

The **AMICALL UK** research was conducted by COMPAS. We reviewed practice across the UK, and conducted in-depth case studies in Breckland, Glasgow, Hackney, Humber, Peterborough, Slough, as well as a case study on the work by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

We found that:

- **Experiences across the UK vary** significantly, in particular between the nations of the UK, with differences in governance, political priorities, demography and local attitudes. LRAs viewed communications work in this area as encompassing communication with front-line staff, between local organisations, at both strategic and operational levels, and with migrants to enable them to take part in local communities, as well as traditional communications such as leaflets and posters.
 - LRAs viewed many of the major **factors affecting attitudes to migrants as beyond their immediate control**, making a long-term, evidence-based approach much harder. Such factors included negative coverage of migration in much London-based national media; frequently changing policy contexts (national migration policies, funding streams, local and regional government responsibilities, powers, priorities and structures); and global migration flows.
 - There was **enthusiasm for sharing practical ideas** and knowledge. Several toolkits and guidance modules exist, but LRAs were keen to identify specific practices they could apply to their situation.
 - Although there are a number of guides to 'good practice' and 'what works' in this and related areas, much of the evidence for practices being 'good' is impressionistic and anecdotal. There is a **lack of robust evaluation** of how interventions have made a difference to outcomes.
 - Many UK LRAs had **doubts about the language of 'integration'**. Some preferred 'equality', 'community cohesion' or 'social inclusion'.
- Developing local **shared language and understanding** of the issues was an important process in itself.
 - The focus of the project on attitudes to third-country nationals (non-EU citizens, and not asylum seekers or refugees) did not fit easily with the ways that LRAs understand their role. For example, their focus was often on specific groups of migrants, or **diversity and inclusion as a whole**.
 - Though interviewees valued strategic oversight, many of the initiatives which LRAs saw as the **most effective had begun as ad hoc initiatives**, in response to – or pre-empting – critical incidents.
 - Successful initiatives are often **driven by the vision and motivation of particular individuals** (whether politicians or officers). Though dependence on an individual in this way can be risky (for example if they leave), some attempts to 'mainstream' practice had led to loss of momentum and expertise.
 - Many UK LRAs had viewed **face to face communication as much more effective** than traditional media-based initiatives that seemed like a public relations or 'spin'.
 - There may be opportunities to **work more practically with local media**, for instance providing potential news content, rather than inviting senior editors to take part in strategic meetings.



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AMICALL

ATTITUDES TO MIGRANTS, COMMUNICATION AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP



The key message of the AMICALL project is that the local matters. Places differ, and the integration challenges vary by locality, at every geographical scale. Local leadership on integration is therefore essential. Although the landscape mapped by the research was very uneven, we found striking examples of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) taking a lead in integration, even where national governments were retreating from the field. In a context marked by high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment across Europe, LRAs have a vital role in ensuring that receiving societies play their part in creating the conditions for integration.

We found a range of activities being undertaken by LRAs: tackling misinformation and misapprehensions and creating a more informed public debate; avoiding, mediating and defusing tensions and conflicts; creating understanding between different communities which share common places; and building a shared and inclusive local sense of belonging and identity for all citizens.

AMICALL was a transnational action research project exploring the role of LRAs in communicating with their citizens about the difficult questions raised by migration. Funded by the European Union's Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals and led by a partnership of six European research institutions, with the Council of Europe as an associate partner, AMICALL provided a platform for the sharing of good practice and the development of new strategies for the communication of positive attitudes towards migrants and towards migrant integration at the local and regional level.

The research was undertaken in six EU Member States: Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. Work began in early 2011 with each partner identifying the context within which LRAs in the six target countries are working, producing country context reports to ground the comparative research. The partners then embarked on fieldwork, including desk research and interviews with key LRA officials, NGOs and experts to ascertain what, if any, communications activities have been undertaken by local government in each of the countries, focusing on a series of in-depth case studies. Each partner sought to identify successful initiatives as well as barriers to success in each country, region and city involved, which were reflected on in technical workshops with practitioners. The second half of the project focused on the policy lessons that can be drawn from the initial research: each country team presented their findings, as well as those from other AMICALL research countries, to a round table of national and local policy-makers, non-governmental organisations and experts for their feedback.

The national findings of AMICALL are presented in 6 country research reports, a handbook of promising practices (including a benchmarking checklist of design considerations) and a final transnational report bringing together key findings from across the case studies. All documents can be downloaded from:

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/research/amicall

Findings

Although **public attitudes** to migration vary across Europe, negative attitudes prevail in most countries and examples of local tensions and conflicts are widespread. The research found that context matters, at both national and local scale, with significant differences across countries and between cities within countries – but there are also resonances and commonalities in different locations. How integration is framed in public debates also matters, and again varies across contexts, with municipalities in some countries not yet focusing on migrant integration while others are moving away from the paradigm and framing their work in terms of cohesion, inclusion, participation or citizenship. Different catalysts have given rise to initiatives, including critical incidents as well as national and EU funding.

LRA activities identified by the project included communication campaigns, as well as hands-on projects which facilitated intercultural communication between groups in a community or face to face communication between individuals. Different forms of activities give rise to different design considerations.

- **Goal:** The research highlighted the dangers of undirected communications strategy, which can at best be ineffective, and at worst, counter-productive. Several different goals are valid, but LRAs need to have a strong sense of what they are trying to achieve if they are to succeed.
- **Target group:** Different strategies involve communications targeted towards migrant groups, towards the non-migrant community, at the whole community or inwardly towards public officials.
- **LRA role:** Some LRAs build on their democratic legitimacy and specific competences to develop a strong leadership role, but most effectively working in partnership with other stakeholders (e.g. from business sector, trade unions, NGOs or migrants themselves). In some cases, there were valid considerations that led LRAs to encourage other partners to take a leadership role, for instance if particular actors had greater credibility with the target audience.



The research identified several trends in **LRA leadership and planning**.

- Those countries with **designated officers** taking a lead, strong and **internal co-ordination** within administrations appear able to deploy more effective strategies.
- Often **small teams or individuals** are acting alone, leaving initiatives vulnerable and unsustainable.
- **Non-governmental stakeholders** play a key role across Europe, but face barriers to becoming full partners in the process.

LRAs everywhere see a need for **strategic development** beyond ad hoc responses to critical incidents or one-off programmes in response to funding streams; such strategic interventions are the exception not the rule, but there is evidence of a shift to longer term approaches emerging.

A **lack of evaluation** has left LRAs struggling to clearly identify outcomes and impacts of their work, but several **factors influencing success or failure** were clear from the research:

- **Financial resources:** Fiscal austerity has been a barrier to successful implementation and sustainability, with integration discretionary in most countries and too often seen as a dispensable luxury.
- **The public debate:** Lack of political will at a national level, as well as the entering of xenophobic discourses into the public debate, has also impacted on LRAs' freedom of manoeuvre, making some initiatives harder to implement. LRAs reported that national media often works as a barrier to success, while local media more often has a positive role, and some LRAs had successfully built productive partnerships with local media.
- **Personalities and individual commitment** drive positive work forward, but this makes it vulnerable to contingencies compared to mainstream approaches.
- **Regulatory frameworks** are a key factor, with complex bureaucratic structures, barriers to inter-agency working and LRA workforces that don't include migrants all preventing effective intervention.

There was a clear demand for **learning** opportunities with regard to communication and shaping attitudes towards migrants expressed by LRAs we engaged, including platforms for sharing learning both within and across national borders.

Recommendations

The handbook of promising practices published with our final report details specific concrete steps LRAs can take in designing and delivering communication activities. The project also had more general recommendations, aimed at LRAs themselves and at other levels of governance, including the European Union.

- LRAs should consider their role, responsibility and unique position to provide **local leadership** in communication work to create the conditions for integration and foster positive attitudes – and other stakeholders should recognise and support this.
- **Joined-up working** with administrations is required to achieve this, as well as co-operation with other LRAs, other layers of governance and also non-governmental stakeholders.
- LRAs should **mobilise all the stakeholders**, building networks and coalitions across sectors. Civil society might require additional time and resources to contribute fully.
- LRAs should move beyond ad hoc responses to **strategic approaches**, based on clear goals and a tested understanding of how to achieve these goals, intelligently targeting relevant sections of the population and tailoring methodology to the goals and audiences. LRAs should consider a range of methodologies, including fact- and emotion-based approaches, using culture, humour and intercultural contact where the goal requires it.
- Strategic approaches should be **evidence-based** and include **consistent messaging, balanced information**, a range of **communication channels** including face-to-face, and **partnerships with media**.
- LRAs should promote **strong, inclusive identities**, based on shared concerns and shared futures of all citizens. Strategies should build **cross-partisan** support.
- Effective development of communications activity in the integration field needs robust **evaluation and impact assessment**, as well as platforms for **sharing learning and practice** within and across countries.

Partner organisations

- **UK:** Centre for Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford.
- **Hungary:** Central European University (CEU), Budapest.
- **Germany:** european forum for migration studies (efms), Bamberg.
- **Netherlands:** Erasmus University of Rotterdam.
- **Spain:** University Complutense, Madrid.
- **Italy:** International and European Forum on Migration Research - Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'Immigrazione (FIERI), Torino.
- **Associate Partner:** Council of Europe.
- **Evaluators:** Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths, University of London.

