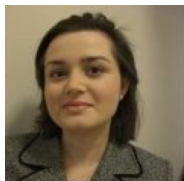


Britain can be a more welcoming society to migrants



*It's not easy being a migrant, and the uncertainty of Brexit and the Windrush scandal only add to the challenge of creating a new home in an unfamiliar place. In this blog, **Olivia Darby** (Wonder Foundation) sets out the ways in which Britain can create a more welcoming society to migrants post-Brexit.*

Within the debates around migration and integration, definitions have been created that don't lead to empathy. The discussions are framed in ways that make those of us living in the countries where we were born to feel very different to migrants. Within the debate around how to define integration, it is important to examine what makes us feel like we belong in a place, and that it belongs to us. Consider these questions: Do I live in the same place where my parents were born? Where my grandparents grew up? Do I speak the same first language as your grandparents? As all of my grandparents? Have I ever lived within ten miles of your grandparents?

Suddenly, most of us who grew up in our own countries now have a sense of migration. How many of us have no migration story? How many of us have no parent or grandparent who moved to another town or city in search of better opportunities or to escape from bad ones? How many of us ourselves have never been in a position where we have moved even within our towns, to a new job or school, and had to start from scratch developing social networks and meaningful friendships? If we can each tap into this, the fact that all of us are constantly in flux with regard to our own social integration, we can much more easily empathise with migrants from outside of the UK.



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In 2017 and 2018, Wonder Foundation worked with young people, informed by experts and their personal experiences, to develop policy ideas for how to make society more welcoming. These are the ideas that they came up with:

The [local-level policy proposal](#) sought to improve **Sure Start Children's Centres**; an initiative designed in 1998 to tackle social deprivation by providing services specific to the needs of the local community. This policy shows why it would be an investment to revitalise these centres and utilise the existing infrastructure **to provide universal English language learning classes**. Learning the local language is absolutely essential for community cohesion and migrants' social and economic mobility. The classes would be supported through the help of volunteers and by creating partnerships between educational organisations and the third sector.

The [national-level policy proposal](#) expands on the current **National Citizen Service (NCS)**. NCS is a programme for youth aimed at improving community engagement through an intensive summer programme. Currently, the NCS targets young people aged 15-17, but this policy proposal believes that **widening the age cohort to 16 to 29-year olds** will enhance social integration between the British white majority, ethnic minorities and migrant groups. Alongside this change, the policy would introduce activities and workshops that facilitate learning around migration and integration.

The [European policy proposal](#) aims to improve the accessibility of the **Erasmus Programme** to reach as many young people as possible. The Erasmus Programme provides students with the opportunity to study or take on traineeships in another European country, thus allowing them to build cross-cultural relationships and learning. Funding provided to Erasmus students is often insufficient for economically disadvantaged students, and it is estimated that over one million students are kept from enrolling on the programme because of the expense. This proposal recommends **providing grant top-ups to socio-economically disadvantaged students** to ensure a more diverse pool of participants.

Running through each of these proposals is the question of how each of us can develop more, and more meaningful, relationships with people who we may not encounter in our normal lives. How many people do we speak to in-depth each day who are not from our socioeconomic background? Even if we do have friends who are from minority and migrant communities, how many of them would we have met if we hadn't been to school or worked together? How can each of us be more welcoming to people who are different to us?

Another key approach is looking at migrants through a whole-person lens. You cannot expect a mother with small children and limited income to have the same learning approach or needs as someone with few family responsibilities and economic stability. You cannot expect the needs of a refugee with a university degree but with mental health problems, having spent two traumatic years getting to the UK as a refugee with family here already, to have the same needs as someone whose journey was easier but has had very limited education.

Every publicly-funded project seeking to offer young people opportunities should be examined to see whether it will actively support integration. Even in areas with low levels of ethnic diversity, there is socioeconomic disparity. We cannot make migrants more welcome without examining our overall approach to making people who are not like us feel welcome, looking for the things we have in common, rather than the things that divide us.

The article gives the views of the author, not the position of LSE Brexit or the London School of Economics.

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