



# Migration & Social Cohesion

## Welcome to our first edition of **Migration & Social Cohesion**

Welcome to this first edition of *Migration & Social Cohesion*, a publication – produced by democracy institute Idasa – that focuses on migration and social cohesion, particularly, but not exclusively, in South Africa.

This publication comes in the wake of the horrific attacks on foreigners in South Africa, which presented significant challenges regarding the relationship between issues of citizenship, identity, inclusion and exclusion, migration, social cohesion and democracy. This project is based on the following declaration:

*Failure to successfully integrate immigrants into society can lead to the creation of different and usually unequal classes of membership. In the longer term, and as has so vividly been demonstrated, this may lead to tension and conflict that have a significant impact on stability at local community level, at a broad societal level and can ultimately undermine social cohesion and the ideals of, and the ability to achieve and maintain, an inclusive democracy.*

This series will provide summaries of the key findings of the research being conducted as part of this project and will draw on the experiences of policymakers, practitioners, migrants and citizens to develop proposals for policy, legislative frameworks, strategies and programmes to promote and facilitate co-operation and integration between citizens and migrants.

In this edition, we firstly provide a description of the scope and intended outcomes of the overall project. Secondly, we briefly define what we mean by integration and how it relates to an overall migration management system and thirdly, we give an overview of the key elements of our integration framework that we believe can be used to both plan for integration and evaluate the extent to which integration has taken or is taking place.

We welcome any suggestions and would encourage you to share your own experiences relating to integration, particularly those experiences that could be replicated elsewhere.

# Challenging the concept of 'integration'

The need for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to be integrated into South African communities has taken on a new significance and has become much more of a priority following the xenophobic attacks in May on foreigners in various locations around the country. In response to the attacks, the government identified a three-part strategy: firstly, to bring an end to the violence and to prevent further outbreaks of violence; secondly, to provide emergency and humanitarian relief to the victims of the violence and thirdly, to "reintegrate" people displaced by the violence. However, the reintegration strategy being pursued by the government seems to be little more than returning people to the communities from which they had been displaced on the basis of some kind of agreement having been reached with those communities.

Certainly, government has to be commended and, in principle, the strategy of reintegration should be supported. It is doubtful, however, whether the strategy will succeed in the long-term unless some of the underlying factors that caused and contributed to the violence are addressed. These include the socioeconomic conditions in those communities, the anger and frustration that many in those communities feel and, importantly, the negative attitudes towards and perceptions of migrants and migration that many continue to harbour.

**Immigration is often seen as a threat to national identity and social cohesion, and has as one consequence the creation of a divide between those who "belong" and those who "do not belong", with country of origin or nationality being the defining characteristic that is used to distinguish between the "insiders" and the "outsiders".**

In addition to shock and outrage, many people expressed surprise about the outbreak of xenophobic violence, citing the fact that South Africans and foreigners had been living together in those communities for many years. It is apparent, however, that living together in the same communities and neighbourhoods does not necessarily result in integration. Real integration requires paying attention to a range of factors, not least of which is a commitment to develop and implement policies and programmes that actively promote the participation of migrants in society, while not neglecting or ignoring the needs of citizens.

In 2006, the Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services (PCAS) unit of the South African government published a report entitled *A Nation in the Making: A Discussion Document on Macro-Social Trends in South Africa*, referred to as the Macro-Social Report or MSR. This report reflects on the key social indicators and trends in South Africa and declares:

*The release of the MSR for public discussion provides an opportunity for interaction across society on the many critical issues it raises. This will afford South Africans the opportunity to reflect on such critical matters as identity, networks of social solidarity and social mobility – the better to determine the role that each one of us can play in building a society that cares.*

The report reflects on a range of issues that impact on social cohesion, including internal migration, but it makes no reference to cross-border or international migration, despite the fact that the impact of international migration on society is becoming an increasingly important matter, both in South

Africa and globally. But, while the discussion on migration typically hinges on the way migration impacts on the social and economic development of both countries of origin and countries of destination, “ultimately, migration is not about wealth and poverty, but about the sort of societies we wish to live in” (Kofi Annan, UN General Assembly, 2006).

The strength of the nation-state has been traditionally rooted in common ethnic and cultural identities, language and history or, in the case of multi-ethnic societies, in a common set of values and beliefs. However, the movement of individuals from one area to another either creates multi-ethnic societies where such similarities no longer exist to the same degree, or challenges the predominant societal values and beliefs. In this respect, immigration is often seen as a threat to national identity and social cohesion, and has as one consequence the creation of a divide between those who “belong” and those who “do not belong”, with country of origin or nationality being the defining characteristic that is used to distinguish between the “insiders” and the “outsiders”. In addition to its economic dimensions, migration needs to be addressed from a political perspective and it must answer the question of how migrants can be incorporated into society in a way that fosters social cohesion and a unified national identity.

A unified national identity in this context suggests that individuals living in a particular country share and uphold a set of core values and beliefs. Failure to successfully integrate immigrants into society can lead to the creation of different and usually unequal classes of membership. In the longer term, and as has been so vividly demonstrated, this may lead to tension and conflict that have a significant impact on stability at local community and at broad societal level, and can ultimately undermine social cohesion and the ideals of, and the ability to achieve and maintain, an inclusive democracy.

For these reasons, countries need to develop strategies to integrate migrants into society so that the autonomy of the nation and strength of the national identity is not eroded, but is rather enhanced. In this respect, developing immigration integration strategies is fundamentally about “becoming” rather than “being”. In other words, integration strategies should not be equated with assimilation strategies – migrants are not merely the passive recipients and objects of the predominant culture (political, social and otherwise) of the host society, but are themselves social and economic actors who contribute to and reshape the society in which they find themselves. Thus, developing social cohesion with migrant integration as one of the elements requires a mutually reinforcing and dynamic relationship between migrants and citizens – as migrants become part of mainstream society, the nature of mainstream society is altered, which then also requires that citizens adapt.





A successful integration programme that strengthens social cohesion entails providing a politically and socially supportive environment in which migrants not only feel welcome and safe, but also have opportunities to contribute to the economic, social, cultural and political development of the host society. To be effective, policies need to be fair and to be perceived as fair by all the groups involved. This requires changes in legal frameworks, institutional structures and specific policies, which in turn will have an impact on attitudes and behaviour towards migrants and migration.

Responding to these challenges, Idasa has set up a project on Migration and Social Cohesion with the following objectives:

- (a) To gain an understanding of the obstacles and impediments to the integration of migrants and their potential contribution to development and poverty reduction, and to develop strategies to minimise these obstacles and impediments. Simultaneously, to gain an understanding of the factors that facilitate migrant integration and to develop strategies and programmes to strengthen these.
- (b) To work with local and national civil society organisations, migrant communities, policy-makers and government practitioners to develop and implement strategies and programmes directed at achieving migrant integration to achieve and strengthen social cohesion.
- (c) To promote joint and mutually beneficial projects and activities between migrants and citizens to strengthen interaction, facilitate integration, enhance social cohesion and strengthen democracy.
- (d) To ensure that the gendered impact of migration is taken into account and, specifically, that the needs of migrant women are incorporated into policy and legislative frameworks, strategies and programmes.

The anticipated outcomes of the project are:

- (a) Government commitment to, and development and implementation of, proactive policies and programmes pertaining to social cohesion and integration.
- (b) Changes in legal frameworks, institutional structures and specific policies.
- (c) Strengthening of inclusive social and democratic norms and practices.
- (d) A more positive political and social environment that will enable individual migrants and migrant groups to contribute to the economic, social, cultural and political development of South Africa as the host society.

## Policy should cover more than ‘who is allowed in’

Given the prominence of migration on the global public agenda in the past few years, there appears to be increasing consensus that governments need to pay attention to, as well as provide resources for, the management of migration if it is to have a positive impact. In this context, the management of migration does not only refer to decision-making about who is allowed to enter the country, for what purposes and under what conditions, but is fundamentally also about the settlement and integration of migrants who intend to remain in the country. This requires changing not only the behaviour of the migrants, but also the behaviour and attitudes of those who will be their hosts.

Generally, integration refers to the relationship between migrants (including asylum seekers and refugees) and the members of the host society that they have become, or intend becoming, part of. While formal programmes and interventions to promote integration certainly do help speed up the process or at least make it more manageable, it should be noted that integration will take place regardless. Often it may take a negative experience, such as the xenophobic attacks in South Africa, to provide a catalyst for integration, but even without such negative experiences there will always be some degree of integration. The question, therefore, is not whether there should be government intervention in promoting integration, but what form this should take and the extent to which it should be applied to ensure that it complements organic relationships and experiences of integration.

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The term “migrant integration” is used in a forward-looking manner to refer to an ongoing process and a desired future situation, rather than as a statement of something that has already taken place. In this respect, migrant integration becomes an objective that needs to be achieved in future and thus provokes the question: what do we need to do to achieve this objective? Do we require specific policies, laws and programmes? Should we offer language and other training to migrants to facilitate the process of integration? Are there particular requirements that potential migrants need to meet before being allowed entry and the possibility of settlement? How do we ensure that policies and programmes, including language, skills training and job placements, designed to facilitate migrant integration do not lead to a situation in which citizens believe that they are being disadvantaged, but understand that migrant integration is part of a broader development strategy and that it is designed to benefit all.

As part of its overall migration management strategy, the government clearly has a critical role to play in ensuring that the necessary policy and legislative frameworks that promote and facilitate integration are in place. However, civil society and community organisations and leaders have an equally important role to play in the integration process. For this to happen, it is important that the government provides leadership and that there is substantive public support for its overall migration policy and management system, including the aspects related to integration.



## Towards an integration framework

As governments around the world have begun to focus more on the positive and beneficial aspects of migration, so too have they begun to grapple with the question of migrant integration. While it is true that, whether or not governments have formal integration policies and programmes, there will always be some measure of integration between migrants and the host society, it is also true that for the most part integration is not a completely spontaneous process, but requires some level of intervention and organisation. On the one hand, this means that integration has to be planned and that appropriate policies, legislation, strategies and programmes need to be in place. On the other hand, it also means that we need to evaluate the extent to which the policies, legislation, strategies and programmes are indeed helping to achieve the goal of integration. An integration framework is based on four key elements, each of which is discussed below.

### Rights and obligations

One of the most troublesome issues that has emerged in the global migration debate pertains to the rights and obligations of migrants in the countries that they have migrated to. The human rights community has consistently argued that, irrespective of their legal status in any particular country, migrants should be entitled to the basic human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as well as other international human rights instruments. In support of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of Their Families, the argument was made that *"...as migration has increased the response to migrants and their presence has deteriorated from acceptance and assistance, to hostility and rejection. The rights of migrants, and particularly undocumented migrants, are often undefined in the national context in which they find themselves or, if defined, are often not known"*

The Convention thus recognises that migrant workers and members of their families, being in countries where they are not citizens, are often unprotected and that their rights are often not addressed by the national legislation of receiving states or by their own states of origin. Through the Convention, therefore, fundamental human rights are extended to all migrant workers, both documented and undocumented, with additional rights being recognised for documented migrant workers and members of their families, notably equality of treatment with nationals in a number of legal, political, economic, social and cultural areas.

The problem of course is that the signing and ratification of international instruments such as the UDHR and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of Their Families, while significant and important, is but one step in setting out the

rights and obligations of migrants. It is critically important that the provisions of these instruments are formalised and given effect to in national policies and legislation.

Key to the successful implementation of a rights-based framework for migrant integration is the need to ensure that both migrants and citizens are familiar with, and that they are willing to respect and promote, these rights and obligations. This implies the need to ensure that there is broad-based public support for a rights-based integration framework both during its development and during its ongoing implementation.

## **Social and cultural integration**

One of the more obvious difficulties with achieving migrant integration is the fact that migrants often “stand out” because of their physical appearance, behaviour, language and cultural and social practices. These factors are sometimes compounded by the fact that migrants often live in “enclave” communities either apart from, or within the midst of, the host community, thus further contributing to the perception of “difference” between citizens and migrants.

**It is necessary to dispel the myth that for every migrant that has access to economic opportunity, a citizen is denied a job or the opportunity to establish a business.**

Given that our understanding of integration is not that of assimilation – in other words, that we do not require migrants to become like ourselves but that we welcome the manner in which our society is enriched by their presence – how do we ensure that these differences do not become the basis for discrimination, hostility and rejection? How do we encourage migrants to become integrated into the host society without having to give up their own identities and social and cultural practices? How easy is it for migrants to interact with and establish friendships and social relationships with individuals and groups of citizens? To what extent are migrants willing and able to become part of the local community and to participate in its activities? Are there formal migrant organisations that operate at a local level? Do they have the support of, and do they co-operate with, non-migrant individuals and groups? Are migrant organisations recognised by local authorities and are they included in consultative processes undertaken by local authorities? Do migrants have a sense that they belong to the communities in which they live?

One of the key issues that emerged in the wake of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa was the need for non-nationals to become more integrated into the communities in which they live and for them to participate more visibly in the activities of the community. However, it needs to be emphasised once again that this will not happen spontaneously, but that it needs to be organised and facilitated.

## **Access to services**

One of the key concerns about the “influx” of migrants has to do with the perception that migrants are a burden on society and that they impede citizens’ access to education, housing, health care and other social and welfare services. The extent to which this may or may not be true is of course debatable, but in the longer term the right and ease of access to services provided particularly by the state but also by the private sector remains one of the key elements in planning and evaluating integration.

On the one hand, access to services has to do with making sure that these rights and entitlements are clearly set out and understood, but even when this is the case how easy is it for migrants to access social, welfare and economic services. Are there regulations in place that facilitate the access of migrants to such services? Are migrants issued with appropriate documentation that enables them to access such services?

Critically, in the development of integration strategies and programmes to facilitate access to services for migrants, citizens should not be, and should not be seen to be, disadvantaged. Thus, in as much as efforts are made to ensure the migrants have access to the services that they are entitled to, such efforts must equally apply to citizens.

## Economic integration

Access to formal or informal economic activity, including employment, entrepreneurial activities, the establishment of businesses, etc. remains one of the key elements in determining whether, and the extent to which, migrants become integrated. The access that migrants may have to economic opportunities, specifically formal employment, also gives rise to resentment and negativity, which of course undermines the possibility of integration.

Key to facilitating the economic integration of migrants is firstly ensuring that in terms of working conditions and compensation, migrants, like citizens, are not vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Secondly, it is necessary to dispel the myth that for every migrant that has access to economic opportunity, a citizen is denied a job or the opportunity to establish a business and so on. Emphasis should be placed on the benefits to both migrants and citizens, not only economically, but also socially and culturally since economic interaction and integration also promote social and cultural interaction and integration.

These are the four key elements that will be used to assess the factors that both impede and facilitate integration. Our research and discussions with migrants and policy-makers will focus on both the policy and legislative frameworks required to facilitate and support integration, but also the practical programmes and mechanisms that can be established to promote integration.

### Project details

The project on Migration and Social Cohesion is funded by the Heinrich Boell Stiftung and is being implemented by Idasa as the South African partner of the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP).

### For further information, contact:

Vincent Williams  
Project Manager  
Tel: +27 (0)21 467-7600  
Fax: +27 (0)86 633-3136  
email: [vwilliams@idasa.org.za](mailto:vwilliams@idasa.org.za)

