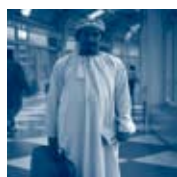# International Dialogue on Migration
Intersessional Workshop

Migrants and

Host Societies

Partnerships

for Success

Background Paper

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Integration is one of the major challenges of migration.

Globalization and increased human mobility have contributed to migratory flows. Increasingly, new notions of belonging and identity are evolving and migrants today are likely to interact with more than one community on a transnational basis. Integration is often viewed as a two-way process of adaptation by newcomers and host communities in multiple arenas. While there are several models used by governments, there is no single blueprint for managing integration.

Successful integration helps migrants become active members in the economic, social, cultural and political life of host states. This, in turn, is beneficial for their countries of origin, because migrants can then more easily mobilize their human and financial capital to support the development process.

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Introduction

Migrants – permanent residents, temporary workers, students, professionals, family members – come from every corner of the world, with all sovereign states now either points of origin, transit or destination, and often all three at once. The integration of migrants is one of the greatest challenges faced by many governments and societies worldwide. Strategies aimed at ensuring that the interaction between migrants and host societies is positive and mutually beneficial need to be considered an essential part of a comprehensive migration policy. A discussion of integration approaches is needed now more than ever today in view of new migratory patterns and greater global mobility. Recent security issues have brought a sharpened focus on what integration should be and to what extent current policies and practices have succeeded or failed. Governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders are looking for different and better approaches to manage integration more effectively. As most migratory flows occur within regions, and many well-established flows occur between developing countries, integration is a challenge for the developing as well as developed world and not only for those states looking to integrate migrants permanently.

While the term is used and understood differently in different countries and contexts, "integration" can be defined as the process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. It generally refers to a two-way process of adaptation by migrants and receiving societies, while the particular requirements for acceptance by a host society vary from country to country. The responsibility for integration rests with many actors: migrants themselves, host governments, various public and private institutions and communities. Integration does not necessarily imply permanent settlement. It does, however, imply consideration of the rights and obligations of migrants and host societies, of access to different kinds of services and the labour market, and of identification and respect for a core set of values that bind migrants and host communities in a common purpose.

The relationship of migrants with the host society can be seen as taking place along a spectrum ranging from:

- very little interaction where migrants are essentially segregated or excluded or segregate themselves from the society in which they live and work;
- an expectation that migrants shed their cultural identity by assimilating into the mainstream culture;
- an encouragement to migrants to take on a new national identity;
- promotion of the retention and development of migrant cultures and languages in a multicultural context; to
- the development of transnational and dual or multiple identities where migrants live in, have a sense of belonging to, and participate effectively in two or more societies, including those of destination and origin countries.

A polarity of integration models is emerging today. The transnational model is gaining relevance as a consequence of globalization and the interconnectedness it brings while other societies are opting for more demanding adaptation to the dominant culture.

In the past, migratory trends were dominated by one-time, unidirectional movement resulting in permanent settlement in countries of destination. As a result, countries of destination traditionally focused on the integration of migrants with a view to putting them on the path to nationality. For this reason, some countries' considered (and continue to consider) integration only in these terms.

International migration today is increasingly temporary, circular and multi-directional, though permanent and long-term migration remains significant. As temporary and circular migration increase, countries that were once relatively unaffected by migration are seeing this phenomenon as a policy priority. These trends in direction and duration highlight the need for integration efforts to be flexible and responsive to the needs of each different situation, and in particular to address the specific place and role of temporary migrants in the host society. To focus solely on integration in terms of long term or permanent migration risks marginalizing an increasingly large segment of the population in many countries, with negative social and economic implications. Moreover, the particular situation of migrants in an irregular status cannot be ignored: at a minimum, their human rights must be respected and enforced. In the interests of social cohesion and stability, measures are needed to prevent their marginalization and to ensure that migrants respect the laws and core values of the host society.

The effectiveness of integration strategies depends to a large extent on the particular needs of individual migrants and those of the host country or community. While policies on integration have mainly developed in Western countries and in traditional immigration countries, every country needs to find its own approach in view of its specific circumstances. The approach to integration taken in a particular context depends on how the host country and community views questions of national identity and cultural diversity, and much more. For example, whether migrants will have access to the labour market and/or to social services such as healthcare and other forms of public assistance depends on host country approaches to these questions for nationals, as well as for migrants. What makes for successful integration - one, the other, or some combination?

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Mobility Identity and Transnationalism

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Transnationalism is becoming a more prevalent phenomenon as it is common today for people to belong to more than one society over the course of a life. It is possible to obtain an education, work, raise children, and retire in several different countries. At each stage, migrants establish roots, participate in community life, and leave a lasting imprint -- whether they intend to or not -- on the communities and persons with whom they have come in contact, and are themselves changed by the experience. Moreover, family and community members who have never left the country of origin are directly affected by the migration of family and community members based on the networks that are formed, in terms of skills transfer, remittances, investment, cultural exchange and more. Growing transnationalism suggests that the more traditional notions of integration may require a fresh look.

Notions of identity are necessarily evolving as individuals increasingly "belong" to more than one country and society. This changed sense of affiliation has direct implications for governmental policy in such areas as multiple nationality and voting rights for non-resident nationals. Some governments of countries of origin are moving in the direction of facilitating multiple affiliations for the benefits these bring to investment and job creation in the country of origin.

Strategies

The migration experience does not begin or end at the moment of crossing the border. Where migration is planned, efforts to integrate migrants into host societies can begin in countries of origin with pre-departure orientation and continue in countries of destination through the provision of consular assistance and social services, inclusion of migrants in the labour market, granting of nationality or other permanent status, information campaigns to sensitize host communities to migrants and their potential contributions, and encouraging greater participation of second- and third-generation migrants in the host community.

Where migration is temporary, a certain level of integration is nonetheless necessary to ensure that the temporary stay is as productive and beneficial as possible. Where migrants have chosen a host society but not been chosen by it (i.e. either entered without permission or overstayed a lawful entry), questions of integration nonetheless are important for social stability, security and national identity. While migrants in an irregular situation are integrated de facto in some cases, particularly if they are employed and speak the local language, some countries have adopted measures enabling certain groups of irregular migrants to regularize their status, in recognition of their contribution to the national economy, or, conversely, to prevent their further exploitation and marginalization, and promote their fuller integration.

The focus of integration strategies is rightly on migrants' experience in and interaction with the host society. Integration strategies aim to find ways in which migrants and host communities can appreciate and respect their social and cultural similarities as well as their differences. Successful integration can help ensure that migrants fulfil their societal responsibilities and are empowered to enjoy their rights. Integration is critical to social cohesion and stability, to maximizing migrants' economic and social contributions, and to improving the quality of life of migrants and host community members alike. By familiarizing migrants with legal requirements and administrative practices and instilling them with a sense of belonging and responsibility to the host community while respecting and valuing their own culture, integration can positively affect migrants' desire to abide by host society rules and to be active contributors to society. All members of the community, including migrants, not only avoid the negative repercussions arising from migrants' isolation and marginalization, but positively benefit from strengthened communities.

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Dimensions of Integration

Policy approaches to integration are often adopted based on the cause or category of movement, such as resulting from persecution or conflict in the case of refugees, lack of economic opportunity, or to unite with family. Migrants' skills, reasons for migrating, cultural values and traditions, place of origin, place of destination, length of stay, family status, and gender are among the factors to consider.

Integration involves a number of dimensions, including economic, social, cultural, political and legal. 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. 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.

Economic

Migrants often choose to move in order to secure a better life for themselves and their families, and countries of destination often select migrants on the basis of their ability to contribute to economic growth. Policies in host countries, in partnership with the private sector, can help reduce employment gaps between nationals and non-nationals, and help improve migrants' ability to secure gainful employment. At the same time, consideration is needed to conditions in countries of origin with a view toward co-development aimed, inter alia, at increased entrepreneurship and joint ventures.

The consequences of failed economic integration of migrants are all too evident. Persistent unemployment among many second and third generation migrants, increasing alienation, isolation and frustration, often fuelled by a combination of relative poverty, limited educational opportunities and the absence of supportive networks, can result in social tension and disturbances. These issues often affect the local population in poorer and more deprived communities and not just migrants, and therefore require comprehensive economic and social strategies, involving governments at all levels as well as a wide range of other stakeholders, such as employers, local communities and civil society organizations.

Social

Whether or not migrants embark on the path to integration can depend to a large degree on social policy advocating a proactive approach to migrants. The provision of social services, in partnership with other stakeholders particularly in civil society, can facilitate integration by giving migrants the information and resources necessary for their self-reliance and interaction in society. Social policies, particularly in education and health care, that promote acceptance of diversity help migrants and their families integrate and build healthier societies. Providing opportunities for migrants – both children and adults – to learn the local language is a critical first step. Migrants' resource centres may "give a face" to such initiatives, as is already the case in several countries.

Tolerance of diversity is crucial, and concerted efforts are required to create relation-ships between culturally distinct communities of migrants and nationals with a view to building social cohesion and harmony. Schools and the media have particularly impor-tant roles to play in promoting tolerance and mutual acceptance.

Cultural and religious

Migration can alter the cultural composition and economic landscape of whole regions, cities and communities in host countries, due to the increase in population or to the particular practices, skills sets and beliefs of individual migrants. Migrants and migration can bring vibrancy, increased productivity, cultural richness and diversity. But cultural and religious differences between migrants and the host society can also bring into focus competing values such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion and can result in intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia.

"Successfully integrated" migrants often are involved in community activities as well as religious organizations. An environment of cultural and religious tolerance is a prerequisite for such participation. In order to maintain social cohesion in the face of growing diversity, sensitization of younger generations to religious tolerance in schools and elsewhere, as well as fair and balanced portrayal of migration and religious diversity

by the media, require particular attention. Moreover, migrants originating from societies where religion plays a key role may need specific support to integrate themselves in countries where socio-cultural diversity is more pronounced.

Legal

The legal dimensions of integration, including mutual rights and obligations on the part of migrants and their host societies, heavily influence all aspects of the integration process. All migrants -- regardless of legal status -- are human beings who possess human rights and freedoms set forth in international human rights law. National laws are adopted to ensure their effective implementation. The core guarantee is against discrimination: differential treatment between nationals may be allowed, but discrimination -- unfair, unjustifiable or arbitrary distinction -- is not.

Political

Proactive attention to migrant integration can lead to long term savings from the preventable costs of failed integration. In a number of countries, policies have or are being adopted to:

• combat xenophobia and discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origin and gender;

• ensure that employers abide by labour standards applicable to all workers;

• outline schools' obligations regarding migrant children; and

• prevent or reduce irregular entry or overstay, or, where irregular migrants are viewed as making a contribution to the host society, to regularize their status.

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Stakeholders

Within governments, action is necessary at all levels -- national, regional, municipal and local. Yet integration requires not only a "whole of government approach" but a "whole of society" approach as the private sector, civil society, and other actors can offer valuable assistance and ideas to facilitate integration. The institutions where nationals and non-nationals mainly interact, such as schools, markets and banks, are often in the best position to assess and address the particular needs of the community and the migrants. Non-state actors therefore complement the efforts of governments owing to their grass roots presence to engage and assist migrants in their daily life.

Moreover, the experiences of individual migrants are a valuable source of information to aid understanding the challenges of integration and for developing effective strategies to address these challenges. They can help identify needs and barriers that policies or programmes might address, and highlight effective ways to engage particular categories of migrants.

Partnership Initiatives

Partnerships between and among stakeholders at the national and international levels are crucial for the development of effective integration policies and practices. Governments will have a central role in facilitating the development and implementation of many of these partnerships.

Partnerships can be initiated between various sectors of society and targeted to address specific challenges such as the rise of extremism or the perpetuation of stereotypes. Partnerships with the private sector can benefit from the direct interaction of employers with migrants in the workplace and access to specialized human resources. Partnerships with civil society can be a means to tap into their institutional knowledge of integration issues and programme design. The resources of the private sector and the experience of NGOs have often been effectively combined to accomplish mutual goals. Nationals abroad can provide direct knowledge of the challenges to be overcome and potential obstacles to success. Migrant associations can provide valuable channels of communication to diasporas.

Some integration strategies and their benefits, particularly in respect of temporary migrants, might be most effectively realized through international cooperation between States. Bilateral or multilateral agreements and regional consultative processes provide opportunities to realize mutual benefits.

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Key Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Key questions for reflection and discussion:

- What does it mean to be successfully integrated today?
- What level of integration is required for each category or type of migrant?
- What are the implications for the identity of a country or a society?
- What are the implications for government policies, for example, regarding language and access to social services, education, and health care?
- What should the core values of each society be and through what process or processes could they be better defined?
- Should diversity and transnational identity be viewed as inherent values to be promoted, or simply as realities that cannot be ignored, and how can they be harnessed to benefit communities in both host and origin countries?