

# INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE: MAINSTREAMING VS LOCALISM

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## Aim

We explore the views of policy stakeholders about mainstreaming and localism as two crucial and interplaying issues for the practical implementation of integration.

## The context (in brief)

There is no integration policy per se in the UK. There are, however, policies directed at facilitating the integration of refugees, which include access to various institutions and services. Lately these have been scaled down following austerity measures. There are also policies linked to settlement and acquisition of citizenship that emphasise language acquisition and knowledge of British culture.<sup>1</sup> In general, and more recently, most policies addressing issues (directly or indirectly) linked to integration have tended to be subject to *mainstreaming*. They have targeted the general population rather than specific groups. Policies more intrinsically linked to integration have also been devolved to the constituent countries and local authorities, seen as push towards *localism*. This has often been done in conjunction with steering and coordination from the central government.<sup>2</sup> Despite this general trend, there has been some targeting within that mainstreaming (especially at the local level). Overall welfare policies have also tended to affect migrant populations, as some generally tend to be part of the disadvantaged groups targeted by many welfare measures.<sup>3</sup>

## The data

Twenty-four semi-structured interviews conducted with policy stakeholders at the national (UK/England/Scotland) and local (Manchester/Glasgow) levels undertaken between January and September 2015. The respondents, recruited on the basis of their specific knowledge and expertise in issues related to integration, ethnic and immigrant minorities, include local policy makers and national and local representative of charities, community organisations, and think tanks. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed in Nvivo 10 following a thematic analysis approach.

## Mainstreaming or targeting?

The debate on mainstreaming is polarised and complex.

On the one hand, migrants appear to suffer from specific disadvantages and face different challenges compared not only to the majority mainstream but also settled ethnic minority groups. Integration would therefore benefit from shifting away from mainstreaming and paying more specific attention to migrant groups.

Nonetheless, other aspects seem to play an important role in supporting the idea and practice of mainstreaming:

- Some strategies address challenges that are widespread (e.g. socio-economic disparities and social exclusion) and need to be tackled;
- Putting the onus of integration solely on migrants when many view it as relating to the whole society.

## Integration happens locally, however...

There was overall agreement that local authorities do and should play a prominent role, as they directly deal with the impact of immigration and integration. Thus, localism is a good channel to operate through and devise appropriate and effective measures, with a focus on even more localised strategies through communities and other groups.

Despite this generally strong support for a 'bottom-up' (rather than 'top-down') approach, the contribution and involvement of national governments (both UK and Scottish) was still described as crucial even in a policy framework that would preferably focus on localism.

This was linked to:

- 1 The fact that national policy frameworks determine the level of financial support to local authorities in the areas of integration that are defined as relevant. Lack of financial support is an important challenge to address and pursue integration.
- 2 The possibility to provide practical and political guidance. This involves facilitating the identification of benchmarks (to measure outcomes); the exchange of good practices (i.e. action that have produced successful results locally); and the identification and monitoring of accountability and responsibility.

## The local impact of non-devolved policy areas

Decisions made by the UK national government in non-devolved policy areas were deemed to pose serious challenges to localism and the effective devolution of powers (especially, but not exclusively, in the case of Scotland).

These include:

- 1 Immigration policies (in terms of citizenship acquisition, family reunification, access to services, etc.)
- 2 Asylum seeker dispersal policies
- 3 'Prevent' strategy

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Saggat, S., & Somerville, W., (2012) *Building a British Model of Integration in an Era of Immigration: Policy Lessons for Government*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.
- <sup>2</sup> Spencer, S., (2011) *Policy primer: integration*. Oxford: Migration Observatory.
- <sup>3</sup> Hepburn, E., (2015) *Immigrant Integration and Policy Divergence in Scotland since Devolution*. *Political Studies Association 65th Annual Conference, University of Sheffield, 30 March – 1 April 2015*.
- <sup>4</sup> Ali, S., & Gidley, B., (2014) *Advancing Outcomes for All Minorities: Experiences of Mainstreaming Immigrant Integration Policy in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute Europe.
- <sup>5</sup> Spencer, S., (2011) *Policy primer: integration*. Oxford: Migration Observatory.