



Press release, May 2022

## Getting to know each other: Quality contact between migrants and longer-term residents is vital for integration – but still too rare

Research conducted by the EU-funded FOCUS project in Jordan, Croatia, Germany and Sweden has shown that migrant and longer-term resident communities are spending way too little quality time together for integration to actually occur.

FOCUS, an international consortium funded by the European Commission (2019-2022), has conducted broad surveys and focus groups with over 5.000 participants which have explored, for the first time in a European context, both the socioeconomic and sociopsychological dimensions of integration.

“With millions of people around the world currently leaving their homes to flee, FOCUS delivers **key messages of fostering trust, reciprocity and intergroup relations** between arriving and receiving communities”, explains Sabina Dziadecka Gråbæk, who works at the IFRC’s Reference Centre for Psychosocial support in Copenhagen and coordinates the project.

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The good news is: The need for integration (rather than assimilation) is generally accepted among the population. And there are many positive signs which contrast with the gloomy predictions made in 2015 and afterwards. However, **while the arriving community – the migrants – acknowledges its active responsibility in the integration process, the receiving community – the longer-term residents – tends to place this responsibility on institutions.**

FOCUS has shown that **core socioeconomic and legal barriers** to integration remain important: legal status and right to employment, recognition of qualifications, family reunion, housing quality and support beyond reception period.

But FOCUS also looked at **sociopsychological factors of integration**, the relations between migrants and longer-term residents: what they think and feel about each other, how they behave towards each other and how frequently they meet. FOCUS research has shown for example that while migrants showed **clearly positive attitudes towards the longer-term residents**, the latter in turn tended to have a more neutral or moderately positive stance towards migrants.

While superficial contact in the workplace or in schools does exist, **quality social interaction** between communities is still rare, but essential for integration. Jana Kiralj from the University of Zagreb, one of the FOCUS research partners, explains: “Migrants experience more contact with the receiving community than vice versa. Receiving community members with more direct contact with migrants have significantly more differentiated opinions about them.”



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The receiving community also tends to have false ideas about the socioeconomic situation of migrants: they underestimate their level of education and employment and overestimate the number of those receiving welfare assistance. **Actively promoting engagement** between arriving and receiving communities and **disseminating information** showing both the real situation of the arriving community and the progress of integration therefore need to become core priorities in integration work.

With the help of different partners from civil society organisations, FOCUS has proposed a structured framework: the **FOCUS Approach to dynamic integration**, with four core elements:

- Incorporating **mental health and psychosocial support** to broadly reduce distress and improve wellbeing in society as a whole;
- Establishing and reinforcing quality intergroup contact between **arriving and receiving community** members, for example through **volunteerism**;
- Actively involving both arriving and receiving communities via **co-creative and participatory approaches**;
- Making institutions, NGOs and communities work together through **multi-stakeholder partnerships and coordination**.



“A fundamentally relevant framework for dynamic integration that can be easily transferred to and used in other global contexts”, explains Gråbæk. FOCUS proposes that **funding and evaluation criteria** for integration programmes should be adapted to reflect these key elements.

Join us at the **FOCUS Final conference – Living Well Together** on 1-2 June 2022 to learn more about our findings and how they can be implemented in policy and practise.

FOCUS Final Conference – Living Well Together  
1-2 June 2022 – La Tricoterie, Brussels



Sign up here: [FOCUS Final Conference - Living Well Together](#)

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## NOTES TO THE EDITOR

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Danish Red Cross  
Austrian Red Cross  
German Association of Psychosocial Centres for Refugees and Victims of Torture (BAfF)  
Partnership Skåne (PS) Regional Integration Partnership  
British Red Cross

Project duration: 01/01/2019 - 30/06/2022

EU financial contribution: 2.999.859,25 €

RIA - Research and Innovation action

Programme: H2020-SC6-MIGRATION-2018

Topic: MIGRATION-08-2018 Addressing the challenge of forced displacement

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no 822401.

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