

From Immigration to Integration: Local Approaches

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Introduction

Flows of migrant workers are increasing. Almost three million long-term migrants enter OECD countries legally every year, and the numbers will continue to rise as host countries grapple with falling birth rates and ageing populations. Immigration offers clear benefits to advanced countries, with some sectors already lacking the labour and skills they need to meet demand. For migrants, attractions include a higher standard of living and better prospects for their children.

For migrants to contribute fully, they need to be effectively integrated into the labour market. Paradoxically, at the same time that migration is increasing in importance, there is worrying evidence that integration results are less favourable than in the past. Immigrants are generally more exposed to long-term unemployment and social exclusion, as well as poorer working conditions and temporary employment. What is more, in many countries the second or third generation offspring of immigrants still experience barriers to the labour market. This has come as a surprise as many believed that children born in the host country would benefit from sharing the same education as native children, and growing up speaking the same language.

The integration of immigrants has a strong local dimension. While immigration applications are likely to be dealt with at the national level, migrants ultimately settle in local communities, and require support from local stakeholders when integration proves difficult. Despite a lack of resources, there has been much local innovation in this field. However national and regional policy makers now need to build on this innovation to provide a more mainstreamed approach, leading to more sustainable employment outcomes in the future. This Policy Brief highlights local innovations in five OECD countries in particular – Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom. ■

Where does the challenge lie?

There is a clear mismatch between immigration and integration policies in many countries. National policies designed to manage immigration are rarely accompanied by strong policies to support integration, particularly where this relates to the adaptation of labour market and education policies to the needs of immigrants. Most countries provide specialised support to immigrants on arrival, particular language training, but after this initial period immigrants are generally felt to be the responsibility of generalised labour market and education programmes.

While migrants can in theory access these services in the same way as anybody else, this overlooks the fact that they are rarely able to compete on an even footing with local jobseekers since they have no local referees or work experience to show prospective employers. Immigrants may find it difficult to find out about local jobs since they are not already “plugged in” to local social networks – they cannot ask friends, family or previous work contacts if they know of upcoming job opportunities. This is without talking about the language barrier (which is becoming increasingly important in today’s service based and knowledge economy) or problems in having qualifications from another country recognised or evaluated fairly by prospective employers.

Employment services, not well equipped to assess the value of foreign qualifications and profile the capacities of immigrants, find it difficult to provide the right advice. In the meanwhile, financial pressures may encourage immigrants to take the most immediately available and accessible jobs to ensure a living, even if these jobs are not at a level commensurate with their skills and experience. This is risky business – in such jobs motivation can deteriorate while skills depreciate, and the overall career paths of immigrants can be seriously effected. Further, failure to find appropriate employment can lead to immigrants and their offspring becoming concentrated in areas of urban deprivation. This then creates social and economic problems which it takes a range of actors and efforts to resolve. ■

How can the gap be filled?

A wide variety of local stakeholders have stepped in to fill this policy gap. Local activities to support integration are carried out by local and regional authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), colleges, trades unions, not-for-profit enterprises, and employers. Regional branches of the employment services, particularly in Canada, have also developed innovative solutions to supporting immigrants into work. However the most important stakeholders are arguably employers, or organisations such as colleges which help to provide a “bridge” between unemployed immigrants and local employers.

It makes sense to take a local perspective on this issue. There is significant variation between local areas in terms of the number and types of immigrants they receive. While certain agricultural areas attract large numbers of temporary migrants, immigrants are more likely overall to settle in urban areas, and in certain cities. Further, within these cities, they

are likely to become concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, either through following existing family or community ties, or through minimising living costs. In the “gateway” city of Toronto, for example, the foreign born population represents a half of the total population, arising to three quarters in one neighbourhood. This compares with a fifth of the overall population in Canada as a whole. Local policy makers are able to take into account such variation, along with variation in labour market demand, to play an important role in matching supply and demand.

Employers are leading partners in the Toronto based Region Immigration Employment Council (TRIEC), for example, which was launched in 2003 and has the mandate to improve access to the labour market for skilled immigrants. The council includes government representatives, professional associations and NGOs and sees itself as a “solution seeking machine” running a number of different programmes which link employers with immigrants (see Box 1). Their “Career bridge” scheme requires local employers to pay a fee to access a pool of pre-selected graduates, who then carry out paid work experience with the company for up to twelve months. 300 internships have already taken place with 85% receiving offers of full employment. The partnership has also arranged over 1 000 mentoring relationships.

Box 1.
**THE TORONTO REGIONAL
EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL
(TRIEC)**

Employers in Toronto have become major players in the TRIEC partnership because they foresee skills shortages in their city in five years time, and want to prepare their recruitment procedures for a rapidly changing source of labour market supply. The TRIEC partnership also receives public sector funding and support from a private foundation, the Maytree Foundation. The partnership has improved the city’s strategic focus on integration, establishing an intergovernmental committee to identify gaps in provision and improve joint working. In addition three practical projects have been launched:

Career Bridge – an internship programme offered through the Career Edge Organisation (a Canada wide not-for-profit organisation founded by employers) that provides skilled immigrants with Canadian work experience. The programme involves a pool of skilled immigrants who have been screened for language skills and qualifications. Over 1 200 candidates are on the programme’s web based database. Employers select candidates for internships which can last 4-12 months, during which time the immigrant receives a CAD 1 500 stipend per month (just over 1 000 EUR). The employer pays the cost of the stipend as well as a programme fee.

The Mentoring Partnership – this programme brings together professional immigrants with mentors established within their respective occupation. Mentors and mentees meet for an average of an hour and a half per week over a four-month period. Of the mentoring relationships completed, 72% have found employment, with 68% finding employment in their own field or a related one.

www.hireimmigrants.ca – this website is a platform from which a learning community of human resources professionals and other employers has been cultivated in order to improve recruitment practices. The site contains case studies with “promising practices” from actual employers, and organises the examples according to human resources practice.

In another world city, London, skills shortages in the education, engineering and construction sectors have led to the development of a city wide partnership involving the London Development Agency and five Learning and Skills Councils, to assess the qualifications of a 1 000 immigrants and broker relevant ongoing training. In the west of the city, a partnership known as Renewal has also been developed to link local employers with a more specific migrant group, refugees. This partnership funds and coordinates a wide variety of community based projects and is led by a major public sector employer, the Ealing Primary Care Trust.

While the recognition of their qualifications is a crucial first step into employment for skilled immigrants, they may still need to go through lengthy retraining programmes within the formal college system to adapt their qualifications to the local labour market context. Local stakeholders in London and in Canada have worked to reduce such training periods, developing shorter modular courses which provide a “bridge” between a migrant’s previous qualifications and the requirements of local employers and professions. In Winnipeg, Canada, for example, local officials working in early childhood education have reduced the retraining time required for a local childcare post from 2 years to 14 weeks, through working with a local college to draw up a “skills profile” for the post. This profile has formed the basis for a customised assessment and training programme which can be undertaken “on the job”.

Modular and in-work courses are not just useful in helping skilled immigrants, but can also improve the employment prospects of the unskilled. In Neuchâtel in Switzerland, a local social enterprise has taken advantage of its independence from the formal college system to provide short modular courses in the new technical skills required by the restructuring of the region’s manufacturing industry. On completion of each course participants receive a certificate which clearly sets out the skills learnt and also records factors such as degree of professionalism and timekeeping, which can help to build trust amongst local employers.

In Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, much of the work carried out to support the integration of immigrants is focused on wider social integration rather than specifically on labour market access. Building solidarity and understanding between local residents is seen as an essential element in ensuring the wider participation of migrants in society and increasing their ability to access work. In countries where much employment is advertised informally this can be an effective labour market strategy. In Italy, the availability of affordable housing is also seen as an important determinant of labour market integration in the context of a general housing crisis, and a number of local schemes have been developed to provide supported housing for immigrants.

A significant challenge facing the Southern European countries is the number of immigrants employed in informal employment, with sectors such as domestic work and agricultural labour being particularly vulnerable. The potential for local stakeholders to tackle such issues at the local level is

illustrated in the province of Lleida, in Spain. The association of farmers in Catalonia (*Unió de Pagesos*) has developed an innovative model for promoting good quality employment for temporary immigrants, bringing small-scale farmers together to co-ordinate and improve working conditions, and providing a variety of different forms of accommodation, training and social support. One of the progressive aspects of the programme is the creation of development projects and leadership training programmes in the immigrants' country of origin. Developing ongoing links with specific localities in sending countries has both supported a sustainable supply of workers and built a strong degree of trust, whilst supporting local development overseas.

Finally, a number of localities have focused not only on supporting access to employment but on stimulating immigrant entrepreneurship. In Italy, recent national growth in the number of entrepreneurs has been identified as being entirely due to an increase in immigrant entrepreneurs, and therefore chambers of commerce have been keen to support the expansion of this area, through for example producing specialised guidance and mentoring support. ■

What needs to be improved?

It is clear from the above examples that to be effective, local actions need to be based on the gathering and analysis of information on the local labour market, on local skills shortages and on the employment potential offered by migrants. Making connections between migrant groups and employers, employment services and vocational training organisations to link demand with supply is also crucial. Yet, the OECD study has highlighted that such actions have been used in too few places, and with too few resources.

Across OECD countries, a whole range of non-profit organisations, some under contract with government agencies, some acting independently, provide services to immigrants. Most of these services can be grouped into two categories: i) personal and skills development; and ii) access and networks. The first category of services comprises basic language courses, help with CV preparation, basic vocational training, and courses to foster acculturation. These activities are sometimes tailored to particular ethnic groups and supported by individual mentoring and assistance. They are strengthened by the non-profit organisations' efforts to reach the groups most remote from the labour market.

The second category of services aims to provide better links between migrant communities and other stakeholders (employers, government agencies, employment organisations, non-government organisations) and to enhance access to the programmes available. They serve as advocacy organisations and lobby for new programmes or changes to be brought to public programmes to better suit the needs of the immigrants and their offspring. They support anti-discriminatory measures and wage campaigns to encourage employers to welcome immigrants. Other activities include fostering networks for hard-to-reach groups and building capacity for self-organisation and representation.

While such actions are important, the majority of support provided by such organisations is relatively short term and small scale, linked to a limited target group and delivered in a single location. Organisations often have a low critical mass and duplicate what other organisation or public services do. They have few resources to invest in their own training, and their expertise in the local labour market and their links with the employment services and colleges are especially weak. Such organisations thus feel unable to get involved in more complex issues such as the recognition of qualifications and the re-training of skilled migrants to meet local professional standards, and so often provide more low intensive support (see Table 1). Language training is often both oversubscribed and too basic to help people meet the demands of knowledge and service related jobs. In the worst cases, local initiatives encourage immigrants to take the most readily accessible jobs to meet their own performance objectives, regardless of their relevance to an immigrant’s background.

Outside of large “gateway” cities such as Toronto and London, resource-intensive actions which properly take into account the skills and competences of migrants and local employment demand are often so small scale as to arguably be only politically significant. Further the sheer number of different actors who become involved at the local level, and the fact that services have often developed on a “bottom up” basis, means that service providers can become relatively isolated; reducing their ability to guide migrants onto other relevant support and new opportunities. While local partnership approaches such as TRIEC and Renewal can provide coordination and strategic development, ultimately a more mainstreamed approach is required. ■

Where do we go from here?

The challenge for government is to find ways to support the relatively resource-intensive mechanisms which are required, and to incorporate them into broader mainstream policy initiatives. Rather than generating new initiatives and establishing new providers or new partnerships at the local level, it may be more effective to concentrate on adapting existing programmes so that they are flexible enough to reflect local change. The key to tackling the barriers that immigrants and their descendants face is therefore increased flexibility in policy management.

Training and labour market policy must be tailored to the need of the local population, including migrants. If information on the local labour market and on the previous skills of migrants groups is properly gathered and

Table 1.
DIFFERENTIATING HIGH RESOURCE AND LOW RESOURCE ACTIVITIES

Low resource activities	High resource activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job search • Confidence building, help with social networking • CV preparation • Short-term training to meet specific local job vacancies • Basic language training • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work experience programmes • Medium to longer term ‘bridging’ training in medium-high skills areas • Recognition of qualifications gained abroad • Projects to tackle discrimination in recruitment procedures • Higher levels of language training, including occupationally specific language use

Source: OECD LIILM Project.

analysed, this is a highly feasible task. Policy makers should ensure that the national immigration system meets local labour market needs, and develop an overarching policy framework that includes anti-discrimination legislation. Education policy needs to become more flexible and modular training courses should be available at different times of the year, and build upon the recognition of prior competences and qualifications. Mechanisms which foster skills upgrading and promote career progression opportunities for migrants already in employment are also crucial as they reduce the time migrants are forced to spend outside the labour market.

At the local level, policy makers should ensure strong co-ordination between institutions; ensure that they involve employers in local partnerships, and support innovation and learning, for example by “seed” grants for start-ups. A strong culture of evaluation of skills, local demand and local potential should be developed. A combination of flexible and adaptive national policies and strong local actions linking immigrants with employers is what will make a difference.

To summarise, the recommendations arising from the study include:

What should be done at the national level?

- Ensure that the national immigration system meets local labour market needs.
- Develop a consistent overarching policy framework which includes robust anti-discrimination legislation.
- Develop open and flexible mainstream programmes.
- Support the recognition of prior competences and qualifications.
- Ensure a strong culture of evaluation.

What should be done at the local level?

- Ensure strong coordination and signposting between institutions at the local level.
- Bring employers on board in local partnerships.
- Support innovation and learning, through, for example local “seed” grants and flexible local budgets.
- Support adaptation to the needs of migrants within mainstream institutions, rather than the unnecessary proliferation of new actors.
- Target but with sensitivity.
- Consider the timing of interventions and ensure migrants are not out of the labour market for too long a period after arrival. ■

**For further
information**

For more information on the OECD's work on integrating immigrants, please contact Sylvain Giguère, sylvain.giguere@oecd.org or Francesca Froy, francesca.froy@oecd.org.



For further reading

OECD (2006), **From Immigration to Integration: Local Solutions to a Global Challenge**, ISBN 92-64-02896-X, € 50, 300p.

OECD (2006), **Skills Upgrading: New Policy Perspectives**, ISBN 92-64-01250-8, € 65, 314 p.

OECD (2006), **Where Immigrant Students Succeed – A Comparative Review of Performance and Engagement in PISA 2003**, ISBN 92-64-02360-7, € 30, 224 p.

OECD (2006), **International Migration Outlook**, ISBN 92-64-03627-X, € 79, 328 p.

OECD (2004), **New Forms of Governance and Economic Development**, ISBN 92-64-01530-2, € 72, 318 p.

OECD (2001), **Local Partnerships for Better Governance**, ISBN 92-64-18588-7, € 54, 305 p.

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The OECD Policy Briefs are prepared by the Public Affairs Division, Public Affairs and Communications Directorate. They are published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General.