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The UK Citizenship Test Process:

# Exploring Migrants' Experiences





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# Introduction

**This report goes to press at a time when questions of citizenship and belonging are everywhere. In the United Kingdom, we have recently had the Brexit vote, spikes in racism and hate crime, and a General Election in which immigration featured prominently. These events all bring to our minds, screens and daily lives questions of belonging and what it does and should mean to become – and to be – part of British society.**

In the pages that follow, we step back from the heated debates taking place in politics, the media, and daily life. We share findings from a project (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council) that we undertook between 2013 and 2017, in which we aimed to address questions of citizenship, migration and belonging from a perspective that is often absent or misrepresented: we focus on migrants' experiences of becoming British citizens.

We draw on our research over the past four years in order to share our findings with the many groups and individuals who participated in the project and more broadly. We communicate these results to more specialised academic audiences elsewhere.<sup>i</sup> Here our aim is to join a wider public conversation about migration, citizenship and ['integration'](#) with a particular focus on migrants' perspectives on these processes. Specifically, we consider how the requirements and actual process of becoming a British citizen – the 'Life in the UK' citizenship test and language requirement and the formalities which surround them – shape different people's lives and experiences.

Debates over citizenship, identity and belonging are not new. But in the UK, the introduction of citizenship tests is a relatively recent phenomenon in contrast to countries such as the United States and Canada. Citizenship tests were introduced in the UK in 2005, amid heightened anxieties over immigration, and the perceived failure of multiculturalism.<sup>ii</sup> Other European countries, such as France, Netherlands and Germany, also introduced citizenship tests as part of a turn away from multiculturalism toward assimilation (see ['History and Context'](#) for more details).

The perceived challenges of citizenship are generally discussed in a top-down perspective. Policy instruments – such as citizenship tests – are considered by some to be appropriate solutions to these challenges; it is claimed that these tests will facilitate integration into British society. Although they are the subjects of these debates, migrants' voices are often inaudible or only selectively represented in public debates.

The Life in the UK citizenship test has been the subject of much media coverage and even of talk shows. Popular representations

generally include the observation that migrants are asked to answer questions about history, culture, law and politics that many British-born citizens would not know.

**David Cameron, while Prime Minister, was interviewed by David Letterman and 'failed' a test**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3K5hio2vqI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3K5hio2vqI)

The UK citizenship test also features prominently in policy proposals. For instance, in her Review into Opportunity and Integration, published in December 2016 by the Department for Communities and Local Government and commissioned by David Cameron, Dame Louise Casey identified the citizenship test process as a key tool of integration and social cohesion. She recommended that the government review the route to British citizenship which:

*"is of huge national, cultural and symbolic value. The Government should look at what is required for British citizenship, as opposed to leave to remain, and separately consider an Oath of Integration with British Values and Society on arrival, rather than awaiting a final citizenship test."<sup>iii</sup>*

Yet the perspectives of migrants on how this 'route to citizenship' is in fact experienced are generally absent. Also, there is very little sustained analysis of the consequences of the process on migrants' lives.

At the time of writing this report, in order to become a British citizen the main requirements are:

- Have five years of residence in the UK<sup>iv</sup>
- Pass the Life in the UK test, a multiple choice test based on the Life in the UK test handbook
- Prove sufficient knowledge of the English language<sup>v</sup>
- Meet requirements of 'good character'
- Participate in a mandatory citizenship ceremony, where one is required to make an oath or affirmation of allegiance

A brief overview of British naturalisation trends in 2015 helps to put these requirements in the wider context.

#### Overview of UK Naturalisation in 2015:

- In 2015, just under 118,100 foreign citizens naturalised as British citizens (the lowest annual number since 2002)
- 9% of citizenship applications were rejected in 2015<sup>vi</sup>
- The largest groups (by citizenship) were from India (16% of the 2015 total), Pakistan (11%), Nigeria (7%), and South Africa (4%). Only 11% of grants were to EU nationals.

Source: [Blinder 2016: 2](#)

Many strong opinions have been expressed in favour and against the use of citizenship tests generally. Here we focus on these arguments specifically in the UK, and provide some examples which we will explore in greater detail below.

Some argue that by proving that they have good knowledge of life in the United Kingdom (UK), or another country, migrants can demonstrate that they will obey the law and accept and support the values of the country in which they are becoming a citizen.

In the 2015 version of the handbook that migrants use to prepare for the current Life in the UK (LUK) test, 'The values and principles of the UK' are described as 'based on history and traditions' and 'protected by laws, customs and expectations. There is no place in British society for extremism or intolerance'<sup>vii</sup> The fundamental principles of British life outlined in the handbook include:

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
- Participation in community life

Migrants are then informed about their responsibilities and freedoms, which flow from these fundamental principles.

The idea is that by learning about life in the UK and acquiring a sufficient level of English, migrants will be able to apply this knowledge in their daily lives. Under this reading, the policy was intended to promote 'integration' and to benefit migrants themselves – including by promising to improve prospects for political participation among new citizens.<sup>viii</sup>

Others argue that these tests, and the administrative steps that surround them, instead contribute to alienation and exclusion. They object to language requirements, cost, length and the effort required to learn information that is not necessarily relevant to being a 'good citizen'.

Citizenship tests are sometimes seen as creating or reinforcing boundaries and actually limiting migrants' access to citizenship, in contrast to the stated intention of facilitating access to citizenship. They are arguably about immigration control rather than 'integration'.

It is also argued that these tests risk failing the most vulnerable groups – often migrants who come from the global South, are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and for whom English is not the first language, in particular women – by limiting their access to full membership and participation in society.<sup>ix</sup> This concern is especially relevant when differences in pass rates by nationality and other unequal effects and outcomes of the process are considered (e.g. the lack of literacy to undertake the test and paperwork, and the computer literacy required to take the test itself). These are issues that we discuss below.

When we consider these arguments for and against the UK citizenship test we can see strong differences of opinion but also very different expectations and predictions of what the effects of the process of becoming a UK citizen will be and how the process will be experienced by those who have to go through it.

With this project we have generated new knowledge and understanding about these experiences and effects. This knowledge and understanding should inform future policy decisions on the continuation, use and re-design of citizenship tests.

The report shows that the test process is experienced quite differently depending on personal and group characteristics, and for some, is even a source of fear and inequality. We must question the kind of citizenship that is then the result. Although citizenship tests send a public message about what it means to be British, in the current context of renewed racism [different approaches are needed](#) that recognise that migrants and migration are, and always have been, part of British life.

# Aims of the project

**This project aimed to fill a gap in knowledge. Many of the opinions and arguments for and against citizenship tests in general, and the UK citizenship test in particular, are based on ‘paper knowledge’. In other words, they provide a general impression about citizenship tests based on scholarly analysis of citizenship test preparation handbooks and materials, laws and policies (e.g. Immigration Acts), speeches of politicians, the content of tests, media coverage.**

With this project, we argue that there is a need for in-depth and intensive research exploring the experiences and perspectives of migrants themselves. We observe that migrants’ voices are often silenced in political and public debates on immigration and integration. We argue that migrants’ voices need to be heard in these debates.

Only a few scholars<sup>4</sup> have recently attempted to investigate immigrants’ experiences of naturalization via empirical research that gains data from people who have met (or tried to meet) the requirements. Their findings are important. We add to this growing body of research to address what has been missing, until very recently. This knowledge can shape policies and public debates that affect migrants’ lives.

When we focus on experiences of becoming a British citizen, we consider citizenship as a formal legal status – most obviously, a passport – but also the ways citizenship can be about a sense of belonging and participation in society. The one does not necessarily follow the other: for example, the term ‘second class citizen’ refers to the kinds of inequalities and exclusions that can exist despite having formal citizenship status. This is important for our purposes because while our focus is on the formal process of acquiring the status of citizen, our attention to how people experience this process extends beyond ‘getting papers’ to broader considerations of belonging, political participation and well-being.

## Our Contribution: Exploring the citizenship test as a “process”

Few studies have analysed the citizenship test as a process: how its message is actually conveyed by public authorities at various levels, how it is received and negotiated by migrants, and its concrete effects on migrants’ lives.

We have adopted a comprehensive approach to these issues, examining the how migrants experience the citizenship process as a whole rather than at different points in the process. With the term ‘citizenship test process’, we refer to whole experience of acquiring citizenship: the tests themselves, the citizenship ceremonies, the preparation courses many immigrants take beforehand, as well as the consequences of the tests for those to whom it is addressed.

As we will develop in the [History and Context](#) section below, an important theme in the literature on the citizenship process is that those who are subject to its requirements experience it as oppressive and marginalizing. We were concerned to consider how people experience that process while they are going through, and also whether there are impacts that persist even beyond the point at which someone becomes a citizen. We explore various ways in which effects might become evident in the lives of immigrants in the UK, including whether it promotes engagement with politics, brings about greater attachment to British national identity, and whether it has an impact on people’s overall satisfaction with their lives (their ‘subjective wellbeing’).

Our three research questions explore these claims through analysis of:

- how immigrants **experience** the process itself, in their own words
- What **consequences** it has on their lives and on their perception of British society

# Research Questions

**We address three research questions. The first relates to the experience of the citizenship process, and the other two, to its consequences for migrants.**

## Question 1: How do migrants experience the citizenship process?

First, we analysed to what extent and how experiences of the 'citizenship process' becomes meaningful for those who participate in it. Public authorities attribute a specific meaning to these tests. However, although migrants are the only group that takes the test, it is not clear how they perceive it. Is this process perceived as inclusionary or exclusionary, as fair or unfair, as useful or not? Do they find that tests help them to feel included in a common social, political or cultural community, e.g. through social recognition, or the acquisition of concrete skills and knowledge?

We also explored how the actual knowledge acquired in the courses and assessed in the tests influences understandings of citizenship. We focused on the main messages conveyed by the test (e.g. 'social cohesion', 'gender equality', 'integration', 'British values') and how these messages were received, interpreted and reacted to by different groups of migrants (different in terms of nationality, gender, age, socio-economic background, stage in the process etc.).

## Question 2: What are the consequences of the citizenship process on migrants' sense of belonging and political participation?

Through these two dimensions, we compared government discourses on their intended outcomes with the actual effects of the citizenship tests. While these tests have been presented as an instrument to increase a sense of belonging (through the reference to 'Britishness') and political participation, their actual effects are unclear. Our objective was to analyse whether the citizenship process leads to specific feelings of inclusion among migrants who have gone through it.

## Questions 3: What are the consequences of the citizenship process on migrants' subjective well-being (happiness)?

It is generally assumed that integration is good for the migrants themselves; so, when governments help migrants to integrate, they can claim to be acting for their benefit. Research on the ways different migrant groups assimilate into different segments of society<sup>xi</sup> shows that this broad assumption is often false. One way to consider whether the process is 'beneficial' is by assessing how migrants themselves perceive their situation: when critics of policies on 'social cohesion', [integration and assimilation](#) assert that the government's current agenda is oppressive and even racist, they are suggesting that it detracts from migrants' well-being. A great deal of recent research demonstrates the importance of gauging individuals' subjective well-being (rather than simply focusing on more 'objective' circumstances in their lives). We wanted to know whether going through the citizenship process improves migrants' lives in this respect (as per the standpoint of the UK government) or whether there are negative consequences (as per the more critical perspective) using people's own reports of their subjective well-being.

# History, background, and previous research on the ‘citizenship test’

The LUK test was introduced as a requirement for naturalization by the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act and implemented in 2005. The Act emerged in response to ‘race riots’ in northern cities in 2001.

A report by Ted Cantle<sup>xii</sup> commissioned by the government explained the riots via the notion that people in various ‘communities’ defined by ethnicity were living ‘parallel lives’, partly but not only via residential segregation. In this frame, immigrants (especially from the so-called ‘New Commonwealth’ – a euphemism for UK former colonies with non-white native populations, e.g. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and a number of African and Caribbean countries) – had allegedly failed to integrate<sup>xiii</sup>, leaving the UK with impaired ‘social cohesion’. In an attempt to avoid aggravating this difficulty, immigrants wishing to gain UK citizenship would be required to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of ‘life in the UK’ as well as competence in English; a ‘citizenship ceremony’ would reinforce new citizens’ affective ties to British national identity.<sup>xiv</sup> Before adoption of these requirements, immigrants seeking naturalization were required to show competence in English only in an ad-hoc manner; ability was assessed informally via conversation and success in completing the application form.

The new requirements mirror similar developments in other countries, e.g. the Netherlands, Denmark, Canada and Australia. In Europe, since the early 2000s, they reflect growing criticism of multiculturalist policies in political discourses and a turn towards more assimilationist policies.<sup>xv</sup> The discourse of ‘social cohesion’ has underpinned anxieties about immigration, e.g. the notion that large-scale immigration damages social trust and social capital by fostering ‘too much’ ethnic diversity.<sup>xvi</sup> This idea gained currency in UK public discourse generally and in the Home Office in particular, leading officials to seek policies that would restore cohesion primarily by demanding loyalty from immigrants.<sup>xvii</sup>

Insofar as the dominant discourse and the requirements themselves could be framed in the language of ‘integration’, the government could plausibly claim that the policy was intended to benefit the migrants themselves – in particular by promising to improve prospects for political participation among new citizens. In that regard, the policy extended an earlier concern with ‘active citizenship’ – for all, to be fostered in a revised school curriculum.<sup>xviii</sup> An early version of the book intended as a study guide for the test includes an introduction by the then Home Secretary (David Blunkett) that makes exactly this sort of claim to a positive vision for the test:

*“The Government is also concerned that those who become British citizens should play an active role, both economic and political, in our society, and have a sense of belonging to a wider community...”<sup>xix</sup>*

Dina Kiwan, a social scientist who was part of the Home Office’s ‘Life in the UK’ Advisory Group (which developed proposals for the test), argues that the test does not represent a restrictive turn for citizenship in the UK but rather is ‘part of a set of measures to promote the integration of newcomers and develop an inclusive understanding of national citizenship’.<sup>xx</sup> The requirement to develop English language ability, in particular, can be portrayed as facilitating inclusion and participation in core social institutions (including politics) – an agenda identified by politicians as especially urgent for women arriving from South Asian countries as spouses.<sup>xxi</sup>

From these perspectives, it emerges that citizenship tests and ceremonies have to be analysed as an act of communication on the part of public authorities: through them, the state symbolically presents how it defines its relationship with newcomers and, more generally, citizenship as a status and a process of becoming a member of a given society.

In contrast with the government’s ‘communication’ on the citizenship process, many observers (social scientists and practitioners in particular) perceive this process (and especially the test) in much more negative terms, implying and/or predicting that migrants will experience these requirements as unwelcome, intrusive, exclusionary, etc.

In some instances, they believe the implications will be negative through considering the test questions (and answers) themselves. For example, studies identify numerous instances where the ‘correct’ answer required by the test is in fact false, inevitably leading to confusion and sometimes even to failure of the test.<sup>xxii</sup> It is also often argued that the test conceives of immigrants as unlikely to know certain things that ‘we’ ought to know: to believe that it makes sense to pose questions about following the law and participating in voluntary organizations, one must imagine that immigrants are less likely to follow the law and to volunteer.<sup>xxiii</sup> More broadly, studies argue that by specifying what migrants must do ‘earn’ citizenship, the policy signals that they do not really deserve it in respect of their own attributes; it also obscures the contributions they make to economic and social life.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The UK test and process have been analysed by some as a 'technology of reassurance' which aims to reassure the British public that migrants are being checked and screened before becoming one of 'Us', rather than targeting the integration of migrants.<sup>xxxv</sup> More generally, studies have demonstrated that citizenship tests and ceremonies paradoxically reinforce a distinction between citizens and 'new citizens' as they are based on the idea that newcomers have to 'earn' their citizenship.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

A key theme in many academic studies on citizenship tests is the idea that the requirements exacerbate exclusion for migrants – a claim that contrasts directly with the stated intentions of British policy-makers. One indication of exclusion comes from consideration of pass rates for the test: people from certain origin countries find it much harder to pass the test (e.g. Turkey, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq, relative to Americans and Canadians) and so they are excluded from full citizenship in quite a direct sense. Therefore, citizenship tests constitute a barrier that is greater for some nationalities than for others.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

For example, highest and lowest pass rates between 2005-2010 were:

**Highest overall:** Finland: **98.7%**

**Lowest overall:** Bangladesh: **44.3%**

Pass rates nationalities represented in our study include the following:

Nationality	Pass Rate
USA	97.5%
Canada	96.9%
Poland	87.5%
India	79.5%
Bolivia	72.6%
China	67.3%
Columbia	66.9%
Ecuador	62.3%
Afghanistan	48%
Iraq	47.8%
Bangladesh	44.3%
<b>All nationalities:</b>	71.2% (average)

Table 1 Pass rates between 2005-2010 for nationalities represented in our study<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Exclusion is also connected to social position in the UK: those who are comfortable with secular principles of liberal individualism are more likely to succeed in demonstrating the sort of 'shared values' that underpin dominant ideas about 'life in the UK'.<sup>xxxix</sup> The requirements are seen to suggest the inferiority of minority cultures, highlighting and thus reinforcing the 'alien' nature of young Muslims in particular, constructing them as objects of presumptive suspicion<sup>xxx</sup> – to such an extent that the policy amounts to 'anti-Muslim racism'.<sup>xxxi</sup> From a similar perspective, studies that specifically focus on citizenship ceremonies have shown that the criteria used for granting citizenship exclude certain groups of immigrants. In particular, they create feelings of exclusion among migrants who are Muslim, who have a low socio-economic status and who have an unstable residence status.<sup>xxxii</sup>

There are, then, sharp divergences in what observers see in and expect from the new citizenship requirements: the government justifies them on the basis that the consequences will be positive, while many academics are deeply critical and anticipate significant negative outcomes. One possible reason for these divergences is that many of the critical analyses 'read' consequences from texts – in particular, from the tests themselves and from the policy debates and documents that gave birth to them. Only a few scholars have attempted to investigate migrants' experiences of naturalization via empirical research that gains data from people who have met (or tried to meet) the requirements. While their findings are important, our project was premised in part on the need for further in-depth/ intensive research exploring the experiences and perspectives of the migrants themselves, and also for research grounded in data drawn from large-scale representative samples.

# Methods

**In this study, we combined different research methods to gain new perspectives on migrants' experiences of becoming British citizens.**

## Qualitative Data Collection

Throughout the project, we conducted 158 interviews between April 2014 and March 2016 with migrants of 39 nationalities in Leicester and London. The participants were at different stages of the citizenship test process (e.g. considering taking the test, preparing for the test, about to take the test, after the test, after the ceremony...) and they had different statuses (temporary leave to remain, indefinite leave to remain, British citizen...). We accessed participants primarily through migrant advocacy and community organisations, colleges providing language training and snowball sampling, where we accessed participants via other participants. The names of the organisations have not been provided here in interest of anonymity. We discuss technical issues relating to our research process in the ['Methods Appendix'](#). Here we provide an outline of the steps we took.

We conducted two waves of data collection. In the first wave, we interviewed migrants of different nationalities. In the second wave, we targeted some communities in particular<sup>xxxiii</sup> in order to develop a more in-depth analysis of how the experience of the citizenship test process is shaped by community and group characteristics. In this report, the findings emerging from this community approach are presented in the section on Research Question Two (['Engagement with Politics'](#)).

In the interviews, we were particularly interested in understanding to what extent and how the experience and consequences of the citizenship process vary across different immigrants, depending for example on age, gender, race, education, networks and group membership of various types. We explored how migrants spoke about negotiating their place in the community, whether local or national.

During the fieldwork, observations and experiences from the field fed directly into the analysis. The observations helped shape our approach to accessing and interviewing participants. We adjusted our research quickly and dynamically in relation what was happening on the ground.

Throughout this report we refer to participants by nationality or region and gender only, to preserve anonymity.



Origin	n	%
Bangladesh	18	11.4
Poland	18	11.4
India	17	10.8
Iraq	12	7.6
Somalia	7	4.4
Canada	6	3.8
China	6	3.8
Colombia	6	3.8
Ghana	6	3.8
Sudan	6	3.8
Afghanistan	5	3.2
Ecuador	5	3.2
Bolivia	3	1.9
Chile	3	1.9
Nigeria	3	1.9
Pakistan	3	1.9
Peru	3	1.9
Brazil	2	1.3
Estonia	2	1.3
Hong Kong	2	1.3
Malaysia	2	1.3
Mexico	2	1.3
Ecuador	2	1.3
Morocco	2	1.3
Philippines	2	1.3
USA	2	1.3
Other	15	9.5
<b>Total:</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 Participants by Country of Origin

The majority of the participants were female, just under half had already become UK citizens, most had lived 6-10 years in UK, the majority had a secondary or tertiary education.

Gender	London	Leicester	Total
Male	36.4%	42.9%	39.2%
Female	63.6%	57.1%	60.8%

Table 3 Participants by Gender

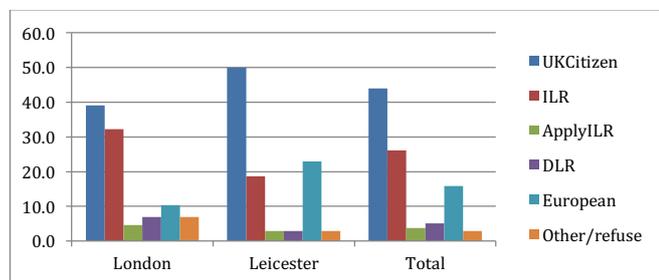


Figure 1 Legal Status of interview participants

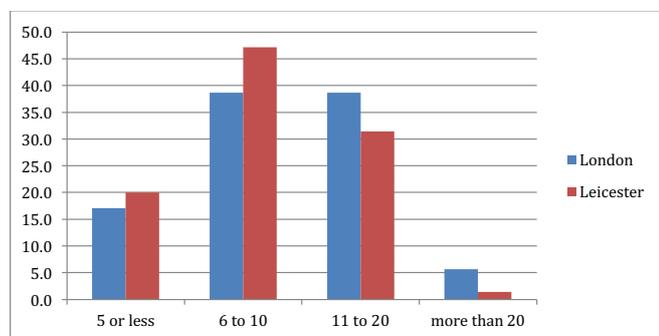


Figure 2 Length of residence in the UK

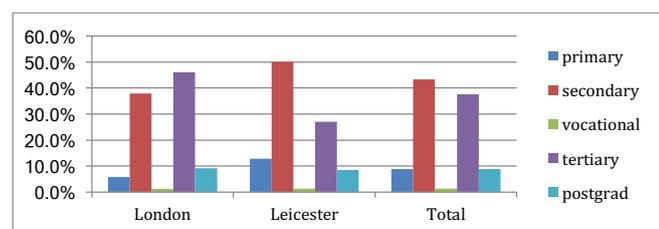


Figure 3 Education

### Focus groups:

In the spring of 2016, in the context of the “Brexit” referendum campaign, it emerged that the migrants we interviewed (and specifically Eastern European migrants) made references to the Brexit context when we asked them about the British citizenship test and about their life in the UK more generally. In particular, the uncertainty about their future right to stay and work in the UK and their belonging more generally became a central point of discussion. For this reason, we decided to explore this issue more in depth through our interviews as well as through a set of focus groups. Four focus groups were organized (all in Leicester) with a total of 26 participants (of whom 13 were Polish migrants). The other participants were Slovakian (five participants), Albanian (one participant), Romanian (one participant), Lithuanian (one participant), Latvian (two participants), and Italian (three participants). The four focus groups were conducted just before and after the referendum of June 23 2016. We accessed participants primarily through the Colleges providing language training. Not all of these participants were considering taking the citizenship test. In this way they differed from the rest of the participants in the study, who were involved in the citizenship test process.

### Differences among respondents

We were particularly interested in understanding to what extent and how the experience and consequences of the citizenship process vary across different immigrants, depending for example on age, gender, education, networks and group membership of various types (including religion). We explored how migrants spoke about negotiating their place in the community, whether local or national. People have different levels of ability and skill to negotiate and claim belonging and rights, in ways that go beyond whether a formal legal status has been achieved.

# The Context in Which We Did Our Research

## Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis of Understanding Society survey data starts with a group of roughly 1000 respondents in 2010, all of whom were non-citizens.<sup>xxxiv</sup> These individuals were surveyed again in 2016, and at that point almost half had become citizens (while the others remained non-citizens). Our analysis compares the two groups: we were able to see how those who became citizens changed over time, using those who remained non-citizens as a benchmark. This 'double' comparison helps reinforce statements about the impact of the citizenship test process: we have 'before and after' measurements for the two distinct groups, which gives us confidence in our ability to connect any changes to the experience of going through the process (or not).

We used this data framework to see whether becoming a UK citizen had any impact on three aspects of immigrants' lives: their interest in politics (which likely connects with actual political participation), their sense of attachment to British national identity, and their overall life satisfaction.

**Since we started our project, there have been changes in the test content and citizenship test process:**

## Changes to the content of the test

Since 2013, the test regulations have changed and become more stringent: both a language test and a knowledge test are required for permanent residency and naturalization. Furthermore, the content of the test has changed with the third edition of *Life in the United Kingdom*, the handbook that forms the basis of the test. In contrast to the previous focus on 'practical knowledge' in the 2005 and 2007 editions, the 2013 edition, published under the Coalition government, now places 'more emphasis on British history and achievements and reflected an increased focus on integration and participation, thus reflecting the shift to ideas of 'earned' citizenship, where rights can only be granted once they have been demonstrably earned'.<sup>xxxv</sup>

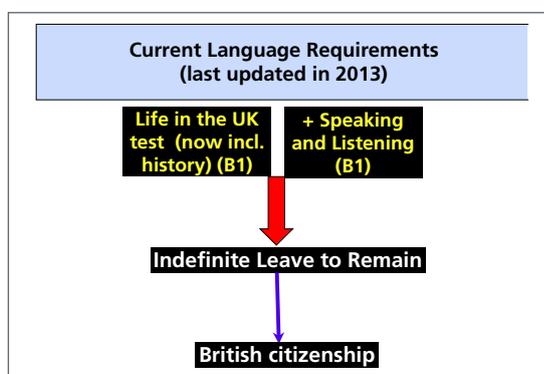
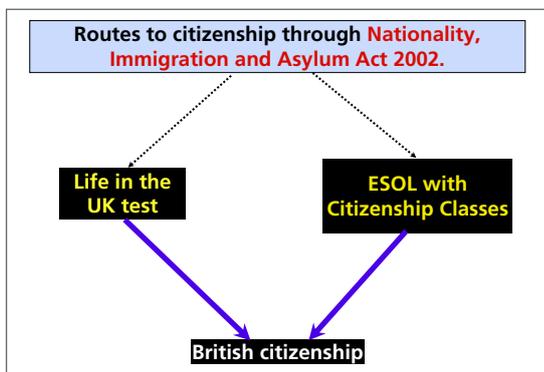
The following statement by Mark Harper MP, Minister for Immigration in 2013, introduces these changes:

*"We've stripped out mundane information about water meters, how to find train timetables, and using the internet. The new book rightly focuses on values and principles at the heart of being British. Instead of telling people how to claim benefits it encourages participation in British life."<sup>xxxvi</sup>*

Participants in our study said that these policy changes generate feelings of insecurity and that they do not always know where to get accurate information. Our interviews captured the ways in which this flux shapes experiences and perceptions.

## Changes to the process

The introduction of the English language requirements for citizenship initially took two forms. First, the *Life in the UK* test for those with a B1 level of English.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Second, those with a lower level could take English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with Citizenship classes in which they could demonstrate progress over a period of time rather than taking a one-off test. This route offered support to lower level learners.



However, with policy changes made in October 2013 the ESOL with Citizenship class option was no longer available. A new Life in the UK test was introduced along with accompanying preparation material in which now history became an area that learners were tested on (it had been previously omitted as a test item). An additional Speaking and Listening requirement was introduced and both the Life in the UK test to be taken and Speaking and Listening requirement were set at B1. By eliminating the ESOL option for lower level learners and bringing a new test with an added speaking and listening requirement, the Government effectively raised the bar for those who would most likely find the test an onerous task. The implications, particularly for women with low literacy (including in their own languages), are discussed below (see 'Broader Themes').

Alongside these policy changes, we observed an increased marketization of the citizenship test process. Since the withdrawal of state-funded ESOL and other courses, private providers and consultants are playing an increased role in the field. Many of these actors are often perceived as a 'cash cow' that takes money from poor people. Discussions with representatives of organizations show that these changes have had profound consequences on their service provision. Organizations are dealing with changes in a variety of ways. Some have introduced short, bespoke citizenship courses. Another factor is that companies (though not colleges) are competing in offering efficient preparation routes.

Market forces come into play as migrants may 'shop around'. In our interviews, we explored how respondents reflected upon this trend.

## The Brexit context

The campaign and the result of the June 2016 referendum, with the vote to leave the European Union, has led to widespread debate about immigration, belonging and citizenship, in particular in relation to EU migrants currently living in the UK.

The 'Brexit' referendum leaves our participants in a situation of uncertainty in relation to their future citizenship rights as well as to their belonging more generally. These uncertainties have been reinforced by the debates surrounding the referendum and the widespread stigmatisation processes that resulted from it.

In this context, we analysed how the campaign and subsequent vote have shaped decision-making processes and strategies in navigating the naturalisation process among EU migrants in particular. We also explored how the Brexit context has led migrants to deal with the anxieties and uncertainties of naturalisation, looking in particular at the implications for belonging and identity. These findings become all the more relevant in the current climate of post-referendum, pre-Brexit withdrawal. These perspectives and the findings that emerge from our analysis are presented in the section on '[Broader Themes](#)' below.



# Findings

## Feedback and Dissemination

We have undertaken significant **dissemination** activities, which we discuss in '[Reponses to the Research](#)' below. These activities included:

- soliciting feedback through stakeholder workshops
- multiple presentations and visits
- informal feedback mechanisms
- a planned public lecture (delayed due to the June 2017 election)

These activities were an important way to share our findings with stakeholders and broader communities, and also fed back into our analysis of our findings and shaped this final report.

## Research Question 1: How do migrants experience the citizenship process?

In this section, we explore the practicalities of the test process and how people in our study responded to them as well as, more generally, to the requirement to take the citizenship test. The points that we present in this section relate mostly to practical and everyday considerations as they are expressed by the migrants we interviewed. This does not mean that these were the only reasons people gave for becoming a British citizen or the only ways the process made them feel. In the following sections we consider the ways the process shaped their relation to politics and political participation, sense of belonging, as well as well-being.

- Beginning the process
- The administrative steps
- Participants' evaluations of the process

## Beginning the process

### *The Passport and the ability to travel*

Many participants stressed the importance of having a UK passport for mobility, even if they will not be travelling straightaway, and even if they don't know whether they will ever use it. The security of knowing they can is important. This was not just a matter of being able to travel, but the possibility of being able to travel with a UK passport in contrast to other passports. The UK passport was also important in terms of having fewer visa requirements to travel abroad.<sup>xxxviii</sup>



These considerations were important for participants in whose countries of origin or transit, corruption at airports meant having to pay bribes or risk having the passport removed. Many participants argued that the passport provided protection while travelling. For example, "If you have good British passport they won't stop you" (Afghani woman). In doing so, many participants described a hierarchy of passports and underlined the idea that the British passport could provide protection and also 'open doors' for them: "I felt really indestructible so like I had green light, it's not like traffic red" (Eastern European<sup>xxxx</sup> woman). In these accounts, access to British citizenship is described in practical, and even instrumental, terms but it is also often related to feelings of "pride" (Eastern European woman). These dual motivations are a common theme throughout our study.

## Security

- Protection against deportation
- Fear of change to immigration law

The process of becoming a citizen was often discussed as a way to manage uncertainty. A part of our respondents identified the fear of deportation as a key motivation. This concern was often related to an uncertainty about the future. The awareness that the rules might change led to a form of 'defensive naturalisation'<sup>xl</sup>: for example some participants apply because they fear that: "I [might] have to leave my baby... people change their mind and they have to send me back" (South Asian woman). In the feedback sessions and workshops that we organized by the end of our project, participants also acknowledged that even citizenship is not an absolute protection (e.g. that those with dual citizenship could be vulnerable to having citizenship 'stripped'). This was still the preferred form of protection, however.

For some participants who already had Indefinite Leave to Remain but then decided to become citizens, the idea of 'defensive naturalisation' was still very important.

For women in particular, these strategies were often framed as 'for the children': to secure their future or, in the case of British children with non-British parents, to secure family unity in case Britain leaves the EU. We explore the Brexit context in greater detail in the discussion of our focus groups below. In our interviews, it was clear that this was already on the radar of some EU citizens who began to consider seriously the possibility of becoming a British citizen: "different political decisions may influence my status here so perhaps it's safer just to get it sorted" (Polish woman).

## Access and the Future

- Access to services
- Access to education
- Access to jobs
- Investment in the future

Finally, some participants expressed the general feeling that access to citizenship would make life easier and open doors for them. For example, some participants who formally had the right to work felt that not having citizenship acted as a kind of 'glass ceiling' preventing further professional advancement. This power of citizenship was not universally accepted, however, as others argued that access to British citizenship does not prevent from discrimination and that "it will be easier for me to find a job if I changed my surname" (Polish woman).

Others considered holding a passport would enable better access to services, and meant they would be treated differently by public authorities. Several participants describe experiences of encounters with public authorities where "they don't value you...they tell you to go and get your passport" (Ghanaian woman).

The perception is that the passport is a privileged form of identification (and others noted that this is important in the UK because there are no ID cards). This perception is also shaped by past, negative experiences of being asked for formal identification in other countries.

The citizenship test is also perceived as an investment for the future, in particular in relation with children and other family members. On many occasions, interviewees said that gaining citizenship (or at least Indefinite Leave to Remain) "will be useful for their family" (Polish woman). In some cases, this notion of investment in the future is related to the ability to enter and leave the country at any time. For instance, for a Latin American woman this was a form of security that enabled her daughter to learn about her culture and heritage: "I would like somehow to go back to [her country] maybe for one year, two years so she can learn my language and my culture" (Latin American woman)

In these cases, the passport is key to the intergenerational transmission of culture and language through free movement with an anchor point in the UK. Often, the idea of investing in the future connects to the broader theme of 'securing the future' of children, as well as one's own future. Here, very practical considerations – being able to travel, having the same

status as family members – combine with feelings of belonging and a sense of identity. More generally, we find that it is very difficult to untangle these practical considerations from the bigger questions that people grapple with as they become citizens of a new country, which we discuss below.

## Who does not begin the process, and why?

The main group that discussed not beginning the process with us was EU citizens. Being EU citizens, this group has the least precarious situation in terms of needing visas and residence in the UK. The main factor for this group was cost, as well as the perception of a long and onerous process. In addition to EU citizens, participants mentioned people of other nationalities who they knew who struggled to engage with the process. They also mentioned that others disengaged from the process having failed the test many times. Also, some argued that information circulating in the community about pass rates (and particularly high fail rates for some communities) combined with knowledge of people in one's immediate circle who had failed many times discouraged some people from applying for citizenship. These forms of knowledge alongside low literacy and other responsibilities (such as caring responsibilities for women) acted as a deterrent to engaging with the process. Often, more vulnerable groups face these obstacles, increasing thus the probability that they get excluded from citizenship. We discuss these obstacles below in the section 'Evaluation of the process'.

## The administrative steps

### Preparing for the test



The requirements of the process changed right before we began our study (see the section on '[The Context in which We Did Our Research](#)'). This meant that while the majority of those who had gone through the process did so under the 'old' system where it was possible to obtain citizenship through the 'ESOL with citizenship' route as an alternative to the computer-based test, some participants had either undertaken the test under the new process or were planning to do so.

Preparation strategies were strongly determined by English proficiency and computer literacy and sometimes followed predictable differences of nationality. For example, some North American respondents (Canada and USA) described relatively little effort and the use of mobile phone apps to prepare.

Those with lower English language proficiency and computer literacy relied instead to a greater extent on private courses (as noted in the 'Fieldwork' section above, this opened up the risk of exploitation through providers that demanded very high fees for unrealistic results), colleges, as well as family and community networks. For many, this was an intimidating and fearful process. For example the Life in the UK handbook was described as a "big massive book, I am really scared of it" (Sudanese woman). Also, participants mentioned the difficulty of the questions on history and culture which we explore further below in '[Evaluation of the Process](#)'.<sup>xlii</sup>

*"The dates it's like the history, it's lots of informations there. So it's quite difficult [to] read...It's difficult for people [who] don't know how to read, it's difficult for them"*

*(Sudanese woman)*

Difficulties in preparation were identified. Rules were unclear to some participants, particularly information on what is required. There were cases in our study of people who undertook unnecessary qualifications, e.g. they did both ESOL and the Life in the UK test when only one was needed. Others were unaware of what it involves and were intimidated (e.g. by the Home Office website). Also, participants (and even ESOL providers) reported confusion due to changing rules with the October 2013 shift away from the ESOL with citizenship route

Preparation was particularly challenging for some women who had caring responsibilities, low first and second language literacy, less-developed social networks, and who could not access free/affordable ESOL that also provided crèche facilities. We return to these challenges in the section on 'Women's experiences' below. We note here that there are important differences of social class between women which meant that women of the same nationality did not necessarily share the same experiences.

Similarly, while nationality often played out predictably in our study – e.g. in easier experiences of test preparation for Canadians than many Bangladeshi participants – this was not always the case, which points to the need to think about differences within nationalities rather than assuming homogeneous groups. For example, migrants from non-English speaking countries had significantly different experiences if they were members of global elites or well-educated middle classes, such as some of our Chinese respondents.

## Taking the test

The test is taken by computer, and requires 18/24 correct responses to multiple choice questions. Test questions can draw on material from any section of the preparation handbook.

When discussing the test, clear divisions by nationality again emerged with Canadian respondents describing it as easy, a 'waste of time' and commenting that they could leave early. Quite often respondents reflected not only on their own stress, anxiety and nervousness but also of other test takers: "people were there but they all looked like really tense (Indian woman).

There was a perception among some participants of different nationalities that the test was 'fair', which often relates to how the test is administered. In contrast to systems where the test is conducted through an interview (e.g. the United States), here the delivery of the test through a computer may provide the sense of impartiality rather than the 'human' discretion of a judge or interviewer.

However, others pointed to this same feature by way of illustrating the impersonal and bureaucratic nature of the process overall. Further difficulties related to the lack of computer literacy, language skills and experience taking formal tests. The level and type of language required in the test were recognized as difficult to attain and length of time of residence in the country can add to this difficulty: "in my situation four years just three years almost pass the test it's not the same as person who lives here 13 years. He have language in her head already" (North African woman).

Participants identified strategies through which language barriers were overcome. They 'translated' the preparation materials into their own languages in order to take the test in English, a strategy that we have identified also in previous research with Yemeni and Chinese communities:<sup>xlii</sup>

*"It was really hard because I didn't study English and I not really comfortable to read the book and this. So I start to translate all of the book and Arabic language to have understanding in it"*

*(East African woman)*

It was also underlined that knowledge was unequally held prior to the test. Those privileged by their background recognized, in some interviews, that they came to the test with a stock of cultural knowledge that others did not necessarily share:

*"I think it's very different for different groups. I think that if you are from a set...from a historical British colony, so from Canada, the US, if you're from a broadly Western country...there are a lot of shared cultures... you still have Christmas and you still have...a history of a monarchy and so forth"*

*(Canadian man)*

Further issues that merit future systematic exploration include geographic inequalities in the UK – we encountered cases where those living in smaller towns had to travel long distances to access test centres – and how these geographic inequalities may combine with caring responsibilities, particularly for women who had to leave children to travel to test centres but did not have childcare. This is especially relevant since the number of test centres has reduced in recent years.

## Applying for Naturalisation & The good character requirement

Once the LUK test has been completed and the language requirement met, the application for naturalisation can be made for a fee of £1282 (as of April 2017).<sup>xliii</sup>

Some of our participants flagged up challenges at this stage surrounding the 'good character' requirement.<sup>xliv</sup> There is considerable confusion about what constitutes good character, its opposite, and what information needs to be mentioned on the form when applying for naturalisation.<sup>xlv</sup>

For example, the application form states:

'Fixed Penalty Notices (such as speeding or parking tickets) do not form part of a person's criminal record and will not be considered in the caseworker's assessment of character unless:

- the person has failed to pay and there were criminal proceedings as a result; or
- the person has received numerous fixed penalty notices.<sup>xvii</sup>

Yet in our study a few participants reported being banned from applying for a certain number of years because of offenses such as a fine for texting while at a red light and, in one case, being banned for 10 years from applying for naturalisation because of a fine, that they had paid, relating to a bus fare. In these cases and in others in our study, there seems to be both confusion about the rules and broad discretion on the part of caseworkers assessing applications. Both merit further exploration. This is particularly important in light of the fact that the ‘good character’ requirement accounts for an increasing number of rejected applications for naturalisation, rising to 42% of all refusals in 2015 (Blinder 2016).<sup>xviii</sup>

## The Ceremony

Reactions in our study were often positive and participants spoke with emotion about the venue (whether ‘grand’ or ‘run down’), music played, the food or drink that was offered to them, receiving a gift in some cases (a coin, a mug, a medal, even a gym voucher). There was a sense of occasion for many – even comparing it to a marriage – and they dressed ‘smart’ or bought special clothes for the occasion.

At this moment in the process there appears to be a glow around ‘being British’ and participants described their feelings of “being important now” (Southern African woman) or “normal” (Somali man). The symbolic dimension of the ceremony is also often acknowledged by respondents who told us that, at that moment, they “felt they actually belonged” (Canadian woman) or that they were “born again”. Also, the diversity of people becoming citizens was often commented on positively.

*“It was a little bit exciting and I was really happy that...finally, you know, after all the years of struggling... It was so valuable, you know, that it just feels something that you have achieved in your life, you know.”*

*(Latin American man)*

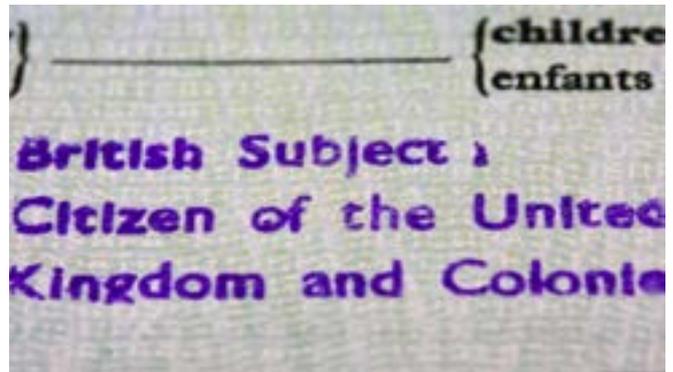
However, for other participants, responses to the ceremony were less positive. For some, the ceremony was experienced as being “scary” because of its very official and formal organisation and though “it doesn’t seem it”, it is a test “pure and simple” (Colombian woman). For others, the ceremony was experienced as a “waste of time” (Canadian man):

*“You’re sitting in a room, I guess. Forced to sing God Save The Queen or whatever it is. Get some piece of paper and I think they give you a, a ceramic mug or something like that or cup or something.”*

However, this person acknowledged that this critical attitude may be shaped by their own nationality, Canadian, meaning they might ‘take for granted’ having liberties and freedoms compared to others.

The range of responses here – from the very positive to the quite negative – indicates the ways that the experience of the ceremony is very much related to individual and group characteristics, particularly (though not exclusively) nationality. While we do not wish to generalise about migrants’ experiences of ceremonies as whole, we note that in our study some of those who are more critical of the ceremony are people who are more ‘privileged’ (in terms of education, profession) which may indicate that these participants felt more comfortable to voice these critical opinions in contrast to those for whom this was ‘scary’ or experienced as a further test.

## The Passport Interview



Contrary to many people’s expectations, the ceremony is not the end of the formal process that leads to citizenship. Some of our participants were asked to attend a passport interview after the ceremony but prior to receiving their passport

In several cases this was not a matter for concern. It was “very simple” and “really really straightforward”, a way to check identity (Latin American man).

For others, this interview made them feel that the process is never-ending and that they continue to be under suspicion. They expressed different understandings of the objective of this interview.

For this group, the passport interview is yet another aspect of the process to endure, effectively another test, but this time of identity. They described being asked “silly questions about your grandparents, or whether you open a gate to enter your home, to know: am I the right person” (Bangladeshi woman). For others, it was perceived to be a further test of English language competency: “they want to know my English” (Bangladeshi woman).

Finally, in one case a participant who described their own experience as ‘another exam’ then explained that their disabled son – who had been exempted from the LUK test because of his disability – had to do the passport interview alone, without his parent in attendance (Latin American woman).

These cases indicate two things. First, more transparency and communication are needed about the reason for passport interviews, who has to attend them and under what conditions (e.g. who might reasonably be exempted or have permission to be accompanied). Second, the last case shows that the experiences of disabled applicants require further exploration. In one of our feedback events a caseworker participant shared the story of a person with learning disabilities who had to take the test six times. This person had a letter from the GP that was not accepted as grounds for exemption. This was in addition to the overall cost as well as to the stress of the process for this applicant.

## Participants’ evaluations of the process

Throughout our study, a range of strong and conflicting opinions were expressed about the process of becoming a British citizen. These views are closely connected to how participants felt about British citizenship more generally as well as to their personal background.

It is not possible to do justice to the full range of responses in this report. We analyse participants’ criticisms, endorsements and emotions in detail in our research publications ([please see our project website for further details](#)). Here we focus on some of the themes that were repeated across the interviews. We also consider issues that were highlighted as particularly relevant in our stakeholder workshops and dissemination events.

Before discussing different responses, we would like to make an observation on who speaks and how. It is striking (and unsurprising) to note that often those who were most critical of the citizenship test process in the interviews were those

from backgrounds which were more likely to find the test and process easier, e.g. English-speaking migrants, and/or higher socio-economic status (well-educated professionals). They likely felt secure enough to voice their criticisms. This is an important indication of the stakes surrounding naturalization, and of the stress and tension experienced during the process.

## Costs

Many participants underline that the process is very expensive. **At the time of writing, the minimum total cost for one adult applicant exceeds £1300 (test £50 + naturalization fee £1282).**

Minimum costs	Additional, variable costs
<b>Official preparation booklet (approximately £15)</b> <sup>xlviii</sup>	Private preparation (language and LUK) courses (e.g. £200 to over £1000, varying lengths of time)
<b>Test fee (£50)</b>	College-based preparation courses for English language and knowledge of Life in the UK (some free, some with fees; some which provide preparation materials)
<b>Biometric residence permit (fingerprints and a photo, £19.20 at time of writing)</b>	Preparation apps (usually £2-3) and online materials
<b>Naturalization fee £1282</b>	Other preparation materials (books, CDs)
	Childcare: when attending preparation classes or attempting to prepare at home; if main carer and need to travel to test centre
	Travel to test centres if living in small town or area without sufficient test centre spaces
	Lost time from employment with travel to test centres
	Ceremony fees
	Solicitor fees
	Nationality Checking Service fees

**Table 4** Costs identified at the time of writing

Not all applicants encountered every one of the costs identified in Table 4. Yet most people identified a combination of several costs which led to financial strain and in many cases severe hardship, for example for participants only receiving the job seekers allowance. Participants reported borrowing money from the bank or from friends in order to cover the costs. Often the test costs were seen as 'fine' provided you do not fail multiple times, as the test can be taken as many times as needed. It is the naturalisation fee that is described as 'horrendous' (Polish woman).

The fear of fees constantly rising adds to the anxiety of the process. For some, this was a reason to apply before it became even more expensive. Yet for others it was an obstacle to validating a process of integration they felt that they had already successfully undertaken. The message some participants received was of not being welcome, with the 'ridiculous' fee cited as the reason (Asian woman). Participants also responded to the processes of marketization we identified above stating: 'I think it became a business' (Latin American man). The cost was seen as being even more prohibitive in cases in which families rather than an individual were applying.

Participants who had a higher socio-economic background recognized that 'it wasn't expensive for me' but that this would depend on individual circumstances (Latin American man), reflecting the varying level of resources available to different people who go through the citizenship test. While it is important to understand experiences of particular nationalities, for example through the pass rates we discuss above, we also argue for a better understanding of different effects of the process within nationalities. Our findings show that differences of social class and levels of education are highly relevant because the preparation and test process favour those who are more educated and computer literate, and because the cost can be more easily absorbed by those who have greater financial resources.

## ***Length and uncertainty***

For some participants, the citizenship test is perceived as a process that has the potential to become endless.<sup>xix</sup> Many described multiple administrative procedures they did not understand and delays, along with the fear that their passport would be held for a long time leaving them stuck.

Many participants also underlined the uncertainty that surrounded the process. Requirements – such as 'good character' and the passport interview -- are often unclear and experienced as arbitrary. Some participants noted that they

did not know what was required in the different stages of the process and if they could appeal these decisions or demand accommodations.

In our stakeholder workshops and feedback events, migrant support workers, advocates, service providers all commented on the uncertainty of the citizenship process. They related that rules are very broadly interpreted by the caseworkers examining the application files. They noted that with the 2016 Immigration Act,<sup>1</sup> the good character requirement became more stringent and that people working in migrant support organisations were advising people to 'declare everything', e.g. late payment of council tax.

The arbitrary nature of the process is even more keenly felt because of the cost: when denied, there was no right to appeal and in the meantime participants described having to start from the beginning (Latin American man).

Many participants expressed more general feelings about how they have to engage with public authorities throughout the process. An already stressful, long and expensive process is made even more difficult by lack of clarity and constantly changing rules, such as the changes to the process from October 2013. The process is often perceived as comprising many successive steps, each of which can be experienced as a new 'test'. Participants felt that, each time, it is necessary to prove, to demonstrate something to public authorities. Even the ceremony, as noted above, was "scary" and seen as a further test by some participants. The passport interview further extends the process. In our feedback events and workshops, some participants were very surprised to learn of this further requirement as they thought that the ceremony was the end of the process.

## ***The citizenship test and everyday life in the UK***

Much of the knowledge that can be gained from the citizenship test process and that participants identified as useful – e.g. how to access services – has now disappeared in the most recent version of the test and preparation materials. Citizenship is to be about more than 'claiming benefits', as Mark Harper stated above.

Again, those who were most vocal about the test as a 'waste of time', a 'necessary evil' and a 'money grab' were highly educated, affluent and from English speaking countries:

*"I'd be very surprised if someone said, 'oh I loved the citizenship ceremony and I love having to take the life the UK test and it brought so much knowledge'. I'd be shocked. I would be shocked."*

*(Canadian man)*

Some participants, including in our stakeholder workshops, mentioned the importance of learning about democracy and equality. However, they were also critical of the process and did not necessarily endorse the test process as a good mechanism for transmitting this knowledge because of the cost, stress and effort involved. As we will develop [below](#), few participants perceived that the citizenship test process could foster political engagement and a sense of belonging.

However, as we explore in our ['Broader Themes'](#), one unintended consequence of the process is the formation of new social networks. In the course of the test process, migrants construct webs of relations in order to navigate the bureaucracy of the test process.

## **Fairness**

When asked whether they thought the citizenship test process was 'fair', many participants commented on the specificities of the test rather than on its overall legitimacy. This may be because, in cases where participants had not acquired citizenship, they did not feel able to criticize a process that still had power over their lives.

There was a significant strand in the interviews where participants described the test as 'fair'. Yet we know from the pass rates above that it is much harder for migrants from some nationalities to pass the test. These migrants are often from non-EU and non-English speaking countries, and they often face racism in their daily lives in the UK.

In many cases, this characterization of the test as 'fair' relates to the notion that the test is administratively sound and 'fairly' delivered on the day.<sup>11</sup> This means wherever in the country you take the test, the conditions and test itself are comparable. There was also the implication that the test is 'fair' because taken through a computer, implying some form of impartiality. It is 'the same for everyone' (North African, female).

As we note in our ['Broader Findings'](#), some participants who perceived the test as being 'fair' endorsed the process strongly on the basis of negative comparisons with other groups who they argue did not 'deserve' citizenship. This points to the role of the test process in fostering or enabling divisive and negative attitudes. However, others insisted on the difficulty of the test for those who do not speak English, particularly those with little or no literacy in their own languages. This was emphasized even by those who were native English speakers, who recognized their own linguistic advantage. We explore the role of these factors specifically for women below (['Broader Findings'](#)). The nature of the test process as a whole, rather than the test itself, was often also seen to be unfair. For example, people described having to leave their jobs to study and to travel out of their cities to take the test due to a recent reduction in test centres.

Connected to the issue of 'fairness' were the ways in which participants linked the process, and then the fact of becoming a citizen, to feelings of respect and dignity. Some described feeling 'offended' at always being asked to show their passport in their daily life (Asian woman) before they became British. Others with citizenship never really feel accepted like 'one who has been born here' (Somali man). This emotive terrain is explored below when we consider the ways the process is perceived to foster – or not – feelings of respect, dignity and [belonging](#).

## ***'Why do you think the citizenship test was introduced?'***

When we asked participants why they thought the government introduced and uses the test, they provided different explanations.

Some participants chose to speak directly about the issue of immigration control. In these cases, whether they endorsed or opposed it, there was a definite perception of the process aiming at selection and immigration control rather than integration and inclusion: "It's all about immigration policies or restricting people to get access to citizenship" (Latin American man). More generally, many participants argue that the introduction of the test is "politically motivated" (North American woman). This shows that, for many participants, the message received is not that the test is meant to help them with their life in the UK. Instead the citizenship test is perceived to be a tool of immigration control 'to make people's life more difficult' (Latin American man).



## Research Question 2: What are the consequences of the citizenship process on migrants' sense of belonging and political participation?

### Engagement with politics: Qualitative Findings

Participants rarely connect political participation or interest in politics directly to the knowledge and experience of the test process. In some cases, political participation and interest predate the process. The fact of naturalizing allowed for pre-existing interest and commitment to political participation to take new forms, but this was not something new that was created by the experience of the citizenship test process.

In the interviews, many participants underlined that the fact of having a passport meant that they could vote, but there was not necessarily an aspect of the preparation and test – and the knowledge of Life in the UK that they were to/had acquired – that they identified as relevant to their desire to vote. In other cases, knowledge was identified as 'useful' and participants explained that they did not know, for instance, how Parliament worked or the frequency of voting in elections. Yet it is difficult to establish a clear link to a particular form of engagement with politics. This knowledge was more generally seen as something that was good for general understanding.

These different reactions were further reflected in the discussions that emerged during the stakeholder workshops that we organized at the end of the project. Some participants argued that the test was useful in fostering political participation and enabling an understanding of British politics, while others

insisted that there is no clear relation between the material on which the test is based and the political participation of migrants. As a matter of fact, some participants argued that the content of the test (because of its focus on culture and history and irrelevant information) could discourage migrants from participating in British politics. For example, it was noted that it was frustrating for people to have to learn about the number of deputies in the Welsh assembly, but not be provided with information about how to register for local or national elections.

In many cases, participants describe or endorse their own understandings of 'active citizenship' in ways that do not refer to or accept the stated intentions of the citizenship test process, or draw on the materials and knowledge involved. We observe that when formulated differently, e.g. 'Helping in our community', some participants then described activities that can be understood as alternative forms of political engagement. Participants who described themselves as uninterested in politics and not engaged actively in political life then provided multiple examples of 'helping' in their communities. They described themselves as active citizens but in terms that they did not connect to the process, which they did not see as a political resource. Examples include helping new migrants in the community to learn English and access services for children; getting involved in parents' committees at school or housing committees in the neighbourhood, organizing street parties as well as own cultural community; and relating to their community in ways that ultimately led to advocacy.

### *Community-specific findings:*

In our second wave of interviews, we focused on the experiences of different communities: Polish and Indian communities in Leicester; and Chinese, Bangladeshi and Latin American communities in London.

Before we discuss these findings, we make two observations.

First, it is very difficult to speak about 'communities' without masking important differences – such as socio-economic background or length of residence in the UK – within these groups. We use this term because people self-identified as members of these communities when we asked them what they considered to be their community in the interviews. We observed that they often compared their experiences as members of these groups to those of other 'communities'. We therefore use this term because it has meaning and importance to the people we interviewed.

Second, the observations we share here are influenced by the organisations and networks through which we accessed participants. This is an inevitable aspect of the research process, which we acknowledge. The ideas presented here therefore should not be read as a representation of the groups as a whole but as one way to reflect on how group dynamics may shape individual experiences of naturalisation.

At a general level, our interviews indicate that members of different communities interviewed in our project tend to have different relations to politics. These relations are shaped by their past experiences as well as how they are organised as a community in the UK.

### ***a. Visibility & Political Representation:***

We were struck by the strong desire of participants from the Latin American community – which includes Colombian, Ecuadorian, Bolivian, Chilean Peruvian, Brazilian, and Mexican nationalities in our sample – to lobby political representatives as a collective rather than in specific national groups. The aim was visibility.<sup>liii</sup> Participants identified themselves as a (relatively) new group that aimed at recognition as an ‘ethnic minority’ in a similar way to other groups, such as Indian or Bangladeshi communities. They made specific mention of undocumented people of the same nationalities and of their precarious conditions in the labour market as reflecting the realities of many Latin American migrants in London.

Several Polish participants in Leicester also raised the challenges of political representation and considered that their community has fewer representatives in comparison to more established and larger communities, e.g. the Indian community in Leicester. They perceived that their group undertakes little political campaigning and is more ‘home-bound’, which we observe relates to the idea of circular migration for many Polish migrants (many interviewees shared that they aimed to return to their country of origin, in particular in the Brexit context).

In London, some Bangladeshi participants identified the difficulties of the language barrier and the need, therefore, to have their own political representatives. Several Chinese participants pointed to the very low number of elected Chinese representatives and felt that their community was small and poorly represented. In informal discussions, leaders expressed concerns about obstacles to voting for those who have become citizens. In contrast, Indian participants in Leicester pointed to well-established networks in the city, based on successive waves of migration, that enabled pooling knowledge about the citizenship test process and direct access to political

representatives (whether of their own nationality or more generally).

As these contrasting experiences show, collective stocks of knowledge about the political system in general shape individual experiences e.g. in terms of who one can access to learn about and participate in British political life.

We also observe that the nature of the group of which one is part appears to shape individual perceptions of political efficacy: being able to be heard and make a difference in political life. Forms of political efficacy could include perceiving the opportunity to lobby current political representatives or to participate in electing new representatives who can help make the community visible and/or promote the concerns of the community in question, not least by addressing experiences of racism and discrimination to which we now turn.

### ***b. Racism and Discrimination:***

Some participants from all of these communities described having encountered experiences of racism – whether as large and visible groups who are the subject of media coverage in the Brexit context (Polish migrants), or small communities that are seen as less ‘visible’ (Chinese migrants).

Participants reacted to stereotypes and media representations of their communities. For some Polish migrants, being labelled ‘Eastern European’ conflicted with their individual sense of national identity. They also reflected on public perceptions of their community as negative (e.g. ‘abusing benefits’, following statements to this effect by politicians at the time of the interviews).

More generally, experiences of racism and discrimination in the labour market led to scepticism for some about the extent to which holding citizenship in fact protected people from renewed racial hostilities, particularly in the context of Brexit. This scepticism raises the broader question of whether the promise of citizenship is ‘hollow’ or whether the formal status means actual membership and protection from racism. We develop this idea in the “[Broader themes](#)” section.

### ***c. Connections to the citizenship test process:***

These observations about community characteristics suggest that the experience of the citizenship test process does not have a direct and straightforward influence on migrants' interest in and engagement with British politics. Migrants' engagement with British politics is shaped by the organisation of their community and their daily experiences of life in the UK rather than what they learn in the Life in the UK handbook.

Therefore, the path from the experience of the test process to engagement with politics is much less straightforward than political debates, the test materials and preparation route would suggest. Through these observations, we can see a multilayered process through which migrants' engagement with politics is shaped, confirming thus other studies on migrants' political engagement.<sup>131</sup> This can include reference to the Life in the UK test in some cases but not in ways that allow us to establish an easy, direct or even strong connection between the experience of the test process and the intended outcome (increased political participation).

## Engagement with Politics: Quantitative findings

The quantitative component of the research exploring the political engagement of naturalized citizens resulted in a very striking finding: becoming a citizen (in the context of the "citizenship process") leads to a decrease in one's interest in politics. That finding emerges from analysis of panel data that considers the "starting point" of immigrants' interest in politics: it is not merely a cross-sectional difference (comparing naturalized citizens to those who do not become citizens). Rather, it rests on a model that makes that comparison while also considering values prior to naturalization (and of course controlling for other determinants of interest in politics).

The finding is striking because there are good reasons to imagine that becoming a citizen would lead to increased engagement with politics. Not only that: whatever one thinks about other consequences of the citizenship process, one could imagine that the requirement to take a test might actually result in increased knowledge that would underpin a greater sense of one's entitlement to participate in politics. The fact that the outcome is strongly negative, against those expectations, is an important result.

We had hoped to consider whether the finding for the sample overall varied across different components of the sample – in particular, whether there was variation by country/region of origin. Analysis along those lines (via 'interaction terms') did

not produce any "positive results" – no such variation is evident. The usable sample size was quite small, though: the size of the sample components was in some cases too small to offer grounds for optimism.

## Belonging: Qualitative Findings

Through our qualitative analysis we find attachment to diversity alongside experiences of racism, and a 'horizontal' dimension to belonging understood in social terms (relating to fellow citizens and groups) as well as to the nation. We show how attachment to diversity becomes an important focus for some EU citizens living in the UK in the context of Brexit. The Brexit context also brings to the fore specific strategies of belonging on the part of other EU citizens in which negative comparisons on the basis of class and race are prominent (see the section on "[Broader Themes](#)").

Our findings show the emergence of different, sometimes contradictory social relationships in the course of the citizenship test process. The test process shapes relations with other social groups, including different groups of migrants. Some of these dynamics are positive: new forms of belonging emerge that show how migrants build solidarities within and outside their own ethnic or religious communities. However, some of these dynamics are more exclusionary in nature: they relate to competition and distinction processes that we present in the section on "Broader Themes". In many cases, the sense of belonging that migrants refer to in the interviews goes beyond the citizenship test process altogether in the way they are described: several migrants mention that belonging has nothing to do with papers. Also, many migrants refer to notions of multiple belongings, explaining that they feel that they can belong to different countries. Finally, the data shows how the question of belonging is often defined in relation to place. In particular, many of our respondents referred to the cities of Leicester and London as welcoming places because of their diversity. Some respondents contrasted this feeling of belonging at the local level with the more "national" notion of belonging that they believe the citizenship test process refers to. This confirms the idea that feelings of 'belonging' are situated beyond the process. Instead, they relate to 'good relations with neighbours' or to a more general experience at the local level:

*"I mean integration doesn't come from you sitting in your own house or in the library to read the book ... Because that's not how you become a citizen. It's not by singing the anthem, passing the Life in the UK test or having the passport even. No I don't think so. It's you feel [like a] citizen when you have a good experience with your neighbour, in your neighbourhood or wherever you live." (East African man)*

In the interviews, questions that relate to the notion of belonging are often connected with the experience of nationalism or racism in the UK. Many of our respondents argue that despite feeling part of British society, they are not seen as being British. In this respect, access to the British passport is perceived in different ways. For some respondents, it will enable them to 'prove' that they belong, in particular in the labour market. However, for many respondents, the naturalisation process is not going to change much about the way they are perceived by others and by British society more generally. This shows once again that, for the majority of our participants, questions of belonging are perceived as complex and going beyond what happens in the citizenship test process.

## Belonging: Quantitative findings

Using panel data from "Understanding Society", we also investigated the sense of belonging among those who are non-citizens at an initial point in time (Wave 1), comparing those who became citizens at a subsequent point (Wave 6) to those who remained non-citizens.

The quantitative component of the project exploring the consequences for "belonging" produced a finding that is more in line with reasonable expectations: becoming a citizen results in a significant increase in one's embrace of British identity ("how important is being British to you?"). Some critics of the citizenship process might have imagined that negative consequences extended to alienation from British identity – but there is no support for that notion in the sample analyzed here. Instead, the opposite is true: while even those who remain citizens increase their attachment to British identity over time, the attachment of people who become citizens is even greater (despite the fact that their embrace of British identity beforehand is well above that of the non-naturalizers).

We are less confident in the notion that the increase is specifically a consequence of the policy requirements – the "Life in the UK" test and the citizenship ceremonies. It's entirely possible that the increase results from the simple fact of becoming a citizen, irrespective of (or perhaps even despite) the requirements. Perhaps the citizenship ceremonies contribute something, via emotional resonance conveyed by speeches, music, etc. – but that's an idea that cannot be tested with the quantitative data available to us. What we can conclude is that the requirements of the citizenship process do not appear to get in the way of increased attachment to British identity among those who become citizens. Here we did not find any variation among sub-groups in this regard.

## Combining our findings

The findings emerging from the qualitative and quantitative analysis show that the consequences of the citizenship test process on migrants' political participation and sense of belonging are complex. In the interviews, migrants reflect upon how the test process relates to their interest in politics and sense of belonging through a diverse, and sometimes contradictory, range of responses. Some migrants point to the positive effects of the test on their political and social inclusion in the UK. Others argue that the test does not have anything to do with their interest in British politics or sense of belonging.

The findings emerging from the quantitative approach show that the consequences of the citizenship test process are neither entirely negative nor entirely positive. In some regards, the requirements seem to have a negligible impact: they are simply a hurdle to overcome, diverting people from more important aspects of their lives. Having said that, the results of the analysis of political participation are worrying: the requirements do not appear to support migrants' integration in the political sphere (and perhaps actually impede it). In that sense, the requirements undermine a key stated objective of the policy.

Bringing these two sets of findings together, we argue that the ways migrants reflect on these dimensions (political participation and sense of belonging) depend largely on their personal background as well as on the features of their community in the UK. From this perspective, the citizenship test can be understood as a marker of identity rather than as a process that brings about more political participation and sense of belonging to British society: the way migrants experience the citizenship test process is largely determined by the features of their own identity.

## Research Question 3: What are the consequences of the citizenship process on migrants' subjective well-being (happiness)?

Analysis of Understanding Society data was conducted to consider whether becoming a UK citizen (in part via meeting the requirements to pass the Life in the UK test and participate in a citizenship ceremony) is associated with an increase (or a decrease) in one's subjective well-being (happiness). The core finding is that naturalization does not have an impact on the happiness of immigrants in the UK: becoming a citizen (or indeed remaining a non-citizen) leads to no net change

in one's happiness. The UK citizenship process might well have significant impacts on the lives of the people subject to its requirements, but those impacts do not themselves have consequences for one's overall subjective well-being. The possibility that the average finding of "no impact" might vary among sub-groups (specified e.g. by region of origin) came to nothing here as well.

## Broader Themes

Beyond these findings that relate directly to our three research questions, broader themes have emerged from the project:

### Process of negotiation

Our interviews allowed us to explore the different ways that participants are able to negotiate the test process. By negotiation we refer to how people cope with the process and its many demands, and even embrace or challenge it. We observe many different responses to the process. This variety of responses leads us to question the extent to which the process can actually "transform" people into the kinds of British citizens that public authorities define as "good citizens". Instead, our interviews show the ways people attempt to assert control over their lives as they navigate the test process, using their own individual and community characteristics and resources. Responses reflect the tensions and contradictions experienced during the process. For example, a reaction of 'defensive naturalisation', motivated by fear of potential changes to immigration law, can also be accompanied by an endorsement of processes of 'distinction' which we will now discuss.

These differences and contradictions matter. First, because they lead us to question whether the desired outcomes of the citizenship test process are in fact achieved, or whether participants distance themselves from the figure of the "good citizen" that is defined by state authorities. Second, these differences matter because the ability to negotiate is unequal and is conditioned by social class, gender and education (among other characteristics). As we discuss below, the process can make existing inequalities worse for some groups.

### Distinction processes

We have identified attitudes expressed by a part of the migrants we interviewed in which they draw a line between their own experiences and behavior around naturalization and that of

other migrants. In this way they demonstrate that they have 'deserved' citizenship. To distinguish their 'deservingness' in contrast to other migrants, they often refer to values of hard-work, trust and respect, as well as their education and social relations. For example, participants expressed the idea that the citizenship test is a good indicator of people's willingness to be part of British society, justifying the selective nature of the test. In doing so, they define citizenship as being based on values and privileges rather than as a right. Our findings thereby explore the less-understood dimension of how some migrants themselves participate in reproducing ideas about exclusion in terms of access to citizenship.<sup>lx</sup> More generally, these findings show how migrants relate to new sets of values about who 'deserves' citizenship and who should be included/excluded. These values reflect broader shifts in the ways citizenship is understood. Increasingly, citizenship is seen less as a set of rights and responsibilities, and more as a status to be 'earned' and deserved. This status depends on effort, having the right values and contributing (to the labour market and public life more generally). This research confirms existing studies on the turn toward 'earned' citizenship in migrants' experiences and more generally.<sup>lx</sup>

### Responsibilisation

Our data demonstrates the way in which responsibility for dealing with the citizenship process has been placed firmly on the shoulders of the individual. One example is the learning that takes place in preparation for the test. Previously individuals were able to use local colleges and independent test providers. Many preparation centers have been shut down and the number of providers has been cut significantly. Given that the ESOL with citizenship route has been closed, the individual must rely solely on dealing with and assimilating the Life in the UK preparation book.

Our data show a variety of responses. In some cases, the individual felt discouraged by the level of the test and demonstrated signs of being reluctant to engage. Others continued learning, albeit with the support of family and friends. Another response was to deal with the test bilingually, by preparing for the test in another language and translating preparation materials. This seemingly undermines the monolingual, English-only test materials. It also more accurately reflects the way people learn a new language: this is, in fact, a bilingual process.

## Collective versus individual dimensions

Overall our study shows mixed results in terms of the extent to which the test process effectively provides knowledge and resources that can then be used in real 'Life in the UK', especially in relation to political engagement.

As we described in the section on '[Engagement with politics](#)' above, participants rarely connect the knowledge they gain throughout the citizenship test process with any interest in politics. However, the social relationships created through the experience of the process are more interesting and significant: networks and interactions within and across 'communities' are constructed or consolidated. It is not the knowledge that is to be tested that is significant here but the socialization that takes place throughout the process.

Some participants tend to describe the experience of going through the citizenship process as a lonely experience: they had to gain the knowledge that is expected from them and navigate the process alone. However, other participants describe the opposite experience. Through the process, they met and interacted with new people, including outside of their own communities, and pooled knowledge and resources to navigate the process itself but also to participate more broadly in social and political life.

What is a highly individual process – each person taking the test has to prove their own individual knowledge and language skills – in fact has collective dimensions for these participants. The role of the organisations we worked with was crucial in fostering this collective experience: participants often refer to the help they received from them. These networking processes are often unintended consequences of the citizenship test in the context of an unequal and often difficult experience. These processes take place sometimes despite rather than because of the citizenship test process. As we explain in the section on "[political participation](#)", the way communities are organized shapes these networking processes.

## Women's Experiences

In our study 94 participants were women or 60% of the total. This has provided the opportunity to focus on women's experiences of naturalization. We find that the citizenship test process can exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for some women.

We find that many migrant women face a situation where there is little state support of the 'journey to citizenship'. Cuts to ESOL funding (see the section on "the Context in Which We did Our Research") have contributed to social isolation and hindered some migrant women's participation in the citizenship test process and public life more generally. In 2011, an Equality Impact Assessment demonstrated that women and ethnic minorities would be disproportionately affected by these cuts to ESOL funding.

This withdrawal coincides with the increasingly difficult test requirements we discussed above. It is no longer possible to obtain citizenship through the 'ESOL with citizenship' route, which was a realistic route for migrant women with little language proficiency who could take these classes instead of a test. All of these changes take place in the context of austerity where social services and free/affordable childcare are reduced or withdrawn. These broader changes also combine with unequal caring responsibilities and a skewed division of domestic labour at home.

These inequalities are not unique to any one community, though they are experienced differently depending on race, class, gender and nationality.

For some migrant women in our study, a combination of barriers effectively prevented them from being able to study and prepare for the citizenship test. In our interviews, they raised issues that relate to difficulties in finding the time to prepare the test due to domestic caring responsibilities, and many ESOL classes no longer provide crèche services. Social isolation was a major barrier. This isolation was a result of experiences of racism and not speaking English, which was made worse when women lacked information about where to learn and how to get to classes. They also argued that the test and preparation materials were difficult and daunting, and that the process was too expensive.

The demands of the test process – the time, money, energy and skills it requires – can therefore make existing inequalities worse and create new challenges.<sup>lv</sup>

## Language as border

Language also acts as a border. In this respect, proof of language proficiency acts as a 'sign' which is to be interpreted by the state as evidence to become a citizen.<sup>lvii</sup> The test therefore acts as a border negotiation between the individual and the State or a representative of the State.<sup>lviii</sup> By 'passing' these forms of language assessment, the individual can find a passage towards inclusion within the community.

Through our analysis, we were able to uncover 'invisible borders' throughout the process beyond the Life in the UK test. Firstly, some experienced a test of their proficiency through the spouse reunification exam prior to arrival. For others, the ceremony became an exam by virtue of feeling assessed in performing the oath and declaration. Finally, even beyond the ceremony, many are invited for a passport interview. This was interpreted as another form of assessment.

The notion of judgment through assessment underlined the entire process. This means a constant checking and rechecking of language and identity. As a result, the process is longer and more demanding for some than others. Also, the path to citizenship could start in one country and end in another with multiple assessments in addition to the LUK test.



## The Brexit context and its effects on the citizenship process

In the context of the 'Brexit' referendum in June 2016, we have developed new perspectives in our research project. Our aim was to explore the experiences of European Union migrants (in particular Eastern European migrants) at this moment of heightened tension. To this end, we draw on our interviews of EU citizens living in the UK, as well as on the four focus groups

with Eastern European EU migrants that we conducted in Leicester (see the section on "[Methods](#)").

Our findings show how the 'Brexit' debates shape strategies of belonging and specific processes through which EU migrants draw boundaries between themselves and other migrants living in the UK. In their reflections about the Brexit context, Eastern-European EU migrants refer to their experience of free movement in the EU in order to demonstrate their sense of respectability and dignity. At the same time, they also refer to the difficulties that they encounter in the UK, in particular in the labour market. In doing so, they display trajectories and strategies that are specific to EU migrants: they try to use the opportunities opened by free movement and also to cope with the obstacles to their upward mobility which emerge in their daily life in the UK.

Many of our participants draw symbolic boundaries with other ethnic groups and along lines of social class. For example, some reproduce stereotypes about migrants living on welfare or "abusing the system". Many are keen to demonstrate cosmopolitan values and to separate themselves from migrants who they believe 'are just here to work' and do not want to 'integrate'. These participants insisted for example on the efforts they make to learn English and to learn about British society, and contrasted this with other groups of migrants who they argue remained too 'attached' to their country of origin. With this boundary they also distinguished themselves from what they perceived to be British working class who they believe do not share the same values. For example, they argued that in the Brexit context working class people did not make the effort to be open to other cultures and engage with them.

# Responses to the Research

The citizenship test process is not only a topic of concern to migrants. In the stakeholder workshops and feedback events that we organised at the end of our project we engaged a broader group of people to discuss the issues we explored in our research. Most participants in these events had direct experience of the citizenship test process (e.g. personally, or as migrant support workers, advocates, service providers). Others had a general interest in the issue rather than direct knowledge or experience.<sup>ix</sup>

We have referred to some of the comments, observations and opinions expressed during these events throughout this report. We now take the opportunity to discuss some examples of the debates that took place in these events. We would like to emphasize these points of discussion. Along with our research findings, these discussions have shaped our main recommendation: a **fundamental review** is needed.

- **Purpose of the test:** when discussing the purpose of the citizenship, many participants believed the test was created for political and ideological reasons – as a political instrument to show that government can control migration and in order to make money (for instance, the level of difficulty of the questions was designed to be harder and therefore to make the test taker fail);
- Others argued that the test fosters responsibility and respect. This led to further debate with others asking why people who work, pay taxes and follow the law have to take a test, and how taking a test can increase feelings of belonging;
- **Language:** Some participants saw it as an opportunity to improve migrants' English language skills, which will help them to be included in the community; while others considered it a barrier (for example, applicants who are not from English speaking countries often found the test and the ceremony more stressful);
- **Integration and inclusion:** Opposing views were expressed about the meaning of integration. Some underlined that the test was created to introduce knowledge about British culture, history, law and rights, while others argued that the test does not promote integration, and instead divides the applicants by depicting them as deserving and undeserving. Integration, in their view, is better achieved 'from doing'.

These disagreements point to the divisive nature of the issues this project addresses: immigration and race in the UK, and the way the citizenship test process calls into question what it means to be a British citizen.

In the course of these events, discussions also took place regarding how the citizenship test process affects people's lives: the financial difficulties it creates, the different ability of applicants to take the test or begin the process particularly due to language difficulties, its impact on self-esteem but also the sense of achievement for those who pass, the lack of clarity about the rules, the way it creates divisions and hostility. Participants insisted on the fact that the citizenship test has a more negative effect on some groups: those who migrated from poorer countries and for whom English is not the first language. Participants were struck by the differences in terms of pass rates (see the section on "Background and history")

We were particularly interested to know whether and how participants in these dissemination events felt this study could have an impact beyond academic communities.

- Participants agreed that the research may serve as a source of **information, evidence and reference** for the government. The research can serve as an **evaluation** of whether existing policy and practices need reviewing or changing – e.g. What constitutes 'good character'? Does the citizenship process affect groups with lower resources and education in particular, and is it, therefore, elitist and unfair?
- For some the research can help to **improve the process** by informing it so that there can be a reduction in the number of failures. For others, the study highlights the **experiences** of their clients, from different parts of the world, some of whom have a harder time in the process and there is a need for data relating to this to be shared more widely (e.g. pass rates by nationality but also gender).
- The research may be used to **challenge the way the test is currently designed**. Some participants suggested that: a) practical questions about life in the UK should be re-included in the test, as they help towards better inclusion in daily life; b) the test lacks appropriate reference to colonisation and the "British Empire", thus failing to represent adequately British history
- Several participants noted the importance of hearing migrants' voices through the study. They noted that the research serves to **'give voice'** to people going through the process. These are views and experiences that migrants have been feeding back to their organisations for years. This was described as 'powerful' because it enables the people working in these organisations to go back to the migrants they are supporting and tell them that their views are not unique, but part of a broader trend.

# Recommendations

- However, some participants suggested that the findings of this study cannot change British public opinion. It was argued that access to formal citizenship is not a guarantee of inclusion, especially in the context of recent events such **Brexit** and **terrorist acts**.

We have considered these comments and reflections in formulating our recommendations.

Many of our participants expressed discontent with the way the citizenship test is constructed and implemented. They questioned whether it is useful and its connection to migration control. Our analysis shows that many migrants criticized the content of the test and its lack of clear connection with their daily life in the UK.

Our study also shows the negative impact that the citizenship test process can have on migrants' lives and on the ways they relate to British citizenship. We find that the test process generates divisive and negative perceptions of some groups of migrants as 'deserving' and others as undesirable, which are sometimes expressed by migrants themselves. In the current context of renewed racial hostility, this is particularly dangerous.

Over a decade after the introduction of the citizenship test, we recommend:

a **fundamental review** that includes **all actors** involved in the citizenship test process

**The review should include:**

- Migrants of different nationalities, social backgrounds, lengths of time in the UK
- ESOL providers and teachers
- Civil society organisations
- Community representatives
- Local authorities
- UK Visas and Immigration, the Home Office

The purpose of this review should be to examine why so many migrants point at ways the citizenship test process **excludes them rather than helping them to integrate**. The review could address the following questions:

- How to better acknowledge the role of migrants in British society, and that it has always been shaped by migration?
- How to formulate policies that use a variety of perspectives – including perspectives of migrants, minority groups – to support learning about life in the UK?
- How to give migrants the best opportunities to feel included in British society?
- Is the citizenship test the right tool?
- How to challenge negative effects that citizenship tests can have on migrants' lives (including the construction of divisions between different groups of migrants)

**Drawing on the specific findings of our project, we recommend:**

**Long-term:**

Our findings confirm the work in other studies showing the fear and anxiety that the citizenship test process creates for migrants. In order to avoid naturalization 'by fear':

- Clearly distinguish debates and policies (including the citizenship test) on migrants' inclusion in British society from migration control policies
- Better inform members of the public about what is actually involved in becoming a UK citizen and the challenges of the process, beyond the popular portrayal of a 'pub quiz'

**Shorter-term:**

Content of the test:

- The test should be less about history and culture, and material that has disappeared in recent versions of the test (practical material about Life in the UK and access to services) should be reintroduced.
- More attention should be devoted to the institutions in which migrants will be able (and indeed expected) to participate. Given the findings about interest in politics, further development of materials and questions about British democracy (at both local and national levels) is advised, so that people who become UK citizens have a stronger sense of their ability and entitlement to participate.

**Preparation for the test:**

- Promote the role of local councils in assisting with naturalization processes and access to Indefinite Leave to Remain
- More effective experiential learning techniques to be used as initially recommended by founders of the process, rather than a 'paper exercise'
- Barriers for women in preparing for the test and succeeding in the process must be directly addressed, particularly the impacts of reduction of ESOL and ESOL with crèche facilities
- ESOL to be made accessible to everyone, taking into consideration the different needs of learners (e.g. childcare)
- Successful multilingual strategies – e.g. translating materials into one's own language – show that the test and its preparation materials should be reviewed and provided in different languages. These strategies challenge the notion of having to speak English to be an ideal citizen, and instead point to many different ways in which citizenship is practiced and understood. The use of other languages can enhance rather than inhibit citizenship.

**Naturalisation application:**

- Reconsider the nature of the good character requirement and its purpose
- The overall cost of the process is prohibitive. The largest component is often the naturalization fee. Reduce costs and waive entirely for some applicants, e.g. means-tested fees and/or interest free loans as in other contexts

**Ceremonies:**

- Serious consideration should be given to making the ceremonies optional, rather than a requirement of naturalization
- Possibility for voter registration at ceremonies

**Passport interview:**

- Make explicit from the beginning that this interview can be required. Clarify the reasons for the passport interview: is this to check identity or language? Who has to undertake it? Under what conditions, e.g. can you be accompanied? What is the right of appeal?

# Future Research

Comparative research, particularly **outside of Europe and North America**, can provide a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of citizenship test processes.

Further exploration of the **experiences of people who decide not to take the test**, though they are difficult to access, can help shed further light on perceptions of and barriers to these processes.

The citizenship test process should now be explored specifically with a focus on the **Brexit context and renewed racial hostilities**. How does this context shape perceptions and practices of citizenship and the sense of belonging of migrants and British people?

Research on **British people's attitudes toward and perceptions of naturalization** and the citizenship test process are needed to complement the focus on migrants: what do they think it does? How do they perceive language and knowledge of life in the UK requirements? How do they feel about it?

Research in **less diverse areas** (that have a higher proportion of white British people in the population and/or in rural areas) would provide an important basis for comparison with studies primarily based in larger cities.

# Appendices

## Key Terms & Abbreviations Used in This Report

We use here (and in publications from the project) some key terms that perhaps need clarification: in particular, **multiculturalism, integration and inclusion, and assimilation**.

**Integration and inclusion** are used to describe the way immigrants gain the ability to participate in the destination country's core institutions (social, political and economic; a good example of an economic institution is the labour market). Initially, immigrants might lack good knowledge of those institutions as well as the characteristics and resources that enable participation. Over time, those barriers can be overcome, and it is hoped that immigrants can participate on the same terms as similarly placed natives. (A key question then is: do they face an obstacle or penalty emerging from the simple fact that they are immigrants? This is what the notion of discrimination points at.)

In some settings, however, gaining knowledge and resources is not enough. In some countries there are official as well as informal expectations that immigrants must also become similar to natives, especially in cultural terms. That expectation signals a need for **assimilation**, in part as a further precondition for integration. So, to get a decent job one might be well advised to adopt clothing styles common among natives, or to try to speak the local language with as little 'accent' as possible.

In other countries, ideas of **multiculturalism** and diversity have taken hold. In those settings the idea that people are 'different' in various ways is not a problem to be overcome – instead, it is something to embrace and celebrate. 'Different' clothing can be interesting (and anyway, why should it be important?); 'different' food might help us move beyond a bland array of 'traditional' food. Not all differences will be acceptable, but as a general principle multiculturalism seeks to avoid a presumption that immigrants' habits and practices are inferior and must be changed.

<b>ESOL</b>	<b>English for Speakers of Other Languages</b>
<b>ILR</b>	<b>Indefinite Leave to Remain</b>
<b>LUK</b>	<b>Life in the UK Test</b>

## Methods and Reflections on the Research Process

This research employed different methods to answer the three questions. We combined qualitative and quantitative methods to explore migrants' experiences of current integration policies

### *Qualitative methods*

We aimed to analyse the citizenship process 'from the inside' through a set of in-depth semi-structured interviews with migrants who are going through the process or who have gone through it. Interviewees were approached through our contacts in community colleges and advocacy and migrant organisations. Interviews focused on their perceptions of the process, which we situated within their broader 'life story'<sup>18</sup> to provide context for their experiences.

Interview data demonstrate the range of perspectives on the preparation process, the test itself, and the experience of the ceremonies. The data also allowed us to identify the background of different groups of migrants, their public and private discourse about this experience, and the nature of their interactions with class providers, test centre officials and government representative. It allowed us to analyse with precision how migrants with different characteristics experience the process. The citizenship process comprises different stages:

- Preparation
- The 'Life in the UK' test
- The citizenship ceremony
- Passport interviews

Fieldwork was undertaken in two different locations: Leicester and London. These locations have been chosen in order to provide as diverse a sample as possible. Leicester is the city with the highest proportion of ethnic minorities in the UK. In London, we undertook interviews in boroughs that have a high proportion of new arrivals in the UK. In two of the most diverse places in the UK we analysed the experiences of different groups of migrants that participate in these processes and compared groups depending on their origins, socio-economical background, legal status, etc.

We planned extended periods of fieldwork so that relationships could be built over time and ethical safeguards respected. Issues arising from fieldwork were reviewed throughout the project with all members of the research team and in consultation with the Advisory Committee.

Throughout the research process, there was a deliberate effort to ensure all parties benefited. It was imperative to be transparent with migrant organisations and ESOL colleges. We researched the organisations and negotiated access. Interviews with participants from organisations where they felt comfortable were extremely rich and this is due in large part to the confidence and trust that had developed between us and the organization.

In some cases, we used snowballing, that is to say, accessing participants via other participants. Again, the validation provided by others in recommending the research team ensured that participants were forthcoming and open in interviews. Participants were compensated for their time with vouchers. The interviews were conducted by Kamran Khan.

We acknowledge the inevitable role of performance and social desirability bias in the interviews. Throughout the research process, we have reflected on the influence of power dynamics to consider what participants may have decided to say, not to say, and how to present themselves. We have tried to represent participants' views in keeping within the spirit and trust in which they have shared their opinions. Through our feedback and dissemination activities we further attempted to provide migrants and their supporters the opportunity to share their views on our findings which we have taken into account in writing this report and in our academic outputs.

All interviews and focus groups were transcribed. Transcripts were then analysed using NVivo software. The coding frame was developed over a period of 8 months, encompassing coding nodes that derived directly from the research questions as well as new, emerging themes. To ensure intercoder reliability transcripts were double (and even triple-) coded by several members of the project team. Transcripts were then recoded using the final coding frame and applying harmonized coding practice. Data analysis was intensive, with significant time allocated to this phase in order to ensure we fully exploited the insights from our large and diverse sample.

## **Quantitative Methods**

The quantitative analysis consisted of regression models suitable to panel data. For the 'belonging' analysis, we used panel regression models for continuous data, e.g. starting with xtreg in Stata (given that the dependent variable was a 12-point scale); for the other two dependent variables (life satisfaction and interest in politics) we used ordered probit and logit models (because the variables could not plausibly be treated as continuous). In each case it was necessary to use a random-effects specification. Ideally, one would have used a fixed-effects specification – but the sample was too small (especially given that only those who in fact became UK citizens were 'eligible' for that approach) and there was too little variation to make this approach a plausible alternative. Random-effects models are also necessary when there is reason to believe that time-invariant factors are important predictors; here the relevant variables included place of origin.

Models were constructed by including control variables indicated by previous research on the three separate dependent variables. Sample weights were used, and the specifications also corresponded to clustering at the level of primary sample unit. Where possible, the analysis also incorporated components that corresponded to the stratification of the sample. This is no small endeavour, given the limitations of Stata; it required implementing some models via gllamm.

In our proposal, we wrote that we would restrict the quantitative analysis to people who arrived before 2007. On reflection, it became clear that restricting the analysis in this way was not a coherent idea. The intention was to try to ensure that we would focus on people who took the 'Life in the UK' test with the intention of gaining citizenship (noting that after 2007 the test was required for gaining ILR – so, some who remained non-citizens as of Wave 6 would nonetheless have taken the test). But the restriction doesn't achieve this goal: someone who arrived before 2007 could easily apply for ILR (but not citizenship) at a later point.

In the end, there is simply no way to know who (in the non-citizen category) has taken the test for gaining ILR and who has not. The only useful angle here is to note that becoming a citizen means that one has 'participated fully' in the 'citizenship process', meaning that they have done the test and participated in the ceremony. Apart from that, the fact that some non-citizens have taken the test is something to be noted as a limitation of the analysis.

## **Mixed methods**

Use of mixed methods was a key component of the project as planned. Progress in this regard was impeded by an unfortunate error of the company that implements the 'Understanding Society' survey. This error meant that the quantitative component of the project was delayed by a year. In consequence, all the qualitative data was collected before the quantitative analysis could begin; it was not possible to orient the qualitative interviews around emerging findings of the quantitative analysis.

We are nonetheless pursuing the mixed methods angle of the project. Throughout the research process, we combined our qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to foster broader reflections and analyse our results jointly. This mixed methods approach led us to:

- design our interview schedule by taking into account the questions included in the Understanding Society survey
- Reflect on the consequences of community dynamics and migration trajectories on political participation and belonging
- Use information from the Understanding Society survey in order to design our coding frame
- Use qualitative findings – e.g. on women's experiences and differences and similarities across nationalities – to explore new possibilities for quantitative analysis of women of specific nationalities, currently in progress

# Notes

<sup>i</sup>Please see appendices 'Methods and Reflections on the Research Process' and our project website <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/sociology/research/uk-citizenship-process-for-further-details>.

<sup>ii</sup>Scholars such as Tariq Modood draw this context to our attention (2012: 14).

<sup>iii</sup>Please see: Casey Review 2016: 168. Accessible online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>

<sup>iv</sup>These requirements vary, e.g. residence requirement if the applicant is married to a British citizen.

For further details please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/life-in-the-uk-test>

For an overview of naturalization in 2015 please see:

Blinder 2016 'Naturalisation as British Citizen: Concepts and Trends':

<http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Briefing-Naturalisation.pdf>

In this study we focus mainly on foreign nationals who have lived in the UK for the five year period. Our study also includes people who apply for/have applied for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). Please note that there are other paths to naturalization, but they are not the primary focus of this study.

<sup>v</sup>For details please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/english-language/approved-english-language-qualifications>

<sup>vi</sup>Blinder notes that 'The majority of refusals since 2002 have been because of failure to meet either the residence or the 'good character' requirements. English language requirements and the Life in the UK test account for a small percentage of rejected naturalisation applications, but may deter additional potential applicants' (Blinder 2016: 2). We discuss 'good character' below.

<sup>vii</sup>Home Office 2015: 7-8.

<sup>viii</sup>Van Oers 2009.

<sup>ix</sup>Groenendijk, Guild and Carrera 2009

<sup>x</sup>Fortier 2013, 2017; Byrne 2014, 2017; Khan, forthcoming; Cooke 2009.

<sup>xi</sup>Please see Portes & Zhou 1993 on 'segmented assimilation'.

<sup>xii</sup>Cantle 2001.

<sup>xiii</sup>Modood 2012.

<sup>xiv</sup>Byrne 2017; Fortier 2013.

<sup>xv</sup>Brubaker 2003; Joppke 2004; Back et al. 2002.

<sup>xvi</sup>Goodhart 2004.

<sup>xvii</sup>Cheong et al. 2007; Pilkington 2008; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005.

<sup>xviii</sup>Kiwan 2008.

<sup>xix</sup>Home Office 2004, 3.

<sup>xx</sup>Kiwan 2008, 72.

<sup>xxi</sup>Blackledge 2006.

<sup>xxii</sup>Brooks 2016.

<sup>xxiii</sup>Osler 2009; Byrne 2017.

<sup>xxiv</sup>Kostakopoulou, 2010; Van Houdt et al. 2011.

<sup>xxv</sup>Fortier, 2017; Turner 2014; Merolli 2016; Aptekar 2015.

<sup>xxvi</sup>Byrne, 2014, 2017; Fassin and Mazouz, 2007; Kostakopoulou 2010.

<sup>xxvii</sup>Ryan 2008; Ryan 2010 ; van Oers 2010.

<sup>xxviii</sup>Ryan 2010. <http://www.rgsi.edu.lv/images/stories/INTEC/uk%20intec%20final.pdf> For more recent pass rate statistics, for the period following our study please see:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/308769/FOI\\_30799\\_Statistics.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/308769/FOI_30799_Statistics.pdf)

<sup>xxix</sup>Morrice 2017.

<sup>xxx</sup>Kalra and Kapoor 2009; Burnett 2004.

<sup>xxxi</sup>Kundnani 2007.

<sup>xxxii</sup>Blackledge 2006; Cooke 2009; Groenendijk, Guild and Carrera, 2009; Cooke 2009; Scheffer 2011.

<sup>xxxiii</sup>We recognize the challenges of referring to what are in fact quite diverse groups as 'communities'. The groups we worked with self-identify as such: the Polish and Indian communities in Leicester; the Chinese, Bangladeshi and Latin American communities in London.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>The 'Understanding Society' survey project can be reviewed here: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/>

<sup>xxxv</sup>Byrne 2017.

<sup>xxxvi</sup>BBC (2013). 'UK citizenship test "to cover Britain's greats"' January 28. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21221773>

<sup>xxxvii</sup>This is a level of B1 on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). It has been described as 'independent user' level. Please see: <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cefr-en.pdf>

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Many websites rank countries by their 'visa free power'. For example, the Passport Index ranks the United Kingdom passport in the third group for 'visa free score', meaning it is third for the number of countries to which it is possible to travel without a visa. <https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php>

<sup>xxxix</sup>When participants are few in number we have referred to the broader geographical region for reasons of anonymity.

<sup>xl</sup> Aptekar 2015; Jones-Correa 1998.

<sup>xli</sup> As we note above, questions about history and culture have now been added on and prioritised in the most recent version of the test instead of information about accessing services.

<sup>xlii</sup> Khan, forthcoming

<sup>xliii</sup> This fee came into effect as of April 2017, and is subject to change. Please see:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/607005/NationalityFeesLeaflet\\_2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/607005/NationalityFeesLeaflet_2017.pdf)

<sup>xliv</sup> The law stipulates that, among other criteria, you can apply for British citizenship if “you’re of good character, for example, you don’t have a serious or recent criminal record, and you haven’t tried to deceive the Home Office or been involved in immigration offences in the last 10 years” <https://www.gov.uk/becoming-a-british-citizen/check-if-you-can-apply>

<sup>xlv</sup> For further details please see the Home Office website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chapter-18-naturalisation-at-discretion-nationality-instructions>

<sup>xlvi</sup> Please see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/591727/Form\\_AN\\_02-17.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591727/Form_AN_02-17.pdf)

<sup>xlvii</sup> In 2015, 10,642 naturalisation applications were refused (9% of total applications). Of these, 4521 were refused because applicants were deemed to be ‘not of good character’, a share of 42%. Since 2002, the majority of refusals have been because of failure to meet either the residence or the ‘good character’ requirements. Please see Blinder 2016: 2, 7.

<http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Briefing-Naturalisation.pdf>

<sup>xlviii</sup> Please note that these costs varied, as participants had taken or were planning to take the test and undergo the process at different times.

<sup>xlix</sup> It proved very difficult to calculate average lengths because of different perceptions of when the official process in fact began, and because people were at different stages of the process.

<sup>l</sup> For the text of the Act please see:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/19/contents/enacted/data.htm>

For the Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association (ILPA) guide to the Act please see:

<http://migrantsrights.org.uk/blog/2017/03/20/ilpa-immigration-act-2016-guide-published/>

For examples of critiques of the Act as divisive and counterproductive, please see:

<https://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/campaigning/immigration-act-2016>

<sup>li</sup> Please see McNamara and Ryan 2011.

<sup>lii</sup> McIlwaine and Bunge (2016) make this observation in their report *Towards Visibility: the Latin American Community in London*. London: Queen Mary University of London & Trust for London.

<https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Towards-Visibility-full-report.pdf>

<sup>liii</sup> Bloemraad 2006.

<sup>liiv</sup> Researchers have analysed similar processes in the United States and in France Mazouz 2012; Menjivar and Lakhani 2016.

<sup>liv</sup> Turner 2014.

<sup>lvi</sup> These arguments are developed in greater detail in Bassel 2016:

<http://discoversociety.org/2016/12/09/the-casey-review-on-opportunity-and-integration-re-inventing-the-wheel/>

<sup>lvii</sup> McNamara 2012.

<sup>lviii</sup> McNamara & Roeber 2006; McNamara 2012.

<sup>lix</sup> For details please see our project website:

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/sociology/research/uk-citizenship-process>

<sup>lx</sup> Atkinson 1998.

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