Do they need to integrate?

The place of EU Citizens in the UK and the problem of integration

Abstract

This article aims to provide empirical evidence against the theory and practice of immigrant integration through the experience of EU citizens in the UK around Brexit. We demonstrate that, in the case of EU citizens, the outcomes of presumably successful 'integration' have been achieved while – and, we argue, because of the fact that – EU citizens have been treated as citizens (not migrants) and have been freed from the requirement to 'integrate'. On the basis of interviews, focus groups and a survey in the period 2016-18 we show meaningful incorporation of a variety of EU citizens of all backgrounds, including those from the so called 'low-skilled' presumably problematic to integrate subgroup. We claim that work, family, locality and time determine much of the intricacies of the incorporation journey. Integration governance which Brexit imposed on EU citizens can only threaten these outcomes.

Although firmly established in policy and research, the notion of (im)migrant integration is problematic in that it positions a presumably deficient group (immigrants) against a presumably defined group (society) in a structure of subjugation and inequality: the former needs to ultimately conform with the latter or miss the opportunities for acquiring 'the good life'. Through the experience of mobile EU citizens, this study speaks to an emerging literature challenging the presumptions and practices of immigrant integration. Unlike third-country nationals who begin their (legal) migration journeys from acquiring some sort of legal status – a permission to reside, work or settle – EU citizens are free to move without the burden of status. This, we observe, also removes the expectation to conform and allows the opportunity for completely different migration journeys: ones that are freed from the imperatives of migrant integration. To describe the complex processes of emplacement within host societies, which invariably follow migration, we prefer to use the term 'incorporation' because of its relative detachment from the subjugation agenda integration is linked to.

Freedom from the expectations and imperatives of migrant integration, we argue, allows mobile EU citizens to incorporate in host societies in ways much similar to those of mobile nationals, and achieves all the goals of integration policies without the agenda of subjugation and inequality. This follows the logic of individual decision-making, personal preference and the passage of time, and applies even to those migrant groups seen to carry an 'integration deficit': the presumably low-skilled non-speakers of the local language (though we do agree with the literature problematising the high-/ low-skill divide, see D'Angelo and Kofman 2018 for example). Mobile individuals begin to incorporate and become integral parts of their host societies in ways as multi-faceted and diverse as the people comprising them. Imposing an immigrant integration agenda on mobile citizens threatens to undermine these achievements because it is unnecessary, as our findings show, and, when done

as a policy shift from the freedom of movement, creates its own divisions and makes for less cohesive societies.

To illustrate this dynamics, we take UK's extraction from the European Union and its shifting policies towards EU citizens living there. The concept of (im)migrant integration, previously not officially applicable to the more than three million EU citizens living in the UK (because EU's policy has been *not* to have a policy of integration for mobile citizens), has now become the dominant paradigm for public and policy discussions (see, for example, Goodhart 2016; and Katwala et al., 2016). Taking as our starting point here the transformation of these EU citizens into EU migrants (e.g. Guma 2020), we explore their incorporation in the UK and their own experiences and perceptions of place and belonging to UK society . We do so on the basis of interviews, focus groups and a survey undertaken in the period 2016-2018.

Through this empirical work, we demonstrate that what the migrant integration agenda seems to pursue ('parity' and 'legitimacy' of national community membership, see Alba and Foner 2015: 5) has been happening largely unproblematically among EU citizens in the UK in the absence of integration policies. Of course, mobile Europeans pursue different migration trajectories: some move briefly and for a specific purpose and have always planned to go, others are part of circular migration patterns (Triandafyllidou 2013, Vertovec 2007). But those who decided, happened to stay and wanted to settle, have largely incorporated well into their local contexts. This, it seems, is true also of the presumably harder to 'integrate' low-skilled EU citizens with little foreign language skills, as our data reveals.

The experiences and patterns of incorporation of EU citizens living in the UK can thus serve (together with further comparative research into intra-EU migration's outcomes elsewhere) as a basis for the empirical evidence needed to challenge migrant integration agendas – and the research invested in them. In what follows, we discuss the theoretical basis for such a challenge, before sketching UK's migrant integration efforts and the methodological and empirical parameters of this investigation into the integration-free incorporation of EU citizens in the UK around the time of the Brexit referendum.

What is the problem with migrant integration?

The mainstream way in which migrant incorporation into societies has been studied and practiced has been through integration (e.g. Scholten and Van Breugel 2018). Migrants are deemed to belong, to have found their place in their host societies, when they have 'integrated'. Integration in this sense, to use the concept as applied by Alba and Foner (2015: 5), is the process by which migrants achieve social acceptance and acquire the valued 'stuff' of a society (cf Penninx and Martiniello, 2004). Full integration implies 'parity of life chances with members of the majority group' and 'legitimacy of membership' (Alba and Foner 2015: 5). This is not too different from the policy definition (e.g. Rutter 2015 'get on' and 'fare well') which began to overshadow multiculturalism towards the turn of the 20th century (Kostakopoulou 2010: 936). Still, the concept is explicitly distinguished from the previously dominant 'assimilation' paradigm (Park and Burgess 1921, Gordon 1964, Kasinitz and DeWind 1999) on the basis of a presumably two-way dynamics (in integration policies) as opposed to a one-way dynamics (in assimilation policies, see Vermeulen and Penninx 2000, Miera 2012).

But once we begin to unpack the concept of migrant integration and its implementation, controversies emerge. To begin with, a growing body of literature over the past two decades has challenged the benevolence behind integration research and practice. In indirect dialogue with earlier writing (e.g. Favell 2003), Kostakopoulou offers an inspired critique of the concept of civic integration and the policies pursuing it, demonstrating their attachment to the 'implicit nationalist narrative of unified and culturally homogenous communities' (2010: 945) and the (disturbingly many) similarities between integration and assimilation which sustain nationalist ideologies in the West (on this see also Schneider and Crul 2010, Joppke and Morawska 2003). Ultimately, Kostakopoulou argues, both processes are characterised by a 'one wayness' which pits the migrant as inferior and *deficient*, and she insists that, as a policy approach, 'there is no historical necessity or inevitability about the adoption of the civic integration paradigm' (2010: 935). Instead, she proposes a 'pluralistic framework' which 'affirms the unavoidable diversity of polities and cities in the 21st century, frees itself from the constraints of nationalist ideology and puts emphasis on political processes of people-making and collective identity formation, practices of cooperation, negotiation and projects of institutional design' (2010: 954).

Problematising the way immigrant integration has gradually evolved into a 'primary vehicle for the imagination of national societies in Western Europe', Schinkel mounts a coherent and deeply honest critique of the social science of immigrant integration (2017). He argues that the way immigrant integration has been studied and measured in Europe has reflected a very narrow agenda of monitoring and policing the boundaries of belonging into ethno-nationally bounded societies imagining themselves in a particular exclusionary way. In his subsequent reflections on this, Schinkel calls it 'neocolonial knowledge production' (2018: 31) which reflects the power imbalance immigrants into Western societies are faced with upon entering the integration paradigm. He shows how a concept which is inherent to the systemic level – the whole of society (on this also Favell 2019) – gets transliterated onto the individual inscribing in her a default deficiency which then gets policed and measured (what he calls the function of 'social hygiene' doing the dirty work of excluding notions of race and class as irrelevant – read, inappropriate to discuss). The intertwinement of race and racism into integration thinking has been highlighted by others (see Valluvan 2018). Ultimately, Schinkel advises social scientists to think about what happens when some people (immigrants) are evaluated in terms of their 'integration' while others are not, and how this evaluation gets reproduced into policy. He later goes on to call the work that 'integration' does today 'indefensible' (2019) because it is solely geared towards identifying and managing the European Others.

Building a survey of how the concept of integration can be used meaningfully in applied comparative research (in the symposium edited by Sawitri Saharso (2019) titled 'Who Needs Integration?'), Favell (2019) agrees that the way integration has been interrogated has been one of 'a nation-state-centred obsession with immigrants, national politics and national integration'. In overall agreement with Schinkel (and others), Favell discourages the move from assimilation to integration as one solving nothing, and he invites responsible use of the theoretically-laden term integration ('it is not a metaphor' for incorporation, insertion, inclusion, adaptation), one that recognizes global inequalities and the naked form of 'colonial nationalism' which often replicates them. In his controversial commentary to the Alba and Foner 2015 book, Favell (2016) also engages with discussions of integration as overlooking numerous other central variables in Europe (and the UK in particular)

such as race, class and Islam. In this he builds on earlier work on 'philosophies of integration' and the idea of citizenship in Europe (1998, 2001).

Ultimately, this discussion of the problems with the study and practice of immigrant integration in Europe feeds into our concern with the place of EU citizens in it, in the case of the UK in particular. We see that mainstream approaches to 'integrating' migrants reproduce subjugating practices of control and exclusion, which are best illustrated in the way UK's restrictive policies on asylum have moved, but also in civic integration and family reunification policies (see Goodman 2014 in the UK chapter, while a survey of earlier integration research in the UK is offered by Castles et al's 2002 report commissioned by the Home Office). EU citizens have long escaped such policy effort but in the context of Brexit they have seen themselves gradually pushed into it with the removal of EU citizenship rights. UK's move to re-affirm its own notion of sovereignty apart from the European integration project has reinforced the need to re-border and re-produce the bounded community required for it, thus accelerating the urgency of integration. Indeed, as we will see below, most of the targeted policy effort in this direction has happened after 2016 as EU nationals in the UK saw themselves captured by this process (see Mindus, 2017 for the legal implications, also evidenced by parliamentary discussions preceding the House of Commons Report HC1071, 2017; see also the Katwala et al., 2016 report on immigration in post-referendum Britain).

In line with the above referenced critique of immigrant integration research and practice, we argue that integration works against its stated purpose. In this study, we demonstrate that EU citizens in the UK have incorporated well in the absence of official integration policies and discourse. UK's shift to treat them as immigrants threatens to undermine this achievement and to worsen 'social cohesion' outcomes (see the British Academy's 2019 overview speaking to this agenda), despite the declared intentions to the contrary.[1] Understanding the incorporation of EU citizens in the UK around Brexit can thus serve as a useful empirical starting point for challenging the immigrant integration paradigm and the policies underpinning it.

UK's Journey to Migrant Integration for All

The history of modern integration policy in the UK is considered to have started in the 1960s with the focus on migrants from the New Commonwealth countries (see Broadhead and Spencer's 2020 policy primer). Yet, integration policies *per se* were not formulated in this period, which saw the consolidation of anti-discrimination legislation both through domestic law and, after the 1974 European accession, as a result of the direct applicability of the growing body of European law.

A renewed impetus, this time preoccupied with 'social cohesion', came with the disturbances in 2001 and the focus on British values (see Blair's 2006 speech on 'the duty to integrate', also Vertovec 2007, Hickman, Mai and Crowley 2012). This policy talk coincided with the 2004 and 2007 EU accessions which saw the arrival of free movers from Central and Eastern Europe, often to places with little or no experience of migration. The 'Our Shared Future' 2007 report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion and the 2008 government response to it outlined a series of measures the government was taking to ensure 'cohesive and integrated communities', also (though not exclusively) in view of immigration. Much of this did not apply directly to EU citizens because of EU's

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[1] Of course, this applies to third country nationals in the same degree, though it is beyond the scope of our empirical work here.

focus on non-discrimination and the gradual transposition into domestic law (in 2006 and 2016) of the EU Citizenship Directive (2004/38) defining rights to move and reside, until Brexit gradually ended the freedom of movement. The UK still does not have an official migrant integration strategy, though it has been deploying increasingly restrictive policies of civic integration for non-EU migrants and their families (Kostakopoulou 2010, Goodman 2014). Their 'reactionary, neoconservative nationalism' has gradually been established as a default common sense (a 'multiculturealism', as Schinkel calls it) 'personified in the massive, best-selling impact of Collier (2013) and Goodhart (2013)', Favell (2019) claims. This approach was well encapsulated in Prime Minister May's 2016 remark that 'if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere', favouring a narrow interpretation of belonging and insisting on the values of national citizenship.

Integration policies naturally applied to immigrants, but UK's wrestling with the integration agenda has tapped into many other pressing problems of modern Britain related to race, class and Islam (see an early document produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) which illustrates this intertwinement). A growing public concern with integration is revealed in the three reports produced by a non-governmental body called the Social Integration Commission (sponsored by the Cadbury Trust, later re-branded as The Challenge) tackling various issues of segregation and hurdles to social mobility in some segments of society, including migrants (e.g. the 2014 Social Integration: A Wake-up Call report).

The same intertwinement of problems is seen in the much more widely cited review commissioned by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary in 2015 to Dame Louise Casey into 'opportunity and integration in our most isolated and deprived communities' (Casey 2016). The Casey report showcases how immigration takes centre-stage in this discussion, despite its incursions into issues of class, race and religion (immigration has changed Britain 'dramatically' and its impact has been 'far-reaching' on pp. 9-10 of the report). For example, the report discusses 'higher birth rates among foreign born parents' [predominantly Polish, Pakistani and Indian] as contributing to the 'growing diversity of the UK' ['diversity' here is used euphemistically to designate the problem at hand]. Further, the main problem of segregation is explicitly linked to places 'of high migration flows' (the big cities). This then is discussed in relation to growing public attitudes of 'unease' at the 'much more significant scale of immigration since the 1990s' (p. 12), especially among the poor whites and those of established minority background. Thus, the report justifies its own endeavour with a 'high concern' with integration.

In response to the Casey report (and to confirm the link between this 'high concern' and immigration), the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration called for 'a fundamental reframing of *our national conversation on immigration*' (The APPG's inquiry into the integration of immigrants, 2017: 4; emphasis added). This resulted in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper issued by the government in 2018 whose very second sentence (p. 10) and primary concern (p. 11) are with the 'level and pace of migration', even as it otherwise focuses on a range of problems with British society. The Home Office, in turn, deployed an Indicators of Integration framework (2019), foreworded by the Minister of State for Immigration, to complement the 2018 Green Paper. It is a detailed document, accompanied by a toolkit and high-colour illustrations of happy people, which summarises usefully 14 domains of integration across 4 headings (foundation, facilitators, social connectors, markers and means). While empirically rich, this integration framework measures immigrants as deficient across the exhaustive list of domains when compared

to nationals, which is precisely why the literature critiques the approach as subjugating and focused on social control.

It is clear then that, precisely in the period when the UK was preoccupied with re-affirming its national sovereignty, the immigrant integration agenda gained ground in public discussions and policy. The experience of EU citizens in the UK after 2016 seems to support the critique of its exclusionary purpose. Previously freed from all requirements to register and report, EU citizens saw themselves facing a protracted period of uncertainty during which they were excluded from policy discussions but subject to political bickering and difficult negotiations. It was hinted that acquiring the non-mandatory permanent residence document may or may not be useful, despite the uncertainties and difficulties around it (this was the notorious 85-pages long form). Finally, in 2019 the EU Settlement Scheme was introduced, which required all EU citizens to register in order to secure their status in the UK. The many difficulties of launching a scheme of such magnitude aside (and in the very aftermath of the 2018 Windrush scandal, see the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration's 2019 report), it confirms UK's move to 'migranticise' the status of EU citizens by obliging them to register (cf here Dahinden's 2016 call to 'de-migranticise' migration studies), regardless of their length of stay, their life circumstances, or their material or cultural contribution to society. The same position is confirmed in the new immigration system (see the UK's Points-based Immigration System Policy Statement of 2020) which after Brexit erased all privileges previously afforded to EU citizens in accessing the UK.

Ultimately, we see an ambition to create a bounded subgroup of immigrants, where previously there were mobile EU citizens, and to subsume their governance under the framework of control and subjugation inherent in the immigrant integration agenda: a 'cohesive and integrated communities' Britain. What we argue in this article is that this ambition tramples over years of successful incorporation of EU citizens in the UK of all classes and backgrounds (including the presumably problematic 'low-skilled' subgroup), which is a societal loss – and potentially a future policy problem. In the reflections that follow we demonstrate that all the stated outcomes of immigrant integration have been achieved by EU citizens in the UK *while* they were freed from the status of immigrants and the burden of integration, and that, if anything, the integration agenda undermines this achievement. This supports the critique of immigrant integration we started from. It also further suggests that in the context of global interconnected Britain, regardless of its precise relationship with the EU, the very notion of immigrant integration becomes awkward and 'indefensible' (see further the problematisation of integration in the context of super-diversity by Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018).

Methodology

Our study explored the experiences and perceptions of incorporation (to deliberately depart from the terminology of the integration agenda) of a range of EU citizens residing in the UK in the period around the 2016 referendum (2016-2018). We carried out a nationwide online survey (*n*=465) and we conducted 11 focus groups (*n*=61) and 26 in-depth interviews (see appended tables). We analysed the collected data using SPSS and qualitative content analysis, identifying patterns through the surveys and triangulating them with the patterns that emerged in the qualitative studies through interviews and focus groups. We carried out a cross-sectional study capturing new participants in its fresh rounds, thus our results are inevitably impacted by the small samples and their biases. For

example, the high representation of EU citizens from Greater London and the South East and South West from the focus groups may have provided us with paths of incorporation more typical of diverse urban environments than more homogenous rural ones. We matched our findings from these with the nationwide survey results and with the individual interviewees from Scotland and the North of England. Likewise, due to recruiting from existing networks and snowballing, we had many EU12 (Central and East European) but less EU12 ('old' member states) Nationals. We explored this bias in view of our interest in 'problematic' integration (as we saw in the above, EU12 migration is associated with some of that talk). We made explicit effort to recruit participants who struggled to speak English or worked in 'elementary occupations' (to use ONS terminology) in order to explore the assumption of problematic 'low-skilled' integration.

We were interested in how EU citizens found a place for themselves in the societies they had joined and how they perceived this place in view of belonging. Emplacement and belonging meet the integration agenda's best outcomes right after they have been achieved, but we wanted to explore how they had been achieved in the absence of official integration policies of the kind we described above. This is why we used the integration agendas domains and headings to guide our questions (this applies especially to our survey) but we encouraged our participants to tell their life stories the way they chose. We also explored group dynamics in the focus groups to capture common lore, shared tropes and dominant narratives.

A larger longitudinal study, particularly in a comparative context, would shed further light on to the argument we put forward about EU citizens' incorporation in European societies in the absence of integration governance (cf Sotkasiira and Gawlewicz 2020, Lulle and King 2019). Overall, we claim, the absence of integration policies and talk has allowed for diverse and sustainable paths of incorporation in British society even among those presumably most challenged to incorporate (according to official integration measures). The shift to subsume this pattern of incorporation under migrant integration governance threatens its outcomes and works against the social cohesion it presumably pursues. In what follows, we sketch some of the findings which sustain this claim.

Experiences and perceptions of incorporation of EU citizens living in the UK?

Even after the referendum our respondents expressed an overall confidence in their place in the UK: they had 'a right to be here' and they did not feel they had to justify that. They shared their stories as ones of exploration, often hardship, and growth, not stories of proving deservingness and suitability of 'fit' to the host societies. To the contrary, differences were often reflected upon and made a point of as a matter of identity and individuality. There was no pressure to conform.

Our main finding is that by and large our participants seemed to have carved a place for themselves in the communities they inhabited and have achieved meaningful well-being for themselves without the status and the expectation of integration. This is not measured against a particular level of achievement but in terms of their own aspirations and perceptions of stability and wellness.

- The limited role of naturalisation for incorporation

Naturalisation, which features in the Home Office's framework of integration as part of the foundation domains, did not figure prominently in our participants' priorities. The main reasons

stated by most for not applying for it was the cost and the fact that British citizenship provided few additional benefits to what EU citizens already enjoyed:

> **Hanjalka** (female, Hungarian-Romanian, catering manager, mid-30s, London): '*[I want to apply, but] actually I don't want to pay that much money for this.*'

> **Lenko** (male, Bulgarian, IT technician, late 30s, Haywards Heath): '*People say, "You should get your [British] passport." "Why?!" It's just - I can stay here indefinitely, so I have no concerns.*'

Among those considering naturalisation in our survey sample (and this is corroborated by our interviews and focus groups) Eastern Europeans were more likely to apply.[2] This is inevitably linked to a longer history of exclusion and immigration control, and shorter time in the EU free movement area. It is important to note, though, that the decision to acquire formal status, when it happened, was considered a confirmation of an already acquired position in the host society. This is unlike third-country nationals, whose integration journeys are inverted and begin from the acquisition of formal status (at least in regular migration trajectories). This was the main difference that EU citizenship made for our participants.

In our post-referendum data (as well as in data from subsequent research into EU citizens' reaction towards Brexit, see Rzepnikowska 2019, Guma et al 2019, Lulle et al 2018, etc), our respondents began to express anxieties and uncertainty with regard to their migration journeys:

> **Sylvia** (female, Italian, full-time student and baby-sitter, late 20s, London): '*I take all this personally: it's like they don't want me here*'.

> **Mitko** (male, Bulgarian, IT specialist, early 30s, London): '*We are thinking about moving to a different EU country, though we are not ready yet: but we will have to go through the paperwork and become citizens if we want to stay here....*'

EU citizens began to see themselves as unwelcome. We note the need for naturalisation discussed here as a challenge to one's position in society rather than a confirmation of it, as mainstream integration discourse would have it. In fact, for most EU citizens the confirmation process contributed to an overall *reduction* in their formal rights, unlike third-country nationals for whom the process was about acquiring *additional* rights.

What was obvious in our investigation was that the push to subsume EU citizens within the migrant integration agenda seemed to disrupt the processes through which incorporation had been occurring: work, education, places of worship, sports clubs, parents' association, informal contacts, etc. These are the standard ways individuals socialise with each other, regardless of their immigration status. Integration policies look into such socialisation too but their starting point is one of deficiency. We, to the contrary, observed a starting point of individual worth: 'I know why I am here, I know what I want to achieve'. Our understanding of the difference is, of course, linked to the

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[2] Using a Likert scale (1-5) the mean for applying for citizenship overall was 3.3, for Eastern Europeans it was around 4 (for example, Polish 4.3, Bulgarian 3.7, and Hungarian 3.8). For comparison, it was lower for all others, for example, French 2.9, German 3.1, and Italian 3.2.

right of free movement and residence, and the non-discrimination framework the EU has insisted upon for its mobile citizens.

- Work as a main path of incorporation

In integration policies, work is discussed as a marker of integration but rather than see it as an outcome, we find that it is more useful to understand employment as the most common path towards incorporation. Excluding those who were not looking for work (retired, homemakers, or in full time education), EU citizens in our survey sample overwhelmingly worked.[3] (with only 4% not in work but looking). This is not surprising as the main driver for EU migration to the UK has been employment opportunities (Migration Observatory Analysis of ONS 2019). In our data, Eastern and Southern Europeans came primarily for work (and/ or to join family members who worked), while for Western and Northern Europeans education, travel, family and culture were also important reasons (what integration policies would subsume under the facilitators and social connectors domains). Our interviewees emphasised that they had been particularly willing to move to the UK because it was relatively easy to find work and being European was not considered a disadvantage.

> **Barbara (**female, Czech, full-time student and au pair, late 20s, London): *'I don't think I've ever been disadvantaged because of my nationality. If you want to work in England and your English is strong enough for the job you're applying for, and you are qualified for the job or you have some kind of experience, I think - I have never been rejected, because I was Czech.'*

If there was a disadvantage our participants pointed to, it had to do with the equity between qualifications and job prospects upon migration. Unsurprisingly, our interviewees admitted that they had experienced difficulties in getting jobs that corresponded to their qualifications and experience, particularly because of English language competency and qualifications recognition issues (e.g. in teaching). This disadvantage, albeit not insignificant, had been mitigated by re-qualification in the UK (to which there were no formal obstacles under EU citizenship rights but time), or acquiring equitable UK-based experience. In any case, no other factor stood out in our findings as more important than employment for the successful paths of incorporation of EU citizens living in the UK.

- Social connectors and obstacles

Of course, not all EU citizens incorporate without hurdles. Our study found a positive correlation between a number of successful outcomes (participation in civil society, employment, number of British friends, exercising political rights,) and higher levels of education and professional skills. Other positive correlations we identified are between fuller incorporation and having British friends and children in the UK. For example, having children in the UK was positively correlated with participating in a range of civil society activities, such as parents associations (.419**) and sports clubs (.274**), and having British friends (.256**); while having British friends was positively correlated with interest in British politics (.295**), registering to vote (.437**). Another standard marker of integration is inter-marriage. In our study, we find that inter-marriage is another path towards successful incorporation and one that should not be thought of in static terms (as an outcome of integration) but in dynamic terms (as a long-term process of incorporation). According

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[3] 62.75% in full-time employment, 15% self-employed, 13% in part-time employment, and 3.75% own their own business.

to our focus groups and interviews, marriages and relationships (including same-sex) with British partners are a common trigger for the decision to settle permanently in the UK (and do not appear to have any stigma attached to them, as integration governance suggests, though we do not have figures for this). What did appear to be the case is that individual personalities and characteristics played a more important role in making such marriages than group identity and nationality:

> **Gosia** (female, Polish, catering manager, late-30s, Goring and Streatly): *'It's funny, because when I came here, the first two years, I could really feel that English people, they don't like Polish. But I remember when I met my partner, I told him, "You know I'm Polish, right?" And he said, "And I'm English. What are you going to do about it?" It was such a nice exchange. Then I met his mother, his family: they are such lovely people, and they really don't care where I come from. What is important is who I am, you know, it's really cool.'*

> **Catalina** *(female, Spanish, catering manager, early 40s, Goring and Streatly): '[I see myself as] Spanglish. You know, it's a process. [M]y partner is British, so it must have some effect on me …'*

On the issue of discrimination and being treated fairly in the UK, few reported to have experienced any outright animosity or discrimination in the pre-Brexit period, but this changed after the referendum (it is also blurred by the tendency of migrants to under-report discrimination in order to 'blend', see Fox et al 2012). Most of our focus group and individual interviewees said they experienced relatively little discrimination or animosity. This was also confirmed by our survey results: most of the respondents claimed that members of their nationalities were treated fairly (though 16% stated they were not) and had the same opportunities as UK born (7% contradicted). Despite the tendency to under-report, it is noticeable that testimonies of hostile attitudes did not start to appear in our data until after the referendum.

The following exchange is representative of many responses we got before the referendum: [Have you faced any discrimination at your work as a result of not being a British national?]

> **Eva** *(female, Bulgarian, IT Consultant, early 40s, South London): "No, not at all. Sometimes it's funny. Sometimes in conversations I misuse a word, but we start laughing. So there are some nuances, of course. But not in the way people treat you."*

Besides work and family circumstances, another factor which seems to determine incorporation appears to be locality. This is rarely considered by integration governance as a factor for successful outcomes (rather, as a structural obstacle, as we saw above in the government's concern with urban areas of high migration flows). We find that the relevance of locality should not be underestimated. Much has been written about the superdiversity of London and its welcoming culture. However, London does not seem to be an outlier here: most diverse urban centres function in the same way. For example, our interviewees in Glasgow were all very positive about the way they were treated and accepted there (and in Scotland more generally):

> **Giannina** *(female, Romanian, teaching assistant, amateur handball player in a local team, late 30s, Glasgow): 'I remember walking down the street [in Glasgow] and it was chucking down, and this was before I met my [Scottish] husband, and I thought, I like it here, I want to make a life for myself here.'*

The purpose of the above overview of our findings framed by the requirements of the integration agenda was to demonstrate that by and large EU citizens had found a place for themselves in British society in ways not dissimilar from those among locals. Navigating the link between the personal and the social had been guided by work, family and location rather than based on nationality, citizenship or group identity.[4] This is in line with our claim that an integration-free approach to incorporation reduces the inequality and subjugation inherent in the habitual governance of migration.

But what of the lower skilled?

We also found that the problematic 'high/low skill' divide had little to do with successful incorporation. What seemed to play a decisive role, regardless of professional or language skills, was time spent in the UK and the personal decision to settle (Ryan 2018 speaks of 'differentiated embedding' to make sense of the various axes across which this happens).

Repeatedly, we came across the importance of time to adjust to the new surroundings, the locality, the demographics of the workplace, acquiring English language skills, family and friends, and understanding and acknowledging one's rights. Time spent in the UK was strongly correlated with having British friends, registering to vote, participating in civil society, and applying for legal status. If there were any lapses among that particular group of migrants at all, they might have easily been explained by cases of circular migration and an imminent decision to return home: an option openly available to EU citizens, unlike third-country nationals, within the right of free movement.

We retell below the stories of Ana and Ezster who offer us an insight into the paths of incorporation for those EU nationals who fit the so called 'low-skilled' profile and the presumably problematic integration trajectories but seem to challenge both. Their stories are representative of many others.

Ana *(female, Portuguese, junior manager at a catering company, late 30s, London)* came to the UK in 2012 for work. She left behind her husband and son and, through Portuguese contacts, found work at a hotel on the Isle of Jersey. As the hotel staff were mostly Portuguese and she had little engagement with guests, she managed to get by with very little English:

> *'I was working just with Portuguese people, I would serve the British their meals and that was it. I went on my own and I had to stay in this hotel where I was working. I couldn't take my child. It was why I only stayed there for three months and I said, "I'm sorry. I can't do it." I think it was the first time I quit a job.'*

However, the situation in Portugal was not any better for her. An aunt in London invited Ana and her family to come and live with her, and she accepted. Through Portuguese friends she was made aware of a catering job in London and she applied. She worked for the same catering company since then (when we last spoke with her in 2020 she had been promoted to shift manager). Work stability helped her decide to give birth to her second child in the UK, which speaks to our finding that work determines much else in the incorporation journeys of EU citizens in the UK. Ana was registered to

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[4] Perhaps the one notable exception to this finding has been the treatment of Roma EU citizens, which – due to a much longer term context of structural marginalisation and discrimination – deserve a separate discussion (Fox, Morosanu, and Szilassy, 2012). One thing out data suggest on this point is that discrimination is perceived not only from British citizens but from fellow EU citizens as well.

vote (in local and European elections). She was happy with life in the UK, especially the education system, which she praised for supporting her son in his transition from the Portuguese school system. Though she did not have British friends and most of her work colleagues were fellow EU citizens, she was in daily contact with British people and felt at home in the UK:

> *'Since we came here, we have discovered a lot. I speak for myself and I like to know different people. We start thinking in a different way about others. Not that I didn't like them before, I just didn't know them. They were different. Now it's almost everyone is the same and we help each other. I like being here. I've always felt welcome. I never met anyone who made me feel that I wasn't welcome here, never.'*

Ezster *(female, Hungarian, retail manager, early 30s, London)* came to the UK from Hungary with her boyfriend in 2007. She had previously been as a tourist and enjoyed that experience. She had an undergraduate degree in theatre studies and had worked full time for several years in a theatre in Budapest. Although in the UK she would take on a 'low-skilled' job, we can see that her background does not corroborate that label. Even though she spoke little English, knew no one and had no job offer, life in the UK attracted her.

> *'Me and my [Hungarian] boyfriend decided to come here, we didn't have any job, nothing, and we just came and let's see what happens. That was in 2007: I stopped here and I am still here'. After spending several days sightseeing around London, 'we went to the agency and got a temporary job in a factory picking and packing' [where?] 'outside of London in Sunbury'.*

> *'I worked there for four years, and no one there spoke any English, so my English did not improve at all … I lived outside of London in Feltham and Stains, most of my four years were about work, little conversation and working with different nationalities mostly outside of Europe. It made me strong so I decided to study English'.*

Studying English in her spare time, Ezster moved to London and started working for a large clothes retailer; her boyfriend found work for a haulage company. She was made shift manager, claimed to have experienced little discrimination or animosity (in or outside London) and had a very diverse group of friends, (several of whom British). In our conversation she claimed (prior to Brexit) to feel as if the UK was her home.

Ana and Eszter shared their life stories to explain their decisions to stay in the UK, confirming the importance of employment, family, locality and time. Furthermore, Ana's and Eszter's stories demonstrate that the rigidity of the category 'low-skilled' rarely fit life circumstances in context – and that there was nothing problematic or, indeed, different in the way EU citizens in that category settled in their host communities over time. The question of status – the foundation of the integration framework – did not come up until prompted, confirming the success of incorporation in the absence of integration governance.

As a result of EU citizenship, EU citizens in the UK have not been governed as immigrants but as mobile citizens. Having the right to come to the UK and the freedom to stay, EU citizens in the UK had managed to avoid the expectation habitually ascribed to immigrants to 'fit in' (i.e. to mitigate differences, integrate or assimilate). Thus, they found themselves (until Brexit) in a position not

dissimilar to that of local citizens: to find their place in society and to do well in much the same way as everybody else, with work, family, location and time playing a more important role than immigration status.

So, do they need to integrate?

So what does this tell us about the place of EU citizens living in the UK in the absence immigrant integration governance? Our primary finding is that, by the time Brexit happened, EU citizens had incorporated in their communities in the UK in successful and sustainable patterns. Their experiences confirmed the redundancy of immigrant integration governance to achieve these outcomes: the outcomes were met *in its absence*. This applies even to those segments of the 'EU immigrant stocks' (Goodhart 2016) that featured in the Brexit campaigns as problematic: 'low-skilled' labour migrants with little or no English language competency.

We argue that coupling migrant incorporation to migrant integration agendas is counterproductive: it works in the exact opposite direction to the goals of integration policies. The case of EU citizens in the UK, until recently freed from the status of immigrants and the requirements of integration, illustrates this point. This is particularly obvious in the case of EU citizens in the UK as it is related to the legal loss of a set of rights (guaranteed under the EU Treaty). But it is also apparent when integration policies are attached to migration governance in the case of the UK's internal Others: what public policy for a long time has called 'black and ethnic minority' (BME) members, and in particular those of Muslim faith. Even as these have been UK citizens since birth, they still fall under the realm of the integration policy agenda as second- and third-generation *migrants*. Their deservingness and desirability then need to be proved as willingness to renounce some of the 'overseas influences [...] undermining [their] attitudes' (Green Paper 2018: 15) to life in the UK. Although this issue is outside the scope of our study here, it demonstrates the wider relevance of exploring the coupling of migrant incorporation with integration policies, and the critique of migrant integration theory and practice where we started our discussion.

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Appendices:

Table 1. Nationwide online survey between 1-19th of June, 2016.

Sections	Gender	Geographic residence	Nationality	Arrived to the UK	Employment status:	Highest level of education completed:
demographic; reasons for coming and staying in the UK; sense of belonging; integration and engagement with civil society; European identity; views on immigration; and Brexit	31% male, 69% female	over half of all respondents were based in Greater London and the South East and South West of England; 426 were in England, 21 in Scotland, 12 in Wales and 6 in Northern Ireland	99 Bulgarians, 64 Polish, 47 German, 44 French, 25 Irish, 22 Italians, 21 Hungarians, 20 Portuguese, 18 Spanish, 15 Dutch, 14 Romanian, 14 Swedish, 11 Lithuanian, 10 Latvian, 9 Danish, 6 Austrian, 6 Belgian, 6 Greek, 4 Czech, 3 Estonian, 3 Finish, 2 Slovakian, 1 Croatian, and 1 Maltese	after 2004: 36.4% between 2004 and 2009, and 43.7 after 2010	52.5% in full-time employment, 11% part-time, 12.7% self-employed, 3.4% looking for work, 1.3% not working, 4.7% full-time student, 0.8% part-time student, 5.3% homemaker, 3.2% business owner, 2.1% other	1.1% primary, 10.4% secondary, 5.9% vocational school, 12.1% some university, 30.1% undergraduate, 26.1% postgraduate, 5.9% PhD, 3.6% professional degree, 2.8% other

Table 2. Focus Groups between May and June 2016 and between July and December 2017.

Location	Nationality	Gender
London, Berkshire (Reading and Goring and Streatly), and West Sussex (Burgess Hill, Brighton)	23 Bulgarian, 7 Romanian, 3 Spanish, 8 Polish, 2 Czech, 4 Portuguese, 4 Italian, 4 Hungarians, 1 Hungarian-Romanian, 2 German, 1 Lithuanian, 1 Greek, 1 French	29 male and 32 female

Table 3. Interviews between May and June 2016 and between July and December 2017.

Location	Gender	Nationality
London, Berkshire (Henley-on-Thames, Reading, and Goring and Streatly), Glasgow, and East and West Sussex (Worthing, Hove, Brighton, Burgess Hill, and Eastbourne)	13 male and 13 female	4 Romanian, 6 German, 3 Polish, 4 Bulgarian, 2 French, and 2 Dutch national 1 Belgian, 1 Italian, 1 Lithuanian, 1 Portuguese, 1 Spanish