



ASK THE EXPERT  
POLICY BRIEF

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## Comprehensive integration at the local level

INTEGRATION



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Ask the Expert Policy Brief

# Comprehensive integration at the local level

By Zeynep Kaşlı<sup>1</sup>

Immigrant integration refers to “the process of becoming an accepted part of society” which takes place in analytically distinct yet interrelated dimensions, namely the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious. This comprehensive process involves different parties, from immigrants themselves to the receiving society, acting at individual, collective, and institutional levels, as well as vertical and horizontal aspects of integration policymaking (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016).

Building on our previous review of the literature on cities as providers, these expert policy brief maps out the latest research on the aforementioned dimensions, role of community organizations and local policies on integration processes.

## Interrelated dimensions of integration process

Recent studies reveal that socio-economic, cultural-religious and legal-political dimensions of integration are mostly intertwined and are shaped by the local and contextual factors as well as the national policies.

Different contextual factors are noted. In the Swedish case, the willingness to receive refugees correlates with many factors, such as income, the unemployment rate, population and support for the right-wing party negatively (Lidén, G. & Nyhlén 2014). In the UK, local deprivation has direct negative effects on the patterns of labour market integration of new migrants (Clark et al 2018). An emerging strand of research on migration-related diversity stress the necessity to study the ‘integration’ experiences of people of native descent in cities and neighborhoods that are becoming increasingly diverse (Crul and Lelie 2019).

In terms of migrants’ integration experiences, considerable variations are observed across Dutch and French

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<sup>1</sup> This brief is based on literature compiled via CrossMigration database. The author would like to thank the providers for privileged access to the portal which will be open access by 2020.

cities that have different education and labor market structures in terms of school and labor market participation of descendants of migrants with shared social capital ([Keskiner 2019](#)). In terms of dependence on social assistance a study on the exists from assistance in Belgium shows that migration status stability and duration of residence eliminate the differences between migrants, refugees and natives ([Carpentier et al 2017](#)).

Studies on political and civic participation of immigrants in multiethnic cities, such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, London or other North American and European cities, also highlight factors related to both immigration and citizenship policies and people's mobility experiences related to those policies. These factors include length of residence, language and citizenship acquisition ([Fick 2016](#); [Yanasmayan 2019](#)), negative impact of immigration enforcement on especially fast-growing mixed-status households in the US and elsewhere ([Amuedo-Dorantes and Lopez 2017](#)) and the restrictive citizenship rules which have impact on voting turnout in local elections even in cities that grant voting rights to foreigners ([González-ferrer and Morales 2013](#); [Seidle 2015](#)).

Others draw attention to individual yet context dependent factors such as the immigrants' or their descendants' class position and life-course stage ([McIlwaine and Bermúdez 2011](#)), religiosity

([McAndrew and Voas 2013](#)), education, party identification and civic habitus ([Sandoval, J. & Jennings 2012](#)) and generational differences in social and cultural integration needs and experiences in different cities ([Vathi 2015](#)).

### **Role of civil society and community organizations at the local level**

On the one hand, scholars observe that civic community organizing activities for all immigrants, regardless of citizenship status, can help empower and build individual and community identity, and mitigate stressors associated with immigrant feelings of social isolation ([Dixon et al 2018](#)). On the other hand, city and neighborhood level studies reveal that community organizations' impact on local immigrant integration policies is dependent on many factors, namely the infrastructure and types of organizational structures, and relations within these organizations ([Morales and Pilati 2011](#)) as well as the political composition of local governments and electoral power of immigrants ([de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016](#)).

Recent studies following a place-based approach show that local organizations and agencies play key roles in bring together newcomers and established communities and including immigrants in general and refugees in particular into the urban fabric manifested. Examples of organizations that

help immigrants gain agency and voice in the public arena include the local development networks in Paris ([Vincent-Mory 2018](#)), volunteer work of migrant and native women in London ([Vacchelli and Peyrefitte 2017](#)), cultural co-production in Andalusia ([Abraham 2016](#)) and place-based communities in Vancouver ([Schmidtke 2018](#)).

Similarly, some studies reveal the 'gap filling' role of the third sector organizations (TSOs) at the local level especially due to national governments' increasingly restrictive approach to the rights and entitlements of migrants in the face of minimal electoral costs of failing to fulfill their legal obligations. TSOs' role is recorded in the welfare support provided to asylum seekers and refugees in the British cities ([Mayblin and James 2019](#)) and shelter to irregular immigrants in Dutch cities ([van der Leun and Bouter 2015](#))

It is also necessary to note here that such place-based perspectives do not presume that social or spatial mobility of immigrants would automatically lead to cutting of social networks and ties with the migrant neighborhood ([Hanhörster and Weck 2016](#)). Even more, a growing body of literature on transnationalism, seeing integration as a three-way process, stress how translocal links between migrant organizations and local governments in countries of origin also contribute to local integration in the country of des-

tinuation ([Di Bartolomeo et al 2017](#); [Garcés-Mascareñas B., Penninx R. 2016](#); [Salamońska J., Unterreiner 2017](#); [van Ewijk and Nijenhuis 2016](#); [Weinar et al 2017](#)).

## Localism in practice

A recently edited volume highlights that, cities worldwide have become markets for migration management and development as a result of decentralisation policies ([Lacroix and Desille 2018](#)). With the recent evolution of migration and integration policies at the EU, national, regional and local levels, the notion of "multilevel governance" is developed as one possible way of structuring relations between various government levels ([Scholten and Penninx 2016](#)).

Scholarly debates on the cities' role in integration are portrayed in our earlier expert briefs on [cities as service providers](#) and also on the local support for [social inclusion of the undocumented](#). Studies focusing on the interaction between national and local policy frames observe either increasing compliance with the national government, as in the case of Sweden ([Emilsson 2015](#)) or frame divergence as in the case of the Netherlands ([Scholten 2016](#)). Studies focusing on local processes of implementation show that local policymakers seem to pragmatically mix and merge different integration perspectives ([Schiller 2015](#)) and some city level policies,

such as Rotterdam's conservative integration policy, even set an example for other national and local integration policies ([Dekker and van Breugel 2018](#)). Recent studies reveal further contradictions in the UK case, namely the frictions between new devolved levels of governance and implementation of non-devolved policies at the time of austerity in the UK ([Coker 2018](#); [Galandini et al 2018](#))

The outcomes of [Concordia Discors](#) project on European neighborhoods bring it closer to the grassroots level and underline that integration of immigrants in rapidly evolving, fragile and yet resilient neighborhoods has become a non-excludable public good, in strictly micro-economic terms. The comparison across European neighborhoods show that those with their own shared sense of a vital narrative or a neighborhood policy community are better able to control and frame news referring to them, and produce a more

balanced (less negative) representation of immigrants and ethnic minorities ([Pogliano 2016](#)). It is also noted that diffuse and proactive engagement of local communities requires regular encounters in 'interaction sites,' such as public libraries, public parks, NGOs' premises, and other similar places which are at high risk of disappearance across European cities due to the sharp retreat of public actors ([Pastore and Ponzio 2016](#)).

In short, latest research on immigrant integration at the local level show that sustainability of integration process requires not only some structural support related to migration process and involvement of civil society and community organizations. Resourceful local authorities, in terms of their decision-making power and financial resources, are also essential to support bottom-up initiatives, to boost and sustain far-reaching and inclusive local communities.

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