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The experience of integration: a qualitative study of refugee integration in the local communities of Pollokshaws and Islington

Alastair Ager
Alison Strang

Home Office Online Report 55/04

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Alastair Ager
Alison Strang

Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh

On behalf of Michael Bell Associates

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Executive summary

This study formed part of the Indicators of Integration (IoI) project which has developed a framework to assist in planning for – and measuring – refugee integration. The purpose of the study covered by this report was to identify local understandings of the experience of integration. Such understandings could then be used to shape the framework to ensure that it was clearly relevant for – and accessible to – local communities with a resettling refugee population.

The study was conducted in two such communities – Pollokshaws in Glasgow and Islington in London. A total of 62 semi-structured interviews were held across the two communities between November 2002 and March 2003. Twenty-nine interviews were held with refugees resident in these areas, and 33 interviews with a cross-section of the non-refugee community. Preliminary social mapping work in the two communities assisted with the identification of samples representing an appropriate range of ethnic grouping and residential location.

Findings suggest that within the communities studied relationships are seen as the core mechanism for securing integration. There was considerable diversity of expectation regarding the nature and depth of relationships defining an integrated community. For some ‘no trouble’ – an absence of conflict and ‘toleration’ of others – was indicative of a well-integrated community. For most, however, there were aspirations for a more active mixing of groups within the community, acceptance of difference and diversity, friendliness, participation in shared activities and equality of access to services. Many articulated greater expectations still of relationships within an integrated community. For these a sense of belonging was key to integration, and this meant such things as having close ties with family members, committed friendships within and across the groups making up the local community, and a sense of shared values. Overall there was striking consistency between refugees and non-refugees on such issues, with the development of social connections seen by all as crucial to community cohesion.

Refugees in particular articulated the importance of equality of rights and respect with the community if such relationships were to develop. Issues of safety and security were acknowledged by most of those interviewed as another crucial prerequisite for establishing such social connections in their locality. English language capability and broader issues of cultural understanding (of majority communities by minority communities *and vice versa*) were also highlighted as significant.

Issues of housing, employment, education etc. were acknowledged to be additional markers of effective integration – and also significant means to this end. Those interviewed frequently linked achievements – or barriers – in these areas to the other issues discussed above, e.g. relationships established in the area (with their own cultural group, with members of other groups, or with state services), or with perceptions of rights and respect.

The above findings have shaped the development of the proposed IoI framework as planned. Domains reflect the experience of integration at a local level, and proposed indicators within domains seek to represent the range of expectation and concerns expressed.

1. Introduction

Background

The concept of integration is central to UK government policy in the fields of immigration and community cohesion. Integration is, in particular, the core principle upon which policy for reception and resettlement of refugees is based. The Home Office report *Full and Equal Citizens* (2001) outlines the key features of policy in this area.

Full and Equal Citizens does not offer a definition of integration, however. The concept has proved very difficult to define, and is often used with different emphases and meanings by different groups. With integration as a clear policy aim – and an objective of many programmes and projects – the lack of a widely accepted definition of the term is clearly a problem.

To address this issue, the Indicators of Integration (Iol) study was commissioned by the Home Office in January 2002 as part of the wider evaluation of the effectiveness of the projects funded by the Challenge Fund and European Refugee Fund (ERF) across the United Kingdom. The Indicators of Integration study aimed to develop a framework for the assessment of refugee integration that:

- establishes a basis for a common understanding of integration for those working in the field; and
- provides a tool for planning and evaluation relevant to local projects and policy makers.

An early phase of the project was an analysis of existing definitions of the term 'integration'. This analysis showed that, although there was considerable variation in the use of the term, there were a number of recurrent themes and issues reflected in such definitions. The analysis proposed a conceptualisation of integration based upon these recurrent themes and issues (Ager *et al* 2002).

This conceptualisation was an important step towards defining a framework for assessing refugee integration. It was important, however, that the framework reflected local experience of issues of integration and not just theoretical ideas. The work described in the current report was thus considered a vital step in the development of a framework to understand refugee integration. In addition to the framework reflecting conceptual analysis of attempts to define integration it needed to reflect the local experience of integration in areas of significant refugee settlement.

Further details of the Indicators of Integration project and the other work that has been carried out are included in Appendix B.

This study

This qualitative study was thus designed as a key phase of the wider Iol work programme. The focus of the work was not on measuring the level of integration achieved in the areas studied, but discovering how local populations judged the extent to which integration had been achieved. Refugees' views were clearly important in this, but so were the views of the wider communities in which they were settling. The study thus addressed the views of both refugees and non-refugees concerning integration and the factors which influenced it at the local level.

The specific goals of the study were:

- to identify local understandings of the concept of integration;
- to identify factors seen locally to support, or disrupt, the process of integration; and

- to use such information to shape the development of a framework for understanding refugee integration.

Given the emphasis of the study on the issues and themes which shaped local understandings of integration, a qualitative approach to data collection was appropriate. Such a method enables the way local people think about such ideas to be identified, rather than imposing pre-existing concepts and ideas upon those interviewed.

The study looked at understandings of integration in two very different locations. Both were settings of significant refugee settlement, but differed in the nature of such migration. Islington was a location with a significant history of self-settlement by refugees, with a large pre-existing ethnic minority population. Pollokshaws, in Glasgow, was a location without a history of refugee settlement until the dispersal policy for asylum seekers led to a number of refugees coming to the area. By considering such diverse locations the intention was to identify issues of potential relevance to integration across a range of settings.

This report presents analysis based upon 62 semi-structured interviews held with people from these two settings. Twenty-nine of these interviews were with refugees, and 33 with other members of the communities. Inclusion of this second group of interviews was vital if a comprehensive understanding of how integration is viewed at a local level was to be gained. Interviewees were selected to represent an appropriate range of local opinion and experience. Appendix A gives more detail regarding the selection of interviewees and the methodology of the study.

In the report that follows quotations from individuals have been selected to illustrate the range of viewpoints identified. It should be remembered that, as a qualitative study, results are not based on statistical evidence but analysis of the social experience of integration described by a cross-section of individuals within the studied communities. The core aim was to identify key issues in the shared experience of integration – or non-integration – within communities. In many cases similar observations were made by both refugees and non-refugees. Although refugee's viewpoints are identified in the text, it was not a goal of the study to formally contrast refugee with non-refugee perspectives.

Structure of the report

- Chapter 2 describes local understandings of integration in the communities studied. A continuum of expectations regarding emerging relationships as a community becomes more integrated is outlined.
- Chapter 3 outlines the key factors identified within the communities as supporting processes of integration.
- Chapter 4 considers the implications of this study for the development of the Indicators of Integration framework.

Appendix A describes the methodology used to conduct the qualitative research, and Appendix B outlines the other work that has been undertaken as part of the Indicators of Integration programme.

2. Local understandings of integration

Interviews principally addressed understandings of integration by identifying general perceptions of the local community as a place to live and reflecting on the extent to which individuals felt 'settled' or 'belonging' to the locality (see Appendix A). Understanding of the term 'integration' was, however, explicitly addressed in the later stages of interviews. A wide range of responses was elicited by such questions, but a strikingly common thread among them was that it was the nature of relationships that most clearly defined a sense of integration.

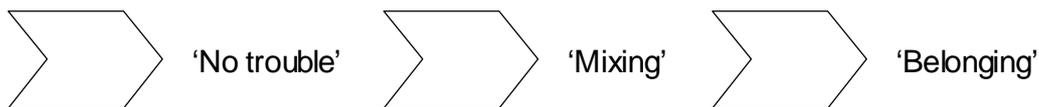
The principles concerning relationships that were most frequently mentioned in this context included:

- feeling safe from threats by other people;
- toleration;
- welcome and friendliness;
- belonging and feeling part of the community; and
- having friends.

These principles were used by non-refugees and refugees alike to describe the characteristics of an integrated community. Refugees additionally emphasised the opportunity to do the same things and be in the same places as other people.

Relationships: a continuum of expectations

Analysis of such responses identified a range of expectations of relationships in an 'integrated community'. Views differed on the depth and quality of relationships that should be expected. Such views could be seen to range from integration as 'no trouble' through integration as 'mixing' of those living in an area to, finally, integration as a sense of 'belonging' within that area.



'No trouble'

At one extreme the expectation was that integration meant 'no trouble'. This involved

- peace between communities
- personal safety.

From refugees' perspective in particular,

- no active discrimination.

If different groups in the area 'tolerated' each other and there was a lack of 'trouble' between them, for some that signified an integrated community.

For instance, refugees felt more positive about their localities if they saw them as *peaceful*, while non-refugees were often concerned that new arrivals did not cause unrest in their community.

It's peaceful, people are the same and nobody is treating you really badly.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

Avoiding 'trouble' was a common concern

I have not made any effort so far to try and talk to neighbours or do anything about that because I don't want trouble... basically. In Castlemilk unfortunately... I had to live there before I lived here, so I learned to keep to myself because that way you avoid trouble.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

A sense of *personal safety* was for many paramount. Refugees often indicated that if they did not feel physically safe in an area they could not feel integrated. Very often incidents of violence or being threatened had determined overall perceptions of a community.

Some people, they were fighting there some day, I don't know, I mean, two men were killed [.....] We feel afraid. [.....] It was really frightening.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

Conversely, if an area was well regarded it was often primarily because it was 'safe'. Personal safety was not just seen in terms of actual violence; verbal abuse or even the perception that an area is 'threatening' appeared to have a similar affect upon refugees' perceptions of their area.

The absence of any active discrimination in terms of access and usage to services was also recognised by many as essential to integration.

I think that's the main issue when we talk about integration. We need to define what's discrimination

Refugee, Islington

Refugees, and workers and volunteers involved in the support of refugees and asylum seekers, were generally clear that that in an integrated community refugees should have the *same rights as the people they are living amongst*. This shared basis of entitlement was seen as important in order to enable refugees to live harmoniously with non-refugees. A number of refugees also pointed out that the establishment of equal rights had an impact on the way people view them; where there are not equal rights, there is less respect.

Most importantly you get as much opportunity as anybody else, you get as much respect as anybody else.

Refugee, Islington

Perceptions of equality were just as important for longer-term residents in the communities. Perceived preferential treatment for refugees was frequently reported by such individuals, and was a clear threat to a local sense of integration.

'Mixing'

However, interviewees generally – both refugees and non-refugees – held greater expectations of relationships within an integrated community than noted above. Such expectations typically focused on aspects of the 'mixing' of different groups, particularly:

- the acceptance of difference and diversity;
- friendliness; and
- participation in shared activities.

Equality of access to services was also a particular concern for refugee and other ethnic minority interviewees.

Some saw an integrated community as one where the legitimacy of other groups to live within the community is accepted. In Islington – the more diverse of the two communities studied – refugees felt that there were so many different groups and nationalities in the area that *difference* was not conspicuous, rather it was accepted as the norm.

Integration for me is: we are different, but it's okay to be different.

Non-refugee, Islington.

Where I live...it is a big estate... I see it as a mixed place... an international kind of place. I see people speaking different languages as I am coming down stairs or coming out of the lift... it has a good feeling... you are not alone here. It gives good feeling when you are actually... it is fine where I live.

Refugee, Islington

In Glasgow refugees were conscious of being very obviously different in appearance, and some found this very uncomfortable. However there was evidence that some non-refugee residents – particularly the older residents – saw the presence of refugees, especially children, as a significant benefit to their neighbourhood and valued their contribution to the community.

Both refugees and non-refugees suggested that an important factor in making them feel 'at home' in an area was the *friendliness* of the people they encountered on a daily basis. Being recognised and greeted by others in the neighbourhood was greatly valued. Small acts of friendship appeared to have disproportionately positive impact on perceptions. Friendliness from the settled community was very important in helping refugees to feel more secure and persuading them that their presence was not resented. Conversely perceived unfriendliness undermined other successful aspects of integration.

You can feel you are settled in. But in ayou feel they isolate you.... They say, 'you foreigners.... Go home again,'..... They don't say 'hello'... not warm, not friendly.

Refugee, Islington

Both refugees and non-refugees discussed integration in terms of *participation of people from different groups in a variety of activities*. A range of examples of shared activities were identified during the study, including sports, college classes, religious worship, community groups and political activity, all of which were welcomed as evidence that integration was occurring. The underlying principle behind such views appeared to be that if a community is integrated then the people will participate equally, and without prejudice, in all the activities and pastimes available to it.

To have people come... come together have something going... for the community so people can meet and not be strangers. Because if I see you on

the streets, because I have not spoken to you I will judge you according to the way you look.... but if you sit down and talk to people, and deal with them you understand them better.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

It was generally recognised that refugees' particular circumstances (lack of familiarity with their surroundings, not speaking the language etc.) led to barriers that required additional effort from both refugees and the wider community if *genuine equality of access to services* was to be achieved. To be integrated meant all members of a community not just having 'equal rights' in *principle* but in *practice*. People interviewed in Islington saw this as one of the benefits of living in areas where refugee settlement was more established, in that local services were seen as more capable of dealing with refugees specific needs, thereby ensuring levels of access more in line with those of other residents.

It's much more of an ethnically diverse community, and you know, London's had a long history of people from other ethnic groups, so I think the issues of racism... have been tackled to some extent. You know, the police are quite sensitive in London, and so are all the services.

Non-refugee service provider, Islington

In Pollokshaws, without this history of ethnic diversity, attempts to support refugees access to services were recognised as practically valuable and inclusive.

I did not find any difficulty accessing services because when I go to my GP I am ask if I need interpreter or not. So if I need one, they find one... telephone connection... telephone service. It is not difficult.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

The principle of equal access to services was viewed as important across all sectors of the studied communities. As noted earlier, perceived 'positive discrimination' – where refugees and asylum seekers were considered to be receiving better conditions than other residents – was identified as a point of concern in a number of interviews.

'Belonging'

A majority of refugees and non-refugees ultimately articulated a vision of relationships with an integrated community some way beyond the principle of 'mixing' noted above. In terms of the continuum noted earlier, the quality and depth of relationships envisioned were characterised by:

- relationships with family members;
- committed friendships; and
- shared values.

As previously, the most striking observation was the similarity between refugees and other residents of the studied localities in terms of these aspirations for their community. The vision of the relationships which characterise an integrated community is broadly a shared one across the groups that make up these communities. Many refugees and non-refugees alike aspired to a sense of belonging within their community. Some explicitly stated that to be fully integrated is to feel that you belong.

Well you lose the feeling that you belong to any particular group or specific place or something. So you always looking for a place a group or something to feel that you are still belong to.

Refugee, Islington

Where this sense of belonging had been achieved it generally was associated with close and *committed relationships with both family and friends*. Many refugees valued proximity to family because this enabled them to share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships. For example, a number of single male refugees pointed out that traditionally it would be their family's responsibility to find them a wife. Without family, they were anxious about how they could ever get married.

In addition to family relationships, committed friendships were seen as crucial to effective integration. Refugees valued contact with the school community, language classes and services such as drop-in centres as opportunities to make friends.

To have more places like this place (church drop-in centre) for people without friends and relatives in the country. You feel very isolated. Through this place you can more easily integrate into society, even if you don't know language.

Refugee, Islington

Both refugees and non-refugees gave friendships as a reason for staying or moving out of an area, suggesting that it is the quality of your relationships with the people who live around you that determines whether or not you feel at home.

There's only half the people I know from when I was a wee boy. They have all moved out... I just can't be bothered with it any more...

Non-refugee, Pollokshaws

However, for such 'belonging' to constitute integration it was generally felt that such *committed friendships* must exist between people from different groups (be they groups defined by nationality, ethnicity, or some other factor). Refugees often listed their English or Scottish friends with pride, and talked of how valuable these friendships were in learning English and finding out about the society around them.

Through this place [drop-in centre for asylum seekers and refugees] I've found English friends. We're different ...when you have friends you can see culture and tradition. It's good to have a place where you can go and find out more about a country – a place where you can meet people.

Refugee, Islington

In the studied communities religious practice served both as a means to come together with others of similar views and values, and as a 'bridge' into other groups within the community.

One of the first families that came, asked to go down and bless their house and that was immediate source of welcome that they felt the importance of the culture of the priest coming to be with them to bless their home.

Non-refugee, Pollokshaws

One morning we came and there was a service and we asked if we could come. We thought it was only for Christians, but they said we could come...[...]...From that day I feel we have family here.

Refugee, Islington

No I do not belong to any religion at all.... I go to church because I like to learn about Christianity because I come from a Muslim country and I like the idea of living among Christianity and Judaism and the different kinds of religion.

Refugee, Islington

It was evident from many interviews that although relationships with people of your 'own group' were important, what promoted a sense of belonging in an area most were mutual respect and shared values across such groups.

[Here it's] integrated to the extent that if an individual is a good individual – by whatever values turn out to be good here – 'cos they're not necessarily conventional values – then they're part of it and that will do.

Non-refugee, Islington

Relationships based on *shared values* and mutual respect were commonly seen to form the basis of true community.

In every aspect of life...if you respect each other...share ideas...If you have yourself...sharing your ideas. That is what a community would be, an ideal community.

Refugee, Islington

Summary

Local understandings of integration were found to be heavily influenced by expectations of relationships between groups within the area. These expectations range across a continuum in terms of the depth and quality of relationships expected within integrated communities. At the most basic level, absence of conflict and 'toleration' of different groups is considered to reflect integration. However, the majority of individuals – both refugees and others within the studied communities – had expectations beyond this to a community where there was active 'mixing' of people from different groups. Many additionally identified 'belonging' as the ultimate mark of living in an integrated community. This involved links with family, committed friendships and a sense of respect and shared values. Such shared values did not deny diversity, difference and one's identity within a particular group, but provided a wider context within which people had a sense of belonging.

3. Supporting the process of integration

The previous chapter identified the development of relationships as a key issue of local understandings of integration. The study additionally revealed a wide range of factors that were seen to contribute to the process of integration in the locality. This chapter briefly summarises these factors.

Facilitating factors

Those interviewed identified a number of factors that had facilitated – or hampered – integration in the area. Key issues included:

- safety;
- stability;
- English language skills; and
- advice and cultural understanding.

Safety and stability

The importance of ‘lack of trouble’ was noted in the preceding chapter. Freedom from physical threats, fear and abuse were frequently stated by refugees to be key issues in enabling a sense of engagement with local communities. Where there was fear of physical threats and abuse, refugees frequently felt unable to be active and involved in their neighbourhoods:

[They were] hitting me with a ball... calling me names. You know and you are talking about children of ten going down. Calling me names, “Black bitch”... “Black this”... telling me, “Go back to your country!” Cursing and talking funny and... you just don’t know what to do.

Refugee, Glasgow

Even without such incidents, unfamiliarity could lead to significant fear:

At first my daughter had to walk from Camden to Islington every day. You know, when she was coming back in the evening, I was worried about her. I don’t know what it’s like in this country – is it safe or not?

Refugee, Islington

Getting to know an area was thus considered an important part of ‘feeling at home’ and ‘putting down roots’.

I think if we stay five years here, it will be a place that I’m going to stay and live in. And I work and study and do my life there [.....] Because we have been in the same place, its peaceful, people are the same.

Refugee, Glasgow

It is great because – especially because my family were settled in one area for most of the time – you do know everybody in the street, you know everybody in the shops.

Non-refugee, Islington

However, the study uncovered many stories of potentially positive relationships being undermined by refugees having to move somewhere else (or the expectation that someone might shortly have to do so). In Pollokshaws, in particular, where existing residents clearly valued continuity in their refugee neighbours, there were frustrations that relationships has been 'cut short' when refugees had moved out of the area after a relatively short while. In Islington long-term residents similarly argued that the high levels of mobility of the wider population in the area undermined any sense of community.

English language skills

The ability to communicate in English was viewed by both refugees and non-refugees as a particularly important component of integration into UK society.

I think the first barrier is the language barrier. I hadn't any help even with someone who knows English and my own language. Even in the shops – when they didn't give change in the shops. For us to explain it was so difficult.

Refugee, Islington

[Without English skills] I could not be myself to them.

Refugee, Islington

Suddenly I am confined to a house... I don't even know how to get into town at that particular time because I couldn't even ask...

Refugee, Glasgow

When you don't know the language.... You don't know your rights, that makes things difficult. We live in all sorts of problems. We fight everyday in life.

Refugee, Islington

Overall, refugees saw 'good English' as important because it:

- helps in developing friendships and relationships with the host community;
- leads to more productive communication with institutions and members of the host community – in particular, enabling them to feel 'understood';
- provides greater access to services and shared/mixed activities;
- boosts your self-esteem and feeling of well-being;
- helps children to progress academically and be successful at school;
- helps you to feel that you belong, and are part of the community; and
- can serve to mollify hostility from the host community many of whom expect refugees to learn English and may interpret continual use of other languages as antisocial.

Advice and cultural understanding

Refugees in the study areas reported having sought and found advice from various sources including Housing Office staff, schools, libraries, and volunteers at drop-in centres. In many cases refugees recalled particular individuals who had played a pivotal role in supporting them. Advice was felt to have been particularly important at times when circumstances changed (e.g. upon arrival or being granted refugee status).

I know the refugee council have produced a welcome pack, and that's a good idea. You come to this country, you don't know the systems, you are used to

the systems where you came from, some [...] just don't understand why you're giving them money. Just simple basic information.

Non-refugee, Islington

Information and support regarding access to services was considered particularly crucial.

I think a lot of people are not actually aware of what they are entitled to... in terms of education, housing needs, social services or that kind of thing... if they need that... job opportunities, training...things like that

Non-refugee, Islington

We went near our house to Camden Town library. We thought maybe in the library we can ask something about the school. I explained the situation slowly with a dictionary – she was very patient, a very nice lady. I explained the need for a school for my daughter. She said okay, she could help. I think she wrote letters to three schools for us. She was very helpful.

Refugee, Islington

In addition to such practical information, refugees needed to develop an understanding of cultural expectations in the areas in which they were living.

My problem was not with the older people around me it was with the children... My culture is really, really different from your culture when it comes to families, because the way we are brought up... whether the older person is wrong or right you do not talk back... you do not disrespect. Whether they are a year older than you... they are older than you so that's it... I honestly do not know what to do about it.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

They left a lot of litter and I said, 'well we can't.... they don't understand. If we don't tell them, and correct them'... So I spoke to one or two of them and said, 'please tidy up', and they did. They did. There was no question, it was just they just needed to be told.

Non-refugee, Pollokshaws

Adjusting to a different culture was, in the experience of most refugees, not straightforward. In particular, refugees who had experienced close family ties in their own culture, found their isolation and the lack of a local strong community to be alienating and depressing.

Along with the emphasis on 'raising awareness' about the 'host' culture, there was a general acceptance amongst non-refugees that refugees were entitled to maintain and celebrate aspects of their own culture and that these links are important. Although a minority of people held the view that maintaining these cultural links may be harmful to integration, the overall consensus was towards a multicultural outlook, recognising the value of strong bonds with members of refugees' own communities.

Obviously people want to hold on to their culture and celebrate the different festivals, [...] to do that, you do it with the same people in your culture.

Non-refugee, Islington

A number of refugees suggested the value of sharing their own culture with others, thereby promoting mutual understanding, and also contributing something of value to the integrated community.

Contexts for integration

Formal definition of integration – and policy frameworks such as ‘Full and Equal Citizens’ – have tended to focus attention on the achievement of integration in such ‘public’ contexts as employment, housing, education and healthcare. Although, as discussed above, interviewees saw local relationships as central to understandings of integration, the importance of experience and achievement in these areas was also acknowledged.

Education was generally seen to be of value for two reasons. Crucially it provided the opportunity to acquire qualifications or skills to advance opportunities for employment.

... I have to learn English and Maths to get higher qualifications to go, I mean to go to other programmes like Business Studies I have to improve my Maths and English.

Somali refugee, Pollokshaws

Further, however, it provided a fertile context for ‘mixing’, enabling the development of relationships across the community.

We have got the Arabic group that meet on a Friday night and we have the Bengali women sewing group... [...]... It is nice that the school is actually being used as a resource to do that because all those things make parents more confident and more accepting of other people, I think that extends to social networks.

Teacher, Islington

However, where school rolls did not reflect the composition of the local community, this could reduce the effectiveness of schooling as a means of developing relationships across different population groups.

This school is in a very high socio-economic area, but the children that live in those houses don't come to this school... Most of our children come over the border from Hackney... from the local estates. I think sometimes families do feel quite isolated in terms of the community... [...].. a lot of the children who live in those nice houses over there don't mix with our children.

Teacher, Islington

Housing, similarly, was seen as an area which could facilitate – or disrupt – the process of integration. Both the permanence of housing arrangements and their location was seen to influence processes of integration through the sorts of relationships that were available as a result.

It has been one and a half years...I like school...and environment. So I am afraid that they are going to send me somewhere else, but I do not want to go.

Kurdish refugee, Islington

You send people to the bad area with the junkies, with the criminals, and in the end it...it helps a bit that you don't really understand where you are and what surrounds you, and what sort of people you meet around you. But eventually...[...]..you begin to understand (that) the high flats are meant for people who don't work.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

Employment was also seen as potentially providing multiple benefits in terms of integration. It was seen as a means to financial security, but also self-respect.

From an early age you learn to fend for yourself and clothe yourself and house

yourself. So when you come here it's a bit unhelpful really... [...]... I want to earn my own keep. I have done that since I was sixteen.

Refugee, Pollokshaws

Where employment opportunities were limited, this could serve as a major barrier to effective integration and a likely prompt for migration from the area.

The people aren't going to stay there if there are no opportunities, once they get [refugee or 'leave to remain'] status they're going to move back down south where the jobs are and where they're more happy to live.

Council Officer, Islington

In the communities studied, access to healthcare facilities was not seen as a particular problem in terms of integration. One Russian refugee reported difficulties in registering with a GP until she had been helped by a refugee support group. Otherwise, the main focus was on health problems themselves, with a number of interviewees (both refugees and others) noting how mental health problems and failing health in older persons reduced their capacity to be actively involved in the community.

Summary

A wide range of factors that are seen to support – or undermine – the process of integration at the local level can be identified. These include characteristics of refugees (such as English language skills), characteristics of the wider community (such as the prevalence of racism and community insecurity), and service characteristics (such as the availability of advice and information). Additionally, housing, employment, education etc. define a range of contexts that can foster or impede integration. An indicator framework seeking to represent the progress of integration comprehensively needs to address a range of such factors. How such factors have been used to inform the development of the Iol framework is summarised in the next chapter.

4. Implications for measuring integration

The previous chapters have outlined the major findings of this study regarding understandings of the goal and process of integration in the localities of Pollokshaws and Islington. Such findings are clearly of interest in their own right. However, the principal purpose of the study was to identify such local understandings of integration to assist in the development of a framework for measuring integration. As noted earlier, the aim was for such local understandings to be added to insights from conceptual analyses of definitions of integration and other sources of data (including a review of existing indicators of integration and a quantitative survey of refugee experience of integration) in order to develop a robust means of measuring integration.

This chapter summarises the major implications of the study reported here for development of the Iol framework. The Iol framework seeks to present – in a concise and coherent manner – key issues relevant to integration. It does this by defining a series of *domains*, and for each of these domains a series of potential *indicators*. The findings of the current study have had particular influence over the selection and definition of the domains of the framework. The study's findings have also been valuable in guiding the selection of proposed indicators within certain domains.

The key implications of the study findings for the Iol framework is summarised below:

Social connection

The central relevance of relationships to people's understandings of integration is reflected in the definition of three domains tracking 'social connection' within communities. Reflecting the range of relationships that people noted as potentially relevant to a sense of integration, these domains seek to capture experience of relationships within one's own (ethnic, religious or other) community, experience of 'mixing' with other communities, and relationships with services and the state. Relationships are thus given a central place within the Iol framework. The diversity of expectation regarding such relationships found in the study has encouraged selection of a suitably broad range of indicators within these domains. Thus measures include frequency of social contacts (with, for example, family members), but also reported sense of belonging within the community. Findings regarding the potential role of recreation and public leisure facilities in the studies areas have shaped the proposal of a number of indicators within the social connection domains, particularly given their potential role to create 'bridges' between groups within the community.

Personal safety and stability

The findings of the current study – reinforced by other recent work (D'Onofrio & Munk, 2004) – stressed the importance of personal safety in achieving integration. This was such a consistent message from respondents that it has led to the definition of an additional domain within the framework: 'Safety & Stability'. This domain prompts measurement of individuals' experience of harassment and crime, reported levels of fear or insecurity etc. The linkage with the concept of stability allows measurement of such issues as permanence, with instability of housing arrangements having been identified within the fieldwork as a major barrier to the establishment of relationships between refugees and other members of the community.

Rights

The recurrence of issues of 'rights' and 'respect' within interview discussions reinforced the importance (established by the preceding conceptual analysis of definitions) within the Iol framework of a domain clarifying the basis on which groups were engaged in a process of integration. This domain encourages the measurement of issues related both to legal rights and to community expectations of local citizens.

Facilitating factors

Issues of safety and permanence – and their measurement within the domain 'Safety and Stability' – have been noted above. The salience of factors as language support and advice shaped the definition of a further domain within the framework: 'Language and Cultural Knowledge'. English language skills were seen by the majority of those interviewed to be of great significance in fostering integration, and the development of these is thus mapped within the framework. The fieldwork, however, pointed out the broader relevance of mutual learning about the cultural practices and values of both majority and minority communities. Indicators of such knowledge are thus proposed within the framework.

Housing, employment, education and health

These four areas were signalled by the conceptual analysis of definitions of integration to be particularly significant for tracking the process of integration. This qualitative analysis broadly reinforced this, with the first three areas consistently noted as significant arenas for achieving integration. In this current study health was infrequently noted in the same way (though the benefits of good health to integration were supported) but, given evidence from other sources of its importance, it is included along with the other three as a discrete domain. Together, 'Housing', 'Employment', 'Education' and 'Health' form key 'markers (of) and means (to)' integration within the proposed framework.

Appendix A: methodology

Rationale for a qualitative study

It was noted earlier that the specific goals of the study were:

- to identify local understandings of the concept of integration;
- to identify factors seen locally to support, or disrupt, the process of integration; and
- to use such information to shape the development of a framework for understanding refugee integration.

With such emphasis on the local experience of integration a qualitative research methodology was required. The focus of the work was not on measuring the level of integration achieved in the areas studied, but discovering how local populations judged the extent to which integration had been achieved. It was therefore important to use a methodology that revealed the criteria that interviewees themselves used to understand integration, rather than impose such criteria upon them. Further, as the aim was to help develop a framework which captures different perspectives on the experience of integration, it was the range and diversity of opinions that was important rather than the 'typical' or 'average' response. This 'range' of opinion required that a diverse sample be obtained for the study. This led to the selection of field sites with very different characteristics of refugee settlement and ethnic diversity. It also required that at each field site the opinions of a range of local people – including both refugees and more established residents – were captured.

Study locations

The study focused on two areas that represent distinctive patterns of refugee settlement:

- Glasgow – recent dispersal-led settlement, relatively low level of prior settlement by ethnic minorities;
- Inner London – historically established self-settlement by refugees and significant settled ethnic minority population.

Given the interest in exploring the experience and dynamics of local integration, within each of these areas one locality was identified as a study site. Localities were chosen on the basis that they were:

- geographically definable communities that had seen significant, ethnically diverse refugee settlement within the past two years;
- broadly representative of other similar localities in the area;
- not the focus of current acute tension between migrant and settled communities; and
- the location of at least one project funded through the Challenge Fund or European Refugee Fund.

Pollokshaws in Glasgow and Islington in London were selected as study sites by this means.

Group discussions

The initial fieldwork in these sites was conducted by means of group discussions. Their purpose was two-fold:

- to make connections and build relationships with members of the community in order to engage them with the research; and

- to begin to explore perceived dynamics of the community and understandings of integration.

The study team employed a participatory appraisal approach (Chambers, 1997; de Koning & Martin, 1996) for such discussions. Such approaches adopt a 'basket' of tools used to generate, analyse and evaluate information and, in particular, emphasise an ethical dimension of respecting the equity of knowledge and the value of people's experiences in shaping the research process. These group discussions served as a means of introducing the research to local communities through relevant networks.

Pollokshaws

The group discussion in Pollokshaws was convened through the local settlement and integration network facilitated by the Scottish Refugee Council. Participants – five men and five women – were all regular members of the network including residents of Pollokshaws and the immediately surrounding area, and some service providers who lived outside the area. No refugees were present at the meeting because at that time no refugees participated in the network.

Islington

The group discussion in Islington was convened through Islington Refugee Forum. Participants – four women and six men – were all regular members of the forum. The majority were service providers, across both the statutory and non-statutory sectors. Two participants were themselves refugees representing refugee community organisations.

Community mapping exercise

In addition to meeting local people and introducing the aims of the research, the major focus of the two-and-a-half hour group discussions was a community mapping exercise, as outlined below:

Object: to explore local perceptions of the geographical location of 'the community' and to identify settings in the community that are used by different groups.

Process: After initial introductions, the group was divided into two, given materials (large sheet of paper, different coloured pens, stickers, 'Post-it' notes) and asked to produce a representational map of the area. One subgroup was asked to produce a map representing the area from the perspective of refugees, indicating the main geographical features, plus places where they went and resources that they used. The other subgroup were asked to do the same, but this time for the rest of the residents who are not refugees. Both subgroups were then invited to look at one another's maps, discuss the similarities and differences, and to add comments on 'Post it' notes if they so wished. The discussion concluded with further participatory activities to elicit information about perceptions of the demographic composition of the area.

Outcome: The exercise fostered understanding of ways in which members of the group described integration, the language they used, and the factors which they considered important in assessing how integrated their community was. The maps themselves produced valuable insights into the social geography of the area providing the research team with a sound basis for subsequent interviewing and analysis. In addition, much value was derived from observing and recording the process of mapping, and the discussions generated by the exercise. It also led to a greater understanding of the internal dynamics of the community and its values. Finally, it was also an important source of engaging support of the groups in making contact with members of the community (both refugees and non refugees) for subsequent individual interviews.

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews

Object: to elicit understandings of integration grounded in the experience of those involved in the process at a local level.

Sample

It was noted earlier that the purpose of sampling was not to gain statistical representation of those living and working in an area. Not only was this not feasible within the resources available for the study, but also it was not appropriate given the aims of the study. With the goal being to understand the nature and range of understandings at a local level – rather than identify the ‘typical’ experience of integration – it was more important to ensure that interviews were held with an appropriate cross-section of the local population. Interviewees were principally identified by ‘snowball sampling’, a process of using contacts with some members of the community to lead on to others. This was appropriate because:

- it was important not to access interviewees only through pre-existing groups because this would restrict the sample to those involved in formal social structures;
- random sampling and ‘cold’ calling would be likely to yield a very low response rate – particularly in the socially deprived areas in which the study team were working; and
- personal introductions would be more likely to promote participation.

However, the acceptance of suggestions of people to interview was strictly steered by the need to reflect the diversity of each area, using:

- perceptions of (particularly ethnic) groupings within areas emerging from the social mapping exercise; and
- demographic data provided by Strathclyde Police (for Pollokshaws) and Islington Housing Department (for Islington).

In practice, the sample was recruited as follows:

- local stakeholders through two networking groups;
- local people involved in the community (refugees and non refugees) through personal contacts and through community groups (drop-in centres etc);
- refugees not involved in groups and/or without English language skills through housing officers;
- non-refugees not explicitly supporting refugee integration through informal contacts (visiting pubs, talking to people on the street);
- young people (aged from 14 to 16) through schools.

In total 62 interviews were held. The composition of the sample across the two sites is summarised in the table below. This sample broadly reflects the demographic profile of communities, except male refugees in Pollokshaws are slightly under represented as a result of access difficulties (many men being enrolled on college courses); and, it did not prove possible to arrange school-based interviews for the 14 to 16 year-old age group in Islington.

Table A.1: Profile of those interviewed

| | Pollokshaws | Islington |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Refugees | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Female | 9 | 7 |
| Male | 5 | 8 |
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| Aged 14-16 | 3 | 2 |
| Aged 17-34 | 11 | 6 |
| Aged 35+ | 0 | 7 |
| <i>Region of origin</i> | | |
| Africa | 4 | 2 |
| Eastern Europe | 4 | 7 |
| Middle East | 4 | 5 |
| Latin America | 0 | 1 |
| Not declared/recorded | 2 | 0 |
| Non refugees | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Female | 7 | 10 |
| Male | 9 | 8 |
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| Aged 14-16 | 3 | 0 |
| Aged 17-34 | 3 | 10 |
| Aged 35+ | 10 | 8 |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | |
| Black & Ethnic Minority | 2 | 12 |
| Other | 14 | 6 |

Interview process

Contact was made with potential interviewees by a member of the research team, and the research's aims explained. If these people consented to be interviewed (as all did) further details of the study – and the confidential manner in which information would be dealt with – were detailed. Interpreters in the first language of the interviewee were employed where interviewees were more comfortable not to use English (this judgement was generally made by the person who had made the contact). For some refugees, particularly in Glasgow (who had generally received refugee status very recently), the team were aware that responses might be biased by a perception that the researchers represented 'authority'. The team anticipated that this might make them reluctant to criticise the services that they had received. Interviewers minimised this by stating very clearly that the interview was completely confidential, and would have no impact on services provided to them. In addition interviewers provided further informal reassurance and sought to conduct the interview in an encouraging, non-judgemental manner.

The priority was to avoid imposing definitions of integration, and to stimulate conversation around experiences of integration in order to elicit dimensions of understanding. Interviews were structured with respect to the following topic guide.

- The participants' perceptions of the community in which they live, how long they have been there etc.
- Whether they lived anywhere else in the UK before coming to their current place of residence, and if so, why they moved.
- Their perceptions of what it is like living in their current place of residence – advantages and disadvantages.
- Family circumstances and important issues/concerns for them and their family, e.g. issues around individual family members needs/issues – accessing services, education, health etc. etc.
- Whether they have experienced any difficulties since living in this area and if so, what
- What kinds of institutions they use/belong to (religion, community groups, pub).
- Social support/networks.
- Whether they think they are integrated (using terms such as 'settled', 'fitting in', 'rooted' etc. and others as determined through the mapping exercise) into the community.
- Whether they think their community is integrated.
- Their perceptions of what an integrated community should look like.
- Facilitators and barriers to integration.

Given the goal of identifying local understandings of issues and processes of integration, considerable care was taken in the use of technical terms in the interviews. For many people it became clear that the term 'integration' was not readily meaningful. The team therefore explored understandings – as indicated above – using a range of terms including 'settled' and 'feeling at home'. For non-refugees who were not particular stakeholders in the process of refugee integration, the distinction between 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' was generally not recognised, and the terms used interchangeably.

Coding and analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed in full. Transcripts were reviewed by the research team to identify preliminary coding categories. These codes were then used to code all the transcripts (after Silverman 1993). The team held intermittent review meetings to refine the coding categories. Such reviews ensured that coding of the data fully reflected emerging themes and issues. These categories were then used as the basis for the conceptual analysis presented in this report.

Quotations coded with respect to emerging themes are used to illustrate the current report. These are selected to represent the thematic analysis and thus the range of perceptions identified across the sample. As an intensive qualitative study with a non-random sample, there is no attempt to formally quantify the frequency of expressed views. However, qualifying terms such as 'the majority', 'most', 'some' and 'a minority' are used where transcripts support such judgement.

Appendix B: the Indicators of Integration programme

The overall aims of the Indicators of Integration programme have been threefold:

- *firstly*: to investigate different understandings of 'integration' as a concept;
- *secondly*: on the basis of this work, to establish a framework for a common understanding of 'integration' that can be used by those working in the field of refugee integration in the UK; and
- *thirdly*: to design the framework for use by local projects and policy makers to assist them with the planning and evaluation of services for refugees.

By commissioning this work the Home Office has aimed to encourage a coherent understanding and approach to refugee integration work across the UK. It has also aimed to help local projects to plan and evaluate their services through the use of the framework, and to measure the progress of their clients towards integration.

The main output from the study is the Indicators of Integration framework that is presented in full in the associated report *Indicators of Integration: final report* (Home Office Development and Practice Report Number 28). The framework considers the concept of refugee integration in ten distinct but interrelated 'domains' and, under each domain, suggests a series of indicators against which progress towards integration might be assessed.

Work undertaken as part of the Indicators of Integration study

The development of the *Indicators of Integration* framework involved two tasks:

- defining the core domains that are relevant to understanding integration; and
- identifying indicators to assess attainment within each of these domains.

This was translated into the six distinct phases through which these tasks were addressed, leading to the final indicators framework. Each of the five phases not covered in the current report are described below.

Review of potential indicators

This first phase of the project involved a review of all indicators that had been used, in other work, or had potential for use – in assessment of integration processes and outcomes. This review identified approaching 200 indicators of potential relevance.

For the purposes of the review, indicators were grouped around the categories adopted for the Council of Europe (1998) report *Measurements and Indicators of Integration*. This distinguished between four key dimensions of integration – economic, social, cultural and political.

Conceptual analysis of integration

The review of existing definitions of the concept of integration was the second phase of the Indicators of Integration study. This was used to identify a more conceptually meaningful basis from which to understand the concept of integration than that which was available from the straightforward listing of indicators undertaken in the first part of the study.

The conceptual analysis began by considering the major review of integration research conducted on behalf of the Home Office which had concluded that:

There is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated
(Castles *et al*, 2001)

With Robinson further noting:

Integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most.

(Robinson 1998)

Such statements made it clear that no consensus on the meaning and application of the concept was currently available.

Following this, the team reviewed over forty formal definitions of the term and related concepts along with the implicit definitions offered by refugees and other relevant stakeholders, and concluded that, whilst no single definition would suffice, a number of discrete themes did consistently recur. These themes included:

- the identification of a series of 'public outcomes' of integration (very much reflecting the key themes of 'Full and Equal Citizens');
- consideration of the importance of participation and relationships (across a range of settings); and
- acknowledgement of the importance of notions of citizenship in shaping local and national expectations regarding 'integration'.

Linkage of variables in the cross-sectional survey

A cross-sectional survey of refugees conducted as part of the wider evaluation of Challenge Fund and ERF-funded projects was conducted in 2003/04 by MORI and provided an additional source of data for the Indicators of Integration study (see Peckham *et al*, 2004). Although a number of the questions on the survey addressed experiences of receiving a particular service from a project, others addressed broader experiences of life as a refugee in the UK. With items covering a wide range of topics (including housing, health, employment, language, community relations, subjective well being etc.), the survey provided the opportunity to conduct statistical analysis to identify potential 'linkage' between items. Analysis of this 'linkage' provided a further potential basis for the definition of discrete domains of experience important to integration.

The selection of indicators

At the conclusion of the statistical analysis of the refugee survey dataset – and with the influence of all the preceding phases of the study – the ten domain structure for the framework was broadly established. This led to the next stage which involved the selection of indicators under each of the ten domains.

When selecting the indicators from each domain there have been four considerations.

1. *Comprehensiveness*: selecting indicators that represented all the important sub-issues within each domain, without making the list of indicators too long.
2. *Flexibility*: enabling users of the framework to choose the indicators that reflect their specific local focus and context.
3. *Comparability*: by using well-established indicators the team aimed to provide opportunities for benchmarking and the collection of coherent data sets.
4. *Feasibility*: the specification of indicators for which – wherever possible – data is readily available. Where such existing data is not readily available, it should be at least feasible for such data to be collected.

Consultation and verification

The final verification phase of the study involved consultation with a wide range of potential users of the resultant framework, at both the level of local practice and of wider policy. The focus of the verification phase was the meaningfulness and utility of the framework for potential users.

The principal means of verification was the presentation of the framework at major verification seminars: one in Islington, one in Pollokshaws (the two sites of the qualitative fieldwork phases) and one in Croydon, to an extensive list of Home Office invitees (across the governmental, voluntary and academic sectors). At each seminar the rationale, structure and detail of the *Indicators of Integration* framework was first presented, followed by structured activities and discussion. Seminars concluded with appraisal of the framework in terms of its potential value to participants' work in promoting the integration of refugees.

These verification seminars were supplemented by seeking reaction to the framework by email from a wide range of additional stakeholders. These stakeholders were consulted principally on the basis that their work involved the tracking of relevant indicators and/or knowledge of pre-existing data sets. In such cases feedback was sought regarding the selection of proposed indicators within the particular domains in which they had specialist interest and expertise, although wider comments on the value of the framework were also welcomed.

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Home Office
Research, Development and Statistics Directorate
Communication Development Unit
Room 264
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT

Tel: 020 7273 2084 (answerphone outside of office hours)

Fax: 020 7222 0211

Email: publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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