

Immigrant populations have grown virtually everywhere in the past decade. Their successful economic integration and social inclusion is a key policy objective. The 2015-16 surge in migrant inflows to OECD countries was a stress test on integration systems. In a number of countries, ensuring the capacity to address the needs of a suddenly growing and increasingly diverse population of newcomers – many of whom were low skilled and in need of international protection – has been challenging. At the same time, this situation has opened up opportunities to experiment with innovative integration solutions involving a broader range of stakeholders. Meanwhile, the nature and scope of migration flows are likely to evolve because of increasing mobility and selectivity or variations in countries of origin. Integration policies need to take these evolutions into account.

*This **Migration Policy Debate** reviews emerging challenges for integration and discusses countries' responses to them.*

How to make Integration Policies Future-Ready?

A changing landscape for integration

Apart from a few exceptions, the foreign-born share of population has increased in virtually all OECD countries over the past decade. Although the increase has been uneven, and inferior to 2 percentage points in a number of countries, new origin countries have appeared: the share of the five largest immigrant groups in the overall immigrant population has decreased in 31 of the 36 OECD countries, indicating a more diverse set of origin countries.

The recent high inflows of migrants with specific vulnerabilities have been a stress test on integration systems in many OECD countries. More than a few struggled to create the capacity to meet the needs of a suddenly growing population of newcomers with particular vulnerabilities, such as lack of formal qualifications, work experience, and language knowledge, or health problems.

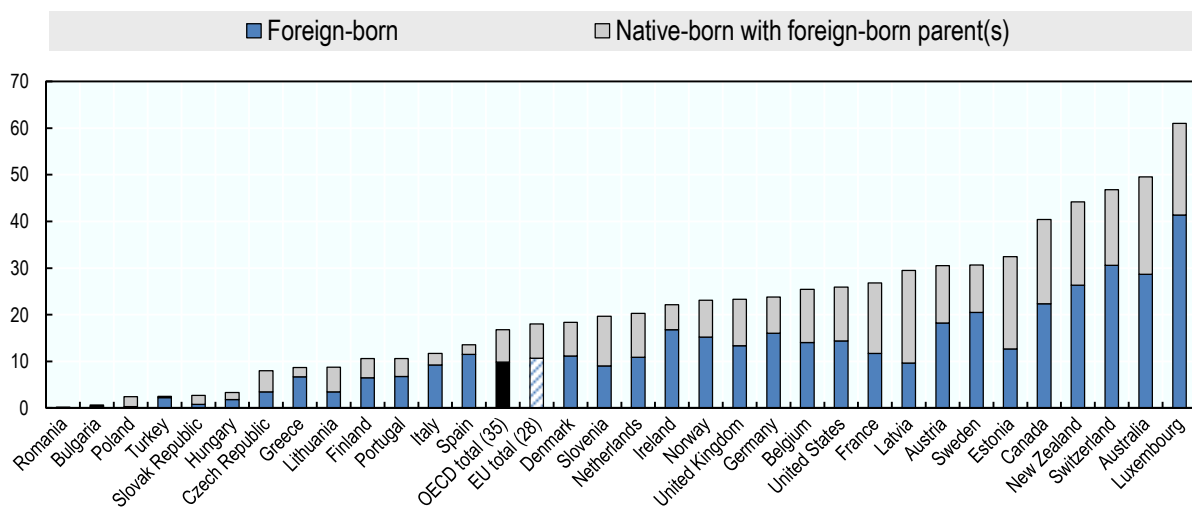
At the same time, patterns of labour migration already in place before the 2015-16 events continued. Labour migrants also benefit from support to successfully integrate in the long term.

In many countries, especially in Europe, native-born children of immigrants also face challenges. Difficulties often spring from the poor socio-economic background of their immigrant parents, but are distinct from those faced by people born and educated abroad. Between 2003 and 2018, the share of native-born children of immigrants among the population at age 15 has increased in all OECD countries except Latvia and the Slovak Republic. Their share has more than doubled in Korea, Poland, Japan, Hungary, Finland, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Germany and Austria.

Evidence from opinion surveys suggest high levels of public concern about social integration, even among respondents who are not opposed to immigration as such. Integration policies are thus increasingly called on to ensure broader social integration – well beyond the traditional areas of policy intervention such as education, language, and the labour market.

Finally, budget pressure and a public opinion often increasingly sensitive about immigration mean that policy makers need to pay close attention to the cost effectiveness of programmes.

Figure 1. Population shares of foreign-born and of native-born with immigrant parent(s), around 2017



Source: OECD and EU (2018).

Harnessing the opportunities provided by new technologies

Information and E-learning tools become increasingly widespread, but also carry some risks

The use of IT tools and new technologies in education and training has enormous potential to expand the reach and improve the cost-effectiveness of integration measures for newcomers and their children. This is notable regarding language and other skills development, including in remote places and pre-departure. There is the potential for great economies of scale.

Information is also more easily accessible online than through traditional paper-based methods, although the risk that outdated information remains online persists without a straightforward way to identify and replace it. This can be overcome, however, by indicating the date of the latest update of the information, as is regular practice in paper documents.

The host-country language will remain the pillar for integration, but its teaching must adapt to new techniques

In recent European Social Surveys, more than one in two respondents EU-wide stated that “speaking the host-country language” should be a key criterion for selecting migrants – compared with only one in three for the level of qualifications or skills. While new technologies will facilitate communications of people speaking different languages, mastery of the host-country language is most likely to remain a key marker for social integration, and thus a pillar of any

integration policy. At the same time, E-learning tools can complement – though not substitute – face-to-face learning. E-learning tools for language are already in place in a majority of OECD countries, although the scale and scope differs widely. Knowledge about what works best and in which contexts is currently limited but will be a prerequisite for harnessing these tools.

Overcoming uncertainty about migrants’ formal qualifications....

One issue in immigrants’ labour market integration is the limited transferability of skills obtained abroad. For about two-thirds of migrants, their highest qualification was obtained abroad. For them, the likelihood to work in a job below their formal qualification level is nearly twice as high as for the native-born. The discount is even larger for those originating in some non-OECD countries. Among other issues such as discrimination and lack of networks, this is partially linked to a mix of employer uncertainty about the quality of the education obtained abroad, lack of knowledge of the host-country language, and (presumed) poorer-performing qualification systems abroad. This latter issue is becoming even more pertinent with the rapid expansion of tertiary education in key origin countries.

Countries are struggling with effective and timely assessment procedures for foreign qualifications, partly because of the multitude of different stakeholders involved. NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, has developed a way of overcoming these obstacles through so-called “turbo assessments” that entail not formal recognition

but rather a fast-track assessment of the candidate's vocational qualifications for a specific job. It has also been involved in developing, with the support of the EU's Erasmus+, a toolkit for the recognition of qualifications of refugees for specific origin countries.

.....and skills

Beyond the assessment of migrants' formal qualifications, there is the issue of assessment of their non-formal skills. Rapidly changing skills requirements in the future of work mean such assessment will likely gain importance.

The 2015/16 surge of new arrivals who often either lacked proof of their qualifications or had little formal education, but had significant work experience, prompted a number of new developments in skills assessment. These included online tools, such as the "my skills" tool in Germany (Box 1). In Austria, the Vienna labour market service has developed a specific competence check for refugees. The EU developed a Skills Profile Tool, free of charge and multilingual, to support early profiling of the skills of refugees and other migrants.

Box 1. The German "my skills" assessment tool

To assess refugees' informal skills, the German public employment service has developed computer-based skills identification tests ("MYSKILLS"). To establish which skills can be transferred to the practical working environment, the tests use videos showing people performing standard tasks in the respective occupation. Candidates must then identify errors or put tasks into the right order. Developed in cooperation with employers' associations, the assessment takes around four hours and is done under the supervision of an expert at the public employment service. Testing will be rolled out to a total of 30 professions.

Matching migrant skills with labour market needs

Once assessed (and, where needed, upskilled), a key challenge is to match employers in need of specific skills with the migrants who possess them. This is a particular challenge for migrants, as they lack host-country specific networks and social capital. Online platforms have great potential to facilitate this matching, but must be designed in a way that is both accessible and accounts for the specific challenges faced by migrants as well as the needs of the employers and service providers (e.g. public employment services).

Dealing with heterogeneous needs

Providing all migrants with the basic skills for sustainable integration

While the education levels of recent arrivals have been rising on average, a non-negligible number of immigrants, especially those coming from countries with long and protracted conflicts or through family reunification, lacks the basic skills to be functional in the host-country labour market and society. Equipping all migrants with these skills is crucial for sustainable economic and social integration. In some cases, this will require multi-year investment in training and education for new arrivals, which however pays off in the long run. It is important to plan this process upfront rather than multiplying courses or trainings ex post. Several OECD countries, in particular in the Scandinavian countries, have 2-3 year introduction programmes for low-educated new arrivals.

Investing in continuous training

Given their more vulnerable situation in the labour market – in terms of qualification levels, skills use and job quality – and the greater upskilling necessary to adapt to the changing nature of work, immigrants tend to have higher training needs than the native-born. However, in the 26 OECD countries for which data are available, immigrants are underrepresented in adult education and training. A first step to addressing this gap is better guidance and counselling on learning opportunities, as well as outreach programmes to immigrants outside the labour market. Low-threshold offers, for example by other immigrants that have succeeded in labour market and society, could be helpful. Second-chance programmes are also important in this context, such as the "Second Chance Ulpan" in Israel and the "Job Opportunities" programme in Norway.

Accounting for gender aspects

Many migrants come from origin countries characterised by high gender inequality, and the gap between immigrant and native-born women in qualification and labour market outcomes is still greater than the gap between immigrant and native-born men in many destination countries. This underlies how integration policies need to account for the specific needs of migrant women, who are often in a vulnerable situation but tend not to be adequately reached by mainstream integration offers. Some countries, including Canada, Germany and Sweden, have implemented specific gender strategies in their integration programmes.

Promoting intergenerational upward mobility

Children of immigrants, particularly those whose parents are low-educated, face multiple disadvantages and deserve specific attention in efforts to promote intergenerational mobility. Integrating immigrant parents is key, and OECD work has shown that the situation of mothers has a particularly strong impact. Regarding the children themselves, attention needs to be paid not only to education and labour market policies, but also combatting discrimination and promoting diversity. France, for example, allows companies to submit to an audit of their fair hiring and promotion practices, and Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden have experimented with anonymous CVs as a means to tackle discrimination and enhance diversity in the hiring process.

Addressing the specific needs of elderly migrants

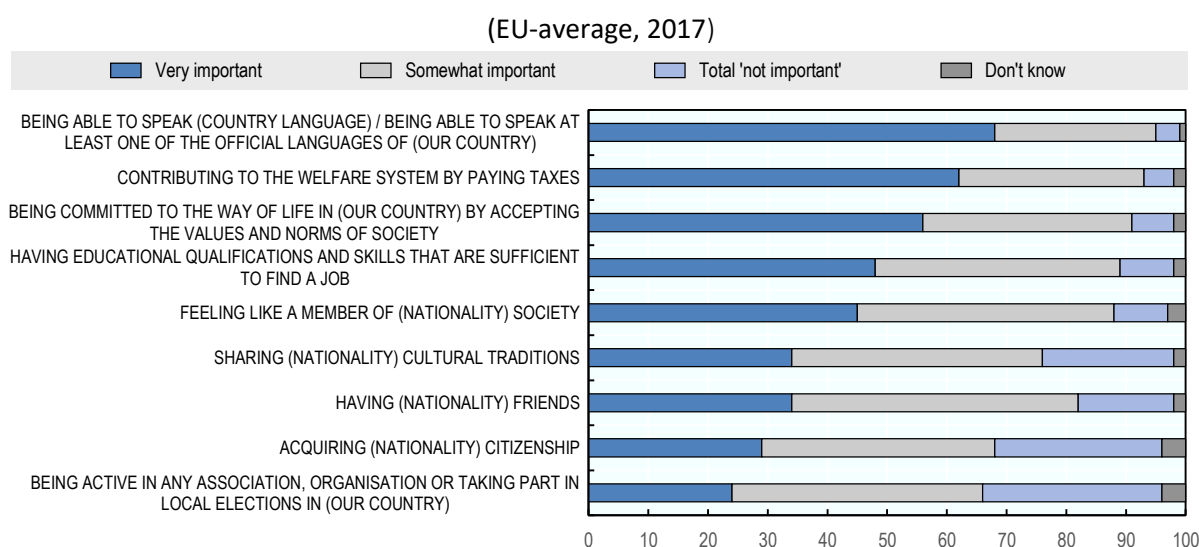
The integration of elderly migrants is becoming a growing issue, especially in Europe where the so-called “guestworker generation” is retiring.

Mainstream health and social welfare facilities are not always easily accessible for elderly immigrants, for example due to language problems or lack of familiarity, and old-age poverty is often an issue. The Netherlands, for example, offers an intervention programme in which ethnic-community health workers act as liaisons between elderly immigrants and local health care and social welfare services.

Addressing public concern

In the past, integration policy has largely focused on the domains of education, language and the labour market. While immigrants’ outcomes still lag behind those of the native-born in most countries, there has been clear progress in these domains, as witnessed by the latest OECD-EU Indicators of immigrant integration. At the same time, there is growing concern about migrants’ social integration and social cohesion, i.e. migrants accepting and adapting to the host-country’s “way of life”, and host societies welcoming them.

Figure 2. How important is each of the following for the successful integration of immigrants in your country?



Source: Eurobarometer 2017

Social integration needs to build on new stakeholders

Supporting immigrants' social integration beyond the "traditional" domains of education, language and the labour market also requires new and innovative partnership with the host-country community. This could take many forms, from volunteer fire brigades to sports and cultural associations. For example, soccer clubs often take the lead, especially in Europe. Museums can transmit host-country history and values. Canada, for example, is currently providing new arrivals with free entrance tickets to museums and special guided tours. In Sweden, the Hej Främling initiative links newcomers and the local population through activities like choral singing, running, mountain hiking and skiing.

Spending money more effectively through new partnerships and incentives

The need to spend more on integration has led to innovative financing schemes, both by enhancing incentives for service providers to be cost-effective and by encouraging private sector engagement. One example is the Finnish social impact bond (Box 2).

Box 2. The Finnish Social Impact Bond

In September 2016, Finland initiated a pilot to allow education and work to be combined in a flexible way, through training modules that are flexibly interspersed with employment. The pilot is funded via a social impact bond; i.e., companies were invited to invest in a private fund used to finance the integration activities in the pilot. Investors see a return on their investment if the costs are below those of a comparable group who do not participate and if the employment objectives are met. In addition, the project administrator is also awarded a bonus.

To assess (cost-)effectiveness, evaluation need to be expanded. Indeed, while there is a plethora of innovative integration projects across the OECD, proper evaluation is not always the rule, and too often conducted as an afterthought rather than built in upfront. Evaluation is a pre-condition for identifying cost-effectiveness and thus a worthwhile investment. The availability of new and linked longitudinal datasets greatly enhances possibilities for assessing what works and what does not. Most past assessment of integration policies has come from the Scandinavian countries – which have longstanding and comprehensive linked data register systems. Other countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands,

New Zealand, Germany and Canada, are increasingly following this route as well.

Effective communication strategies

Public perception of actual outcomes of immigrants may well differ from reality. Future integration policies must include a communication dimension, promoting a balanced and facts-based approach while acknowledging and addressing both the challenges and opportunities that migration can bring along for the host country. Through their capacity to reach out to groups not addressed by traditional media, new media provide a wide range of opportunities. However, there are also challenges such as false information and propagation of negative stereotypes. Among the rapidly growing number of initiatives to build on new technologies is the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)'s #SpreadNoHate initiative, which addresses traditional and new media. The OECD has also set up a website with innovative practices regarding communication on integration, (www.oecd.org/migration/netcom), thanks to a new network (NETCOM) gathering communication and migration experts.

Dealing with more volatile inflows

Forecasting integration needs requires information on arrivals

New tools are also needed for advance planning. This implies close interaction between different parts of government – both horizontally and vertically, as information on actual and expected arrivals needs to be shared with integration services further downstream. Advance planning is particularly important since evidence suggests that early intervention has the greatest payoff. So is forecasting to make sure that spots are readily available and waiting lists are limited. Advance planning also means that some contingency needs to be built into the system.

Countries which have multiyear plans or numerical limits, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand or the United States, are better placed in this respect, but unmanaged migration notably for asylum is a challenge everywhere. In Switzerland and Sweden, for example, public policy planning is informed by elaborate models developed to predict the arrival of asylum seekers.

Pre-arrival support

Given the crucial role of early intervention, countries are increasingly looking at means to provide integration support before actual settlement. One important area in this respect is the provision of pre-departure services for migrants. This has been pioneered by Canada (Box 3) and Australia, but a growing number of other OECD countries are preparing similar measures, notably in the EU for resettled refugees from Middle East countries.

Box 3. Canada's pre-departure services

Canada has been providing pre-departure services since 1998. These vary in scale and scope, but generally include information dissemination and orientation sessions, as well as needs assessments. Based on these assessments, future migrants can then be referred to services in Canada upon arrival, to ensure a quick integration. Recent changes to the programme have strengthened the links with arrival communities and employment and other services in Canada, especially for those migrants wishing to exercise a regulated occupation and thus in need of a Canadian license after arrival.

Civil society is an essential and growing complement to public services

Taking more stakeholders, e.g. civil society actors, on board is an essential complement to national baseline services. Traditionally, civil society has stepped in where public action has either been lacking or cannot be scaled up quickly enough. In Germany, according to surveys, a full 13% of the population engaged in supporting asylum seekers and refugees during the 2015/16 inflow. More government-focused integration models, such as in the Nordic countries, have also seen a blossoming of new initiatives by non-governmental stakeholders. Meanwhile, in countries where non-governmental stakeholders used to be dominant in the past, such as in the settlement countries, the public sector is also increasingly active. This has led to some convergence in integration models across the OECD. These experiences could also be applied for the integration of non-humanitarian migrants.

As decentralised approaches become increasingly widespread, co-ordination needs to be improved

Local communities - including migrant communities - are increasingly involved in providing integration services, and countries like Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, have largely devolved integration to the local level. This raises important co-ordination challenges.

Box 4. The co-ordinated approach in the local integration of refugees in Portugal

In 2015, the Portuguese authorities designed a new integration system for refugees arriving through EU schemes. Co-ordination at the national level relied on an inter-departmental working group composed of representatives of the High Commission for Migration, the ministries for Foreign Affairs, Health and Education, the Border Services, the Social Security Institute, and the Institute for Employment and Professional Training. The integration plan was based on a local approach to integration. Each refugee, or refugee family, was matched with a hosting entity responsible for the refugees' integration along five dimensions: housing, health, language training, education, and work. Hosting entities were mainly municipalities, parishes, foundations and NGOs. The High Commission for Migration followed up with the hosting entities and facilitated the exchange of good practice among all actors involved.

Establishing minimum standards and ensuring harmonisation

With the increase of the number of local actors in migration and integration policy comes the challenge to ensure common standards across the host country. The national government has to develop a monitoring system covering lower levels of government and other stakeholders, by setting minimum standards and monitoring how they live up to them. An example of a decentralised country that has recently implemented minimum standards is Switzerland, where the federal government has reached a binding agreement with the regions on the strategic objectives to be achieved in eight areas of integration policy.

Evaluation of project-based interventions and mainstreaming the most successful

Small-scale projects developed by local authorities or civil society may be useful not only for the local communities concerned, but also to gain knowledge about what works in integration policy. However, to learn from these projects, they need to be carefully designed and evaluated. Building capacity in terms of programme design and evaluation on which different actors can draw should therefore be considered an investment for the central government. Projects evaluated as successful may then be scaled up if appropriate, or successful elements of the projects may be integrated into mainstream programmes.

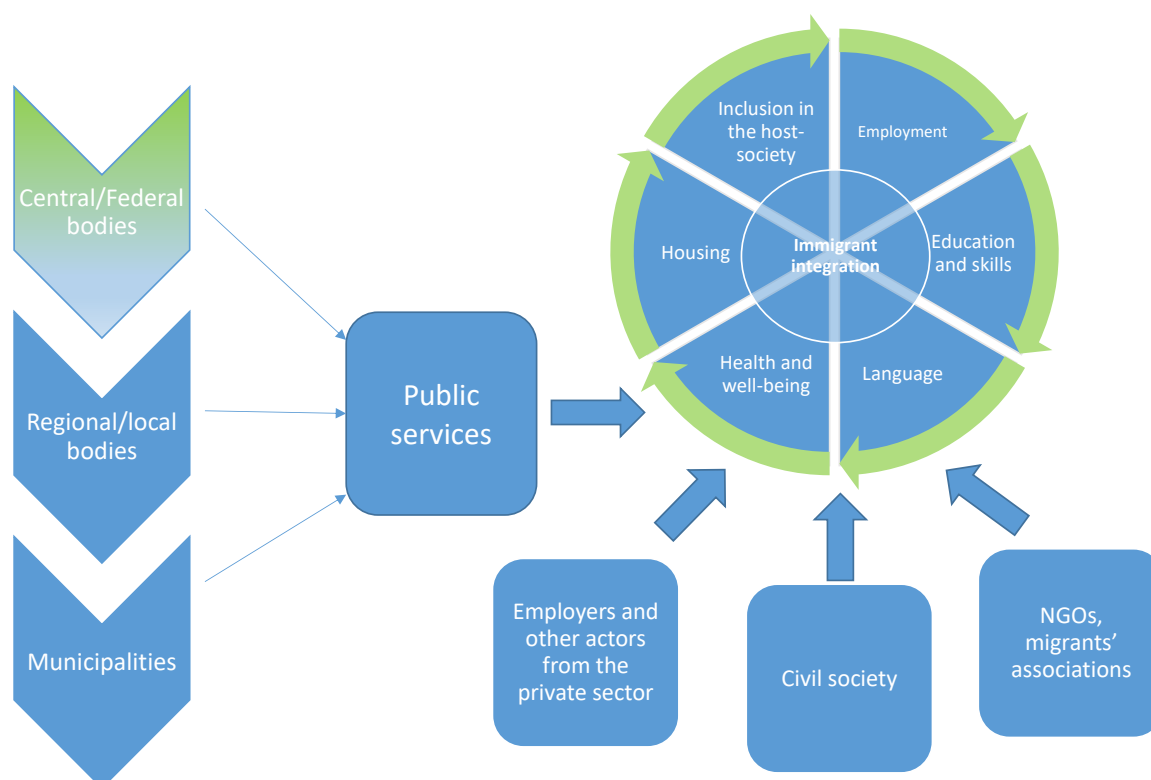
Setting up more efficient and sustainable funding structures

Many central governments across the OECD provide funding to local authorities for integration programmes. This funding generally takes the form of a lump-sum payment per immigrant, irrespective of

individual characteristics. Yet each immigrant has a different potential to integrate. Transfers from the central government could be based on the expected integration costs given the specific immigrant population and the local labour market situation, as has been experimented in some countries, including Denmark.

Ultimately, making integration policies future-ready in times of highly diverse situations implies both tailor-made and holistic approaches that accompany migrants along the whole integration process – from pre-departure and continuous training to full social inclusion of immigrants and their native-born children. This requires co-operation and co-ordination with multiple stakeholders, within and across levels of government. It also requires taking a whole-of-family approach to the integration issue, with special attention to immigrant mothers who have too often been the blind spot of past integration policy

Figure 3. A Whole-of-Society Approach to Integration



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