

The reception and integration of new migrant communities

Executive summary

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About the research team

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Executive summary

The scale and nature of recent immigration has changed the map of diversity in Britain. Areas where immigrants have traditionally settled have become more diverse than ever, while areas that had previously not known much immigration have received relatively large numbers of newcomers.

The increasing diversity of backgrounds and experiences among Britain's population has raised urgent questions about how best to encourage integration, and has made clear the importance of using reliable information about people's needs as a basis for developing effective policies. The Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) tripartite approach to integration, focusing on equality of opportunity, universal participation and interaction between people from different ethnic and racial groups, provides a framework for taking up these challenges.

This research looks at the reception and integration of new migrant communities across ten locations in the UK, paying particular attention to the tensions arising from their arrival and settlement, key lessons from the response of public authorities, and how they use their responsibility under the race equality duty in this response.

The findings of this report point to a number of worrying trends influencing both the reception of new migrants across different parts of the UK and the capacity of local authorities to promote integration amid increasing diversity. Misperceptions and misinformation lie at the heart of how new migrants are received, with the media playing a key role in filling what is often a vacuum of accurate information on the dynamics of social change at the local level. These misperceptions are largely forged along the fault lines of race, ethnicity and religion, with white migrants in England reporting a broadly more positive reception than non-white migrants. The reception of new migrants is also influenced by local labour markets, local housing pressures, local and regional demographics, and political leadership on migration.

While strong dynamics of race, religion and ethnicity influence the reception of new migrants, local and public authorities do not fully understand the relevance of race relations to the integration of new migrant communities. In other words, refugees, asylum seekers and white migrants are not considered by many public authorities to fall within the remit of 'race relations'. This is largely because of a widely-held view among public authorities that 'race relations' involves established white communities and established ethnic minority communities, but not new European immigrants. The findings of our research show that this simplistic 'black and white' perspective on race relations is out of step with the UK's new diversity and the tensions arising from it that tend to divide communities in increasingly complex ways.

The capacity of public authorities to integrate new migrants is further limited by the diversity and pace of new migration. Public authorities are not well-informed about the scale and nature of new migration flows which limits their response to one which is largely reactive and driven by frontline pressures.

Despite these challenges, the findings of this report highlight three positive lessons for advancing integration policy. The first is that there exists a wide discrepancy between the actual impacts of new migrant communities, as reported by local authorities and public authorities in England and Scotland, and their perceived impacts, as reported by local communities and the media. This discrepancy reveals that the current focus on the 'burden' of new migrants in national and media discourse is misplaced and misjudged.

More importantly, this focus is overshadowing a more productive discussion that could be taking place among policymakers on how better to support and improve local capacity to integrate new migrants.

The second is that good practice on integrating new migrants is being forged in some localities and does offer wider lessons for securing better integration for new migrant communities. In particular, these good practices were found to be important and necessary first steps in promoting the greater interaction and participation of new migrants by advancing proactive measures to help newcomers settle into a local community. The good practice evidenced in this report is used to set out a basic framework of guidance on what works well and why. This guidance is not definitive as the influence of local factors makes it impossible to prescribe a 'one size fits all' approach to the integration of newcomers. However, three key characteristics underpinned all the evidence of good practice that emerged during the course of this research and so constitute the basis of the guidance outlined in this report:

- strategic partnerships between public authorities and other agencies;
- effective communication with local communities; and
- proactive measures to improve the local evidence base on new migrants in order to better inform integration policy.

The third is that Scotland seems to possess several characteristics that facilitate the reception and integration of new migrants that differ to those observed in England: a different scale of migration; a stronger sense of national identity; strong political leadership on migration; and more balanced media coverage. Many of these are 'natural' advantages determined by socio-demographic factors, but some are not - most notably the political leadership of the Scottish Executive in promoting a positive message on migration. However, these advantages are not a license for complacency and there are indications that a positive reception is not a uniform trend across all parts of Scotland. As such, the Scottish Executive should consider these strengths as a useful foundation upon which to formulate an integration strategy for new migrant communities - one that builds on Scotland's relatively strong predisposition to receive newcomers and reflects the growing diversity of Scotland's new migrant population.

Based on these findings, this report makes a number of recommendations:

- Successful integration of new migrants needs to be part of a broader process of integration for all in society, focusing on interaction, participation and equality.
- Central government needs to reassess current funding formulae for local authorities to assist those areas experiencing genuine pressures as a result of rapid population change.
- Central government need to provide clear and consistent political leadership on migration. Drawing on the example given by the Scottish Executive, they need to provide strong statements on the positive socio-economic benefits of migration as a foundation from which to improve the reception and advance the integration of new migrants.
- The Scottish Executive should formulate an integration strategy for new migrants, in the same proactive way that it has addressed refugee integration, to build on its successes to date and reflect Scotland's growing diversity.

- Public authorities need to fulfil their obligations under the Race Relations Act (RRA). This includes assessing how their policies affect race relations in order to maximise opportunities for interaction and participation. To this end, public authorities should familiarise themselves with the CRE's Promoting Good Race Relations: A guide for public authorities (CRE 2005) and the good practice outlined in it.
- The CRE should issue specific guidance on the relevance to new migrant communities of promoting good race relations, in order to clarify public sector responsibilities to these groups.
- Public authorities need to become more transparent in their decision-making procedures, particularly in relation to housing and grants, in order to eliminate misperceptions of preferential treatment for some communities.
- Public authorities and local agencies should proactively work to better inform local communities about the impacts of new migrants and work more closely with the local media to dispel myths and ensure more balanced coverage.
- Public authorities should work closely with employers, trades unions and others to plan for services better; improve the evidence base at a local level; share best practice and resources; and establish who is best placed to support and facilitate integration.
- Central government and local authorities should work together to improve the evidence base and data on new migrant communities. Reliance on Census data alone is inadequate to capture rapid population change.
- The national press and broadcast media should follow clause 1 (accuracy) of the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice and adhere to the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct.

The report draws two key conclusions for the integration of new migrant communities. First, the statutory duty under the RRA to promote good race relations (referred to as the race equality duty) is a potentially useful tool for public authorities to secure better integration of new migrants. Useful and thorough guidance issued by the CRE on promoting good race relations already exists but this guidance is not consulted because new migrants are not commonly considered 'racial groups' among public authorities. In order for public authorities to realise fully the benefits of proactively meeting the race equality duty it will be necessary for the CRE to provide a stronger articulation and understanding of 'good race relations' as one which encompasses new migrant communities, both white and non-white, and in doing so captures the increasing diversity among the UK's 'minority' population. The good practice on integrating new migrants that we highlight in this report offers some practical guidance to complement this broader understanding of 'good race relations'.

Second, while valuable guidance from the CRE and central support from government is critical for supporting the conditions within which public authorities can best meet the challenges of increasing diversity, the current pace and nature of migration increasingly renders the successful integration of new migrants a local project. As such, the report concludes that the focus of policymakers should be on how to build and harness local capacity to integrate new migrant communities.