



# INTEGRATION

Integration is a contested term. It is important for people who wish to help migrants and refugees 'integrate' to reflect what is meant by integration. It can be easy to slip into an "us" and "them" way of speaking and thinking, when in reality integration is way more complex than that.

First of all, social integration is much more than successful mixing between newcomers and those born and bred in a particular place. It is not only about nationality and language, as it is often depicted, but also about social class, age, gender, sexuality, religion and regional identities. There are often as many divisions and as much disconnectedness within national groupings as between them.

Discussions of Integration can focus on the rights of migrants to participate in the new society or on the other hand it can focus on the responsibility of migrants to learn and play by the rules of the new country and adapt to the cultural norms. It can be seen as a one way-street (rules and responsibilities for migrants) or a two-way street (rules and

responsibilities for migrants and non-migrants). Whilst the two-way street seems a fairer, more inclusive version, perhaps in reality it's way more complicated than this.

As a teacher, you can encourage your volunteer to keep an open-mind in regard to what 'integration' looks like. You can encourage them to find out from the students how they are settling in and what the main barriers are to feeling at home. Newcomers may be interested in the local culture - volunteers may have knowledge to share in this regard. However, some students may know more about this subject than volunteer or teacher, depending on how long they've been in the area or the

networks and knowledge available to them! The point is, culture and belonging are not straight forward or simple. Exploring differences in culture, knowledge and habits between teachers and volunteers can bring this home and allow for a more nuanced and diverse understanding of 'national culture'.

"During the project we talked of integration as being a 'two way street' where the onus should not be just on the migrant to adapt and understand the host nation. We observed, though, that the reality of the integration process was more complex even than this.[...] Unexpected alliances were formed which transcended the boundaries of culture, nationality, class and religion and many of us moved outt, even if fleetingly, from our comfort zones."

**'Whose Integration?'**  
**research project** D. Bryers,  
B. Winstanley, M. Cooke

"The process of adapting to a new environment requires time and the sharing of local knowledge and in this project the [language] class provided a useful site for people to do this."

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