



Migration & Social Cohesion

Welcome to the second edition of **Migration & Social Cohesion**

In the first edition, we focused on the concept of integration and identified the key factors and issues that need to be taken into account in designing policies and programmes for integration and also in evaluating the extent to which integration is taking place. In this second edition, we look more closely at the concept of social cohesion and how it relates to migration. In broad terms, we argue that social cohesion is about the construction of a society in which people share a common set of values and agreed 'rules' by which they all abide to ensure the proper functioning of society. This is not to suggest that there cannot be diversity. On the contrary, achieving social cohesion is precisely about harnessing the diverse capacities, values, skills and experiences in society for the benefit of all. In this respect, the richness of the diversity that migrants bring to society, while often seen as a threat to social cohesion, has an important bearing on how we define the type of societies we wish to live in. In particular, we draw on the report of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) published in 2005 and look specifically at three groups that are especially vulnerable in the context of migration integration and social cohesion; namely women, children and undocumented migrants.

At a practical level, we provide information about a savings scheme that is an example of collaboration between citizens and migrants. It is an initiative that not only benefits the participants financially, but also makes a significant contribution to social cohesion and integration. We also look at the Migration Help Desk established by the City of Johannesburg as an example of a government initiative directed at promoting the integration of migrants.

From a broader policy perspective, we briefly summarise some of the key points contained in a report, entitled *Economic Migration, Social Cohesion and Development: Towards an Integrated Approach*, which was presented to the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Migration Affairs in Kyiv, the capital of the Ukraine, on 4-5 September 2008.

As before, we invite you to share your information and experiences with us. The next edition of *Migration and Social Cohesion* will provide a summary of a workshop that will be held in Cape Town at the end of November, focusing on integration and social cohesion in the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape. We welcome contributions from other parts of the country and, indeed, other parts of the world.

Understanding social cohesion

The term 'social cohesion' generally refers to the processes of bringing together and integrating a wide range of policies, including economic, social, educational and cultural policies, to facilitate the participation of citizens and non-citizens in society. In addition, it also refers to the development of a society based on shared values and the adherence to societal 'rules' that allow people to work together for the 'common good' rather than focus on divisions and differences.

Social cohesion does not refer to the absence of diversity or the desire to create a homogeneous society that is intolerant of difference. On the contrary, a socially cohesive society is one in which there is less potential for individuals or groups to mobilise around issues of difference and diversity, thereby deepening societal divisions and tensions. However, being a socially cohesive society does not mean that there are no tensions and divisions, but rather that society works together to minimise the potential conflict that such tensions and divisions may cause.

Social cohesion is often closely tied to the concept of social capital, which refers to the 'pooling' and sharing of resources and skills inherent in relationships within and between families, households and social and community networks. In essence, the more social capital exists – in other words, the more individuals and communities are engaged in mutually beneficial relationships – the higher the levels of social cohesion.

The lower the levels of trust between different groups, the lower the levels of social cohesion.

The extent of social cohesion in society is often measured, firstly, by looking at the extent to which individuals become members of social organisations and participate in civic affairs, since these are important indicators of their willingness and propensity to cooperate with others. A second and equally important measure of social cohesion is the extent to which individuals trust other people in their group or community as well as those outside their group or community. In general, the lower the levels of trust between different groups (whether groups are determined by language, ethnicity, race, political party affiliation or any other variable), the lower the levels of social cohesion.

Political, social and economic inequalities, while not usually the direct cause of the breakdown of social cohesion, can exacerbate societal divisions and adversely impact on the willingness and ability of various groups to work together for the common good, since, by definition, there does not appear to be any 'common good', even if different groups and communities face the same challenges and problems.

For example – the attacks on foreigners living in South Africa earlier in 2008 were attributed by many at least partly to a 'lack of social cohesion'. It is generally accepted that there is very little trust between South Africans and foreigners and also that very few foreigners participate in the local organisations that operate in the communities in which they live. In essence, there is an absence of social capital between foreigners and South African citizens. As a result, the fact that foreigners face the same difficulties as many South African citizens in accessing employment, housing, health care, education and so on does not become a basis for cooperation to achieve the common good, but rather exacerbates the divisions and leads to even further breakdown of social cohesion.

There is an important symbiotic relationship between social cohesion and the nature and quality of societal and political institutions. In cases where societal and political institutions are weak and/or serve to protect and promote only the interests of a particular group to the exclusion of others, social cohesion is likely to be at very low levels. Of course, low levels of social cohesion will impact negatively on the nature and quality of societal and political institutions. Conversely, where societal and public institutions are strong, inclusive and

designed to function in the interests of society as a whole, social cohesion is enhanced, which in turn, strengthens the inclusive nature of those institutions.

The development and achievement of social cohesion is in essence based on a 'contract' between individuals, communities, society generally and the state which sets out and prescribes the nature of the various relationships. The contract that underpins social cohesion is not static, but constantly evolves to accommodate new situations, groups and ideas. To the extent that we can continue to develop policies, programmes and institutions that help us focus on and cooperate in the interests of the common good we will be able to achieve social cohesion, without having to deny or attempt to do away with the diversity that exists in our societies.

International migration is increasing, not only in scale and speed, but also in terms of the number of countries and the range of people involved. As a result, the notion of the socially or ethnically homogeneous nation-state with a single culture has become increasingly outdated. Most societies are now characterised by a degree (and often a high degree) of diversity. The diversity that has resulted from international migration has also created some important challenges, especially in the degree of social cohesion in host communities. All societies are characterised by conflicting value systems and competition for resources, and it would be wrong to suggest that migration brings tension to communities that would otherwise be perfectly harmonious. Even so, it is clear that migration can have powerful and emotional human consequences, both among migrants themselves and among members of the host society.

International migration often entails the movement of people whose social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and characteristics are different from those of most people in the society they are joining. Destination countries have traditionally dealt with this situation in a number of different ways. One has been to exclude migrants (especially temporary contract workers and asylum seekers) from society, ensuring that they have no prospect of integration. Another has been to insist that migrants abandon their own culture and assimilate into the majority way of life. A third has been to pursue policies that enable all members of society, migrants and nationals, to express their own culture and beliefs, on condition that they remain within the rule of law and subscribe to a set of common social values.

States have a right to determine their own migration policies, but in doing so must ensure that such policies are consistent with international human rights principles to which most states have formally agreed. Ensuring that migrants are able to live at ease in the society they have joined is not simply a question of human rights, but is also a question of mutual interests and benefits. Migrants who are accepted and respected by other members of society are best placed to fulfil their potential and to contribute to their adopted country. Social cohesion provides migrants and citizens alike with a sense of security and common purpose, and is an important component of economic success.





Integrating vulnerable groups

Integration recognises and accommodates differences, but requires a sense of common belonging among nationals and migrants alike. There is no simple or single blueprint for the effective integration of migrants in society, although the best examples of integration seem to take place in countries where there is a broad degree of consensus on the issue of immigration among political parties. The process of integration occurs primarily at a local level, and the process must therefore be situation-specific, and take into account the precise circumstances and characteristics of both migrants and other social groups. Moreover, many states are unable to meet the needs and demands of their own citizens. It is therefore not easy for them to give the situation of migrants high priority. Indeed, nationals may react in a negative manner if they feel that scarce public resources are being used for such a purpose.

In the absence of effective integration, destination countries will not be able to capitalise on the contribution that migrants can make to society. There is no simple or single blueprint for the effective integration of migrants in society, although the best examples of integration seem to take place in countries where there is a broad degree of consensus on the issue of immigration among political parties. The process of integration occurs primarily at a local level, and the process must therefore be situation-specific, and take into account the precise circumstances and characteristics of both migrants and other social groups. Moreover, many states are unable to meet the needs and demands of their own citizens. It is therefore not easy for them to give the situation of migrants high priority. Indeed, nationals may react in a negative manner if they feel that scarce public resources are being used for such a purpose.

Migrants who are accepted and respected by other members of society are best placed to fulfil their potential and to contribute to their adopted country.

Migrant women

Migration can be an empowering experience for women. It can entail moving away from societies with traditional and patriarchal forms of authority. It can allow women to work, to earn their own money and to exercise greater decision-making power in their daily lives. Women who migrate may also have the opportunity to learn new skills and enjoy a higher socio-economic status when they eventually return to their own country.

Regrettably, however, migration can also have the opposite effect. Women who migrate for the purpose of marriage, domestic labour, or to work in the entertainment and sex industries are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and isolation, as are those who are trafficked. Such problems are reinforced when migrant women do not know the language of the country they are living in or do not have access to supportive social networks. In some countries, migrant women experience discrimination in the labour market and 'brain waste', i.e. they have to take jobs for which they are over-qualified. In others, migrant women may be subject to dismissal and deportation if they become pregnant or may be socially stigmatised if they contract HIV/AIDS. Migrant women who have moved in an irregular manner

may find that their children are stateless and thus deprived of basic rights both in their country of residence and in their country of origin.

Moreover, migrant women are more likely than men to remain outside the labour market and spend most of their time at home, making it more difficult for them to establish the language skills and social networks required to integrate into their new society.

The Commission recognises that all societies are characterised by gender inequalities, and that such inequalities affect migrants and non-migrants alike. The Commission underlines the need for migration policies and programmes to be gender-sensitive, to give special attention to the social situation and inclusion of migrant women, and to ensure that women are empowered by the migration experience. Every effort must be made to ensure that migrant women are actively involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of such policies and programmes.

Migrant children

Children who are taken from one country and continent to another may be traumatised by leaving behind a familiar way of life and finding themselves in a society where the language, culture and values are quite different. Migration can lead to gender and generational tensions within households and such conflicts can impinge very directly on the health and welfare of the youngest family members. In the worst cases they can lead to violence and other forms of abusive treatment, particularly against girls and young women.

As migrant and minority children grow up, they may also experience a sense of alienation and uncertainty over their identity and allegiances, particularly if they encounter discrimination and xenophobia from other members of society. The children of migrants with irregular status are especially vulnerable, as they may find themselves effectively stateless and may not be able to exercise their right to education. The Commission underlines the need to ensure that the rights, welfare and educational needs of migrant children are fully respected by all members of society.

The children of migrants with irregular status are especially vulnerable, as they may find themselves effectively stateless.

Irregular migrants

The Commission is aware that states are generally not prepared to consider social inclusion or integration of migrants who have entered or remained on their territory in an irregular manner. In practice, however, the social situation of migrants who have moved in an irregular manner cannot be dismissed so easily because such migrants and their children have needs that must be met and rights that must be respected. It can be argued that people who have been living in a country for long periods, especially if they have been working and contributing to the national economy, have some claim to the services of the state, irrespective of their legal status. States must meet their obligation to provide essential services to irregular migrants and their families. States which tolerate and benefit from the presence of such migrants on their territory should also give serious consideration to measures that would regularise their status.

Integration is not a quick, simple or linear process. It is a process that places significant demands upon nationals and migrants alike. It is also a process that warrants a significant investment, not only because of its difficulties, but also because of its economic, social and cultural rewards. With the scale and scope of international migration growing, countries and communities must seize the opportunity to make the most of their diversity.

This is an edited summary of chapter 4 of "Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action," a report by the Global Commission on International Migration. The full report is available at www.gcim.org

Towards an integrated approach to migration

Migration has a profound impact on receiving societies; it can change society and its institutions. This, to a large extent, explains the controversies that surround migration policy. The composition of migrant groups rarely mirrors the receiving society, with a considerable portion having different or lower education and many experiencing greater disadvantages in the labour market. Migration can therefore lead to changes in social stratification.

The entry of migrants, often recruited or attracted to employment in the “3-D” (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs shunned by native workers, often exacerbates the segmentation of the labour market and contributes to fragmentation in the working class. The growth in numbers of irregular migrants has tended to exacerbate this trend. Migrants have experienced markedly different rates of social mobility and different degrees of integration in different countries, suggesting that integration policies, as well as social and economic conditions, determine the overall consequences of migration.

The rights-based approach of the Council of Europe, articulated in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter, affirms that social cohesion must be built on human rights, social justice and respect for democracy.

In reality many migrants today remain excluded from employment, housing, health and education. Migrants also face obstacles to obtaining access to training and limited opportunities for taking part in civic life. For many immigrants, the combination of these factors can lead to a level of exclusion that precludes any possibility of their integration.

The protection of migrant workers is essential for ensuring that migration contributes positively to development in receiving and home countries alike.

Immigrants are commonly portrayed in the media, public discourse and private debate as competing for scarce employment and housing, unfairly or illegally drawing on public welfare resources, and being associated with criminality. As a result of this, adverse public perceptions and opinions and resentment against foreigners are widespread.

The extent to which migrant workers can become successfully integrated varies considerably, depending on factors such as the degree of vocational specialisation, cultural dynamics of particular groups, duration of stay and the available forms of community solidarity. Other factors have to do with the social, cultural and political characteristics of the place of residence. The persistent unemployment, poverty and social exclusion suffered by some migrants and populations of immigrant origin demonstrate the need for greater efforts to address the economic and social aspects of integration as well as issues of cultural and religious diversity and citizenship. Policy approaches that validate and celebrate cultural and social diversity appear to lead to better integration outcomes than do expectations of assimilation to the dominant cultural identity of the receiving state.

Today, evolving patterns and constraints on mobility, immigration and settlement pose new challenges to elaborating viable approaches to integration and social cohesion. Emerging terms such as circular migration, repeat migration and “persons settled in their mobility” represent departures from the assumptions underlying classic policies. These evolving dynamics are also often reflections of restrictions on mobility, on settlement in host countries, and on policies of economic, cultural or civic exclusion that leave migrants no choice but to move between societies that reject them. At the same time, long-term and permanent immigrants increasingly maintain multiple social, economic and political ties and, sometimes, dual citizenship of both receiving and home countries, establishing social networks and communities that transcend geographical, cultural and political borders.

Additionally, many migrants are developing trans-national activities and multi-cultural, inter-cultural and multi-lingual skills. These evolving features of international migration also need to be taken into account in designing policies and practices to ensure social inclusion and cohesion in European countries. An integration framework must be based on legislation guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination, be linked to migration policy addressing labour market needs and composition and ensuring decent work opportunities for all, and include institutional and practical measures to ensure its implementation.

Deliberate, sustained and consistent policies and practices by states and concerned stakeholders are required to ensure that migration benefits both host and origin countries and the migrants themselves. As a phenomenon that can involve human beings in situations of potential exploitability and inadequate protection, migration cannot be regulated by market forces alone. Migration policies and practices can only be viable and effective when they are based on a firm foundation of legal norms, and thus operate under the rule of law. International standards set parameters for the protection of migrant workers and the preservation of states’ interests. They also provide a framework for national legislation, policy and practice as well as for co-operation within states and between states at opposite ends of the migration process.

Protection of the human rights of all migrants is a legal, political and ethical imperative in its own right, regardless of economic, financial or other considerations. The protection of migrant workers, equality of treatment, campaigns against discrimination, and encouragement of integration are essential measures for ensuring that migration contributes substantially and positively to economic and social development in receiving and home countries alike.

A priority for all governments is to ensure the well-being of migrant workers and to secure the payment of decent wages and basic safeguards. Such policies, legislation and programmes should take into account that women migrants often find themselves in irregular situations, in unregulated sectors of the economy, or as victims of traffickers or smugglers and subject to many forms of violence and abuse.

Governments can exercise their regulatory role in migration only in partnership with a range of other actors. Consultation and policy-making thus must also take into account employers’ organisations and businesses that provide employment; workers’ organisations representing the interests of both migrant and national workers; civil society bodies; and certainly men and women migrants. Dialogue and co-operation among countries involved in labour migration processes are essential if international labour migration is to benefit.

Effective governance of migration requires coordinated and complementary interventions and regulation. Only a comprehensive and integrated approach to policy formulation, implementation and evaluation covering a broad range of areas will secure the benefits of migration for origin and destination countries alike.

This is a summary of a report presented to the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Migration Affairs, held in Kyiv, Ukraine, on 4-5 September 2008.



City projects promote integration

Sisonke Savings Scheme in Cape Town and the Migrants Help Desk established by the City of Johannesburg are examples of projects that concretely contribute to the process of integration and social cohesion.

While working with migrants and encouraging interaction between refugees and citizens around issues of human rights, the members of Cape Town-based non-governmental organisation, Africa Unite, realised that much of the tension between citizens and migrants arises out of conflicts over resources, with migrants perceived as exacerbating the poverty that many citizens experience. In response to this, Africa Unite established the Sisonke ('All of Us') Savings Scheme, a project that encourages citizens and refugees to jointly save modest sums of money that are subsequently invested in income-generating projects. The income that is generated is then shared by the members of the scheme.

The project was initiated in 2005 and has since come to the attention of the South African Micro-finance Apex Fund (SAMAF), an initiative of the Department of Trade and Industry. With assistance from SAMAF, what was initially just a small project run by Africa Unite has effectively become a loan and savings scheme that provides access to finance for previously disadvantaged individuals. The benefits of the project are not only monetary in nature. The scheme also demonstrates the value of co-operation between citizens and migrants that ultimately contributes to reducing the tensions and conflicts that prevent integration and lead to a breakdown of social cohesion.

In April 2007, the City of Johannesburg officially opened a Migrant Help Desk to provide information to legal migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees regarding their rights, entitlements and access to services. The decision to establish a help desk for migrants came out of the city's 2004 strategy for social cohesion and human development that identified the need for migrants to be properly integrated into the city.

At the official opening of the help desk, the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Amos Masondo, said that 'migrants contribute to the cultural diversity of ... our vibrant city; we must recognise diversity as an urban strength.' He went on to say: '...The City of Johannesburg is adopting a progressive approach with regards to ensuring that migrants to this city feel that they are part of an inclusive city.'

The City of Johannesburg's initiative was welcomed by migrant groups as well as local organisations working with refugees and migrants and significantly contributes to the creation of a more welcoming attitude towards foreigners, which will go a long way towards promoting and encouraging integration.

Information from an article by Emily van Rijswijk, which can be found at http://joburgnews.co.za/2007/apr/apr18_migrants.stm

Project details

The project on Migration and Social Cohesion is funded by the Heinrich Boell Stiftung and is being implemented by Idasa as the South African partner of the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP).

For further information, contact:

Vincent Williams
Project Manager
Tel: +27 (0)21 467-7600
Fax: +27 (0)86 633-3136
email: vwilliams@idasa.org.za

