

*Policy Brief*

# REFRAMING MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION CHALLENGES: HOW THE INCLUSIVE CITIES FRAMEWORK IS HELPING TO BUILD CONSENSUS AND CAPACITY ON INCLUSION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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## Introduction

One of the puzzles of integration policy making is that whilst integration has a much lower profile policy concern than migration policy, public opinion research on the effects of migration policy consistently demonstrates that the public cares about integration. Eurobarometer (2018) research shows that whilst 77% of UK respondents felt that fostering integration is a necessary investment in the country in the long run, only 39% felt that the government was currently doing enough. Interconnectedly, respondents from across the EU were also more likely to agree that integration is successful in their city or local area (47%) than in the country as a whole (39%).

These findings demonstrate that whilst integration often has lower levels of salience as a policy issue than migration, it provokes more positive attitudes in particular when there is a focus on local communities and contexts – where people can place the subject in the context of their everyday life, rather than in the abstract or as mediated through press coverage.

Integration is then an important policy frame, but an often overlooked one. It centres the local level, but is often at the whim of national policy making on migration, which dominates debates. In the UK context, it has few policy parameters and little dedicated resource (Broadhead and Spencer 2020).

The Inclusive Cities programme works with 12 UK municipalities to support their development of an inclusive approach to newcomers in the city. It is a knowledge exchange initiative, facilitated by the Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity at the University of Oxford and supports knowledge exchange:

- Between academic research findings, policy and practice.
- Peer to peer between the participating UK cities.
- On the international level, through membership of the Welcoming International.

As part of this programme, the Inclusive Cities Framework draws on academic research on integration alongside learning from participating cities and internationally. This paper considers the framework, the academic context in which it sits, its



developments and some key questions as to how policy frameworks can support inclusive practice at the local level and beyond.

## Defining Integration

Vertovec (2020) highlights that whilst the concept of immigrant integration is highly contested, with at least 20 different types of critiques, it has proved 'especially hard to displace in the public sphere, despite all of the problems associated with it by academics.' These critiques focus, among other things, on the vagueness of integration as well as the idea of integration as something 'done to' migrants, a one way linear process offering only a partial account of how these processes unfold and one which is framed almost exclusively in terms of membership of a nation state and on a 'groupist' understanding of immigrants as being a homogenous group. These critiques cluster around the idea that it is an error to see society as a singular entity into which someone can 'integrate into' and one which seeks to reinforce, rather than challenge normative ideas of society.

Notwithstanding these, in many cases, well-founded critiques, Vertovec concludes that, 'integration works...as a cognitive organizing principle in people's heads, and...as an organizing or central reference concept for a set of public policies and practical mechanisms. To say that 'integration' works does not mean it is therefore a normatively desirable term: I merely mean that it functions effectively, for many, as an accepted conceptual and organizational tool.'

In this vein, Inclusive Cities draws on academic research conceptualising integration – acknowledging its limitations, but accepting its use-

fulness as a concept. Specifically, the project draws on Spencer and Charsley's (2016) model of integration, which sets out a number of core concepts namely that integration:

1. is concerned with both newcomers and receiving communities, that this is a mutual, two-way process and this should be reflected in policy making,
2. takes place across society (not only through public services) and so requires a range of actors to be involved and to take shared responsibility,
3. is not a single process but takes place across a number of domains: structural (as in the labour market); social, cultural, civic participation, and in relation to identity and mutual belonging. The interplay between these is complex, can go forwards or backwards over time and an experience in one may impact on the experience in another,
4. can be impacted by a wide range of external factors across these domains. This includes policy interventions as well as human capital, social networks and opportunity structures (such as access to the labour market or housing),
5. takes place, mostly, at the local level.

We can see in this, a number of implicit and explicit responses to the critiques outlined above. Whereas integration is often criticised as a one way linear process, this model sets out a two way process of shared responsibility. The model uses the intercultural understanding of creating a new whole to characterise integration not as a singular process, of 'integrating into' but rather a wider process of building a new whole. Finally, the model emphasises the importance of the local level as the site for the majority of integration processes. The Inclusive Cities programme and framework builds on this to

identify (and perhaps reframe in the UK context at least) the local level as the natural home for governance of integration – both in terms of providing leadership, as well as in convening partners in order to create change.

## The Inclusive Cities Framework [1]

Building on this empirical research, alongside practical learning from policy makers and practitioners through sustained knowledge exchange, the Inclusive Cities framework aims to help UK municipalities and local government to set out their approach to inclusion and integration at the local level. The Framework is a non-binding policy tool to support local government in its development of inclusive policy and practice.

In order to do this, the framework sets out **five core principles** and **five thematic areas**.

The core principles underpin how cities should seek to develop their inclusive policies and practice. These are:

1. Provide local leadership to create change.
2. Inclusion is a shared responsibility delivered in partnership.
3. Work with newcomers and longer standing residents.
4. Use available data and evidence to understand the local context in order to identify core priorities, set goals, monitor impact and update strategies as needed.
5. Take action at the local level provide advocacy at the national level learn from best practice internationally.

Five thematic areas then set out areas for iterative policy development and implementation:

1. Leading in the development of a shared local story of inclusion.
2. Supporting and driving inclusive economic growth.
3. Connecting communities.
4. Mainstreaming and building inclusive public services.
5. Encouraging civic participation and representation.

## Discussion

The development of the Inclusive Cities Framework has been an iterative process which leads to a number of key questions to be considered:

- How could this framework help localities reframe integration challenges?
- Are these the correct policy areas and how can progress be measured?
- How can international learning on the use of frameworks and standards drive change?

### *(Re)framing integration as place shaping*

Whilst integration has often (in the UK at least) been a low priority for policy makers both at the local and national level, it actually speaks to some of the most important policy questions for local politicians and policy makers, namely ‘how do we live well together,’ how do we ‘build a new us’ in the face of the ever changing character of the city. These challenges form the essence of local government and if framed in this way integration moves from being a sometimes peripheral concern – regarding targeted

[1] The full framework is available here: [https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Inclusive\\_cities\\_framework\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Inclusive_cities_framework_FINAL_web.pdf)

initiatives for newcomer communities – to a city wide policy priority.

The approach of focussing on mainstreaming inclusion and integration brings risks – there is a risk that a focus on newcomer communities will be lost but also allows for a wider perspective than has usually been encompassed in the integration policy debate.

### *Defining and measuring progress*

The Framework also sets out to define a number of broad policy areas [2] as thematic areas on which localities should focus. These areas seek to maintain a focus on areas for which municipalities have competency, whilst broadening out the policy perspective as outlined above. This means that they do not focus specifically on questions of migration policy but instead areas over which the municipality either has power and can act as a leader – or over which the local authority can act as a convenor to bring together stakeholders. This is particularly pertinent for the thematic area focussed on inclusive economic growth. Whilst this has grown in policy relevance, the role of employers and business has been relatively weak in integration policy making and practice – outside of a focus on encouraging entrepreneurialism. Encouraging greater shared ownership of the integration and inclusion agenda across the city is one way in which the Framework could support the development of a new approach.

The framework aims predominantly to support the development of policy using available data and evidence. It is not primarily intended as a measurement or evaluation tool (as opposed to some of the international examples considered below.)

However, it is important to give consideration as to how progress can be monitored. Rather than defining strict assessment criteria or performance indicators, the framework instead sets out case studies from each of the founder cities and a consideration of ‘what does good look like?’ in each thematic area. This is in recognition of some of the limitations of the data available to policy makers, but it also speaks to the wider point that integration is a complex phenomenon of place shaping and interconnectedness which cannot easily be measured. Lowe and Plimmer (2019) point out that given this complexity, if we want to ‘contribute to creating positive social outcomes, we must learn to embrace this complexity’ through a measurement system which focusses on the conditions for creating change as well as measuring specific outputs.

### *Using frameworks and standards to drive change*

Linked to this question of measurement is the extent to which the development of frameworks and standards can support policy change. Through its learning partner Welcoming International, the Inclusive Cities programme draws on the experience of the Germany, US, Australia and New Zealand, each of whom have developed similar frameworks or standards. The primary difference in approach has been in the comparison between a set of standards which a city must meet (for example to gain accreditation as a Welcoming City) versus the looser and more facilitative approach of a non-binding framework – which aims to support cities but is not directive. Each of these has its advantages and disadvantages in terms of developing inclusive practice and is partially as a result of the governance arrangements for each country – where programm -

[2] The full framework also includes a number of sub goals outlined underneath each thematic area

es are facilitated by NGOs (US and Australia) and the federal government (New Zealand) as opposed to the university facilitation of the Inclusive Cities programme.

## Conclusion

The Inclusive Cities Framework aims to facilitate local municipalities to act as leaders in promoting inclusion and integration at the local level. It does this by identifying both ways of working for local authorities and a range of thematic policy areas in which they have both the legal competence and local impetus to make change. Whilst integration is often a fraught area of academic research, there are clear empirical findings about the two way nature of integration as a shared responsibility delivered in partnership and the importance of the local level, which the framework can support to translate into local policy and practice.

However, there remain a number of questions which remain to be explored – how effective are these frameworks at translating research findings and facilitating policy making and practice. In particular, can frameworks move beyond directing the delivery of particular services through to wider conceptions of place shaping in an effort to reframe integration and inclusion in order that they gain more traction and policy salience. Finally, can frameworks support the measurement of progress in a policy area as complex and multi-faceted as integration. The continued knowledge exchange between policy making, practice and academic research aims to test and explore these questions further as a method of facilitating inclusive practices in the UK and beyond.

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