Where are the Integration Policies Successful? Explaining Immigrants' Integration in Europe with Multi-Dimensional Measures

Monica Roman[1] | *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*
Smaranda Cimpoeru | *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*
Elena-Maria Prada[2] | *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*
Ioana Manafi | *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania*

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Abstract

The paper aims to assess and explain the multidimensional integration of migrants in Europe by addressing two research questions: (1) *Are there differences between European countries regarding migrants' integration?* and (2) *What individual characteristics might explain differences in integration levels?* To answer the research questions, an Aggregate Integration Index was built, based on four partial integration indexes, covering social, psychological, political and economic dimensions of integration. The paper uses individual data for third country nationals residing in Europe, extracted from the European Social Survey (2018), and relies on a multistage methodology, using factor analysis for deriving various integration measures and multivariate regressions. The results show that in all the European countries in the sample, migrants' integration is still relatively low and there is room for improving their situation. At the same time, the integration policies seem to be effective: in countries with more inclusive integration policies, individuals feel better integrated.

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[1] Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Faculty of Cybernetics, Statistics and Economic Informatics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Calea Dorobanti 15–17, Bucharest, 10552, Romania. Also Institute for Labor IZA Bonn, Germany. E-mail: monica.roman@csie.ase.ro.
[2] Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Faculty of Cybernetics, Statistics and Economic Informatics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Calea Dorobanti 15–17, Bucharest, 10552, Romania. E-mail: elena.prada@csie.ase.ro.

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, the continued migrants' inflow to Europe consolidated the position of the EU as a net immigration area with more than 23.7 million non-EU citizens living in Europe in 2021, representing 5.3% of the total EU population (Eurostat, 2022). Their integration has emerged from a constant topic on the political agenda to a concrete and utmost need. According to the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU agreed by the Council of the European Union (EC, 2014), integration should be a dynamic and two-way process of mutual accommodation of all immigrants and residents, while the immigrants should respect the fundamental values of the EU. Moreover, the EU acknowledges multiple layers of integration, which happens in all aspects of life and occurs concurrently at the individual, family, general community, and country levels. The complex and multidimensional nature of the concept of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; Schinkel, 2018), as well as the assimilation and evaluation of national or EU policies implemented, have been acknowledged by many migration researchers (Aleksynska and Algan, 2010; Neureiter, 2018; Jorgensen, 2012). Although several integration measures have been proposed in the last decades, there is still a need for a common empirical measure of immigrant integration (Alba and Foner, 2014). According to Harder et al. (2018), the impossibility of comparing migrants' integration across countries or studies comes from the heterogeneity of proposed measures.

In this paper, we aim to assess and explain the multidimensional migrants' integration in Europe, using statistical instruments. Therefore, we address two research questions:

Q1: What is the migrants' integration level in Europe and how big are the differences between European countries? Related to this, we hypothesise that integration in European countries is not a homogenous process and there are significant differences in integration at individual and country levels.

Q2: What individual characteristics of migrants may explain the differences in integration levels? We expect to find differences in integration based on gender, education levels, migration history.

There is no unified migrant integration policy at European level, and each country implements its integration policy, influenced by the social and political system, by the historical and cultural characteristics of the country, but also by the scope and composition of the migrant flows (Gregurović and Župarić-Iljić, 2018). We expect that migrants will consider themselves better integrated if they are more educated or have a longer stay at destination.

In response to the first research question, we develop an aggregate integration index in a cross-country setting, using the ninth round of the European Social Survey from 2018.We adapt the Immigration Policy Lab (IPL) methodology (Harder et al., 2018) to the available survey-data and we apply Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to derive four partial indexes covering the social, psychological, political and economic dimensions of integration. The partial indexes are subsequently combined into an aggregate integration index. Multiple regression models are employed for answering the second research question and explaining the effects of various individual factors on aggregate integration.

The study contributes to the migration literature on integration measures in several ways; firstly, it develops indexes able to provide an overarching and comprehensive perspective on migrants' integration in the European countries; using a large European survey as a unique data source, the results are comparable and suitable for further aggregations; secondly, the paper assesses the role of the personal characteristics on the individuals' integration. This may have significant benefits for European and national policymakers, that may identify the specific integration dimensions to be improved, by correctly adjusting their policies.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next sections, the measures of integration are examined as well as the migrants' integration in Europe through the lens of the most recent results. In the 2nd section, the data and methodological aspects are depicted. The 3rd section presents the main results, followed by discussions. The last section concludes the paper.

1 DIMENSIONS AND MEASURES OF INTEGRATION

Integration as a concept does not have a general and universal definition, mainly due to its fickle nature in different contexts (Ager and Strang, 2008; Schinkel, 2018; Coșciug, 2018). Many of the debates surrounding the integration of migrants are not unanimous (Coșciug, 2018). This lack of clarity in the conceptualization of migrants' integration is mainly determined by the complexity of the interactions between host communities and the origin communities of migrants (Schinkel, 2018; Maystadt et al., 2019; Klarenbeek, 2019). Schinkel (2018: 3) suggests that integration cannot be viewed at an individual level and "integration is not a description of individual states of being". In other words, integration cannot be understood by focusing solely on individuals and the reasons for migration. Additionally, Klarenbeek (2019) argues that the integration of migrants is an intersection between the communities of host and origin countries, and it can be viewed from different perspectives and dimensions.

Integration factors are categorized in several topics, such as: legal status (Maxwell, 2010; Solano et al., 2022), education and skills (Maxwell, 2010), foreign-language proficiency (Zubrzycki, 1958; Maxwell, 2010; Amit and Bar-Lev, 2015); employment opportunities (Maxwell, 2010); skills and access to education (Solano et al., 2022); social support networks (Arpino and De Valk, 2018; Amit and Bar-Lev, 2015); shelter and healthcare access (Solano et al., 2022); social attitude of host country toward cultural diversity (Maxwell, 2010; Amit and Bar-Lev, 2015; Majid et al., 2020); government policies (Solano et al., 2022). All these factors interact with each other based on various circumstances, including the social, political or economic context of the host country, but as well the migrant's own condition (Solano et al., 2022).

One of the main concerns of policy-makers and scholars is how to improve and measure the integration of migrants in the host communities that usually are different from their origin communities (Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003; Bosswick et al., 2008; Kogan, 2016; Guzi et al., 2022). Due to this ambiguity in the conceptualization of integration, it has been challenging to develop a general framework to measure migrants' integration. However, in the last decades, numerous attempts have been made to develop a general index for measuring the integration of migrants (e.g. Kymlicka and Banting, 2006; Helbing et al., 2013; De Haas et al., 2014; Beine et al., 2016; Helbing et al., 2017; Alaimo et al., 2023). In 2006, Kymlicka and Banting developed a scholarly research project called Multiculturalism Policy Index (MCP). The MCP monitors multiculturalism policy evolution in 21 Western democracies through standardized data for three different time points (in 1980, 2000, and 2010) and encompassing three minority categories: immigrants, historic national minorities, and indigenous peoples. Helbing et al. (2013) developed an Immigration Policies in Comparison Index (IMPIC) to offer a conceptualization of immigration policies that allow for measuring their impact on migrants' integration. The IMPIC database covers the period from 1980 to 2010 on data regarding migration policies in 33 OECD countries (Helbing et al., 2017). The "International Migration Law and Policy Analysis" database (IMPALA) was designed in 1999 to measure and compare immigration policies (Beine et al., 2016). The IMPALA database covers 10 years (until 2008) and five migration dimensions: economic migration, citizenship changes, asylum and humanitarian migration, family reunification, and student migration (Beine et al., 2016). Another measurement of migration policy restrictiveness is the DEMIG POLICY database, which evaluates migration effects based on policies from 1950 to 2010 (De Haas et al., 2015). The DEMIG POLICY database consists of approximately 6 500 migration policies enacted between 1954 and 2013 in 45 countries worldwide as part of the DEMIG project (De Haas et al., 2014). Finally, it is important to highlight The European Civic Citizenship and Inclusion Index (MIPEX), comprises almost 100 indicators grouped into five categories: labour market inclusion, long-term residence, family reunion, naturalization, and anti-discrimination (Bullen and Peiro, 2005).

All these attempts to provide an integrative measurement for migration policies were just a tipping point for future and more complex indices that measure migrants' integration. A holistic approach

is exemplified by the seminal paper of Ager and Strang (2008). The first (basic) domain of integration, Makers and Means, includes employment, health, and housing. Other dimensions are related to social connections, facilitators, like the cultural knowledge, and foundations, such as the legal framework. To develop the synthetic index of immigrant integration, several researchers have measured and assessed a wide range of indicators across economic, social, cultural and political domains (Caselli, 2015). The Immigration Policy Lab (IPL) has developed a practical survey-based measure to assess immigrant integration, known as the IPL Integration Index (Harder et al., 2018). The measure captures six dimensions of integration, including psychological, economic, political, social, linguistic, and navigational aspects; it is intended to be used by researchers and allows for comparison across countries and over time, being applied in the United States and Switzerland (Harder et al., 2018).

However, due to the subjective nature of selection and the choice of indicators as proxies, no synthetic index can have objective validity (Harder et al., 2018) and therefore the complex measures for integration are rather scarce in the literature. The paper plans to fill the gap in the migration literature by providing an updated measure of the migrants' integration in Europe, through partial and aggregate multi-dimensional indexes.

2 METHODOLOGY AND DATA

For providing a comparative analysis of migrants' integration in Europe based on aggregated measures, we rely on the ninth round of the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2018. Conducted every two years, the ESS collects public opinion and attitudes data from various European countries on a wide range of topics, including social and political attitudes, institutional trust, well-being, employment, social networks, and health. The overall sample used in this research has 47 086 participants and includes data on respondents' current residence, citizenship, as well as the country of birth. The subsample of immigrants is identified based on the respondent's country of birth: those born outside the EU (the so-called Third Country Nationals, hereafter TCNs) were included in a working sample of 3 071 individuals from 27 countries. Table A1 in the Appendix describes the distribution of the sample by country. The sample was adjusted depending on the availability of the variables used in the analysis.

The methodological frame is developed in two stages:

i. In the first stage, we compute four partial integration indexes, based on which we determine the Aggregate Integration Index (AII). The AII is further correlated with MIPEX.
ii. In the second stage, we evaluate the main explanatory factors of integration and we assess the role of the migrant's individual characteristics on the constructed index.

Inspired by the IPL Integration index, we propose an index with four dimensions: attachment (corresponding to the psychological dimension of the IPL Integration index), economic, political, and social- all three matching similar dimension of the IPL index. Each dimension is reflected by a corresponding partial index.

In the case of psychological integration, our measure reflects respondents' feeling of connection with the host country. For the economic integration, we use income, employment, and satisfaction with current income. For political integration, our index captures an understanding of the important political issues facing the host country, active citizenship and political knowledge and self-confidence in political abilities. In the case of social integration, our model captures social ties and interactions in the host country, as well as bridging social capital as evidenced by participation in organizations with natives. Table 1 shows the selection of items from the ESS that capture best the dimension of integration.

Taking the advantage of a large number of items included in each integration dimension, we employ a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to develop the four partial indexes. The names used for each partial index of integration are depicted in Table 1. PCA has the advantage of reducing the complexity

of our dataset by identifying patterns and relationships between variables. In order to ensure that data is fit for this type of analysis we use Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and we test for the sphericity using Bartlett's test.

Table 1 The items of the Partial Integration Indexes

Partial Integration Indexes	
Partial Index of Attachment (PI_A)	
Variable	**Scale**
How emotionally attached to [country]	0 = not at all emotionally attached to 10 = very emotionally attached
How emotionally attached to Europe	0 = not at all emotionally attached to 10 = very emotionally attached
How satisfied with present state of economy in country	0 = extremely dissatisfied to 10 = extremely satisfied
How satisfied with the national government	0 = extremely dissatisfied to 10 = extremely satisfied
State of education in country nowadays	0 = extremely bad to
	10 = extremely good
State of health services in country nowadays	0 = extremely bad to
	10 = extremely good
How satisfied with life as a whole	0 = extremely dissatisfied to 10 = extremely satisfied
PI_E. Partial Index of Economic integration	
Variable	**Scale**
Household's total net income, all sources	Categories (based on deciles of the actual household income range in each country)
Feeling about household's income nowadays	1 = living comfortably on present income / 2 = coping on present income / 3 = difficult on present income / 4 = very difficult on present income
Ever unemployed and seeking work for a period more than three months	1 = yes / 2 = no
Partial Index of Political integration (PI_P)	
Variable	**Scale**
How interested in politics	1 = very interested / 2 = quite interested / 3 = hardly interested / 4 = not at all interested
Confident in own ability to participate in politics	1 = not at all confident / 2 = a little confident / 3 = quite confident / 4 = very confident / 5 = completely confident
Political system allows people to have influence on politics	1 = not at all / 2 = very little / 3 = some / 4 = a lot / 5 = a great deal
Political system allows people to have a say in what government does	1 = not at all / 2 = very little / 3 = some / 4 = a lot / 5 = a great deal
Active_citizen is a variable constructed as sum of the seven ESS binary variables	Contacted politician or government official in the last 12 months (1 = yes / 2 = no)
	Worked in political party or action group last 12 months (1 = yes / 2 = no)
	Signed petition last 12 months (1 = yes / 2 = no)
	Taken part in lawful public demonstration last 12 months (1 = yes / 2 = no)
	Posted or shared anything about politics online last 12 months (1 = yes / 2 = no)
	Worn or displayed campaign badge/sticker last 12 months (1 = yes / 2 = no)
	Boycotted certain products last 12 months (1= yes / 2 = no)

Table 1 (continuation)

Partial Index of Social integration (PI_S)

Variable	Scale
How often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues	1 = never / 2 = less than once a month / 3 = once a month / 4 = several times a month / 5 = once a week / 6 = several times a day / 7 = every day
How many people with whom you can discuss intimate and personal matters	0 = none / 1 = 1 / 2 = 2 / 3 = 3 / 4 = 4–6 / 5 = 7–9 / 6 = 10 or more
Take part in social activities compared to others of same age	1 – much less than most / 2 = less than most / 3 = about the same / 4 = more than most / 5 = much more than most
Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	0 = you can't be too careful to 10 = most people can be trusted
Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair	0 = most people try to take advantage of me to 10 = most people try to be fair
Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves	0 = people mostly look out for themselves to 10 = people mostly try to be helpful

Source: Own construction

The partial indexes are aggregated as an arithmetic mean for producing the Aggregate Integration Index (AII). As a result, each individual in our sample has an aggregate integration score, reflecting their integration and allowing to provide comprehensive cross-countries comparisons.

In order to assess the country differences in integration (Q1), we computed the AII at country level and we correlated the results with the MIPEX index, for a consolidated analysis.

The AII was employed in a set of multi-linear regression models run for explaining integration through individual characteristics of migrants. Inspired by the existing evidence, we evaluate the role of the following factors: gender; age; years in the destination country (Duration); years of full-time education completed (Education); belonging to a minority group (Minority); being discriminated due to his/her nationality (Discrimination). We expect that a feeling of discrimination or belonging to a minority group may decrease integration level, while education may positively influence integration. Thus, the regression model we have used in the analysis can be written as follows:

$$AII_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_i , \quad (1)$$

where AII is the Aggregate Integration Index, X is the vector of individual characteristics: Gender, Age, Duration, Education, Minority, and Discrimination.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Partial and aggregate integration indexes across Europe

Before applying PCA on the four dimensions, sample adequacy was firstly assessed (Table 2). The highest KMO value is reported for the variables included in the PI_A (0.82) and the lowest one is for PI_E (0.516). Since all the KMO scores pass the minimum threshold (0.5), variables meet the criteria regarding sampling adequacy. Moreover, Bartlett's test of sphericity which is highly significant, provides support for this finding (Table 2).

The partial integration indexes were determined based on the first component resulted from the PCA conducted on each of the four dimensions. For an easier interpretation and to ensure comparability, the scores resulting from the first component have been standardized and rescaled from 0 to 10.

Table 2 Results of the sample adequacy tests before conducting PCA for the partial indexes

Partial indexes	Bartlett test of sphericity	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure
PI_A. Partial index of attachment	Chi-square = 5 283.177 Df = 21 P-value = 0.000	0.820
PI_E. Partial index of economic integration	Chi-square = 714.583 Df = 3 P-value = 0.000	0.516
PI_P. Partial index of political integration	Chi-square = 2 878.506 Df = 10 P-value = 0.000	0.674
PI_S. Partial index of social integration	Chi-square = 2 710.478 Df = 15 P-value = 0.000	0.689

Source: Own construction

PCA results for the Attachment dimension reveal that the first two components have eigen values higher than one, with the first component retaining 45% of the total variance in the variables. Component loadings (Table 3) show that all variables have positive loadings on the first component, with factors related to satisfaction regarding various aspects of the host country (democracy, education, health, economy state) having the highest contribution. Consequently, the first component would be a proxy for the satisfaction level and attachment to the destination country and thus will be considered as the Partial Index of Attachment (PI_A) of TCNs to the host countries. The overall mean value for the PI_A was 5.92, with highest averages reported in Switzerland (7.63), Finland (7.22) and Norway (7.07), while lowest ones being recorded in Latvia (3.78), Montenegro (4.15), Serbia (4.5) and Croatia (4.67).

Table 3 Component loadings for the variables included in the PI_A

Variable	Component 1	Component 2
How emotionally attached to [country]	0.1588	0.7192
How emotionally attached to Europe	0.2294	0.6354
How satisfied with present state of economy in [country]	0.4387	–0.1457
How satisfied with the national government	0.4466	–0.1499
State of education in country nowadays	0.4103	–0.1458
State of health services in country nowadays	0.3934	–0.0544
Satisfied with the way democracy works in [country]	0.4551	–0.1052

Source: Own construction

Results of the PCA for economic integration of TCNs show that only the first principal component has an eigenvalue higher than 1, and retains 51% of the total variance in the original data. Highest loadings in the first component (Table 4) are for the variables related to the income, covering both objective (corresponding decile associated with income) and subjective perceptions (feeling about income). The mean score for the Partial Index of Economic Integration (PI_E) was 5.27, highest national averages being reported in Sweden (6.68), United Kingdom (6.35), but also in Montenegro (6.17). At the other end, the countries with the lowest averages are Italy (3.85), Latvia (3.98) and Lithuania (4.03).

Table 4 Component loadings for the variables included in the PI_E

Variable	Component 1
Household's total net income, all sources	0.6668
Feeling about household's income nowadays (variants recoded from low to high)	0.6869
Ever unemployed and seeking work for a period more than three months	0.2892

Source: Own construction

Similarly, for the Political dimension, component loadings (Table 5) reveal that the largest contribution in the first component (which retains 46% of the initial variance) is attributed to variables related to subjective perception of the political system (political system allowing people to have a say in what government does or allowing people to have influence on politics; confidence in own ability to participate in politics). The lowest weight is of the variable reflecting the active participation and implication of the citizen in politically related activities. The average value for the Partial Index of Political Integration (PI_P) was the lowest among all four partial indexes, at 3.43. Once more, countries with the highest average on this dimension are the Scandinavian ones (Norway 4.95, Sweden 4.76, Finland 4.65). Other countries with an average political score above 4 are: United Kingdom (4.5), Ireland (4.38), Germany (4.34). Surprisingly, Italy has the lowest country average on this dimension (1.88), followed by Latvia (2.08) and Croatia (2.18). Slovenia and Estonia record also national averages below 2.5.

Table 5 Component loadings for the variables included in the PI_P

Variable	Component 1	Component 2
How interested in politics	0.4444	0.3468
Political system allows people to have influence on politics	0.4940	–0.4632
Confident in own ability to participate in politics	0.4618	0.2828
Political system allows people to have a say in what government does	0.4514	–0.5589
Active_citizen	0.3760	0.5223

Source: Own construction

In the case of the social dimension of integration, the first component captured the largest information (36%) and describes optimally the social integration of migrants. For the first PC, all variables have positive loadings, with the highest contribution coming from variables which refer to the interaction with other people, in terms of trust, help or correctness. Lower loadings in the first component are attributed to the variables referring to frequency and intensity of social activities (Table 6). Thus, we can argue that

the first component is a proxy for measuring how well TCNs socially interact and integrate in the host country, qualifying it as a Partial Index of Social integration (PI_S). The overall mean for this index was 5.26, with country averages varying between 4.04 (for Lithuania and Serbia) and 5.6 (for Nordic countries: Norway 5.61, Finland 5.58, Sweden 5.56).

Table 6 Component loadings for the variables included in the PI_S

Variable	Component 1	Component 2
How often socially meet with friends, relatives or colleagues	0.2347	0.5711
Take part in social activities compared to others of same age	0.2554	0.5593
How many people with whom you can discuss intimate and personal matters	0.3336	0.3837
Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	0.5141	–0.2542
Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair	0.5139	–0.2825
Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves	0.4899	–0.2633

Source: Own construction

The results obtained for the four partial indexes of integration are summarized in Table 7. All four partial indexes range between 0 and 10, higher values being associated with a better integration on the analysed dimension. As already outlined, the PI_P has the lowest average among all four (3.42), while the PI_A has the highest average (5.9). Correlation between the four partial indexes are modest (with a highest correlation coefficient of 0.34, Table 8), confirming that each partial index reflects integration on a single dimension.

Table 7 Summary Statistics of the four partial indexes of integration

Partial index of integration	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Social	5.2633	1.6182	2 957
Attachment	5.9187	1.7790	2 553
Political	3.4298	2.0956	2 771
Economic	5.2745	2.3776	2 490

Source: Own construction

Table 8 Correlation matrix between the four partial indexes of integration

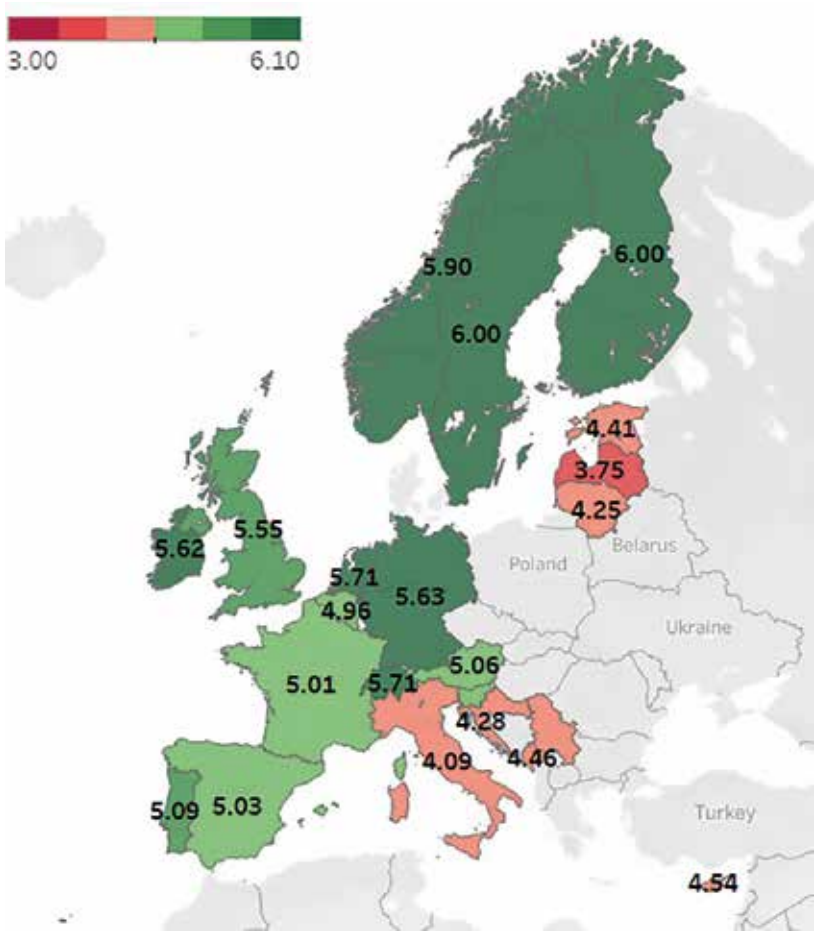
	Social	Attachment	Political	Economic
Social	1			
Attachment	0.3395	1		
Political	0.3264	0.2467	1	
Economic	0.2571	0.0082	0.2585	1

Source: Own construction

The mean AII, computed as the average of the four partial indexes, is 5.1, having a homogenous distribution with a normal shape appearance (see Figure A1 in the Appendix).

The first relevant result shows that the overall integration scores are rather low and the integration seems to be modest across Europe. Also, there are important differences between European countries, as highlighted by Figure 1, confirming the initial hypothesis. Highest country averages are reported for Finland, Sweden, Norway, but also for Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany or United Kingdom. On the other end, the lowest scores are found for Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, Croatia, Serbia or Estonia (Figure 1). Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria have been excluded from reported national averages due to low number of observations in the sample (< 15 and only 19 observations for Czechia).

Figure 1 National averages for the Aggregate Integration Index



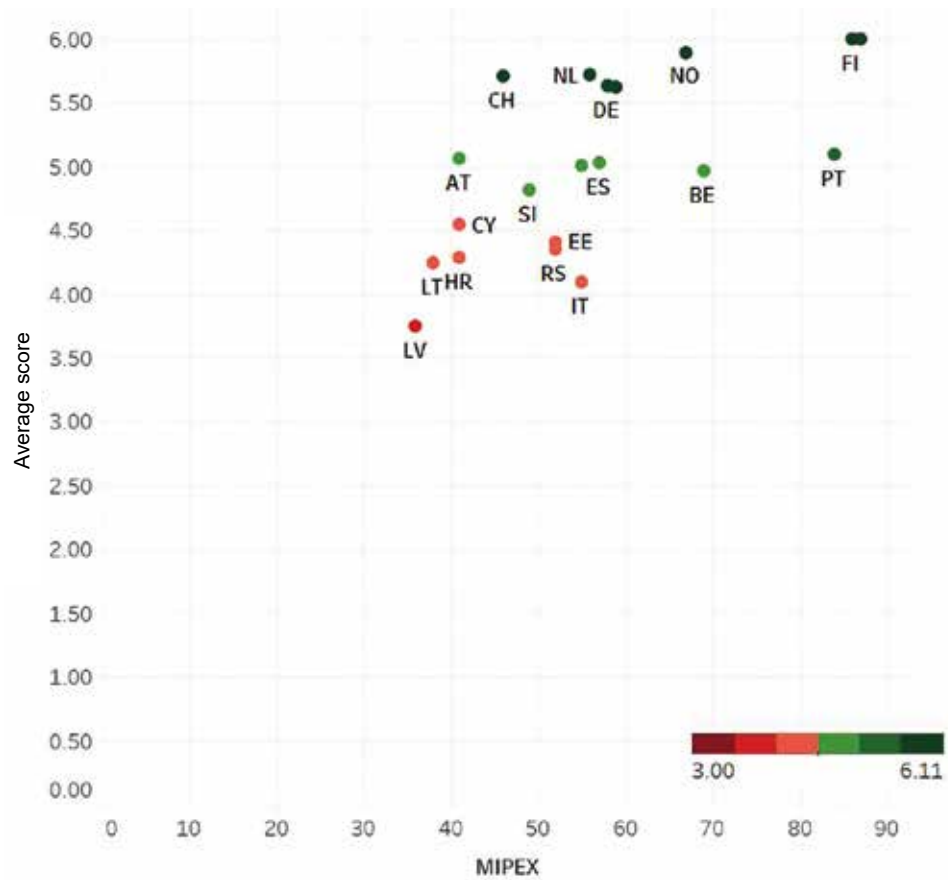
Source: Own construction

We run a correlation analysis of the AII with MIPEX, which measures the level of development of integration policies and also "establishes the level of equality and responsibility of citizens of a given country and the level of support given to their specific needs in order to have the same opportunities in different areas of society (economics, politics, culture, education, etc.)" (Gregurovic and Zuparic-Iljic, 2018: 106). The 2018 MIPEX score is used for consistency over time.

The countries in the sample also present important differences in the development of the integration policies, as presented below, with MIPEX score for each country included in parenthesis. Sweden (87), Finland (86), and Norway (67) have the most open integration policies in Europe. Germany (58), with a long history of immigration, also has an open integration approach. Belgium (69) and the Netherlands (56) have integration policies slightly above the EU average, similar to other Western European countries. France (55), Spain (57), and Portugal (84) have supportive integration policies, with Portugal focusing on equality for migrants. Italy (55) attracts refugees and labour migrants but has relatively less open policies. The UK (54) and Ireland (59) have medium openness. Central European countries like Croatia (41), Czechia (47), and Slovenia (49) are emerging destinations, but less open to migrants. Lithuania (38) and Latvia (36) have restrictive integration policies, while Estonia (52) is moderately favourable.

The correlation analysis between MIPEX and the AII, resulted in a coefficient of 0.6310. This confirms that migrants perceive themselves better integrated in countries where the MIPEX score is also higher. Scatter plot depicted in Figure 2 reinforces this conclusion and confirms the consistency of the constructed integration index and MIPEX.

Figure 2 Correlation between MIPEX scores and the country AII



Source: Own construction

3.2 Individual explanatory factors of integration

The AII is used as the dependent variable in OLS models, in order to explore the characteristics and factors that might have an influence on the integration of TCNs in the destination country. Results of the multivariate analysis are depicted in Table 9, in two model specifications. All estimated models are valid, and have a satisfactory explanatory power, with a coefficient of determination of 16% (Models 1 and 2).

The significance and the sign of the coefficients associated with the demographic variables are stable across the four models. Variables such as gender, age, education and discrimination are highly significant, the sign of the coefficients being the hypothesised one. However, duration of migration and belonging to a minority are not statistically significant.

Table 9 Estimation results for the regression models

Variable	Dependent variable: Aggregate Integration Index	
	(1)	(2)
Gender (Male)	0.2261***	0.2293***
	–0.0531	–0.0524
Age	–0.0129***	–0.0134***
	–0.0023	–0.0015
Duration	–0.0007	
	–0.0022	
Education	0.0890***	0.0906***
	–0.0061	–0.006
Minority	–0.0148	
	–0.0576	
Discrimination	–0.3535***	–0.3805***
	–0.1063	–0.1019
F statistic	63.61***	100.28***
R2	0.1634	0.1664
N	1 954	2 011

Source: Own construction

The results are in line with our hypothesis that individual characteristics are expected to pay a strong role in a successful individual integration. These findings are discussed in the next section together with an analysis of the country level integration policies' impact.

4 DISCUSSIONS

The results of the partial index of integration showed that migrants perceive low integration levels in the case of all the four dimensions considered. On one hand, the PI_P had the lowest average among the four partial indexes, confirming the low interest in political aspects of the destination country and low political implication of third country nationals. On the other hand, PI_A had the highest average out of the four, reinforcing the fact that migration is triggered by pull factors and better prospects

in the destination country, reflected in the perception on the economic, education or health system. Low levels of the four partial indexes and the AII confirm the complex process of migrants' integration in the host society, with its multiple aspects that need to be considered (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2015; Caselli, 2015). Moreover, there are important differences between European countries, with country averages above 5 reported for Finland, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany or United Kingdom, lowest scores (below 5), found for Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, Croatia, Serbia or Estonia.

This heterogeneity in AII may be related to the openness of the integration policies in these countries. Migrants in Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway), Germany, the UK, Ireland, Belgium, and the Netherlands have higher integration scores, reflecting favourable policies in these nations. Sweden and Finland rank among the top destinations for migrants, while Germany, a long-standing destination, adapted its policies to support equal socio-economic opportunities after the 2015/2016 migration wave. Central European (Czechia, Croatia, Slovenia), Baltic (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia), and Italian migrants feel less integrated, reflecting more restrictive policies that hinder political participation and nationality access.

Gender, Age, Education and Discrimination are the individual characteristics that have a significant influence on migrants' integration in the host country. On average, men have a significantly higher integration index than women, confirming the gender divide in terms of integration of third-country nationals. Our results sustain that non-EU women have a lower participation in the labour markets of the host economies compared to their country of origin (Barslund et al., 2017). Moreover, cultural factors may be playing also an important role in the integration of women in the labour market and for the wider societal integration.

In terms of age, we found that older migrants have a lower integration index than younger ones. This is in line with the literature suggesting that elderly migrants are often more vulnerable due to social isolation, deficient socio-economic conditions and health access (Aslund et al., 2009). Many of them lack the necessary resources in the old age and the cultural capital, relying mostly on their own communities and on the support from their families (Ruspini, 2009). This outcome is supported also by the fact that duration of migration is not statistically significant in any of the estimated models. Thus, our results suggest that migrants being for a longer time in the European countries do not necessarily feel more integrated than the recent ones.

Education supports the economic integration of migrants (De Paola and Brunello, 2016). We found that more educated migrants, having better economic prospects and a more developed human capital, also registered significantly higher integration index values.

Migrants that reported feeling discriminated due to nationality perceive themselves significantly less integrated than others. Thus, discrimination becomes a key factor of integration, confirming the classic assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964): as ethnic minorities become more integrated into their country of residence, their perception of discrimination decreases. However, based on the results we could not conclude that TCNs who come from a minority feel less integrated than the rest.

To sum up, our results allow for developing the profile of the better integrated migrants in Europe, who are men, young, highly educated, and who also feel less discriminated based on their origin.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we assess the multifaceted migrants' integration in Europe, using a multi-dimensional Aggregate Integration Index applied to TCNs. Based on four partial indexes covering economic, social, political and attachment dimensions, our results demonstrate a rather low level of TCNs integration and significant intra-European differences. Migrants from the Nordic countries have higher integration scores compared to the rest, while those from the Central European countries seem to be least integrated. The migrants who are better integrated tend to be male, young, possess a higher level of education, and feel less discriminated against.

Our study is not free of limitations. As the ESS is not especially devoted to the analysis of immigrants, the topics covered in the dataset are not a priori developed for such studies. As a consequence, integration dimensions included in the IPL approach, such as navigational and linguistic, are not covered in this study due to lack of data. However, working with secondary data, such as the ESS has clear advantages: the data is accessible, comparable across many countries and also rich enough for producing reliable results.

The results may be valuable for migration researchers, policymakers, and civil society organizations to assess the effectiveness of immigrant integration policies and practices. By comparing various countries, the study suggests examples of best practices that may be further developed. Moreover, using the integration index at individual level, we are able to identify the personal characteristics that have a significant influence on integration, such as age, gender, or education, thus identifying areas benefit from specific integration policies.

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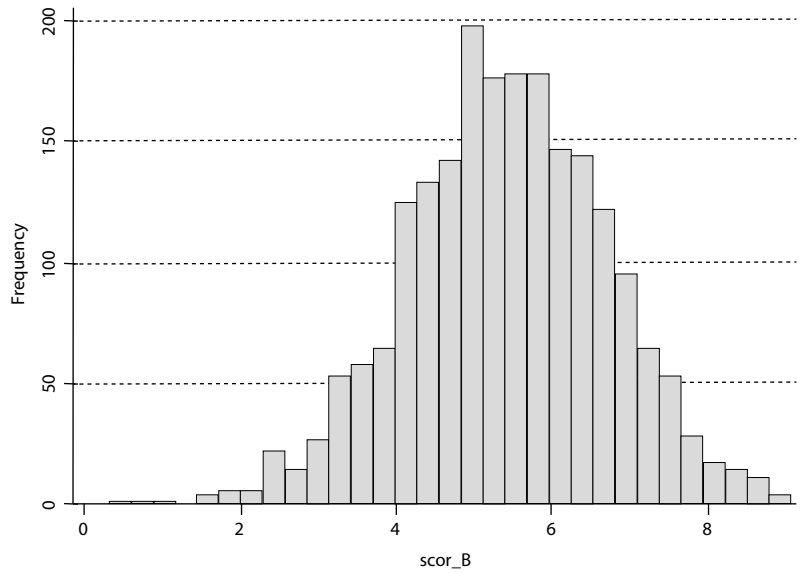
APPENDIX

Table A1 Sample distribution by countries

Country	Number of respondents	Percent of total
Austria (AT)	143	4.66%
Belgium (BE)	163	5.31%
Bulgaria (BG)	14	0.46%
Switzerland (CH)	180	5.86%
Cyprus (CY)	46	1.50%
Czechia (CZ)	19	0.62%
Germany (DE)	195	6.35%
Estonia (EE)	239	7.78%
Spain (ES)	152	4.95%
Finland (FI)	53	1.73%
France (FR)	174	5.67%
United Kingdom (GB)	216	7.03%
Croatia (HR)	153	4.98%
Hungary (HU)	8	0.26%
Ireland (IE)	131	4.27%
Italy (IT)	190	6.19%
Lithuania (LT)	52	1.69%
Latvia (LV)	84	2.74%
Montenegro (ME)	72	2.34%
Netherlands (NL)	133	4.33%
Norway (NO)	86	2.80%
Poland (PL)	9	0.29%
Portugal (PT)	106	3.45%
Serbia (RS)	105	3.42%
Sweden (SE)	226	7.36%
Slovenia (SI)	116	3.78%
Slovakia (SK)	6	0.20%
Total	3 071	100%

Source: Own construction

Figure A1 Distribution of the Aggregated Integration Index



Source: Own construction