

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

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The integration of migrants is an important and desirable step in the immigration process. Both countries of origin and destination can gain from greater integration and diaspora engagement. Although rarely acknowledged, countries of origin have a role to play in integration. The important conditions for this win-win situation are correct definition of the target group and noncontroversial policy areas suitable for intervention.

Why countries of origin should care about integration

Destination and integration is a multilayered process that can be subdivided into economic integration (labor market, education, language), sociopolitical integration (civic and political participation), and cultural integration (religion, popular culture). A vast body of research shows that migrants may be well integrated in one area while not in others. Although outcomes differ according to a variety of factors, it seems that homeland diaspora policies are not among them (Unterreiner and Weiner 2014; Di Bartolomeo, Kalantaryan, and Bonfanti 2014; Schneider and Weiner 2015; Unterreiner 2015). Research to date shows that policies targeting the diaspora in fact have negligible effects on integration in the host country.

Why should an origin country concern itself with the integration of its emigrants? Researchers agree that integration in at least one area, the labor market, can be highly beneficial for countries of origin. Migrants who have jobs adapted to their skills and who are employed outside of ethnic enclaves usually earn better wages and thus have more wealth to remit or to invest back home. Well-integrated emigrants also seem to have better life satisfaction and higher human capital for knowledge transfer and thus a higher propensity to engage in non-profit activities that may support homeland development. Finally, well-integrated emigrants promote a positive image of the home country. Their political clout can influence broader geopolitics, whereas migrants who do not integrate well cannot fully engage in development activities or serve as respected ambassadors for their homelands because they often face disdain or even hostility in the host society.

Whom to target and how?

The important question is who should the target of policies enhancing integration be? Diaspora policies usually engage with permanent residents abroad, while emigration policies support the risk-reduced mobility of temporary workers (Unterreiner and Weiner 2014). Until now the three countries implementing integration policies most successfully as a part of their diaspora outreach have been Mexico, the Philippines, and France. They happen to focus on completely different groups

and follow three different models of support for integration: complementarity, predeparture, and cooperation. But their efforts are good examples of how countries of origin can reap the benefits of supporting their nationals abroad.

Mexico supports the integration efforts of mainly undocumented low-skilled immigrants in the United States. The government supports their pursuit of legal residency and cooperates with civil society in the United States to provide English language training and skills enhancement. This is a prime example of what a country can do for its emigrants if the destination country has no broad integration strategy and leaves space for grassroots initiatives. Mexico's support is administered through consular services in the destination society.

The Philippines is known globally for its organized labor emigration policy. The aim is the integration of Filipino workers in destination labor markets. The migrants are long term but temporary workers who often do not enjoy the benefits of integration programs at their destination. Extensive predeparture measures are provided by the Philippine government to support economic integration.

France supports the mobility of temporary workers, most of whom are skilled and highly skilled, and does so through foreign policy as opposed to migration policy. Examples of policies include a web of bilateral agreements that ensure the qualifications of French nationals are recognized abroad, especially in Canada; support for language training (in Canada and in the United States); information services about rights and obligations at destination; and general support for mobility to temporary skilled positions abroad as part of a philosophy of keeping human capital high and obtaining real brain gain through international circulation. France is also a part of the EU regional arrangements on mobility and migration, so-called intra-EU mobility. Under the EU framework, migrants, whether permanent or temporary, are granted a portfolio of labor rights, although their sociopolitical and cultural integration is supported only partially (some voting rights and support for language learning).

These governments have made their priorities clear: For Mexico, support for vulnerable populations is provided to improve

not only the image of Mexicans in the United States but also relations with migrant communities. The Philippines established a system for safely sending low-skilled migrants abroad for increased remittances. For France, the support given to French skilled temporary workers is part of the country's global political and economic strategy as well as a consequence of how the relationship between government and citizen is structured in French political culture.

How can integration support be embedded in a broader diaspora policy?

There are two conditions for successful support of integration for diasporas: the right target group and cooperation at destination.

Because integration measures cannot hope to cover all emigrant populations successfully, priority categories that best fit the homeland's policy objectives must be identified. And because equal support cannot be provided all over the globe, countries ought to focus on a manageable number of geographical areas, usually where the migrants receive the least support or where the broader geopolitical interests of the homeland lie.

The focus until now has been firmly in the area of labor market integration. This approach is quite understandable, as therein lies the main interests of those who emigrate for work, the interests of destination countries that accept foreign workers to boost their economies, and the interests of origin countries that hope for a development dividend. Also, cooperation on integration measures specifically regarding the labor market seems to be the least contentious aspect of integration (Desiderio and Weinar 2014).

Although other areas of integration are usually handled by destination countries and their institutions, origin countries can make a difference by, for example, allowing dual citizenship and supporting social interactions such as the political and cultural accommodation of foreign spouses. These are minimally contentious areas that will gain the cooperation of institutions of the countries of destination.

References

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