

'Black Africans' in Britain: Integration or segregation?

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A new study shows that the ability of "black Africans" settling in the UK to integrate with society varies according to their national and ethnic background.

The study, by Dr Lavinia Mitton and Mr Peter Aspinall of the University of Kent, finds that 'Black Africans' in the UK are a diverse group with a wide range of experience and needs depending on country of birth, religion and native [language](#). Understanding these distinctions between different Black Africans is the first step to providing better support, improving their quality of life and helping integration into society.

There are now 737,000 'Black Africans' in England and Wales (according to an estimate by the Office for National Statistics for 2007) and they are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups. Unlike some other ethnic groups, 'Black Africans' are predominantly migrants. Many encounter significant language difficulties together with financial and other problems when they settle in the UK. The Somalis and Congolese are the most disadvantaged and deprived communities amongst the 'Black African' group.

Using data from several existing social surveys, the study uncovered a number of factors that affect integration:

- Deprivation varies by home language, with pupils from Somali, Lingala and French-speaking homes having the highest levels of

eligibility for free schools meals, while Igbo, Yoruba and Shona speakers live in financially better-off households. Moreover, as many as half of Somalis and Congolese live in the most deprived 20 per cent of local areas

- There is a commonly held assumption that 'Black Africans' do not face linguistic barriers but those who originate in countries such as Somalia and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) do face language difficulties in their education or in getting a job
- Employment, self-employment, unemployment and economic inactivity vary considerably by country of birth. The study found that Black Africans, especially Somalis, are paid less on average than white British people. Black Africans, especially those from southern Africa, are also heavily concentrated in the health and social care professions
- Pupils whose first language is English achieved the most passes at grades A - C in their GCSEs, with those of Nigerian background achieving close to the national average, whereas pupils whose first language was Somali, French or Portuguese performed worst in education.

Dr Mitton found that Black Nigerians and Black Zimbabweans tend to speak English and fare relatively well, although they do have difficulty securing work at a level that is in line with their qualifications.

The study concludes that Somalis and Congolese need to be targeted with intensive support, including help with language skills, such as interpreting / translation and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) training. While the government needs to work with employers and trade unions to improve the occupational status of 'Black Africans'.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Mitton said: "The research should inform policy and practice and enable actions that are sensitive to the diverse needs of the Black African community. It will also help public services secure support for a future integration strategy and will be particularly useful to London boroughs, local authorities and Primary Care Trusts in areas with a high proportion of Black Africans."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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