Extract from *Towards 2035: Making Migration and Integration Policies Future Ready* (OECD, 2020)

OECD executive summary

In a time of rapid change and great uncertainty, responsible migration and integration policy must prepare for the unexpected. While it is impossible to predict the future, it is possible to consider how current megatrends and potential future disruptions might affect policy in the years to come, and draw implications for policies today.

Three powerful and interconnected megatrends will have a significant impact on migration and integration in the coming 10–15 years, although the precise extent and direction of these impacts is unknown.

- **Environmental changes and extreme weather events** are expected to displace millions. Even if much of this migration will occur to adjacent local areas, it could also contribute to broader societal breakdown and conflict that could, in turn, set off unforeseen waves of large-scale longer-distance migration.
- **Geopolitical instability and conflict** have been a traditional cause of out-migration based on drivers such as rising inequality, youth unemployment and political corruption, as well as terrorism and insecurity. A number of these drivers have the potential to continue or accelerate if a combination of preventive measures, reception and integration support, and legal pathways and multilateral cooperation is not adopted.
- Finally, major demographic shifts will occur in the coming decades due to the global trend of **population ageing**, albeit at different rates in different regions. The most rapidly ageing countries may be tempted to use migration as a mitigating factor. However, it is uncertain how much migration these ageing economies will require in a potential context of increasing automation, virtual work, and increased employability of older workers, and it is uncertain that labour supply available in origin countries will match skills demand in destination.

In addition to these main megatrends, a large number of key uncertainties and potential disruptions could also significantly affect the future of migration over the coming years. These developments, while unpredictable, could be game-changers, creating both new challenges and opportunities.

Technological change

Big data profiles

What if, in 2035, many countries exploited advances in technology to select immigrants based on accurate and detailed assessments of their potential for successful integration and other desired characteristics? This could lead to better integration outcomes and greater public support for migration.

It could also give rise to debate about appropriate selection criteria, security, privacy and human rights concerns.

Transparency and visibility

What if, by 2035, it became increasingly difficult for migrants to live in a territory without being visible to host governments? This could pressure governments to take greater accountability for migration, rapidly regularising or deporting migrants in an irregular situation; and lead to improved public confidence in the integrity of the migration system. However, this could also coincide with increased societal surveillance, including for non-migrant populations.

Change in the purpose of migration and integration

Homo non economicus

What if, by 2035, public opinion on migration were driven primarily by non-economic arguments? Concern for social cohesion, cultural identity, like-mindedness, inequality and other indicators become the most important determinant of migration policy. At the same time, if labour market integration were less of a political priority, it might lead to underinvestment in training, skills development and employment support with consequent negative long-term impact on the labour-market integration of immigrants.

Virtual migrants and digital workers

What if, by 2035, the rise of virtual work meant that people no longer migrated for employment? What if automatic translation tools allowed communication without learning foreign languages? For the highly skilled, this could increase the attractiveness of migration to communities offering high quality of life and high digital connectivity relative to traditional economic capitals. For the lower skilled this could lead to more isolation and poorer integration.

New stakeholders

City power

What if, by 2035, metropolitan areas became more powerful actors in migration and integration policy-making? Equipped with smart-city technology, municipalities rather than national governments could possess the best data on selection and integration. This may lead to selection and integration criteria diverging within countries, with smaller communities, rural areas and disadvantaged urban areas receiving a greater share of poorly-rated migrants, exacerbating an increasing geographical divide.

Superstar firms

What if, by 2035, corporations became key actors in migration management? Global 'superstar' firms could use their power to acquire global mobility rights for their employees and guarantee their successful integration.

Shifting migration directions

New destinations

What if, by 2035, non-OECD countries became the primary destinations for mid- and high- skilled migrants? Economic dynamism and technological supremacy combined with improved quality of life could transform formerly 'emerging' economies into the new magnets for long-term migration and citizenship by top global talent.

Oil price shock

What if, by 2035, the price of oil collapsed and several non-OECD migrant-destination petro-economies no longer recruited migrant workers? There could be a large-scale return migration to major origin countries or, alternatively, onward movement of migrants resulting in a sudden migration supply shock.

The above megatrends and potential disruptions could combine and interact to generate additional consequences. For example, multiple changes could align to create **a perfect storm of global migration imbalances** and high ongoing migration pressures. Alternatively, factors could combine to **lessen or shift global migration pressures**.

These and other conceivable combinations serve to highlight the high level of uncertainty regarding the future of global migration, and the need to learn from a range of alternative plausible scenarios, including ones that may currently seem unlikely or extreme.

Governments can already incorporate a range of policy implications, detailed below, to prepare for the future. These implications draw on the scenarios and enable governments to develop the ability to keep ahead of the curve by detecting emerging trends at an early stage and anticipating future challenges.

Megatrends and scenarios are a torch in the policy marker's toolkit to help identify a path forward when faced with unpredictable migration patterns and integration challenges in the future. By illuminating unexplored potential developments, they can help reframe existing policy choices and reveal others. These new choices include: (i) **better measurement** by building understanding and flexibility into the way governments identify and measure current migration and integration criteria to understand the degree to which they reflect societal values; (ii) **strategic partnerships** which identify and partner with stakeholders to further objectives; (iii) **wiser technological choices** by understanding the dilemmas new technologies may present; and (iv) **better preparedness** by consciously building anticipatory capacity within government.

Policy implications: How can policy makers prepare for the unexpected in the future?

Make policy objectives and key performance indicators more flexible

• Consider migration and integration policies as a cross-cutting issue in connection with other policy areas, such as education, employment, social protection, trade etc.

- Recognise the significance and impact of megatrends such as labour market shifts, population ageing, changes in education systems, geopolitics, technology and environmental changes.
- Avoid basing policy choices primarily on short-term developments, because they might mask more significant long-term trends.
- Continually reassess what efficient and effective migration and integration policies look like by periodically re-evaluating the markers for success.
- Pay greater attention in selection and integration policies to the social integration of immigrants and social cohesion rather than just economic integration.
- Be prepared for the main reasons for migration to mix or change over time. Be aware that competition for attracting and retaining skilled migrants might increase.
- Find new ways to identify and develop migrants' potential based on their capacity to acquire new skills and adapt to changing labour market conditions and skills needs, rather than focusing only on formal qualifications.

Form new partnerships

- Ensure that all relevant parts of government are involved in identifying, sharing and addressing emerging migration and integration issues. Develop specific coordination mechanisms between public authorities on all levels.
- Include cities, employers, social partners, civil society organisations, tech entrepreneurs and migrants themselves in the implementation of migration and integration policies.
- Develop new partnerships with countries of origin and emerging economies to favour co-development and facilitate upgrading of skills as well as the creation of genuine "Skills Mobility Partnerships".
- Ensure that changing roles in governing migration of local authorities and non-state actors, such as large companies, are conscious choices, and do not lead to more in-country inequalities or unfair competition, by maintaining standards and common rules. But devolve as much power and resources as possible to the regional and local level, and install control mechanisms at the same time. Make sure that new partnerships are constantly evaluated and adaptable.
- Use periods of low migration flows to strengthen partnerships on migration management, including return and readmission of migrants in an irregular situation.

Seize the potential of big data and technology but avoid being ruled by it

- Rethink existing processes and programmes in light of available new technologies to improve compliance, enforcement and migrant assessment and selection, as well as more coordination across relevant services.
- Build migration systems that are as transparent as possible and easy to explain, understand and justify. Avoid basing migration decisions exclusively on algorithms and Artificial Intelligence, and explain the mechanisms behind each decision. Ensure that a human is always accountable for important decisions.

- Be careful not to depend on external service providers for complex selection mechanisms. Maintain ownership of the data on which public policies are based.
- Carefully consider the protection of personal data and privacy issues, including for people residing abroad who are expressing an interest in migrating.

Build anticipatory capacity

- Conduct, at all levels of government, forward-looking analyses about the future of migration and integration and the significance of different developments for policy development, strategic planning and decision-making.
- Survey people in potential source countries (including OECD) regarding their migration intentions and requirements.
- Prepare for future changes by using intelligence and other anticipatory tools to detect and take into account emerging signals, including early warning systems, modelling and programming tools, as well as foresight methods such as scenario planning.
- Build contingency plans for migration management and integration capacity in case of major disruptions in migration flows.
- Implement innovative and flexible policy design, which incorporates research, responds to rapidly changing circumstances, uses pilots that allow for evaluation and upscaling, and responds to lessons learnt.
- Develop active communication strategies notably to avoid being only reactive to shocks and biased social media discussions. Underline the benefits of well managed migration and integration.