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Where next in integration?

Sitting in a room with ten academics specialising in integration plus the EU Commissioners for Migration and Integration last week we were collectively charged with the task of trying to design a package of research that could feed into post-Stockholm programme European integration policy. The question of what constitutes integration and how it might be facilitated is one that has received a great deal of attention from academics and policymakers over the years and has yet to be answered. Eight hours spent discussing integration possibly raised more questions than answers and helped me to realise that attitudes to migration and integration vary enormously across the EU and of course depend on the academic discipline from which they are explored.

I often revert back to the social-psychology and the theory of John Berry and colleagues. Berry's work clearly shows that integration is a two way process of mutual adaptation. Without the efforts of what Berry calls "dominant" communities and institutions to adapt and evolve in light of increased diversity, migrants may follow a pathway to separation or marginalisation and therein experience **psychosocial stresses or social exclusion (http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8280854)** . Recent **analyses of the Survey of New Refugees (PDF - 777Kb) (/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2013/nuffield-refugees-integration-research-report.pdf)** by staff at our **Institute for Research into Superdiversity (/research/activity/superdiversity-institute/index.aspx)** and our colleagues at Cardiff University have demonstrated clearly that for refugees at least there is a strong connection between feeling unwelcome or experiencing harassment and ill health. These findings provide robust and reliable statistics that support earlier qualitative work that we have **undertaken for Joseph Rowntree Foundation (http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/migrant-refugee-community-organisations)** and Birmingham City Council where migrants have told us that they are too frightened to mix with local residents because they are aware of anti-migrant or anti-refugee sentiment or have experienced harassment because they were identified as migrants. Contrast these with research that we did evaluating European Refugee Fund and European Integration Fund initiatives where we identified that amongst the most effective approaches to integration were those programmes that sought to educate local people and businesses about the reality of refugees and asylum seekers lives or to set up initiatives that gave migrants and local residents the opportunity to work together on a local project

Returning to the KING project meeting I was struck by how my Italian and German counterparts focused on integration as a challenge in terms of how to encourage migrants to remain in their host countries in order to address the demographic time bomb. Youthful migrants were seen as the answer to concerns about a dwindling working age population and associated tax base. Certainly at regional level, my colleagues were from the wealthy Lombardy and Hessen municipalities, policy makers were concerned to ensure that economic recovery was not undermined by a lack of labour. I contrasted this to the approach in the UK, where the Government's Immigration Bill contained measures to "stop migrants abusing public services…and reduce the pull factors which draw illegal immigrants to the UK". The message we are sending out is that migrants are not welcome in the UK and that those who do arrive are responsible for their own integration. The negative language which dominates debate around migration and integration in the UK is clearly aimed at supporting the Government's goal of reducing net migration and assuaging the media and public frenzy about migration numbers. Such a short-term approach threatens exacerbating anti-migrant, anti-integrative, sentiment and arguably in the longer term may impact upon our economic recovery encouraging migrants to take their skills and resources to those regions of Europe that have the courage to take a longer term perspective.

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