



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

Integration Practice in Europe: A Qualitative Study of the Views of Senior Professionals

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FOCUS INTEGRATION BRIEF #1

The FOCUS project's work will be directly relevant to better understanding factors influencing integration and implementing more effective integration programmes. As an early stage of this work a series of in-depth interviews were undertaken with senior professionals working in governmental and non-governmental organisations active in the field.

Background

A total of 31 senior professionals responsible for policy development and/or programme implementation in governmental and non-governmental organisations were interviewed. The organisations are both from the EU level and a mix of 7 countries with differing experiences of refugees in recent years. The interviews were carried out in the period Feb-May 2019.

The FOCUS project

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Objectives

The overall objective was to examine how policy and programmes are developed, implemented and evaluated. More specifically, to provide details on:

- » an overview of the target audiences of research on integration practice,
- » perceptions of key knowledge gaps and best practices,
- » engagement with research and evaluation,
- » current processes for programme development,
- » views on the usefulness and format of proposed outputs for guiding activities in relation to the mental health and psychosocial dimensions of integration.

Key findings

A total of 31 senior professionals responsible for policy development and/or programme implementation in governmental and non-governmental organisations were interviewed. The organisations are from EU level and a mix of 7 countries with differing experiences of refugees in recent years.

- » There are a range of knowledge gaps which can be roughly grouped as concerning the questions **“What matters?”** and **“What works?”** This concerns a desire to more fully understand the drivers of successful integration as well as more practical issues of which programmes and programme elements to emphasize.

Most commonly identified knowledge gaps:

Long-term impact of different general approaches	Best use of volunteers
Difference between practice and theory in access to services	Mental health – importance and appropriate action
How to measure impact	Most effective role for civil society
Integration needs of both refugees and host communities post-reception phase	Role of racism in determining integration outcomes

- » As integration work emerges from a period of significant pressure there is an understanding of the need to move to an **emphasis on long-term sustainability and impact.**
- » At present there is **no clear ‘centre of gravity’** for identifying best practices and programme ideas in the field of integration,

with both formal and informal networks being central to current programme development. Engagement with academic research in the field is limited and determined by the availability of funding for research personnel.

- » Research project outputs which aim to bridge the research-to-practice gap should emphasize practical information and provide short summaries which are **accessible to non-academics.**
- » It is understood that current integration practice is rarely genuinely ‘two-way’ and **the direct engagement of host communities is underdeveloped.**
- » **Practical assistance on the incorporation of mental health and psychosocial elements** into integration programmes would be welcomed.
- » The **impact of radical anti-refugee politics** is being felt by organisations in some countries and regions, leading to uncertainty about funding and the ability to implement programmes.
- » For H2020 work in this field to be relevant and useful it must **link with existing networks** of integration policy development and practice.
- » There is a widespread belief in the need to move to **more systematic and inclusive evaluation of the impact of integration work.** This requires both funding for evaluation to be incorporated within funding programmes together with an understanding of the limits of what can be evaluated using different methodologies.
- » **EU funding is critical** to practice in this field and the next multi-annual EU budget is expected to be central to future activity. The process of applying for funding will require the review of existing activities and development of new programmes.

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