Implementing Integration in the UK: Lessons for Integration Theory, Policy and Practice

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Jenny Phillimore
University of Birmingham
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Implementing integration in the UK: lessons for integration theory, policy and practice

Jenny Phillimore

While immigration policy in the United Kingdom (UK) largely focuses on securing borders and restricting access to welfare, a separate strand has developed around promoting refugee integration. This article examines the way in which integration policy had been implemented. It explores academic and policy perspectives around what constitutes integration, and the development of integration policy. Interview and focus group data are employed to evaluate the effectiveness of UK integration initiatives. The article finds that successful initiatives adopt a pathways to integration approach that maximises the potential for the interlinkages between integration dimensions while facilitating a two-way integration process engaging refugees and wider society.

Introduction

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and subsequent arrival of thousands of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom (UK) (Schierup et al, 2006), much attention has been focused on the challenges associated with supporting refugees. The complexity of immigration policy has already been highlighted in *Policy & Politics* (Christensen and Laegreid, 2009; Robinson, 2010) and elsewhere (Sales, 2002; Phillimore, 2009). While the majority of policy and legislation adopted a restrictionalist stance, placing emphasis on securing borders and restricting access to social welfare for asylum seekers (Sales, 2002; Phillimore, 2009), a separate strand of policy developed around promoting the integration of refugees. The precise number of refugees present in the UK is unknown. Estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2009) put the figure at around 300,000, with the UK housing about 3% of the world's refugees; around 0.5% of the UK's population. With thousands of asylum seekers arriving in the UK each year, around 27% of whom are likely to receive some kind of leave to remain (Home Office, 2009), refugee numbers look to continue to increase.

Integration has long been the focus of academic debate, and although there is no agreement about what constitutes successful integration, certain trends can be identified in the literature. These largely concern the importance of enabling refugees to access public services and to develop social capital, and consideration of integration as a two-way process between newcomer and host communities, which is multidimensional and multifaceted (Schibel et al, 2002; Fyvie et al, 2003). Policy discourse has largely focused on the integration of 'recognised' refugees – those who arrived as asylum seekers and successfully gained refugee status (Home Office, 2005) – and has tended to view integration as a one-way process wherein refugees are helped to 'achieve their potential'. Some investment has been put into initiatives aimed at furthering refugee integration. Little research has been undertaken to explore what kinds of approaches to facilitating integration are effective.

Key words: migration • integration • refugees • policy

This article employs the analytical framework *Indicators of Integration* developed by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) to explore the efficacy of integration projects funded by European Refugee Fund II (ERFII) in facilitating refugee integration. Three key questions are addressed. First, the article asks what types of approaches are effective in facilitating refugee integration. Second, attention is turned to what can be learned about integration from the evaluation of the initiatives. Finally, the article explores the usefulness of Ager and Strang's framework as an analytical tool. Answering these questions will allow the development of a knowledge base around how integration might be facilitated to inform policy and practice.

The article begins with a brief discussion about the meaning of integration from academic and policy perspectives, before outlining Ager and Strang's framework. It then sets out the key policy initiatives aimed at facilitating integration in the UK and, using data from an evaluation of ERFII, the article looks at the efficacy of projects in terms of Ager and Strang's dimensions. The article ends with a discussion of the ways forward for state-funded integration initiatives in the UK.

Conceptualising integration

Integration as a term is often used in policy, practice and academia, but it can mean different things to different actors depending on their perspective, interests, assumptions and values (Castles et al, 2002). Favell (1998) conceives integration as an umbrella term under which sits a whole range of processes and domains. He traces the idea back to Weber and Durkheim, and ideas around socially inclusive unity based on 'value integration'. The Chicago School then applied the concept to the study of ethnicity, conceptualising integration as a process through which migrants pass en route to assimilation.

Work by social psychologists, particularly Berry (1994, 1997), builds on the idea of integration as a process, arguing that over time both migrant groups *and* host societies change and new identities emerge. For Berry, integration is one possible dimension of the acculturation process. He argues that integration occurs where an individual has an interest in both maintaining their original culture *and* taking part in daily interactions with other groups. They could, alternatively, elect to '*assimilate*', thereby deciding not to maintain their original cultural links; '*separate*', when they do not mix with the indigenous (*sic*) population; or, if excluded, become '*marginalized*' and have little contact with the indigenous population or members of their own ethnic group. Acculturation strategies may be *chosen* by migrants or imposed on them if, for example, they experience structural inequalities or racial hatred. The central tenet of Berry's conceptualisation of integration is the two-way nature of the process. Integration, out of all the possible acculturation pathways, is the one that requires both host and migrant adaptation so that new values and identities are formed.

While there is support for understanding integration as a process, this approach has been criticised for assuming that there is a unidirectional, monolithic route that all migrants follow. The approach rarely asks how migrants experience integration as individuals or questions exactly what 'society', at what spatial or ideological level, migrants are integrating into (Castles et al, 2002). Yet as Castles et al (2002: 114) point out, 'it is with reference to such presumed universal stages and pace that migrants

and refugees are often judged, in public discourse, "successfully" or "unsuccessfully" integrated'. Often it is assumed that there is a set of homogenous norms to adopt.

While, on the one hand, researchers and policy makers have conceived integration as a linear process, alternative discourses have emerged concerned more with diversity and complexity of cultures or contexts (Hall, 1990). Bhatia and Ram, (2009: 140) have criticised the linear approach as 'fixed, invariant, and apolitical' and proposed that integration be understood instead as an ongoing negotiation between past and present, and country of origin and country of refuge, wherein identity is contested and constantly moving. The notion of integration as a non-linear process accounts for the fact that interruptions may occur, which may in turn impede aspects of integration, making any assumptions about how integration might ideally proceed somewhat problematic (Atfield et al, 2007).

Moving away from sociocultural definitions of integration, some sociologists and social policy analysts have sought to identify different dimensions of integration. Much has been written about the multidimensionality of integration (ie, Portes, 1997; Zetter et al, 2002), and the need to explore integration as a multidimensional process in which individuals, migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs), institutions and society all have a role (Schibel et al, 2002; Ager and Strang, 2004). In a review of integration literature, Fyvie et al (2003) outline functional dimensions of integration, highlighting education and training, the labour market, health and housing as being critical to integration, arguing that progress in these areas is necessary for the integration process to start. Others have focused on developing integration typologies within which they describe the range of different areas, such as functional and civic, that influence integration (ie, Zetter et al, 2002). In policy, and to some extent academia, emphasis is generally placed on tangible, quantifiable aspects of the process or a top-down approach focused on structural and organisational elements of the system (Korac, 2003). Yet individual refugees tend to make use of their rights in different ways and at different speeds, depending on factors such as their ability to speak the host language, their employment history and/or their willingness to utilise their rights (Gans, 1992). For example, having permission to work does not mean that a person will seek or secure work. Thus, it is argued that research on integration should enable refugees to articulate their views and experiences, allowing interrogation of the subjective nature of the process (Schibel et al, 2002; Korac, 2003).

While there is no one definition of integration, it is possible to identify some themes that emerge from the academic literature. Integration implies the development of a sense of belonging in the host community, with some renegotiation of identity by both newcomers and hosts. It also encompasses the development of social relationships and different kinds of social networks, and the means and confidence to exercise rights to resources such as education, work and housing. There is a clear need for research around refugee integration to focus on the full range of dimensions, their interconnectedness and the way that they are experienced (Schibel et al, 2002; Korac, 2003). Yet we have no clear definition of integration and no consensus as to whether we measure integration at the level of the individual, community or society. In light of this, it is not surprising that much emphasis in the UK has been placed on research looking at dimensions of, and challenges to, integration, rather than how it might happen (Atfield et al, 2007). Little work has looked at the experiences of individuals and considered how personal, cultural, policy and experiential factors

combine to influence settlement experiences. There is almost a complete absence of work that has focused on the role of the host population in facilitating integration. The lack of analytical framework to structure research across multiple dimensions may be one of the reasons why little research has explored interconnectedness or different perspectives on experience.

Policy and integration

Much emphasis has been placed on the role of integration policy and initiatives in securing the settlement and inclusion of migrants. In the UK, refugee integration emerged as a key policy goal in 2000 when the New Labour government set out its desire to make refugees 'full and equal citizens' (Home Office, 2000). At this time, the UK, in tandem with countries such as Canada and the Netherlands, followed a multicultural route to migrant settlement, accepting, even encouraging, minority ethnic groups to retain their own culture, identity and language. The state facilitated cultural maintenance through encouragement of migrant community organisations and the offer of specialist services. At this point it might be argued that the state took a truly integrative approach in the terms that Berry set out because there was organisational adaptation and encouragement to retain cultural values (albeit some have argued tokenistic) as well as opportunities for new arrivals to adapt to the UK, be helped into employment and locate housing.

Initial approaches to refugee integration were integrative. Clusters of refugees were offered funding by the Home Office to establish their own refugee community organisations (RCOs), the idea being that these would enable the retention of cultural identity and encourage self-help (Zetter and Pearl, 2000). Government engaged in dialogue about refugee integration with RCOs, who advised the government by participating in the National Refugee Integration Forum (NRIF) in conjunction with other professionals. In 2006, there was a major shake-up of approaches to integration that saw the abolition of the NRIF and the majority of funds for RCOs withdrawn. At this point, the Home Office's approach to refugee integration took more of an assimilationist turn, which reflected the growing backlash against multiculturalism in the UK emerging from a variety of concerns such as fears that the approach fostered separateness, refused common values or provided a haven for terrorists (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Integration policy, outlined in *Integration matters*, the Home Office's (2005) strategy, and a recommitment to integration published in 2009, focused on the functional aspects of integration, becoming about the provision of opportunities (but not necessarily equal outcomes) and the encouragement of participation in civil society.

Integration takes place when refugees are empowered to:

- Achieve their full potential as members of British society
- Contribute to the community and
- Access the services to which they are entitled (Home Office 2005: 14)

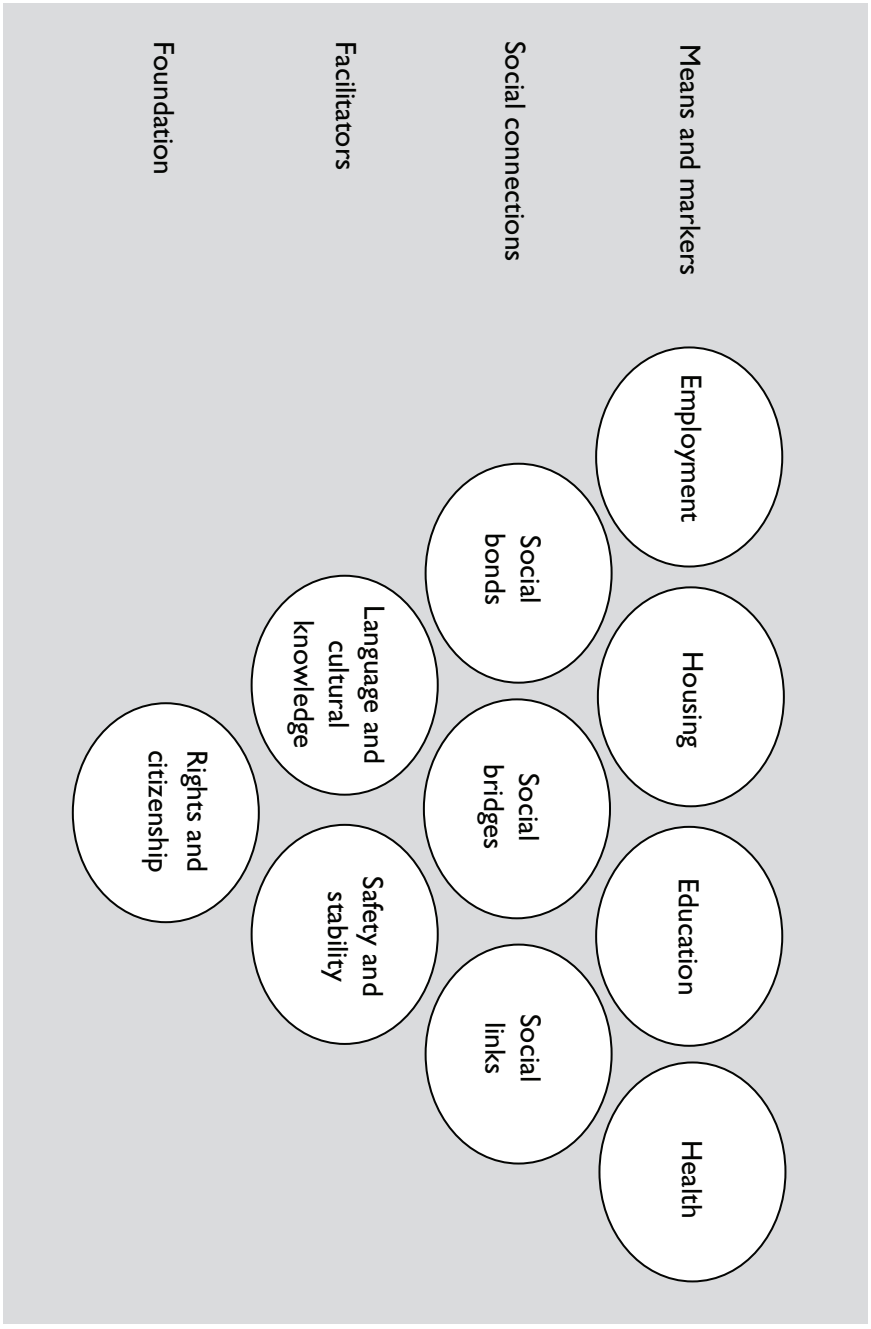
The theme of 'contribution' was subsequently expanded in the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill 2009, as the notion of earned citizenship emerged and

refugees were encouraged to accelerate their qualification for citizenship through volunteering. They could be denied citizenship if they failed to demonstrate sufficient understanding of Britishness (tested via the *Life in the UK* test) or the English language. This more assimilationist approach now dominates thinking in the UK as almost all financial support for integration initiatives has been ceased and speeches by Prime Minister David Cameron point to multiculturalism as one of the causal factors in 'separatism' and the undermining of British identity (Cameron, in *New Statesman*, 2011). Thus, UK integration policy now operates as if integration is one way, and takes an assimilative stance, in contrast to academic understandings, which stress complexity and two-way adaptation.

Whilst there are some clear differences in the ways that policy makers and academics believe integration can be facilitated, there is some agreement about the key importance of functional dimensions and the role of social interaction. A key problem is how to bring these aspects together in a way that is useful for policy development and evaluation. Ager and Strang (2004) were commissioned, by the UK's Home Office, to develop the *Indicators of Integration* framework. They sought to identify, following empirical research and a literature review, an operational definition that 'reflects commonalities in perceptions about what constitutes "successful" integration in a range of relevant stakeholders' (2004: 166). The framework was intended to be employed to help commission and develop services, facilitate policy discussion around integration and provide an evaluation framework for initiatives. Figure 1 illustrates the framework, which consists of 10 indicators that are organised into four domains.

The first domain, *Means and markers*, is based on functional indicators and includes employment, housing, education and health. These areas were selected both because they are viewed as a means to achieving integration and because satisfactory outcomes in these areas can operate as markers of integration (Ager and Strang, 2004, 2008). Taken from Putnam's (2002) work on social capital, and reflecting also Berry's (1997) ideas, the *Social connections* domain includes three dimensions of social capital: bonds within a refugee's own community, bridges with other communities and links to institutions of power and influence. The third domain, *Facilitators*, covers language and cultural knowledge, argued to be the main barriers that prevent refugees engaging confidently within communities. This domain also includes safety and stability, reflecting to some extent the two-way nature of integration, in stressing the importance of feeling safe from persecution or harassment, and settled within an area. The final domain, *Foundation*, relates to the rights and responsibilities offered and expected by, and from, the state, other people and refugees themselves. These include the presence of policies that facilitate integration, ensuring that all parties understand their rights and responsibilities and enabling a sense of equity. The four domains reflect many of the dimensions of integration outlined by academics and can be utilised from the perspective of refugees and host communities. The framework has the potential to provide an approach to understanding and measuring integration that addresses some of the concerns around complexity and multidimensionality outlined above, while providing a mechanism for testing the efficacy of policy initiatives.

Figure 1: The indicators of Ager and Strang's Integration Framework



Source: Ager and Strang (2004, 2008)

Integration initiatives in the UK

Early approaches to funding integration in the UK were generally piecemeal, with the Home Office providing seed corn monies – the Refugee Community Development Fund – to enable RCOs to become established in dispersal areas, and pump-priming integration activity within other non-governmental organisations, and sometimes authorities, through the introduction of a competitive fund known as the Refugee Challenge Fund. In addition, new refugees were able to access a small fund to help them access housing or training. These funds were replaced with Refugee Integration and Employment Support, which provided refugees with a personal development worker who facilitated access to key social welfare agencies such as Jobcentre Plus. This programme was scrapped in 2011 following the austerity cuts and arguably because of the coalition government's new hardline approach to immigration and reluctance to fund special measures for migrants. Over time, funds available for integration activities have reduced to the point where now only European Union funds are available. These continue to be awarded, administered and monitored nationally.

The European Refugee Fund (ERF) was established in 2000 and since that time has been used to support a range of integration initiatives. It is available to projects aimed at supporting and encouraging the reception and settlement of refugees. The projects cover a wide range of the areas associated with integration, including:

- functional aspects, such as housing and employment;
- social aspects, such as the development of social capital;
- attempts to tackle negative processes that mitigate against successful integration and cohesion, such as racial harassment, negative images and ethnic segregation.

Release of ERF funds is dependent on the availability of match funding. Beneficiary organisations must prove that they can access funds from other sources, such as local government, or can provide funds 'in kind' through provision of staff or premises funded by another source. In 2005, during the second round of ERF (known as ERFII), six projects were funded. Details of the projects are set out in Table 1.

To date, there has been little systematic research exploring what types of initiatives can successfully facilitate integration. While Ager and Strang's (2004, 2008) Integration Framework has been influential in shaping discussions around service delivery and policy development, it has yet to be used as a tool for assessing the effectiveness of refugee integration initiatives. This article uses data collected as part of the evaluation of ERFII-funded projects to explore types of approaches that are effective in facilitating refugee integration, and to examine what can be learned about integration through evaluating initiatives. The article also considers the usefulness of Ager and Strang's framework as an analytical tool for understanding the nature of integration. The research methods utilised are described in the following section.

Table 1: Project funded by ERFII

Project	Status of project	Experience working with refugees	Project aims
Refugee image project	Civil society organisation	Yes	To address high levels of racial harassment by raising awareness, promoting accurate perceptions and encouraging positive images of refugees through training, support and empowerment of refugee and community volunteers
Refugee housing project	Charitable foundation	Yes	To undertake work in several localities and several different projects, to address the needs of refugees for appropriate housing in safe, supportive communities and to mainstream the solutions
Refugee enterprise project	Social Enterprise	Some	To enable refugee entrepreneurs to set up community projects, establish positive role models, encourage community cohesion and achieve their social, economic and political potential
Refugee women project	Civil society organisation	Yes	To provide programmes of education and training, work experience and support to enable refugee women to gain vocational integration
Refugee integration centre	Private sector	None	To bring together and merge refugee and host community organisations and decrease the proliferation of parallel advice services, thereby building cohesive communities
Refugee training project	Private sector	None	To provide RCOs with an accredited training programme to enable them to gain the skills necessary to apply for and manage funding from public and charitable sources

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Methods

A range of methods were employed. These explored a number of key questions with stakeholders, including project staff, organisations that benefited (that is, local service providers, businesses, RCOs and community groups) and individuals (refugees and members of the host population where relevant). We examined:

- expectations of the project;
- which aspects of the project were effective/useful or ineffective;
- the impact of the project on beneficiaries' lives or organisational practices;
- the ways in which the project impacted on feelings of integration, belonging and home.

The methods employed are set out below.

Documentary analysis

The evaluation of the ERFII programme commenced with a systematic documentary analysis of all available documents, including monitoring data, feasibility studies, client lists, internal and externally commissioned evaluation reports and general project literature. The documents were scrutinised to explore processes and impacts, evidence of effectiveness and quality and to identify discrepancies between achievements and goals.

Interviews and focus groups

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 36 project staff, working in a range of roles, from frontline to strategic, across the projects. All staff were interviewed in projects with five or less employees; a sample of staff based on role and location were interviewed in larger organisations. Some 177 clients participated in the evaluation largely via semi-structured interviews. Two focus groups were undertaken, each with five clients. A sampling frame was designed using criteria identified in the documentary review and included a broad range of ages, genders, ethnicities and locations. Clients who did not complete the programme were interviewed as well as those who had engaged successfully. The beneficiaries of the programme could be categorised into individual refugees, for example women who had engaged with the refugee women's project, and organisations who were either the direct target of the initiatives, for example RCOs in the case of the integration centres, or who had become involved as partners. Both types of beneficiary were interviewed (see Table 2). All refugee respondents were interviewed by our team of trained, multilingual, refugee community researchers. Where necessary they undertook interviews in the client's mother tongue. Interview data were analysed using a systematic thematic approach for the qualitative data and SPSS for quantitative data.

As every project had taken a different approach to delivering integration, it was not possible to operationalise integration in exactly the same way for each project. Thus, while topic guides included many common questions – for example, key changes

Table 2: Breakdown of interviewee type by project

Project	Project worker	Organisation beneficiary	Individual beneficiary	Total
Refugee image project	7	9	12	28
Refugee housing project	5	24	6	35
Refugee enterprise project	3	0	16	19
Refugee women project	6	6	15	27
Refugee integration centres	8	12	11	31
Refugee training project	7	12	18	37
Total	36	63	78	177

experienced as a result of engaging with the programme – topic guides also varied and included project-specific questions. All interviews were undertaken towards the completion of the ERFII programme when the majority of interviewees had been engaged with their projects for some time. Without a baseline recording the extent to which respondents were integrated at the beginning, we were reliant on asking them to consider the impacts of the programme and the ways in which they had changed, relying on their perceptions rather than direct comparison.

What worked

The data collected demonstrated that there was much variety between respondents and projects. Key themes emerged around the importance of social connections for building confidence to engage, the role of basic training and volunteering as a route to improved language and access to services and the importance of structured contact with host organisations and communities for improving relationships at the neighbourhood level. The main impacts are summarised by project in Table 3 and discussed by domain below.

Social connections: social bridges, bonds and links

The development of social connections was important for all respondents regardless of whether they were individuals or organisations. Social connectors provided the foundations for integration. Refugees' initial involvement with a project was characterised by meeting other refugees, and establishing friendship networks that might be described as social bonds. The importance of these social bonds should not be underestimated. Refugees described how friendships helped them feel better, reduced isolation and lowered levels of depression, increased motivation and

Table 3: Summary of impacts across Ager and Strang's domains

Project	Beneficiaries	Social connections	Facilitators	Foundations	Means and markers
Refugee image project	Refugees Host community (individuals, agencies and businesses)	Refugees develop friendships with other refugees, and hosts plus relationships with agencies	Host community now know 'the truth' about refugees and are prepared to help them Volunteering provides language practice Refugees feel safer Some hosts become ambassadors for refugees	Improved self-esteem Refugees empowered to contribute Hosts awareness of refugee rights and entitlements is enhanced	Volunteering built confidence and led to employment Businesses and agencies have begun targeting services at refugees
Refugee housing project	Refugees RCOs Host communities Institutions	RCOs linked closely to housing providers and other institutions Refugees and hosts build trust in targeted areas Refugees connected to RCOs	Development of cultural knowledge helps refugees and hosts to develop mutual understandings	Provided an anchor to local communities	Refugees and RCOs able to address housing problems RCOs have new base from which to run activities
Refugee enterprise project	Refugees	Friendships and support networks developed through meeting other refugee entrepreneurs	Knowledge about how to run businesses in UK enhances success rates	Refugees empowered to contribute	Helped refugees to earn an income and provide services for their communities

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Refugee women project	Refugees Refugee families Institutions	Social support networks developed, isolation reduced Connections made to service providers	Safe environment to learn and practise English Enhanced understanding of British culture helps the whole family to fit in Mothers' improved English enables them to help children with homework	Refugees empowered to contribute Refugees supported to become citizens	Low-level training and volunteering effective in building confidence and skills Improved access to services Families benefit from mothers' improved language skills Institutions able to target services to refugees
Refugee integration centres	Refugees RCOs Host communities	RCOs meet and learn from others Events provide opportunities to meet host population and reduce local tensions in some areas	Some improvement in refugee safety	Volunteers overwhelmed by too much responsibility	Some enhanced access to services
Refugee training project	RCOs Refugees	Support networks develop between students Non-refugee non-governmental organisations provide support for a small number of RCOs	RCOs learn protocol around running a community organisation Opportunity to practise English	Increased awareness of legal obligations associated with running a RCO	New skills may enhance employability

enhanced capacity for mutual support as networks expanded beyond the walls of the project. In the words of one woman refugee, "socialising with other women, meeting new people, learning about a new culture, helped women to work together to solve their family problems".

Within all projects there was some evidence of refugees and host communities being brought together. Indeed, these bridging activities were the explicit aim of three projects and were credited with the promotion of integration: "integration has happened through the contact with each other" (refugee, integration centre). Interviews with hosts and refugees revealed that both sides felt less suspicious of each other and organisations said that there had been an improvement in community relations: "Before organising the sports and events there used to be fighting between Somali and Afro-Caribbean people, but now those problems are solved" (RCO, integration centre).

Neighbourhood-based events bringing new and old communities together around organised activities were the catalyst for change. Also important were the social links that developed between refugees and RCOs, and host organisations: "I had the opportunity to meet with people from other community organisations, I got more confidence, and new knowledge which I am still getting from the project" (refugee, housing project).

Projects formed partnerships with local service providers and RCOs and through mutual learning developed services to meet the needs of refugees. Outreach projects took learning back from projects to their mainstream location.

Change followed from organisations gaining a better understanding of refugees' needs. In the image project, individual refugees met with a range of organisations, from community groups to private enterprises. Refugees acted as advocates for their peers, discussing "the refugee experience" and managing to change the attitude of host individuals and organisations. Both refugee, and non-refugee, organisation respondents believed that these interactions resulted in less discrimination, better access to services, improved community relations and a greater feeling of belonging among refugees:

> 'Before our staff didn't understand the immigration process: What was the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee? What did it mean if someone had leave to remain? What services were they entitled too? Our generic support workers could not cope.' (non-refugee organisation, image project)

> 'We then helped to provide childcare facilities so that the women could be involved in our activities." (non-refugee organisation, image project)

Facilitators: language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability

Once social connectors provided refugees with a social network, which provided support and boosted confidence, refugees spoke of the ways in which projects helped to enhance their language skills. Women refugees had lacked the confidence to engage in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. The women's

project provided a safe environment within which they could learn English and practise speaking it to other refugees. Elsewhere individuals improved language through interacting with others, an opportunity previously unavailable. Improved language helped refugee respondents to be self-reliant and for women to help their families: "I have improved English, can now speak, can write, and listen in English ... it's helped me to get benefits for my disabled child" (refugee, women's project). In addition, refugees gained through their interactions increased understanding of "how things are here" and useful local knowledge and mannerisms: "There are some things that are acceptable in own culture and British culture. You learn to say and what should not be said" (refugee, women's project).

Projects that encouraged the interaction of refugees with host communities helped local people to know the "truth" about refugees: "We now have a lot of knowledge, it's widened our eyes. We understand that lot of qualified refugees are here ... we had been misled by media. We now have insight and understanding about refugee and asylum-seeker issues and we can ask them questions" (non-refugee organisation, image project).

Refugees felt better understood, and local people said that their communities became more stable as refugees started to settle and become part of the local social fabric. Refugee and host respondents argued that they felt safer: "I think that X is a safer place to be and I have gained confidence to talk to people knowing not everyone in society is bad and there are people who are good and we can talk to" (refugee, housing project). Once they felt more secure, refugees were confident enough to talk to their neighbours, to ask for help and participate in local activities. Two projects focused on building partnerships between refugees or RCOs, and organisations. Respondents spoke of the usefulness of the cultural knowledge gained and the development of mutual understandings that aided both parties to work to improve the image of refugees.

Foundations: rights and citizenship

Participating in integration projects had a positive impact on respondents' self-esteem. Many felt abandoned when they moved from asylum-seeker to refugee status, lacking the knowledge they needed to access work, or housing, and being nervous of asking for help because they did not know their rights and entitlements or who to speak to. Being involved in a project was enough for some to feel that they had an anchor to a community, and were not fending for themselves. Through language training and citizenship courses, some passed their *Life in the UK* tests, and became UK citizens. Others learned about their rights and responsibilities and outlined how they had begun to exercise them. Projects taught refugees or RCOs to help themselves:

> 'Our service is based on my own personal approach, where we want people to learn the skills to help themselves, we don't want them to be dependent on us. If we teach someone to write a CV [curriculum vitae] for one job, they now have the skill to write a CV for four jobs that they will apply for in the future. They may even help other people to be able to write a CV.' (project worker, women's project)

Respondents described how an improved understanding of UK society led them to know how to contribute. Volunteering then increased their feeling of belonging: "I can do more now in society, I can volunteer and help others" (refugee respondent). Indeed, across the projects, organisations and individuals made a clear link between empowering refugees to offer support, rather than receive it, and belonging. The refugee image project was particularly important in educating organisations about the nature of the refugee experience. Organisation respondents spoke of becoming motivated to help refugees once they were aware of the "facts": "The fence sitters and sympathetic have been energised to do something to actively engage in tackling prejudice."

Means and markers: education, health, employment and housing

Once equipped with social connections and enhanced self-confidence, refugees were more prepared to get involved in training. Training design needed to appeal to individuals who had limited, or no, experience of education in the UK. Women in particular were attracted to informal, low-level training, for example around basic information technology or dressmaking, becoming further involved as they grew familiar with the organisation, and made friends. Few refugees engaged with their project with the express intention of gaining work. However, four projects offered volunteering opportunities, which for some were a natural progression from initial training, and on occasion led respondents to gain paid employment: "through the project I learned English, helped out and can now look for a job by myself. My family benefit as I can provide for my family" (refugee, women's project). A refugee who participated in the image project described how she "excelled through this project" and eventually became a project manager within the project. Another stated: "the project has helped me to climb the ladder in this country" to a job outside the organisation. As I explain later in this article, volunteering opportunities were only beneficial when structured and supported.

The projects also helped refugees to improve their access to services. Although the provision of housing was not an explicit goal of the refugee housing project, RCOs received training about housing options and housing markets, while providers received training about refugee housing needs. The project facilitated partnerships between providers and RCOs who then worked together to improve refugees' access to housing. A wide range of actions emerged from this project: refugees engaged in a programme to renovate and access housing in a deprived area; and a refugee housing centre was established by a housing association, the local authority ran housing surgeries and RCOs were encouraged to use the centre to offer advice. RCOs developed the knowledge needed to help refugees tackle housing problems and widen their housing options: "we have identified rogue landlords and people now know they can do something about it" (RCO); "we have a better understanding of housing issues in order to help our own community effectively" (RCO).

The women's project and integration centres helped refugees to improve their access to health services. As with housing, the availability of outreach services, based within trusted premises was critical to improved access. There were also benefits for service providers: "I feel we have benefited from the expertise available at [women's

project] and that we are better equipped to provide for refugees throughout our services, not just here at the centre" (non refugee organisation).

Through engagement with projects, refugees learned how to access health services appropriately, ensuring that inappropriate usage, for example, of accident and emergency services, was reduced.

What didn't work

While all projects demonstrated some degree of success, their ability to achieve agreed outcomes and targets varied enormously. Projects run by organisations without prior knowledge of refugees were clearly the least successful. The RCO training project took longer to establish than expected, dropout rates were extremely high because a UK training model was imposed on individuals unaccustomed to the education system. Without prior working knowledge of refugees, the project underestimated levels of support needed: "I had to work by self, I needed more support" (refugee, training project). Monitoring documents showed that completion rates on this programme were extremely low. The integration centres project expected volunteers to run their centres. They had not consulted with RCOs about the feasibility of this proposal before applying for funds. They neglected the process of establishing social networks, building confidence and providing a structured volunteering programme, instead expecting refugee volunteers to set up and run the integration centres with little support or groundwork. Without experience, support and guidance, RCOs struggled to manage the centres, became overwhelmed and then left: "There is no one here to give us access. What is the point of a centre that you cannot get into?" (RCO). Indeed, activities that sought quick solutions or neglected the development of social connectors struggled to deliver outcomes effectively.

On the other hand, the women's project was experienced in working with refugees but lacked project management experience. Delays in set-up meant that some outcomes were not fully achieved. Potential partner organisations complained that the project did not take up opportunities: "We kept sending them the project plan but they did not respond until it was too late" (non refugee organisation). This project did not know what they could realistically deliver within the programme timeframe. However, in terms of integration, all refugee respondents were convinced that the project had changed their lives dramatically.

Discussion

Much of the academic discussion around integration stresses the importance of interconnectedness (Schibel et al, 2002), although this complexity is barely acknowledged at policy level. Evaluation of ERFII-funded projects indicated that integration was multifaceted, bringing together activities from across Ager and Strang's domains. Effective integration projects focused on the development of social connections between individual refugees, or refugees and RCOs or wider civil society. Connections helped to facilitate access to the wide range of support that refugees needed to move their lives forward. Different social networks had different functions. As bonds developed, language and cultural knowledge were acquired, and confidence and self-esteem improved. With increased confidence, refugees felt able to

volunteer, engage in training, help themselves and others, interact with mainstream organisations and perhaps seek employment or better housing

As the backlash against multiculturalism continues, policy makers have adopted a more assimilationalist approach to migrant settlement. Much emphasis in the policy literature and political rhetoric is placed on the need for new arrivals to adapt and on the importance of developing common values (Cantle, 2005; Cameron, in *New Statesman*, 2011). Refugees attending the projects expected and sought to adapt when they had the knowledge to do so. Initiatives that supported refugees to understand UK society, values and norms were an important precursor to engagement in wider society.

One of the most striking findings of the evaluation was the way in which two-way adaptation frequently proposed by academics (eg, Berry, 1997) could lead to shifts in thinking that impacted on refugee integration, and community. Policy focus solely on equality of opportunity and one-way adaptation may neglect the development of effective integration initiatives. We found evidence that structured contact between refugees and hosts, such as presentations or events, was sufficient to change community relations. There were some data suggesting that attitudes towards refugees transformed at the local level, and when this occurred refugees felt more accepted so were more prepared to put down roots. Areas that had previously experienced high levels of population churn had the potential to become more stable. The findings have implications for the types of initiatives supported by integration and cohesion funds. When funds are scarce, as is likely to be the case for several years, it may be more effective to focus activity on hosts rather than migrants. With the extent of negative attitudes against refugees and other migrants (Lewis, 2005), and refugees being willing to adapt and build connections if they feel secure, activities educating local people about the refugee experience may have a significant impact on community relations at the neighbourhood level. Further research is needed to explore the efficacy of other initiatives and whether findings apply to cohesion work with migrants more generally.

Investing in initiatives that worked with a wide range of non-refugee organisations was also an effective mechanism for securing a change in organisational culture of civil society organisations and state agencies. Through their new connections with refugees and acquisition of knowledge about refugees' needs, new services, modes of delivery and outreach services were initiated that benefited individual refugees and the wider refugee population. These findings suggest that well-designed integration initiatives can be used to enable systemic change as well as attitudinal change, so that mainstream services can better accommodate refugees' needs, and support them to contribute to their local communities.

There has been much debate about the role of RCOs in integration (Zetter and Pearl, 2000; Phillimore and Goodson, 2010). We found evidence that RCOs can help to promote transformative institutional change; indeed, one respondent described them as the "knowledge bearers of superdiversity" (non-refugee organisation, housing project). RCOs were involved in the development of four of the projects and helped to ensure that programmes could meet refugees' needs. New knowledge invested in RCOs trickled out of them into refugee communities and subsequently helped refugees to access jobs or housing. New forms of working, bringing together RCOs, institutions and agencies, were effective in promoting integration. However,

RCOs required support to participate in integration initiatives, which, because of their lack of experience of UK policy and practice, needed to be long term and intensive. Further research is necessary to explore the extent that RCOs involved in integration programmes can sustain their activities after funding ceases.

In terms of organisational capacity to run effective refugee integration projects, it was clear that experience working with refugees is important. Acquiring this specialist knowledge, which of course varied between refugees from different countries of origin, gender, faith and ethnicity, took time. Working in partnership with RCOs was one way to gain knowledge quickly. Introducing private sector organisations, with no refugee experience, into the provision of integration services, however competitive their offer, could be a false economy if projects cannot reach their target client group, or if refugees' needs are not met. Refugee-focused organisations contracted to deliver integration services need to be supported to develop the project management skills they need to deliver projects with the high bureaucratic burden associated with European funding.

The themes that emerge from the academic literature around integration were identifiable in our data. Cultural adaptation has been an important theme in theorising around integration (ie, Berry, 1997). Certainly, there was evidence that adaptation largely resulted from interaction between refugees, projects, host communities and organisations. That adaptation was a two-way process as interaction helped refugees to build confidence and social networks, enabling them to engage in ways they had not before joining projects, and hosts, agencies and institutions became more sensitive to refugees' experiences and needs. Multidimensionality (Schibel et al, 2002) and interconnectedness (Atfield et al, 2007) were also in evidence as refugees pointed to multiple aspects of projects, which when experienced as a whole helped them to feel more integrated.

While the idea of an integration process has been dismissed by some (Bhatia and Ram, 2009), there were signs of process, at least in the early stages of integration. Perhaps by choosing to participate in projects refugee respondents were seeking to change their trajectory and thus were receptive to engaging in some kind of integration process. Wherever they discussed feeling more integrated their journey had started with the development of new social networks. Projects by themselves could not deliver all the dimensions of integration. Their role was to act as pathways: establishing refugees' networks, then language skills, knowledge of UK culture and systems, and self-confidence, before connecting them to the different resources they required. The nature of connections and pathways varied considerably. They were not always in the same sequence for every individual, or community, and needed to be flexible enough to meet varied and often complex needs. Integration projects are only part of the settlement and acculturation picture. They may well be a starting point for those who are most isolated or who are most keen to become integrated. Other refugees may not choose to join projects or simply not have access. Comparative research looking at the differences in experiences between those joining and those not participating in initiatives would help us to further understand how integration occurs.

Ager and Strang's framework proved a useful way of structuring analysis of a large body of data. The wide-ranging domains enabled the multifaceted nature of integration to be interrogated. One of the difficulties in developing theory around

integration is the lack of comparability between data, particularly at the level of evaluations and neighbourhood-based studies (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008). The framework provided a useful tool for comparative work between different integration projects that may also enable comparison between studies by different researchers. However, *Indicators of Integration* did little to aid understanding about the interlinkages between domains. Further work is needed to develop methods to help record, analyse and theorise such interactions.

Conclusion

The learning from this research has relevance for current and future integration programmes such as ERFIII, in the developed world, and can also inform policy and practice around community cohesion and race relations. It is clear that integration requires long-term investment. Projects need time to establish, build trust and create networks between refugees and local organisations and agencies. Three years of funding enabled sustained work that built independence and resilience in refugees, and networks between refugees and institutions. One of the most effective ways to meet the needs of refugees appeared to be via the development of relationships between the integration project and outside agencies. Such partnerships are necessary given the wide-ranging needs of refugees and limited amount of funding available for specialist services. The evaluation provided valuable findings that have already enabled managing authorities to adapt their approach to commissioning and supporting integration projects (Phillimore et al, 2009). It is important that even in times of austerity, integration, cohesion and inclusion initiatives are evaluated so that knowledge of what works and what fails can shape future policy and practice. Integration does appear to occur iteratively. Further research is needed around the nature of integration and how it occurs over time. We need to study experiences after engagement with projects to understand how new knowledge and skills are used and see if changes are sustainable. We also need to know what other kinds of experiences impact on refugee integration, including which factors or experiences are counterproductive. With the policy shift away from multiculturalism, it is important to stress the continuing need for integration initiatives. Withdrawing integration funds may prove counterproductive for those refugees who lack confidence, language or opportunities for interaction. If we cease support for refugees, and fail to address the role of hosts in integration, we increase the likelihood of separatism or marginalisation.

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Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham, UK
j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk