MEASURING INTEGRATION: LINKING DECISIONS TO DATA

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Conversation Participants

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Introduction

In November 2018, Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service (LIRS) brought together thought-leaders in refugee integration to engage in a conversation on how to measure integration. LIRS aimed to explore and know what impacts integration. If integration is a compilation of pathways and programs, how does one measure which programs are the most effective or influential on integration? The goal of the conversation was for LIRS and its partners to be equipped with tools to measure integration and assess the factors impacting refugee integration in order to inform resource allocation and programmatic decision making. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) suggests the networks of the nine resettlement agencies help to mediate state-to-state policies that would otherwise magnify differentiation in integration outcomes[1], but the decline in arrivals and budgets compromises the capacity of the resettlement agencies to continue to mitigate these differences. LIRS believes investing in integration programming strengthens the LIRS partner network and its ability to serve refugees and migrants.

Data informs how refugees are served and therefore without integration indicators, services and programs are created based on conjectures. In addition, evidence on integration can support or challenge existing policies, both internally and externally. There are varied understandings of refugee integration and therefore different approaches on how to measure integration. Through this conversation, participants explored frameworks of integration as well as data currently being collected and used to define integration. Assumptions were challenged and possibilities were contemplated within the context of an uncertain political and financial landscape.

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1   Fix, Michael, Kate Hooper, and Jie Zong. "How are refugees faring? Integration at US and state levels." (2017).

Defining Integration - What are the existing frameworks and definitions of integration?

Existing frameworks and definitions inform the current understanding of refugee integration. Many concepts of integration are built on Ager & Strang's conceptual model of integration which outlines levels of integration: markers and means (employment, housing, education, health), social connection (social bridges, social bonds, social links), facilitators (language and culture, and safety and stability), and foundation (rights and citizenship)[2]. The RISE Survey, White House Task Force on New Americans, Immigration Policy Lab, and others have derived their own definitions and versions of pathways or levels[3][4][5]. LIRS defines integration as newcomers belong to and are reciprocally engaged with their communities. Healthy integration encompasses strong social connections and opportunities for economic success.

These definitions and frameworks attempt to support a multifaceted understanding of refugee success, sometimes as an attempt to counter narrow or contradictory notions of integration. While the goal of the resettlement program is to provide protection and refuge for the most vulnerable, economic outcomes have long been touted as markers of success. Integration frameworks tend to focus on the integration of an individual, rather than the family unit. Some individuals may contribute to the collective integration of their family, while their individual integration may be limited.

Integration differs from assimilation in that it does not call for an abandonment of home culture. There is therefore a tension as to the role the receiving community plays in the integration of refugees. Some frameworks of integration specifically reference the two-way or reciprocal relationship needed for successful integration, including LIRS's. How integration is achieved therefore may vary depending on both the receiving and arriving community. This challenges if integration can be defined and measured universally, or is it a localized and individual process. The reciprocal relationship component of integration highlights how systemic policies and attitudes can promote or inhibit integration.

The assumption is that that integration is mutually beneficial to communities and refugees, but participants discussed that the validity of this assumption is still being explored. Why do refugees need to be integrated? Can they just be people living their lives? And who decides? Policy makers, funders, organizations, communities, or refugees? Continued conversations should continue to include the voices and perspectives of all these stakeholders. Participants also noted that in attempting to measure integration, it becomes an outcome, rather than a process. Consequently the attempt to measure integration may be at odds with individual understandings and definitions of integration. Integration conversations like the one hosted by LIRS prompt these discussions and challenge understandings of refugee integration. Participants acknowledged a desire to have a common understanding and definition of integration, as well as an understanding of the limitations and challenges of doing so. The process of understanding the multi-faceted, localized, and individualized nature of integration informs abilities to serve refugees and communities.

2   Ager, Alastair, and Alison Strang. Indicators of integration. Home Office, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, 2004.

3   Colorado Department of Human Services. "The Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE) Year Five: Final Report: A Study of Refugee Integration in Colorado." Colorado Office of Economic Security Division of Employment and Benefits.(2016)

4   Muñoz, C., and L. Rodríguez. "The White House task force on new Americans: A federal strategic action plan on immigrant & refugee integration." Retrieved from final_tf_newamericans_report_4-14-15_clean. pdf (2015).

5   Harder, Niklas, Lucila Figueroa, Rachel M. Gillum, Dominik Hangartner, David D. Laitin, and Jens Hainmueller. "Multidimensional measure of immigrant integration." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 115, no. 45 (2018): 11483-11488.

EXAMPLE TOOL: Refugee Integration Survey & Evaluation (RISE) Project

RISE is a longitudinal study of a cohort of refugees in Colorado to evaluate their integration over the course of four years as commissioned by the Colorado Refugee Services Program. The study was not designed to assess or evaluate a specific program or service. Researchers relied on Community Connectors to help conduct surveys and focus groups over the four years, resulting in a 70% retention rate. The study highlighted the value of social connections. In the last year of the study, extra focus was put on "low-integrators" and what characteristics or factors contributed to low integration. While the study produced a wealth of data around the integration of refugees, because it did not evaluate a specific program or service, it did not directly impact the decision making or programming of resettlement agencies, such as Lutheran Family Services-Rocky Mountain.

Current Integration Data - What data is already being collected and how does existing data inform our understanding of integration?

The conversation served as an opportunity for practitioners and academics to share data they were currently collecting or analyzing as indicators of integration. Urban Institute (Hamutal Bernstein, Senior Research Associate) shared insight from their report published in April 2018 on "Bringing Evidence to the Refugee Integration Debate."[6] This report compiles the sources of existing data on refugee integration and what has been gleaned and concluded about refugee integration based on the data available. Reports produced by think tanks such as Migration Policy Institute, Center for American Progress, and New American Economy rely on the American Community Survey (ACS) to extrapolate and estimate who is a refugee, based on year of arrival, country of origin and how that compares with refugee resettlement arrivals data from Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS)[7]. The table on the next page outlines examples of data sources and the benefits and limitations of each source.

6   Bernstein, Hamutal, and Nicole DuBois. "Bringing evidence to the refugee integration debate." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www. urban. org/research/publication/bringing-evidence-refugee-integration-debate/view/full_report (2018).

7   Bernstein, Hamutal, and Nicole DuBois. "Bringing evidence to the refugee integration debate." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www. urban. org/research/publication/bringing-evidence-refugee-integration-debate/view/full_report (2018).

Table 1: Current Refugee Integration Data Sources, Benefits & Limitations[8]

	National Surveys	Administrative Data	Primary Sources
Current Examples	• Census Bureau Data 　° American Community Survey (ACS) • New Immigrant Survey • Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR)	• Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) data • Refugee resettlement program data – national and local • Non refugee-specific government data (e.g., wage records, public benefits records)	• Surveys of refugees • Surveys of refugee resettlement staff • Interviews and focus groups with refugees, staff, and stakeholders • Community-based research
Benefits	• Large sample • Historical data and consistency • Updated and long-term information	• No identification problem • Potential to collect policy-relevant information • Can avoid self-reporting • Can be longitudinal • Can be used for evaluation research	• Rich data to answer specific research questions • Grounded in refugees' and organizations' reality • Can be longitudinal
Limitations	• Imprecise identification • Systematic bias from imputation method • Combining long- and short-term residents • Snapshot only • Self-reporting	• Only certain refugees • May only capture early stages of resettlement path	• Snapshot only if limited resources • Usually limited scope (local, program-specific) • Project specific

At the local level, agencies collect data on the month that refugees attain a first job, job retention, salary, and benefits. Data on youth may include grade level for reading and math, school attendance and some component of parent engagement such as parent-teacher conference attendance or how often parents access the schools' parent portal. Attendance and service provision is also tracked; this includes ESL classes, cultural orientation, home visits, health visits and assessments. Some organizations conduct community surveys on perception of newly- arrived refugees and others that engage volunteers in co-sponsorship may complete a feedback form on their experience. In Utica, New York, the

8   Bernstein, Hamutal, and Nicole DuBois. "Bringing evidence to the refugee integration debate." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www. urban. org/research/publication/bringing-evidence-refugee-integration-debate/view/full_report (2018).

Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRCR) partnered with Hamilton College to conduct a study on refugee happiness. The study has not yet been finalized but initial findings indicate that refugees' happiness is not tied purely to economic success, but to friend and family groups.

At the state level, data depends on the state and grant requirements. The Refugee Social Services (RSS) grant through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) collects data on employment, social service program participation, citizenship classes, transportation access, childcare, and cultural orientation. Access to this data varies based on who manages the state grants. The Preferred Communities grant, also through ORR, measures whether a refugee who participates in an intervention transitions from being "at-risk" to "stable" to "thriving." Both Colorado and North Dakota recently commissioned studies on the economic impact of refugees on their state.

EXAMPLE TOOL: Kuja Kuja

Kuja Kuja is project of the American Refugee Committee (ARC) that is a real-time feedback mechanism for organizations to design impact projects. Currently operating in five countries, Kuja Kuja asks two questions of its customers on the satisfaction of the service they received: 1) Were you happy with today's service? 2) Any ideas on how we can be better? ARC can see service issues in real time and receive daily snapshots of their performance and client satisfaction globally. Natural language detection is used to identify trends within the sector. For more information, visit http://arcrelief.org/kuja-kuja/.

This client-centered approach with a binary feedback mechanism poses a potential tool for resettled refugees to self- assess their integration and services or programs intended to promote integration.

Existing data informs understandings of integration; because something is already being measured it is more likely to be used as a proxy or indicator of integration. Currently economic, language and civic engagement tend to be the primary measures cited as integration. There are several economic factors that are used to assess the integration of refugees, including labor force participation, income, tax contribution, spending power, home ownership, entrepreneurship, and use of public benefits. English-language proficiency and educational attainment are also cited as indicators of integration. Levels of civic engagement are measured in terms of naturalization rates and proceeding voter registration and participation.

Based on the summary of current data being collected, conversation participants analyzed the limitations and gaps in the data and how those limitations and gaps impact understandings of integration. Census data does not specifically ask for immigration status and therefore who is a refugee is extrapolated based on ethnicity and amount of time in the US[9]. Data collected for local resettlement agencies tend to be short-term because services are limited to 90 or 180 days. There

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9   Bernstein, Hamutal, and Nicole DuBois. "Bringing evidence to the refugee integration debate." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. https://www. urban. org/research/publication/bringing-evidence-refugee-integration-debate/view/full_report (2018).

EXAMPLE TOOL: Refugee Services of Texas (RST)

In Fiscal Year 2018, RST piloted a Client Stability Scale at their Austin and Houston sites with the objectives to 1) measure and track refugee integration during the first year of arrival and beyond, 2) maintain contact with clients in order to provide needed services and follow-up, and 3) tailor and streamline service plans to measured integration needs. RST developed a three-point scale (unstable, stable, and thriving) and a rubric of stabilization and integration indicators for case managers to assess clients' resettlement experience during their first year in the US. The first phase of the pilot focused primarily on the data collection. RST was challenged to create a metric that reflected a standardized measure and accounted for individualized understandings of "thriving." Furthermore, cultural considerations are essential in the assessment of integration. RST also piloted a Randomized Control Trial called RefugeeMobile to understand the impact of connectivity through mobile phone access and apps on a refugee integration. Upon arrival a sample group of refugees were given a smart phone, eight months of free service and a suite of apps. At six months and one year, refugees were sent a survey via SMS to assess their integration. While the survey indicated promising results, RST also learned some challenges related to ensuring questions were culturally relevant. Similarly, there were challenges in terms of clients understanding and remembering the consent and agreement to participate in the survey.

is also a lack of longitudinal data because of the challenges and cost of tracking individuals over a long period of time. Longitudinal data that does exist tend to be small samples in a limited geographic area.

Participants identified and discussed additional factors that are influencing integration. Refugee characteristics such as country of origin, education background, gender, age at arrival, personal agency/efficacy may impact integration. State and local policies and sentiment may also impact integration and further complicate integration if at odds with federal policies. A refugee may feel welcomed within their immediate community, but feel negative sentiment from a national narrative. There are also limited data on the perceptions of refugees within a community. Outmigration measures are often used as a proxy measure for how welcoming or receptive a community is to new immigrants. Furthermore, if integration is considered the outcome, then what is the baseline or comparison group? Is it the native born population? Non-refugee immigrants? Change in the individual refugee client since arrival? Parity with the native-born population can be flawed based on the diversity within the native-born population. Even more complex is how to measure the dynamic interplay and evolution of both the newcomer and the receiving community. While this is complex, it accounts for the localized differences. For example, in some communities the level of English proficiency may be less important for integration than in others. Variation within the refugee population deepens the layers of complexity; race may influence indicators of integration, such as income and access to opportunity.

These pieces of data start to put together the puzzle of integration, but may fall short of completing the full picture. Integration can occur over generations. These challenges should not prohibit attempts to measure integration, but rather

encourage awareness and transparency of how integration is being defined and the aspects and indicators of integration that are being measured. In the absence of comprehensive data or holistic measure of integration, single indicators can be used as long as they are acknowledged as such and not assumed as proxies for overall integration. Existing data should inform and enhance understandings of integration without dictating definitions.

Current data emphasizes economic, language, & civic indicators, what other indicators of integration should be considered?

Health access
Social connections & social capital
Navigation (ex: public transportation, driving)
Short-term vs. long-term housing
Technology/cellphone access
Relationship with outgroup communities
Agency & Self-Efficacy-Refugees feel empowered to ask questions

Measuring Integration What tools are available to measure integration? What is needed to be able to implement integration measurement tools?

Throughout the conversation and highlighted throughout this report, participants shared tools they are currently using or formerly used to try to measure integration. Participants acknowledged limitations and challenged each other's assumptions. Participants also realized, with guidance from Immigration Policy Lab (Duncan Lawrence, Executive Director), that in order to truly measure the impact of interventions on integration they must account for the counterfactual- what would happen if there was no intervention? This becomes extra challenging when measuring integration if the assumption is that some integration occurs naturally over time. Therefore, in order to understand the counterfactual, one must select a comparison group and because a Randomized Control Trial is not always feasible, it is essential to be creative to identify natural comparison groups whenever possible.

In order to implement integration measurement tools, there are several resources and elements needed. To obtain a counterfactual, an agency would need access to non-participants or a similar comparison group. One possible avenue to create a comparison group is to have a recruitment period for program participation and then a lottery for those who are able to participate. This also helps to mitigate the limited resources available for programs. Funding is needed to support any efforts for impact evaluation, including technology and staff capacity to collect and analyze data. If using external data, staff need both access and the ability and tools to analyze the data.

Furthermore, if there is desire to measure integration over time, then agencies must be able to connect with refugees over an extended time. While agencies have some programs that encourage participation beyond the initial 90-day period, contact is primarily maintained within the first year.

There are even fewer programs that maintain connection for five years or beyond. Opportunities to connect or reconnect with refugees include career advancement, citizenship, individual development accounts and micro-loans, driving lessons and car seat distribution, and women-specific programming. Agencies with on-site English language classes and continuing education and trainings have more continuous contact with refugee clients. There are also opportunities to connect by offering continuing case management, assisting with family reunification, and building relationships with places of worship, schools and employers. LIRS can explore how to connect with refugee clients through the payment of their travel loans. The medium for communication, in-person or utilizing remote technology, is also an important factor to consider. Overall, an effort can be made to empower communities and develop a partner commitment to the data and its impact on future integration programs and policies.

No matter what tool practitioners or researchers choose to implement to measure integration, there needs to be an awareness of what is actually being measured and evaluated. Impact evaluation requires a comparison as well as staff who understand and have the resources, including access to refugee client, to conduct an evaluation.

EXAMPLE TOOL: Immigration Policy Lab Integration Index

Based on a lack of a standard measure of integration, IPL aimed to create a universal index to measure the degree to which migrants can achieve success. The IPL Integration Index was designed to be employed across a variety of communities around the world and can be administered through different mediums. The survey examines six dimensions of integration: psychological, social, economic, political, linguistic, and navigational. Each dimension is represented in 2-4 questions depending on whether the IPL-12 or IPL-24 is being used. Questions were tested for validity and translated in eight languages.
For more information, visit https://www.integrationindex.org/

Conclusion

LIRS and participants intended to understand the essential questions posed at the onset of the conversation. At the most basic level, some participants still feel conflicted on how to define integration. There are layers of bias and complexity that still need to be discussed and included in continued conversations on integration. Participants acknowledged a desire to have a common understanding and definition of integration, as well as the limitations and challenges in doing so. Multiple stakeholders have a significant role in the ability to define and measure integration and therefore conversation and collaboration should continue in order to develop a collective understanding of integration outcomes.

While current data informs understandings of integration, it is primarily economic focused and not always holistic nor informed by refugees themselves. These challenges should not prohibit attempts to measure integration, but rather encourage awareness and transparency of how integration is being defined and the aspects and indicators of integration that are being measured. Existing data should inform and enhance understandings of integration without dictating definitions. Multiple tools exist and persist as attempts to measure integration, but limited staff capacity and knowledge

of data analysis also challenges agencies in effectively measuring integration outcomes.

The Integration Index developed IPL is a promising tool that allows for a universal measure of integration. However, the conversation concluded without a clear vision of how the impact of programs and services on integration be effectively evaluated. Impact is a comparison and therefore without a comparison group there is limited actual data and understanding of the impact. The IPL Integration Index could easily be used in programs, but there was a consensus for it to be executed thoughtfully in order to measure actual impact. This requires resources, capacity, and a strong commitment from all stakeholders the value of genuine impact evaluation.

Practitioners were challenged to decide what aspects of integration will and should happen gradually over time, and what can and should be accelerated with programs and services. While participants have a desire for evidence informed programs and services, there is a gap in knowledge and investments to make this a reality. Once real impact data exists, measurements be used to guide programmatic decisions and resource allocation. This requires further discussion and training staff and leadership to be able to interpret the data to guide decision making.

This conversation further renewed LIRS' commitment to effectively evaluating the impact of programs and services to inform decisions. While the conversation illuminated aspects of integration that make impact evaluation challenging, it also highlighted tools that hold promise. LIRS is dedicated to continuing to host integration conversations as forums to bring together a diversity of perspectives and stakeholders in developing a shared understanding of integration.