

Measuring integration of international migrants: a review of progress, current state and shortfalls in the conceptual framework

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Abstract:

With the continued importance of international migration in the media and political debates, there is considerable progress in recent years in the measurement of migrants' integration into receiving countries. This includes extensive attempts for defining the concept, particularly by the Council of Europe (1994, 2004), the European Commission (EC, 2010, 2013; EUROSTAT, 2020), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015, 2018), the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2011, 2017), and the statistical system in various developed economies, such as more recently by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO et al, 2020).

Migration has also gained increased policy importance by its integration into the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly as a disaggregation variable for SDG indicators. This should lead to increased availability of data in more countries and improved knowledge on migrants' integration, as well as to its increased defining criteria, particularly from those SDG Targets where migrants are targeted.

Despite this tremendous progress, current studies focus mostly on developed economies (see more in the Migration Data Portal), and with the various criteria used to measure integration of migrants, there is no international agreement on which ones are key factors to integration. There are fewer studies on an index of integration that can assess when a migrant is fully integrated, or closer to full integration. The concept of migrants' integration remains also absent from current attempts by international organizations such as UN agencies (ILO, 2018 & UNSD, 2021), as they revise various aspects of international migration statistics.

The paper reviews recent attempts for defining and measuring the integration of international migrants, and looks at possible communalities in the concept and common criteria for measuring integration. The paper also touches on a key question: is a single index of migrant integration possible, combining both the aggregate dimension of the receiving country, and the individual level dimension of the international migrant? The latest attempts available have been mostly for a migrant integration policy index (Giacomo Solano and Thomas Huddleston, 2020). Then is it possible to define statistically which criteria have contributed the most to a higher level of migrant integration?

Keywords:

International migrant; migrant integration; migrant worker; receiving country; migration policy.