



Global  
Exchange  
on Migration & Diversity



# Inclusive Cities COVID-19 Research and Policy Briefings Connecting Communities

Issue #3

November 2020

Jacqui Broadhead  
Denis Kierans  
Lucy Mort

COMPAS



# Inclusive Cities COVID-19 Research and Policy Briefings

**Connecting Communities: Inclusive Cities COVID-19 response**

**Issue #3: November 2020**

---

## Introduction

Inclusive Cities is a knowledge exchange programme working with 12 UK cities on their approach to integration and inclusion at the local level, led by the Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity at the University of Oxford.

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the UK's leading progressive think tank. Our policy research sets out the ways in which the UK can build a stronger, fairer economy and society. A prominent theme of IPPR's work on migration looks at the local impacts of migration and at how we can shape welcoming communities through economic security and investment in integration. IPPR recently reported on a major two-year research project, [Communities up Close](#), which focused on experiences of neighbourhood change and migration in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

As part of its response to COVID-19 and following consultation with the participating cities, the Inclusive Cities programme has developed a series of research and policy briefings illuminating some of the main challenges for local areas as part of their response to the COVID-19 epidemic and the link to inclusion and integration.

The work builds on [the Inclusive Cities Framework](#), which sets out a roadmap for local authorities in their planning on integration and inclusion.

The Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity has developed this briefing in partnership with the [Institute for Public Policy Research](#) (IPPR).

This briefing looks at:

- A brief recap of the existing research base on community contact
- How the COVID-19 pandemic has changed work on connecting communities
- Examples of good practice from UK cities
- Policy implications of these shifts

## How does work on connecting communities impact upon inclusion and integration?

Work on promoting community contact and connection is at the heart of practice on integration and inclusion and there is a strong research base on the role of community contact on social cohesion. The Inclusive Cities Framework sets out a core thematic area:

### **CONNECTING COMMUNITIES**

- a. Pro-actively supporting activities and initiatives which bring newcomers and longer standing communities together
- b. Working to build trust within and between communities and public agencies, including the police

The Framework sets out what good would look like in this area stating that, 'the inclusive city positively encourages and promotes opportunities and initiatives which bring newcomer and receiving communities together and works to facilitate spaces in which any divides between communities can be bridged. The city supports workplaces, schools, community settings and local businesses to provide everyday opportunities for communities to mix and meet – including mentoring opportunities, creative community language learning opportunities and schools-based initiatives. The city supports grass roots initiatives to organise communities and bring them together. It may provide funding (or support to find funding) for civil society organisations that promote these aims. The city works to build trust within and between communities, including with law

enforcement, and organises outreach activities to ensure that people feel safe within the city.'

## What is the research and policy base on connecting communities?

There is a long-standing research base on the importance of face-to-face contact in reducing inter-group hostility, though its efficacy is dependent on certain pre-conditions, including equal status among participants, shared goals and institutional support (Allport 1954, Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, Hewstone and Swart 2011). Evidence suggests that direct contact reduces inter-group anxiety and encourages positive processes such as greater empathy and perspective taking. There is also evidence that indirect contact – extended, or even imagined contact, can reduce inter-group bias.

The challenge comes in translating this theory into approaches for societal change, given the difficulty of meeting the pre-conditions for success – in particular that of equal status between groups, in an unequal society.

There is a growing policy and research evidence on the importance of 'meaningful' contact. The Greater London Authority's 'All of Us' (2018) social integration strategy sets out the importance of quality contact, stating that traditional approaches 'can overlook the nature of social contact between people, emphasising the quantity rather than the quality of interactions. A truly socially integrated society is not just about interactions. It is about people building meaningful relationships, whether as friends, colleagues or fellow citizens ... The level of equality and the nature of the relationships people experience make a difference to their interactions'.

'Meaningful social contact' is distinct from '*fleeting, unintended encounters*, where diverse people rub along together as a consequence of accidental proximity,' (Mayblin et al. [2015]). This is contact, which breaks down prejudices and translates beyond the moment to produce a more general respect for others. There is a growing interest in the nature of contact. This research considers the role that 'contact zones' play – the everyday

spaces that facilitate contact. This has most commonly been applied to classrooms and workplaces, but also applies to other public spaces including community spaces, libraries and public transport.

The researchers identify three different types of contact: 'contact to bridge across difference; contact predicated on facilitating shared or common interests; and banal everyday social contact.'

The first two types of contact echo research literature on social capital focused on 'bridging' and 'bonding' (Putnam 2000). Bonding is associated with closed networks (e.g. organisations that mainly encompass people with the same background), whereas bridging refers to crosscutting or overlapping networks (e.g. associations that bring people into contact with people from a cross-section of society.)

Salway et al (2020) identify three main types of interventions, which have been implemented to improve social interaction (with a focus on social isolation and loneliness, specifically among migrant communities and ethnic minorities). These are defined as:

- Befriending programmes - identified as 'provision of a one-to-one relationship of trust that provides tailored emotional support and companionship.'
- Shared-identity social support group interventions (bonding) – defined as 'providing a safe, authentic, reciprocal social space where people who recognise some kind of shared identity engage with meaning and enjoyment.
- Inter-cultural encounters, which aim to 'bring people who do not normally interact together in meaningful contact across ethnic/ cultural/religious difference.'

The review found that there was consistent (qualitative) evidence that befriending programmes reduced loneliness but limited evidence that these approaches were effective in creating wider positive ties. Similarly, the bonding groups were found to provide a safe social space for interaction. Few studies provided data on outcomes on the efficacy of intercultural encounters though there is some evidence of increased within

group and out group ties, as well as broader ambitions to produce wider attitudinal shifts (though with limited evidence on the effects of this).

Community contact is distinctive from the integration and inclusion of newcomers, but is generally seen to be a central part of integration policy and outcomes.

IPPR and Migration Yorkshire recently completed a study of migration and integration in Yorkshire and Humber, where they spoke to over 300 people about their experiences of neighbourhoods that have seen increased migration in recent years. Conducted across ten sites, four of the sites were located in cities. Obviously, experiences are distinctive to each city and region and so what applies in one area does not necessarily apply everywhere – however, there may be some common lessons which can be drawn out.

Social contact between new migrant communities and settled/host communities was a key area of discussion for participants, with the majority seeing the benefits of having opportunities to meet and build relationships with new migrants. Neighbourliness and friendliness were valued (i.e. the “banal” everyday social contact), but participants also recognised that adequate resources and physical spaces were necessary for people to meet and connect regularly and in a meaningful way.

This finding was replicated in a review (Salway et al 2020) which attempts to identify system conditions which increase or decrease social isolation and loneliness specifically amongst migrant and ethnic minority communities. The review finds both societal and independent factors. Individual factors include ill health and disability, lack of confidence and a loss of family ties. However, wider societal factors were also found to be at play. Feeling unwelcome limited interaction and reduced belonging, whilst ‘neighbourliness’, defined by the researchers as ‘the positive, relatively fleeting, encounters between people in public spaces’ were identified as ‘contributing to a feeling of being ‘at home’’. Significantly, the researchers found that place - the presence, or absence, of spaces and places for positive social encounters and connections - were highlighted as important. Specifically in relation to newcomers, the review finds that, ‘new migrants can be

disappointed by a lack of hoped for close relationships with non-migrant established residents.'

Participants in the Communities up Close programme also discussed the key challenges to building and maintaining community connections across diverse communities. These included:

- The retrenchment of local government resources was linked to a lack of physical community spaces in which people could meet, and many working with local communities noted a lack of central government investment in integration. Some proposed that given funding constraints, integration efforts had become an 'additional', rather than core, function of local government.
- Strained economic conditions that meant incomes were low and jobs were insecure. Long working hours, low pay and irregular work have the effect of constraining the ability of many to participate in activities, including civic action, that connect communities.
- Limited opportunities for settled communities to meet with new migrants.

Participants saw that integration, specifically connection between communities, worked well in schools and workplaces. Additionally, participants cited a number of initiatives that were developed in partnership between local authorities and voluntary and community sector groups. Areas with longer histories of migration and with greater resources (be that economic or institutional knowledge), generally facilitated more events, activities and initiatives that sought to bring diverse communities together. It was felt important by participants that initiatives that seek to facilitate greater social contact should be designed in consultation with local residents and communities, rather than being a top-down effort that could be seen to be intervening too heavily or artificially.

## What has been the impact of COVID-19 on social connection and integration?

### Community contact

COVID-19 poses a number of specific and distinctive challenges for work on social connection. Zaki (2020) warns that it is a mistake to confuse (vitaly important) physical distancing with social distancing, instead calling for an approach of 'distant socialising'. This is to recognise the profoundly social nature of human beings and the potentially corrosive impact of loneliness and isolation.

One obvious immediate change in behaviour has been the immediate increase in the use of technology as a means of socialising. Whilst this can bring huge benefits in terms of keeping people connected, it can illuminate some fault lines. Some newcomer groups, such as those used to keeping in touch over long distances, might find they have unexpected skills and assets. However, it is also clear that digital skills gaps and access gaps may limit access and use.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, these platforms function primarily as closed groups, on privately owned platforms – we generally use them to connect with those that we already know and are familiar with (bonding), and so they are less useful in bridging outwards towards others in the community. This makes it more difficult to replicate the shared spaces of the public realm in which contact which 'bridges' between social groups, most often occurs.

Finally, COVID-19 has undoubtedly limited and reduced the role of physical contact zones in the public realm. Where schools and workplaces have been identified as the places where contact works best, this may be limited by the reductions in use of these spaces or the restrictions, which limit social contact.

---

<sup>1</sup> See briefing on [access to information](#) for more information on this area



## Community Action and infrastructure

In contrast to these limitations, there are several community level actions being facilitated and established as a response to the pandemic – both virtually and in communities and through the development of mutual aid groups. Research by New Local (Tiratelli and Kaye 2020) set out several key points in relation to these groups, namely:

1. Mutual Aid groups have been crucial to our society's COVID-19 response.
2. Mutual Aid groups illustrate the wider potential of community power and represent a case study in the potential of community-led movements focussed on reciprocity, offering an alternative to traditional public service relationships.
3. Mutual Aid groups reveal the importance of the attitude of local government. Local government, which has significant 'make-or-break' power over community initiatives, and the extent to which they succeed.
4. Where social capital is more developed and working age people have more time, Mutual Aid Groups function with more ease, which has profound implications in terms of inequality.
5. Central government has struggled to connect with Mutual Aid groups – locally specific support is key.

The report sets out a number of recommendations, in particular focussed on two core areas – the facilitative role of the local authority and the potential role for private enterprise, in particular that employers can play in supporting community action, which mirrors many findings of the Communities up Close research. One core finding of the report is the 'make or break' role of local authorities in this work – which areas with very little support from the local authority found it difficult to sustain, or felt ignored. However, it was also noted that overly interventionist approaches from local authorities or unrealistic expectations in relation to formal processes for these often new and loosely formed groups, could also impede the development of these groups. A facilitative role for local authorities – providing support, but being non-extractive and allowing community groups sufficient freedom to mobilise swiftly was advocated as the most effective

approach. This was strongly reiterated by city participants in a webinar on the topic (Oct 2020.) The group also noted the amount of community engagement, which had emerged, on a small and grassroots scale from some of the most deprived areas of the respective cities.

Research by the Belong network and the University of Kent (Abrams et al 2020) emphasised the positive consequences for those who have volunteered, stating that, 'people who had volunteered in the context of the pandemic reported higher trust in all people to follow the guidelines, higher trust in the government, higher compassion for people living in their local area, and stronger connections with their family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, as compared to people who had not volunteered. This shows that volunteers have experienced more positive behavioural and emotional engagement with other people around them. They also feel more connected to their local area.'

On the flip side, the point raised in relation to inequality, is also mirrored by the British Academy (Morgan Jones et al 2020) who highlight that 'these positive experiences of social cohesion tend to be concentrated at the very local level and are unevenly distributed...the pandemic is also increasing fragmentation and exacerbating inequalities, exposing how we are not actually 'all in it together'. Voluntary mutual aid and solidarity are significantly easier for groups with resources, including money, the ability to work from home, green space, and time not required for work or caring responsibilities. In many ways, the 'all in it together' discourse actually legitimises very unequal practices.' This has particularly profound consequences both for place-based work in terms of geographic inequalities, but also in relation to integration and inclusion, given the disparities both between and within newcomer and longer standing resident communities.

Whilst the focus on mutual aid has reflected the rise of specific groups as a response to the pandemic, it is also true that other approaches such as community development or Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches may support other forms of community outreach – in particular for those communities less likely to volunteer, or in those areas which may struggle to sustain these approaches.

## Public opinion

Public opinion research on immigration has been extensive, with attitudes shown to be complex, nuanced and shifting in salience over time.

Research by the Policy Institute at King's College London and British Future found that following the COVID-19 outbreak there has been a 'subtle warming' in attitudes towards immigration – though this has been part of a longer trend, with attitudes towards migration improving since before 2016. Researchers found that since the EU referendum, the idea that immigration is a positive force culturally and economically – that makes the country 'a better place to live' - has become a majority view. The researchers emphasise that this has been a small shift, with the majority of the public remaining 'balancers' in their views of migration – that is, recognising both the pressures and gains of migration to the UK and their local community (Hewlett et al., 2020).

Opinions on integration specifically are slightly harder to gauge, and public opinion surveys focus on it less than on attitudes towards immigration, but a survey conducted by The Challenge (2019) found that there are a number of lines along which the British public is persistently divided. They found that most people associate and spend time with people who are like them – in terms of age, class, ethnicity and education – most of the time. Particular 'cold-spots' of integration are highlighted, with white Britons, those in lower socio-economic grades and those aged 55 and over less likely to spend time with people from a different background to themselves. The authors find that there is a correlation between diversity of social connections and empathy towards others that are different from oneself; therefore, they suggest that greater attention to social integration is imperative in areas where there is not much opportunity to mix with different groups.

The significance of age for interaction and connection between people of different backgrounds, highlighted by The Challenge report, was also a theme evident in the Communities up Close research, with focus group participants across all age groups

highlighting how there might be higher levels of reluctance or hesitance towards new migrants among the older generation in a neighbourhood.

Public opinion research on the pandemic and community connections has highlighted a number of pertinent issues for integration and inclusion, such as: shifting views of migrants in light of the 'key/essential worker' narrative, differences in views of the Black Lives Matters movement, witnessing and experiencing racism related to COVID-19, and perceptions of the far-right exploitation of COVID-19.

Polling from Hope Not Hate, earlier on in the year, pointed to the prospect of an increased sense of community connection and solidarity in communities across the UK (Carter, 2020a). They also found that public support for migrants – including those working in low-paid jobs – has seen an uptick in recent months (Carter, 2020b), but they caution that the economic effects of the pandemic could 'exploit discontent and anger' in the coming months. In slight contrast – and highlighting the ambivalence of polling research on this topic – a survey conducted by Migration Yorkshire (2020) as part of the Communities up Close research found that 55 per cent of 2,049 Yorkshire residents polled neither agreed nor disagreed that since the COVID-19 outbreak they valued migrants in their local community more highly than before. Only 16 per cent agreed, while 23 per cent disagreed.

Further research from Hope Not Hate (Carter, 2020c) polled 1,001 people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities on a number of social issues, including the pandemic, the Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement, racism and intercommunity relations. The report highlights that 2020 has been a year in which race relations and racism have come to the fore, largely as a result of the BLM movement and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on ethnic minority groups. Of particular significance to this briefing are that:

- Though not necessarily related to the pandemic, half of those polled had witnessed or experienced racist comments being made in public, on social media and in the

press, or had witnessed or experienced racial abuse in their day-to-day life in the last year. Racist violence had been witnessed by 27% and experienced by 17% of those polled. Young people predominantly reported experience of racist comments, threats and violence.

- 65% of respondents agreed that COVID-19 is 'exposing great inequality in British society', compared to 56% of respondents in a nationally representative poll (p.38).
- The report highlights that 65% of Chinese respondents listed COVID-19 in the issues most important to them, compared to 47% of respondents overall. The authors suggest that this is linked to the impact of anti-Chinese sentiment following reporting of the COVID-19 outbreak in China.
- The far right was seen as a significant threat for around half of respondents. This aligns with research that found that far-right posts on social media have increasingly linked COVID-19 with immigration, anti-Muslim tropes, and anti-Asian tropes (ISD and BBC Click, 2020).
- Asked how community relations could be improved, some of the most popular answers included stronger action on hate crime (35%), increasing anti-racist education in schools (34%), cracking down on extremists in all communities (25%), community initiatives that work to bring people from different backgrounds together (22%) and increasing community resources such as youth clubs, sports facilities and community centres (21%). This is in contrast to nationally representative research in which people framed solutions around 'assimilationist approaches to integration' (p.21).

Public opinion research highlights a mixed picture in relation to immigration and integration, one that is evolving at the same time as the pandemic and resulting economic and social context. COVID-19 has been shown, particularly earlier on in the outbreak, to have the potential to increase positivity towards migrants working in essential services and to increase people's sense of connection at the local level. However, pre- and post-COVID-19 research highlights that there is the potential for societal divisions to be

heightened too. The research draws our attention to groups for whom social connection is the least likely, and also to those for whom a populist backlash may be most harmful – those from ethnic minority groups (including migrants).

## **Managing community tensions**

As indicated in the above section on public opinion, in the context of integration and social contact, the issue of how to manage community tensions also comes to the fore. Hope Not Hate research has shown that, pre- COVID-19, tensions have been particularly high and often directed towards Muslim communities, ethnic minority communities, and certain migrant groups. This chimes with the findings of the Communities up Close research, which found pockets of racism and xenophobia, particularly directed toward Muslim groups and some Central and Eastern European newcomers.

The Communities up Close research found that community tensions were also evident along a number of other lines, such as:

- Related to age and generational differences, with some residents airing concerns about younger people's involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Related to local grievances, for instance referring to overcrowding and waste in the local area.
- Connected with the economic and social conditions of a place and the people within it, as well as the level of recent migration to the area. Where poverty and unemployment were high or where services may be facing resourcing challenges, there was a heightened tendency for some to direct blame towards new migrants.

Recent events have been reported in the media as potentially inflaming tensions, for instance, the BLM movement and associated protests. Researchers from Hope Not Hate (Carter, 2020d) and British Future (Rutter, 2020) found that while there is broad support for the BLM movement in the main, subsequent demonstrations that have involved the toppling or graffitiing of statues can be viewed as divisive, with the potential for far-right groups to capitalise on them to stoke tensions (British Future, 2020). Hope Not Hate

caution however that the divisions on this issue are more reflective of people's views on protest as opposed to representing people's ideological views on racism and anti-racism (Carter, 2020d).

The British Future (Rutter, 2020) report also highlights the complex role that social media has had during the pandemic and resulting social distancing requirements. They find that as well as keeping people in touch, 'the same social media also provided a platform for hatred, prejudice and damaging conspiracy theories' (p.26). Research on behalf of the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group finds that a consequence of COVID-19 has been the proliferation of Islamophobic hate language on social media. Analysis of a range of social media and online platforms found that Muslim communities have been portrayed as 'super-spreaders', and that this narrative was particularly heightened around the Ramadan period. While this has not translated into an increase in hate crime towards Muslim communities, likely due to social distancing measures, the authors fear that the incubation of hate and prejudice in online forums could translate into hate crime when measures are lifted (Awan and Khan-Williams, 2020).

A central tenet of much work on integration has been that meaningful social contact and mixing between people from different backgrounds is crucial for building mutual understanding, trust and tolerance and reducing prejudice (Laurence, 2017). Researching the effects of a national youth engagement programme, Laurence (2019) found that organised social participation in a group, club or activity can have a notable positive impact on young people's view towards those from a different background, and in turn on 'interethnic cohesion'. As highlighted above, the type of contact matters – instrumental or superficial opportunities for mixing are not found to be sufficient in this case. In particularly diverse areas, the opportunities for positive contact increase – but so too does the opportunity for negative contact – with the potential for attitudes to become polarised. Laurence (2017) finds that younger people may be more susceptible to positive change as a result of diverse social mixing, where older adults may have less capacity to change as views 'ossify and become harder to shift.' To a certain extent, this was

observed in the Communities up Close research too – with some participants (though a minority), often older residents, expressing the view that the issue of change and migration in their local area had ‘gone beyond’ integration efforts, with migration to the area seen primarily as a threat.

Managing community tensions such as those outlined above may require a ‘pre-contact’ solution that seeks to overcome the initial barriers that inform anxieties and negative views of those from a different background. Anti-rumour strategies, developed in Barcelona and applied across Europe, seek to proactively tackle fake news and misinformation. Focusing on the frame of ‘rumours’ and ‘fake news’, the conversation shifts away from explicitly accusing individuals or groups of prejudice, which could cause some to become defensive, and rather raises awareness of underlying stereotypes. Importantly, it is recognised that this approach does not simply negate or counter false information, but seeks to promote alternative, positive narratives about community relations that seek to influence those with ambivalent views (de Torres Barderi, 2018). Challenging negative views and attitudes in the first instance can then be built upon with opportunities for social mixing that reinforce positive views and attitudes (Laurence, 2017).

## How have local areas responded to these shifts?

The following examples include both specific COVID-19 response work and other relevant approaches.

### Strategic recovery planning

- [Bristol](#) has set out its priorities for recovery planning, through its One City programme following a city gathering of more than 300 business, public and voluntary sector leaders. Four new priorities were agreed including a new Mayoral Commission on Domestic Abuse, a new One City Culture Board and to create a One City Children’s Board. The final priority is to build a remembrance project focusing on loss and hope. This project will record and commemorate the loss felt



by many in the city while looking forward with hope to the future. This will involve acknowledging the loss and pain many within the city are feeling right now. This might include loss of loved ones, lost opportunities, loss of life events and or memories with those close to us. This runs in tandem to the development of an [economic recovery plan](#), which also focusses on the impact of the pandemic on place making.

- The **Greater London Authority** has established a recovery Community Conversation Toolkit, which supports partners to take part in shaping the recovery process by hosting a [community conversation](#), which aims to ensure that all Londoners have the opportunity to shape the future of London. This sits in parallel with the [London Recovery Board](#), bringing together London's leaders from City Hall, Local Authorities, business, the community, education sectors and essential services to help shape the future of the capital. In addition to the community conversations, there will be research, stakeholder engagement and public engagement taking place through [Talk London](#), an online community where Londoners can have their say on big issues, including recovery.

### **Changes to the public realm as a way of facilitating social contact**

- The [Connected Places Catapult](#) is setting out a number of ways in which cities across the UK can rethink how the public realm is used in response to the pandemic, focussed over three timescales:
  - *Right now* – the current situation and impact on public spaces during lockdown. How can technology help correct the unequal access to natural spaces? How are public spaces being reconfigured to manage flows of people while minimising contact.
  - *What next?* – the transitional restart for issues relating to public spaces in the post-lockdown, pre-vaccine period. How can the reallocation of public spaces help sustain businesses and neighbourhoods while distancing needs to be maintained? Can we introduce more flexibility into the planning system to help with this?

- *Beyond recovery* – a look further into the future of public spaces. What does the migration to online business models mean for public realm? How can we sustain and scale some of the changes made as a result of the crisis?

## Mutual aid, community infrastructure and community development work

- [Leeds Community Volunteers programme](#) Over 8,000 Leeds residents registered as Community Care Volunteers in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Voluntary Action Leeds and Leeds City Council established the programme, which matches volunteers with vulnerable people in need of help with a range of tasks - from shopping deliveries to dog walking. To make this possible, a network of 27 local third sector organisations were established known as 'Community Hubs'. These organisations are delivering the volunteer programme locally, across all 33 wards in Leeds.
- The **Cares Family** pivoted their programme of intergenerational befriending and social clubs for older people online at the beginning of the pandemic and reflect on the learning of this rapid change. They have developed a series of tools to help communities to get the most out of remote programmes. This includes practical guidance on virtual social clubs on [supporting neighbours in using zoom](#), [tips and guidelines](#) and [a guide for participants](#). Whilst this switch online has been undoubtedly challenging, across The Cares Family, 612 older and younger people shared in 379 virtual social clubs, a total of 3,383 times, from March to August 2020. The project has also developed 'phone a friend' to connect people one-to-one over the phone while they cannot meet in person and has developed a [volunteer handbook](#) to support this programme.
- [Near Neighbours](#), a programme that works across England, and which aims to bring people living in ethnically and religiously diverse areas together across difference, has had to adapt since the outbreak of COVID-19. They are exploring new ways of working that enable people to be relationally close while staying physically distant, as well as transforming their programmes to respond to the

immediate crises of the pandemic. Organisers have set up virtual coffee mornings, exercise and relaxation classes, developed phone-based support networks and 'phone chains' to combat loneliness and isolation among those who may otherwise be digitally excluded, and delivered photography and cookery courses/exchanges that maintain connection among diverse groups. Moreover, they have organised for the translation of important public health messages, and shared information in person about lockdown rules. Where there have been tensions and miscommunication between public sector bodies and communities, they have challenged fake news, mediated to rebuild trust, mitigate tensions and ensure the health of diverse communities. Near Neighbours have supported and facilitated rapid response initiatives to prepare and deliver food to vulnerable groups – this has the dual benefit of bringing people together in a safe way to work towards a common goal, within the confines of lockdown restrictions. In Luton, the Near Neighbours hub coordinated a Black Lives Matter event in partnership with young people. Working with the police, council and local organisations, they ensured that 1400 young people could come together safely and peacefully and have their calls for racial justice heard.

### **Community grant schemes and other funding opportunities**

- [Brighton and Hove](#) has established a youth led grants programme. The programme offers funding for positive activities for young people, for a number of aims including supporting with recovery from the impact of COVID-19. Young people came up with the criteria that the projects need to meet and will also lead on deciding how the funding is allocated. The local authority also established a small [COVID-19 recovery-funding programme](#) specifically for BAME grassroots groups. The decision panel for the BAME funding included elected BAME representatives from the city -wide umbrella organisation for CVS groups (called Community Works). Successful bids from emerging BAME- led groups include projects supporting informal online ESOL and befriending work with individuals including refugees and international students.

- The **Greater London Authority**, in partnership with [London Plus](#), is offering Consultation Access Grants of up to £500 for small organisations (with a turnover of under £100,000) that need support to facilitate a community conversation (as described above.) As outlined in the [guidance document](#) for the programme, funds can be used to cover accessibility requirements, translation or interpretation costs, or volunteer costs.

## Arts and culture led responses

- [Liverpool without walls](#) has provided grants for projects ranging from live music, theatrical performance, dance, light installations, murals, photography exhibitions and street animation to almost 50 cultural organisations and freelance artists to bring art and performance to Liverpool's city centre streets. The aim is to both support creative businesses and individuals, who have been hardest hit by COVID-19 in the cultural sector, and in doing so, start to bring the city's streets to life with its world-famous cultural offer. It complements the huge the first stage of the project, which saw bars and restaurants reimagine themselves as outdoor eateries. Projects included, freelance artist Sumuyya Khader creating a series of billboard style artwork which celebrates the creative talent of black artists in the city, Whispered Tales worked with Unity Theatre on a project called Distant Drums – a project that tells the story of Reggae Sound System culture using animation, music and narration and in a celebration of diversity and inclusivity, The Daisy Choir will take part in a number of performances across the city centre, singing brand new music which showcases the skills of the choir which is made up of people living with disabilities.
- [People's History Museum Manchester](#) launched a year-long programme of new exhibitions, events, learning activities and creative collaborations that will explore the theme of migration. This programme will be curated in partnership with the communities whose lives have been shaped by migration. The stories the museum tells will be re-examined through their eyes, creating a rich visitor experience with gallery takeovers, new exhibits, digital installations, banner

displays, artistic responses and collaborations. As part of this, the museum recruited a Community Programme Team made up of six people whose lives have been shaped by migration to co-create our programme of activity, events and exhibitions in 2020.

## **Managing Community Tensions**

- The [Upstanders Project](#), Brighton– A network bringing diverse grassroots community groups (BAME, LGBTQ, Faith, disability, women’s groups etc.) together with services public services (including the police, local authorities and CPS to stand together against hate and all forms of extremism – share experiences, learning and undertake joint projects and events. During Hate Crime Awareness Week in October 2020, the project trialled an online workshop focussing on what people can do if they witness a hate incident and how to stand against hate.
- [Bradford For Everyone](#) has developed an anti-rumour and critical thinking strategy that is looking to work across the city and with community, faith and educational groups to develop and increase critical thinking skills. The interventions are aimed at combating rumours and misconceptions about migrants, LGBTQ+, Muslims and working-class communities, as well as to tackle COVID-19 rumours. The co-designed project will create a critical thinking toolkit bespoke to different sectors, recruit and train people in critical thinking skills, identify ambassadors to engage others and create a counter narrative, and engage a wide range of participants in order that critical thinking skills are developed and the confidence to challenge injustice and discrimination is increased.

## **What are the policy implications of these changes?**

Community contact forms a central part of work in integration and inclusion. However, undoubtedly, there are profound challenges in trying to do this work in the context of the pandemic, which cannot be understated. Some of the recommendations may be about improving provision, but it is also true that in this case, some of the work may

predominantly be about mitigation, as the pandemic severely restricts opportunities for some types of work.

This section collates the policy recommendations arising from the research resources outlined above. These are not policy recommendations of the Inclusive Cities programme, but instead a collection of policy implications for local authorities and partners to consider.

- **Focus on tackling existing inequalities of access as a prerequisite for successful work to connect communities.** A workshop by the British Academy focussed on cohesion highlighted the fact that ‘the pandemic has increased some forms of cohesion, but it has also exacerbated inequalities’ (Morgan Jones et al 2020.) The webinar with participants in the Inclusive Cities programme (Oct 2020) also strongly emphasised this point and the need for this focus to be front and centre of work on connecting communities. These approaches may include:
  - Improving digital inclusion, access to information and advice and language access<sup>2</sup>
  - Focussing on access to services and developing targeted services where necessary
  - Acknowledging and responding to differential experiences and outcomes in relation to the pandemic - in relation to both contact responses (see below) and service delivery
  - Development of participatory approaches, including through grant making but also through deliberative consultation and inclusion, to ensure proactive community representation within decision making processes
  - Reviewing existing funding and future funding plans through the prism of both integration, anti-racism and equalities work with a particular focus on the equitable distribution of funds. This is particularly important for those areas and sectors, which may not have the same institutional base of organisations to fund.

---

<sup>2</sup> See briefing on [access to information](#) for more information on these topics

- Coordinating work with other partners – with a particular focus on engagement with healthcare providers, in particular given the differential outcomes for BAME communities as a result of the pandemic.

Whilst recognising the severe constraints on local authority resources, local authorities and their partners may wish to mitigate the impacts of reduced contact as a consequence of the pandemic, in a number of areas:

- **Continued and growing investment in community infrastructure** such as
  - Mutual aid and volunteering infrastructure - with the focus on facilitative and non-extractive approaches, which enable rather than stymie community engagement. As per the point above on inequalities, a particular focus may be needed to ensure the equitable distribution of funds and support.
  - Asset based community development approaches - with a particular focus on access to interventions and services – in particular given the differential outcomes outlined above
  - Contact interventions (such as befriending programmes, social groups, intercultural contact programmes) subject to adaptations to make these suitable for the COVID-19 era
- Pro-active efforts to bring in new partners to increase (or, in some cases, maintain) opportunities for contact, with a particular focus on areas where contact is taking place such as schools and workplaces (with a particular focus on the role of employers) and other shared community assets.
- Development new and enhanced 'contact spaces' and places through a reimagining of the public realm and other public spaces.

**Local authorities and partners should work proactively to identify, manage and mitigate community tensions.** Approaches may include:

- Partnership working between local authority community teams, police, schools, employers, local services and third sector organisations to monitor evidence of emerging tensions, tackle xenophobia and hate crime, and challenge fake news at local level
- The development of 'pre-contact' strategies such as anti-rumour campaigns and critical thinking initiatives that address the spread of fake news and misinformation online
- Ensuring robust hate crime responses that are attentive to the context of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions – including online hate crime and targeted groups.
- Services and policy makers should consider how to improve the likelihood that individuals feel confident to report hate crime, through outreach with migrant and ethnic minority communities regarding their rights and providing effective forums for anonymous reporting (Morris, 2020), specialist victim support, and public workshops/bystander training focussed on what witnesses can do to stand up to hate crime (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2020; Citizens UK, no date).
- Exploring the delivery of anti-racist education to promote racial equality and tackle racism.

## References

Abrams, D. Lalot, F. Broadwood, J and Platts-Dunn, I (2020) 'Beyond Us and Them Perception of COVID-19 and Social Cohesion' University of Kent/ Belong – the Cohesion and Integration Network



Allport, G (1954) 'The nature of prejudice' Cambridge, Mass: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company

Awan, I. and Khan-Williams, R. (2020) *Coronavirus, fear and how Islamophobia spreads on social media*. Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group.

<https://antimuslimhatredworkinggrouphome.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/research-briefing-report-7-1.pdf>

Brighton and Hove City Council (2020) 'Taking a stand against hate crime.' 9 October.

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/news/2020/taking-stand-against-hate-crime>

Broadhead, J and Kierans D. (2019) 'The Inclusive Cities Framework' COMPAS, University of Oxford

Buck, D. and Gregory, S, (2013) 'Improving the public's health A resource for local authorities' The King's Fund

[https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field\\_publication\\_file/improving-the-publics-health-kingsfund-dec13.pdf](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/improving-the-publics-health-kingsfund-dec13.pdf)

Carter, R. (2020a) 'Coronavirus polling: hope and solidarity.' *Hope Not Hate*. 16 April.

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/04/16/polling-hope-and-solidarity/>

Carter, R. (2020b) 'Corona crisis: building on positivity towards migrants.' *Hope Not Hate*. 25 April.

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/04/25/corona-crisis-building-on-positivity-towards-migrants/>

Carter, R. (2020c) *Minority communities in the time of COVID-19 and protest: A study of BAME opinion*. Hope Not Hate.

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BAME-report-2020-08-v3-00000003.pdf>

Carter, R. (2020d) 'Black Lives Matter: Complex divides.' *Hope Not Hate*. 1 July.

<https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/07/01/black-lives-matter-complex-divides/>

Citizens UK (no date) 'Better hate crime protections for all.'

<https://www.citizensuk.org/hate-crime-law-commission>

De Torres Barberi, D. (2018) 'Antirumours handbook', Council of Europe.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/-/anti-rumours-handbook2018>

Greater London Authority (2018) 'All of Us: the Mayor's strategy for social integration'

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final\\_social\\_integration\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final_social_integration_strategy.pdf)

Hewlett, K., Duffy, B., Benson, R., Ballinger, S. and Katwala, S. (2020) 'Has COVID-19 reset the immigration debate?', Policy Institute at King's College London and British Future.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/has-COVID-19-reset-the-immigration-debate.pdf>

Hewstone, M. and Swart, H. (2011) 'Fifty-odd years of inter-group contact: From hypothesis to integrated theory' *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50:3

ISD and BBC Click (2020) 'Far-right exploitation of COVID-19.' *COVID-19 disinformation briefing No.3*. 12 May.

<https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID-19-Briefing-03-Institute-for-Strategic-Dialogue-12th-May-2020.pdf>

Laurence, K. (2017) 'Local youth led social engagement programmes' in British Academy *'If you could do one thing...': 10 local actions to promote social integration*. (Pp.47-57)

[https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/292/British\\_Academy\\_IYCDOT\\_Essays.pdf](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/292/British_Academy_IYCDOT_Essays.pdf)

Laurence, J. (2019) 'Cohesion through participation? Youth engagement, interethnic attitudes, and pathways of positive and negative intergroup contact among adolescents: a quasi-experimental field study.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 46(13).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1700787>

Majevadia, J (2019) *British Integration Study 2019*. The Challenge.

<http://tedcandle.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/the-british-integrationsurvey-Challenge-2019.pdf>

Mayblin, L. Valentine, G. Schneider, T. Kossak, F. (2015a) 'Experimenting with spaces of encounter: creative interventions to develop meaningful contact' *Geoforum*, 63:67

Mayblin, L. Valentine, G. Andersson, J. (2015b) 'In the contact zone: engineering meaningful encounters across difference' *The Geographical Journal*, Online first [DOI: 10.1111/geoj.12128](https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12128)

Migration Yorkshire (2020) 'What Yorkshire folk think about migration.' 1 August.

<https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/?page=NewsView&itemid=436>

Moonshot (2020) *From #CoronaVirusCoverUp to #NukeChina*. Available at:

<http://moonshotcve.com/COVID-19-conspiracy-theories-hate-speech-twitter/>

Morgan Jones, M Abrams D. and Lahiri A. (2020) Shape the Future: how the social sciences, humanities and the arts can SHAPE a positive, post-pandemic future for peoples, economies and environments *Journal of the British Academy* 8

Morris, M. (2020) *Sanctuary Cities? How regional mayors can protect victims of crime with insecure immigration status*. IPPR. <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-09/safe-reporting-sept20.pdf>

Mort, L. and Morris, M. (2020) *Communities up Close: Neighbourhood change and migration in Yorkshire and Humber*. IPPR and Migration Yorkshire.

<https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/attachments/pages/844/cuc-final-report-july2020.pdf>

Pettigrew, T. and Tropp, L. (2008) 'How does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Meta-analytic tests of three mediators' *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38:6

Putnam, R. (2000). 'Bowling alone: Collapse and revival of American community' *New York*: Simon & Schuster

Rutter, J. (2020) *The kindness of strangers: Division, unity and social connection during and beyond COVID-19.* British Future. <http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RememberingTheKindnessOfStrangersReport.pdf>

Salway, S., Such, E, Preston, L et al. (2020) How can we reduce loneliness among migrant and ethnic minority people? Systematic, participatory review of programme theories, system processes and outcomes (first look summary) NIHR

Tiratelli, L. and Kaye, S. (2020) *Communities vs. Coronavirus: The rise of mutual aid.* New Local Government Network. <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Communities-Vs-Corona-Virus-The-Rise-of-Mutual-Aid.pdf>

Townsend, M. and Iqbal, N. (2020) 'Far right using coronavirus as excuse to attack Asians, say police.' *The Observer*. 29 August.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/29/far-right-using-coronavirus-as-excuse-to-attack-chinese-and-south-east-asians>

Zaki, J and de Witte, M (2020) Instead of social distancing, practice "distant socializing" instead, urges Stanford psychologist Accessed [here](#)



The Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity is an ambitious initiative at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) opening up opportunities for knowledge exchange and longer term collaboration between those working in the migration field.

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the UK's leading progressive think tank. We are an independent charitable organisation with our main office in London. IPPR North, IPPR's dedicated think tank for the north of England, operates out of offices in Manchester and Newcastle, and IPPR Scotland, our dedicated think tank for Scotland, is based in Edinburgh.

**IPPR**