

# Promoting Dynamic Integration in Europe

## Sociopsychological Factors & Integration



A lot of emphasis in integration policy and practice is correctly placed on socioeconomic indicators. A lot less attention has been paid to sociopsychological factors influencing integration – a significant gap because integration must involve interaction at several levels between groups of newcomers and members of the receiving community.

### What do we mean by dynamic integration?

“In the EU context, a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States.”

*Action 1, section 2 of Communication on a Common Agenda for Integration, COM(2005) 389 final*

**FOCUS** is an international consortium funded by the European Commission which has undertaken the first research programme which has looked at both socioeconomic and sociopsychological dimensions of integration. **This research shows that despite very high levels of support amongst both receiving and arriving communities for integration as a way of mutual accommodation, the frequency of contact between communities is low, and this is a practical hindrance in terms of integration.**

*This short policy note provides a summary of what past research says about the importance of sociopsychological factors, outlines key findings of FOCUS’s research with post-2015 Syrian Refugees and members of the communities where they now live, and then details a policy implications for improving integration practice in Europe.*

### WHY ARE SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IMPORTANT?

Although sociopsychological factors are rarely central to integration research, there is a broad range of relevant work available. FOCUS partner the University of Zagreb undertook a detailed literature review which identified key factors seen to both positively and negatively influence sociopsychological integration. (Read the full report [here](#))

**Sociopsychological integration** describes the intergroup relations between the arriving and receiving community members, with particular emphasis on intergroup thoughts, sentiments and behaviour represented by attitudes, perceptions, social distance, frequency and valence of intergroup contact, the intertwining of social networks, etc. While there are some overlaps between these factors and socioeconomic dimensions of integration, they are distinct and influence each other.

| Sociopsychological factors | Positive contribution to integration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intergroup contact         | Frequent 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. |
| Attitudes                  | Positive attitudes towards each other between refugees and members of the receiving community facilitate integration. Such attitudes can be linked to the preference for integration as a form of the acculturation process (over assimilation or separation), to the                                   |



|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                               | support of the receiving community for the rights of refugees and integrative asylum policies, and the frequent and positive contact between the two groups.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Support for rights and asylum policies</b> | Support for the rights of refugees and integrative asylum policies are related to other desirable outcomes, such as positive intergroup attitudes and proactive behavioural intentions. Such support can facilitate the integration of refugees.                                                                                                              |
| <b>Behavioural intentions</b>                 | Proactive behavioural intentions of members of the receiving community towards refugees could ease integration. Such demonstration of acceptance and readiness to help shown towards refugees can facilitate positive feelings and behaviours of refugees in the new community.                                                                               |
| <b>Perception of acculturation</b>            | Both members of the receiving community and refugees see integration as a desirable form of acculturation over assimilation and separation. This shows that both groups aim at preserving their culture, but also showing appreciation for the other culture.                                                                                                 |
| <b>Negative implications for integration</b>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Social distance</b>                        | The desire to maintain a greater social distance between the groups is related to the negative attitudes of members of the receiving community. High levels of social distance lead to the social exclusion of refugees and prove as a barrier to integration.                                                                                                |
| <b>Perception of intergroup threat</b>        | Perception of intergroup threat between groups is an unpleasant feeling independent of the actual threat posed by the members of the other group. It 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.                                       |
| <b>Perception of discrimination</b>           | The more refugees feel discriminated, the more they are unwilling to maintain contact with the members of the receiving community. Perception of discrimination 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. |

## FINDINGS OF THE FOCUS RESEARCH

Over 5,000 people participated in extensive qualitative and quantitative studies undertaken in Germany, Sweden, Croatia and Jordan. The research was carried out with post-2015 refugees from Syria (the arriving community) and the longer-term residents of the cities where they now live (the receiving community). Asking 132 questions the goal of the research was to gain in-depth knowledge of the interplay between the socioeconomic and sociopsychological dimensions of integration. Half of these questions were designed to specifically explore the relevance and current status of the sociopsychological dimension of integration.

The completed research is very broad and deep, but the key findings concerning the sociopsychological dimensions of integration as they apply to this key group of refugees and their receiving communities include:

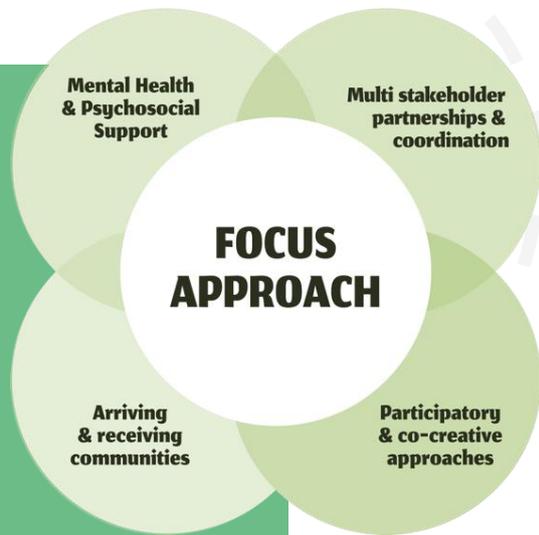
- ◆ Overall, the findings concerning characteristics that hinder or facilitate sociopsychological integration support do not appear to have changed significantly because of the scale and nature of the post-2015 migration.
- ◆ While the refugees experienced more contact with the receiving community and had more receiving community members in their social circles than vice versa. The contact reported by the receiving community members was very rare. Members of the receiving community with more direct contact with the refugees had more significantly differentiated opinions about them.
- ◆ While refugees clearly showed positive attitudes towards the receiving communities, the receiving communities tended to have a more neutral or moderately positive stance towards the refugees. Qualitatively, refugees were aware of the asymmetries in social positioning and seemed cautious about criticizing the receiving community so as not to be perceived as “ungrateful”.
- ◆ Many receiving community members showed very positive attitudes and acceptance of refugees. Within this, qualitatively, two polarized negative views emerged from the receiving community: “vulnerable and traumatized refugees” vs. “parasitical and potentially criminal refugees”, views which appear linked to a lack of contact or up-to-date information about the current position of refugees in their communities.

- ◆ Refugees felt themselves to be part of the society they now live in while receiving communities felt that refugees were not yet part of their society. This is again linked to lack of personal knowledge and contact.
- ◆ While perceptions of threat were low to moderate, for the receiving communities the primary concern was for culture, customs and way of life, while for refugees the primary concern was for socioeconomic wellbeing.
- ◆ Refugees reported experiencing discrimination quite rarely, while the receiving community estimated that the refugees experience discrimination quite often. These results might reflect the unwillingness of the refugees to report unpleasant encounters with the receiving community, thus downplaying the severity of these experiences.

**The FOCUS Approach to Dynamic Integration** is a practical framework to strengthen existing promising integration practices and support the development of new ones.

At its core is the idea of fostering social bonds, connections, and bridges among arriving and receiving communities. The FOCUS Approach highlights key elements to promote trust and reciprocity, social connectedness, wellbeing, resilience and a sense of belonging of all community members.

Read more and find further resources on the different dimensions of the FOCUS Approach in the [Living Well Together Resource](#).



## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Given the importance of sociopsychological factors in influencing integration, addressing them systematically within integration practice should be a priority.

- ◆ The active promotion of more extensive and substantive engagement between arriving and receiving communities needs to be addressed in integration work.
- ◆ The lack of contact between the communities increases the need for more active work to ensure that basic facts are shared. In particular, information showing both the real situation of arriving community members and the progress of integration needs to be regularly disseminated and the media engaged.
- ◆ The impact of racism and discrimination on integration should be recognised and understood as an issue to be considered throughout integration practice.
- ◆ Given their central role in shaping practice, funding and evaluation forms should explicitly address sociopsychological issues.

**THE FOCUS PROJECT (2019-2022)**

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