



Research on what matters and what works in improving integration,
with an emphasis on psychological and social factors

The socio-psychological factors influencing integration: what does the literature say?

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FOCUS INTEGRATION BRIEF #2

The FOCUS project is undertaking detailed survey and focus group work with both refugees and members of receiving communities. This work will add to the understanding of factors influencing integration with a particular emphasis on groups impacted by forced migration in recent years.

An early step in this work has been the undertaking of a systematic review of existing literature concerning the socio-psychological factors influencing the integration of refugees and members of the receiving communities. This review identifies factors and indicators which existing research has

The two research questions guiding this literature review were:

What are the factors and indicators of socio-psychological integration of refugees and receiving communities?

What are the impact factors of refugee migration on the receiving communities?

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suggested as relevant and examines the most important concepts which are to be researched further by FOCUS.

This Brief presents a short outline of the work and a link to an edited summary of the full report.

Background

Systematic literature reviews are a well-established methodology for defining the state of understanding of particular topics. They involve a series of seven steps to define questions, search databases, review publications and synthesize findings in a final report.

Using this methodology for publications up to January 2019, four major databases and additional sources were searched. Over 600 unique publications were identified and further refined down to 87 publications directly relevant to the research questions. This final collection of studies was then subject to a content analysis of findings on the socio-psychological integration of migrants and receiving communities.

- » **Integration** is here defined as a **dynamic two-way interaction process** between refugees and members of the receiving communities. It is a complex process which always involves interaction at several levels between groups of newcomers and members of the receiving communities.
- » **Socio-psychological integration** refers to **between-group relations such as attitudes, mutual group perceptions and tensions, behavioural intentions, frequency and valence of contact** etc.

While here are some overlaps between these factors and the more extensively researched socio-economic dimensions of integration, they are distinct and clearly influence each other.

Key concepts of socio-psychological integration of refugees and members of the receiving communities

Thoughts	Perceptions	Behaviour & behav.l intentions	Other
Understanding integration	Refugees' perceptions of discrimination and attitudes of the receiving communities	Contact between members of the two groups	Emotions and solidarity
Refugee's return wishes	Attitudes	Social distance	Political & national orientations
	Inter-group threat		
Support for rights & asylum policies	Perception of form of acculturation process	Behavioural intentions	Interventions aimed to change negative attitudes
	Perceptions of distinctive migrant groups		

Key findings

In the research literature **some concepts were more frequent than others** – indicating their higher scientific importance and potential for being addressed in integration practices.

They were also closely related to the overarching concept of socio-psychological integration and are relevant for the new research elements of the FOCUS project. **These concepts are:**

Socio-psychological factors	Positive contribution to integration
Attitudes	Positive attitudes towards each other between refugees and members of the receiving communities facilitate integration. Such attitudes are often based on frequent and positive contact between both individuals and groups, and can be linked to support for migrants retaining their culture (acculturation).
Support for rights and asylum policies	Support for the rights of refugees and integrative asylum policies are related to other desirable outcomes, such as positive inter-group attitudes and proactive behavioural intentions . Such support can facilitate integration.
Behavioural intentions	Proactive behavioural intentions of members of the receiving communities towards refugees could ease the integration. Such demonstration of readiness to help and acceptance shown towards refugees can facilitate positive feelings and behaviours of refugees in the new community.
Contact	Both frequent and positive contact is strongly related to positive attitudes, support for the rights of refugees and positive behavioural intentions. Interventions aimed at reducing negative attitudes create opportunities for members of the two groups to experience positive contact over a longer period of time .
Perception of acculturation	Both members of the receiving communities and refugees see integration as desirable form of acculturation . This shows that both groups aim at preserving their culture , but also showing appreciation for the other culture.

Socio-psychological factors	Negative implications for integration
Social distance	Desire to maintain a greater social distance between the groups is related to negative attitudes of members of the receiving communities. High levels of social distance leads to social exclusion of refugees and prove as a barrier to integration.
Perception of inter-group threat	Perception of threat between groups is strongly related to negative attitudes. If one group feels a threat to its economic integrity, safety, culture and customs , it tends to reject the other group.
Perception of discrimination	The more refugees feel discriminated against, the more they are unwilling to maintain contact with the members of the receiving communities. Perception of discrimination therefore is an important barrier to integration as it could lead to separation of the groups, marginalization and isolation of the refugee group, with potential for conflict with the majority group.

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