

Executive summary

Most of the six million refugees in OECD countries arrived in the last five years as part of the largest inflows in recent history. The challenges faced by OECD countries in ensuring the integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants have been heightened by this increase in inflows of migrants seeking protection. There are lessons to be learned from these recent inflows for other crisis situations, elsewhere or in the future. In many regions around the world, humanitarian crises may induce large migration flows, especially in developing countries. Risk factors that may trigger other humanitarian crises are not likely to diminish in the future. The international community must address the integration needs of the most vulnerable, including people affected by forced displacement, but also other migrants in situations of vulnerability.

Record inflows, which have abated in some countries but which continue in others, have left a legacy of increased demand for integration into the labour market, education system and society. The integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants is a crucial objective. By improving the employability of refugees and other vulnerable migrants, countries can help them realise their full economic potential and generate a positive economic impact. This also improves their acceptance and social inclusion in the local community. Failure to integrate refugees and other vulnerable migrants not only increases social exclusion and tension but would sharply constrain policy options in addressing future inflows.

This report aims to support OECD countries to be better prepared to ensure integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants, notably in the context of sudden and large inflows. Building on the recommendations of the Global Compact on Refugees as well as on previous OECD work, and drawing on the recent experience of OECD countries, this report identifies a number of policies that can improve integration and support origin and transit countries.

The first lesson drawn from this analysis is that, contrary to frequent public perception, the systems in place in OECD countries have largely proven capable of coping with sudden, unexpected inflows of people seeking protection. Countries have, in most cases, successfully provided emergency reception and addressed the immediate needs of vulnerable migrants. Most mainstream education and employment services continued to function adequately. However, this is not to ignore the cases where services have not kept up with unprecedented demand, or where standards of service have been compromised; these are situations which provide important lessons for better preparing for the strain of future sudden arrivals.

The resilience of systems in the face of the challenge was largely due to ad hoc measures, rather than to pre-established rapid response plans. Government flexibility in responding should be seen positively, but came at a high cost. Channels of consultation and collaboration with partners within each country and abroad had to be newly established. In addition to higher financial costs, the lack of a plan created a public perception of

uncontrolled migration flows and a breakdown of systems. The political crisis which ensued was larger than the humanitarian situation would have justified.

The second lesson is that ensuring integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants is a long-term commitment more challenging than initial reception. Evidence from OECD countries shows that while refugees and other vulnerable migrants understandably lag behind other migrants in terms of labour market integration, a wide range of policies have proved effective for their integration in the medium and long-term.

A third lesson is that no country can address the complexity of integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants alone. Host countries can share the burden of response to spikes in demand for international protection, can help each other to be better prepared and informed, and can share good practices. Integration in one host country may have spillovers on the perception and prospects of vulnerable migrants in other countries. Failures in one country may complicate policy development in others.

Another area for international co-ordination is in promoting greater coherence between humanitarian, development, and peace actors in their support to developing host countries, where 85% of the world's refugees are located. Stronger partnerships in targeting aid and assistance can help achieve mutual objectives for integration and protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. Development co-operation and other types of financial assistance for situations of forced displacement can also ease pressure on these countries. Another form of burden sharing with developing host countries is to provide resettlement and complementary legal pathways for people in need of protection.

Similarly, a fourth lesson is that no central government can ensure integration without working with other actors. The UN Global Compact on Refugees recognises the role of relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, civil society and the private sector, among others. Similarly, the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration calls for national integration policies to include local authorities and, as appropriate, civil society organisations, employers' and workers' organisations and other stakeholders, such as third sector organisations and social enterprises. Sub-national levels of government such as local authorities have a role to play and need to be involved. A whole of society approach is necessary, sharing responsibilities according to appropriate multi-level governance arrangements.

A fifth lesson is that continuity of public action is key for an effective response. Many OECD countries have boosted budgets for supporting the integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. Those resources are adequate as long as an effective plan is in place. Such a plan must take a whole-of-society approach, involve multiple stakeholders and levels of government, identify different target groups and partners, and establish robust evaluation and feedback mechanisms. There are several elements to continuity. First, the plan must be consistently supported over time. Institutional capacity and knowledge should be preserved even when interventions wind down. Second, vulnerable migrants must be supported with different interventions along their journey from origin to host country and through all phases of settlement and integration. Return to origin countries when warranted and support for voluntary return and reintegration is an integral part of continuity.

OECD countries can be better prepared for future large inflows of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. In part, this requires improved early warning systems, but also the development of channels of collaboration with partners – internationally and domestically

– which can be quickly activated. Communication with the public is part of the response. Better information about the integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants helps establish appropriate policies, helps migrants choose the best-suited activities to achieve their own integration, and shape realistic expectations in the public. There is an ample toolkit of specific policy interventions which support integration of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. As many OECD countries emerge from a crisis phase, it is important that feedback from recent experience be included in rapid response plans for the future. There is no reason to be caught off-guard or unequipped.



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