

# **Migration and the media**

**The impact of the debate –  
migrant voices and perspectives**

**Contents**

About Migrant Voice

Acknowledgements

**Executive summary**

Introduction.....7

Migrants in the media .....8

Methodology .....8

A sense of belonging .....11

The importance of context .....12

The political debate ..... 13

The role of the media .....14

The relationship between migrants and the British public.....15

Conclusions and a way forward.....16

## About Migrant Voice

Migrant Voice is a migrant-led organisation set up to develop the skills, capacity and confidence of members of migrant communities, including asylum seekers and refugees, to develop their own strategies to strengthen their voice and representation in the media and at a policy making level.

Migrant Voice provides a platform for members from migrant communities, especially those whose voices are not usually heard, encourages and enables them to express their views on the issues affecting their lives in the UK, and to address the British public with the aim of correcting the imbalance in the way migrants are represented across large parts of the media. We believe that making your voice heard is an important step towards change, and that every individual has the ability to make positive changes in their own life and the community they live in.

Migrant Voice currently has regional hubs in London, Birmingham and Glasgow. Membership is open to all migrants and non-migrants wanting to engage in creating positive change. To get involved in the UK Migrant Voices for Change network or to find out more about our work please visit our website [www.migrantvoice.org](http://www.migrantvoice.org)

## Acknowledgments

Migrant Voice would like to thank all those who participated in the research for sharing their views and experiences.

We would also like to thank the following individuals who volunteered their time towards this research: Professor Heaven Crawley, Dr Simon McMahon, Dr Fanny Florémont, Nydia Swaby, Spela Drnovsek Zorko, Jordan Groh, Amélie Belfort, Ilariah Bellacci, Patricia Vincent, Oscar Frandson, Emma Olsson, John Kitching, Anne Stoltenberg and Nazek Ramadan.

## Executive summary

The debate on migration has intensified over recent years and is likely to become increasingly important in the run up to the next general election in May 2015. Migration is a hugely complex issue often eliciting a wide range of views and strong positions. This is perhaps not surprising given that that discussion of migration touches on ethnicity, religion, nationality, jobs, sex, food, personal habits, education, taxes, housing, dress, language, health and much, much more.

Migrant Voice believes that the reporting of these issues by the print, broadcast and electronic media is of vital importance. The media can echo what is being said or it can scrutinise it. It can influence the debate by excluding particular facts and comments or illuminate it by digging out fresh information. It can muddle and confuse understanding by inaccurately reporting statistics and failing to understand terms or clarify it by balanced presentation. It can inflame debate by using emotive language but it can also contribute to reasoned discussion by identifying exaggerations, stereotypes, prejudice and generalisations and by presenting all sides of the issue. The media can put people at the centre of debate by giving a voice to migrants themselves. But it often fails to do so.

### *Giving migrants a voice*

In May 2015 the United Kingdom will hold its next general elections. It is very likely that migration will be one of the most highly debated topics. But is there really a debate? Whose voices will we hear?

There are 7.8 million foreign-born nationals in the UK but they are largely under-represented in mainstream British media. Our research '*Migrants Invisible in UK media*' conducted between January and April 2014 reveals that migrants' voices are quoted in only 12% of all articles focusing on migration. And many of these articles reflect critical, sometimes explicitly negative, attitudes toward not only migration processes and policies but also migrants themselves.

Migrants are aware of the way they are represented in the media. They watch the news on TV, read online or printed news, and speak with their friends and colleagues about how this makes them feel. But this story is not in the media and the wider public does not know what migrants think.

Our research aims to change this. We want to give migrants a voice, to hear what they want to say about the consequences of the debate for them. Do migrants feel like they belong in Britain? In what ways does the representation of migration and migrants in the media affect their sense of belonging? And what are the wider implications for the society in which we all live?

### *Our research*

Our research was undertaken between June and August 2014 with migrants from a wide range of backgrounds. 100 people completed an online survey, there were 32 interviews and there were three focus group discussions - in Birmingham, Glasgow and London - with a total of 50 individuals taking part. The majority of those taking part have been living in the UK for more than three years, with nearly half living here for more than ten years. Our research does not claim to be representative of all migrants' views on the migration debate but it draws on a significant sample.

### *So what did we find?*

First, the vast majority of migrants participating in our research feel that they belong in the UK and are well-integrated into British society. Legal status plays an important role in creating a sense of belonging but it's also important for migrants that they are able to engage with the local community and with wider British society, that they adapt to the culture, laws, rules and regulations of their new country, that they speak English, that they have opportunities to contribute and that they share values with others in society and are considered equal.

Second, the extent to which migrants feel as though they belong within British society is influenced by a wide range of factors including whether or not they are able to work or study, the attitudes of neighbours towards them and their ability to speak English. But it is also influenced by factors outside themselves and their communities. Nearly two thirds (63%) of migrants told us that media and political debates have an impact on their sense of belonging.

Third, migrants are both aware, and critical of, the tone of the current political debate on migration and the ways in which they are represented within it. This was expressed particularly strongly in relation to the representation of Bulgarian and Romanian communities, but it was also articulated in relation to specific government policies and campaigns - including the 'Go Home Vans' and increases in 'Stop and Search' - and the rise of political parties with an anti-immigrant agenda and focus.

Fourth, many of those who participated in the research expressed a deep sense of anxiety and unease as well as sadness not only about the direction of the political debate on migration and about what they perceived as the persistent, and often deliberative, misrepresentation of migration and migrants in the British media. More than two thirds of those participating in the research told us that they have been personally affected by both the overall tone of the migration debate and by inaccurate media reporting.

Finally, and perhaps most worryingly, migrants feel that both the tone of the political debate on migration and the media's reporting of migration issues have both undermined the relationship between migrants and the British public and led to an increase in racism and discrimination. One clear theme is an increasing sense of defensiveness and accompanying exhaustion from migrants who feel as though they have to continually prove themselves or who are guarded in their interactions to avoid prejudicial reactions from others.

### *Conclusions*

It is clear from the findings of this research that the migration debate in the UK is not considered inclusive by migrants who feel that their voices and experiences are largely absent or misrepresented. Yet this debate affects the lives of migrants in many ways. The biggest impact of the debate on migrants is on their sense of belonging. The majority of participants feel that they belong and are integrated within their local communities. But the debate impacts negatively on their sense of belonging to the country: they do not feel wanted or accepted.

It is also clear that political and media debates on migration both create anxiety among migrants and also have the potential to undermine trust between migrants and the communities in which they live.

This, in turn, can lead to an increase in negative feelings amongst some migrants towards members of the host community. The majority of participants consider that migrants are being scapegoated and used by politicians for their own electoral gains. Most importantly migrants do not consider that there is a debate on migration in the UK. This is because a debate requires different sides of an argument to be presented and heard.

Migrant Voice will continue works to strengthen the voice, participation and representation of migrants in the media to encourage more balanced, well-informed and inclusive debate on migration.

## Introduction

Immigration has been one of the most controversial topics in British politics and society for many years. Surveys and studies of public opinion have often recorded immigration and immigrant integration as dominant concerns in the UK, describing British voters as ‘broadly negative about immigration for decades’ (APPGM 2011). Immigration is a hugely complex issue often eliciting a wide range of views and strong positions on topics including identity, ethnicity, religion, employment, welfare, education, housing and many others. Yet what is missing from the noise and the fear is the perspective of migrants themselves. There are 7.8 million people in the UK who were born overseas<sup>1</sup> but they are largely under-represented in mainstream British media. In fact, our previous research revealed that migrants’ voices were quoted in only 12% of all articles focusing on migration between January and April 2014.<sup>2</sup>

In this context we wanted to hear from the migrants in Britain today, to uncover what they say about the consequences that the current immigration debate has for them and their sense of belonging. This could not be a more urgent task given that immigration dominates the political agenda in the run up to the general election in May 2015.

It is clear that whilst migration has been a long-standing issue in the UK, the political and public debate on migration and its consequences has intensified over recent years together with the scale of media coverage. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has grabbed headlines with anti-immigrant sentiment, thrusting fears of diversity and a sense that British citizens have been ‘left behind’ by globalization and austerity politics onto the front pages (Goodwin and Ford 2014, Kaufmann and Harris 2014<sup>3</sup>). Yet UKIP has not been the only negative voice in the immigration debate: the Conservative Party’s Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon, recently spoke of Britain being ‘swamped’ by immigrants, and the Labour Party leader Ed Miliband has stated that immigration will be ‘a key priority’ for an incoming Labour government.<sup>4</sup>

In the words of journalist Hacharan Chandhoke, writing for the New Statesman, it would seem that ‘these are not good times to be an immigrant in Britain’.<sup>5</sup>

We hope that this report will help to redress that balance by presenting insights into the factors that migrants themselves view as important in terms of their belonging in the UK. Our findings highlight the negative role that politics and the media have had on migrants themselves and on the relationship between migrants and the British public.

In the shadow of the next general election, the opportunity to hear these views and perspectives could not be more important or pressing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Migration Observatory (December 2013) *Migrants in the UK: An Overview*, [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview)

<sup>2</sup> Migrant Voice (2014) *UK Media-Monitoring Research, Migrant Voices in Migration Stories* [www.scribd.com/doc/229372612/Migrants-Invisible-in-UK-Media](http://www.scribd.com/doc/229372612/Migrants-Invisible-in-UK-Media)

<sup>3</sup> [www.democraticaudit.com/?p=8363](http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=8363)

<sup>4</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24193771](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24193771)

<sup>5</sup> <http://may2015.com/issues/these-are-not-good-times-to-be-an-immigrant-in-britain/>

## Migrants in the media

Migrant Voice UK is a migrant-led organisation that aims to strengthen the voice, participation and representation of migrants in the media to encourage a more balanced, well-informed and inclusive public debate on migration. We develop the skills, capacity and confidence of our members to develop their own strategies to strengthen their voice, participation and representation in the media and in public debates on migration issues.

We believe that reporting by the print, broadcast and electronic media is of vital importance for both the migration debate and the experiences of migrants living in the UK. The media can echo what is being said or it can scrutinise it. It can influence the debate by excluding particular facts and comments or illuminate it by digging out fresh information. The media can muddle and confuse understanding by inaccurately reporting statistics and failing to understand terms but can also clarify the debate through balanced presentation. It can inflame debate by using emotive language but it can also contribute to reasoned discussion by identifying exaggerations, stereotypes, prejudice and generalisations and by presenting all sides of the issue.

The media can put people at the centre of debate by giving them a voice and raising their concerns yet when the media refers to migrants, it so often fails to provide the opportunity for these voices and perspectives to be heard.

Our research seeks to inform and influence the current situation by asking the following key questions:

- **Do migrants feel that they belong in Britain?**
- **How do migrants feel about political and press coverage of immigration issues?**
- **What are the consequences of this coverage on migrants themselves?**
- **How does the representation of migrants in the media and the policy level affect their sense of belonging?**
- **What are the wider implications for the society in which we all live?**

Our work is about giving migrants a voice, to hear what they say about life in the UK today. Migrants are aware of the way they are represented in the media. They watch the news on TV, read online or printed newspapers, and speak with their friends about how this makes them feel. This research aims to capture these perspectives so that they are part of the discussion about migration in the UK.

## Methodology

### *The sample*

Our research brought together a range of migrants from diverse backgrounds to offer their views. We combined a survey and focus group discussions to gather data from three cities - Birmingham, Glasgow and London - between June and August 2014. The majority of those taking part in this research have been living in the UK for more than three years, with nearly half living here for more than ten years.

Our research draws on a significant sample: 132 individuals participated in our online survey and interviews and 50 took part in our group discussions. The participants came from a broad range of



backgrounds and include those with British citizenship, new arrivals and those with a variety of statuses in between. We have tried to ensure that the research includes the views of young and old, new arrivals and long-term residents, and those with different experiences of integration in the UK. Although we cannot claim our findings to be representative of *all* migrants' views on the migration debate, this research nonetheless provides some rich and interesting insights into the views and experiences of Britain's migrants about a debate in which they are centrally positioned.

### *The survey*

Participants were asked to answer 38 questions. We used both open-ended questions – to allow participants to express their views and opinions – and close-ended questions to calculate percentages.<sup>6</sup>

The variety of respondents to the survey has meant that our results reflect the views of a broad range of migrants, with differing countries of origin, age, citizenship status and so on. There are 43 countries of origin and a variety of migrant statuses from across the range of legal categories represented in the research: 31% of respondents are British citizens, 35% are citizens of European countries, 9% have refugee status or are seeking asylum, 5% hold a student visa, 4% have a spousal visa and 3% are undocumented. Just under two thirds (64%) of the respondents were female (Figure 1). The age of respondents ranged from across all age categories (Figure 2). Just under half (44%) of respondents are in full time employment and a further 17% are employed on a part-time basis. The majority of respondents have been in the UK for between three and ten years, with the vast majority (83%) having lived here for over three years (Figure 3).

The range of migrants responding to the survey provides an interesting insight of the impact of the media and political debate on the lives of people with very distinct patterns and experiences of integration in British society. As will be shown later in the study, the public debate has had an effect on migrants from across this spectrum, reaching beyond the specific groups and communities which might be referred to more frequently in political speeches or press reports.

**Figure 2 Age of survey respondents (n=132)**

**Figure 3 Length of time in the UK (n=132)**

### *The focus groups*

Focus group discussions took place in each of the three cities where our network is represented: Birmingham, Glasgow and London, involving a total of 50 individuals. The division among the groups was close to an even split: in Birmingham we gathered 18 people, 13 in London and 19 in Glasgow. The groups concentrated on three main questions:

---

<sup>6</sup> The percentages quoted in this document always represent the percentages of expressed views and do not include non-responses

- **What does it mean to belong in Britain?**
- **Do you think the media affects how most people see migrants?**
- **How does the public debate on migration make you feel?**

There was a gender balance in the focus groups. The participants were slightly older than respondents to our survey, with one third of participants aged 35-44 (32%) and 26% aged 45-54. As with the survey, over half (58%) of the participants were employed on a full time or part time basis, three were asylum seekers and three were students. In terms of ethnicity and race, 40% were Black and 38% were white (half of whom were originally from Central or Eastern European countries).

## **A sense of belonging**

The vast majority of research participants told us that they feel strongly connected to the UK and are well-integrated into British society. 55% of survey respondents stated that they feel partially integrated and 38% that they feel fully integrated. Just 8% of respondents said that they do not feel integrated at all. These feelings were associated with a strong sense of belonging, underpinned by being able to participate in their local community life. The result was a broadly positive view of life in the UK which contrasts with the negative tone of much political and media debate.

Belonging is often defined as having, or being perceived to have, the right qualities to be a member of a social group or community. The terms of membership can be defined and expressed in different ways: they might be inscribed in laws and policies which grant an equal legal status to fellow citizens, or enacted in culture and everyday life.

Our research found that migrants' belonging was partly associated with a sense of identity and culture, but also with being able to work, adapt to the laws, rules and regulations of their new country, speak English and to be considered equal with others in society:

*"I've been here for 25 years. And I feel this is home for me. (...) I feel 100% British. And I feel I'm happy I took the decision to stay in this country. I have three children who are doing very well. (...) So I feel this so a country of opportunities, where everyone who wants to work hard can achieve"*

Participation, engagement and cooperation were also commonly referenced in relation to belonging and integration. These factors highlight the importance of being able to participate locally in order to effectively integrate in their communities and to feel a part of British society. Emphasis was placed on this being a mutual process among all people living together in a society, with those who are born in the UK and migrants coming together to create a better society together:

*"Integration is an invitation, a welcome and acceptance into the country. It is also a form of cooperation with the community, of being a part of the community and participating within society"*

*"Integration is when you mix with others in a positive and meaningful way. When there is deeper interaction. People are kind and help each other. They must know each other to some extent."*

Moreover, belonging is not always associated with cultural similarity. Some respondents feel that they were well integrated because they follow the law, speak English, engage in their community and

contribute to society on many levels, but that this does not require them to give up their cultural identity. Belonging and participating in a local community can therefore involve acceptance of difference and diversity.

These views reflect some of the differing but largely positive ways in which migrants experience a sense of belonging in the UK. Yet as the following sections will show, for some this is brought into question as a result of the tone and content of the migration debate in British politics and the media.

## **The importance of context**

Our findings so far have highlighted how the belonging and integration of migrants in the UK is a multi-faceted process which entails not only acceptance of cultural identities, but also mutual participation and cooperation between migrants and British residents in society. However, the research also found that a range of external factors have an important impact on feelings of belonging and integration. It is these to which we now turn our attention.

In our survey we asked about the factors which influence respondents' sense of belonging. From the answers that were given, the two most commonly-cited factors are working or studying, and living in a friendly, welcoming neighbourhood (Figure 4). This indicates the importance of workplaces on the one hand, and local communities on the other, in creating a sense of belonging.

The level of English language skills was also seen as particularly significant, perhaps due to the way that this enables migrants to communicate in the workplace or the local neighbourhood:

*“Deep understanding of language helps in communicating in your personal, professional life and skills development. Working with British people and making friends makes you feel more at home”*

The importance of language is further reflected in the fact that over half (53%) of the survey respondents reported that they had encountered barriers to employment in the UK, the two principal ones being English language ability (20% of respondents) and experiences of discrimination (for 32%).

In addition to these lived experiences however, the political and media debate on migration was also mentioned as a further factor that has an impact on migrants' sense of belonging. In our survey, 44% of respondents told us that the debate on migrants and migration has influenced their relationship with the British public. Of even greater concern, many of those in the focus groups told us that the previously positive relationship between migrants and the public was increasingly coming under threat. The following sections explore this relationship in more detail.

## **The political debate**

Migrants are both aware, and critical about, the tone of the current political debate on migration and the ways in which they are represented within it. The concerns expressed by migrants often reflect specific government policies and campaigns - including the 'Go Home Vans' and increases in 'Stop and Search' – as well as being expressed in relation to the more generalised representation of certain nationalities such as Bulgarians and Romanians, particularly by political parties with an anti-immigrant

agenda. The result is that migrants feel threatened and powerless to change the situation, which undermines their sense of belonging and integration in the UK.

We asked survey respondents to select the range of words which best describe the way that they feel they are represented within the political debate. Less than 4% of respondents consider that the representation of migrants was accurate, and less than 7% suggest that migrants were depicted in a positive way. By contrast, 43% consider that the representation of migrants in political debate is inaccurate, 47% claim it biased and 53% feel that it is negative.

The political debate on migration is viewed as threatening. Respondents feel that they are used as scapegoats for a range of problems in Britain which are not necessarily caused by migration including the economic crisis and subsequent impact of austerity politics:

*"I have many friends here and most people I deal with in my everyday life are not xenophobic, so I do have faith that most people are decent and reasonable. But I also worry about how politicians and the media influence public debate, and that they are encouraging people who are worried about the effects of austerity to blame migrants."*

*"People have been judged even before they arrived in the country, I can see the British concerns and I don't blame them for that but, you need to think carefully before you make such prejudice"*

In this context, migrants often feel powerless to change the terms of the debate. Respondents told us that specific initiatives such as the 'Go Home Van', and 'Stop and Search' tactics are not only divisive and discriminatory but represent an 'abuse of power'. This sense of powerlessness is compounded by respondents' perception that migrants' voices are missing from the debate and that it is difficult to speak out:

*"The problem with UKIP and other parties who are using the immigration debate for political gain is that they are not held accountable for the things they say and communicate to the wider public. As most migrants cannot participate in elections they and their issues are considered as something that could be played with without any significant repercussions especially around losing an election or vote. I think that's why they dared to have those posters and why many politicians are going further right in the immigration debate."*

This powerlessness contrasts with the migrants' feelings of belonging and integration. Whereas belonging is associated with being able to engage with others in society through participation and cooperation, powerlessness is linked with an inability to do so. The role of the media appears to be important in this process.

## **The role of the media**

As previously noted, our research has found the media to have a significant role to play in shaping migrant's sense of belonging. The evidence from this research suggests that the media can have a potentially significant impact not only on the public's perceptions of migration, but also on migrant's lived experiences in the UK.

A majority of survey respondents together with the participants in our focus groups expressed concern about the debate on migration and feel personally affected by it. Nearly two thirds (63%) of survey respondents told us that media and political debates have an impact on their sense of belonging. Less than 10% of migrants participating in our research feel included or valued in these debates.

Three different effects of the migration debate on the lives of migrants can be highlighted in particular:

Firstly, **the media debate evokes a strong emotional response among migrants**. The terms most commonly used to describe the way that migrants feel about the tone and content of the current media debate are *worried*, *unwelcome*, *sad* and *threatened*. Whether participants express sadness, anger or frustration, their emotions are associated with a sense of resignation and acceptance that they simply do not, and will never, belong no matter how integrated they may feel.

*"It makes me feel like we are guilty of everything, that migrants should be blamed for everything. Even starting from the economic crisis, through to the benefits problems, bedroom tax and the NHS cuts. Everything. That's how it's being portrayed by the media."*

*"Sometime the media make you feel ashamed and of course, with the consequent feeling of being out of place"*

Secondly, **the debate also leads migrants to feel excluded**, even when they have been living in Britain for a long time already. This suggests that media debates can have a negative impact on, and even undermine, the process of integration:

*"...the way in which migrants are represented make me feel that my contributions to British society are devalued and not respected. The short-term economic perspective neglects the long-term cultural and social contributions evident in society. It frustrates me when an issue of illegality and terrorism creeps in the debate as these issues criminalises migrants in public perceptions"*

*"How can you feel like you belong in a society that makes it all too clear it hates you and wants you gone?"*

One respondent explained how the debate had already caused alienation from the wider community:

*"We were told to go back home, so we did. We went back to our communities and we stayed within them."*

Finally, **concerns about the negative debate on migration stand in contrast to the values that migrants have adopted and accepted as British** including as freedom and tolerance. In this way the debate on migration could be said to undermine the very values associated with being British.

*"I feel a sadness as well. There is press freedom in the UK. They don't have a gun to the back of their head forcing them to write this racist drivel, they're choosing to do it."*

*"While I normally feel perfectly integrated, the words used by some politicians and sections of the media make me feel excluded."*

*"I used to feel like I belonged. Now I feel I unwelcomed."*

## The relationship between migrants and the British public

The previous two sections have touched on the implications of the media and political debate on the lives of migrants in the UK. It is also important to note that responses to our survey and focus groups highlight a concern among migrants that the tone of the political debate and negative media reporting of migration issues has undermined their relationship with the British public and has contributed to an increase in racism and discrimination.

One clear theme in the data is an increasing sense of defensiveness and accompanying exhaustion from migrants who feel as though they have to continually prove themselves or who are guarded in their interactions to avoid prejudicial reactions from others.

*“On everyday basis someone doesn't forget to remind me that I am not from here either by what they say, how they treat me, how they make me feel or by their body language. Double standards in shops and taxis is not an exception. I prefer to send email rather than speak on the phone for I don't want to be treated differently just because of my accent.”*

Another theme is a deep sense of anxiety and unease which could influence the integration of migrants and interactions with their local community. Concern was mentioned particularly in relation to the potential for the media's treatment of migrants to trickle down into individuals' opinions and perceptions and of the growing influence of UKIP in British politics and what this may hold for the future:

*“It makes me feel scared. Scared of how politicians of all mainstream political parties are pandering to UKIP.”*

*“I worry about mainstream media fostering fear among the 'British' towards migrants.”*

These findings illustrate a sense of victimisation among migrants has an impact on the way that they view themselves and those around them. These comments by migrants are a particularly important finding of the research: much research and commentary has only *suggested* that public debate could negatively affect migrants' integration and social relations in local communities. The comments from our respondents suggest that this is an increasing part of the lived experience of being a migrant in the UK. These views underpin the need for migrants' perspective to be more broadly known:

*“This debate on immigration only shows one side of the picture (...).It doesn't tell you how a single person feels. I mean all my friends who got their status after years and years of fighting. Why don't the media tell us about what all these people are living?”*

## Conclusions and a way forward

It is clear from the findings of this research that the migration debate in the UK is not considered inclusive by migrants who feel that their voices and experiences are largely absent or misrepresented. Yet the implications are potentially further reaching and more negative, as the tone of the debate affects the lives of migrants in a range of ways.

The most significant impact of the migration debate is on migrants' sense of belonging. The majority of participants feel that they have integrated within their local communities and have a sense of belonging in British society. Yet the comments and arguments that they hear in politics and the press contrast this, making migrants feel excluded and powerless to participate in public life.

With the significance of immigration continuing to rise as the next election approaches, these findings are particularly important. Whilst many migrants have had positive experiences of integration experiences into British society, these experiences are under threat from the relentlessly negative tone of political and media debate. The risk is that patterns of integration could be reversed and communities could feel increasingly divided as a result.

There is also the risk that this creates rising anxiety and distrust among migrants. As noted previously, there is a concern among migrants that they are being used as political debate scapegoats for problems in British society that are not caused by immigration. Steps will be needed to develop a more positive narrative in order that this does not damage relationships in local communities. Focusing on commonalities rather than differences and on the issues and problems shared by both immigrant and British-born residents within local communities may provide one opportunity for this to happen.

Migrants are aware of the gap in the knowledge about the history and dynamics of immigration in the UK, and are eager to work together with British and migrant communities to better inform the public. They also want a more balanced understanding of migrants' roles and contribution, greater honesty and a change in the overall tone of the debate.

Most importantly migrants do not consider that there is a debate on migration in the UK. This is because a debate requires different sides of an argument to be presented and heard.

*"It is not a debate – it is one sided"*

*"Why aren't our voices heard - we want our voices heard"*

Finally, our respondents have called on politicians and the media to ensure that in this new migration debate, statements are supported by evidence and understood in context. They want to see increased accountability when talking about immigration and a reduction of damaging, inaccurate claims.

*"We need to see positive messages about migration, not only about how immigrants benefit the economy but also how they benefit society".*

In this context Migrant Voice will continue to work to strengthen the voice, participation and representation of migrants in the media to encourage a more balanced, well-informed and inclusive debate on migration.

## **Appendix A: Quotes from the research**



## Migrants and integration

### Migrants definition of integration

When asked to define integration, four broad components emerged as important to respondents: *Engaging with community and the wider British society*, *Adapting to the new country*, *Sharing values and being considered as equal*, and finally the *need to contribute to the UK*.

#### Engaging with community and the wider British society

*"Integration is when you mix with others in a positive and meaningful way. When there is deeper interaction. People are kind and help each other. They must know each other to some extent."*

*"Integration is an invitation, welcome, & acceptance into the country. It is also a cooperation with the community, & being a part of the community, & participation within the society".*

*"Participating in society beyond [their] family and immediate community sharing certain aspects of culture through one or more of the following: language, education, employment, leisure activities, friendships, voting."*

#### Adapting to the new country (to the UK culture, society and laws)

*"Integration is the process of getting adapted to the new society, understanding the culture, law, rules and regulations of the new country."*

*"Willingness to comply with country's law, culture, etc."*

*"Knowing, language, traditions, and regulations and familiarity with the laws and the system, then settle in the new country"*

*"to exercise your rights, opportunities and abide by the law of the country fully in the country you migrate [to]."*

#### Contributing

*"It is about contributing to this country. And I feel that this is not just a duty, but something like a moral commitment"*

*"I really need to contribute to the society, to do something, the same as others are doing."*

#### Sharing values and being considered as equal

Integration would then mean: *"respecting diversity but treating everyone the same"*, and *"having the same opportunities and obligations as native citizens"*.

*"Feeling home in another country. Being considered the same way as people who are born in our new country"*.

Integration should then be a two-way process *"that leads individuals to have equal conditions, opportunities, freedom, and social life as the rest of society; and not a specific moment or stage...there need to be actions from both the individual and the rest of society for there to be integration"*.

*"Integration would also entail migrants having decision-making powers on the territory of the hosting country"*.

#### Integration or assimilation?

One respondent defined integration as: *"Try to understand the culture of the country, speak the language; make your life here. Doesn't mean being the same as host people."*

*Integration is "accepting a society as your own and being accepted by the society as a member without having to lose your identity". A common mistake is made between "integration" and "transformation" and people who has not transformed into the commonality of the society is considered has not been integrated.*

## What makes you feel integrated?

Feeling integrated comes from a sense of security from legal status and a feeling of being part of a community as well as an appreciation of the opportunities and freedoms of the new society. Some also distinguished between integration and belonging, feeling that they are integrated fully, but do not necessarily want to belong to a particular British identity.

### Opportunity and Freedom

*"Here we are free to criticise the [Prime Minister] without reprisals. This is something we should be able to do everywhere in every country."*

*"I've been here for 25 years. And I feel this is home for me. (...) I feel 100% British. And I feel I'm happy I took the decision to stay in this country. I have three children who are doing very well. (...) So I feel this so a country of opportunities, where everyone who wants to work hard can achieve."*

### Social and legal status

*"Once that feeling that you always have to ask permission is gone, then probably you feel integrated, you feel at home".*

*"I think it's a matter of acknowledgement, whether (...) you have the right to be here. Unless you cross this border of recognition, I'm talking let's say about asylum and refugees, it's really hard. It's a matter of legal identity. Once they gain it, they will feel more powerful to feel equal, to look for jobs and then to feel they have a voice and can easily mix in the society."*

### Community, belonging and participation

*"I don't feel British, I don't want to feel British, and I don't think I [ever will be] British. It doesn't mean that I don't have the right to be here. I'm part of the society, I'm part of the community – wider and local community – I contribute, but I don't have to become British to be part of it. I really like to exercise my right to choose the country where I want to live. I'm a citizen of the world rather than belonging to one place. I chose now to make my home here, to have my child and my family life here. But I'm not British."*

*"Integration is a two way process. Belonging is also a mutual feeling, so both parts have to play a role to do this."*

One person stressed the need to contribute to the society in the same way as others to "not see the difference between the British and not British".

*"So wherever we are, in our [neighbourhood] especially, we need really to let others know that we are part of the community, of the society. We can't be living in [quarantine], in isolation, like only with our own fellow members, or our own people... we need to be part of the community."*

## What influences your sense of belonging?

*"When my neighbours started to talk to me like I was normal and not 'the migrant'. Having my daughter who after 10 years living in this country is much more British than she will ever be Lithuanian. Deep understanding of language helps in communicating at personal, professional life and skills development. Working with British people and making friends makes you feel more at home."*

*"Sometime the media make you feel ashamed and of course, with the consequent feeling of being out of place."*

## Migrants are worried about the impact of the debate:

A majority of respondents were concerned about the debate on migration, and many felt personally affected by it.

### Migrants feel that media and policy makers mostly represent migrants in an inaccurate, biased and negative way

There was strong consensus that the debate on migration was biased – that immigration played a large part in the formation of modern Britain and that this issue is either marginalised or ignored.

*“...the way in which migrants are represented make me feel that my contributions to British society are devalued and not respected. The short-term economic perspective neglects the long-term cultural and social contributions evident in society. It frustrates me when an issue of illegality and terrorism creeps in the debate as these issues criminalises migrants in public perceptions.”*

Participants also felt that migrants' views were missing in the discussion on migration.

*“You see migrants filmed getting into Italy and some of them dying in boats but there is no article that is made to explain why people end up seeking asylum in Italy or in Europe”.*

Participants also questioned the use of the word 'debate.' One participant in London said that *“it is usually a one way conversation”* and that bringing together *“a bunch of people [arguing] with each other”* does not mean having a proper debate.”

### The Media's representation

The media was seen as the source of much of the misinformation about migration.

*“There are a lot of people in this country who wants to escape being asylum seekers and refugees. It's only because media has portrayed them as, with this... stigma that they are wrong for it to be a refugee or asylum seeker. You know? And that is coming from the media.”*

*“It makes me feel like we are guilty of everything, that migrants should be blamed for everything. Even starting from the economic crisis, through to the benefits problems, bedroom tax and the NHS cuts. Everything. That's how it's being portrayed by the media.”*

*“The media only generally and especially because of UK tabloid media (...) compete with each other for headlines, most of those headlines are negative things. You only hear about the negative migrant, the positive athlete, but anyone else (...) they find that one bad apple and that gets magnified. Its not just migrants that face this (...) if you look at how people get welfare support, or state support, or single mums, or homosexuals until not too long ago. Different groups get demonised in the media, so its important to realise we're not alone in that, and the way the media works in the UK is particularly strong.”*

*“If we say that the media probably will be generalizing. Probably we should say certain sections of the media. Because there are others, like the Guardian newspaper for example, if it is reporting on, you know, migrants issue or refugee issues it reports it from a very balanced point of view. There are certain sections of the media, if you read the story from them you, obviously it will be very much biased.”*

*“I feel a sadness as well. There is press freedom in the UK. They don't have a gun to the back of their head forcing them to write this racist drivel, they're choosing to do it (...) The sales is the motivating factor (...) I don't think they have an agenda, I don't think they're doing it with an end in mind other than making money.”*

Other respondents saw a problem in the lack of migrant voices in the debate and wanted migrants to speak up to change this.

*“Yeah I know the media does portray a negative topics about asylum seekers but I think also migrants If we could use our voices to be voice for the voiceless.” “If we can't get it by going to the media to say what we think is wrong, we should individually try to infiltrate our communities spread the word and be the voice for the voiceless.”*

### **Migrants feel personally affected by the debate**

#### **The debate's negative influence on migrants' sense of belonging**

The debate on migration was seen as provoking strong, unpleasant emotions such as insecurity,

marginalisation/exclusion, a lack of sense of belonging, disconnectedness and feeling unwelcome. Many, who had felt that they were integrated, were made to feel that they did not and could never fully belong. Participants were concerned about the impact the debate might have on native Brits. Some had considered leaving as a result.

*"It changes my perspective. I feel I will be noticed more obviously – when I hear a story about migration on the news it makes me wonder about my status here: 'Am I legal or 'illegal'? Am I accepted or not accepted?"* Another said: *"Yes when media and public opinion reflect negative image about migration, I feel worried and not part of this country."*

*"I know I'm not English, but British. I carry a British Passport but I'm one leg in one leg out in actuality. I'm really not wanted here."*

There was the sense that while you can be living and contributing to society, there is a sense that it does not mean the wider society will accept you: *"Belonging is to have friendship, to blossom, to have freedom and to use your skills (...) to offer to society. My children who studied here can make a contribution to society, but probably need another generation to be accepted (...)"*

However, participants distinguished between their experiences in their personal lives where they feel they have friends and supporters, and the policies of the state and media rhetoric, which create an unwelcome atmosphere in a broader sense.

*"I am working in the UK since I have arrived here, 9 years ago and have never claimed any benefits. I feel being included on the local level because people know me here but not on the national level because of the negative stigma attached to the Eastern European migrants."*

*"People around me [are] friendly, but [I'm] not very confident in showing I'm a migrant if I'm around people that I don't know."*

A minority of participants explained that the debate had created obstacles in the practicalities of their personal and professional lives

*"Many times I wonder what if I will not be able to get a job because I am a Romanian immigrant"*

Whether participants expressed sadness, anger or frustration, their emotions led to a sense of resignation and acceptance that they simply do not and will never belong no matter how integrated they may feel.

*"I feel like no matter how hard I try I will never be an equal with the 'native' people because I am being singled out all the time."*

*"How can you feel like you belong in a society that makes it all too clear it hates you and wants you gone?"*

*"While I normally feel perfectly integrated, the words used by some politicians and sections of the media make me feel excluded."*

*"I used to feel like I belonged. Now I feel I am unwelcomed."*

*"But someone like me who actually lived most of my life here I still feel a migrant...we have a problem in this country, if you live here for most of your life and you are still seen as a migrant then you have an issue. "*

Several participants said that the debate has made them question if they should not have come to the UK, or has made them want to leave.

*"I ask myself if I have made a mistake to come here"*

*"In a way, it just gives me a nudge to move on somewhere else once I'm finished with my studies here."*

One respondent explained how the debate had already caused alienation from the wider community: *"We were told to go back home, so we did. We went back to our communities and we stayed within them."*

## The debate's influence on migrants' relationship with the British public

While a majority of respondents said that the debate had not influenced their relationship with the public, their comments emphasized that they were starting to feel an increasing sense of mistrust and worried for the future of the relationships. It made them selective in who they interacted with and for some it led to a sense of negative feelings towards British people. A larger majority of participants felt that the debate led to an increase in racism and discrimination and some had felt discriminated against.

One clear theme emerging from participants is the reporting of an increasing sense of defensiveness and accompanying exhaustion from having to continually prove themselves.

*"I feel in need of showing who I really am to the British people that I meet. I need them to understand why I am here and what it is that I am doing, but I also feel like I want to make sure that they know that I am much more than a migrant".*

*"I am just more cautious of my accent and sometimes I don't talk at all for people not to know that I am migrant."*

*"I am more scared to talk to people casually on the bus or train because I am afraid they will say something thoughtless about immigrants".*

*"It's not fair for me to judge the general public for what some politicians, media, people and individuals with agenda do or say. So it won't affect my relationship as such but won't make me open and engaging, as I would like to be."*

*"I trust less and less British people, and that's probably unfair".*

*"I choose very carefully who I associate with and will not discuss migration with anyone who is anti migration"*

*"I feel that they are putting a mark on my face for not being from here. It makes me feel that people in the streets will start considering migrants their enemies, and that I am going to be in danger soon."*

A few respondents also mentioned their appreciation for the many that did not hold negative views against migrants.

*"In some way of course it make influence, when you hear someone talking rubbish on the TV, or when a leader of country accuses the migrants in stealing benefits, or UKIP leaflet, I become sad. But, on the other hand, I know how many people stand for migrants, even statistic of migrants' contribution makes me feel better and valued."*

*"I have many friends here and most people I deal with in my everyday life are not xenophobic, so I do have faith that most people are decent and reasonable. But I also worry about how politicians and the media influence public debate, and that they are encouraging people who are worried about the effects of austerity to blame migrants. And this will make me feel unwelcome."*

## Racism and discrimination

### Discrimination is a major concern for migrants, including those who are white. Participants reported being discriminated or verbally abused.

*"On everyday basis someone doesn't forget to remind me that I am not from here either by what they say, how they treat me, how they make me feel or by their body language. Double standards in shops, taxis is not an exception. I prefer to send email rather than speak on the phone for I don't want to be treated differently just because of my accent."*

*"I know that lots of people think that white people are not subject to racism and discrimination but they are. (...) People told me, 'you know I can tell you anything, you are white'. People told me 'you come here and you take our jobs and we don't care about you, your education doesn't matter because Polish education is nothing'. You know I heard it all."*

Some felt that the debate on migration led to racist views: once people start talking about immigration, hatred against foreigners end up coming in.

*"I think British people who are our friends won't have any problems with us because they don't see us as migrants. (...) Suddenly one of my colleagues started saying 'oh you know they won't give my son a house because of all those migrants and those asylum-seekers. They come here and they just got everything, a house, money...' And I told her 'I'm not sure where you got this information from but who you think is an asylum-seeker?' She said 'Oh you know those people who are on the street begging and...'. And I said to her "Do you realise I'm an asylum seeker?" She said "No". I said "Yes". She said "No". I said "Yes and I am working" (...). And I think you get that quite a lot. Until you have a conversation where that comes out, you wouldn't know."*

*"Being a Black man is rarely an advantage employment wise and too often a disadvantage."*

This discrimination is not new as one respondent explains: *"In the late 70s and early 80s people wouldn't give you a job because of your colour. They would speak to you on the phone and tell you to come (because you are well spoken). Once they saw you they would just say "vacancy has been filled."*

## **Recommendations**

The majority of migrant respondents were very clear about the changes they would like to see in the public debate on migration. They wanted to see a change in the overall tone of the debate. They wanted a less partisan, more balanced, informed, evidence based and honest debate. They also wanted to see a 'balanced' positive accurate reporting and debate which also speaks about emigration.

*“Please handle the immigration issue with credibility, honesty and objectivity without hidden agenda”.*

*“Tell the truth about how we help economic growth and don’t take people’s jobs or decrease wages”.*

*“I would like to see more balanced representation of migrants highlighting their valuable contributions”.*

*“Elect a migrant to represent the people the debate is about”.*

*“It would be good to finally have a debate, hear all parties involved, show all the facts and not only selective ones”. “I would love to change all the negativities and racial bias against migrants”.*

They wanted their hard work and contribution to society to be recognised. *“We need to see positive messages about migration, not only about how immigrants benefit the economy but also how they benefit society”.*

They also wanted to see solidarity amongst all workers. *“The labour movement has a certain responsibility to tell people that migrants don’t threaten their jobs”.*

