

Executive Summary

The integration of immigrants at the local level is a topic of significant interest for OECD countries. The growing importance of the knowledge economy means that the battle for talent is becoming as important as the battle for inward investment, and skilled migrants can offer a significant comparative advantage to local labour markets, as long as their potential is harnessed. Unskilled migrants are also in demand, particularly where rising living costs make lower paid jobs unattractive to the native population, and where demographic change and population movement combine to reduce the self-sufficiency of local labour markets. For the potential advantages of migration to be maximised however, it is crucial that immigration is accompanied by *integration*, that is, effective mechanisms for ensuring immigrants are effectively incorporated into local labour markets. Paradoxically, at the same time that migration is increasing in global importance, there is worrying evidence that integration results do not seem to be as favourable in a number of countries as they were in the past.

The integration of immigrants is a policy area where a local approach is particularly important. While immigration policy is often determined, designed and funded at national level, its impact on migrants and society are strongly felt at the local level where other policies, including labour market policy, interact. There is strong variation between local areas in terms of the number and types of migrants received. While certain agricultural areas attract large numbers of temporary migrants, migrants are more likely overall to settle in urban areas, and in certain “gateway” cities. Further, within these cities, immigrants often become concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, either through following existing family or community ties, or through minimising living costs. Local policy makers are able to take into account such variation, along with variation in labour market demand.

This publication highlights common principles and key factors which are important in supporting integration at the local level, particularly in relation to the development of effective governance approaches. A comparison of local initiatives implemented in five OECD countries: Canada, UK (London), Spain, Italy, Switzerland highlights a number of key questions facing all local policy makers working in this field. Which stakeholders should be involved and how can their contribution be maximised? How should resources best be used?

Should migrants be targeted specifically, or should policy makers develop a strategy aimed at the whole community? How can the local level support innovation, whilst also achieving a mainstreamed sustainable approach? What is the role of local partnerships in tackling this issue, and on what should partnerships focus? The publication includes case studies from each reviewed country, in addition to analysis of the principle findings and a set of policy recommendations aimed at both local and national level policy makers.

Who is involved locally?

There are a wide variety of different stakeholders involved in this policy area, reflecting the diversity of barriers to labour market integration which immigrants may face. Depending on the local area, activities to support integration can be taken forward by local and regional authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trades unions, not-for profit enterprises, and employers. Each of these organisations complement the support to immigrants which is delivered by the public employment service (PES), which in fact rarely targets immigrants specifically in its programmes. Amongst the participating countries, Canada had the most extensive and diverse set of PES programmes targeted towards immigrants, including newcomer assessment and referral projects, specialised job search and work experience programmes, mentoring schemes, and skills upgrading projects.

Despite the fact that local authorities in most cases have no specific legal competency to help people into employment, they play an important role in the local integration of immigrants in the majority of the countries covered by this study. Local policies in the field of housing, schools, social assistance and spatial planning can all have a significant impact on the ability of immigrants to access employment, and the overarching responsibility of local authorities for the social and economic well being of their local area makes them a natural lead partner in local partnerships to support integration.

Both local authorities and the PES frequently work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the delivery of services to immigrants at the local level, sometimes for legal reasons (because they are able to provide support to migrants who do not have employment or resident permits) but also because NGOs provide the supportive environment and individualised “one stop shop” approaches that some migrants with multiple obstacles to employment need. Colleges and vocational schools are also particularly well placed to take forward an integration approach at the local level, in that they act as intermediaries between local people and local employers. The community college system in the United States is seen by many as acting as an “integrative social institution”, for example, which actively links post-

secondary education to local labour market needs, and 25% of students within this system are immigrants. Vocational schools are also central to the integration of young people in Switzerland, reflecting the central role of the Swiss apprenticeship system in the labour market.

Employers are perhaps the most important of all the stakeholders to be involved at the local level. In Canada and the United States, employers play a strong role in integration approaches in some local areas, participating in partnerships, and working together to provide employer based training opportunities for migrants. Employers are leading partners in the Toronto based Region Immigration Employment Council (TRIEC), for example, which has the mandate to improve access to the labour market for skilled immigrants in the context of demographic change and predicted skills shortages. Employers associations and chambers of commerce can also play a particularly useful role. The ability of employers associations to progressively tackle both integration and quality of work issues is illustrated in the province of Lleida, in Spain, where the local farmers association has developed an innovative model for promoting good quality employment for temporary agricultural migrants, providing accommodation, training and social support in addition to building development links with localities in countries of origin. It is important that employers associations take up this challenge; whereas unions have a natural role in helping to improve employment conditions, many of the more precarious employment sectors in which immigrants become concentrated have low unionisation, and the unions are sometimes persuaded against getting involved if it means disadvantaging their existing members. In Italy, local chambers of commerce also participate in a wide variety of initiatives, from training to accommodation and support for entrepreneurship. For example, they have been at the forefront of developing bilateral relationships with regions in countries of origin to train immigrants in skills which are in regional demand before they arrive in the country.

Not-for-profit private sector organisations such as social enterprises and community foundations can also be particularly effective in this field, not least because of the flexibility they gain from being outside of the public sector. A social enterprise in Neuchâtel in Switzerland, for example, has developed short term customised training courses for migrants which are geared to the needs of local employers. Their independence from the formal training system allows them to take a “demand led” approach, delivering modular courses all year round.

Finally, it is increasingly being recognised that immigrant associations have an important role to play in integration at the local level, in that they encourage the development of services that are culturally sensitive, and that take the demands of immigrants themselves into account. Immigrant associations already run

many of the services for refugees which exist in London, for example, and are being encouraged to play more of a role in integration issues in Spain.

What are the main policy instruments used?

Many of the tools and instruments used to support the integration of migrants in the local areas studied are similar to those used within mainstream active labour market policies, including job search support, education and training, mentoring and the provision of “work experience” placements with employers. However these tools are often adapted to the specific needs and lifestyles of migrants, with specialised support being provided including help with wider social acculturation, participation and networking.

When making employment decisions about migrants, employers do not have recourse to the usual sources of information (on educational background, previous local work performance) which guide them in choosing the right employee. Local activities to ensure that employers can quickly see the potential offered by migrants are therefore crucial, including, for example, programmes that provide work experience placements, actions to support the transferability of qualifications and projects which recognise prior competencies. Language is also viewed by many local stakeholders as particularly important given the increasing relevance of communication skills within the service based and knowledge based economy. There is some concern in fact that the language courses currently on offer locally do not reach the high level of competence now required by employers, and local stakeholders in the Canadian provinces and in London are piloting higher level language and occupational specific language courses, at least on a small scale.

In Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, much of the work carried out to support the integration of immigrants is focused on wider social integration rather than specifically on labour market integration. Building solidarity and understanding between local residents is seen as an essential element in ensuring the wider participation of migrants in society and increasing their ability to access work. In countries where much employment is advertised informally this may be an effective strategy. In Italy, the availability of affordable housing is also seen as an important determinant of labour market integration, and a number of local schemes have been developed to provide supported housing for immigrants, including a project in Bergamo which is run by a consortium of sixteen public and private bodies, including the regional and local authorities, trades unions and associations.

Finally, a number of localities focus not on supporting access to employment but on stimulating immigrant entrepreneurship. In Italy, recent national

growth in the number of entrepreneurs has been identified as being entirely due to an increase in immigrant entrepreneurs, and therefore chambers of commerce have been keen to support the expansion of this area, through for example producing specialised guidance and mentoring support.

Governance issues

There a number of specific governance issues which affect the delivery of local initiatives to support the labour market integration of immigrants.

The management of change

The integration of immigrants at the local level is principally a question of the *management of change*. Effective labour market integration depends on helping migrants to manage the rapid changes which are happening in their own lives, while at the same ensuring that the local community itself evolves and responds to changes in its population and in its urban fabric. While local stakeholders need to be thinking about managing the consequences of longer term change, migrants need clear road maps to guide them between the various services which will support their transition into a new life. This means that there is a need for well coordinated and accessible local services which will meet their various needs, either through the mainstreaming of migrant-friendly approaches across all local services, or else the provision of one-stop shop approaches specifically aimed at migrants. Unfortunately the sheer number of different actors who become involved at the local level, and the fact that services have often developed on a “bottom up” basis, means that such clear route maps frequently do not exist, and provision is relatively fragmented with low levels of communication and coordination.

Such fragmentation has a number of implications. A lack of communication between the different institutions dealing with integration can reduce the ability of localities to develop a coherent strategic response. Service providers can become relatively isolated; reducing their ability to guide migrants on to other relevant support and new opportunities. Service providers can fall outside of “communities of learning” and the sharing of good practice which is essential to the development of more effective services. In addition, there is frequently a lack of communication between organisations involved in labour market supply and demand. Given the speed of local labour market change it is crucial that organisations are aware of the latest labour market demands so that they can accurately guide migrants towards realistic employment routes. While this may seem self-evident, it is apparent that supply side organisations (training institutions, NGOs) often operate without up to date information about labour market needs, providing

relatively generic labour market advice. This can lead to an un-necessary focus on the perceived “deficits” of the migrant (their personal confidence and generic job search skills for example) rather than on ensuring that migrants understand and respond to local demand.

Avoiding fragmentation and supporting mainstreaming

In the face of the complexity and relative fragmentation of delivery of support to migrants in many local areas, some experts have begun to question whether mainstreaming is more effective. Encouraging mainstream local institutions to take into consideration the needs of newcomers in their wider programmes also has the benefit of being more sustainable in the longer term. In London, for example, the education and training system is relatively flexible, so rather than local initiatives developing new training courses they often provide guidance to migrants on accessing wider provision. In Italy, a major reform of the adult education system has resulted in the development of “permanent local centres for adult education” which have taken the place of third sector language courses, improving consistency in certification and reducing local level competition and duplication.

Whereas mainstreaming services can improve coordination, however, it can also reduce flexibility and innovation. Immigrant integration is a particularly diverse area of policy, and it is an area where policy makers are still learning about the most appropriate mechanisms. Because of this the local level can be particularly effective when it encourages diverse approaches and innovation. One particularly effective method of supporting innovation is the development of a seed-funding system or local “innovation grant”. In Winnipeg, the flexible budget available under the Manitoba Immigrant Integration Programme has been used to fund a variety of different pilot programmes. The *Diputació de Barcelona* (provincial government of Barcelona) in Spain has also been particularly successful at accessing national and European funding to encourage innovation and to ensure that the results are circulated to other local authorities, through for example the production of methodological guides.

Mainstreaming also threatens to remove the sheltered individualised “one-stop-shop” support which can be provided by smaller organisations such as NGOs. The CASI model in Madrid has overcome this by developing a strong mainstreamed approach which also benefits from both the innovative nature of NGOs and their ability to provide individualised support. The entire region of Madrid is covered by CASI initiatives and all the local NGOs work to similar goals and methodologies, leading to a consistency in the provision. There is a degree of inbuilt flexibility in the programme, however, with block grants being allocated to each CASI which allow relative freedom in expenditure.

Local “place based” or territorial partnerships have been developed in many local areas as a mechanism for reducing the isolation of individual stakeholders, supporting innovation and encouraging mainstream organisations to adopt integration-based approaches. In London, a number of the NGOs supporting refugees are coordinated by wider partnerships bringing together a mix of social and economic partners. The Renewal partnership in West London has a £16 million budget (approx. 23 million euro) for a seven year programme, involving a wide variety of partners with a major local employer, the Ealing National Health Service Primary Care Trust as the accountable body. Renewal provides a degree of continuity within a field dominated by short-term funding programmes, and a degree of capacity building support. In Italy and Spain, the Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) have also provided a useful mechanism for helping local stakeholders to work together across administrative boundaries and across traditional divisions of labour.

Resources

The availability of resources is a significant issue affecting the effectiveness for local initiatives to support integration. Given that NGOs often provide the “front-line” of services to immigrants it is often within these organisations that financing issues become most apparent. The sustainability of funding for NGOs was a concern across all the participating countries, with local actors reporting not only continual efforts to access and renew funding, but also low wages and long hours, which threatened to create “burn-out” in staff.

Given the limited resources available, a key question facing local actors is where should resources best be placed? Evidence shows that a relatively focused and intensive approach is needed in order to create longer term labour market integration – cheaper interventions which are not specifically targeted at a migrant’s skills level and aspirations, or linked to local labour demand, have lower long-term success. However, it is short term interventions that are the most prevalent at the local level. The performance management systems of funding programmes (with their emphasis on quick outputs) in particular encourage local initiatives to support rapid access to employment for migrants, which may ultimately produce short term labour market participation as opposed to longer term integration. Where more intensive interventions do exist they tend to be relatively small scale, leading to a relatively negligible impact on the overall integration of migrants into the labour market.

Targeting

There are, however, examples of targeted approaches at the local level which seek to maximise their impact through focusing on the specific characteristics of certain groups within the migrant population. For example, a number of initiatives target female migrants because of their poorer labour market integration rates. Other initiatives target immigrants differently according to their skills levels. Many local initiatives in Canada, for example, focus on graduates or professionals, reflecting the favourable selection of such migrants in the Canadian immigration system. Focusing on the highly skilled has the advantage of presenting a particularly positive face to employers, with migrants being seen as a “resource to be exploited” rather than a problem to be solved. However there is also the danger that imposing too many selection criteria before admission can lead to “creaming” or “screening” effects, with projects supporting those most easy to help, neglecting those that perhaps have more need of support.

Particular approaches have also been developed to reflect the amount of time that a migrant has spent in the country. A pre-apprenticeship training course in Neuchâtel Switzerland, for example, has taken the name “Jet” reflecting the fact that the new arrivals it works with are often dynamic and highly motivated to succeed, helping to create a positive profile for participants with local employers. When supporting second or third generation migrants, local initiatives often focus on providing support to children, to prevent their exclusion later in life. For example, the local development company in Santa Coloma de Gramenet in Spain has attempted to tackle immigrant underperformance in the education system through tackling issues of isolation and promoting inter-culturalism in schools.

Some initiatives focus on one particular ethnic group or community, through for example being managed by an immigrant association, thereby benefiting from greater cultural sensitivity. There are some concerns, however, that such policies can ultimately create competition between different communities rather than integration. Other localities resist the idea of targeting immigrants at all as a separate group, with a key feature of Zurich's cantonal policy on integration, for example, being to treat the problems experienced by migrants as “problems of exclusion” rather than necessarily “problems particularly experienced by migrants”. Indeed some experts warn against “racialising” poverty as a social phenomenon, arguing that when poverty is associated with people from particular backgrounds and cultures, people forget that they are actually looking at a more embedded and structural issue.

Timing

Timing is particularly important in the governance of initiatives to support the integration of immigrants. Employers, in particular, stress that immigrants should not be out of the labour market for too a long period after arrival, so that they remain in touch with their relevant employment sector and their skills do not atrophy. While immigrants may need extra support to adapt to the local labour market on arrival, therefore, initiatives which allow migrants to find jobs and then “back-fill” through in-work training and up-skilling are particularly valuable, as they help avoid time-intensive periods in education and training. Where external training is necessary, modular training courses which allow migrants to build on their skills, at any point in the year, are also particularly important.

Policy recommendations

Building on local experience in participating countries, a number of policy recommendations can be made, at both the national and local levels.

At the national level

- Ensure that the national immigration system meets local labour market needs.
- Develop a consistent overarching policy framework which includes robust anti-discrimination legislation.
- Develop open and flexible mainstream programmes.
- Support the recognition of prior competences and qualifications.
- Ensure a strong culture of evaluation.

At the local level

- Ensure strong coordination and signposting between institutions at the local level.
- Bring employers on board in local partnerships.
- Support innovation and learning, through, for example local “seed” grants and flexible local budgets.
- Support adaptation to the needs of migrants within mainstream institutions, rather than the unnecessary proliferation of new actors.
- Target but with sensitivity.
- Consider the timing of interventions and ensure migrants are not out of the labour market for too long a period after arrival.

From Immigration to Integration

LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Today the battle for talent is as important as the battle for capital. In the knowledge economy, skilled migrants can offer a significant comparative advantage to local economies. Unskilled migrants are also in demand, particularly where demographic change reduces the self-sufficiency of local labour markets. Yet for the potential advantages of migration to be harnessed, it is crucial that immigration be accompanied by integration, or effective mechanisms for ensuring that immigrants are incorporated into labour markets, the economy and society. Paradoxically, at the same time that migration is increasing in global importance, there is worrying evidence that integration results do not seem to be as favourable as they were in the past.

The integration of immigrants is a policy area where a local approach is critical. While immigration policy is often determined, designed and funded at the national level, its impact on migrants and society is more strongly felt at the local level where other policies interact. This publication highlights principles and factors which are important in supporting integration locally. A comparison of local initiatives implemented in five OECD countries: Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, UK (London), addresses key questions facing all policy makers and stakeholders working in this field. This book provides a set of concrete policy recommendations for implementation at both local and national levels.

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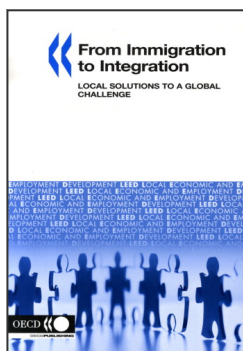
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