Be Here Now

Six stories of life and change in modern British communities
THE STORY BEHIND ‘BE HERE NOW’

These illustrated stories are snapshots of people’s lives in diverse areas. They are based on true accounts, but all names and visual appearances have been changed. Where possible, we have used their own words.

This booklet accompanies IPPR’s major report, Shared ground: Strategies for living well together in an era of high immigration. Our report argues that integration policy should support migrants and British people to live well together by introducing a localised and inclusive integration strategy in areas where there are ongoing, high levels of immigration and ‘churn’ in the population.

We believe it is possible to have an optimistic vision for the future grounded in the things that bring us together as a good society – building strong relationships between British people and migrants, alleviating tensions which arise between settled residents and transient citizens, and supporting settlement in the UK.

To download a free PDF copy of the Shared ground report, visit: www.IPPR.org/publications/shared-ground

“The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity.”

Amartya Sen
Identity and Violence 2006
Some of us yearn for adventure: we want to migrate and see the world. Others want to feel more settled and stick close to home: we are happy staying put.

Personal identity is elastic – it changes over the course of a lifetime. Housing, work and family, not to mention our age and personality, all have a part to play in how we define ourselves, and whether we seek the open road or put down roots.

For some people, movement and change is liberating and exciting; it can open doors, change perceptions and bring new opportunities. But for others it can be unsettling – new rules and ways of life can take time to adapt to.

On the other hand, being firmly settled in one place can be reassuring and bring stability. But for people who are comfortable in their place, experiencing the changes brought by newcomers can cause understandable anxiety.

Migration is a natural phenomenon. We live in a global age where people increasingly move from one country to another. Cheap, regular flights mean that crossing continents is easier than ever before. Modern technology means that people who move can easily stay in touch with their family and friends in other countries.

The UK is now one of the most diverse countries in the developed world. High immigration has changed our country irreversibly. One thing is certain – we will never be able to turn back the clock. Lowering immigration will not reduce the impacts that immigration has.

These six stories have been chosen to help illustrate some of these impacts, and to show why supporting migrants and British people to live well together should be a high priority for us all.
MAEVE

I take pride in my house and where I live – the street and the community.

A while ago, I had some neighbours from the Congo. They were lovely. I would have loved them to stay as my neighbours.

One day you wake up and think... "where have they gone?"

But now they’re renting out the place next door, and they’re letting people move in who I just can’t live with.

Our children used to play together...
When they moved away three or four different families came and went. Cars always coming and going, shouting through the night.

Some houses have up to nine people in them...

The landlord tells them to leave their litter on the street – they say the council will collect it.

I suppose people who can’t get food on the table won’t really care if there’s rubbish on the street...

But I do what I can to keep the street looking nice.
Ernesto

My wife and I came to the UK two months ago with our kids, looking for new experiences. This is a good place to live - it's a nice community and people are friendly.

We need to look for a school for our older child...

But I don't know the process very well.
In the future I would like to be settled. I have two children so I want to feel secure where I am.

I love the idea of a street party… it would be great to get to know the neighbours and speak with other people.

My wife and I are studying English…

In Venezuela, the library is just for books, but here it’s part of the council and there’s so much more to do.

At the beginning it’s hard but with time it’s going to get easier.

It would be great to get to know the neighbours and speak with other people.

In the future I would like to be settled. I have two children so I want to feel secure where I am.
Andrew

I WOULD DESCRIBE MYSELF AS REPUBLICAN, REVOLUTIONARY, SOCIALIST, REBELLIOUS, ANARCHIST...

I DON’T WANT MY WHOLE LIFE MAPPED OUT FOR ME UNTIL I DIE ... I COULDN’T FACE THAT LEVEL OF PREDICTABILITY.

THE ONLY REASON I LIVE WHERE I DO IS TO BE NEAR MY TEENAGE SON...

AND I’M STUCK IN THIS BORING DESK JOB.

THIS PLACE CAME UP THROUGH THE HOUSING ASSOCIATION. IT’S GREAT TO GET A ONE-BED FLAT WITH A GARDEN AND SPACE FOR MY SON TO STAY...

BUT IT FRIGHTENS THE HELL OUT OF ME THAT MY RENT MIGHT GO UP.
It's my dream to go live somewhere in Asia...

The local festival is a fantastic day. It's just local people doing nice, simple things. It's a perfect day – something I really look forward to...

But I'm not interested in attending community meetings.

I can't think of anything worse than people moaning about the roads!

It's my dream to go live somewhere in Asia...

But I'm not doing anything until my son is grown up and doing his own thing.
My first two years in the UK were spent on friends’ sofas.

Every three months I would travel back to Lithuania to finish my studies in business management.

My biggest problem here is the language...

One day I came home crying when I couldn’t understand what the shopkeeper had said to me.

My husband is Polish, so our son has two languages at home. At nursery, more English would be good...

It’s good for him to meet different cultures and people.
I would love to go back to Lithuania but I think we are in too deep here now.

My son will grow up British but I don’t want him to forget where he’s from – I don’t want him to forget that connection.

I would apply for British citizenship, for security...

But the problem is I don’t have proof of living here for those years I was sleeping on sofas.

I’ve read in the papers that they want to kick us out.
Fardous

I came to the UK with my grandmother when I was nine...

I was born in Somalia but I'm about as British as I can be!

When I was young I fell out with my auntie....

But within a year, with the support of my college, I showed I could live alone.

When I went back to visit family in Somalia, I felt homesick for the UK.
I like getting involved with the local community here...

...in the future, I would like to become a foster parent.

...I have a boyfriend now...

The other day we went out to eat at a new local Asian restaurant.

...I'm planning to go to the zumba class at the local community centre...

In the future, I would like to become a foster parent.
Ahmed

When we first moved here in the ’70s we were surrounded by English people...

Our neighbours were like family – it was very safe.

My grandparents left Asia when it was called Hindustan, in the British Empire – from what is now Agra.

For 18 years I worked as an engineer at Rolls Royce.

We moved to a cleaner, quieter area...

A lot of the people were professionals and didn’t have much time for neighbours.
To begin with my new neighbours didn’t know what the recycling bins were for. They just didn’t understand.

Now my daughters are grown up and live abroad.

And I’ve moved back to where we were before... to the same street I lived on as a child.

It takes time ... I had to readjust too.
Some of us yearn for adventure: we want to move around and see the world. Others want to feel more settled and put down roots: we are happy staying put.

The stories of Maeve, Ernesto, Andrew, Emilija, Fardous and Ahmed illustrate some of the impacts of migration and change in our communities, for settled residents and newcomers alike, and show why supporting migrants and British people to live well together should be a high priority for us all.