



*As an organisation, WSCF works on many issues concerning peace, solidarity and justice. In this section we will introduce some of these themes and actions that run throughout WSCF at a global, regional and local level. We will focus on the inter-regional event on migration in Mexico City that was attended by Sonja Kosunen from Finland and by Torbjørn Askevold from Norway as delegates from the European Region.*

*Sonja Kosunen*

## Migration

### Reflections from the Inter-Regional conference

When families move to a new culture, children have to adapt to many things. Migration can cause a stressful stage in life for every migrant for a certain period of time; however, children especially have to start building their identities as migrants in a new country as soon as they arrive into the culture.

In general, it is not very important how the child feels about migration as a process or about her or his own ethnical group itself. According to Carmela Liebkind's research in Helsinki University, the most important factor is the way that the parents support the child within the entire process of migration. Children have to adapt even more than adults when going to school to learn the language, which can be a difficult process. Adapting is a psychological as well as a socio-cultural process.

***In September, WSCF held its annual inter-regional conference in Mexico City. The Inter-Regional WSCF office and a group of Latin-American SCM members organized the event. During the conference, we were engaged in many different methods of learning about and reflection upon the issue of migration. We attended lectures giving classical academic presentations on the topic. We did Bible studies on different scriptural passages; theological analyses and all worships were somehow focused on the situation of migrants. We watched documentaries and were visited by Mexicans working with the social and pastoral realities following migration in Mexico.***

*Torbjørn Askevold*

In his research, John Berry (1986) found four different ways that people act when adapting to life in a new country. These possibilities are assimilating, separating, marginalizing and integrating.

Assimilation is what happens when migrants abandon their own cultural values and traditions and take all parts of their identity from the new culture. In Finland, for example, some Russian migrants may feel that it is easier to give up their previous Russian cultural identity and take a Finnish one instead. In this process, the parents have to stand strong, because otherwise children might stop speaking their original first language. Assimilation is especially harmful when it results in an unfinished childhood identity, as the child is still putting together difference pieces of the two surrounding cultures. In the separation method of adaptation, the migrants coming to a new country separate from the major population in the country and keep their old identities whole. This usually happens when people, feeling isolated, seek their own tradition and group control. This leads into a total separation from the majority society and causes massive problems. These migrants stick together with other migrants from the same culture. Separation has been a big issue in cultures such as Roma. Families face the greatest problems when their children get involved with the majority society, for example in school. Some people say they can not see separation as a solution for the upcoming problems in the new culture and it can be seen as a problem caused by the majority population. Ethnic or cultural groups that separate are usually afraid of rejection from the major population and it is easier for them to stay removed.

Marginalization might be the most difficult way of adapting (and not adapting) to a new country and culture. In this case, the migrant separates from both the old and new culture. Marginalization causes identity problems and the migrant drops out of the society.

The fourth method of adaptation is to integrate to the culture. In the other three methods (assimilation, separation and marginalization), people always give something away. Either part of the old or new culture has to go in order for migrant to get an identity she or he can live with. In integration, one keeps some parts of one's old culture and integrates them with some parts of the new one. In order to integrate, migrants have to take part in the social life of the new country; they must take part in the economical, political and social life of the society. Much depends on the people responding to the migrant's request to become a part of "their" society. One of the most important factors for integration is that both parties, the migrants and the locals, feel that they all have same the rights and obligations. This leads to the best psychological basis for bi- or multiculturalism.

Integration is both an internal and external process, according to Professor Mirja Talib's research. Inner balance can be achieved, but it takes a lot of work. When a migrant learns the new spoken language, gets social contacts and status in society, for example through getting a job, it becomes easier to accept things in past and present life. The whole process of integration could be called "building a bridge between past and present selves".

**Assimilation is what happens when migrants abandon their own cultural values and traditions and take all parts of their identity from the new culture.**