

The Attitudes and Values of Migrants

Olle Hammar

Olle Hammar has a Ph.D. in economics and is a researcher at the Research Institute of Industrial Economics (IFN) and the Institute for Futures Studies.

The report is based on the chapter “The Cultural Assimilation of Individualism and Preferences for Redistribution” in Olle Hammar’s dissertation *The Mystery of Inequality: Essays on Culture, Development, and Distributions*, and on additional survey data from the ongoing project Migrant World Values Survey.

The number of migrants and the share of foreign-born individuals have increased in Sweden and Europe over the past years. A key for increasing the inclusion of these individuals into their new societies is through integration, not only in the labor market but also in terms of attitudes and values. Yet, we know very little about how a person's attitudes and values are affected by moving to a new culture with other values and norms.

In this report, I first study how migrants' preferences for redistribution are influenced by the level of individualism or collectivism in the culture of their country of origin. By analyzing a large sample of migrants from around the world and using individual-level global survey data, I find that people from more individualistic countries on average prefer less economic redistribution and accept larger income differences compared to people from more collectivistic cultures. I also find that migrants having spent a relatively short amount of time in their new country of residence are still affected by the culture in their country of origin, whereas people having lived in their new country for a longer period of time are instead affected by the culture in their country of destination. Moreover, I find no statistically significant effect of the migrants' cultural origin on their preferences for redistribution when it comes to second-generation immigrants or if they were below the age of ten years when migrating.

Second, a preliminary, descriptive analysis of new survey data for non-European migrants in Sweden shows that with time spent in Sweden, their attitudes and values seem to converge with the Swedish average in various cultural dimensions (regarding the importance of family, leisure, religion, politics, freedom of choice, and trust). The speed and rate of convergence, however, differ between different cultural values. After about ten years in Sweden, migrants have the same values as the average Swede regarding the importance of family, leisure, and politics. In terms of religion, freedom of choice, and trust, the gaps in values between immigrants and native Swedes remain—but are roughly cut in half—after the migrants' first ten years in Sweden.

These results suggest that cultural integration, or assimilation, occurs and at a fairly rapid pace in many dimensions. Concerns about migration leading to altered cultures in the destination countries thus seem to be relatively unfounded based on current research. That is, values appear to be quite persistent at the cultural, but not individual, level. While culture matters in terms of shaping attitudes and preferences, it does so when it comes to both the origin and destination countries. Yet, for some values (such as freedom of choice), convergence is slower and could probably be boosted by policy interventions related to, for example, early education.