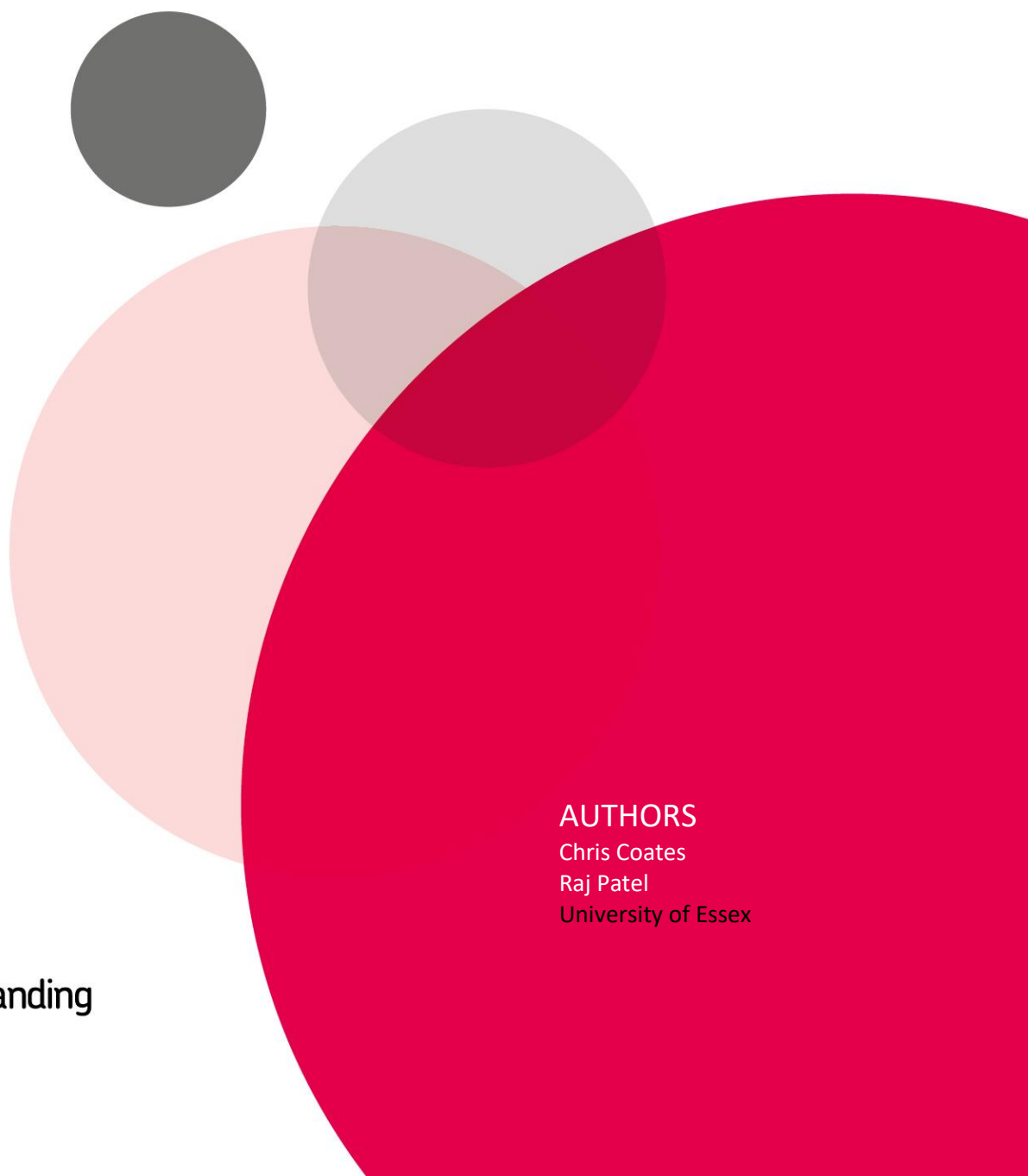


Social Integration and Cohesion Policy Briefing: Summary from Insights 2020 event



AUTHORS

Chris Coates

Raj Patel

University of Essex



Introduction

The last few years have seen widespread concern about polarisation, xenophobia and segregation in society, with a growing feeling of social fragmentation. This concern arises alongside evidence that participation in civil society is falling, and our public spaces and civic institutions, which facilitate contact between different groups and enable relationships to develop at a community level, are in decline¹.

However, the picture is highly mixed on some indicators². There are positive signs that societal attitudes are becoming more accepting on particular issues – for example, on people’s attitudes towards same sex relationships³. On social integration, research suggests that issues of deprivation, disadvantage and long-term marginalisation, unrelated to immigration itself, are important factors to consider in understanding the nature and pace of integration⁴. In this context, the experiences of second and third generation ethnic minorities, born in the UK, provide an interesting yardstick to assess progress.

Rather than focusing on possible causes of fragmentation, this policy briefing explores the question of whether social integration and cohesion is at a crossroads and how different sections of society can move forward in promoting it. We have combined evidence emerging from *Understanding Society* with the perspectives and views of experts and delegates taking part in an event on social integration and cohesion, at which we asked them to discuss the question of where progress is being made and what challenges lie ahead.

This briefing was written during the coronavirus pandemic but grew out of an event held before the outbreak began – so it does not address issues such as the potential benefits of community mobilisation across the country during the pandemic and a new found appreciation for ‘key workers’, and whether such benefits will endure. How the effects of the pandemic are experienced by different groups in society over the short- and long-term, and its aftermath managed, will have an important bearing on social integration and cohesion. For example, hate crimes directed at south and east Asian communities have increased during the coronavirus crisis, and the disproportionate health impact of the disease on BAME groups is now the subject of research by the government.

The views expressed in this briefing are not from *Understanding Society*. They represent individual as well ‘collective’ views from our Insights 2020 event on the topic of social integration and cohesion (January 2020). Speakers included: Catherine Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, The Jo Cox Foundation; Professor Adrian Favell, Chair in Sociology and Social Theory, University of Leeds; Professor Jenny Phillimore, Professor of Migration and Superdiversity, University of Birmingham; and Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement, Greater London Authority.

We begin by looking at social integration, itself a contested concept, from two different perspectives – integration between people but also integration between places – and the importance of using concepts and language that make sense to local communities. Using the Home Office Indicators of Integration framework, we then look at who is responsible for promoting integration and cohesion. There is a summary of evidence from *Understanding Society*, which specifically examines how black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups are doing on a number of indicators, and a ‘stock take’ on progress and challenges from the event. Finally, we summarise some practical pointers on the way ahead. The wide range of measures relevant to different aspects of social integration that can be found in *Understanding Society* is provided in the appendix.

Nira Yuval-Davis’s work on the ‘politics of belonging’ aptly argues that we need to understand the discourses around which people organise and construct collective boundaries of belonging: “From the ground up, people attach to different ethnic and racial backgrounds, different age and generation groups, different gender, sexuality and ability, people living in London or in the North.”⁵ However, for most of us the experience of belonging, or belongings, is a multi-layered one. The challenge for integration and cohesion is to look at belonging in “an intersectional way, at how people are differentially located and differentially identified ... and to identify the boundaries between people”.

How should we think about social integration?

Integration between people

When it comes to social integration between people, the dominant narrative has been about the integration of minorities and migrants. The concept and language have moved from multi-culturalism to inter-culturalism and now to social integration and cohesion. While the labels have changed, though, the burden has traditionally been on minorities and migrants to demonstrate that they are integrating. However, integration is a two-way street and multidimensional, with many stakeholders who can facilitate it, and it should be the responsibility of both the majority and minority communities.

There is also under-appreciation and misunderstanding of the term 'host population'. At our event, Jenny Phillimore pointed out that this is already a very diverse and not homogenous group, so talking about host and migrant populations as two distinct groups does not paint an accurate picture of the complexity in communities. One of the fastest growing groups in the UK is 'White other' – so, for example, where do people of Turkish or Brazilian origin fit in?

In this context, thinking about super-diversity may be more useful. A super-diverse population may be more dynamic in the way it changes and could be less clustered in geographical locations. It also allows room to factor in diaspora identities and continued associations that immigrants have with their countries of origin. Compared to post-war immigration, modern migration is differentiated by greater migration from member states of the European Union, and dispersal across a wider range of communities not simply urban areas in industrial towns and large cities. Migration from member states of the European Union has also been more dynamic, demonstrated by those who have returned as a result of UK's withdrawal from the European Union or the changing economic environment.

On a practical level, the language of 'kindness' and 'social mixing' is seen as more likely to cut through to local communities in influencing attitudes and behaviours than the concept of social integration. Social mixing, or the intergroup contact hypothesis, was first proposed by Gordon Allport in 1954. Enormous progress in research has since been made on contact theory, its effectiveness and under what conditions it reduces prejudice⁶.

When it comes to the 'integration agenda', there is a sense that expectations and assumptions abound. Some fear that integration is seen as people becoming a particular thing – in spite of having gone beyond the idea of assimilation in the 1990s and 2000s. At our event in January 2020, the expert speakers sought to dispel some of these myths, setting out that such preconceptions need to be continually challenged:

"We don't want to create a mindset. We want to encourage the coming together of people."

Catherine Anderson, The Jo Cox Foundation

The story of Bradford

Adeeba Malik, Deputy Chief Executive of the QED Foundation, wrote about the history of Bradford for our Insights publication. Immigration has been central to that history. Its riches were built on wool, triggering a flow of large numbers of (especially) Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, particularly post-WWII. There were also Polish people during and after WWII, and more recently people from the EU. This has all contributed to making it the UK's fifth largest metropolitan district, with the largest Pakistani population in the UK. Just under a quarter of the population is under 16 and ethnically diverse.

It is still talking about integration. For all the people who think Bradford is integrated, an equal proportion think it's not. Diversity is both a strength and a challenge. Many schools are ethnically segregated, and women of Pakistani origin between 45 and 64 are the group most likely not to speak English. Reducing child poverty and giving people skills and employment have to be priorities to facilitate integration.

The QED Foundation has been working for 30 years to support the ethnic minority community, and Adeeba believes that "Integration can't be forced. Bradford needs job creation to give young people opportunities, so they have a stake in society – and a thriving town centre that people can take pride in and which brings people together and provides a sanctuary. However, if people feel that they are competing for scarce resources, there will be problems."

“It’s not about clone-building. We need to enable everybody to have a sense of belonging.”

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor of London

“It’s difficult to compare white British with all ethnic minority groups in the same way. There is an implicit assumption that ethnic minorities are ‘immigrants’, but many are not – so we can’t impose the same integration model on all groups.”

Adrian Favell, Chair in Sociology and Social Theory, University of Leeds

Integration between places

Is integration more complex than simply the relationship between groups? Could it also be associated with places where communities feel forgotten? Should it also be associated with problems around predominantly white neighbourhoods and localities where there is little sense of community? At our event, Adrian Favell asked us to imagine a large Northern town with two different neighbourhoods that both score highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. One neighbourhood might be super-diverse, but have a strong sense of cohesion and community-level interaction between groups, while another is predominantly white, has many of the social issues associated with deprivation, but little or no sense of community cohesion.

It is not uncommon to hear that “London doesn’t listen or care.” In some ways, people everywhere want to feel that someone cares about them, but many communities feel ignored by those in power. Brexit was partly about peripheral and outsider places that might well be majority white, but weren’t well integrated into the global economy. So, while trying to improve cohesion within communities, should cohesion between communities also be a feature of this agenda?

Professor Favell leads the project ‘Northern Exposure’ on class and race in the North of England in the aftermath of Brexit, which examines how local authorities are now responding to the challenges of integration and cohesion. He argued: “There is an assumption that ethnic minorities lack something in relation to the white British population, and this notion of ‘lack’ becomes the primary way of conceptualising integration. However, we cannot assume national cohesion in Britain. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, even the north and south of England, have different cultural, social and political contexts. The United Kingdom itself is not integrated in this sense.”

Whose responsibility is it?

Integration can sometimes feel like the ‘department of minorities’ but it is everyone’s responsibility to reach out to individuals and groups unlike themselves. [The Home Office’s Theory of Change for Integration](#) provides a high-level framework for how integration can become a reality, adopted from the Indicators of Integration. The framework has been refined since the earlier 2004 version and sets out good practice for local and national partners and the media.



The framework includes an interactive suite of documents, including a toolkit, and sources of data to measure integration, all based on evidence. Although originally developed for refugees, Jenny Phillimore points out that it can be adapted for any group of newcomers – students going to university, for example, or prisoners reintegrating into society.

[The British Academy's Cohesive Societies review](#) identified the importance of both social characteristics, such as solidarity and a sense of belonging, and structural characteristics, such as the political and economic dimensions of a society. While local communities are better placed to address social connection issues, tackling structural barriers depends on wider partnerships, including with the police.

Structural factors such as housing, employment, access to healthcare and good quality advice can be formidable barriers to integration. A wide range of organisations can play a role – from schools and housing organisations to leisure providers and employers. In particular, employers, who have benefitted tremendously from immigration, could play a bigger role in facilitating integration.

The framework makes it clear that integration is complicated, and can move forward in one area and back in another at the same time. It also means established communities have to be prepared to adapt to changing demographics, and to include and accommodate newcomers.

However, the Home Office's creation of the "hostile environment", where a set of administrative and legislative measures have been designed to make staying in the United Kingdom as difficult as possible for people without the right to remain, was not seen as conducive to integration. This has placed a responsibility on a range of service providers to 'police' the effectiveness of the immigration system, and has also resulted in the Windrush scandal. Is this perpetuating a narrative of polarisation, making it harder to develop a coalition approach to integration?

Progress and challenges

We have identified areas of progress and challenge through emerging *Understanding Society* evidence, group discussions at the event, and speaker presentations on London and Bradford.

Understanding Society findings

[Rory Coulter and William Clark's research on whether we are "sleepwalking to segregation"](#) explores factors associated with the types of neighbourhoods that people from different ethnic backgrounds are moving to. The authors show that, regardless of ethnic background, people tend to move to more affluent neighbourhoods as their income increases. This, in consequence, is expected to gradually lead to lower segregation between ethnic minority groups and the white British population. However, the researchers also note that this expected direction of change is slow for a few reasons. Firstly, only a small share of the population moves geographically and the majority of moves happen within the same local area (short-distance). Secondly, because ethnic minority groups, on average, live in more deprived neighbourhoods, their destination neighbourhoods also tend to be less affluent compared to the average white British movers. As a result, we still observe persistent inequalities in the socio-demographic make-up of British neighbourhoods.

London's approach

Given that over 36% of London's population was born outside the UK, shouldn't integration happen naturally in the capital? Debbie Weekes-Bernard, the Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement, argued that social integration can't be left to chance. A strategy is essential.

Underpinned by data, London's strategy has four components:

- relationships
- participation
- equality
- evidence

Each element has an equal role to play, and they are interconnected. Meaningful relationships reduce unconscious bias and discrimination – and greater equality means people relate to each other as equals. Reducing inequality allows people to participate more fully in society; and increased participation creates more opportunity for meaningful relationships to form.

With limited powers to call on in this area, the Mayor's approach has been to use his convening powers and to invest in sports, volunteering and advocacy, and in pilot schemes to test ideas. The Sport Unites programme, for example, aims to create new partnerships between communities, and to engage socially isolated people and alienated sections of communities through sport. The Mayor has also aimed to incorporate social integration across City Hall and its work.

[Yaojun Li's work on social mobility](#) compares the so-called 'origin-education-destination' pathways among ethnic minority and white majority groups in the UK. The author explores whether the factors associated with upward social mobility work in the same way for ethnic minority and majority populations. He finds that upward social mobility is, on average, more difficult to achieve for those from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to those from a white British background. This is despite the fact that educational attainment, traditionally perceived as a vehicle to upward social mobility, is higher among ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the persistent ethnic disadvantage in terms of social mobility patterns is noticeable not only among immigrant generations but also among British-born generations, suggesting that there is still a lot to be done to achieve racial equality.

[Nicole Martin and Jonathan Mellon explore the phenomenon of high political party identification among ethnic minority young people](#). The authors find convincing evidence for intergenerational transmission of political engagement. For example, they show that young people are 11-13% more likely to identify with a political party if their parents are also political party supporters (compared to young people whose parents do not identify with any party). Since, on average, ethnic minority parents have higher levels of political party allegiance, their children also tend to identify with political parties more often than white British youth. Interestingly, the type of political party the parents support does not seem to matter much. If anything, there is a small indication that political disagreement between parents might be more beneficial in stimulating political awareness among their children.

The final piece of research presented under the social integration theme, by Alita Nandi and Lucinda Platt, explores [the relationship between political and ethnic identities among UK ethnic minority and majority populations](#). The authors focus on different social identities and their drivers to investigate some of the claims frequently made by the sceptics of multiculturalism, such as the claim that minorities do not identify with Britain. They show that the factors associated with the higher importance attached to political or ethnic identities largely work in the same way for minority and majority populations. For example, women tend to have weaker political identities than men, and those with political party affiliation tend to have stronger political identities. Interestingly, the authors show that other aspects of identity such as age/life stage, gender, family, etc. tend to be more important than political and ethnic identities both for those from minority and majority backgrounds.

Areas of progress and challenge identified at the event

Areas of progress	Challenges
Social and community factors	
Increasing recognition of the issue across national and local stakeholders	
'Social mixing' is being factored into outcomes for different programmes	People not highlighted who have not been integrated (potentially all of us) – old people, carers, people with disabilities – categories which are going to grow
	Hate crime policies: school responses are individual and often down to parental choice
	Complexity of socio-cultural identities
Some progress in inclusion of ethnic minorities in high-profile roles in arts, sports and politics	...but progress is slow
There is evidence of prejudice falling	...but there are regional differences, with immigration largely going to poorer areas

Long-term trend of increasing intermarriage	
Ethnicity not the outstanding feature of young people's identities; can create bonding capital in different combinations as ethnic identity is less salient	
Local networks, multiple funders (good but hard to track)	Are grassroots organisations respected and adequately resourced?
	Slacktivism: how do we encourage active community organising?
	Media putting blame on marginalised groups for problems caused by historic underinvestment and financial crisis
Structural factors	
Work can be levelling/integrated, compared to school/neighbourhood	...but unequal opportunities to progress in career
	Insecure employment, benefits and the state of local economies
	Bias in recruitment – can we overcome it with blind recruitment? Are we training AI to repeat our bias?
Opportunities for foreign qualification conversion	People should be taught languages which are relevant to their skills (e.g. medicine)
	Housing, which interplays with economic and financial issues
	Standards of social housing are poor
Growth in head teachers wanting to link schools	Some areas and schools are very segregated
Educational attainment	Progress on social mobility is still slow
Children often co-exist	...but splinter voluntarily at secondary school. Intervention at 7-9 has greatest impact
	Fewer soft services and roles such as care work devalued
	Factors play out in differently across areas in the UK compared to London
Leadership factors	
Strong leadership from city mayors	Absence of leadership in masked problems, such as Islamophobia, and disability
	Lack of local stake and control in funding and government

Informational factors	
Some <i>Understanding Society</i> evidence challenges popular perceptions in a positive way	
Alternatives to mainstream media	Bias in think tanks and media
	Need for better evaluation and knowledge sharing
	How we look at data – not categorising all groups together; impact on different social groups is affected by bias/isolating factors
	Under-reporting effects of travellers/Roma people
	Need for policies to start actively responding to the findings of such studies
	Persistent labour market disadvantages: could this be studied with linked admin data?
More accessible information	Lack of clarity on government agenda: localism v integration

Moving forward

What ‘successful’ integration looks like may be difficult to define, and how we live together in a super-diverse society is a constant process of learning and adaptation. While change takes time, particularly tackling structural factors, integration is sometimes described as an ‘imagination agenda’.

One such initiative is The Jo Cox Foundation, which works both internationally⁷ and nationally. In the UK, it focuses on tackling abuse and intimidation in public life and the loneliness agenda. Locally, it aims to build stronger communities. Their flagship project, [the Great Get Together](#), which takes place on Jo Cox’s birthday, brings people together and unites communities, inspired by Cox’s belief that people have more in common than that which divides them.

As a ‘convening’ charity, it mobilises and convenes thousands of events across the country, showing that there is an appetite for community building – with the organisers increasingly doing things year-round as well. One organiser in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, for example, is now doing monthly anti-knife crime work. The charity has also facilitated exchanges between the London Borough of Lambeth, the most Remain-voting borough in the country, and Boston, the most leave-voting locality.

Catherine Anderson, the Chief Executive, advocates the need for an intersectional approach to community building – and it needs to be community-based. The government can also be doing more by creating spaces where communities can come together.

How integration moves up the policy agenda, particularly in the context of the rhetoric of ‘bringing the country together’, remains to be seen, but there are opportunities to drive progress.

Action research for bottom-up action

Mapping out what unites and divides a local community in different places is an important starting point – to challenge or verify the perspectives on the state of local integration and cohesion and to search for imaginative ideas. Diversity sampling – based not simply on ethnicity, but gender, age and socio-economic status – can be more important to identify areas of common interest. While the European Union is investing extensively into research on migration and integration⁸, no similar initiative exists in the UK.

Local players, such as local authorities, do not have the resources or tools to undertake such research exercises in their communities. This is where partnerships with universities can help. With UK Research and Innovation keen to stimulate public engagement of under-represented communities in research and innovation this should provide new opportunities for collaboration⁹.

Giving local communities the tools to do their own research (and accept it as evidence) can help build local understanding, capacity and community relations. However, some people cannot easily be involved in active research due to their immigration status and fear of how the evidence might be used. But giving people the tools to do their own research gives them a sense of agency and allows them to make a difference in their own lives and their communities.

A supportive national network

A major challenge for those engaged in promoting integration and cohesion is the lack of ability to connect with like-minded individuals and organisations, reflect on their activities, draw inspiration and develop new ideas. There may also be a lack of diversity within the organisations which aim to promote integration, and their volunteers. The vast majority of Great Get Together's current organisers are white women in their 40s and 50s. The organisation is working to appeal more widely, and looking at training and skills for its community organisers to help them feel part of a national network.

One organisation working in this field is [the cohesion and integration network called Belong](#). It seeks to connect, support and mobilise the individuals and organisations who are doing vital work in their communities – with an ambition to transform policy and practice in this area.

Tackling structural barriers to integration across places

Addressing the structural barriers to integration will depend on long-term investment and institutional reform with greater decentralisation of power from Whitehall. In terms of the home nations, policy competence in areas such as economic development, education and skills, and housing is a devolved responsibility. With the vast majority of public resources already dedicated to current services, social integration depends on leverage and influencing institutional behaviours.

There are, though, a number of policy initiatives in the pipeline that could potentially be helpful, namely the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (domestic replacement for the European Structural and Investment Fund, which will be devolved), The Towns Fund (England) and an expected White Paper on Devolution in England. How these funding initiatives combine economic development and regeneration with social integration remains to be seen, but this will depend on local evidence of need and the effectiveness of community involvement.

Proving that progress can be made

Ideas and lessons can also be drawn from other countries as well. How are other countries moving ahead – from Portugal, France and Germany to Canada and Australia? While there are significant differences between the UK and other countries, such as the extensive reliance on low-paid work in the UK, comparative research and analysis can provide opportunities for policy and practice. Portugal has a good model where they have firewalls between different government departments and their immigration services. Canada looks at integration in a very different way, and while it is driven by economic imperatives, the country is home to 7.5 million immigrants (2016), one of the largest foreign-born populations in the world. However, it will be important to make sure evidence is made useful and does not perpetuate assumptions about identity and cultural divisions in society.

Appendix

What aspects of social integration can be measured using *Understanding Society* data?

A wide range of measures relevant to different aspects of social integration can be found in *Understanding Society*. This section highlights some of the modules frequently used by researchers interested in this topic.

Module name	Module content
Neighbourhood module Local neighbourhood module	Questions related to relationships within local community, neighbourhood belonging, social cohesion, subjective assessment of local area in terms of quality of local facilities, crime, safety and social relationships
Social networks module Best friends module	Questions related to the make-up of friendship and social networks
Groups and organisations module Voluntary work module	Questions related to organisational membership and activity, frequency and type of volunteering
Political engagement module Politics module	Questions related to political efficacy, sense of civic duty, voting behaviour, partisanship, satisfaction with democracy, perceived cost of political engagement
Discrimination module Harassment module	Questions related to experience of discrimination and harassment due to different personal characteristics
Ethnicity and national identity module Britishness module	Questions related to the strength of identification with mother's/father's ethnicity, importance of being British, feeling close to someone from the same religion, speaking the same language, etc.
Migration history module Migration history short module Migration background module	Questions related to different aspects of migration history

Notes

1. [Repairing our social fabric, Towards a new understanding of community strength](#), Onward (2020).
2. [Understanding Society, Insights 2020](#), Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex (2020).
3. [Unresolved Public Policy Challenges](#), NATCEN Social Research, Office for National Statistics and Understanding Society (2020).
4. [Immigration and social cohesion in the UK: The rhythms and realities of everyday life](#), Mary Hickman, Helen Crowley and Nick Mai, with Umut Erel. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008).
5. [The politics of belonging in Britain](#). Nira Yuval-Davis in conversation with Jenny Allsopp on religion, migration and the politics of belonging, Open Democracy (2012).
6. [Living Apart, Living Together? The Role of Intergroup Contact in Social Integration](#), Miles Hewstone, Joint British Academy/British Psychological Society Lecture (2006)
7. Internationally, it administers a £10m DFID fund for projects in two areas that Jo Cox was passionate about: women's empowerment and building resilient communities to combat identity-based violence.
8. The 2018-2020 Work Programme of the EU's [Horizon 2020 research programme](#) makes migration a priority. During the course of the Work Programme, the EU has allocated €200 million to support investigations into the drivers of migration, migration management and the integration of migrants in host societies.
9. [Vision for Public Engagement](#), UK Research and Innovation (2019)

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Understanding Society

Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER)
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester
CO4 3SQ
Tel: +44 (0) 1206 872957

www.understandingsociety.ac.uk

 @usociety

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