



Inclusive Cities

INTEGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE DURING COVID-19

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council briefing

April 2021



About this briefing

Newry, Mourne and Down is a participant in the Inclusive Cities programme – a city-led knowledge exchange programme facilitated by the Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity at the University of Oxford.

The programme aims to support local authorities to create a step change in their approach to the inclusion of newcomers at the local level. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, local authorities and their partners have had to adapt their inclusion programmes, often at speed, to support their newcomer and longer standing communities. These briefings capture the learnings from these adaptations, as well as ongoing work to promote inclusion and integration undertaken between March 2020 and October 2020 (unless otherwise stated), against the five thematic areas set out in the Inclusive Cities Framework.

- Briefings from the other Inclusive Cities are available [here](#)
- The Inclusive Cities Framework is available [here](#)
- A series of policy and research briefings on COVID-19 and inclusion, arising from the programme is available [here](#).

1. Leading in the development of a shared local story of inclusion

[Ongoing support](#) is being provided to EU/EEA citizens in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) through information workshops, registration clinics and referrals. Translated voice notes have been developed which provide information about the EUSS and help link particularly vulnerable migrants to available support. As part of this work, the Council has organised a public information campaign to generate awareness about the 30th June 2021 deadline. The visual materials (pictured below) speak not only to those residents eligible for the EUSS, but also to their “families, friends, neighbours and colleagues”, which may serve to reinforce a broader sense of community, shared identity and mutual responsibility.

2. Supporting and driving inclusive economic growth

Supporting and driving inclusive economic growth is a key priority for Newry, Mourne and Down and a core driver for the Council's participation in the Inclusive Cities programme.

The Council promotes equitable rights and working conditions through regular employment rights clinics delivered in partnership with Community Advice.

The Council's Enterprise Development Team provides advice and support to new and existing businesses in the District through a range of programmes, such as start-up support, skills development, and funding information. The priority is to develop partnerships to ensure that these services are accessible to migrant communities, in particular in the context of Brexit and the challenges it raises for Newry as a border community.

3. Connecting communities

Newry, Mourne & Down Local Government District is one of the most diverse areas in Northern Ireland and the Council has been involved in integration work for a number of years. The Council has a dedicated Social Inclusion Unit within the Active and Healthy Communities directorate and its current work includes:

- The operation of the Ethnic Minority Support Centre and Intercultural Forum
- Integration programmes, including mentoring for migrants, befriending

projects, orientation programmes for newly arrived migrants (e.g., Syrian refugees, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma)

- Capacity building programmes and English language classes
- Cultural awareness projects with the wider community
- Support for local Supplementary Schools

Due to the pandemic, most of these activities have moved online and the Council has continued to deliver programmes that bring together newcomers and longer-standing communities.

In 2020/21, the Council introduced a new Ethnic Minority theme under its Small Grants programme. It aims to promote minority community culture, tradition and identity, build positive relations, raise awareness and understanding, and encourage respect for minority communities.

4. Mainstreaming and building inclusive public services

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.¹ The Council is also required to take account of the desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious beliefs, political opinions and ethnicity.

The Equality Scheme is in place to integrate equality and diversity into all areas of Council service delivery, decision-making and policy development.

The Ethnic Minority Support Centre opened in 2007 to assist the growing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population in the area. Based in Newry Town Hall, the Centre supports people who have recently arrived in the district and assists them in accessing public services through providing information, language support, referrals and clinics (e.g., a weekly clinic in the office of the local housing executive).

Supported by the EU's Peace IV funding, the Centre has developed orientation programmes which provide newcomers with information about their new country and introduce them to public services (education, health and social care, welfare system, housing); rights and entitlements; and Northern Irish and UK culture, customs, traditions and laws. The workshops and learning are enhanced by visits to the local library, health centre, jobs and benefits office, housing executive, the Council and local community groups.

The programme moved online in response to the pandemic and has adapted quickly. A new online workshop 'Life Together after Lockdown' provides information on local services, health and wellbeing.

Newry, Mourne & Down's Intercultural Forum is an inter-agency partnership committed to working together towards an inclusive community and creating opportunities that embrace diversity. The Forum brings together public and community/voluntary sectors with service providers to promote equity, diversity, and interdependence.

5. Encouraging civic participation and representation

The Council is actively promoting the civic participation of minority ethnic residents. Through the district's [Good Relations](#) programme and funding from the EU, it has delivered a number of programmes aimed at increasing the active participation of migrants in civic, community and political life.

The Council encourages the participation of minority ethnic groups in the Small Grants scheme. For example, it has a Community Events and Festival theme, which assists groups to organise small local festivals and events.

Case Study 1: Supporting the most vulnerable

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Council has continued to support the most vulnerable members of the district's minority ethnic communities. Support was targeted at those experiencing financial hardship and food poverty, isolation, loneliness and issues of well-being and mental health.

Projects have included targeted remote support clinics (e.g., for Roma and Syrians), referrals to the local Community Hub and Food Banks and the distribution of the Red Cross Crisis Fund.

The Council has successfully delivered a COVID-19 Response and Recovery grants programme to assist organisations alleviating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic within their local communities.

Case Study 2: Connecting communities during the pandemic



Despite the challenges brought about by COVID-19, the Council has continued its commitment to promote minority ethnic cultures and enhance cultural understanding between communities. Under the EU-funded Peace IV programme, [Blueprint](#), it has organised a number of cultural diversity projects designed and delivered by migrant communities themselves.

During these challenging times, the workshops help to address isolation and bring communities together. Projects include [Taste the World](#), Hello Neighbour (an arts, dance and culture programme) and [Diwali](#).

¹ Between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, between men and women, between persons with a disability and persons without and between persons with dependents and persons without.

INCLUSIVE CITIES

Inclusive Cities is a knowledge exchange initiative supporting UK cities and their local partners to achieve a step-change in their approach towards the inclusion of newcomers.

Drawing on innovative ideas and practices from Europe and the United States, Inclusive Cities aims to support the development of an approach to inclusion which is strategic across the city administration. This approach consistently uses positive messaging to develop an inclusive narrative for the city which informs and drives practice and is local authority led, working in close partnership with business, public and voluntary sector organisations to achieve shared goals.

Inclusive Cities is supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/inclusive-cities

THE GLOBAL EXCHANGE ON MIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

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.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/global-exchange

ABOUT

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