



4 JUNE 2018

**Wonder Foundation Written Response:
Ministry Of Housing, Communities & Local Government**

Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Wonder Foundation is a London-based charity dedicated to empowering vulnerable people through education. We work with local-led partners around the world to help women, girls, and their families access the education and support they need to exit poverty, for good.
- 1.2. The Wonder Foundation has several ongoing initiatives and projects dealing specifically with refugees, migrants, and integrated communities in the United Kingdom. Our work in this area encompasses project delivery, research, fundraising, policy development, and youth engagement.
- 1.3. In 2016, the Wonder Foundation released *Empowerment through Education: Women Breaking the English Barrier*¹, a report on the challenges that migrant women in the UK face when accessing English language learning. Wonder conducted interviews with vulnerable migrant women, community workers, and ESOL teachers to hear, reflect on, and respond to their experiences with English language provision in the UK.
- 1.4. From 2017-2018, the Wonder Foundation ran *Knowing Me, Knowing You*, a project to engage young people on the topic of social integration. This included inviting expert policy-makers, academics, and young people from across the UK to share and develop policies geared towards fostering integration and generating solidarity with new migrants.
- 1.5. In 2018, the Wonder Foundation launched the FATIMA project, a ground-breaking operation that aims to engage and empower migrant women living in the UK, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain. The FATIMA project uses a personalised and holistic approach to support the economic, social, cultural, and political integration of 210 women. Each woman receives individualised support through language classes, mentoring, civic engagement programmes, volunteering, and work experience.
- 1.6. Given our organization's areas of focus, our written response to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Green Paper will focus on addressing questions posed in the Introduction (Building Integrated Communities), Chapter 2 (Supporting New Migrants), Chapter 4 (Boosting English Language Learning), and Chapter 7 (Rights and Freedoms).

¹ You can find our report here: <http://wonderfoundation.org.uk/resources/report-women-breaking-english-barrier>



2. Building Integrated Communities: We define integrated communities as communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Do you agree with our definition?

2.1. We agree that “Integration is a shared responsibility and is a two-way process between migrants and their local communities”, but also that it is more than that. The burden to integrate should not and does not fall solely on the shoulders of the immigrant. It is critical that actual policy, and not just rhetoric, reflects the claim that host communities also have important responsibilities to undertake in the integration process. Integration is complex. ‘British Culture’ is almost impossible to define and dominant attitudes, value and behaviours vary across the UK and according to people’s socioeconomic backgrounds. We agree with the statement that integration is a *‘Spaghetti Junction’*, i.e. *a complicated, dense set of intersections, crossroads and junctions going in lots of different directions*². Many British people would also face challenges in ‘integrating’ were they to move to other parts of the country, or even within their own cities.

2.2. It is important to recognize that integrated communities must also be welcoming communities. In the OECD’s Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015 report, research showed that countries who were most successful with regard to the civic engagement outcomes of migrants were those that had a more welcoming attitude towards them. While non-discrimination is a crucial aspect of a welcoming society, it is not enough. Positive measures to create a more accepting and inclusive environment, such as the funding of local mentoring and befriending initiatives, should be pursued.

2.3. Wonder believes that truly meaningful social mixing in integrated communities occurs with the understanding that natives and migrants can approach each other as equals. While members of the host community may naturally take a leadership or mentor role in facilitating the inclusion of new migrants, such interactions should not presume or produce a power imbalance. As a complex transaction, integration requires mutual appreciation and understanding of different cultural norms and life experiences.

3. Building Integrated Communities: Do you have any examples of successful approaches to encourage integration that you wish to highlight, particularly approaches which have been subject to evaluation?

3.1. The Wonder Foundation would like to highlight the FATIMA³ (Female Active Citizenship Training Integration Migrant Accompaniment) project, our newly launched collaboration with the EU that provides individualised, holistic support for the integration of female migrants. This project

² British Council, 2013, ‘Whose Integration?’ https://esol.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/informational-page/Whose%20Integration_0.pdf

³ Information and updates about the FATIMA project can be found at <https://www.wonderfoundation.org.uk/fatima-project>



was designed by and for migrant women, through focus groups, analysis of previous projects, and extensive desk research.

- 3.2. FATIMA is working to empower migrant women aged between 15 and 50. Each woman will receive one-to-one support from a mentor from the host community, as well as language classes (6 – 12 hours per week), personalised development programmes, volunteer/employability support, and civic inclusion activities. The individualised approach encourages long-term engagement and allows for the provision of tailored, personalised support. Integration activities will be delivered by five partner NGOs over a period of two years.
- 3.3. FATIMA includes the local community in the integration process through events, get-togethers, volunteering opportunities, access to local services, and activities encouraging the overcoming of prejudices. Migrant women are invited to get involved with their local society through family days, visit to schools, and participation in community-wide life.
- 3.4. Indicators of success with the FATIMA project include: an increase in the number of women achieving higher levels of reading, writing, and being understood; an increase in take-up of libraries, children’s centres, and other services; an increase in volunteering; an increase in the number of women able to help children with school homework and participating in parents’ evenings; and an increase in the number of women reporting that they feel less isolated.
- 3.5. The success of FATIMA will be tracked through pre- and post- programme participant surveys, attendance monitoring, journal records, in-depth interviews with participant NGOs, and interviews with teachers and tutors.
- 3.6. The Wonder Foundation would also like to highlight the work done at one of our partner organisations in the UK, the Baytree Centre. Their mission is to, “create supportive pathways towards social inclusion for inner city families through education and training programme for women and girls.”⁴ As they are an organisation with whom we have a strong relationship and is regularly offering English learning services and activities to women, we have included them as a case study and a source of information for our research.
- 3.7. In studying and evaluating their work, we found that Baytree have been able to effectively promote friendship between people from different host and migrant communities as possible and help the people they serve in becoming meaningful members of society. This success is perhaps best explained by the fact that they offer contextualised support in a supportive, welcoming, safe, and inclusive community-based spaces. For example, their PEARL programme, which offers ESOL classes coupled with social activities, helps to bring women together to learn English in a fun, engaging, and social way.
- 3.8. Their impact is truly felt by the people they serve. One of their former students shared her experience with Baytree and her account captures the impact of this organisation in shaping her

⁴ You can learn more about the services offered at The Baytree Centre by visiting their website: <http://www.baytreecentre.org/>



life in London. Specifically, she explained how the English classes she participated in helped her gain the confidence needed to pursue her goal of working for the NHS, as well as learn how to make meaningful and lasting friendships with women from different countries and cultures. More importantly, she shared that the support she received from Baytree motivated her to pursue outreach work with her community on health promotion campaigns and maternal health.

3.9. Another former student also had a similar experience. As a refugee from Kosovo, she arrived with a very limited command of the English language. However, by enrolling in the English and literacy classes at Baytree, she was given the support and guidance needed to not only learn English and acquire the skills needed to become a qualified accountant, but also become an ambassador and friend to newcomers to the Centre and London.

4. Chapter 2, Supporting New Migrants and Resident Communities: The Green Paper proposes measures to support recent migrants so that they have the information they need to integrate into society and understand British values and their rights and responsibilities. Do you agree with this approach?

4.1. Wonder recognizes the importance of reaching out to and supporting newly arrived migrants. Our own research notes the importance of early action: as described in our *Women Breaking the English Barrier*⁵ report, we found that women who were not able to access English classes soon after arrival found it increasingly difficult to start learning later on.

4.2. However, we find the focus on the *Life in the UK* test and “British values” to be disproportionate and misplaced. In order to foster long-term integration, there must be greater opportunity for migrants and local residents to meet early on and to interact as equals. It should not simply fall on the migrant to seek out and create these interactions; rather, the government should encourage and facilitate nationals to engage with migrants and fund initiatives that create opportunities for social mixing. Addressing social isolation in this way is more sustainable and effective than theoretical discussion of British values, and will more effectively ensure that migrants become aware of British norms and practices.

4.3. While quick and successful integration may be an ideal outcome, it is likely to be out of reach for many immigrants. The difficulty of learning a new language, negotiating new cultural norms, getting settled, and managing other responsibilities can be compounded by pre-existing challenges and other barriers. Demands that certain immigrants pass English language tests or prove certain knowledges should thus be accommodating and incorporate the understanding that everyone integrates at their own pace.

4.4. With that in mind, although Wonder is happy to see recognition that refugees arriving in the UK may have particular mental health and wellbeing needs, it bears emphasizing that such needs

⁵ More information about our research into English language learning, including the report in full, can be found at <https://www.wonderfoundation.org.uk/resources/report-women-breaking-english-barrier>



may substantially hinder their ability to fully engage in formal employment, language learning, or other social activities. Ill mental health, stress, dislocation, and trauma can affect learning ability and can lead to other challenges such as depression or poor physical health. Therefore, the expectation that refugees understand British culture and take up English language training must be accompanied by the provision of extensive, accessible, and affordable services, as well as substantial flexibility in expectations of one's pace of integration.

4.5. Additionally, young people from both migrant, minority and host communities in the UK worked together in 2017 and 2018 as part of our 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' project to consider how young people could better integrate. They proposed the expansion of the current National Citizen Service (NCS), which is programme for youth aimed at improving community engagement through an intensive summer programme. Currently, the NCS targets young people aged 15-17, but this policy proposal believes that widening the age cohort to 16 to 29-year olds will enhance social integration between the British white majority, ethnic minorities and migrant groups. Alongside this change, the policy would introduce activities and workshops that facilitate learning around migration and integration. The evidence base and detailed proposal can be found in the footnotes⁶. This activity, along with all of our youth activities, gives young people the chance to encounter peers who they may not come across otherwise, placing them on an equal footing and giving them the opportunity for meaningful social mixing which has led to friendships.

5. Chapter 4, Boosting English Language: The Green Paper proposes a number of measures to improve the offer for people to learn English. Do you agree with this approach?

5.1. We are pleased to see recognition in the Ministry's Green Paper of the importance of providing language learning opportunities that are tailored to particular needs, that are affordable, that are close to one's home or work, that are offered at suitable times, and that build learners' confidence. It is of utmost importance that learning opportunities are responsive to the needs of migrants.

5.2. We support the allocation of funds to increase childcare provision so that parents are able to access English classes. We would like to emphasize that it is imperative that this childcare is low- or no-cost. New parents are time- and energy-poor. Often, new migrants do not have social networks to help with childcare and cannot afford to pay for alternative sources of care. Language learning is thus an impossibility if childcare is not provided.

5.3. We also support the MHCLG's proposed community-based English language programme that would utilize existing community venues, rather than formal learning environments, as sites of English language education. Our research indicates that well-used community spaces can help

⁶ Wonder Foundation, 2018, 'KMKY National Policy Proposal'
<https://www.wonderfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/National%20Policy%20Proposal%20-%20KMKY%20FT.pdf>



women feel more safe and welcome, thus reducing their isolation and encouraging them to build relationships with others.

- 5.4. However, this should not replace the current formal ESOL provision which is much needed, under-funded and over-subscribed. Formal ESOL provision is essential if migrants are going to move into further education and training and realise their academic and professional potential.
- 5.5. We support the Ministry's introduction of an England-wide initiative to encourage more volunteers to participate in setting up and running conversation clubs. Female migrants that we spoke to indicated that it was difficult to meet native English speakers who they could practice their English with. They wanted more opportunities for continued contact with native English speakers, both to improve their English as well as to form new friendships. One of our key recommendations was to develop policies that encouraged members of the host community to mentor and befriend migrant English learners. However, it should be taken into consideration that there is a natural power imbalance between people with a skill and those without. In order for these conversation clubs to lead to genuine relationships, we would recommend non-formal activities where English can be practiced, but the skills and knowledge that migrant women already have can be shared, so that everyone has a chance to learn and to teach.
- 5.6. Wonder would like to see initiatives and approaches that foster language learning opportunities outside classrooms and other formal learning environments. It should be made easier for all migrants to volunteer should they wish to, to allow them to use their skills for the good of society and create new social networks. Complex English-language application processes should not bar them from roles that do not require high English language levels.

6. Chapter 4, Boosting English Language: Do you have any other suggestions on how we can improve the offer for people to learn English?

- 6.1. In Wonder's research report *Empowerment through Education: Women Breaking the English Language Barrier*, we found that when migrant women did not learn English, it was not due to a lack of desire to, but due to a lack of accessible opportunities for English language learning. We would thus recommend a whole-person approach to English language provision, i.e. one that considers the multitude of needs of the learner (for example, the need for childcare provision) and ensures that they are being met.
- 6.2. Given that, as the Green Paper states, more women than men report not speaking English well (2.1% of women compared with 1.5% of men), it is important to recognize and consider the particular challenges faced by migrant women in the UK. A gendered approach to English language education may be necessary to reduce this disparity.



- 6.3. Wonder's research found that many migrant women faced complex practical barriers that prevented them from accessing or attending English language lessons. These barriers included particular mental health challenges, significant care responsibilities, illiteracy in their own language(s), feelings of fear and unfamiliarity, and multi-dimensional poverty. In order to fulfil the stated goal of having every UK resident speak English, local and national policies must consider how these barriers can be broken down for migrants, particularly for vulnerable women.
- 6.4. Migrant women interviewed in the study suggested a number of teaching methods and formats that they felt could enhance their learning. These include:
- 6.4.1. The provision of single-sex (all-female) classes. Although the majority of women interviewed were happy to attend mixed-gender classes, it was often clear that learners were more confident and found it easier to speak up and participate in a female-only environment. Such classes, particularly in the early stages of language learning, could thus increase teaching effectiveness. Wonder is currently conducting research into the effectiveness and impact of women-only classes.
 - 6.4.2. Classes focused on everyday practical knowledge and/or classes that also foster the development of concrete skills, such as technology use or cooking. Women found it discouraging when their lessons lacked relevance to their day-to-day life. While a focus on English for employment may be important, learners also wanted their lessons to allow them to meet needs in their personal or social life.
 - 6.4.3. Opportunities for English language learning that allow for extended socialization, with both other migrants and natives. In our research, women said they found it encouraging when they met friends and developed a social network, as this network would incentivize them to keep up with their education. They also valued these friendships intrinsically, and were happy to meet new people.
- 6.5. English language learning does not have to take place in a classroom. Opportunities where migrants can practice applying their language skills through non-and informal learning, such as through volunteer opportunities, may be equally or more valuable in fostering learning and social integration.
- 6.6. English language education, as well as integration measures more generally, should recognize that women often have responsibilities not only for themselves, but for others, such as their family. These responsibilities are often priorities in women's lives and factor heavily in their self-identity and notions of fulfilment. Strong family relationships and commitments should be celebrated and promoted, both intrinsically and because they can incentivize participation in wider society. It is often the case, for instance, that mothers improve their English skills to ensure that they are able to communicate with their children's friends and teachers. It is thus crucial that women do not have to make sacrifices in their family life in order to participate in integration activities.



7. Chapter 7, Rights and Freedoms: The Green Paper proposes measures to address practices which can impact on the rights of women. Do you agree with this approach?

- 7.1. Wonder applauds the Ministry's recognition of, and attention to, the challenges faced by vulnerable and marginalised women in the UK. Migrant women often face a more pronounced risk of exclusion and social isolation, and face gender discrimination on top of race and class discrimination. It is thus important to take a gendered approach to integration. Wonder strongly believes in fostering women's agency and breaking down the barriers they face in order to allow them be active participants and leaders in their communities.
- 7.2. Wonder believes that policies focusing on women must recognize that women are not simply individuals or economic agents, but are social actors who play a critical role in the integration of their children, families, and wider communities. Whilst women's caring roles are often culturally mediated, the majority of British women also put motherhood ahead of career goals in a 2014 YouGov survey, a similar proportion to women in the MENA region, so the choice to prioritise caring is not contrary to British values⁷.
- 7.3. Women who learn English are able to make informed decisions about their own lives. It is essential to recognise that women face more barriers to learning English than men and that there is purpose in women learning English for their own benefit and empowerment rather than as a means to another end. A woman should not struggle to access English classes because she is not from a community that is seen as a risk or, due to factors such as health or caring responsibilities is not in a position to go into paid work.
- 7.4. The Green Paper's focus on sharia law, forced marriage, and extremism does not adequately recognize the multitude of practical barriers that most women face, is potentially unproductive, and also risks perpetuating harmful stereotypes about migrant communities. Our consultations on harmful practices and child protection with affected communities confirm this. It should be noted that many of the most vocal activists on harmful practices are people born into the communities where they are practiced and that long-lasting change will only happen through leadership from within.
- 7.5. Our own research has highlighted how the social integration of women is hindered mostly by day-to-day challenges, such as poverty, lack of childcare provision, unaffordability of English classes, poor health, and more. These challenges are often common to all women, whatever their faith or immigrant status. However, for some groups of vulnerable women, who lack a social network and access to support, these things can be debilitating. A strategy that aims to address the rights of women must address the practical barriers that they face each and every day.

⁷ YouGov (2014) International Omnibus Survey <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/03/07/mult-country-survey-most-women-put-motherhood-ahed/>



- 7.6. We would like the Ministry to seek ongoing consultation with women from immigrant communities in Britain and respond to the concerns that they voice. Such women are best-placed to make informed decisions about the challenges that they face to establishing themselves thriving in the UK within the broader social environments, and consultation in this regard is an important step in fostering their empowerment.

Further Action

Wonder Foundation would be delighted to continue these conversations further with any interested parties. We would also be ready to engage in the delivery of projects to promote integration, especially of young people and women, where our expertise lies.

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