



# POLICY PRIMER

## Integration

AUTHOR: Jacqui Broadhead  
PUBLISHED: 05/03/2020



[www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)

This policy primer discusses government policy towards migrants after their arrival in the UK. It covers the history and goals of policy intervention, what is meant by ‘integration’, to whom national and local policy intervention is directed and some of the issues which underlie policy debates.

### What is meant by ‘integration’?

The term ‘integration’ can be used in academic and policy debates to mean different things. Historically, integration was often seen as a one-way trajectory of becoming similar to the rest of the population, ‘assimilation’, with the focus on adaptation by the migrants. Research has shown that the outcome of the process is in fact influenced significantly by the responses of the other residents they meet and the institutions with which they engage, including the opportunities (such as job vacancies) and barriers (such as non-recognition of qualifications) they face. The term now commonly used in analysis is thus that integration is a ‘two-way’ process (or three-way, taking account of migrants’ continuing transnational connections). The association of ‘integration,’ nevertheless, with expectations of assimilation, and the way in which its use can project migrants as separate or ‘other’, means use of the term by researchers and policy makers remains controversial (Rytter 2018).

Integration is not one but a series of processes. It involves participation in the labour market and social institutions (such as education), social interaction, changing attitudes and cultural practices and civic participation. The sense of identity and belonging of migrants, and of those with whom they interact, may also change over time. The rates at which these different processes take place differ, and what happens in one domain (e.g. civic participation) can impact on another (e.g. sense of belonging) (Rutter, Cooley et al. 2008; Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas 2016; Spencer and Charsley 2016).

### What is integration policy trying to achieve?

A key consideration for policy makers is what happens to migrants after they arrive in the UK. Some new arrivals access employment, accommodation and any services they need without difficulty and begin to build new

social networks. Others do not. Some migrant groups, such as refugees, have low labour market participation rates (Kone, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2019) and disproportionately poor housing and health (Gidley and Jayaweera 2010). Public concern about migration can reflect a perception that some migrants are unwilling ‘to integrate’: to learn English, for instance, or mix socially with people from outside of their immediate community. Research evidence places greater emphasis on the barriers to participation that they can face.

This raises the question what the aims of policy should be and where responsibility should lie. Should the primary focus be addressing barriers to employment or should it be cultural practices? In social integration, is the absence of tensions sufficient or should the aim be to foster stronger relationships? Should all residents be the target of policy intervention or only certain groups? To the extent that this is a matter for public policy, is it primarily for central and devolved governments or local authorities; and who should pay?

### Who is the target of integration policies?

Refugees are the only group in the UK for whom central government has consistently taken some responsibility for integration policy measures. Family migrants have, until recently, rarely been identified as a target, nor labour migrants or students. This may reflect an unspoken assumption that families, employers and education providers respectively fill this void. Nor has there been a strong focus on the attitudes and practices of other residents and institutions, despite recognition now of the importance to integration outcomes of the role that they play.

Unlike many other EU states, UK national policy has not generally identified new arrivals as a priority for information, advice or services. Many local authorities and service providers have acted on their own initiative to provide information and advice to migrants, the public

and front-line staff. The lack of a focus on newcomers may reflect an underlying assumption that it is those who will remain in the UK in the long term who should be the priority for intervention and resource allocation. Information on life in the UK is provided to all those applying for settlement and UK citizenship, coupled with language requirements (Home Office 2019) (see Migration Observatory the policy primer on [Citizenship: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?](#)). Yet those who are in the UK for shorter periods also need to engage with their neighbours and may face challenges in accessing jobs or services (e.g. how to register with a GP) to which they are entitled under their conditions of stay (Spencer et al 2007)).

There are also policies that have included migrants within their remit: on discrimination, for instance, and important areas of service provision, such as English language tuition. In health and education services some targeted provision is made to meet migrants' particular needs. However, Parliament's All Party Policy Group on Social Integration noted in 2017 that the *'UK's policy approach in this regard has been remarkably non-interventionist – especially when compared to those of most European countries.'*

It also concluded that the *'tangled division of responsibility for integration policy between central government departments and agencies has been compounded by the lack of an agreed view as to the role of local government in this policy area.'* (APPG 2017).

### Integration policy in the UK

There is no national UK-wide policy framework on integration. The Home Office is responsible for refugee integration and for settlement and Citizenship policy while the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) leads on community cohesion in England. Other departments lead on initiatives in their policy areas, such as education and adult skills. Integration is a devolved matter and each of the constituent nations of the UK has developed its own approach – though responsibility for migration policy remains in the Home Office.

### Integration policy from the 1960s to 2010

The history of integration policy began in the 1960s, directed at migrants from New Commonwealth countries. The overt hostility they faced ensured that the policy had a strong focus on addressing discrimination and incitement to racial hatred and on mechanisms to manage community relations. Commonwealth migrants also retained rights to vote and stand in elections and a fast track to Citizenship. In subsequent decades the focus of policy, however, remained with the second and subsequent generations of these communities, not migrants (Spencer 2011: 212). This left a vacuum in policy towards newcomers which to an extent continues to the present day.

A Refugee Integration Strategy, first launched in 2000, was intended to help recognised refugees (not asylum seekers) secure access to jobs, accommodation, welfare benefits, health, education and language services and to encourage community participation. The aim was not to assimilate but to enable refugees to realise their potential as equal members of society (Home Office 2000; 2005; Ager and Strang 2008).

Following disturbances in northern English towns in 2001, the Labour government developed a community cohesion agenda which initially had no focus on migrants, addressing issues relating to long standing ethnic minority communities, with an emphasis on cultural assimilation and British values (Blair 2006). The arrival of people from Eastern and Central Europe following EU enlargement in 2004, many settling in areas with little experience of migration, led to some additional resources and guidance for local authorities and service providers, following a critical Commission on Integration and Cohesion report in 2007 (CIC 2007).

In 2012 a short strategy paper, 'Creating the Conditions for Integration' argued integration would be achieved by people contributing at neighbourhood level together. The government was *'committed to rebalancing activity from centrally-led to locally-led action and from the public to the voluntary and private sectors'* (CLG 2012). The 2016 Casey review returned the focus to highlighting segregation and *'cultural and religious practices in communities that are not only holding some of our citizens back but run contrary to British values and sometimes our laws'* (Casey 2016:5). Casey suggested that the integration policy agenda had not

been consistently implemented (Casey 2016: para 70).

In response, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published an Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper in 2018, followed in 2019 by a cross departmental action plan for England. The Green Paper, addressing long standing communities and migrants, states: *'integration is not assimilation ... [it] is a two-way street [and] everyone has a part to play in upholding these values. This includes not just the people who are already here, but those who want to make it their home.'*

The paper defines integration as *'communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.'* It sets out areas for development in integration policy such as boosting English language provision, increasing economic opportunity and promoting meaningful social contact. It provides a shift in focus from earlier equalities and community cohesion agendas and toward supporting new and resident communities.

Alongside the Green Paper, a number of national policy developments have been created to support integration such as the selection of 5 local integration areas in England supported by MHCLG to develop integration strategies, funding for integration through the 'Controlling Migration Fund', and a set of Indicators of Integration published by the Home Office (2019).

Meanwhile, each of the devolved administrations has taken a distinctive approach to integration policy, in some cases more proactive than the UK wide administration. In Scotland, for example, the New Scots strategy (Scottish Government 2018) is distinctive in centering its approach on 'integration from day one' meaning that asylum seekers should be included within its approach rather than being required to wait until status is granted.

### Devolved responsibility at the local level

A key fault line of the debate on integration is where responsibility lies between local and central government. Local authorities are closest to many of the issues raised by the presence of migrants within their communities,

and can to an extent impact on their access to jobs, housing, services and civic participation. They do not, however, control some of the levers that affect integration outcomes. Central government determines the extent of migrants' rights to participate (e.g. rights to work and to vote); is responsible for key areas of policy such as discrimination law; and shapes, to an extent, national media and public discourse. It can incentivise civil society and employers to contribute to this agenda and could ensure local authorities have an evidence base to inform their interventions.

Some local authorities across the UK have recently taken a lead in developing their own integration strategy for refugees and migrants, while others have taken initiatives without using that terminology. Since 2010 there has been a trend towards devolution of budgets and policy responsibilities to the English city regions including through the creation of a number of 'Metro Mayors.' They have taken on additional responsibilities some of which relate to integration - most notably in relation to skills and English language policy through the devolution of the Adult Education Budget, though with some continued restrictions.

Related to responsibility is the question who should pay. The Labour government (1997-2010) established a Migration Impacts Fund (MIF), resourced by a levy on visa fees, aiming in part to demonstrate that migrants were contributing to the cost of local initiatives. Its suggestion that employers should contribute towards the provision of language classes for migrant workers equally reflected the view that those who benefit from migration should contribute to costs that arise (Griffiths and Morris 2017). The Coalition Government announced the closure of the Migration Impacts Fund in 2010, but in 2016 established the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF). Like the MIF, CMF is a grant programme for local government to fund integration (and some enforcement) activity.

### The impact of immigration policy on integration

Migrants are granted many civil rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial (as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights) on arrival. In other respects, the extent of their rights to work, access social housing and services, to draw on welfare

benefits or to vote, and to family reunion, depend on their immigration and nationality status and their length of residence in the UK. This raises the question whether migration policy in this respect promotes or hinders integration.

The pattern of rights and restrictions is complex and constantly evolving. This can make it difficult for employers, service providers, advice agencies and migrants to know exactly who is entitled to what. Where the balance lies in rights or restrictions reflects a trade-off between the benefits of allowing access (to promote integration or, for instance, to protect public health) versus the cost, financial or political. Access may also be denied for reasons of immigration control: to deter potential migrants who might be attracted by the availability of the service, or to encourage those not entitled to be in the UK to leave. Limited evidence is available on the consequences of these restrictions; or on the impact of the additional restrictions placed on irregular migrants in the 'hostile' or 'compliant' environment post 2010 (Migration Observatory, 2019). It is therefore difficult to assess whether these restrictions are proportional to the policy aims they are intended to achieve or counterproductive in limiting integration (Pobjoy and Spencer 2012).

## Conclusion

The nature and extent of migrants' engagement in society and in the labour market is a matter of legitimate interest to policy makers and the public. There is, nevertheless, no single national policy framework for integration, and no consensus on what the goals of such a policy might be. There is a lack of clarity on where responsibility lies in Whitehall, or between national and local government; differing definitions of integration used and some lack of consistency: for example between the expectation that migrants learn English but a shortage of opportunities to take language classes. Policy rhetoric and practice has placed greater emphasis on the migrant's obligation to integrate than on addressing barriers that they face. The devolved governments and some local authorities have identified integration overtly as within their role while others have relevant initiatives within other programmes. The lack of data on migrants (as opposed to ethnic minorities) contributes to a paucity of evidence on integration

outcomes, including the impact of interventions, to inform future policy and practice. Clarifying the goals of 'integration' policy in a way that reassures and motivates civil society, employers and local authority partners could in practice prove helpful in securing their active participation (Spencer 2011).

## References

- Ager & Strang 'Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework'; *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21:2 2008
- APPG on Social Integration 'Integration not Demonisation' London: House of Commons (2017) <https://socialintegrationappg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/09/Final-Report-into-the-integration-of-migrants.pdf>
- Blair, T. "The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values." Speech at 10 Downing Street, 8 December 2006.
- Casey, L. 'The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration' London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016
- Commission on Integration and Cohesion. "Our Shared Future." CIC, London, 2007.
- Gidley, B. and H. Jayaweera. "An Evidence Base on Migration and Integration in London." Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford, 2010.
- Griffiths and Morris 'An immigration strategy for the UK Six proposals to manage migration for economic success' IPPR: London 2017 <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/an-immigration-strategy-for-the-uk>
- Greater London Authority Website 'EU Londoners Hub' <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/eu-londoners-hub> Accessed 22nd Jan 2020
- LASSN Website 'Help in Leeds' <https://helpinleeds.com/credits> Accessed 22nd Jan 2020
- Home Office. Full and Equal Citizens — A Strategy for the Integration of Refugees into the United Kingdom. London: Home Office 2000
- Home Office. "Integration Matters." Home Office, London, 2005.
- Home Office 'Indicators of Integration' Home Office, London 2019
- Home Office. Life in the UK: A guide for new residents. Home Office. London. 2019

- COMPAS 'Inclusive Cities'  
<https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/inclusive-cities> 2017
- Kone, Z., Ruiz, I., and Vargas-Silva, C. Refugees and the UK Labour Market. Compas Report. 2019  
<https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2016/the-economic-outcomes-of-refugees-and-other-migrants-in-the-uk/>
- MHCLG 'Integrated Communities Green Paper'  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/696993/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf) 2018
- Northern Irish Executive 2013 Together: Building a United Community  
<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/together-building-united-community-strategy>
- Penninx, R., & Garcés-Masareñas, B. 'The concept of integration as an analytical tool and as a policy concept', in Garcés-Masareñas, B, & Penninx, R. *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe: Contexts, Levels and Actors*. Heidelberg: Springer Open, 2016 pp.11–29  
<http://www.springer.com/us/book/9783319216737>
- Pobjoy, J. & Spencer, S. 'Equality for All? The Relationship between Immigration Status and the Allocation of Rights in the United Kingdom'. *European Human Rights Law Review*, 2: 160 –175. 2012
- Rutter, J., L. Cooley, et al. "Moving Up Together: Promoting Equality and Integration among the UK's Diverse Communities." Institute for Public Policy Research, London, 2008.
- Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. "Community Cohesion and Migration." Tenth Report of Session 2007–2008, House of Commons, London, 2008.
- Rytter, M. 'Writing against Integration: Danish Imaginaries of Culture, Race and Belonging'. *Ethnos*. 2018  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1458745>
- Scottish Government 'New Scots: refugee and asylum seekers integration strategy 2018–2022'  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/> 2018
- Social Integration Commission 'Kingdom United? Thirteen Steps to tackle Social Segregation' 2015
- Spencer, S. *The Migration Debate*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2011.
- Spencer, S., M. Ruhs, B Anderson, and B Rogaly. "Migrants' Lives beyond the Workplace". Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2007.
- Spencer, S. & Charsley, K. 'Conceptualising integration: a framework for empirical research, taking marriage migration as a case study'. *Comparative Migration Studies* 2016 4(18).
- Welsh Refugee Council 'Migration Services in Wales'  
<https://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/migration-information> 2016



## The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



## COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

[www.compas.ox.ac.uk](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)

## About the author

Jacqui Broadhead

Director

Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity

COMPAS

[jacqueline.broadhead@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jacqueline.broadhead@compas.ox.ac.uk)

## Press contact

Rob McNeil

[robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:robert.mcneil@compas.ox.ac.uk)

+ 44 (0)1865 274568

+ 44 (0)7500 970081

