



UPSTREAM Policy Brief Nr. 3

Into the Mainstream: Rethinking Public Services for Diverse and Mobile Populations – Policy Brief

Elizabeth Collett, Meghan Benton, Helen McCarthy

Introduction

Europe is experiencing a deep social and economic transformation, at the heart of which is large-scale international migration and the challenges it can create for labour markets, communities, and individuals. The increased diversity of minority groups' immigration status, country of origin, and length of stay, often described as 'superdiversity'ⁱ, is drastically changing localities. Less commonly noted but equally important is the trend of 'hypermobility': the churn created by large numbers of people coming and going can put pressure on existing reception and integration policies, the bulk of which are designed to accommodate permanent migration.

Against the backdrop of these twin trends, the concept of 'mainstreaming' immigrant integration has become more popular. Mainstreaming captures the idea that integration policy requires a whole-of-government response, including strong cooperation between different policy portfolios and the national and local level. But despite the intuitive appeal of the concept of mainstreaming, the term is understood differently in different contexts and has been used to describe a range of processes.

This policy brief outlines research undertaken in five countries (and the EU) to examine this renewed interest in mainstreaming and how it was being utilised in practice.ⁱⁱ It exposes the risks and opportunities associated with the idea of mainstreaming integration, whether and how mainstreaming is understood outside of integration circles (or even inside them), and whether it is helping or hindering policymakers as they design public services to accommodate mobility and diversity.

Properly understood, mainstreaming is a call to action for countries failing to meet the needs of diverse populations. Rethinking public services – from schools to public employment services – to ensure they are fit to serve superdiverse and hypermobile populations is vital if Europe is to regain its economic competitiveness. The impetus for change is clear, but is mainstreaming practice living up to expectation?

The Benefits and Drawbacks

Rapid social and cultural change has forced many European countries to adopt inclusive notions of what it means to belong. But ideologies about how to include newcomers in social and economic institutions have tended to dominate the debate, to the detriment of practical investments. Addressing real issues, such as how an elderly person with limited language proficiency can access services they need, or how a young engineer trained in a different education system can persuade an employer they have sufficient training, have become something of an afterthought.

In recent years, the idea of “mainstreaming” has appealed to both public servants dealing with practical integration issues and politicians and academics disillusioned with debates about multiculturalism. But it has not been interpreted consistently.ⁱⁱⁱ In places such as the Netherlands and Scandinavia, which had designated integration ministries, mainstreaming has meant a shift toward supporting newcomers largely through generic, mainstream policies. By contrast, in countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, which lacked direction from central government, mainstreaming can mean new structures to improve cross-government coordination on integration issues or efforts to enhance diversity awareness across public services.

There are a number of recent trends that could be or have been labelled ‘mainstreaming’:

- ***Shift from targeted to generic policies.*** A shift away move away from targeted policies, sometimes in favour of alternative ways to channel resources, such as those that focus on neighbourhood or parental background, rather than immigration status (e.g. Netherlands).
- ***Political or economic constraints that prevent targeting.*** Constitutional commitments not to differentiate citizens by group (e.g. France) or financial constraints that mean immigrants are de facto supported only through mainstream services (e.g. Poland, Spain).
- ***Public narratives emphasising all of society.*** Integration discourse that emphasises the whole population, as in the case of ‘community cohesion’ in the United Kingdom or city’s ‘inclusion’ strategies.
- ***Whole-of-government cooperation on integration issues.*** The creation of cross-governmental bodies to encourage dialogue across different portfolios or between national and local governments.
- ***Opening up public services for diverse populations.*** Reforms to prevent services from having an adverse impact on certain groups, from improving access to services to overhauling education systems that harm learners of migrant background.

But the concept has not always been employed in policy circles as an impetus for action, and it suffers **from a number of drawbacks:**

- ***Excusing decreased investment or inaction.*** In some cases, mainstreaming can be and has been used to relinquish responsibility for integration and may sideline, rather than promote, integration priorities in the public sector, allowing governments to direct resources elsewhere.
- ***Deprioritising integration.*** Even if officials have the best of intentions, departments that do not have an integration mandate may lack the capacity and specialist knowledge to address the needs of migrants and minorities, especially at a time of austerity. Without vocal advocates, or a responsible body, the impetus for change may be lost.

Thus, the main challenge with the term ‘mainstreaming’ is that the different policy tools that fall under this banner function independently of one another. For instance, it is possible to jettison targeted programmes in the name of mainstreaming without making any positive efforts to strengthen cross-governmental cooperation or improve diversity awareness, which practitioners have identified as key. Herein lies the danger implicit in the idea of mainstreaming: it can lead, intentionally or accidentally, to less support for immigrants, rather than more.

But, properly understood as a whole-of-government approach to integration, mainstreaming can provide a guiding ethos for governments seeking to reform public services to meet the needs of diverse and mobile populations. It is especially helpful in highlighting the continuum of ntegration needs faced by diverse and mobile groups. Mainstreaming should therefore be understood as a call

to action: policymakers must both ***mobility-proof*** and ***diversity-proof*** public services, which means rigorously auditing and then reforming services to ensure that they are fit to serve diverse and mobile populations (see Box 1).

Box 1. The New Mainstreaming: Mobility-proofing and diversity-proofing Public Services

- **Mobility-proofing.** Migrants who move on a short-term or circular basis may require intensive initial support and may be less likely to invest in local communities. Adapting services to mobility means adapting to the realities of high population turnover, and supporting swift access to services to prevent greater problems emerging further down the line.
- **Diversity-proofing.** Ensuring public services are fit to serve diverse populations demands deep investments, long term thinking and more substantive changes to overcome institutional discrimination and systemic bias. To fully diversity-proof public services, enhancing the diversity-awareness of the workforce, either through training or directly hiring diverse groups, is key.

Source: Authors' own analysis

**Rethinking
Public Policies**

Mainstreaming is a process that can benefit all of society and not just those with an immigrant background. This brief focuses on two areas of policy in which the ethos of mainstreaming may support positive changes to public services: education and social cohesion policy. These by no means represent the totality of reforms necessary to mobility-proof and diversity-proof public services, but they illustrate the direction that mainstreaming can take in practice.

Education

In the field of education, migration presents a number of challenges. Most obvious are the difficulties faced by newly arrived pupils, who may not speak the host country language (and whose prior educational experiences may have been lacking). However, beyond that, research indicates that the children of immigrants may continue to be disadvantaged in the school system, due to a range of factors including language spoken at home, to lowered expectations from teaching staff, and that socio-economic status has a significant effect, a characteristic shared with a broader segment of the population.

- **Providing host language support** for new arrivals can be key. Many countries provide catch up classes to support recently arrived pupils, the length and character of which varies considerably. These classes appear to be more successful when schools are given enough flexibility to respond to the needs of pupils (for instance by being allowed to provide additional support beyond a certain period). But the most effective schools orientate the *entire* school towards addressing language needs (for instance through training all teachers on supporting a continuum of language needs), instead of limiting language support to catch-up classes, which may not be enough to achieve fluency.
- **Engaging with families.** Some schools seek to support new arrivals through engaging with families, e.g. by providing language training or advice on parenting and/or the school system. In this way the school can act as a community hub. In the long term ongoing engagement with parents can help education providers understand complex and

overlapping needs. Such approaches work best when the entire school is committed and when contact with families is sustained over time. This may be more likely to occur where there is a dedicated position on the school staff such as a community development coordinator or inclusion manager.

Local autonomy has the advantage of allowing schools to provide extra support where necessary, but creates the risk that integration needs are ignored in those schools where the immigrant population is not seen as a concern. An additional risk is that, in most countries, collaboration among schools is rare, making it unlikely that innovative practice will spread. While most schools recognise the importance of providing language support to new arrivals, to be successful, support needs to be embedded in broader school-wide inclusion strategies that also consider the needs of second- and third-generation pupils. These approaches also require adequate investment in teachers and schools more broadly, as well as a balance between oversight and flexibility.

Social cohesion policy is often a poorly defined (and understood) policy area, and may encompass a broad range of policy areas and interventions. It is characterised by the need to ensure equal access to services and the labour market—including through housing, health, education, and anti-poverty programmes—as well as to promote positive community interactions and relations. At the heart of all promising practices are efforts to reduce discrimination.

- ***Addressing inequalities in access to mainstream services.*** Ensuring everyone is able to access public services is essential to building an inclusive society. New arrivals may face particular barriers to access, creating the risk that worse challenges build up further down the line. ‘One stop shops’, which bring together multiple services under one roof, can act as the first point of call for people who may not otherwise know how to navigate local institutions and services. Translation and interpretation services are vital for people to adequately access services and know their rights, but remain patchy (in part because of political sensitivities).
- ***Investing in neighbourhood organisations.*** Local neighbourhood associations can build a sense of community and a stake in the local environment. One especially promising example for fostering local cohesiveness can be found in Spain, where intercultural mediation initiatives coordinate local programmes and build on existing community networks.
- ***Campaigns to raise awareness of and challenge discrimination.*** All EU member states now have equality legislation that is in line with EU standards but translating rights on paper into rights in practice remains a challenge. In a number of countries levels of reporting of discrimination remain very low and in some countries, ‘colour blind’ policies make monitoring the existence of such discrimination very difficult. Local organisations that are close to the ground can play an important role in supporting people to make claims and run awareness raising campaigns. Nonetheless the effectiveness such work will be limited if the issue becomes politicised and in this respect political leadership can play a big role.
- ***Improving the diversity awareness of the public sector workforce*** Lack of understanding of diversity among frontline staff can perpetuate cycles of exclusion. Countries increasingly provide diversity training programmes for public facing frontline staff to help develop awareness of the different needs of different communities. However, such training varies in quality and reach. Employing a more diverse workforce is a more direct approach to improving diversity-awareness in the public sector, and can have a number of other positive outcomes, such as supporting access to decent jobs for disadvantaged groups and tapping into specialist language skills and knowledge. While some countries have introduced

initiatives that support the recruitment of more diverse staff, more could be done to improve diversity awareness among public sector staff.

Social cohesion is notoriously intangible, making it difficult to measure the success of related efforts. Many of the interventions involve incremental changes, rather than wholesale systemic reform. Nonetheless, investing in this area of policy whether through improving access to services, or developing anti-discrimination campaigns can prove cost-effective in the long run. In addition, governments can prioritise approaches that address diversity in the public-sector workforce, which offers a number of quantifiable benefits for the delivery of public services, as well as demonstrating leadership by example.

Innovations in governance to support the needs of diverse and mobile populations fall into two camps. Decentralisation allows local authorities more room to respond to variable needs, while whole-of-government coordination is needed to ensure that integration challenges are addressed across policy portfolios.

One of the main challenges facing local authorities is the concentration of newly arrived or disadvantaged communities with specific needs. Local authorities, responsible for delivering programmes on the ground to individuals of all backgrounds, may be both better placed to respond to diverse needs, and more inclined to do so: turning people away is rarely an option. Improving flexibility in funding at the local level is thus one way to allow localities to tailor services to diversity.

Examples of this include:

- **Area based policies:** such as priority zones in France, in which deprived areas receive more funding;
- **Pupil premiums:** such as in the UK, where schools receive extra funding for disadvantaged children;
- **Dedicated child care places:** such as in the Netherlands where municipalities provide free early years places for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Greater local freedom allows frontline workers and service providers to tailor interventions to the needs of the local population. But flexibility may sometimes be a double-edged sword. Some places may lack the political will to implement promising practices. In others, devolution can create policy incoherence, especially if top-down regulatory requirements are developed without sufficient consultation with the local level.

Funding models based on measures of economic disadvantage rather than other indicators also have advantages and disadvantages. They can allow governments to address a broader population with similar need, without recourse to immigrant status or other identifiers. On the downside, they may divert actors from identifying specific integration needs, or make these needs more difficult to address. And some disadvantaged groups may be left out of programmes completely: they may fail to meet eligibility criteria or be unaware of their entitlements. Ultimately, it may come down to whether socioeconomic status or immigrant background is a greater determinant of success in the host country.

Successful integration governance at local level also depends on good data. Approaches to data collection vary widely in different countries across Europe, but problems of over- and undercounting plague all local authorities, making planning and budgeting difficult, especially where resources are linked to population levels. If policymakers are to adequately meet the needs

Rethinking Governance Models

Increased flexibility at the local level

of a mobile and diverse population they need to improve the monitoring of integration outcomes across generations, which may involve taking a much more comprehensive approach towards data collection.

National governments also have a role to play in mitigating possible gaps by encouraging localities to share good practice, and by providing complementary tools to address sources of need (such as supplementary funding for language support, and means to collect and use data).

Diversity has become a fact of life, and one that affects all mainstream services. Integration thus requires a coordinated, whole-of-government response. While cross-departmental and multilevel cooperation are rare, some countries are beginning to strengthen this area:

- **Interministerial cooperation.** Coordination across policy portfolios is most effective when it is formalised at a high level. A number of countries have interministerial groups on some aspect of migration policy or related areas such as social mobility or equality. Making use of such forums to discuss *integration* policy, or creating a similar mechanism for integration could drive momentum on this issue forward. Whether using existing mechanisms or creating new ones, these need political buy in.
- **Local partnerships.** Local actors can be better at brokering relationships than central government; promising approaches convene a wide set of stakeholders to forge holistic responses to localised challenges. For instance, the Rotterdam Zuid area-based project brings together local and national government, employers, housing associations, and educational institutions. Although the programme is relatively new and its results will not be apparent for some time, the mix of partners means the team can think through barriers to participation that students may face across their educational lifecycle and support the entire family to improve aspirations and attainment.

Promoting successful integration is seen as part and parcel of an increasingly coordinated migration policy at the EU level. Despite having limited competence to act in this field, the European Union seeks to influence through a number of mechanisms, including policy coordination, data collection, funding and promoting partnerships and learning.^{iv} It has also made a commitment to mainstreaming integration policy, although the extent to which this commitment is followed through across each of these activities varies considerably.^v

- **Policy coordination.** Competences for integration are scattered across the Commission. In theory this could represent a mainstreamed approach. In reality, coordination is severely lacking and further complicated by the division of responsibility between third country nationals versus mobile EU citizens. The European Commission has made use of some soft policy coordination mechanisms, such as the European Semester, to try to steer member states' integration policies. However, while integration is explicitly mentioned in some country reports, these rarely make it into the recommendations, as the European Commission must balance multiple goals and priorities within the annual recommendations.
- **EU funding responding to localised challenges.** The European Social Fund and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund have had some influence on integration priorities, by 1) funding migrants as beneficiaries 2) funding grass roots NGOs and 3) driving forward social inclusion policy. But in other respects EU funding has not lived up to its promise. EU funds are rarely employed in a way that stimulates local innovation or allows local stakeholders to address challenges that are not in line with national priorities. Despite a formal commitment at the EU level to mainstreaming, no systematic attempts to promote mainstreaming through EU funds have been made and EU funding has not shaped national priorities or encouraged mainstreaming beyond a focus on labour market integration.^{vi}

- **Promoting partnerships and learning.** The European Union promotes learning through the European Migration Network, the European Migration Forum, and a number of city-to-city networks. While these networks play an important role, there is a risk that they are preaching to the converted rather than bringing in different groups. For instance, few networks and cooperative structures exist that try to encourage debate about integration issues with people from policy areas that do not explicitly include an integration mandate such as housing and health.

While the European Commission has sought to influence integration policy and to introduce a degree of coordination between member states, integration remains a national competence. As discussion of integration is often highly politicised, member states may resist influence from the European Union in this area, particularly when it goes against national policies.

In conclusion

Mainstreaming immigrant integration involves taking a whole-of-government approach to retuning public services to ensure that they are fit for the populations they serve: increasingly diverse and mobile ones. But thus far, no country has lived up to the mainstreaming ideal. Instead, mainstreaming has sometimes been used as an excuse for cuts, often at the expense of innovative, needs-based services.

Diversity- and mobility-proofing public services—that is, ensuring that services are attuned to the needs of diverse groups and new arrivals—provides a rich roadmap for policymakers seeking to mainstream immigrant integration. Such an approach will involve a mix of targeted and generic policies, and a strong focus on horizontal and vertical cooperation. Designing such a whole-of-government integration strategy is no easy feat, and will depend on the political and economic constraints of the country. Nonetheless, there are likely to be a number of key elements for national governments, including:

- **Set up structures for horizontal coordination.** Whether interministerial groups or other cross-cutting bodies, national governments need to promote communication and cooperation across different departments.
- **Rigorously audit and assess services** to ensure they are both diversity- and mobility-proof. Mainstreaming is above all a call to scrutinise and evaluate whether public services are open and responsive to the needs of diverse groups. Monitoring and evaluation is of paramount importance; indeed all other policy recommendations will flow from these findings.
- **Monitor and recalibrate funding models.** Adopting proxy strategies, such as funding models that target disadvantaged groups or areas instead of minorities, may be an alternative way to channel resources in difficult economic times. But since each funding model must necessarily make decisions about whom to exclude, it is important to monitor closely who is left out of differentiated funding models and plug the gaps or recalibrate where necessary.
- **Make hiring multilingual staff and ethnic minorities a priority.** Equal opportunities processes can be complemented with other strategies to boost hiring, such as adding a premium for multilingualism. This approach compensates staff for their additional work as a language teacher or translator, reflecting additional responsibilities instead of preferential treatment, and thus may be perceived as more neutral than traditional positive discrimination interventions.

The European institutions need to consider:

- **Creating an inter-service group for integration.** Coordination in the Commission is ad hoc and reliant on specific individuals. Creating an inter-service group with the power to bring together policy officials from across the DGs, including from health, justice and regional

policy would promote joined-up thinking on integration which moves beyond a focus on labour market integration.

- **Improving mechanisms for three-way dialogue between the national level, regional and local level.** Currently there is patchy communication between the three levels of government on questions of integration. There is an opportunity for the Commission to use existing mechanisms to more effectively promote dialogue between the local, national and EU level. Meetings of National Contact Points on Integration could be opened up to include certain city and regional level representatives. These meetings could also coordinate with other expert meetings (for example on education) to create jumbo meetings to promote cross fertilization of ideas.
- **Rebranding mainstreaming.** There is a lack of shared understanding of the concept 'mainstreaming', which limits the value of term. Instead the phrase 'adapting services to diverse and mobile populations' could help the ethos of mainstreaming to flourish while clearly labelling the twin challenges integration policies seek to address.
- **Improving flexibility and innovation in the administration of EU funding.** The move to promote integration projects through the ESF is to be welcomed, but reducing the administrative burden, including by allowing funds to be used together, could support innovation by promoting engagement of smaller actors. Allowing Asylum, Migration and Integration funding to be used for integration needs regardless of distinction between EU citizen, third country national and undocumented migrants would also be an important step forward. Providing more specific guidelines on definitions of target groups for social inclusion priorities for the ESF would provide greater transparency of how the money is spent. Finally, the Commission should put pressure on member states to ensure the national administrative procedures are simplified and that local stakeholders are meaningfully engaged during the design of national priorities.
- **Preaching beyond the converted.** Ensuring that policy networks are engaging beyond the 'usual suspects' and include policymakers that may not be traditionally considered as 'interested in' integration would be an important step forward. Moving outside the 'Brussels bubble' with work visits to local organizations is one way to ensure that more diverse voices are heard. Including migrant-led organizations as part of the conversation is also vital to designing effective policies.

Local government options include:

- **Pooling resources,** in order to be better placed to get EU funding would help meet local needs and ensure the local level can feed back into the EU debate. Engagement in local level networks, such as EURO CITIES, is an important part of this.
- **Improving data collection** and monitoring across policy areas to ensure that policies are effective and engaging with desired groups. This may require collecting more data on a range of different indicators across policy areas to effectively analyse how interventions are reaching different groups.
- **Investing in relationships with civil society.** As civil society is increasingly being asked to shoulder the burden with regards to integration, it is important to ensure there are effective channels of communication open between local policymakers and civil society.
- **Coordinating horizontally.** As at the national level, it's important that policy officers are coordinating across policy portfolios on questions of integration for diverse and mobile populations. This could be achieved through working groups at the level of officials, or committees at the level of local politicians.

Clearly, it may be difficult to make the political case for extra investments in an era of fiscal constraints; however, the idea of mainstreaming lends itself to mobilising resources from across policy areas. Taking a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to adapting public services to the needs of increasingly mobile and diverse populations is likely to reduce the potential for problems to build up further down the line. Moreover, improving the resilience of public services to the needs of minorities is likely to benefit the public broadly, as it ensures that educational and employment institutions are responsive to a continuum of needs. Many of the proposals outlined here are low-investment, and require a smart redeployment of resources rather than extra funding. The case for mainstreaming—whatever label it is given—is clear.

Contact

For more information on UPSTREAM, this policy brief, or any questions in this regard, please contact:
Ms. Ilona van Breugel
Erasmus University Rotterdam – Department of Public Administration
vanbreugel@fsw.eur.nl, T: +31 10-4082039

Project partners

- **Erasmus University Rotterdam** (project coordinator): Dr. Peter Scholten, Ilona van Breugel and Xandra Maan
- **Migration Policy Institute Europe**: Dir. Elizabeth Collett, Dr. Meghan Benton, Helen McCarthy, Paul Clewett
- **COMPAS**: Dr. Ben Gidley, Dr. Ole Jensen
- **Universitat Complutense Madrid**: Prof.dr. Joaquin Arango, Dr. Elisa Brey, Dr. María Sánchez-Domínguez and Dr. Daniel Sorando.
- **Centre of Migration Research**: Ignacy Jozwiak, Dr. Joanna Nestorowicz, Dr. Magdalena Lesinska
- **INED Paris**: Prof.dr. Patrick Simon, Mélodie Beaujeu

Erasmus
University
Rotterdam



CENTRE OF
MIGRATION
RESEARCH



ⁱ Steven Vertovec, 'Super-diversity and its Implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007): 1024–54.

ⁱⁱ The UPSTREAM project, details of which can be found at <http://project-upstream.eu>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Xandra Maan, Ilona van Breugel, and Peter Scholten, *The Politics of Mainstreaming: A comparative analysis of migrant integration governance in Europe*, UPSTREAM comparative report (Rotterdam: Project UPSTREAM, 2015), <http://project-upstream.eu/publications/comparative-reports/241-the-politics-of-mainstreaming-a-comparative-analysis-of-migrant-integration-governance-in-europe>.

^{iv} Meghan Benton, Elizabeth Collett, and Helen McCarthy, *The Practice of Mainstreaming Immigrant Integration Policies at European Level*, UPSTREAM case study report, (Rotterdam, UPSTREAM Project 2015).

^v Elizabeth Collett and Milica Petrovic, *The Politics of Mainstreaming, Immigrant Integration Policies: Case Study of the EU*. UPSTREAM case study report, (Rotterdam: UPSTREAM Project, 2014), <http://project-upstream.eu/publications/17-country-reports/228-the-politics-of-mainstreaming-immigrant-integration-policies-case-study-of-the-eu>.

^{vi} It remains to be seen whether a new commitment to spend 20 percent of the ESF on social inclusion, including integration projects, results in more innovative uses of the ESF over the next funding period