



KOMPETENTA
UNGA

DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF NEWCOMERS



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The basis of integration

1. The state of **being a refugee**, hopefully, **is not permanent**. In practice, when the circumstances that forced the individual into exile have been reversed, a refugee will either willingly return to his or her home country, or will have to find a permanent solution within a new culture, either in the first country of resettlement or in a third country.

2. The 1951 [‘Convention on the Status of Refugees’](#) and its Protocol of 1967 placed significant emphasis on refugee integration. The Convention lists social and economic rights intended to assist integration, and Article 34 of the Convention calls on States to promote the “assimilation and naturalization” of refugees.

3. The purpose of the Convention’s framework is that, as their association and relations with the host state grow stronger, refugees should eventually be able to enjoy a wider spectrum of rights. In this sense, the 1951 Convention offers a stable base for refugees to be able to gradually regain the social and economic freedom needed to go on with their lives.

4. UNHCR has consistently advocated that subsidiary protection recipients be given the same level of integration facilities as individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention as refugees. Their need for international protection is as compelling as that of refugees, and almost as long in duration. Integration initiatives for individuals to whom subsidiary protection is granted will also increase their capacity to make a positive contribution to the communities that have welcomed them.

Integration is a two-way process

5. **Refugee integration is a complex** and multi-faceted two-way **process** that involves the efforts of all stakeholders, including the readiness of refugees to adjust to the host community without losing their own cultural identity, and the required readiness of host communities and public institutions to welcome and meet the needs of a diverse population. The integration process is complex and incremental, involving distinct yet interrelated legal, economic, social and cultural aspects, all of which are essential for the ability of refugees to integrate effectively as members of the host community who are completely included.

6. Virtually all European countries have significant numbers of refugees that are likely to stay in their midst. In their new countries, a large number of them do well economically, and many have become citizens. Yet far too many, whether economically or socially, have been excluded. Unemployment and underemployment are prevalent barriers to citizenship for those who wish to naturalize. This leads to further residential and social segregation in some countries.

7. In 2019 alone, 16.2 million asylum applications were registered. These are all individuals who live with no hope of ever returning to their home countries year after year. While refugees are entitled by law to the same socio-economic rights as natives, there are a number of obstacles that they have to face in their efforts to integrate. These range from access issues to affordable accommodation and practical barriers that could make it difficult for refugees to fully enjoy the right to work, to difficulties relating to the recognition of their academic and professional credentials, limitations on family reunification, and stringent naturalization conditions.

Integration is a process

8. A key question to ask is **at what point refugee integration programs should begin**. Upon request for refugee status? After the recognition of a refugee status? Upon being granted citizenship?

9. Every refugee is an asylum-seeker first and foremost. Therefore, a good reception policy for asylum seekers is vital to the eventual legal, psychological and social integration of the aspiring refugee. Promoting a reception policy with a long-term perspective is in the best interests of both the host society and asylum seekers and refugees. Refugees who have begun their lives in detention in the host country or who have been isolated for several months in a state of forced inactivity at a collective asylum seeker reception center are likely to be hampered when they try to integrate later.

10. Therefore, the circumstances under which asylum seekers find themselves during the immediate reception process are of crucial importance with respect to potential integration possibilities. Increasing the chances of effective integration in the host country will be a reception strategy that incorporates efficient and sufficient facilities (in particular skills training, access to well-paid jobs and health care) with a swift asylum procedure which focuses on granting asylum seekers as much autonomy as possible.

Conclusion

There is no **"one-size-fits-all"** integration strategy. It is important to evaluate the situation of refugees in the sense of the respective host community and with regards to the living and working conditions of locals. It is also evident, however, that international activities, discourses and processes have a significant effect on refugee integration and the respective national and local policies. There are a range of broad integration objectives that extend across nations. These include efforts to empower and improve the full potential of refugees, to protect their human rights, to avoid their marginalization, and to promote social harmony and harmonious coexistence.

