TransAtlantic Council on Migration
A Project of the Migration Policy Institute

Beyond Work: Reducing Social Isolation for Refugee Women and Other Marginalized Newcomers

By Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan

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Executive Summary

Refugees and other newly arrived migrants often face a long path to integration in their new societies. While employment is typically the most effective way to fast-track both social and economic integration, it may not be equally attainable for all, at least in the short term. Groups unable to find work are at high risk for social isolation, including female migrants, refugees, and immigrants who are unskilled, illiterate, or elderly (with many falling into multiple categories of disadvantage). The consequences of this are far-reaching and go beyond simple economics. Work can improve self-esteem and mental health, foster vital social interactions that themselves boost integration outcomes, and even smooth frictions between newcomers and longer-term residents. In its absence, there is an urgent need to create alternative ways for socially isolated populations to participate meaningfully in their host communities and forge the vital social ties that will anchor them to their new homes. This could take the form of "work-adjacent" activities (such as informal crafts or cooking businesses or volunteering in shortage areas) or nonwork programs to build networks within communities.

There is an urgent need to create alternative ways for socially isolated populations to participate meaningfully in their host communities.

While governments have proposed or funded new ideas to reduce exclusion (such as community service and mentoring), these tend to be small scale and informal, often implemented by nongovernmental organizations and social enterprises as "complementary" to core integration offerings rather than part of formal integration programming. As such, they lack the clear standards and benchmarks that generally guide programming focused on work, language instruction, and civic integration. There is also limited evidence to date on what works, which makes it harder for governments to justify these costly investments, especially in comparison to spending on initiatives to support labor market participation, which has a more established record of yielding concrete results. As a result, there is little consensus as to how to best spend limited public resources addressing something that cannot be easily measured.

For those who will never find traditional employment (or who need a longer-than-average timeline to get there), societies will need to reconsider what "successful" integration might look like, and how to invest in it. Promising practices that target vulnerable newcomers can be grouped into three main categories:

- ***Economic empowerment programs.*** These widen the definition of what "work" means for vulnerable groups (such as female refugees) by connecting them to (or creating) opportunities in parts of the labor market that may be overlooked by formal employment services, namely cooking, crafts, child care, and gardening. These programs leverage participants' existing skills (without requiring formal qualifications) while helping them to access a greater degree of financial independence and build social ties and resilience. However, securing funding to scale programs up in a sustainable way remains a challenge.

- ***Volunteering programs.*** Such activities can provide either a stepping-stone to the formal labor market or an alternative to work. For example, volunteering as a health-care assistant or preschool aide provides vocation-specific experience that can be leveraged in the path to paid work (and can bypass the need for certification or even a work permit). Alternatively, volunteering can open doors for individuals who may lack the skills or qualifications to join the labor market but who can contribute in other meaningful ways to their local communities, as in the case of elderly refugees volunteering in local schools. Volunteer programs can deliver high value if done well, but they are not cost free; effective programs require deep investments in

training and support (e.g. to facilitate good matches between mentors and mentees, or to equip volunteers to engage with culturally or religiously different groups).

- ***Nonwork initiatives.*** Programs that boost social ties and connect newcomers with locals serve an important integration goal, even if they do not lead to work. These efforts range from social activities such as sports, arts, and community gardening, to mentorship and peer-to-peer programs that can reach out to socially isolated groups (e.g., women inside the home or unaccompanied minors). As with economic empowerment programs, many of these initiatives are small in scale and unevenly incorporated into mainstream integration programs.

As policymakers weigh how to invest in marginalized populations, a complex set of cost-benefit analyses are at play. Policymakers must strike the right balance between programs that unlock value for the receiving communities (including but not limited to economic value) and offerings that are most likely to benefit (and appeal to) newcomers—particularly those who do not have an in-demand skills profile. Part of this calculus is determining how much to invest in "social" versus economic programs, and whether policymakers are willing to invest in reducing social isolation for its own sake, not just as a path to economic self-sufficiency.

A review of efforts since the global migration crisis offers several insights into how policymakers can address the problem of social exclusion:

- ***Reconceptualize what successful integration looks like and how to measure it.*** Integration programs are often evaluated on the basis of easy-to-quantify metrics such as self-sufficiency or employment outcomes (and typically only on a very short time horizon). Evaluations may therefore miss participants' progress toward important markers of social integration, such as strength of social networks or feelings of belonging, that may be more worthwhile indicators for some newcomers.

- ***Introduction programs are not the only way to target refugee women.*** While there is an increasing focus on reaching socially isolated women, most interventions are concentrated in the period immediately post-arrival. But in many countries, the arc of refugee women's progress in the labor market is longer than that of male refugees (continuing even after 10 to 15 years). Nonworking women can thus benefit from targeted interventions far beyond the first few months and years post-arrival.

- ***One-size-fits-all systems can miss the mark.*** Mainstream integration programs typically target the "average" immigrant, refugee, or refugee spouse, and thus fail to account for the considerable diversity within categories. This can result in policies and programs failing to meet the needs of those who do not fit this mold.

- ***Leverage market forces to ensure programs are sustainable—particularly when funding is tight.*** Because nonprofits have limited resources to scale up activities in any meaningful way, the social enterprise model (which leverages market forces) or social impact bonds may be more promising and demonstrate market demand for refugee products and services.

- ***Improve coordination between government and civil-society organizations providing integration services.*** While nongovernmental programs have several advantages, including their ability to serve the most vulnerable regardless of legal status, and less pressure to produce a tangible "return" on investments, policymakers should look to link these efforts to mainstream services, so as to improve coordination, avoid duplication, and provide avenues to scale up promising initiatives.

Addressing social isolation for newcomers out of work will require taking risks. Programs designed to strengthen social ties can be resource-intensive and their outcomes are rarely systematically evaluated, making it hard to demonstrate a clear return on investment. Yet economic empowerment activities, volunteering, or nonwork programs to build networks within communities can be a vital bridge out of social isolation for the most vulnerable—even if they never lead to traditional employment—and thus benefit society as a whole.

I. Introduction

Workplaces and schools have long been considered the pillars of immigrant integration policy. These are the places where positive encounters with members of the host community can expose newcomers to language, skills, and cultural norms, and where they can begin to build the social and professional networks critical to success in their new society. But despite thoughtful investments into getting newcomers into work in most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, certain vulnerable populations are inevitably left out. These include socially isolated immigrant women (who may have child-care responsibilities and lack prior work experience or familiarity with Western culture), refugees dealing with trauma and mental health issues, as well as newcomers who are unskilled, illiterate, or elderly. Such populations may never be able to enter "work" in the way it is traditionally conceived of, or they may need specialized support and a longer timeline to get there. The risk of their social exclusion has jumped to the top of the agenda in many countries, but a coordinated approach (and a consensus on how best to spend scarce resources) is lacking.

The presence of a large population of economically marginalized immigrants can endanger public trust in migration and integration governance.

The challenge facing policymakers tasked with helping vulnerable immigrant groups integrate into society is twofold. Some newcomers may have skills that could eventually be applied to the host labor market, but they face additional barriers in accessing available language and training programs, or need targeted support over a longer timeline. For advanced economies with unfilled positions at the higher end of the skill spectrum, it may be hard to decide if these investments would pay off, since these groups are competing for intensive training with people who could more easily slot into jobs. Other members of these vulnerable populations may never integrate into the host-country labor market, even with specialized support, posing considerable economic and social costs for societies, communities, and the individuals themselves. In addition to the added fiscal burden of supporting people out of work (at a time when aging populations are already straining the public purse in many immigrant-receiving countries),[1] the presence of a large population of economically marginalized immigrants can endanger public trust in migration and integration governance. And without work—the most robust channel to social interactions with long-time members of local communities—newcomers can find themselves socially isolated, contributing further to the downward spiral of public trust.

1 Dorothée Rouzet, Aida Caldera Sánchez, Theodore Renault, and Oliver Roehn, *Fiscal Challenges and Inclusive Growth in Ageing Societies* (OECD Economic Policy Paper No. 27, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, 2019), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/fiscal-challenges-and-inclusive-growth-in-ageing-societies_c553d8d2-en.

For those who will never find jobs, societies may need to reconceptualize what "successful" integration looks like and invest in new ways for newcomers to participate in the social and economic fabric of communities. Even if they do not make traditional contributions in the form of paying income taxes or creating jobs, newcomers may contribute through volunteering and other avenues—though the payoff may be less visible and accrue over the longer term. While there is a growing recognition that social isolation is harmful both to individuals experiencing exclusion as well as to society writ large, most countries have not devoted serious resources to addressing this issue—either because it is considered less of a priority than employment or because there is limited evidence on what types of policies and programs work best. And with resources scarce, governments are also struggling to justify costly interventions in the absence of measurable "returns" on these investments.[2]

While vulnerable groups have historically been something of an afterthought in immigrant integration programming, a growing acknowledgment that many newcomers will be unable to enter work—at least not without targeted support—has led many OECD countries to begin to adapt their integration programs to better suit the needs of the most vulnerable. Governments have proposed new ideas to reduce exclusion, such as community service and mentoring, and countries including Austria and Germany have devoted a significant proportion of their integration budgets to empowering female refugees.[3] However, much of the programming that targets groups who are far from the labor market is provided by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social enterprises. Even where they receive funding from local and national governments, these initiatives are not always well integrated into formal government-run introduction programs. And in Europe, the 2015–16 migration and refugee crisis only exacerbated this challenge, by exponentially increasing its scale at a time when the most promising programs and initiatives still only cater to a handful of individuals. The crisis has also created new types of vulnerability, with some asylum seekers left in legal limbo while their cases are being determined, and others left with an uncertain status indefinitely (including "tolerated" persons who cannot be returned yet are ineligible for many benefits).

This report outlines interventions that have broadened the lens of integration beyond the labor market, and draws some preliminary observations on what works and why. It also considers the consequences of having these programs run on parallel tracks to job and employment services, and asks whether more could be done to factor them into the traditional machinery of integration.

II. The Risks of Marginalization

The extent to which societies support their most vulnerable members serves as a barometer for the success of integration overall. While the costs of not participating in the labor market tend to be conceived in narrow ways—for instance, lost tax revenue or productivity—failing to meet the needs of vulnerable populations can create much greater costs for societies in the long run, especially if disadvantage is passed onto the next generation. Social exclusion—defined as "a situation or process whereby individuals or groups are not able to participate fully in society as a result of unemployment,

2 Meghan Benton and Paul Diegert, *A Needed Evidence Revolution: Using Cost-Benefit Analysis to Improve Refugee Integration Programming* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/cost-benefit-analysis-refugee-integration-programming.

3 Monica Li, "Integration of Migrant Women: A Key Challenge with Limited Policy Resources," European Website on Integration, December 11, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/integration-of-migrant-women.

low skill levels, ill health, or other factors"[4]—can have long-term consequences for the wellbeing, safety, security, and economic viability of societies. These costs may not always be immediately visible, instead materializing over the longer term. As a result, they may be neglected in day-to-day policy calculations.

The dangers of social exclusion accrue to both the individual and to society more broadly. First, social isolation may catalyze or exacerbate mental health challenges. Remaining "behind closed doors" without meaningful links to the local community can intensify feelings of depression and hopelessness among newcomers.[5] Even immigrants with secure legal status may carry a heavy mental load: they may face separation from family and friends in their origin countries and have limited networks in their new communities. And newcomers who were formerly employed but no longer have jobs can experience a loss of self-esteem and self-worth and may struggle to find purpose in their new lives.

Unemployment is thus a double-edged sword: it is an independent risk factor for mental disorders, while also making it more difficult to recover because it limits migrants' ability to develop professional and social ties and feelings of belonging in their new homes.[6] The gap between a migrant's prearrival expectations of what life in a new country will be like and the reality at destination can also trigger depression or other disorders.[7] The hostile political climate in many receiving countries that feel overburdened by the large volume of newcomers in the wake of the global migration and refugee crisis can compound these challenges. Syrian women who started catering businesses in Turkey, for example, note that "it feels great to be doing something useful rather than simply being a burden" on the host country.[8]

Social exclusion also poses collective risks. Aging societies are already facing unsustainable dependency ratios,[9] and thus can ill afford to increase the pool of working-age individuals who are not in education, employment, or training. While many vulnerable newcomers may never join the labor market, some could still participate in informal forms of work (such as selling crafts) or volunteering (including in high-shortage areas such as elder care). A lack of access to these opportunities represents a potential loss of productivity to the society writ large. But the repercussions go far beyond economic losses. Facilitating ways for refugees to participate productively in nontraditional work or community activities can serve as a bridge to integration, immersing newcomers in their new communities and ensuring they are "empowered not assisted."[10] There is a strong connection between refugees' social networks and

4 This definition is borrowed from Olof Bäckman and Anders Nilsson, "Pathways to Social Exclusion—A Life-Course Study," *European Sociological Review* 27, no. 1 (2011): 107–23. By another measure, Eurostat assesses the share of the European Union (EU) population at risk for poverty and social exclusion based on a combination of three metrics: persons who are at risk of poverty, those facing material deprivation, and those living in households with very low work intensity. In 2017, half of non-EU migrants were deemed at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and most of these were women. Eurostat, "Migration Integration Statistics—At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion," 2018, accessed November 5, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_at_risk_of_poverty_and_social_exclusion.

5 For example, the lack of social integration—and specifically unemployment—is associated with higher prevalence of mental disorders in refugees and migrants. See World Health Organization (WHO), *Mental Health Promotion and Mental Health Care in Refugees and Migrants: Technical Guidance* (Copenhagen, Denmark: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2018), www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/386563/mental-health-eng.pdf?ua=1

6 See, for example, Ryan Dermot, Ciarán Benson, and Barbara Dooley, "Psychological Distress and the Asylum Process: A Longitudinal Study of Forced Migrants in Ireland," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 196, no. 1 (2008): 37–45.

7 As noted by Dinesh Bhugra et al: "After the initial relief of postmigration arrival in a safe haven, it is not uncommon for frustration and disillusionment to set in." Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is also up to ten times more likely for migrants than the host community. See Dinesh Bhugra et al., "EPA Guidance: Mental Health Care of Migrants," *European Psychiatry* 29, no. 2 (2014): 107–15.

8 Peter Kenyon, "Refugee Women Cook up Syrian Cuisine to Eke out a Living in Turkey," National Public Radio, April 15, 2018, www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2018/04/15/600491303/refugee-women-cook-up-syrian-cuisine-to-eke-out-a-living-in-turkey.

9 Rouzet, Caldera, Renault, and Roehn, *Fiscal Challenges and Inclusive Growth in Ageing Societies.*

10 Maria Vincenza Desiderio, *Integrating Refugees into Host Country Labor Markets: Challenges and Policy Options* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integrating-refugees-host-country-labor-markets-challenges-and-policy-options.

employment outcomes.[11] For refugee women in particular, language acquisition is critical; research shows that refugee women who become proficient in their host country's language are 40 percentage points more likely to be employed.[12]

There are also legal and security ramifications. When social exclusion accompanies uncertain legal status, the de facto result of a portion of society living in the shadows is a growing sense of insecurity and a loss of public trust. Even one instance of an unauthorized migrant or asylum seeker committing a violent crime can then do irreparable harm to social cohesion. Getting newcomers into jobs serves to disrupt stereotypes and paint a broader picture of the talents and skills they bring with them (not just their costs)—which may ease potential resentment among native-born populations. Immigrants and refugees who become engaged in their communities can also catalyze a virtuous cycle, serving as "ambassadors" who help future cohorts of newcomers do the same. Some NGOs rely on refugee entrepreneurs, for example, to provide training to the newly arrived.

The benefits of integration—and the dangers of social isolation—also accrue to subsequent generations. Studies show that children can experience their parents' trauma secondhand, and that mental health challenges experienced by caregivers are associated with social, cognitive, and behavioral problems among children.[13] The economic integration of parents is also highly correlated with that of subsequent generations. Growing up in poverty affects children's academic outcomes, development, and mental and physical health.[14] Parental unemployment also transmits disadvantage; in particular, the labor market status of mothers has a strong impact on the eventual employment of their daughters.[15] And beyond employment, there are measurable benefits for families that are connected to mainstream services that support integration. Children who have interactions with the receiving country (through high-quality preschool or "wraparound" services for the whole family, for example) have better outcomes.[16] Success and failure in integration must therefore be seen as having multigenerational effects, yet few initiatives are evaluated with an eye to long-term benefits.[17]

Barriers to Participation

Across OECD countries, almost all introduction programs for immigrants and refugees have been recalibrated several times over to make them appropriate for vulnerable and low-educated individuals. Yet, certain newcomer populations are still unable to access them. Available courses may be too far away from where immigrants live or held at times that are incompatible with work or child-care responsibilities.

11 Thomas Liebig and Kristian Rose Tronstad, "Triple Disadvantage? A First Overview of the Integration of Refugee Women" (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper 216, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, August 2018), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/triple-disadvantage_3f3a9612-en.

12 According to Eurostat, about 500,000 women obtained international protection in Europe between 2015 and 2017, adding to the pool of 800,000 refugee women already resident. Yet according to the 2014 European Labor Force survey, only 45 percent of refugee women in the European Union were in employment. See Liebig and Tronstad, "Triple Disadvantage?"

13 Mark Greenberg et al., *Promoting Refugee Integration in Challenging Times: The Potential of Two-Generation Strategies* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/refugee-integration-two-generation-strategies.

14 American Psychological Association, "Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth," accessed January 24, 2019, www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx.

15 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Catching Up? Intergenerational Mobility and Children of Immigrants* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), www.oecd.org/publications/catching-up-intergenerational-mobility-and-children-of-immigrants-9789264288041-en.htm.

16 Maki Park, Margie McHugh, and Caitlin Katsiaficas, *Serving Immigrant Families Through Two-Generation Programs: Identifying Family Needs and Responsive Program Approaches* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/serving-immigrant-families-through-two-generation-programs-identifying-family-needs-and

17 Even the most robust evaluations of introduction programs for refugees typically measure only short-term employment outcomes, for instance, the number of newcomers in jobs after the completion of the program or within a few months thereafter, and thus fail to capture any long-term or noneconomic effects. However, this may be changing as more countries broaden their integration frameworks to include the wellbeing of the second generation and indicators such as social capital. See Benton and Diegert, *A Needed Evidence Revolution*.

In addition, newcomers may not know about them, see them as relevant or a high priority, or feel comfortable attending (e.g., some immigrant women may face cultural pressure not to participate in public activities). Certain categories of newcomers (such as asylum seekers awaiting a status decision) may even be ineligible. These barriers can be layered on top of one another, causing some newcomers to "fall out" of available programming (most often, not due to explicit exclusion but rather a mix of factors that nonetheless create high barriers to entry). These barriers may be categorized as follows:

- ***Structural/policy barriers.*** Asylum, distribution, housing, and even family leave policies can all limit the scope and coverage of integration policies. Asylum seekers may be barred from work or training while their claims are being assessed; people whose asylum claims are rejected but who cannot be returned or who receive a "tolerated" status may be excluded from integration services or be lower priority. In some countries, refugee spouses who come through family channels may not be entitled to the same language and training package as humanitarian migrants.[18] The chronic scarcity of housing in cities and the logic of distribution policies—the pressure to more equitably spread newcomers across a country, particularly in less dense areas where rents are lower[19]—means that individuals may not be located where jobs and services are most abundant. And even family leave policies coupled with limited integration services targeting parents caring for children can have the result of excluding women in particular.

- ***Time and resource barriers.*** Lack of time, skills, or institutional knowledge can impede participation in integration and language courses. Newcomers pressured to take readily available low-wage jobs soon after arrival (as is often the case for refugees in the United States)[20] may be unable to participate in training or language courses offered during work hours; and those employed in shift work with unpredictable schedules may be unable to commit to weekly classes held at a certain time. Lack of literacy in the home language also impedes participation in formal training or language courses. Many immigrants also lack the institutional knowledge needed to make an accurate cost-benefit analysis of how to spend their time and resources. In turn, immigrants who are not already plugged into social networks may simply lack knowledge of what offerings are available to them, especially when these are community- or NGO-led programs that are not part of formal introductory programs and are often advertised by word of mouth. Finally, some populations may require special accommodations (including interpretation for those with hearing impairments), but disability resources can be scarce even for native-born populations.

18 While refugees' family members are eligible for the same package of benefits across Scandinavia, in countries such as Germany women who come through family channels are not eligible for the same services as refugees. Evidence shows that this makes a difference, as female migrants who go through an introduction program do better than counterparts in Germany who do not. This also suggests that some women remain isolated simply because they do not come into contact with mainstream services. See Liebig and Tronstad, "Triple Disadvantage?"; OECD, *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/the-pursuit-of-gender-equality_9789264281318-en.

19 In Germany, for example, the EASY quota system determines what share of asylum seekers are received by each federal state each year; this ensures a "fair distribution" among the Länder. In Sweden, a law passed in 2016 requires each municipality to take its fair share of asylum seekers. See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), "Initial Distribution of Asylum-Seekers (EASY)," 2018, accessed November 5, 2019, www.bamf.de/EN/Fluechtlingsschutz/AblaufAsyl/Erstverteilung/erstverteilung-node.html; European Migration Network, *EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2016—Sweden* (Stockholm: Migrationsverket, 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/27a_sweden_apr2016_part2_final_en.pdf.

20 The U.S. resettlement program has long emphasized getting refugees into jobs as quickly as possible, and as a result, concentrates most benefits (such as cash assistance) in the first few months after arrival. See Randy Capps et al, *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges.

- ***Life-cycle barriers.*** Additional barriers may be related to demographic characteristics, such as the individual's age[21] and family status. For example, refugee women who have delayed having children during the uncertainty of displacement may be more likely to give birth during the first year after arrival in a destination country—when most integration services are offered.[22] Women raising young children may not yet be thinking about work, thus traditional language or training courses offered immediately post-arrival are likely to be underused by this population unless they offer special accommodations for families with young children. On the other end of the spectrum, older refugees nearing retirement may decide not to start over from scratch and invest multiple years in learning the host-country language and finding a job.

- ***Cultural barriers.*** Newcomers (and especially women) may face additional cultural barriers to accessing integration programs.[23] Women from some devout Muslim communities, for example, may be discouraged from participating in training or be unable to take part in mixed-gender programming.[24] Immigrants in general, and particularly refugees fleeing state-sponsored persecution, may have a distrust of authorities that makes them reluctant to join programming offered by government agencies or located in government buildings. Finally, general racism, xenophobia, or religious bigotry (in many places, specifically against Islam) within the wider community can pose an important barrier that targeted integration programs on their own will be unable to address.

- ***Socioemotional barriers.*** Mental health challenges may also compound the barriers above. While some jurisdictions employ culturally competent providers and trained interpreters, and offer trauma-informed services—interventions that are sensitive to the needs of those who have experienced multiple layers of trauma (including through the asylum process itself)—smaller municipalities may lack the ability to cater to refugee populations in this way. Finally, a new body of research explores the role of individual attributes, such as adaptability, resilience, and being a self-starter, which are correlated with better employment outcomes.[25] These traits enable people to more effectively navigate unfamiliar environments and thrive in the face of having to start over from scratch.

One of the shortcomings of mainstream integration programs is that they have limited ability to take into account the diverse needs *within* migration categories. While programs may be designed to reflect the

21 An analysis of the longitudinal Survey of New Refugees (SNR) in the United Kingdom (UK) conducted between 2005 and 2009 showed that English-language acquisition was highly correlated with age, health, and social networks (in addition to family responsibilities). The 14 percent of refugees who still reported low language abilities after 21 months were disproportionately likely to be over age 35, to report poor health, to be parents or guardians of a child, and to have little or no contact with religious organizations. See Andreas Cebulla, Megan Daniel, and Andrew Zurawan, *Spotlight on Refugee Integration: Findings from the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom*, Home Office Research Report 37 (London, UK: UK Home Office, July 2010), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116062/horr37-report.pdf.

22 Liebig and Tronstad, "Triple Disadvantage?" This can be particularly overwhelming for those coming from more communal societies where domestic and child-care tasks are shared, which can contrast sharply with expectations in the country of settlement where new arrivals lack family or community networks at a time when they are most needed. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2002), 245–58, www.unhcr.org/3d98627f4.html.

23 In Germany in 2017, more than 6,500 migrant women could not participate in the regular introduction program offered due to "family and cultural reasons." See Li, "Integration of Migrant Women."

24 A report by the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI) found that an immigrant woman is more likely to access labor market programming if her husband accompanies her to the first few meetings with her case officer, thus ensuring that both parties receive the same information about a woman's rights and her future participation in the labor market. As cited in Nino Simic et al., *New in the Nordic Countries: Labour Market Inclusion of Migrants* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018), https://issuu.com/nordicwelfare/docs/new-in-the-nordic-countries-en-web. In a similar vein, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) interviews with Austrian officials describe instances of fathers and husbands preventing women from attending courses until they were made mandatory.

25 Martin Obschonka, Elisabeth Hahn, and Nida ul Habib Bajwa, "Personal Agency in Newly Arrived Refugees: The Role of Personality, Entrepreneurial Cognitions and Intentions, and Career Adaptability," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 105 (2018): 173–84.

Box 1. Improving Access to Services for Immigrant and Refugee Women

The recognition that vulnerable groups, such as immigrant and refugee women, can be excluded from mainstream services has led to a flurry of innovation across Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

One important line of innovation has been improving access to services, namely by providing free or subsidized child care so that parents (usually mothers) can attend language or training courses. Coordinating parent and child programming in this way allows for greater penetration into socially isolated populations, for whom participation might otherwise be impractical. Some programs offer evening classes or distance learning (using smartphones or other technology) to reach those who would otherwise be unable to access services during work hours. In Canada, all federally funded language training is designed for the needs of diverse learners, and is accessible through full- or part-time training, in classrooms, or online. The Association for New Canadians, for example, offers a number of language training programs to assist refugees who cannot attend daytime courses (particularly due to child-care obligations), including evening sessions, weekly tutoring sessions, and even home visits. In Colorado, almost all the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for refugees offer child care (with a focus on providing early childhood education) and are located where refugees live to streamline access.

Another approach is to offer two-generation or "whole family" programming that coordinates (and sometimes combines) services for adults and children that would otherwise have been offered in parallel. A key to this approach has been the involvement of schools. Canada's Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program (a partnership between the federal government, school boards, and local service providers) reaches newcomer families in a safe, easily accessible space, functioning as a mini welcome center to help them navigate their new environment and identify appropriate settlement services. Crucially, settlement workers also promote understanding and collaboration *between* immigrant families and school staff and students. In a similar approach, Canada's Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is an in-home program that assists parents in preparing their children for kindergarten. It takes a holistic approach to education by involving children, parents, and the community. In the United States, ACCESS to School Readiness provides training sessions focused on parenting, early childhood literacy and education, parent/child interactive literacy, and adult education to socially isolated immigrant families with young children. Providing these services to the family as a whole—rather than targeting women or children on their own—is thought to be the best way to equip young children with the cognitive, social, emotional, and language skills they will need to succeed in school. Regardless of what children learn in school, having a strong and supportive family foundation is key to ensuring good outcomes; and in the same vein, addressing the needs of children is key to their parents' success.

But despite these promising practices, it is rare to find long-term integration support (after the initial introduction period) that is compatible with work and child care. Programs may be more sustainable if they can plug into (or create) a network of similar providers within a local community, ideally coordinating with local authorities.

Sources: ACCESS, "Adult Programs," accessed June 13, 2016, www.accesscommunity.org/education/adult-programs; Associations for New Canadians, "Additional Language Services," accessed June 13, 2016, www.ancnl.ca/?Content=Language_Training__Assessment/Additional_Language_Services; Mark Greenberg et al., *Promoting Refugee Integration in Challenging Times: The Potential of Two-Generation Strategies* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/refugee-integration-two-generation-strategies; Hippy Canada, "Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (Hippy) Canada," accessed June 13, 2016, www.hippycanada.ca/; Maki Park and Margie McHugh, *Immigrant Parents and Early Childhood Programs: Addressing Barriers of Literacy, Culture, and Systems Knowledge* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-parents-early-childhood-programs-barriers; OECD, *Making Integration Work: Refugees and Others in Need of Protection* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016); Vancouver School Board, "Settlement Workers in Schools," accessed December 8, 2019, www.vsb.bc.ca/site/nwc/support-Services/swis/Pages/default.aspx.

different needs of refugees versus family migrants versus labor migrants, there is in fact an enormous variety of life experiences within each of these groups. Some young and entrepreneurial refugees may need services that look more like what is offered to labor migrants, while older newcomers who cannot bring themselves to start over and those recovering from trauma may need more social supports. There is also significant variation in the educational attainment of different refugee groups. Yet programs geared to the newly arrived tend to assume clients are in similar life stages, and are thus in some ways designed with the "average" refugee or "average" refugee spouse in mind. But this approach is neither fair to people who are unable to meet the demands of learning the host-country language and entering work, nor is it cost-effective from the perspective of the receiving country, which may miss out on alternative means for newcomers to contribute.

III. Interventions to Combat Social Isolation

In the wake of the migration crisis, many refugee-receiving countries have revised their formal integration programs to target hard-to-reach groups. These efforts have mainly been organized around the policy "hook" of accelerated labor market integration, including Germany's Strong at Work program (funded by the European Social Fund), and increased funding in countries such as Germany and Austria to target hard-to-reach female populations.[26] In parallel, there has been a surge in public activism, with new start-ups and private initiatives being launched in an effort to fill perceived gaps in government programming. While many of these efforts (such as Airbnb for Refugees) focus on emergency support, some have attempted to improve longer-term socioeconomic integration. Civil-society providers have filled gaps where government services have been insufficient to meet the scale of needs, by, for example, providing language courses and vocational training as well as social networking.[27]

There has been a surge in public activism, with new start-ups and private initiatives being launched in an effort to fill perceived gaps in government programming.

While introduction programs focusing on work, language, and civic integration adhere to a centralized integration strategy and typically have concrete standards and benchmarks, governments do not have the same systematic, centralized approach to the *social* integration of hard-to-reach groups. Interventions that address social integration in general, and especially that of isolated populations such as women and mothers, refugees, or the elderly, are typically considered complementary to core integration offerings and are usually offered by national and international NGOs, social enterprises, and local nonprofit service providers (some of which receive funding from local and/or national governments). Programs may be targeted to refugees or

26 Austria's national integration fund spent roughly 10 percent of its budget in 2017–18 on supporting women-related projects; in Germany, the federal refugee integration budget has had a strong focus on the empowerment of female refugees, with more than 100 projects implemented by civil-society organizations in 2017. See Li, "Integration of Migrant Women."

27 Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play different roles—from independent operations to full-fledged partnerships with local authorities—depending on national laws regarding, for example, whether nonstate actors are allowed to participate in public tenders to provide integration services. As Galera, Giannetto, and Noya explain, in Italy and France most reception services are provided by nonstate actors who have won public tenders, while in Germany municipalities are the principal providers (sometimes in cooperation with civil society). See Giulia Galera, Leila Giannetto, and Antonella Noya, "The Role of Non-State Actors in the Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers" (OECD Local Economic and Employment Development [LEED] Working Paper 2018/02, OECD, Paris, December 2018), www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/the-role-of-non-state-actors-in-the-integration-of-refugees-and-asylum-seekers_434c3303-en/.

other immigrants, specific vulnerable populations (e.g., women of all backgrounds, or female refugees in particular), or "mainstreamed" and available to the whole population. Municipalities in some cases have a large amount of discretion in what types of programs to fund and which partners to work with.

The result is a patchwork of social integration programs that specifically target vulnerable populations with low labor market prospects. These fall into three main categories: economic empowerment, volunteering, and building social ties, which are explored in the subsections that follow.

A. Economic Empowerment

A new generation of economic empowerment programs has widened the definition of what "work" can mean for vulnerable groups (particularly refugees). Programs connecting refugees to opportunities in cooking, crafts, child care, and gardening are typically run by nonprofits and social enterprises and have a two-pronged approach: facilitating economic empowerment (i.e., putting participants on a path to financial independence) while also building social ties and resilience. These programs have a lower barrier to entry because they are designed to leverage and build on existing "soft" or "latent" skills while not requiring formal qualifications. And by drawing newcomers directly into a work environment, they can impart necessary hard skills while bypassing the classroom (e.g., the skills needed to run a catering businesses include math and human resources management). Meanwhile, these programs seek to build social capital for all participants, regardless of employment outcomes. Bringing people together to cook, sew, or tend a garden builds social and professional networks within immigrant communities (creating new communities between refugees from different parts of the world, for example), and builds bridges between newcomers and long-term residents of a community. These benefits minimize social isolation even if the business ideas themselves do not materialize or turn profitable.

Economic empowerment programs fall into four categories:

- ***Cooking.*** Ethnic food has increasingly become a gateway into work. Social enterprises that help refugees (usually women) use their cooking and organizational skills to sell food products or start catering businesses have popped up in a number of countries. For example, Meet My Mama, a French social enterprise, helps refugee women who aspire to become chefs break into a traditionally male-dominated field;[28] From Syria with Love[29] is a Belgian social enterprise that employs Syrian housewives for catering jobs; and Mezze[30] is the first Syrian restaurant in Lisbon, launched by an NGO, which employs refugee servers and chefs, and also runs workshops available to the larger community. These programs leverage existing knowledge and skills—that might otherwise have been taken for granted—which allows them to focus on teaching industry-specific practices such as how to operate a commercial kitchen, negotiate contracts, or use business terminology. Beyond self-sufficiency, the goal is to foster mutually beneficial interactions between refugees, the host community, and even tourists, such that "everyone feels like they are both giving and receiving."[31]

- ***Crafts.*** Sewing and craft activities have also been used to reach socially isolated mothers and family caregivers. The "learning by doing" model makes training accessible to a pool of

28 Sarah Leduc, "Turning a Love for Cooking into a Career for Refugee Women," InfoMigrants, March 23, 2018, www.infomigrants.net/en/post/8054/turning-a-love-for-cooking-into-a-career-for-refugee-women.

29 As they put it, "the mission is not just to empower the women and tickle the tastebuds of the tasters; it's a bigger vision to blur the lines between the locals and the newcomers." See From Syria With Love, "About Us," accessed November 23, 2019, www.fsyriawlove.com/our-story.

30 Zahra Mackaoui and Bruno Galan Ruiz , "Lisbon's First Syrian Restaurant" (news release, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, April 23, 2018), www.unhcr.org/news/videos/2018/4/5addceff4/lisbons-first-syrian-restaurant.html.

31 Rana Elhawary, "Mezze: The Syrian Restaurant in Portugal That's Helping Refugees in a Very Big Way," Scoop Empire, May 6, 2017, https://scoopempire.com/mezze-syrian-restaurant-portugal-thats-helping-refugees-big-way/.

vulnerable women at all levels of skills and abilities who would otherwise have trouble engaging with traditional providers—for instance, women illiterate in their native language or those reluctant to attend formal courses offered by government providers. Examples include SisterWorks,[32] a hybrid nonprofit and social enterprise in Australia that helps women sell crafts and eventually become entrepreneurs; Stitch by Stitch,[33] a fashion workshop in Frankfurt that employs refugee women with tailoring experience; and Bread & Roses, a British social enterprise that helps refugee and asylum-seeking women gain skills, confidence, and language through training in the craft of floral arrangement.[34] These programs allow people to participate and build their skills without the pressure of "results," giving those who need it a longer timeline to financial independence.

- ***Child care.*** Helping women start their own child-care businesses has the dual benefit of boosting self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship within the migrant and refugee population and at the same time addressing the shortage of child-care providers in local communities. The U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, for example, provides grants to NGOs across the country to train refugee women to become licensed providers (see Box 2). Another virtuous side effect is that increasing the pool of refugee providers boosts the number of families who take advantage of early childhood education and care,[35] which improves integration outcomes for the second generation, as well as for parents who are then free to pursue work or training opportunities. Finally, early childhood service providers serving immigrant populations are increasingly recruiting staff from these ethnic communities, increasing opportunities for immigrants overall.[36]

- ***Gardening.*** Community gardens have long been used as places to bring together all residents and forge social ties (see Section III.C.). They also can offer a bridge to the labor market. The New Roots Program run by the Sacramento office of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) manages three community gardens that give 80 refugee families an opportunity to grow food for their families while also developing a sense of community.[37] Community gardens allow refugees from rural areas to leverage their agricultural experience growing food and even to sell it at local farmers' markets. Just as with catering, these programs capitalize on skills that are often overlooked in formal labor markets, and also contribute new products to local markets (e.g., introducing locals to vegetables unavailable at traditional farms).[38]

The models above work for three main reasons. First, they emphasize learning by doing—acquiring language and other skills without the need to fulfil entry or course requirements. The barriers to entry are low as participants can start out as observers or contributors, meaning all skill levels can be

32 SisterWorks, *Annual Report 2017–18* (Richmond, Australia: SisterWorks, 2018), https://sisterworks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SisterWorks-Annual-Report-2017-18e-smaller1.pdf.

33 Helen Womack and Gordon Welters, "Refugee Seamstresses Stitch Together New Lives in Germany," UNHCR USA, July 7, 2017, www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/7/595a3e4f4/refugee-seamstresses-stitch-together-new-lives-germany.html.

34 It draws inspiration from an American feminist who argued that women working in low-paid jobs need more than just the basics to survive—beyond "bread," they also deserve dignity, respect, and the opportunity to flourish ("roses"). See Bread & Roses, "Our Story," accessed December 19, 2018, www.wearebreadandroses.com/.

35 Refugee-run centers increase the pool of beneficiaries because many refugee parents are reluctant to place their children in programs where teachers do not speak the children's native language. See Greenberg et al., *Promoting Refugee Integration in Challenging Times*.

36 See an example from Grand Rapids Michigan in Greenberg et al., *Promoting Refugee Integration in Challenging Times*, 17.

37 For those with more agricultural ambitions, the program also manages a five-acre farm where refugees can learn farming techniques (everything from pest management to irrigation) as well as more general business skills, such as financial literacy, while preparing food to be sold at local farmers' markets. See International Rescue Committee (IRC), "New Roots in Sacramento" (announcement, September 6, 2018), www.rescue.org/announcement/new-roots-sacramento.

38 For example, IRC Sacramento openly advertises its refugee-run farmstand market saying that "because of the varied backgrounds of the refugee farmers, much of the produce available on the farm is rare and cannot easily be found elsewhere." See IRC, "New Roots in Sacramento."

accommodated.[39] Once newcomers are engaged in hands-on learning in a field they can relate to (like cooking or gardening), they can acquire other skills such as financial literacy or management, which are built into almost all of these programs.[40] Second, they leverage informal skills such as cooking, sewing, and childrearing, which might otherwise be overlooked in formal labor markets. Because they are not subject to the same complex requirements as regulated professions, jobs such as catering or selling crafts can draw talent from a wider pool—providing a route into work for individuals lacking formal qualifications. Third, these programs can create a bridge to formal services, including by bringing in mainstream service providers to offer advice and support in a "safe space."[41]

Box 2. Getting Refugees to Work in Shortage Areas

The Refugee Family Child Care Microenterprise Development Program in the United States provides work opportunities to refugee women in a market where there is a shortage of child-care providers. The U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides financial assistance to nongovernmental organizations throughout the country to help refugee women become licensed child-care service providers. However, this program is on precarious ground amid major cuts to U.S. refugee resettlement and associated integration infrastructure. In fiscal year (FY) 2012, its first year of operation, ORR invested USD 5.75 million in grants to 34 agencies. The project enrolled 879 refugee women, of whom 160 started their own home-based child-care programs, creating a total of 1,061 child-care slots for children. In FY 2019, it awarded ten grants (totaling USD 1.85 million). Some of these programs managed to raise private funds when federal funds dried up (e.g., the Diocese of Olympia in Washington State, and Bethany Christian Services in Michigan). The latter licensed 25 individuals as child-care providers, of whom 13 launched home-based child-care businesses. But as political tensions around refugees have risen, the scale of the program has been dramatically reduced.

Sources: Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), "Refugee Family Child Care Microenterprise Development," accessed January 3, 2019, www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugee-family-child-care; Greenberg et al., *Promoting Refugee Integration in Challenging Times*.

Despite their promising innovations, these programs face numerous challenges. The most urgent is scale. Some social enterprises are demonstrating impressive growth, for instance, by reinvesting a portion of profits into creating new opportunities for participants.[42] The promising Swedish social enterprise Yalla Trappan has also secured high-profile partnerships with businesses (its sewing studio takes commissions from IKEA) and has a partnership with the Swedish Employment Service and the city of Malmo to offer immigrant women training in commercial kitchens.[43] But most cater to only a handful of people;

39 The Swedish social enterprise Yalla Trappan—which focuses on providing opportunities for women "far from the labor market" in catering, sewing, and cleaning—also offers internships that provide an introduction to work, further lowering the barriers to participation. See Simic et al., *New in the Nordic Countries*.

40 Being a part of a broader social network also gives potential jobseekers the means to overcome another critical barrier: unfamiliarity with cultural nuances and the "unwritten rules" that guide the job market.

41 For example, UK employment advisors have attended training sessions at Bread & Roses to help refugee women with resume writing, interview techniques, and finding volunteering positions. See Lydia Shellien-Walker, "Bread and Roses: Helping Refugee Women Blossom," UNHCR UK, March 24, 2017, www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2017/3/58d4fb9a7/bread-and-roses-helping-refugee-women-blossom.html.

42 For example, one of the most successful social enterprises, SisterWorks, grew from supporting 23 women to 187 (20 of whom had their own businesses) in the five years since its founding. See SisterWorks, *Annual Report 2017–18*.

43 See Simic et al., *New in the Nordic Countries.*

the most successful may reach a few hundred.[44] A landscape dotted with small-scale initiatives also creates problems of coordination, quality control, and sustainability, particularly in a precarious funding environment. Newly created initiatives may not be able to sustain their growth after the initial period of buzz and enthusiasm. And programs supported by national-government funding face uncertain futures when the political climate turns sour on refugee support and budgets contract (as in the United States, see Box 2). Accessing funding is compounded by difficulties demonstrating success. The most successful initiatives go beyond creating employment (indeed some newcomers may not even have the legal right to work) to focus on building self-esteem and independence, promoting language learning, and forging networks and cross-cultural friendships.[45] Valuing these benefits to individual, family, or community wellbeing is not second nature for most funders or governments oriented toward more concrete outcomes such as employment rates.[46] Their metrics are difficult to quantify—a steep barrier to meaningful government investment at a time of scarcity.

B. *Volunteering and Alternative Economic Contributions*

Volunteering provides a pathway for individuals to engage meaningfully with the host community, either as a stepping-stone to the formal labor market, or as an alternative to work. Some volunteer opportunities can create on-ramps into formal employment—for example, individuals volunteering as health-care assistants or preschool aides are acquiring the vocation-specific language skills and cultural competency needed to work in these professions. Some of these opportunities may even be accessible to those without formal work permits.[47] Meanwhile, individuals who do not have the skills or qualifications to join the formal labor market may still be able to lend their skills to their new communities. For example, elderly newcomers can volunteer in local schools or community gardens. The surge in refugees in OECD countries provides a new pool of unconventional talent that may also be well matched to new community needs, such as the growing demand for cultural mediators and translators in hospitals and schools serving newly diverse populations.[48]

Individuals who do not have the skills or qualifications to join the formal labor market may still be able to lend their skills to their new communities.

Some countries have experimented with ways of incentivizing (or requiring) newcomers to donate their time and skills in ways that benefit their new community. One approach is to plug gaps in local labor

44 The popular New Roots community gardens run by the IRC in Sacramento reportedly have a waiting list of two years for families to get a plot. See Mimi Pollack, "El Cajon Community Garden Helps Refugees Transition to America," *Times of San Diego,* March 28, 2016, https://timesofsandiego.com/life/2016/03/28/el-cajon-community-garden-helps-refugees-transition-to-america/.

45 For example, the dream for Bread & Roses is "to be able to provide employment opportunities through floristry for women who have the right to work, and emotional support and sense of purpose for those who don't." See Shellien-Walker, "Bread and Roses."

46 Some countries have already broadened their definition of successful integration to include measures such as "social capital" and "feelings of belonging." The New Zealand Migrant and Settlement strategy, for example, defines successful integration using five metrics, one of which is "migrants participate in and have a sense of belonging in their communities." And the UK government is developing a new set of criteria to measure the integration of Syrian refugees, one of which is social capital. See Benton and Diegert, *A Needed Evidence Revolution*.

47 The Swiss federal government and cantons, for example, are discussing plans to allow foreigners without a work permit to volunteer in order to access certain work opportunities. See Eduard Gnesa, "Improving the Labor Market Integration of Refugees in Switzerland" (unpublished working paper, Transatlantic Council on Migration, MPI, February 2019).

48 See Desiderio, *Integrating Refugees into Host Country Labor Markets*.

markets with immigrant volunteers or trainees, for example, in elder care.[49] An NGO in Hungary provides free elder-care training courses and certification to refugees, with practical training in local retirement homes (cofunded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund);[50] and Sweden's leading public-sector union agreed to establish a new care assistant position to allow newcomers to work in elder care with only nine months of training.[51] Others encourage volunteering for the common good. For example, Austria's 2017 *Integration Year Act* required newly arrived refugees to volunteer with a charity for one year. And Germany expanded its "one-Euro jobs" program for refugees to supplement their social benefits.[52] These programs are appealing because finding ways to leverage volunteering could, in theory, both shield newcomers from social isolation and also deliver tangible benefits (even economic ones) to their host communities.[53] The evidence is mixed, however, on whether this type of engagement can be made mandatory (thus going against the spirit of what "volunteering" traditionally entails) and still be expected to reap the same benefits.

Immigrants can also be the beneficiaries of volunteer services that aim to create on-ramps to work. Deploying volunteers from the host community to boost social ties with newcomers increases the likelihood that immigrants and refugees will be able to access the kinds of social and professional networks that are vital to economic success.[54] Interviews with refugees in Austria, for example, showed that newcomers living with Austrian "guest families" received high levels of support in practicing German language skills, identifying apprenticeship opportunities, writing resumes, and navigating job applications.[55] Many countries have tried to capitalize on this synergy by experimenting with private sponsorship programs in which a group of individuals from the community play a significant role in getting newcomers settled. In Belgium, the DUO for a JOB intergenerational mentoring program matches unemployed immigrant youth with local residents over age 50 who can help them gain local labor market knowledge and language skills.[56] This program has clear benefits in terms of the employment outcomes of

49 Interviews with refugees working in the care sector in the United Kingdom revealed that they felt well suited to this type of work because they are accustomed to being polite, learning new skills quickly, and showing respect for elders. Barriers included racism and lack of social networks where these types of jobs are likely to be advertised. See Shereen Hussein, Jill Manthorpe, and Martin Stevens, "Exploring the Potential of Refugees and Asylum Seekers for Social Care Work in England: A Qualitative Study," *Health and Social Care in the Community* 19, no. 5 (2011): 468–75.

50 Helen Womack, "Hungarian Elderly Help Refugees Find New Purpose: In Caring for Others, Refugees Leave Traumas behind and Gain New Friends in 'Sceptical' Hungary," UNHCR, January 3, 2018, www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/1/5a3914534/hungarian-elderly-help-refugees-find-new-purpose.html.

51 Radio Sweden, "New 'Care Assistant' Job Created with Immigrants in Mind," Radio Sweden, April 5, 2017, https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6667519.

52 This program is designed to encourage welfare recipients to pursue "a meaningful activity" and gain familiarity with work; jobs include things such as doing laundry or distributing food within refugee shelters. Participants are paid 1 euro per hour and work a maximum of 30 hours a week for up to six months. See Meghan Benton and Liam Patuzzi, *Jobs in 2028: How Will Changing Labor Markets Affect Immigrant Integration in Europe?* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/jobs-2028-changing-labour-markets-immigrant-integration-europe.

53 Benton and Patuzzi, *Jobs in 2028*.

54 OECD research shows that interactions between locals and new arrivals boost language skills and accelerate migrants' transition into the labor market. There is strong evidence that access to social and professional networks helps job seekers obtain leads and increases their chances of finding employment. See OECD, *Ready to Help? Improving Resilience of Integration Systems for Refugees and other Vulnerable Migrants* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), www.oecd.org/publications/ready-to-help-9789264311312-en.htm. Evidence from Norway suggests that migrants who have Norwegian friends or join clubs or associations find it much easier to get into work than those who lack similar networks. See Simic et al., *New in the Nordic Countries.*

55 In a small study done in Austria of mostly Syrian and Afghani refugees who arrived in 2014 and 2015, all interviewees who had completed apprenticeships found their employment via social contacts. See Roland Verwiebe et al., "Finding Your Way into Employment against All Odds? Successful Job Search of Refugees in Austria," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 9 (2018): 1401–18.

56 With an estimated 70 percent of jobs in Belgium unadvertised, receiving mentoring from a retiree from the same sector is extremely valuable for newcomers seeking to build their networks and understand how the industry operates in their new context. See Julie Bodson, "Building the Foundations for Inclusion: What Does the Future Hold for Immigrant Integration in Europe?" (comments during MPI Conference in Brussels, January 25, 2019), www.migrationpolicy.org/events/building-foundations-inclusion-what-does-future-hold-immigrant-integration-europe.

mentees, but is also designed to benefit mentors who may themselves be socially isolated.[57] The Mentor Network run by the Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Diversity (KVINFO) has matched more than 3,500 refugee and immigrant women with Danish women who are active in the labor market.[58] This type of mentoring, however, may be more effective for educated women and less promising for those with little to no schooling.[59]

It should be noted that both types of volunteering require investments from the community. While volunteer programs are not free to maintain, they can potentially deliver high value if done correctly. However, if volunteers lack adequate training or support, they run the risk of actually undermining the social ties they seek to foster.[60] Good programs require staff who are well trained and carefully attuned to cultural sensitivities, as well as continuity and follow-through to be successful. There is also a sensitive question of how to use these programs as complements to public services rather than as substitutes. Critics of Germany's successful multigenerational houses (discussed below) claim the government is pushing volunteers into providing services that the state should be providing. Volunteering should be a way to fill gaps and offer more rather than an excuse to cut funding.

C. Nonwork Initiatives to Boost Social Ties

Boosting the quantity and quality of interactions between immigrants and the local communities in which they settle is an important path to creating a new sense of "we" and plugging newcomers into their new communities. While in some cases social networks can also be a critical stepping-stone to employment,[61] opportunities may materialize only after years or decades, if at all. This means that governments thinking about how to invest in building social ties need to define success in noneconomic terms, using metrics such as building social capital and networks. But most governments face a steep challenge in prioritizing these programs in a context of deepening integration needs.

Finding ways to share experiences across group lines (whether by attending events at the local library or even riding the subway together) boosts newcomers' language skills and sense of belonging in a new community. But since most urban infrastructure is designed for efficiency rather than to foster meaningful social interactions,[62] these interactions and connections need to be purposely built. Once again, local authorities and civil society have stepped in to fill this gap. Community-based programs provide opportunities for marginalized groups to engage with others and develop social ties, including with members of the host community. Many also create "safe spaces" to connect marginalized groups with relevant services, making use of spaces already frequented by vulnerable individuals (namely schools, libraries, community centers, homes for the elderly, or places of worship).

At the local level, sports, arts, and community gardening all offer opportunities for vulnerable newcomers to come into contact with locals. Many programs are offered by local officials or refugee service providers, and are open to the community at large. Sports can be a particularly effective means of breaking down

57 Belgians ages 55 to 64 have among the lowest activity rates (share of the population that is economically active) in the European Union and can thus benefit from volunteering activities that make them feel useful and sharpen their social skills. As of 2016, 98 percent of participating mentors opted to start a new mentoring relationship and remained in contact with previous mentees. See Claudia Cruz Leo and MaryBeth Morand, *Building Communities of Practice for Urban Refugees: Europe Regional Workshop Report* (Geneva: UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, 2016), www.refworld.org/pdfid/570617304.pdf.

58 KVINFO, "About KVINFO," accessed June 14, 2016, www.kvinfo.dk/side/715/.

59 MPI interview with Barbro Bakke, former Director General, Ministry of Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion, Government of Norway, January 23, 2019.

60 Susan Fratzke and Emma Dorst, *Volunteers and Sponsors: A Catalyst for Refugee Integration?* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2019), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/volunteers-sponsors-refugee-integration.

61 A recent study found that 70 percent of jobseekers in Sweden got into work via networks, while 16 percent did so through the Public Employment Service. A 2016 OECD report shows that 40 percent of employers in Germany make use of informal networks. See Simic et al., *New in the Nordic Countries.*

62 Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2018).

barriers between newcomers and long-term residents—as athletic ability and sportsmanship can transcend cultural differences—and providing a sense of purpose and feeling of belonging in communities. Amnesty International UK's Football Welcomes initiative organizes a weekend of special activities for local football clubs to learn more about the contribution of refugees to the sport.[63] Community gardens that create an outdoor gathering place for new residents have been shown to boost emotional and physical health, even if their purpose is not to provide a livelihood (as discussed in Section III.A.).[64] Reflecting this, Arrive Ministries, a refugee referral agency in St. Paul, Minnesota, started a program to turn the front lawns of local churches into community gardens.[65] Room to Heal, which runs a community garden in North London, aims to create a sense of belonging and help refugees from more than 30 countries heal from trauma.[66] Libraries also serve as the locus of many of these efforts; in Oslo, there are weekly "language cafes" that are free and open to anyone who wants to improve their Norwegian.[67]

Sports can be a particularly effective means of breaking down barriers between newcomers and long-term residents.

Mentorship and peer-to-peer programs are increasingly seen as cost-effective means of plugging vulnerable groups into social networks.[68] Some target specific types of vulnerability. Grandma's Kitchen in Calgary runs conversation groups for socially isolated senior women (with and without a recent immigration background),[69] while conversation circles in minority languages (such as Mandarin) can benefit seniors with limited host-country language skills.[70] Other initiatives have a broader goal of improving contact between refugees and local communities. In Norway, the H&M Foundation has had a partnership with the Norwegian Red Cross since 2016 called Refugee Buddy (Flyktningkompis), which matches young, socially isolated refugees (including unaccompanied minors) with their Norwegian peers.[71] The mentoring program Neighborhood Mothers (active in Finland, Germany, and Denmark) recruits women with origins in non-Western countries who already speak Danish to support socially isolated newcomers that mainstream programs have failed to reach. In Denmark, this program receives a mix of government and private funding, and it is thought to work best when it runs in cooperation

63 AFC Wimbledon, "Darius Backs Football Welcomes Initiative to Support Refugees" (news release, April 20, 2018), www.afcwimbledon.co.uk/news/2018/april/darius-backs-football-welcomes-initiative-to-support-refugees/.

64 Kari A. Hartwig and Meghan Mason, "Community Gardens for Refugee and Immigrant Communities as a Means of Health Promotion," *Journal of Community Health* 41, no. 6 (2016): 1153–59.

65 The gardens began as a pilot project in 2010, with a handful of churches, and by 2018 included more than 20 churches and 1,200 gardeners. See Kari A. Hartwig and Meghan Mason, "Gardens Offer Refuge to Refugees," *Public Health Post,* April 5, 2018, www.publichealthpost.org/research/community-gardens-public-health-newly-arrived-refugees/.

66 Mark Tran, "Garden Helps Refugees Put down Roots in Britain," UNHCR USA, October 23, 2017, www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2017/10/59eda4e24/garden-helps-refugees-put-down-roots-in-britain.html.

67 For example, Norway's oldest and largest public library (with 23 branches across Oslo), offers free Norwegian classes led by the Red Cross every Tuesday. Deichman, "Norwegian Training with the Red Cross," accessed November 6, 2019, https://deichman.no/event/norsktrening-med-r%C3%B8de-kors_f09eb69f-96b6-455f-8301-d5c122d5ed1f.

68 OECD, *Ready to Help?*

69 Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA), "Grandma's Kitchen," accessed November 5, 2019, www.ciwa-online.com/client-services/family-services/grandmas-kitchen.html.

70 While strengthening ties within ethnic enclaves is typically not seen as a means of integrating into the host community, there is some evidence that these activities can actually be a gateway to broader civic engagement. Individuals who join home-town associations, for example, may be more likely to join other kinds of community groups later on, such as parent-teacher associations at their local schools. See S.U.C.C.E.S.S., "Seniors Quality of Life Outreach Project," accessed November 5, 2019, www.successbc.ca/eng/services/community-services/senior-services/621-seniors-quality-of-life-outreach-project.

71 The program rationale is that "a Norwegian friend can mean more for a refugee's integration than all other integration efforts taken on by government and society." It plans to invest USD 665,000 and reach 1,200 people in the 2016–19 project period. See H&M Foundation, "Building Social Networks for Young Refugees in Norway," accessed November 5, 2019, https://hmfoundation.com/social-networks-for-young-refugees-in-norway/.

with key local actors (such as housing associations).[72] And some programs harness technology to foster intercultural friendships. HostNation is a UK app developed to combat social isolation among refugees and migrants. It uses technology designed for dating apps to match local volunteers—so-called befrienders—with refugees in the greater London area, who are referred to the program by refugee service providers.[73]

Another innovation is connecting youth and the elderly through mutually beneficial volunteering. Germany's Multigeneration Houses (*Mehrgenerationenhäuser*) are an attempt to recreate the kinds of social ties across generations that used to exist when children and grandparents lived in the same city (or even the same house). This has two practical goals: using available "grandparents" to fill temporary childcare gaps, while also reducing social isolation for the elderly. This program now has houses in nearly every German municipality, more than 80 percent of which serve populations with a migration background.[74]

As with economic empowerment programs, many of these initiatives are small scale and unevenly integrated into mainstream integration programs. In some countries, such as Norway and Sweden, municipalities have well-developed partnerships with local partners (including large organizations like the Red Cross and companies such as IKEA), which allow them to scale up community programs. In Canada, ethnic organizations play a critical role in migrants' settlement process, which lays the groundwork for forming social networks upon arrival (and networks of coethnics can eventually serve as a bridge to engaging with the broader community). But in other places, these partnerships are ad hoc and fledgling. Governments need to do a better job of engaging immigrant and refugee communities in order to further the integration of hard-to-reach populations.

But perhaps the most pressing challenge is the lack of clarity on what "success" looks like. Because governments do not have clear metrics on what results to expect from social integration efforts and how to measure them, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these programs. Even in countries that have done periodic surveys to gauge things like feelings of belonging in different municipalities, it is impossible to establish cause and effect.[75] This serves as a handicap for governments seeking to justify social integration investments at the expense of labor market programs that (while costly) have more tangible results.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Alongside the critically important focus on getting refugees and other immigrants into work, policymakers in major immigrant-receiving countries are grappling with another challenge: helping those who may never find jobs participate meaningfully in their new communities. Reducing social exclusion will require a different set of tools, and a different understanding of what integration "success" looks like. Policymakers will need to consider investments that can create social

72 Simic et al., *New in the Nordic Countries*.

73 Volunteers commit to regular contact and meet-ups (for excursions, events, logistical/administrative assistance, English practice, etc.) for three months with the intention of building long-term relationships. HostNation publishes a detailed guide for these interactions, intended to bridge cultural differences and establish realistic expectations, that each volunteer is expected to follow. See HostNation, "About," accessed November 5, 2019, www.hostnation.org.uk/.

74 Some programs are taking these critiques to heart. As of 2018, Neighborhood Mothers is implementing a new tool to measure the effect of this program on the women receiving support as well as on the volunteer "mothers" themselves.

75 Mark K. Smith, "Mehrgenerationenhäuser – Multi-Generational Meeting Houses in Germany," Encyclopaedia of Informal Education, accessed December 21, 2019, www.infed.org/mobi/mehrgenerationenhausen-multigenerational-meeting-houses-animation-care-pedagogy.

infrastructure[76]—not just employment and training infrastructure. This may mean supporting community interactions in libraries or gardens that can promote self-worth and social connectivity; or it may mean facilitating alternative contributions through volunteering or community service. Above all, it will require rethinking the value of social programs that cannot demonstrate immediate, easily quantified economic benefits. While supporting vulnerable, socially isolated groups has benefits for the whole of society, the benefits are diffuse, accrue over the longer term, and may not have political support; meanwhile, the costs of investing in this area are immediate and sometimes steep.

As policymakers weigh how to invest in newly arrived populations, a complex set of cost-benefit analyses are at play. Groups of people who need more social support over a longer timeline (such as parents of young children) or who may never enter work (such as older refugees) are often seen a riskier investment because it is easier to make the case for integration spending if the end goal is employment. Investing in boosting social ties and networks, which may or may not have a measurable economic payoff, is likely to be a harder sell. Funding conversation circles in migrants' native languages, for example, could be an initial bridge toward greater integration, or a stopping point (if people do not leave their ethnic enclaves). The challenge is that, due to the limited evidence available, governments often will not know in advance what the outcome is; this requires willingness to invest in reducing social isolation for its own sake, not just as a path to economic self-sufficiency.

Reducing social exclusion will require a different set of tools, and a different understanding of what integration "success" looks like.

How should government-run programs decide how much to invest in "social" versus economic programs? In some cases, social and economic goals dovetail, and programs successfully create paths to eventual employment for vulnerable populations. But in other cases, new standards for successful integration need to be developed—standards that reflect the importance of ensuring that newcomers acquire social capital and a feeling of belonging in their new homes. The benefits have long-term spillover effects that often include host communities and society overall. For instance, filling shortages in elder care with volunteers who may have experience with or interest in working with seniors holds tremendous potential in aging host communities, which may be reassured of the value of newly arrived migrants as an asset to society. However, the evidence on whether economic empowerment, volunteering, or social networking programs offer an eventual stepping-stone to employment—or whether they succeed in catalyzing deeper social ties more broadly—is lacking.

Despite this incomplete evidence base, there are a number of takeaways that can help policymakers address the problem of social exclusion:

- ***What successful integration looks like and how it is measured need to be reconceptualized.*** Integration programs are often evaluated on the basis of self-sufficiency or employment outcomes, and this does not capture benefits such as addressing women's isolation and promoting interactions between different groups. In addition, entering the labor market is not a feasible objective for all vulnerable populations; thus, instead of investing in traditional training for people who are not realistically going to become productively employed, resources might be better spent building bridges between immigrants and their host communities (e.g., by fostering volunteerism), and engaging parents in an effort to give a boost to the next generation.

76 Sociologist Eric Klinenberg defines "social infrastructure" as established physical spaces where people can assemble (such as libraries, schools, and even cafes). These vital civic spaces provide ways to "draw people into the public realm" where they can regularly cross class, race, and generational lines. See Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*.

- ***Introduction programs are not the only way to target refugee women.*** The arc of refugee women's progress in the labor market is longer than that of male refugees, whose progress tapers (and in some cases even reverses after six to ten years). Women, however, continue to progress, slowly, over a time frame of ten to 15 years.[77] And the first years after arrival are often a time of peak fertility and thus family obligations. This suggests that even if newcomers fail to engage with mainstream services in the first few years post-arrival, it is not too late to target nonworking women. Governments should work closely with civil-society providers to ensure that community-level programs are available on a much longer timeline for vulnerable groups.

- ***One-size-fits-all systems can miss the mark.*** Mainstream integration programs typically target the "average" immigrant, refugee, or refugee spouse, and thus fail to account for the considerable diversity within categories. Specifically, a lack of understanding of where newcomers may be in their life cycle can result in policy mismatches; new parents and soon-to-be retirees not only have varying immediate needs, but also different work goals and prospects.

- ***Market forces may be leveraged to ensure programs are sustainable—particularly in scarce funding climates.*** Because nonprofits have limited resources to scale up in any meaningful way, the social enterprise model (which leverages market forces) or social impact bonds may be more promising. Demonstrating market demand for refugee products and services also indicates real benefits to receiving communities and can thus defuse tensions.

- ***Better coordination between government and civil-society providers is needed.*** How to balance mainstream integration support with that offered by NGOs? Nongovernmental programs have several advantages, including their ability to serve the most vulnerable regardless of legal status. Some newly arrived refugees whose asylum claims have not yet been adjudicated may not yet be eligible for work (or even access all integration services). These programs can fill a gap for these populations, who otherwise might be isolated during this time spent in legal limbo. The mission of NGOs is also well suited to promoting social integration without expecting a tangible return on investment. But in other ways, the lack of a structural link to mainstream services is a disadvantage, as it impedes coordination, invites duplication, and leaves initiatives in a precarious position in terms of funding and sustainability.

The risks of social exclusion carry long-term consequences beyond individual wellbeing, including the long-term success of children of marginalized adults, for intergroup dynamics, and for society as a whole. Yet most countries lack the policy tools to systematically address this challenge. It is difficult to make the case to divert scarce resources away from employment when the benefits of getting newcomers into work are so clear and immediate, while the benefits of investing in social ties are less studied and slower to materialize. But for those who may never find traditional jobs (or who may need a decade or more to get there), investments in social infrastructure can serve as a lifeline to a society from which they would otherwise remain isolated.

77 Liebig and Tronstad, "Triple Disadvantage?"

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The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

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