

## HOST SOCIETY INTEGRATION

*Howard Duncan*

*Investments in integration are of mutual benefit to the host society and to the migrant. As we see growing numbers of migrants returning to their homelands and leading transnational lives, we see that the homelands also benefit from the enhanced human capital that their émigrés acquire through being integrated into their host society's institutions.*

**T**he integration of migrants, when well-managed, offers direct benefits to the migrants and the destination society and potential deferred benefits to the migrants' homelands. The process of integration into the host society, when followed by return migration and homeland reintegration, can offer powerful development benefits to the homeland. The mechanisms at play in this process are the acquisition of enhanced human and social capital in the destination society and their application in the homeland through reintegration, particularly within institutions of government, business, and civil society. In these human and social capital transfers lie significant development potential as is evident now in the effects of foreign education and work experience in such countries as China, the Republic of Korea, and India, among many others. But we note here that these transfers are made possible by previous integration into host society institutions.

The term "integration" is ambiguous, operating within economic, social, political, cultural, and other spheres. Referring most generally to relations between a migrant and the destination society, here we will consider primarily economic aspects of integration, including employment or business ownership and the knowledge, skills, and values acquired through these activities. Our interest, then, is in the factors that facilitate migrants' employment in the sort of host society institutions that enhance their human capital to embody the way in which competent organizations are managed and organized according to the rule of law and with effective accountability mechanisms. It is this sort of human capital that, applied in homeland institutions, can help raise its prospects for development.

Traditionally, integration into the mainstream of the host society has been regarded as the natural desired outcome of the migration experience. Accordingly, integration failures have been attributed to barriers imposed by the host or brought by the migrant. Host society integration policy has emphasized dismantling these barriers over other possible policy interventions. Host-imposed barriers can include labor market racism and discrimination, restrictive hiring rules and practices to protect national interests, restrictions on foreign investment and business establishment, restrictions on borrowing for business investment, refusal to recognize foreign credentials and work experience, and various legal impediments to migrants joining the societal mainstream. Barriers brought by the migrant can include a lack of competence with the host society language including local pragmatics, a lack of awareness of host cultural

practices and attitudes, a lack of social capital and networks, a lack of knowledge of employment and business practices as well as of law and regulation, and an unfamiliarity with how to exploit the available employment and business opportunities. Any one of these can curtail the economic success of a migrant and, taken together, they are devastating to the migrant's chances.

### **Language, educational qualifications, and foreign work experience**

Recent research shows that the most salient determinants of successful integration into a host society labor market are language proficiency and education. Migrants with host society language competence and recognized education are most likely to be employed at a level reasonably commensurate with their qualifications. Countries such as New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, which have immigration programs that offer qualified migrants permanent residency visas, have long studied which migrants best succeed in the labor market, and it is those whose language skills are highest and whose education is highest, especially those whose foreign credentials have been recognized.

These countries try first to ensure labor market integration success through the criteria used to select those immigrants who will receive permanent residency visas. All use a points system for selecting skilled migrants and each of these systems emphasizes language and education. But for those countries that do not select migrants this way, the lesson remains: successful economic integration requires a fit between the language and education preferences of the employer and the human capital characteristics of the migrant. Where the fit is good, immigrant incomes tend to be higher. More and more governments, recognizing the correlation between language and education with economic success, are offering language training as a central aspect of their integration programs.

Australia, Canada, and New Zealand all invest heavily in language training, especially for those who enter Canada through other immigration programs such as family reunification, but others intensive language training. Of course, language proficiency not such as Israel, the Netherlands, and Germany are also offering only helps migrants find better jobs but it enables them to integrate socially, politically, and culturally. Social cohesion in the host society is enhanced, and with migrants being more productive economically, investments in language training

are of benefit to the host society, its economy, and its institutions.

The recognition of foreign credentials is a problem felt by migrants around the world. Many employers are reluctant to hire people who were educated in a system that they do not understand. And the reality is that not all education is of the same quality, not only across countries but within countries. It is commonly believed that the non-recognition of foreign credentials is nothing more than discrimination or attempts by professional associations and regulatory bodies to restrict membership in unjust ways. However, not all educational qualifications are of equal value. Some countries are investing heavily to improve the quality of higher education to support future economic growth but in the meantime are populating their universities, government offices, and businesses with people trained in the West. It is unreasonable to expect employers to hire people whose educational qualifications are not at a level that the institution requires. Better to help employers understand the relative merits of education from different sources and to establish fair and effective mechanisms to assess foreign credentials and to offer remedial training to help migrants meet national standards. Many countries have created such assessment bodies, and national educational institutions contribute to the solution by providing upgrading for those who require it. This is in recognition of a *practical* problem with immigrant integration to which effective practical solutions can be provided. This approach helps both the migrant and the employers, providing benefits to the national economy, the hiring institution, and the migrant.

A related issue is the recognition of foreign work experience. Studies have shown that many employers discount foreign work experience and may insist on domestic experience as a condition for hiring. The Ontario Human Rights Commission ruled in 2013 that the requirement for Canadian experience was a rights violation unless an employer could demonstrate that such experience is necessary to properly carry out work. But there are other ways to address the problem of recognizing foreign experience, among them showing the value of foreign experience to firms that have business dealings outside the domestic market, the potential for innovation that foreign experience offers, and more broadly the value of diversity to an organization.

### **The advantages of integration for the host society**

The traditional countries of immigration, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, deal with integration in different ways but they share the belief that their societies are better off when immigrants are allowed to contribute to their economies and to society overall. This has meant not only measures to ensure that they are employed but legislative and other measures to ensure that they are not excluded from society's opportunities and access to "the good life." The recogni-

tion of the value of immigrant integration has meant that these countries have been highly prosperous and have long enjoyed reputations as destinations for the world's most skilled migrants. Also common to these societies has been a history of leadership favorable to immigration, investments in policy and programs to manage migration in the best interests of their citizens and society, and direct investments by government and civil society in integration and the protection of migrant rights.

This comparative success has provided incentives to other countries to adopt analogous policies and programs following years of trying to prevent migration. Many European countries until 15 years ago were reluctant to consider immigration as a feature of their societies, preferring to hope that those residing there were temporary. But this has given way to robust recognition of Europe's need for immigration and the integration of migrants.

Not investing in immigrant integration means missed opportunities for the domestic labor force and the domestic economy as a whole. Effective integration programs not only help migrants find employment, but can help businesses and other institutions find employees. In countries with demographic deficits, this will be increasingly important. But it is not only opportunity costs that matter. Countries that have large numbers of migrants who have failed to integrate have problems: civil unrest, citizen anger, the rise of political populism, and a growing belief that governments are unable to act in the best interests of their people. When integration fails, citizens lose confidence in their governments to manage not only integration but migration as well. And we have seen the effects on electoral politics in many European societies with an attendant rise in xenophobia, social unrest, diminishing social cohesion, and violence against minorities.

### **Conclusion**

Governments have the responsibility to manage migration effectively to ensure that the capacity for integration is realizable and to manage integration in ways that benefit both the domestic society and the migrants. Doing so is possible as has been demonstrated by many countries. Those countries that perform best make it a point to share their experiences with legislation, regulations, and programs to learn what works well and what fails. Investments in integration are of mutual benefit to the host and to the migrant. And the growing numbers of migrants returning to their homelands and leading transnational lives demonstrate that homelands also benefit from the enhanced human capital that their émigrés acquire through being integrated into their host society's institutions.

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