

NORTH EAST

RACE EQUALITY FORUM

RESEARCH BRIEFING

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How has Britain's integration debate developed since 2000?

Introduction and summary: Ethnicity has been the primary lens through which policymakers have viewed integration policy, but policy aims have shifted over the last 18 years. Three objectives stand out and have been priorities at various times:

- Harmonious community interaction between immigrants and residents;
- Reducing barriers to integration;
- Shifting immigrant behaviour and attitudes to better fit existing economic and societal norms.

Recently, there has been a growing requirement on migrants to “fit in” with a shift from central government lead with local implementation to local policy, planning and implementing.

The policy framework in 1997: In 1997, integration policy followed the “race relations model” developed since 1965: a bi-partisan political settlement with two arms: restriction on immigration and the integration of existing immigrants and their children. Integration policy comprised anti-discrimination law and, after recommendations from government-appointed commissions, incremental change to institutional practice, such as policing methods.

Previous immigration experience led to a focus on ethnic diversity which has since driven the UK integration agenda. After 1997 immigration flows became much larger, more temporary, more diverse; new communities emerged

alongside established ethnic ones. In part due to these changing patterns, but also to external events and new policy directions set by Labour, integration policy has undergone significant change from the race relations model.



Stephen Lawrence and the Equalities and Human Rights Agenda:

1997 Labour Home Secretary Straw, initiated a process leading to a widening focus on equality and human rights. The *1998 Human Rights Act* enshrined the long-standing European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, reinforcing the existing anti-discrimination framework.

In direct response to the 1999 Macpherson inquiry, the *2000 Race Relations (Amendment) Act* aimed to eradicate institutionalized racism in public authorities. Other laws followed, culminating in the *2010 Equality Act*. However, at no point did the government intend for the advance in rights to increase the integration of immigrants. Indeed, there have been consistent attempts to oppose developments in rights as they apply to immigrants.

Refugee strategy: The Labour government was unprepared for the spike in asylum numbers. The subsequent Sangatte crisis¹ of 2000/01 led to asylum being seen as a central political issues. One response, largely to balance a more restrictive asylum approach, was bespoke integration support for recognised refugees. The Home Office set out a coherent vision in 2000, focusing on improved advice. Later policy focused on encouraging employment.

The coalition government has been supportive of refugees but there have been significant cuts to advice services and employment training programmes. There is now no meaningful refugee integration strategy.

Community cohesion: David Blunkett, 2001 Home Secretary developed community cohesion policy responding to the mill town riots and 9/11. A series of reports, including a government enquiry, suggested that a major cause of the riots was the segregation of Asian and white communities; it recommended

¹ The Sangatte (Calais) refugee camp was a lightning rod for media and political attention over asylum.

initiatives to bring them together. Following policies aimed at encouraging good relations between groups, including summer youth programmes, school-twinning projects, and ethnically-mixed housing policies — all largely promoted locally. The coalition government appeared sceptical and funding in this area was cut.



Volunteering and citizenship: Citizenship and naturalization law and practice has undergone substantial change; it marks perhaps the biggest direct impact in immigrant integration policy. Promotion of citizenship began in earnest under Blunkett, who saw “activating” the naturalization process as key integration policy. New policies included citizenship tests, language tests, citizenship ceremonies and increasing the waiting period for residence.

There remains a strong emphasis on mentoring and volunteering. The coalition government continued to place a high value on citizenship. Volunteering, especially among young people, was promoted through the National Citizenship Service.

7/7 and the Commission on Integration: The 2005 7/7 terrorist attacks led to government counter-terrorism policy focusing more on domestic “home-grown” terrorism, including measures (PREVENT) to tackle potential support for violent extremism. The bombings were one motivation behind the 2006 Commission on Integration and Cohesion. The Commission sought to balance the interests of immigrant identities with wider concerns about the long-term failure to integrate some settled immigrant communities. Meanwhile, analysis (and political pressure) from local actors noted the strains and challenges of new and growing immigrant inflows. Local concerns were well captured by the Crossing Borders report published by the Audit Commission.

By broadening the remit beyond Muslim communities, the Commission prompted the 2005 government to flirt with introducing a comprehensive integration strategy, involving both old and new communities. The DCLG subsequently mapped existing strategies and projects, introducing funding for local projects in places with significant numbers of new arrivals (the Migration Impacts Fund –

MIF). Responsibility for integration (except refugee integration) moved in 2007 to CLG from the Home Office. Ultimately, however, “no clear rationale” was found to commit extensive funding and capacity to an integration strategy.



MIF was ended by the 2010 government, whose integration strategy, unlike in other European countries, made clear there was no room for national policy and leadership. Counterterrorism strategy has now shifted firmly towards aligning integration and security policy aims.

The big levers still matter

Mainstream government programmes and social policies include deliberate correctives to benefit disadvantaged populations. Traditionally this was through area-based grants, with programme weighting favouring disadvantaged groups – including minorities and immigrants, who are disproportionately poor. However, immigrants have also been “targeted within mainstream” provision e.g. in education policy. Thus, while stand-alone measures have small effects, mainstream programming favours integration as many immigrants and second-generation communities are significant beneficiaries of policies conceived without reference to immigrant integration. The reverse also applies: deleterious effects of public spending reductions disproportionately impact on first and second-generation immigrants.

Conclusion

The coalition government broadly favoured focussing on the disadvantaged within policy areas such as education, but moved away from increased tailoring within mainstream provision. As policymakers do less “targeting within the mainstream” and there are increasing restrictions on access to services for some immigrant groups, certain specific problems will not be addressed coherently. Successive UK governments, including the 2010 one, have not defined long-term immigrant integration as a discrete public policy challenge. Various strands now make up integration policy: a clear shift away from the late 1990s race relations model.

Contact: For further information, back copies of Information Briefings or Research Briefings, or to join the Network email, gary.craig@galtres8.co.uk



The North East Race Equality Forum is a Network of around 300 individuals and organisations in the North East Region committed to promoting racial equality in the context of social justice. No one organisation is necessarily committed to every idea published in the name of the Forum. The Forum is supported by the 'Race', Crime and Justice Regional Research Network, which includes researchers from each University in the region.