MEASURING SOCIAL OUTCOMES FOR IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Jane Badets is a former Assistant Chief Statistician of Social, Health and Labour Statistics at Statistics Canada. Jane had responsibility for the network of Research Data Centres across Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN). She has extensive experience engaging with governments, researchers, and non-profit organizations on data and key topics facing Canada, such as the care economy, immigration, ethnicity, and diversity. Currently, she is the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Association of Canadian Studies and serves on the Board for the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES).

This article examines two frameworks for measuring immigrant social integration in Canada: the Canadian Index for Measuring Integration and Inclusion (CIMI) and Statistics Canada's social inclusion framework. Key indicators include sense of belonging, social networks, civic participation, and experiences of discrimination. While comprehensive, these frameworks could benefit from more timely, detailed data. Enhanced indicators and frequent data collection are essential for informing effective immigrant inclusion programs and policies in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

The successful integration of immigrants into Canadian society and economy is essential for Canada's success.[1] Traditional research on the integration process has focused on topics such as labour market integration. There has been less attention on the social integration of immigrants in Canada: what it means, what are the key indicators, and how social integration is measured, supported with data.

DEFINING IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

There is no universal consensus on what immigrant integration means or how we know when immigrants have successfully integrated into Canadian society. Integration can mean different things to different people and may vary across immigrant communities or groups, depending on the specific circumstances and contexts whereby immigrants enter the country. Perspectives on integration can also differ between

1 For the purpose of this article, the concept of 'immigrants' is based on Statistics Canada's standard definition. Refers to people who are, or have been, landed immigrants in Canada. A landed immigrant is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities.

immigrants and their families and the broader host society, Canada. What we do know about immigrant integration is that it is complex, dynamic, multi-dimensional and changes over time. Some suggest integration may never fully occur until the second generation – when the children of immigrants are born and raised in Canada, with their schooling and social adaptation rooted in the host country. For many of the second-generation, however, there may be a loss of their parents' original language and the ties to their origin or home country may gradually weaken. Immigrant integration is a two-way process whereby both immigrants and the receiving society both share a responsibility. Both parties adjust over time: immigrants and their families adapt to the host country; while the host country adjusts to facilitate the integration process.

Integration is not about assimilation. Rather the concept of integration – in the Canadian context – assumes that people and groups can maintain their immigrant identities and cultures, while at the same time attaining full and equitable access to, and participation in, Canadian society and its institutions. For this to happen effectively, to occur, the host country must be adaptable and supportive, assisting immigrants in the integration process.

WHY IS SOCIAL INTEGRATION IMPORTANT TO MEASURE?

Measuring social integration is crucial because it provides insight into the "lived" experiences of immigrants within both private and public spaces. While traditional research has focused primarily on economic integration – tracking labor market participation, job quality, and income as indicators of parity with Canadian-born residents – social integration captures dimensions that are equally essential for understanding immigrants' sense of belonging and participation. If immigrant integration is viewed in the broad sense of participation and equitable access, then social integration is just as important as the economic dimensions of integration. Social integration is about the extent to which immigrants feel at home in the host country (Canada); that they feel accepted by the broader society; and that they have equitable access to the institutions of Canada.

There are various definitions of social integration. One perspective defines it as "the process during which immigrants or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society. Social integration, together with economic and identity integration, are three main dimensions of an immigrants' experiences in the society that is receiving them".[2] The United Nations adds that "social integration represents the attempt not to make people adjust to society, but rather to ensure that society is accepting of all people".[3]

Social and economic integration are closely interconnected. If immigrants are to participate fully in the labour market, they need an environment without barriers to social acceptance. If these conditions do not happen, complete economic integration becomes difficult.

HOW TO MEASURE SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Measuring social integration should focus on the extent to which immigrants attain equal or improved outcomes across various social dimensions, in comparison to the Canadian-born population. To do this, various indicators are tracked over time to track social outcomes of different groups of immigrants, as well as the challenges they face. It is critical to have a holistic measure of the various dimensions over time to understand how immigrants are integrating into Canadian society.[4] Moreover, it is important to capture the relationship between immigrant communities and the host society: how well are immigrants doing, and how accommodating Canadian society and institutions are to different groups of immigrants.

One frequently cited indicator of social integration is whether immigrants have a strong sense of belonging to the community, whether at the local, provincial or national level.[5] A strong sense of belonging is often associated with immigrants' quality of life, subjective well-being, and the feeling that one is "at home" in Canada.[6,7,8,9] Immigrants form their sense of

2 Scholarly Community Encyclopedia. 2022.

3 United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development. Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration. 2007.

4 Excluded from this discussion of social integration indicators are health status and outcomes. They are important aspects of social integration, but also touch on access and functioning of the health care system in Canada.

5 Carla Valle Painter, *Sense of Belonging: Literature Review*, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013.

6 Berry, John W., and Feng Hou. "Immigrant Acculturation and Wellbeing in Canada." *Canadian Psychology* 57, no. 4 (2016): 254–264.

7 Bilodeau, Antoine, Stephen E. White, Luc Turgeon, and Ailsa Henderson. "Feeling Attached and Feeling Accepted: Implications for Political Inclusion among Visible Minority Immigrants in Canada." *International Migration* 58, no. 2 (2020): 272–288.

8 Kitchen, Peter, Allison M. Williams, and Maria Gallina. "Sense of Belonging to Local Community in Small-to-Medium Sized Canadian Urban Areas: A Comparison of Immigrant and Canadian-Born Residents." *BMC Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2015): 1–17.

9 Stick, Michael, Christoph Schimmele, Martin Karpinski, and Samba Cissokho. *Immigrants' Sense of Belonging to Canada by Province of Residence*. Statistics Canada, 2023.

belonging based on their post-migration experiences, especially their perceptions of acceptance and opportunities for success in the receiving country.[10,11] When immigrants report a strong sense of belonging, it indicates a positive integration outcome.

Other key indicators are: social connectedness and personal networks, self-rated life satisfaction, organizational engagement, access to and confidence in institutions, political participation, and experiences of discrimination. These are considered as measures of social attachment and social inclusion.

The discrimination indicator, in particular, provides insight into barriers that may hinder immigrants' full participation in society. If immigrants report higher rates of discrimination than Canadian-born individuals, we can conclude that there are barriers immigrants face which prevent their ability to fully participate in society and receive equitable treatment. It highlights areas where the host society may need to improve acceptance and inclusion for immigrants.

FRAMEWORKS MEASURING SOCIAL INTEGRATION

There are two national frameworks used to measure the social integration of immigrants over time in Canada. [12] These frameworks are based on several indicators, supported by data that can be disaggregated by socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, immigration period, place of birth, generational status, racialized group, or category of admission. This allows for a nuanced analysis of outcomes from an intersectional perspective.

The first framework is the Canadian Index for Measuring Integration and Inclusion (CIMI), a data-driven index measuring immigrants' integration into Canadian society. The key objective of the CIMI is to provide a framework for the ongoing assessment of the state of immigrant integration in Canada. It leverages data from sources such as the Census of Population, the General Social Survey and the Canadian Community Health Survey, to support four major dimensions of integration (economic, social, health, civic and demographic participation). Each dimension is broken down by a series of indicators and by the socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant groups, over time, and by various geographic areas.[13] For measuring the social outcomes of immigrants, the "social" dimension is of particular interest, as it examines immigrant outcomes by considering social networks, sense of belonging and experience of discrimination. Specifically, the indicators include the number of close friends, the number of close friends living in the same community, sense of belonging to the local community/province/Canada and experiences of discrimination in the past five years.[14,15]

The second framework developed by Statistics Canada[16] and aligns with Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy, which aims to address challenges faced by racialized groups.[17] This framework organizes indicators according to a conceptual model and provides data accessible under eleven themes, several of which are essential for measuring immigrant social integration: representation in decision-making positions (e.g., workers in all management positions); civic engagement and political participation (e.g. member of at least one organization); social connections and networks (e.g. strong sense of belonging to local community/province/Canada); public services and institutions (e.g. confidence in institutions); local community (e.g. satisfied with feeling part of the community); discrimination and victimization (e.g. experience of discrimination). The indicators are linked to Statistics Canada data. Similar to the CIMI, indicators such as sense of belonging, social networks and discrimination figure

10 Hou, Feng, Grant Schellenberg, and John W. Berry. "Patterns and Determinants of Immigrants' Sense of Belonging to Canada and Their Source Country." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 9 (2018): 1612–1631.

11 White, Stephen, Antoine Bilodeau, and Neil Nevitte. "Earning Their Support: Feelings Toward Canada among Recent Immigrants." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 2 (2015): 292–308.

12 The CIMI is developed by the Canadian Institute for Identities and Immigration (Metropolis Institute), with support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. For more details, see Holley, P. (2020).

13 The CIMI looks at the outcomes of immigrants compared to the Canadian-born population from 18 to 64 years old. Changes and trends overtime – as of 1991 – are assessed for all 10 provinces and 35 cities (census metropolitan areas) across the country.

14 Berry, John W., and Feng Hou. "Immigrant Acculturation and Wellbeing in Canada." *Canadian Psychology* 57, no. 4 (2016): 254–264.

15 Hou, Feng, Grant Schellenberg, and John W. Berry. "Patterns and Determinants of Immigrants' Sense of Belonging to Canada and Their Source Country." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 9 (2018): 1612–1631.

16 Statistics Canada provides a list of the social inclusion indicators for ethnocultural groups and immigrants in Canada available on the homepage of the Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics Hub. The information provided for each indicator includes a short description of the corresponding derivation, available data sources and reference years, and accessible levels of geography and disaggregation. Each indicator has various corresponding products (data tables, visualization tools and analytical documents).

17 Ibid.

prominently to measure social outcomes of immigrants and racialized groups.[18,19]

COMMENTARY

Both the CIMI and the social inclusion framework developed by Statistics Canada provide a solid baseline for capturing the social outcomes of immigrants across communities, over time and in comparison, with the Canadian-born population. These frameworks are comprehensive in terms of the number of dimensions measuring social outcomes, and allow for the disaggregation of indicators by socio-demographic characteristics. However, a primary limitation to these frameworks is the limited availability of timely data that is fully disaggregated by socio-demographic characteristics and geography. Increasing the frequency of data collection, along with enhancing survey sample sizes, would allow for deeper analysis to better understand how social integration varies across communities. This more granular data is essential for informing programs to better support immigrants. Both frameworks could be enriched by adding other indicators to provide a more fulsome picture of social integration, such as "sense of belonging to the workplace" and "trust of specific institutions." Additional information on immigrants' experiences in public spaces – such as equitable access to workplaces and community institutions – could further enrich these frameworks.

Finally, it is notable that both frameworks use subjective measures of social integration, such as "sense of belonging" or "experiences of discrimination." These measures are based on immigrants' perceptions, which may sometimes be influenced by a reluctance to report fewer positive experiences, such as discrimination or a weak sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Measuring social outcomes of immigrants is essential for understanding the entirety of the integration and settlement process as well as the overall well-being of immigrants in Canada. Successful immigrant integration is ultimately achieved when immigrants experience full participation and inclusion in Canadian society. The two frameworks discussed are important tools to understand the social outcomes of immigrants in Canada.

18 Holley, Peter. CIMI Methodology Overview. Metropolis Institute, 2020. https://integrationindex.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CIMI_Methodology_EN_Final.pdf. Accessed May 31, 2024.

19 Kitchen, Peter, Allison M. Williams, and Maria Gallina. "Sense of Belonging to Local Community in Small-to-Medium Sized Canadian Urban Areas: A Comparison of Immigrant and Canadian-Born Residents." *BMC Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2015): 1–17.

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