of European societies. The COVID-19 pandemic, with the economic recession and social uncertainties it brings, has increased risks of stigmatization and discrimination against migrants and people with a migrant background. As persisting incidents and expressions of xenophobia have both short and long-term implications for society-at-large, there is an urgent need to explore new ways to reduce prejudice among local populations vis-à-vis migrants and effectively counter various forms of intolerance and disparaging expressions towards them. To that end, IOM encourages the EC to foster balanced and evidence-based reporting around migration and to shape positive narratives on migration and migrants’ contribution to society. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that migrants, at all skill levels, have played an instrumental role in supporting critical sectors during the pandemic – including the healthcare, agricultural, food-processing and transport industries – and keeping supply chains afloat. Likewise, migrants can contribute to Europe’s socio-economic recovery as agents of economic revitalization.

IOM also notes the importance of strengthening the implementation of existing policy and legal frameworks at EU and national levels that combat discrimination and xenophobia against migrants. In relation to that, the establishment of safe reporting mechanisms for victims of xenophobia, discrimination and other forms of intolerance is key in ensuring remedial measures are accessible to migrants. Initiatives that promote social mixing among native-born and migrant populations are also important in breaking cycles of internalized discrimination and stereotyping vis-à-vis migrants.

Finally, addressing structural and systemic manifestations of discrimination – whether direct or indirect – is key in improving migrants’ integration prospects. In fact, discrimination manifested in the lack of inclusionary policies and practices at institutional levels often translate into unequal access to the employment market as well as basic services which in turn lead to unequal integration outcomes. Removing access barriers, raising awareness at institutional levels and reviewing processes are preconditions to migrants’ full inclusion in society.

Ensuring adequate funding for migrant integration

In view of the ongoing negotiations relating to the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021-2027), IOM would like to highlight the need to allocate adequate financial resources towards migrants’ integration. While the shift of
long-term integration to the forthcoming European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) can bring value to better link migrant integration with broader social cohesion and inclusion policies and actions, the multiple nature of the target beneficiaries intended by this instrument means that funding towards migrants’ integration will compete with funding for other vulnerable groups within society. The decentralized and heterogenous nature of social and economic policy-making across EU Member States, means that efforts to streamline migrant integration into these funding envelopes may be challenging at national and local levels. It will therefore be important that in the framework of the next MFF, the EU complements its new Action Plan on Integration with adequate financial resources and strong advocacy efforts vis-à-vis its Member States to appropriately streamline funding envelopes towards migrants’ integration, channeling those at national, regional and local levels.

Conclusion

IOM believes that ensuring migrants’ sustainable integration will not only contribute to migrants’ improved well-being and maximize their full potential as active members of society, but will, by the same token contribute to healthier and more cohesive European societies. IOM recognizes the need for a holistic response to migrants’ – and societies’ – growing integration and social inclusion needs, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and socioeconomic challenges it brings. Without a coordinated, targeted and tailored approach to integration across policy areas and at different levels of intervention and governance, migrants’ integration prospects risk to become unequal, or only partially fulfilled. A sustainable integration policy framework would be inclusive of migrants and their specific needs – including gender considerations; and would rely on a cross-sectoral and multistakeholder approach that clearly links different dimensions of the integration process. A solid integration response would also require the recognition that integration operates along a continuum and should start already at the pre-departure/pre-arrival stages of migration. Following that logic, responses to integration needs are to be addressed early along the migration continuum. Finally, effective funding mechanisms to fuel integration programmes sustainably at EU, national and local levels are essential, in view of appropriately translating the new Action Plan into real action.
Resources

**IOM, Integration that Values Diversity – Exploring a Model for Current Migration Dynamics**

This IOM publication explores different models and policy approaches to integration across EU Member States – from assimilation to multiculturalism. By drawing from different practices and in view of the increasingly heterogeneous makeup of societies, it proposes a balanced integration model that values diversity and responds to contemporary realities of international mobility. It looks at promoting integration in the midst of diversity rather than integration models intended to “overcome diversity”.

**IOM, HEADSTART to Integration: A Global Review of Pre-departure Support Measures for Migrants**

This report, produced under the EU-funded project “HEADSTART: Fostering Integration Before Departure” implemented by IOM and partners, seeks to establish promising practices in pre-departure integration support for migrants with a particular focus on promoting early labour market inclusion in line with the migrants’ level of qualifications and competences. The study also considers services that assist migrants in their social integration process more broadly, including basic services. It identifies good integration practices implemented by public and private entities that target migrant workers, family migrants and migrant students.

**IOM-ICMC, LINK IT EU Integration Best Practice brochure**

This brochure, produced under the EU-funded project “LINK IT: Linking pre-departure and post-arrival support to facilitate the socio-economic integration of resettled refugees in Europe” implemented by IOM and partners summarizes a selection of innovative good practices identified in the framework of resettlement schemes as well as pre-departure orientation and post-arrival support activities in Europe. These practices concern, inter alia, early labour market integration, peer-to-peer mentoring systems and volunteering activities for both refugee and host communities.

**IOM-MPI, European Cities on the front line: New and emerging governance models for migrant inclusion**

This IOM-MPI study conducted under the EU-funded project “Admin4All: Supporting social inclusion of vulnerable migrants in Europe” implemented by IOM examines different challenges to migrant and refugee inclusion at the local level before turning to potential solution to address such challenges. Findings include promising approaches for promoting migrant inclusion at the local level, drawing in part on interviews conducted with representatives of municipalities across Europe. It concludes with recommendations on how to make the most of local governance levers to optimize integration outcomes.

**IOM-MPI, Driving Migrant Inclusion through Social Innovation: Lessons for cities in a pandemic**

IOM-MPI study conducted under the EU-funded project “Admin4All: Supporting social inclusion of vulnerable migrants in Europe” implemented by IOM, looks at innovative practices that emerged at local levels in the context of increased migrant arrivals in 2015, and how these can be capitalized upon in the current pandemic era. The paper finds that
although innovative ecosystems of integration support have been fragilized by COVID-19, they also provide for fruitful practices that can be revived and scaled to new contexts. The paper issues recommendations to foster more resilient integration systems, including through innovative and untraditional partnerships, the mobilization of local communities – through neighbourhood led approaches, for example – and co-designing with migrants themselves.

**IOM, Designing policies to strengthen labour market integration of refugees in the EU**

These guidelines developed under the EU-funded Skills2Work project “Valuing Skills of Beneficiaries of International Protection” implemented by IOM and partners, identify a selection of good practices based on desk research and interviews with employers, government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and organizations that support migrants. The publication highlights how the skills and talents of refugees can be better matched to the skills gaps that European labour markets currently face. The document is conceived to guide policy makers and project owners in their planning and implementation.

**IOM-EUA, Higher education for third-country national and refugee integration in Southern Europe**

This IOM-EUA cross-regional comparative study conducted under the EU-funded project “TandEM: Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Europe” implemented by IOM and partners, analyses third-country nationals and refugees’ access to and participation in higher education. It looks at the potential impacts of higher education on migrants’ integration outcomes. It finds that while higher education can play a significant role in the integration of migrants in their host countries, this particular group of students face a range of specific barriers – both direct and indirect - when trying to access higher education. The study provides concrete recommendations on how to remove barriers for access to and the participation of TCNs and refugees in higher education and, by doing so, promote their social integration.

**IOM, Countering Xenophobia and Stigma to foster Social cohesion in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery**

This IOM brief analyses the different impacts that COVID-19 has had on xenophobia and stigmatization against migrants, including increased fear and anxiety as well as unequal access to basic services. In light of these challenges, the brief proposes key solutions to counter the rise of xenophobic and stigmatising behaviors and manifestations vis-à-vis migrants. These include, amongst others, strengthening legal and policy frameworks, promoting social mixing among migrants and their receiving communities as well as fostering stigma-free and evidence-based discourse on migration and COVID-19.