

# Immigrant integration in British society

At the end of 2014, annual net migration for the UK had risen to a current high of 318,000. Integration in British society has become an increasingly central part of the debate around immigration - raising questions about social cohesion, shared values and national identity.

Despite the prominence of this issue, there is no common understanding of how integration should be defined and measured. At which point can an immigrant be seen as 'integrated' into British society? What are the indicators showing how much people have adapted to life in the UK?

The ongoing Unity out of Diversity research project, based at the University of Manchester, is exploring how immigrant integration is perceived and understood in different sectors of society, including public policy, the academic sector and amongst the general public. It aims to gather research evidence and stimulate the public and policy debate as well as identify effective indicators of integration.

The researchers are analysing survey data and research literature for an overview of the integration of individuals and groups, interviewing policy and third-sector stakeholders, collecting general public input from focus groups, and examining how integration issues are presented in the media, political debates and policy documents.

Focus group feedback suggests that 'integration' is connected with ideas of community, mixing of different races and cultures, acceptance of diversity, but also conforming to British society.

Speaking English emerges as an important part of integration in all groups.

However, some participants felt that integration is something imposed on people and communities, and that it should not only be applied to immigrants but to all citizens. What people are expected to 'integrate into' also remains unclear.

**Ethnic majority and minority groups in the UK share a wide range of common values.**

## Key findings

- A comparison of integration outcomes shows that ethnic majority and minority groups in the UK share a wide range of common values, aspirations, attitudes and sense of responsibilities.
- Typical indicators of integration are not limited to one area, but measure integration across various areas - such as spatial, economic, political and cultural. Success in one area of integration does not necessarily imply success in other areas.
- Integration is mainly presented in the media as a one-way process, with the onus being on immigrants to adapt.
- In the public's view, integration is not only the responsibility of the immigrant, but also involves other societal actors (media, government, local authorities, schools and religious institutions).

## Key findings - continued

- How integration, immigration and diversity are discussed in the public arena has an important impact on people's attitudes.
- Religion has over time become more prominent in the debate about integration - since 2001 especially with regard to Muslim communities..
- Ethnicity appears to play an important role in the degree of integration, regardless of country of birth.
- Perceived barriers to integration include negotiating local customs; lack of English language skills; discrimination, racism, and prejudice; community segregation; and social class.
- Schools, sports, and community centres are seen as important channels to encourage integration.

## Policy relevance and implications

- Given the many-faceted nature of integration, policy initiatives need to explicitly define what is meant by integration, which specific area is targeted, and how success will be measured.
- Local authorities and national government play a crucial role in creating spaces and opportunities for communities to come together. These could be represented by investing resources in community centres but also recreational activities (eg street festivals, neighbourhood activities) involving local communities and organisations.
- English language skills are crucial to integration. Funding should be earmarked to ensure local authorities provide language training for immigrants.
- There is a need for initiatives that actively counter prejudice and discrimination – for instance information campaigns delivered through schools and local communities.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Unity out of Diversity is a three-year research project funded by the ESRC's Future Research Leaders scheme, based at the University of Manchester and led by Dr Laurence Lessard-Phillips. The research aims to explore the nature and characteristics of immigrant integration and how it is perceived in the public policy sector, the academic community and among the general public.

Web: <http://projects.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/unity-out-of-diversity>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Dr Laurence Lessard-Phillips,  
University of Manchester  
Email: [laurence.lessard-phillips@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:laurence.lessard-phillips@manchester.ac.uk)

Dr Silvia Galandini,  
University of Manchester  
Email: [silvia.galandini@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:silvia.galandini@manchester.ac.uk)

The Economic and Social Research Council is the UK's leading agency for research funding and training in economic and social sciences.

Web: [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)  
ESRC communications team:  
[comms@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:comms@esrc.ac.uk)

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