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Walking a tightrope between policy and scholarship: reflections on integration principles in a hostile environment

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘integration’ has received considerable academic attention, much of it critical. Yet it continues to be widely used in policy and practice to capture the processes of change that occur following migration from one country to another. In an environment of increasing hostility and anti-migrant sentiment, we outline the process of working with the UK Home Office and a wide range of stakeholders to revise the original Home Office \textit{Indicators of Integration framework} [Ager and Strang (2008). “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework.” \textit{Journal of Refugee Studies} 21: 166–191]. We directly engage with some of the key criticisms of integration by offering four core, co-developed principles: shared responsibility, context, multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality. We believe these principles cut through the institutional cultural bias of policymakers and offer a new framework for thinking about integration policy, practice and scholarship. Our work underlines the importance of scholars taking the opportunity to engage with policy and to present scientific evidence as a mechanism to confront hostile immigration practices and address the social injustices that usually accompany migration.

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KEYWORDS

Integration; indicators of integration; hostile environment; principles of integration; migration

Introduction

The term ‘integration’ is widely used in scholarship, policy and practice to capture the processes of change that occur following the migration of individuals or groups from one country to another (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016). In academe, the concept has received a vast amount of attention with publications featuring the keywords refugee and integration being produced at a rate of 500 peer-reviewed papers per year since 2015 (Phillimore et al. in development). Integration has been the target of much criticism (Favell 2022; Schinkel 2018) despite the undeniable empirical reality that following migration, social, cultural and psychological changes occur both at individual and group levels (Berry 2005; Hynie 2018). Post-migration adaptation experiences can
exacerbate or ameliorate trauma and migration bereavement for migrants, and especially forced migrants (Hynie 2018; Porter and Haslam 2005). Within so-called receiving communities, successful integration processes, however, measured, are seen as integral to support for multiculturalism (Larin 2020) and refugee resettlement commitments (Hynie 2018; UNHCR 2023). Integration is highly politicised, especially in countries where hostility to immigration, and particularly forced migration, has been increasing (Larin 2020). This has resulted in the development of integration policies and strategies that often reflect expectations that migrants adapt in line with imagined national values (Casey 2016). For example, oftentimes policy has focussed on implementing programmes seeking to mould newcomers into idealised citizen subjects (Morrice 2017). The hostile environment not only impacts policies that seek to directly shape integration processes but also arguably on those which indirectly shape processes.

Critical border scholars have tended to view scholars who engage with the notion of integration, and especially with policy and policymakers, as reinforcing dominant racist and normative thinking (Schinkel 2018). In this paper, we argue for scholars’ active engagement in integration policymaking processes as a mechanism to confront hostile immigration practices. Focusing on our work shaping the UK’s Indicators of Integration framework (IoI) (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019), we show how we utilised evidence and engagement to change the direction of travel of a national integration policy tool, which is being used to shape integration practice internationally. We begin by setting out some of the potential and problems with the concept of integration before considering the ways in which policy operates as a challenge and an opportunity to ameliorate hostile integration practices. We set out the process of developing the IoI, before outlining the four co-developed principles intended to cut through the institutional cultural bias of policymakers. We explain how these principles provide the foundations for the IoI expressed through a series of multi-level, multi-actor, good practices. In conclusion, we contend that engaging in social research is progressive and that the use of expert knowledge to generate an integration framework was a social justice project and an example where expert knowledge was used to contribute to policy development (Boswell 2009). We argue that engaging with policy development and policymakers can enable scholars to begin to ameliorate some of the excesses of hostile policies.

The problems and potentials of integration scholarship

Attempts to theorise and examine empirically the processes of post-arrival adaptation that follow the movement of migrants into a new country have spanned nearly a century and have been well-rehearsed elsewhere (Berry 2005; Phillimore 2020; Ryan et al. 2008; Ryan, Dooley, and Benson 2008). Of multiple concepts which have been utilised: assimilation, adaptation, incorporation and acculturation, the term integration dominates in Europe, Canada and Australia. The popularity of integration in these places likely relates to its framing as the lesser evil in that integration places less emphasis on the loss of cultural identity. Integration is heavily favoured in studies of forced migration. As with many key sociological ideas core to Migration Studies, there is no one accepted definition of integration and no agreement of what successful integration looks like, or how it can be measured (Castles et al. 2002). Scholars such as Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016, 11) use a processual definition ‘the process of settlement,
interaction with the host society, and social change that follows immigration’. Others also refer to participation (Joppke and Seidle 2012), dynamism (Ponzo et al. 2013), relational process (Klarenbeek 2024), the involvement of multiple actors (Habash and Omata 2022) and the importance of multiple policy arenas (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016; Spencer andCharsley 2021; Strang and Ager 2010) and context (Phillimore 2020). Much attention is focused on community, locality, group or ‘society’ level changes with measurements often working at these levels. Little attention is paid to individual experiences or the ways that integration of multiple actors can be achieved despite the call for ‘two-way’ approaches (Klarenbeek 2021). Rather than becoming enmeshed in attempts to define integration, we identify four core principles which we believe can be used to ameliorate the social inequalities which emerge in contexts of migration, and which are amplified in hostile and anti-immigrant contexts. We draw on insights from Klarenbeek (2024) who, rather than attempting to define and theorise ‘perfect integration’, argues we should focus on defining what an ‘integration problem’ is and what potential solutions might look like.

Scholars have identified multiple domains of integration wherein processes of change occur. These include practical arenas such as labour markets, healthcare and education systems (Ager and Strang 2008; Esser 2004), and the evolving nature of migrants’ social relationships (Cheung and Phillimore 2013; Heckmann 2005), and cultural and identificational dimensions (Heckmann 2005). The original IoI model was developed by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) as a heuristic device setting out the key domains of integration identified through a review of literature and primary research with refugees, local people and other stakeholders. Following the model’s publication in the Journal of Refugee Studies in 2008, it has been cited 3508 times and across every continent. The 2004 publication, based on the research reported in the 2008 paper, operates as a policy document and facilitates policy and practice by setting out the core integration dimensions to be considered when devising policy, funding integration interventions and evaluating integration outcomes.

The model and much of integration scholarship have been heavily critiqued. It is accused of being conceptually weak, heavily reliant on problematic sociological terminology, such as ‘society’ (Schinkel 2018), and failing to question national boundedness (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2003). However, more recent scholarship has explored the ‘deterritorialization’ of integration (Dahinden 2023) and argued that understanding is not necessarily limited to national-level integration (Klarenbeek 2024). The use of binary language such as them/us, host/guest and migrant/native (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018; Strang and Ager 2010) is said to fail to recognise the population heterogeneity. In recognition of increasing ethnic and racial diversity, Crul (2024) argues that all groups, including non-migrants, are required to ‘integrate into diversity’ which calls for new indicators of integration which include non-migrant groups. The reality of multiple levels and layers of identification and belonging (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018; Strang and Quinn 2021) including transnational (Levitt and Schiller 2004) is another concern. Integration is criticised for assumptions of linearity or sequentiality (Phillimore 2012), and as constructing migrants as ‘others’ in need of corrective policy interventions (Larin 2020).

Scholars such as Larin (2020) and Gray (2006) consider integration policy as a form of control, managing migrants in ways not applied to non-migrants. Such approaches
denote inferiority, imposing essentialist ideas around cultural superiority (Larin 2020; Schinkel 2018) while controlling access to resources and power (Gray 2006). This criticism raises a fundamental question at the heart of migration research about whether ‘migrant’ is a priori research subject and whether ‘migration-driven differences’ are the inevitable category of difference (Dahinden 2016). It is a question which can only be addressed by a focus on a whole population approach, including non-migrants, proposed by scholars such as Crul (2024) and Klarenbeek (2024) which is attentive to other non-migration axes of difference. Schinkel (2018) argues that integration research is a form of neo-colonial knowledge production failing to recognise its racist foundations (see also Mayblin and Turner 2020).

Although the importance of context is frequently reiterated, few scholars have considered the operationalisation of context. Rather the term is commonly used interchangeably with ‘place’ thus failing to consider how context influences integration processes (Phillimore 2020). Replacement terms such as embedding, and emplacement suffer from the same problems (i.e. embedding into what?). We argue there are compelling arguments for the retention of the concept of integration. It has proven extraordinarily enduring (Vertovec 2020), making sense to a wide range of stakeholders. Further, while accusations of normativity abound, much work has focussed on the empirical reality of resettlement experiences and researched whole populations rather than just migrants. Acknowledgements of fluidity and heterogeneity have begun to address outdated ideas of a homogenous society (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018). Further, and of huge importance, is the reality that integration processes are crucial to newcomers, and especially forced migrants, because post-migrant experiences are more influential to long-term wellbeing than pre-migration (Porter and Haslam 2005). Individuals who report feeling integrated demonstrate higher levels of wellbeing than those who do not and recover more swiftly from trauma (Hynie 2018). There is clear evidence that forced migrants fare worse than the general and minoritised populations in terms of accessing decent work, healthcare, good quality housing and education and that this refugee penalty lasts for over a decade (Bevelander 2020; Connor 2010; Fasani, Frattini, and Minale 2022; Fix, Hooper, and Zong 2017; Matlin et al. 2018; Phillimore and Goodson 2008). Further, there is a need to provide support to individuals who want and need to engage with welfare and employment systems to move forward with their lives (Lessard-Phillips et al. 2022; Lewis et al. 2014; Strang, Baillot, and Mignard 2018).

The concept of integration is not perfect. However, many of the fiercest criticisms of the integration paradigm do not offer solutions, which inevitably preserve the status quo, and do nothing to improve the lives of migrants (Alba, Statham, and Foner 2024; Goodman 2023; Statham 2023). Therefore, we favour Klarenbeek’s (2021) argument that integration can be framed as an outcome of social justice, equality and equal relations and argue for the conceptualisation of integration as a tangible pathway to a better life. Processes of change are inevitable post-migration. If we do not research integration we cannot identify inequalities, racism and exclusion which prevent people from having a decent life. If we do not devise good integration policy and associated interventions, then we leave newcomers unsupported and unable to access key resources which we know can contribute to their quality of life (Phillimore 2012). Moreover, if academic debate and research on processes of change are suppressed, the resulting vacuum creates fertile conditions for extremist rhetoric (Pantucci 2023). Thus, supporting integration is a
progressive project. Yet in the UK and much of Europe current political and policy environments are increasingly hostile to forced migrants who are expected to integrate with minimal or no support in the face of vilification, everyday slow violence (Mayblin 2019) and increasing uncertainty around their futures. We argue for integration research, policy and practice which can address some of the above criticisms. But how can we challenge dominant narratives in a hostile policy environment? How do we contribute to developing policy addressing individual and collective needs, and account for complex, and highly individualised and unpredictable processes?

Policy as challenge and solution

Levels of forced migration are at an all-time high having more than doubled in the past decade (UNHCR 2023). Ongoing geopolitical instability and climate displacement ensure that numbers will rise further. Most displaced people move within their home nation or just across borders meaning that the 'burden' of support lies disproportionately within the Global South. Global instabilities have inevitably led to an increase in forced migrant arrivals to the Global North. The UK response is increasingly characterised by tightly proscribed resettlement programmes targeting very specific migrant groups such as recently Ukrainians. Currently, there are almost no ‘safe and legal’ ways to seek refuge in the UK. The number of resettlement places does not reflect the scale of need (UNHCR 2023). Rather than recognising the increase in forced migration as a reflection of global trends, many driven by legacies of colonial empires, North/South inequality and global capitalism, the Global North has shored up its borders. Walls and fences, detention centres with multi-national companies specialising in forced migrant capture, incarceration and removal have appeared as migration or border industrial complexes profiting from keeping the dispossessed from crossing national borders (Burridge 2014; McGuirk and Pine 2020).

The UK’s 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act set in train a series of policies embedding the national government’s differentiation between asylum seekers and refugees, creating an increasingly hostile environment for asylum-seeker arrivals (Mulvey 2010). These began with no choice dispersal to housing in impoverished areas and exclusion from mainstream welfare benefits. The UK Government’s Hostile Environment Policy was formally introduced in 2012 specifically to create an environment so unpleasant for illegal immigrants (but, which also ended up being applied to skilled migrant workers, rejected asylum seekers and Commonwealth citizens) that it acted as a deterrent to those thinking of coming to the UK. Although the terminology has changed, the hostility remains, with employers, banks, hospitals, universities and landlords coerced with the threat of huge fines into engaging in the generation of hostility through enacting bureaucratic borders that at the very least ‘other’ those who try to cross them but sometimes cause them grave harm. Hostility has progressed to a situation where, under the provisions of the Illegal Migration Act 2023, those who do not arrive through ‘legal’ routes, are deemed ineligible for asylum, with plans to ‘offshore’ to a third country or enforce returns. Forced migrants to the UK are accused of being ‘bogus’ arriving to take advantage of the welfare state (Zimmermann 2014). This is despite 76% of asylum applicants in 2022 being granted refugee status (Home Office 2023). Asylum seekers in England are excluded from all state-funded integration measures, leaving them living in a state of
uncertainty for extended periods, inflicting long-term harm to psychological and physical health (Burns et al. 2022; Phillimore and Cheung 2021). Leave to remain for those who gain refugee status has become more temporary, and access to citizenship and family reunion is greatly restricted.

Yet those who gain refugee status, in the face of such hostility, face expectations that they integrate through, at the very least, accessing work and speaking the language. The national integration discourse embedded in the Integrated Communities Action Plan (MHCLG 2018) argues for a local approach to integration, which demands that allegedly self-segregated minorities adopt so-called British values and engage in ‘meaningful mixing’, without setting out the nature of such values or what makes mixing meaningful. In policy terms, the responsibility for integration has been placed squarely at the door of migrants and minorities. In the context of such hostility and negative public opinion and media coverage, there is limited investment in the services needed to help individuals build a life in a new country (ICAI 2023).

The IoI framework (Ager and Strang 2004; Ager and Strang 2008) was developed to inform the planning, monitoring and evaluation of integration strategy, projects and practice. As the only integration policy aimed squarely at refugees that applies across the whole UK, the IoI sets the benchmark for integration interventions and investment. The IoI was used extensively to shape local actions and devolved administration strategy, to measure the usefulness of integration interventions and to compare refugee integration outcomes in different resettlement programmes (Ipsos 2023). The UK Home Office expressed their intention to update the IoI in 2014. As scholars, activists and public intellectuals, we were involved in its development over a 5-year period. We used our involvement to steer the IoI away from the hostile environment agenda towards an approach that is genuinely supportive of social justice.

We respect the position of critical bordering scholars and their decision to disengage with the hostile Government. But we believe that policy can and should be evidence driven and has the potential to create conditions for all individuals to live a good life (Phillimore under review). Our combined seven-plus decades of practice and research with forced migrants, in which we have heard repeatedly about refugees’ desire to integrate and the need for support, convinced us of the importance of this endeavour. We hoped that engaging in the review process and using evidence to argue for core integration principles reflecting the needs of newcomers, local people, institutions and other stakeholders would enable us to push back against some of the hostility and generate a policy that is progressive. As outsiders/insiders in the process, we used our position as experts to challenge assumptions and essentialisation and to advocate for evidence-based policy rather than using evidence to legitimise or substantiate Government policy (Boswell 2009). While the outcome of our efforts is inevitably a compromise, we believe our involvement facilitated the production of a policy tool challenging the current discourses and setting out a series of measures with the potential to be socially progressive.

**Walking the tightrope: collaboration in a hostile environment**

The original IoI study was commissioned in 2002 in response to the impact of the 1999 UK Government Dispersal policy (UK Immigration and Asylum Act 1999). An explicit
policy driven agenda underpinned the research: the quest to define refugee integration in a way that it could be measured, and government support mechanisms evaluated. The research programme encompassed field research with new refugees and longer-term residents; a national survey of forced migrants; and consultation with practitioner and policy stakeholders. The dataset informed the development of a conceptual framework elaborating core integration domains. This was published as a Home Office working document in 2004, accompanied by lists of indicators for each domain generated by policy stakeholders. A peer-reviewed journal paper was published in 2008 presenting the underpinning research.

Despite the origins of the IoI as a research programme commissioned for a very specific UK policy purpose, the framework has been widely used by scholars globally. Practitioners have implemented practice models based on IoI (e.g. STARTSS, Victoria Australia; RISE Colorado USA; Holistic Integration Service, Scotland), and diverse integration policies such as the National Youth Settlement Framework for Australia 2016 and the New Scots strategy 2014 and 2018 have drawn heavily on the framework.

By 2014 policy and practice engagement and application of the IoI had gathered momentum, alongside new evidence and thinking on integration, so an HO policy-driven refreshing of the IoI commenced. Critically, the process was led throughout by a civil servant, herein termed ‘HO policy entrepreneur’, with much integration policy experience. The review was a stop/start process with extended periods of apparent dormancy, and then intensive input. A wide range of UK stakeholders, ensuring the participation of the devolved nations, were drawn into the process at different points. There was a strong emphasis on engaging directly with forced migrants, achieved with the active support of practitioner organisations. The timeline (see Figure 1) outlines the key milestones in the process. A de facto working group drove the process forward comprising the HO team and ourselves, academics, and co-authors of this paper. The work of this group was unfunded with membership evolving around a shared passion to see integration policy developed in ways that would be supportive of forced migrants. We each had a track record of research critiquing and building on the IoI framework as well as a strong commitment to, and experience of, community engagement and evidence-based policy making.

The HO team was charged with delivering to the agendas and priorities of elected politicians. As academics, we were not similarly constrained. We brought our knowledge of scientific evidence on integration to inform and shape policy to promote the wellbeing of forced migrants settling in the UK. Thus, the HO IoI 2019 toolkit (Home Office 2019) was shaped by the opportunity for the evidence base to interact directly with the political agenda. Without the engagement of academics and policymakers, in this case, civil servants from almost all Government departments, in co-production, we believe the resulting IoI would have been significantly different. Our direct participation gave us the opportunity to pushback on politically motivated proposals and to use evidence to contribute to new thinking rather than legitimising the dominant political discourse (Boswell 2009).

Initially, the focus of internal discussions between HO stakeholders and ourselves was on updating the domains of integration first outlined in the original 2004 working paper. During the discussion, we argued for the inclusion of four principles fundamental to operationalising the domains. A key debate concerned the attribution of responsibility
Figure 1. Indicators of Integration timeline.
for integration. For example, the original framework had established that responsibility is two-way and not solely the responsibility of refugees. There was strong pressure for the revised version to be more explicit about newcomer responsibilities. We argued that the weight of expectation is already on newcomers to adapt and the need to elucidate a principle of shared responsibility (e.g. Mayblin 2019; Mulvey 2010). Once agreed upon, these principles framed the identification of indicators for each domain and crucially the outlining of good practice examples setting out the responsibilities of all stakeholders. There followed a four-nation-wide round of consultations involving refugees, practitioners, local government and devolved administration.

Much of the work revising the framework and toolkit occurred between 2016 and 2018 during major shifts in migration patterns and responses. Schemes were introduced to bring forced migrants from Syria to the UK and many rural areas welcomed refugees for the first time. Meanwhile, MHCLG (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) was developing the Integrated Communities Action Plan informed by the Casey Review that raised concerns about the lack of ‘meaningful mixing’ between some ethnic minorities and the rest of the population. It recommended that all those settling in the UK should be required to follow ‘British values’ (Casey 2016).

As the full draft of the policy toolkit took shape, there was a recognition that the multi-dimensional nature of integration experiences as elaborated by the IoI would require cross-government support. Written feedback was received on the full draft from all but one UK government department. A roundtable discussion was organised including government representatives and the academic members of the working group. This forum brought together champions of various policy agendas (termed ‘policy customers’) including the Prevent (counter-terrorism) strategy and those working on the Integrated Communities Action Plan. As core actors, we were able, amongst other things, to challenge politically motivated proposals to require forced migrants to adopt ‘British values’ as an indicator of integration. We demonstrated that there was no coherent or enduring formulation of ‘British values’ representing the complexity of British attitudes, cultures and lifestyles. Similarly, some policy customers wanted to develop the IoI as a tool to identify and prevent radicalisation. Using knowledge of forced migrants’ experiences, we pushed for the IoI to focus on measures that enable all UK residents to build their lives together. We argued that ‘meaningful mixing’ could not be defined or measured and that integration evolved, according to the IoI principles we proposed, as a process of facilitating opportunity and choice for individuals to pursue their own lives in a positive relationship with others.

The toolkit was then shared through another round of consultation with refugees, practitioners, local government and all devolved administrations. The final version reflected the input of local stakeholders as well as national government priorities moderated through the active engagement and contestation with ourselves. It was launched in June 2019 by HO and MHCLG with Prime Ministerial sign-off. It has since been supplemented with training for local policymakers and practitioners developed by IOM (International Organisation for Migration). Regional hubs such as the West Midlands strategic migration partnership and the Welsh and Scottish Governments are drawing on it to shape integration strategy, policy and practice.
**Indicators of Integration 2019**

The existence and wide adoption of the 2004 IoI was both an opportunity and a challenge. The IoI Framework is easily understood and has been applied to wide-ranging integration policy needs including strategy building, designing interventions and monitoring their outcomes. The 2004 framework consisted of a short report mainly focused on outlining 10 domains across four themes followed by a short list of indicators for each domain cutting across practice and policy levels. The domains were selected following research about what matters in integration with refugees and other stakeholders. The report outlined a series of tentative indicators compiled through consultation with multi-departmental stakeholders.

In order to build on the growing body of knowledge associated with IoI, the 2019 publication retains the original format of the much-cited 2004 framework diagram, albeit with the addition of four new or amended domains (see Figure 2). As a consequence, some have mistakenly assumed that it simply provides an updated iteration of the original (Favell 2022). In reality, the remainder of the document is much changed. First, there is no definition of integration, instead referring to integration ‘as a multi-directional process involving multiple changes from both incoming and diverse host communities’ rather than refugees alone (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). The 2019 version is not as squarely aimed at refugees as the 2004 version, reflecting a shift in policy requirement perhaps recognising that the original IoI has been widely used to consider the integration of multiple newcomers groups. Instead, it refers to the needs of incomers, reflecting the processes associated with building a new life faced by everyone moving to a new country, although it does highlight that forced migrants face particular challenges potentially requiring additional support. The approach is underpinned by four principles: that integration is multi-dimensional, multi-directional, depends on everyone taking responsibility and is context-specific. These principles are intended to shape all thinking around each indicator domain providing a shared language for talking about integration and understanding the need for collective efforts of different actors. While the domains are described individually as per the 2004 document, they are extended by outcome indicators. The establishment of suggested outcomes, for example, measuring satisfaction with different services, access to good quality resources (i.e. decent housing, sports and leisure activities) and feelings of safety and belonging go beyond ideas of success/failure to consider the quality of life and the availability of the appropriate opportunity structures to enable individual engagement in integration processes.

The principles are further operationalised via the inclusion of local and national good practices: the practices and structures that underpin effective integration processes. These outline the actions that may be undertaken by multiple parties to promote adherence to the principles. The IoI is complemented with three additional documents (see Table 1): a detailed toolkit showing how different outcome indicators can be measured using existing data; a report detailing good practice in refugee integration initiatives; and a theory of change to help stakeholders identify and adapt integration to suit the needs of specific contexts and programmes. All are targeted at multiple stakeholders with influence on integration processes, shifting the emphasis of the 2004 IoI from refugees to all parties.

Before we move to discuss the principles in detail we outline our use of terminology. As noted above, the IoI 2004 referred to solely refugees, while the 2019 version covers all
Figure 2. Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019.
those building a life in a new country paying special attention to refugees. We use the umbrella term newcomers to encompass all individuals who have moved, regardless of their legal status, and accepting that newness does not cover a defined period, but a set of processes, experiences and feelings which relate to unfamiliarity with living in the new place. Newcomers could potentially refer to those who move internally within the UK and there were discussions as the IoI was developed about extending to covering all movers. However, the final IoI and this paper refer only to those who have moved from overseas to the UK in recognition that they encounter a high degree of novelty and newness (Phillimore 2014). Noting the superdiverse nature of many places in the UK (Vertovec 2010) we do not use terms such as natives, citizens or hosts, preferring instead ‘local people’. These are individuals who are long-resident and would consider themselves, and feel, established within the locality. Finally, we refer to all other organisations and institutions with a role in integration processes as stakeholders. These include NGOs, community groups, policymakers, politicians, the media and others. On occasion, we refer to specific types of stakeholders. While this language is NOT utilised in the IoI, wherein we were constrained in our use of terminology, we use it herein as we feel it best expresses our intentions as operationalised in the principles and good practices.

**Table 1. Indicators of Integration 2019 Key Documents.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019</strong></td>
<td>Evidence-based framework which seeks to inform the planning, monitoring and evaluation of integration projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Office Research Report 109</td>
<td>Theory of change and an interactive tool which maps multiple pathways to bringing about integration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019:</strong></td>
<td>Guides practitioners wishing to develop their own theories of change for integration programmes and strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Change Guide notes Part A and B</td>
<td>Connects to standard survey questions and measures to support data collection and local, national and international comparisons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Office Integration Interactive Toolkit</strong></td>
<td>A summary of existing evidence on integrating refugees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What works in integrating refugees</td>
<td>IOM UK and Home Office guide for local authority and civil society organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide for Practitioners on the Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Principles of integration**

**Shared responsibility**

Integration depends on everyone taking responsibility for their own contribution including newcomers, receiving communities and government at all levels (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019).

First, and probably the most important principle, is that integration is a shared responsibility requiring change and adaptation on the part of everyone (Ager and Strang 2008; Esser 2004). It recognises that individuals can only be integrated in relation to others, and that established individuals, groups and institutions inevitably have the greatest power and responsibility to support integration (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016). This principle shifts the gaze from integration as a process only relevant to migrants, to recognise the multiple stakeholders implicated, and the structural factors which impede or facilitate integration. Although this principle establishes integration as a process of transformation for all parties, it recognises that the process occurs in the
context of inequitable social, economic and political realities facing migrants and power differentials in intergroup relations (Ngo 2008). Structural factors may undermine or enable integration and cannot be separated from underlying patterns of inequality and power differentials. Structures undermining integration include the multiple harms occasioned by the UK asylum system, which systematically and purposefully impoverishes people seeking sanctuary (Mayblin 2019; Mulvey 2010). Structures also include the proliferation of detention and deportation, difficulty gaining legal support, restricted access to work and education, and exclusion from mainstream welfare system; a constellation of harms that Mayblin refers to as slow violence (Mayblin 2019). Alternatively, the presence of enabling structures such as civil society organisations, appropriate and tailored language and education programmes, support for family reunion, etc., can facilitate integration and inclusion (Phillimore 2020; Phillimore et al. 2022; Strang, Baillot, and Mignard 2018).

Adding shared responsibility as a principle created the opportunity to push back on political pressure to foreground migrants’ responsibilities. The principle was embedded through the good practice sections where we list indicators within each domain (section 7, 27–55). It enabled us to question what multiple players at national and local level need to do to support integration. For example, the Rights and Responsibilities domain includes ‘Strategies to enable migrants to exercise their rights, e.g. presence of support services and NGO sector to provide advice on rights’ (55), which scholarship demonstrates play a crucial role in enabling newcomers to build a new life (Phillimore 2020; Piacentini 2012; Zetter 1996). In the Safety domain ‘Initiatives to deal with social media groups which grow negative stereotypes and increase racist sentiment (online and offline)’ (51) is outlined reflecting the evidence of the role of such activity in undermining newcomers’ wellbeing (Blinder and Allen 2016) and in orchestrating anti-migrant sentiment (Moore-Berg, Hameiri, and Bruneau 2022). In the Social Bridges domain, we included: ‘Political rhetoric and public discourse at national level celebrating social diversity and cohesion; Press and media coverage promoting integration; National policy/legislation to ensure equal access to opportunity and services’ (41). Again, placing responsibility on those with the power to create welcoming environments and reflecting evidence about how negative discourse and the failure to facilitate appropriate opportunity structures (Phillimore 2020) undermines integration processes. Several structures and practices are identified at the local level which includes Social Links – with institutions ‘Integration and outreach policies aimed at engagement with local services or activities’ and ‘Engagement of communities in local policy and strategy development’ (41). These reflect the difficulties that newcomers can experience accessing appropriate services (Nakhaie 2018), and the failure of policymakers to engage newcomers and established residents in local policymaking that can meet the needs of all residents (Harley and Hobbs 2020).

**Context**

Integration can be measured only in relation to particular populations in a particular context and within a particular timeframe (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). We identify three overlapping and interacting dimensions of context that highlight why universal integration targets do not work. Firstly, there is no homogenised newcomer subject. Newcomers are individuals whose socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics, such
as gender, age, capacities and resources, networks, life stage and physical and mental health all help shape integration processes. Secondly, geographical place affords different assemblages of opportunities and constraints (Phillips and Robinson 2015; Strang and Ager 2010). Previous patterns of migration and diversity determine whether institutions, services and amenities there are culturally sensitive (Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015). Local identities and local narratives (Hickman, Mai, and Crowley 2012) can positively impact on wellbeing and sense of inclusion, or induce adverse effects, such as depression and emotional distress (Phillips and Robinson 2015). Material conditions and locally available resources give rise to structural differences in access to employment and services, including housing, education and health opportunity structures (Phillimore 2020). Refugees are often settled in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Robinson 2010; Stewart 2012), which will restrict opportunities in integration markers such as employment and housing. Settlement in ‘deprived’ areas can encourage misperceptions of competition over resources, which in turn promotes negative attitudes to newcomers (Hickman and Mai 2015).

Our third dimension concerns assumptions about progression through time. UK Government resettlement schemes offering different forms of tapering support over time (Local Government Association (LGA) 2017) conceptualise integration ‘… as a process of perpetual becoming’ in which the newcomer integrates into some idealised future (Çağlar 2016, 958). However, integration does not occur sequentially, or at the same pace for everyone. Life course and life-stage situations, such as motherhood, caring and older age, have temporal implications. Individual and collective agency and anti-integrative experiences such as racist harassment, discrimination and inability to unite with family also shape experiences (Kerlaff 2023). In direct contradiction to the linear assumptions embedded in resettlement schemes, the UK asylum process, by creating open-ended conditions of liminality, assumes that integration processes can be ‘frozen’, not beginning until leave to remain is granted.

The good practice indicators (section 7, 27–55) outline a range of practices that can produce the opportunity structures needed to support integration processes. These include for Language and Communication ‘support to overcome structural barriers to access such as childcare, transport and examination costs; Availability of support for vulnerable learners’ and ‘Opportunities for ESOL for all’ (44/45). These reflect evidence that access to language lessons is difficult for newcomers living in a rural area (Hassan and Phillimore 2020) while those in employment cannot access classes or afford to pay the fees (Morrice et al. 2021). In terms of work, we suggest providing a structure to enable newcomers to establish businesses and return to former careers such as ‘Programmes for overseas trained/practising professionals to join/access UK professional registers’ and ‘Strategies to support business start-ups (e.g. support to access finance)’ (29). These reflect the well-known difficulties newcomers face in getting decent quality work (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2018), especially when dispersed to deprived areas (Phillimore and Goodson 2008). They acknowledge evidence of refugees’ desire to return to decent work and the detrimental effect of economic inactivity on psychological wellbeing (Hayes et al. 2017). At the local level, Health and Social Care good practice focuses on building the capacity of local services to understand and address diverse needs ‘Training and support for frontline social work practitioners, health professionals (including GP administrative staff) and foster carers to understand and address the needs of their
local community’ (36). The necessity of developing the cultural capital of service providers to work with newcomers through approaches such as cultural safety is well established (Reavy et al. 2012) but rarely implemented (Phillimore 2014). Local good practice also includes developing localised services accounting for varied language-learning needs, for example, calling for ‘Local ESOL/equivalent strategies which meet the diverse needs of population (e.g. fast track/higher level/vocational ESOL and specialist provision for non-literate/pre-entry learners)’ (44). This underlines the wide range of variables such as literacy and previous education levels, and caring responsibilities which means the current one-size-fits-all approach fails to meet needs (Morrice et al. 2021).

**Multi-dimensionality**

The Indicators of Integration framework seeks to present a holistic understanding of the experiences of integration. It identifies the factors that are known to contribute to integration (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). This principle recognises that integration occurs across multiple, simultaneously interacting, domains. Often achievement in more easily measurable domains such as work, housing and education are prioritised and considered as single markers of integration. Yet positive outcomes in one domain do not mean an individual feels integrated across others. For example, employment is often considered the primary indication of integration, and yet early entry into employment not requiring high levels of English language can be at the expense of developing further language skills and long-term integration outcomes (Hyndman and Hynie 2016; Morrice et al. 2021). As argued above, the experience of integration varies across individual characteristics, place and time. For example, secure housing might be an immediate priority followed later by language and communication or paid work. For a parent, integration of their children into education might be an immediate priority. Integration processes can stagnate and revert (Phillimore 2012), for example, lack of secure housing and frequent relocation to new areas undermine wellbeing and previous positive integration experiences (Tip et al. 2019). The framework does not specify causal relationships or suggest that integration should happen in a particular way; however, there is an increasing number of empirical studies that elaborate these complex relationships (Baillot et al. 2023; Tip et al. 2019). Recognition of integration as a holistic and multi-dimensional process, capable of moving in different directions for different domains challenges the predominant policy focus on a narrow range of indicators such as any employment and housing. Instead, it facilitates a policy focus on domains pertinent to newcomers and avoids prescriptive and normative understandings of integration.

The new IoI recognises Safety and Stability as separate domains that enable the development of a set of good practice indicators for each (sections 7.12 and 7.13). The safety domain recognises the critical importance of feeling safe for making social connections and enabling progression through education, employment and engaging in leisure pursuits. National good practice includes ‘Commitment to equal access to security and protection from racist harassment and violence’ (51) and local good practice includes ‘Support mechanisms to help individuals to report to police, council or other appropriate services’ (50). Likewise, stability is critical to integration as it enables sustainable engagement with different dimensions, such as work, education, and health. It is also critical for developing and maintaining social networks. In the context of forced relocations and a
national housing crisis, we include local good practices such as ‘Local housing policies which maximise opportunities to stay in the area’ (53). Recognising the importance of being able to plan and imagine a future we identify ‘Policy to support applications for citizenship and/or permanent leave to remain’ (53) as national good practice. These facilitators and the practices and structures at their foundation are key to enabling newcomers to progress and access resources and opportunities relevant to their needs and aspirations.

**Multi-directionality**

A focus on integration exists in the context of diversity and recognition of differences. This framework therefore accepts that integration is a process of ‘mixing’ through interaction between people who are diverse in multiple ways, not only on the basis of ethnicity or countries of origin (Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). This principle centres on heterogeneity stressing that newcomers are not simply ‘inserted’ in any straightforward way into a long-established homogenous group. Instead, longer-established communities are constantly evolving, and increasingly superdiverse and transnationally connected (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018). Newcomers may integrate into superdiverse cities with many layers of migration history or, with the growth of community sponsorship, into areas with very little migration history. The arrival of newcomers may go unnoticed or, in rural areas be experienced as beneficial for all actors whether newcomers or locals (Reyes and Phillimore 2020).

IoI 2019 resists the pressure to envisage integration as a simple project of incorporating newcomers into a homogenous established social context. Social connections are widely recognised as facilitators of integration and occupy a central place in the IoI framework (section 7.6–7.8). Establishing two-way interactions and creating bridges with those perceived to be of other backgrounds are at the heart of many definitions of integration. While confirming the complementary functions of ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital we have avoided simplistic assumptions about who is considered to be ‘like us’. We suggested broad national good practice guidelines, such as ‘Initiatives to support activities that build friendships between people from different backgrounds’ (41), and local guidelines such as ‘Provision of activities aimed at encouraging participation of diverse groups’ and ‘Availability of befrienders or mentors’ (40). This challenges the binary assumptions of us/them and opens the door to a more nuanced understanding of the multiple layers of identification and belonging that accompany migration (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018; Strang and Quinn 2021).

Furthermore, the principle of multi-directionality enabled us to avoid references to a single dominant culture and set of values, practices and beliefs. Instead, in the indicators (section 7), we foreground diversity and the importance of mutual knowledge and understanding of multiple cultural values, practices and beliefs. For example, the Culture domain includes good practices at the national level such as ‘Strategies to support learning about everyday life in Britain, and immigrant and refugee populations in Britain’, and ‘Political rhetoric and public discourse at a national level celebrating social diversity and cohesion’ (47). Local good practice includes ‘Opportunities available for cultural expression and exchange (e.g. existence of local classes and groups that focus on a particular cultural expression and are genuinely open to diverse participants from different backgrounds)’ (46). Multi-directionality enabled us to challenge normative assumptions of British values and ways of life.
Discussion

The IoI (2004) framework has an extensive and enduring appeal for a wide range of stakeholders but has been criticised by those who consider the concept of integration as problematic. The original IoI, following extensive research, engaged with the empirical reality of newcomers’ desire and need to engage in integration processes. The new IoI (2019) goes beyond the original in ambition and articulation, incorporating a wide range of evidence-based ideas with the potential to ameliorate hostile integration practices and thus offer a substantive change in policy founded upon expert evidence (Boswell 2009). It directly engages with some of the scholarly criticisms of integration by offering core co-developed principles, realised through good practices aimed at multiple stakeholders. These principles offer a new framework for thinking about integration policy, practice and scholarship.

The principle of shared responsibility focuses on multiple structures and stakeholders. It highlights wide-ranging responsibilities for integration processes demonstrating the good practice roles and responsibilities which go beyond a singular focus on refugees. The principle of context introduces three types of context: personal, place and time that are highly variable and ever changing. It demonstrates why universal targets cannot work and pushes back against ideas of linearity and sequentiality. At the same time, it outlines the impossibility of notions such as integration processes beginning at the grant of refugee status, instead highlighting that policy cannot arrest the empirical reality of change that inevitably happens when someone moves to a new place, regardless of their status. The principle of multi-dimensionality argues how indicators can impact negatively or positively on each other while varying at different points in time. It highlights the need for certain conditions such as stability to be in place to underpin efforts and the holistic nature of integration which has to fit the needs of a person at a particular moment in time. Finally, in multi-directionality, the diversity and fluidity of established communities is acknowledged. This principle directly challenges the idea that a single ‘society’ exists and stresses the absence of a dominant culture or set of values challenging normative assumptions of British values and ways of life.

We believe we have been able to pushback some of the hostile ideas, such as refugee responsibility, there being a single British culture and set of values and that integration begins with a grant of status. In so doing, we have been able to contest, in a UK Government policy tool, some of the politicised narratives around integration.

Our involvement in the IoI was possible because of a sympathetic, savvy and enlightened civil servant who knew how to manage the review process in ways that enabled the possibility of doing something radically different in direct contravention of the hostile environment. They operated as a policy entrepreneur, exploiting opportunities to influence policy outcomes with limited resources (Mintrom and Norman 2009). They believed in the importance of evidence-based policymaking and levered in resources, including the donated time of ourselves and many others, including forced migrants, local authorities and NGOs, offering us the opportunity to do things differently.

We recognise our privileged position as white middle-class scholars with the time and gravitas to become engaged in the process. The support of our institutions, courtesy of the UK Higher Education Institutions’ Impact agenda, as articulated in the UK’s Research Excellence Framework provided our employers’ motivation, was critical. Our
ability to donate our time, rather than working on a contract, gave us the independence
to engage with the HO on our own terms. We had considerable power in the process,
partly because we provided the time and expertise to draft the IoI, but also because we
were able to support our argumentation with evidence. Our research and publication
records in the field of refugee integration and our seniority also gave us a degree of auth-
ority. At the same time, we were aware of the need to compromise. We were unable to
push the Home Office to articulate that integration begins on arrival for forced migrants.
Although the shift to the language of ‘newcomer’ does little to mitigate the deeply nega-
tive impact of the current UK asylum system, it does at least enable asylum seekers to be
included, albeit tacitly, within the IoI. Fortunately, the three of us also agreed on key
ideas, and on our own red lines. We were adamant throughout that we would not put
our names to a document which expounded normative thinking about integration,
hence our collective ability to resist multiple attempts to include politically motivated
rhetoric.

We acknowledge our white privilege sitting around a table with largely white policy-
makers discussing refugee integration. Whilst we believe that our many years of working
with refugees, for example, co-creating research projects, and with migrant and refugee
community organisations, and undertaking research with forced migrants will have given
us insight into refugee integration experiences, we recognise that we lack the uniqueness
of lived experience. In light of this, we, and the policy entrepreneur, were acutely aware of
the need to involve migrant and refugee NGOs and forced migrants in consultation pro-
cesses and therefore facilitated participation by providing practical and financial support.
We hope that future iterations of the IoI will build on this co-production model.

In writing this paper, we have inevitably reflected on our years working on the IoI, as
well as on subsequent events. Working in a doubly hostile environment, of a deeply anti-
immigration Government on the one hand, and of the concerns of critical bordering
scholars on the other, we took a number of risks. There was always the danger that
our names would be tied to a document with which we did not agree and that we
would be seen as backing a government with whose policies on immigration and
asylum we profoundly disagree. Yet overall, we believe that we succeeded in our original
goal of making integration policy less hostile. We were able to produce a Government
document that flies in the face of much Government rhetoric. We argue that it is impor-
tant for scholars to take the opportunity to engage with policy and to present their ideas,
no matter how critical, to policymakers. To do this, they have to have a good understand-
ing of policy, take up opportunities to engage with policy development, particularly
through calls for evidence and consultations, to speak the language of policymakers
and to compromise. We know this might not be acceptable to all scholars but our
belief in the importance of engagement, and the role of evidence in pushing back
against political rhetoric, is driven by imagining what the IoI 2019 would have looked
like had we not been in the room.

In summary, we have argued in this paper for the need for taking scholarship into pol-
ically driven policymaking spaces and ensuring that critical scholarly voices are heard.
We have also shown how such engagement can result in government guidelines that
reflect in this case the complexity of integration processes. The new IoI and associated
toolkit gives policy and academia tools to address integration in ways that highlight
the roles of all parties, calls for a much greater understanding of integration processes
from multiple perspectives and refocuses on opportunity structures to mitigate social inequalities. The IoI appears to be making a difference in policy development, with the shared responsibility and context principles attracting considerable attention in some arenas. The new IoI and the principles that underpin it are already being implemented by devolved administrations in the UK and through integration policy and practice in Victoria, Australia and the Netherlands. While they are utilised by national UK Government in evaluating resettlement programmes, they have had no impact on asylum policy and practice which has become even more hostile in the 4 years since the IoI was published. Thus, the success of our goals of ameliorating the hostility of, at the time of writing, the extraordinarily hostile immigration environment is rather mixed. Given the IoI’s adoption globally we believe it offers a blueprint for integration that will have wide application in addressing the normative thinking.

**Note**

1. Ministry of Health.

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