Refugee Integration Reframed: Adapting Existing Framework to the Unique Experience of Nagorno-Karabakh Refugees in Armenia

Lydia Smith
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Introduction

Refugee integration into local communities has become a popular topic in migration studies over the last twenty years. Refugees, defined broadly as people who are forced to leave their homes due to persecution or violent conflict, can be subdivided into two main types: those who flee their homeland for somewhere else and those who flee within their own country, or internally displaced persons (IDPs).[1] This bifurcation leaves little room for cases such as the 2023 exodus of people from Nagorno-Karabakh, where approximately 120,000 ethnic Armenians were forced to flee from their homeland, within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan, to the Republic of Armenia. In order to understand this case and assess Armenian policy in a nuanced way, an adapted framework for understanding refugee integration is needed, building upon preexisting work on refugee integration by Ager & Strang, Ndofor-Tah et al., and Jenny Phillimore, as well as Armenia-specific migrant integration contextualization by Scot Hunter et al.

In order to best fit the post-2023 Armenian context, I propose three changes to the refugee integration frameworks popularized by Ager & Strang and Ndofor-Tah et al.:

1. Adding "security," including the perception of security, as a foundational element
2. Emphasizing the role of refugee language and cultural preservation
3. Adding "public narratives" as a facilitating element

All of these changes stem from the unique situation in Armenia, either from the geopolitical context of the nation or from the shared identity between the refugee and local populations.

The Unique Case of Karabakh Armenians

In September of 2023, the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnically Armenian enclave within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan, was ethnically cleansed from the territory after a monthslong blockade of the Lachin corridor, which connected Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and an Azerbaijani military offensive that sought to forcibly reintegrate the territory into Azerbaijan. Of the population, though some migrated to Russia or

[1] Gerasymenko, Yevgen, Nataliia Zadyraka, Viktoriia Georgiievska, Nataliia Kovalenko, and Yulia Leheza. 2022. "Correlation of Administrative Definitions of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: Compliance with International Standards." The Age of Human Rights Journal, no. 18 (June): 491–505.

Europe, the vast majority moved to the Republic of Armenia, a nation whose population shares ethnic, cultural, and historical ties to that of Nagorno-Karabakh.[2]

For many, Armenia was the only natural destination. Survey data taken in 2020 indicated that while 85% of the population had never traveled to a state outside of Nagorno-Karabakh *other* than Armenia, nearly two-thirds of the population *had* already traveled to Armenia, with 40% of the population having visited "several times." Additionally, 99.5% of the people living there self-described their ethnicity as Armenian, with 73% describing themselves as "very proud" to be a member of their ethnic group, and another 21% as "somewhat proud." Despite this strong association with Armenia and Armenianness, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh has strong distinct regional identity – from the same data, 85% of respondents self-identified as Karabakhi (meaning Armenian from Nagorno-Karabakh), while only 11.9% identified themselves as Hayastani (meaning Armenian from the Republic of Armenia).[3]

In addition to regional identity, Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh speak a distinct dialect of Armenian, containing not just unique syntax and morphology but also significant variation in vocabulary from the Eastern Armenian dialects spoken in the regions near Yerevan.[4] Since arriving in the Republic of Armenia, the preservation of their language has become a unique challenge for many refugees. As a minority language, there is concern that the dialect may disappear, especially as the younger generation of speakers grows up mostly among Eastern Armenian speakers.[5] Because the refugees were forced to leave behind many tangible aspects of their culture – unique architecture, art, churches, the places and sites that were significant to them – their language carries an extra psychological and cultural significance.[6] Although there are regions such as Syunik and Tavush where the local dialect is similar to the Karabakh dialect, because there is no longer any geographic area with a concentrated number of speakers, it is unlikely that the dialect will be preserved as a living language for more than a couple of generations. The social and psychological importance of maintaining refugees' native languages is well documented, though most research focuses on cases where the refugee's language and the local language are more different from one another than in the case of Eastern Armenian and Karabakh Armenian.[7] Despite this grim future, there are some organizations, most of which are community-funded, working to preserve the dialect and cultural heritage of the region.[8]

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[2] Heinrich, Andreas, Ivaylo Dinev, Nadja Douglas, Farid Guliyev, and Tatia Chikhladze. 2025. "Forced Displacement: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the South Caucasus." ETH Zurich. https://doi.org/10.3929/ETHZ-B-000712914.

[3] Heinrich, et al. "Forced Displacement"

[4] Melkonyan, Victoria, and Sonya Dymova. 2024. "Forcibly Displaced from Artsakh, They Work to Preserve Dialect despite Discrimination." CIVILNET. August 14, 2024. https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/793263/forcibly-displaced-from-artsakh-they-work-to-preserve-dialect-despite-discrimination/.

[5] Vanyan, Marut. 2025. "Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians Struggle to Cling to Their Identity." The Armenian Mirror-Spectator. Armenian Mirror-Spectator. January 16, 2025. https://mirrorspectator.com/2025/01/16/nagorno-karabakhs-armenians-struggle-to-cling-to-their-identity/.

[6] Melkonyan, "Forcibly Displaced from Artsakh"

[7] McLoughlin, Shirley Wade. 2023. "New Language Acquisition for Refugees: A Key to Effective Transitioning." "Intercultural Dialogues" Transactions 7 (October). https://doi.org/10.52340/idw.2023.96.

[8] Melkonyan, "Forcibly Displaced from Artsakh"

Even the official position of the government of the Republic of Armenia appears divided on just how "Armenian" these newcomers are. On September 24th, 2023, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said in a public address to the nation that "the Government will welcome our sisters and brothers of Nagorno Karabakh to the Republic of Armenia with all care."[9] But, though in principle they are all eligible to apply for citizenship, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was not immediately recognized as citizens of Armenia upon their arrival. Previous passports were no longer valid as anything other than travel documents, and the process of obtaining new passports was difficult and confusing for many.[10] Additionally, many institutions from Nagorno-Karabakh, from legislative and political bodies to the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Artsakh, were not allowed to re-register in the Republic of Armenia as official institutions.[11]

This in-between – neither indistinguishable from local Armenians nor fully different – is unusual in a refugee crisis. Though no crisis is ever identical to another, frameworks provide useful tools to help policymakers and analysts alike understand how to implement successful programs. In a refugee context, that means a framework for refugee integration, or the process of helping refugees move, adjust, and eventually thrive in their new environment. Traditional refugee frameworks were built imagining a situation where the refugee and local communities are far more different and less familiar with one another than is the case in Armenia today. And, therefore, when discussing Armenia, traditional refugee integration frameworks should be adjusted accordingly.

In Search of an Integration Framework

Though ideas of migrant integration were first developed in the 1920s, primarily to discuss the arrival of European immigrants to the United States, modern conceptions of integration first gained ground in the 1970s as an attempt to replace the notions of acculturation and assimilation wherein the goal of immigration policy was to force migrant populations to become virtually indistinguishable from non-migrant populations.[12] Since the turn of the 21st century, "integration" has come to mean something between multiculturalism and assimilation, especially in Western Europe, North America, and Australia.[13]

In 2008, BriAger and Strang developed a framework for integration that was specifically tailored to refugees which has become very important in the field. Their normative framework describes what they call "successful" integration of refugees into a new society, based on ten core domains subdivided into four categories: Markers and Means (*Employment, Housing, Education, Health*), Social Connection (*Social Bridges, Social Bonds, Social Links*), Facilitators

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[9] "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Message about Independence." 2023. September 24, 2023. https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2023/09/24/Nikol-Pashinyan-messages/.

[10] Schicks, Ursula. 2025. "Updated. Why Aren't The People Of Artsakh RA Citizens Despite Holding Passports?" Media.Am. January 12, 2025. https://media.am/en/verified/2025/01/12/41473/.

[11] Heinrich, et al. "Forced Displacement"

[12] Hunter, Scot, Marina Shapira, Maria Fotopoulou, Sarah Wilson, and Maria Zaslavskaya. 2024. "Indicators of Integration: Assessing the Impact of Perceptions about Rights and Security, Public Outcomes, and Social Connections on Intentions to Stay of Newcomers in Armenia." Diaspora A Journal of Transnational Studies, November.

[13] Phillimore, Jenny. 2024. "From Mere Life to a Good Life: Shifting Refugee Integration Policy from Outcomes to Capabilities." Refugee Survey Quarterly 43 (4): 387–409.

(*Language and Cultural Knowledge, Safety and Stability*), and Foundation (*Rights and Citizenship*). The domains are not necessarily discrete, nor do they have to be fulfilled in a particular order, though the foundation of *Rights and Citizenship* (and the goal of achieving it) is important because it clarifies what the metric of comparison is – other members of the local society who have rights and citizenship. According to the authors, the framework was created intentionally broadly, in order to be applicable to as many different societies and situations as possible.[14]

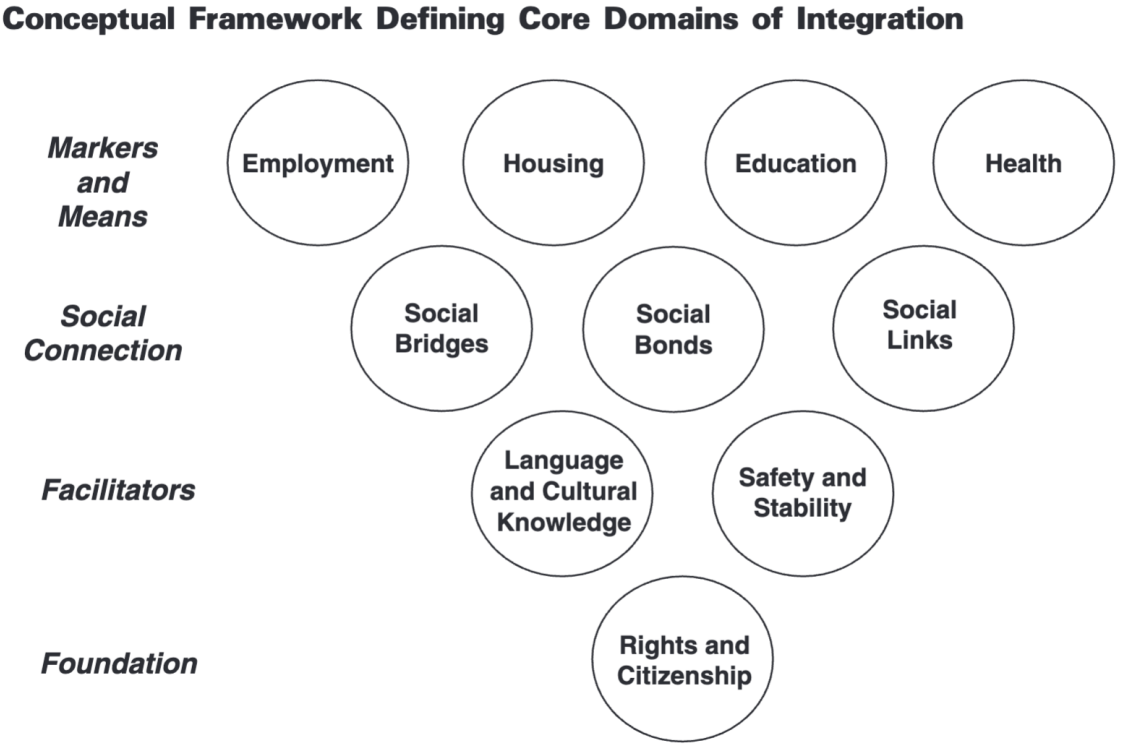

Fig 1. Ager and Strang's Refugee Integration Framework (2008)

In 2019, Ndofor-Tah et al. created an updated framework based on Ager and Strang's which includes two new domains: one in the category Markers and Means (*Leisure*) and one in the category Facilitators (*Digital Skills*). The updated framework also breaks up *Language* and *Culture* as their own categories, as well as *Safety* and *Stability*, and rephrases the Foundation domain to *Rights and Responsibilities* (though there still appears to be a particular emphasis on citizenship; in the explanation for the category, the authors state that "[t]he acquisition of citizenship … provides an important bedrock to the integration of any individual in a society").[15]

[14] Ager, Alastair, and Alison Strang. 2008. "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework." Journal of Refugee Studies 21 (2): 166–91.

[15] Ndofor-Tah, Carolyne, Alison Strang, Jenny Phillimore, Linda Morrice, Lucy Michael, Patrick Wood, and Jon Simmons. 2019. "Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework." Home Office. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/627cc6d3d3bf7f052d33b06e/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf.

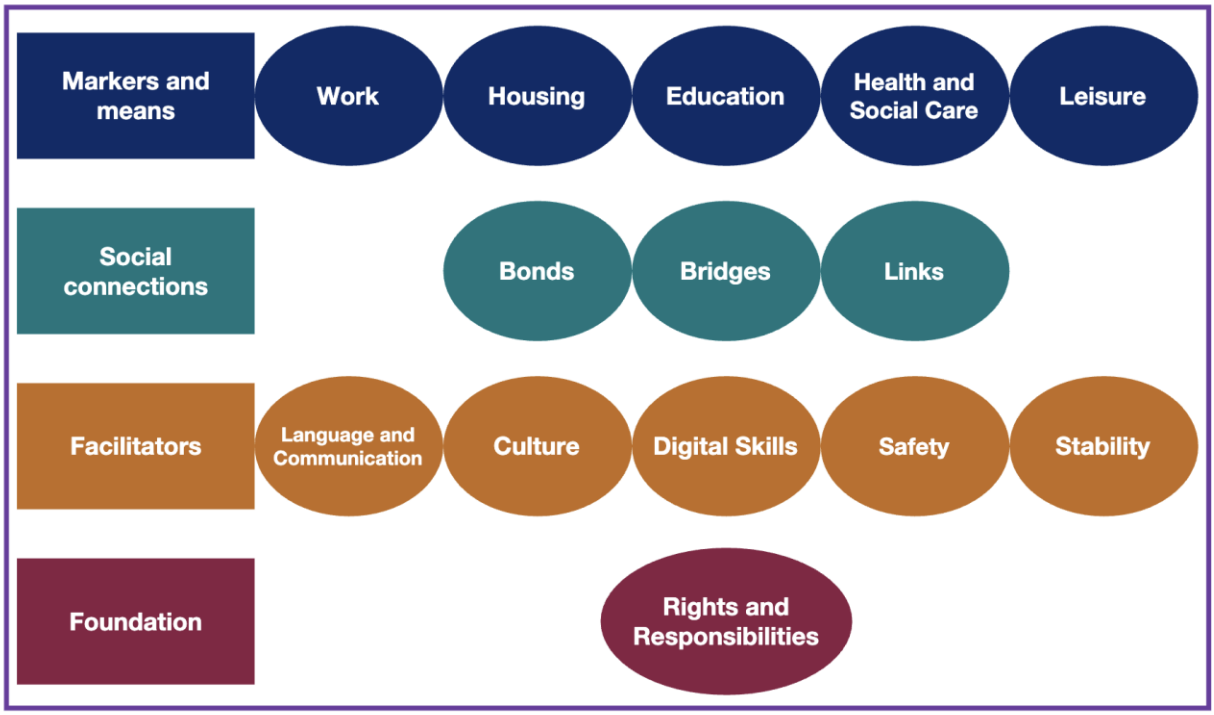

Fig 2. Ndofor-Tah et al.'s Refugee Integration Framework (2019)

Recently, the notion of refugee integration has been criticized by scholars as being overly normative, de-individualizing, and perpetuating the idea that refugees and migrants must necessarily live outside of some ill-defined pristine "society" in order to "integrate" *into* it – therefore contributing to the marginalization of these communities.[16] Worse, the concept of "integration" can perpetuate the notion of a binary of *us-vs-them* that pits the host society and migrants at odds with one another, due to an overemphasis on national frameworks and perceived differences that must be bridged in order for the migrant community to belong.[17] Additionally, there is a problematic lack of consistency in the scholarly definition of "integration," and, as pointed out by critics, definitions that focus on *functional standards* such as employment or citizenship that refugees "ought to meet" tend to prioritize compliance above all else, and neglect important metrics such as happiness, social and emotional health, and quality of life.[18] As Jenny Phillimore writes, "[e]xisting integration policy and scholarship overlook a key imperative of human existence: the desire to live a good life."[19]

Despite such criticisms and a lack of clear definitions, "integration" is still the term used to describe asylum and immigration policies. I argue for a definition of "integration" that emphasizes both functional metrics *and* refugees' quality of life, drawing inspiration from Phillimore's capabilities integration framework, which was created in part to address the

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[16] Schinkel, Willem. 2018. "Against 'Immigrant Integration': For an End to Neocolonial Knowledge Production." Comparative Migration Studies 6 (1): 31.
[17] Erdal, Marta Bivand. 2013. "Migrant Transnationalism and Multi-Layered Integration: Norwegian-Pakistani Migrants' Own Reflections." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 39 (6): 983–99.
[18] Phillimore, "From Mere Life to a Good Life"
[19] Ibid.

criticisms of integration scholarship.[20] I also argue that the framework used to define integration should be adapted from previous literature in order to fit the Armenian context post-2023. Specifically, I focus on the notions of refugee well-being, drawing from Jenny Phillimore, as well as Scot Hunter et al.'s Armenia-specific work on perceptions of identity, security, and social connections. This work, in addition to Ager and Strang's and Ndofor-Tah et al.'s refugee integration frameworks, serves as the groundwork for my framework.

An Integration Framework For Armenia Post-2023

As previously discussed, there are several ways in which the case of refugees in Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh is unique. In the frameworks proposed by Ager and Strang and Ndofor-Tah et al., there is an implicit assumption that the refugees and host community do not share the same national identity, and therefore, citizenship is presented as a foundational domain.[2122] In a Western European context (where both frameworks originate), there are relatively few situations when a refugee already has some significant national claim to the country they relocate to. In other words, it is rare (though not impossible) that a Belgian refugee arrives in Belgium, or that an Englishman shows up seeking asylum in England (either under a civic or ethnic definition of nationalism). Though some such people certainly do arrive, they do so on a case-by-case basis, and not in the form of a mass refugee event.[*see note 23*] In most cases, the refugees that do arrive to Western Europe and North America face a long and difficult road towards citizenship, which, under the civic conception of nationalism, is their only way of becoming French, or American, or Canadian.[24] *see note 25*

In the post-2023 Armenian context, the situation is very different. Of the people who fled Nagorno-Karabakh, 99.5% self-identified as "Armenian."[26] The Republic of Armenia can issue

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ager and Strang, "Understanding Integration"

[22] Ndofor-Tah et al., "Home Office Indicators"

[23] Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, many of which show how fraught the concept of "national identity" really is. One such example is the case of so-called Kazakh Germans, many of whom relocated to Germany from Kazakhstan in the 1990s. Most of them descend from Volga Germans, who were invited by Catherine the Great to settle the Volga river valley in the 18th century. Much of the population was deported to Kazakhstan during World War II. Interestingly, before the move to Russia, many of these "Volga Germans" were born in geographic territory which is today Denmark. (Kaiser, Darrel Philip. 2007. Emigration to and from the German-Russian Volga Colonies. Darrel Philip Kaiser.)

[24] Piwoni, Eunike, and Marlene Mußotter. 2023. "The Evolution of the Civic–Ethnic Distinction as a Partial Success Story: Lessons for the Nationalism–Patriotism Distinction." Nations and Nationalism 29 (3): 906–21.

[25] Whether or not they are accepted by the general public as French, American, or Canadian is a different matter. Most citizens of a country view their national identity as a combination of civic and ethnic factors (Piwoni and Mußotter, The Evolution of the Civic-Ethnic Distinction). Immigrants who have obtained *de jure* citizenship but don't fit into the ethnic/racial/religious definition of nationalism in their new society are often prevented from having the same *de facto* privileges of citizenship as individuals who do fit those definitions. Additionally, immigrants are often tasked with abiding by a higher standard if they want to *keep* their citizenship, and both citizenship and the lengthy process to acquire it are frequently used as carrots and sticks to ensure the compliance of immigrant populations. (Houdt, Friso van, Semin Suvarierol, and Willem Schinkel. 2011. "Neoliberal Communitarian Citizenship: Current Trends towards 'Earned Citizenship' in the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands." International Sociology: Journal of the International Sociological Association 26 (3): 408–32.)

[26] Heinrich et al., "Forced Displacement"

passports, which function as travel documents, to individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh.[27] Though few people have applied for citizenship, in principle, all are eligible.[28] But even those from Nagorno-Karabakh without Armenian citizenship are eligible for temporary protection status and have access to primary care practice and free or reduced medical services, according to the Ministry of Health.[29] Unlike the contexts that the frameworks were created in, many refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh already had significant ties to Armenia, either tangibly, socially, or through their conception of shared national identity.[30] Similarly, because Armenian national identity is closely linked to cultural and ethnic identity, most Armenians from within Armenia view those from Nagorno-Karabakh as Armenian, regardless of their citizenship status.[31] Therefore, from a functional standpoint, citizenship does not appear to be foundational, as there are (theoretically) few administrative barriers to obtaining citizenship, and an individual's "Armenianness" is less defined by citizenship as it is by cultural and ethnic ties.[see note 32]

Hunter et al. highlight the importance of *security* as foundational in an integration framework in an Armenian context.[33] They argue that, in the Western European or North American contexts, refugees' underlying assumption is that by moving to Europe or America they are removing the threat of war. However, for refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh who move to Armenia, this assumption may not be so.[34] This paper was written in response to those who fled the 44-day war, but in light of the 2023 forced displacement, it still holds. Perceived security threats, whether due to the uncertainty of the outcome of the proposed Zangzeur corridor, conflict in bordering nations such as as the short-lived war between Iran, Israel, and the USA, or concern over further aggression from Azerbaijan, can all contribute to a continued feeling of insecurity.[35]

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[27] Schicks, "Why Aren't The People Of Artsakh RA Citizens Despite Holding Passports?"

[28] Heinrich et al., "Forced Displacement"

[29] Sargsyan, Gohar. 2024. "Ինչ են կորցնում արցախցիները՝ ընդունելով Հայաստանի քաղաքացիություն •." [What do Artsakh residents lose by accepting Armenian citizenship?] media.am. August 1, 2024. https://media.am/hy/verified/2024/08/01/40232/.

[30] Dinev, Ivaylo, and Nadja Douglas. 2024. "The Political and Cultural Fate of Karabakh Armenians in Armenia." September 4, 2024. https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/the-political-and-cultural-fate-of-karabakh-armenians-in-armenia.

[31] Yacoubian, George S. 2022. "Evaluating the Triadic Relationship between the Armenian Diaspora, Armenia's Cultural Identity, and the Artsakh War: Toward a Sustainable Map of Peace." Advances in Applied Sociology 12 (09): 557–84.

[32] Counterpoint to this, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan appears to be attempting to reposition Armenian national identity towards civic nationalism, emphasizing the importance of patriotism for internationally recognized borders of the nation with his "Real Armenia" ideology. Under this ideology, the primary definition of "Armenian" would shift away from a person with cultural and/or ethnic ties to the nation, and towards a person who lives, works, and pays taxes inside the country's borders. In the context of refugees and other recent migrants to Armenia, including Syrian Armenians, Russians, and Ukrainians, this might make citizenship more foundational than I present in this article. However, "Real Armenia" is currently quite unpopular, and is viewed by many as Pashinyan "giving up" on Nagorno-Karabakh. The long-term implications of the doctrine for national identity are unclear.

[33] Hunter et al., "Indicators of Integration."

[34] Ibid.

[35] Aliyev, Ilkin. Feb. 27 2025. "Armenia and Azerbaijan Trapped in the Security Dilemma. Militarization or Peace for Security?" Caucasus Edition. Accessed July 15, 2025. https://caucasusedition.net/armenia-and-azerbaijan-trapped-in-the-security-dilemma-militarization-or-peace-for-security/.

This aligns with Phillimore's wellbeing framework, where key elements include the ability of a person to plan for the future and have control over their own environment in order to *feel* secure – an element of integration which she notes is underresearched, despite the focus on bodily safety.[36] The perception of security is distinct from the notion of physical safety as defined by Ager and Strang/Ndofor-Tah et al, which, while still critically important, is primarily defined through a presence or lack of negative outcome indicators (such as hate crimes, sexual violence, etc.) instead of being defined through the presence or lack of opportunity for the refugee.[37] Under Phillimore's framework, importance is placed on refugee agency and capability, which allows for more individuality and self-determination of a "good life."[38]

I argue that, drawing on ideas from Hunter et al. and Phillimore, security – including perceived security – should be viewed as a foundational category for an Armenian refugee integration framework. This is not to diminish the importance of citizenship, but to stress the need for attention towards security. In a country where more than one out of thirty people have recently fled their homes and the country is only five years out from a war, the need to feel secure is something that unites members of society. Immigration and asylum policies in particular should have the ultimate goal of leading refugees towards a sense of security. One way this may apply specifically to Armenia is ensuring refugees are able to resettle away from the border with Azerbaijan, where they may face retraumatization.[39]

Another way in which the situation in Armenia differs from other refugee crises has to do with the shared cultural and linguistic background between the refugees and host community. Under Ager and Strang/Ndofor-Tah et al.'s frameworks, *Language* and *Culture* are domains under "Facilitators." The function of a "facilitating" domain is something that "removes barriers to integration."[40] Under traditional frameworks, language and culture are presumed to be different between refugees and locals, and there is less scholarship on the cases where they are similar. However, what research exists shows that it is very hard for refugees to preserve their dialects, particularly across generations and when faced with social pressure to conform to the "standard" dialect. For instance, Abushihab et al. found that "Palestinians living in Jordanian refugee camps try to preserve their dialects [of Arabic] as part of their identity, but the coming generations are obliged to integrate into the Jordanian society and to use Jordanian dialects."[41] Mi Yung Park found a similar situation among North Korean refugees living in South Korea,[42] as

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[36] Phillimore, "From Mere Life to a Good Life."
[37] Ndofor-Tah et al. "Home Office Indicators"
[38] Phillimore, "From Mere Life to a Good Life."
[39] Vartanyan, Olesya. 2024. "Armenia Struggles to Cope with Exodus from Nagorno-Karabakh." International Crisis Group. March 4, 2024. https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/armenian-azerbaijani-conflict-armenia/armenia-struggles-cope-exodus.
[40] Ager and Strang, "Understanding Integration."
[41] Abushihab, Ibrahim, and Basel Al-Sheikh Hussein. 2015. "The Dialectal and Cultural Situation among Palestinians Living in Refugee Camps in Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Study." International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities 9 (2): 16–25.
[42] Park, Mi Yung. 2022. "'I Don't Want to Be Distinguished by Others': Language Ideologies and Identity Construction among North Korean Refugees in South Korea." Language Awareness 31 (3): 271–87.

did Tanya Basok when studying Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica.[43] In all of these cases, losing one's original dialect is done in order to achieve better social status, but is not desirable, as alongside the loss of dialect comes the loss of particular stories, songs, sayings, and other intangible aspects of culture. In Armenia, refugees have reported being discriminated against for their use of the Nagorno-Karabakh dialect, which has caused some to move away from it in public use.[44]

While other refugee frameworks focus mainly on language acquisition, I believe language preservation is, in this case, especially important. No longer having a homeland, the dialect as a spoken language will die. But there could be a role for policy in its preservation – ensuring that intangible cultural heritage such as literature, songs, and stories are recorded so that the end of the dialect as a spoken language doesn't mean it is completely erased. Similarly, cultural legacies such as traditions, dance, and food will become difficult to maintain without a concentrated community of people to pass them along. You can't carry a museum with you when you flee, but there are already public institutions in the Republic of Armenia dedicated to the history and preservation of Armenian culture that may be able to work collaboratively with historians, scholars, and other professionals from Nagorno-Karabakh. This could help encourage people from Nagorno-Karabakh to see that their dialect and way of life is viewed as being as worthy of preservation as those of other Armenians, and it could open the door to that view for other citizens, too.

Another metric I will add to the framework to specifically address the Armenian case is the presence of a public narrative. Because of the scale of the 2023 refugee crisis, the topic has been present on all levels of Armenian media. And, while the initial reception of refugees was welcoming and measures to improve refugees' quality of life were supported by the general public, as the strain on the state budget and competition for jobs started to show, social friction has grown.[45] According to Ager and Strang, "friendliness of the local people" is the most highly correlated activity with quality of life.[46] Phillimore also points out the necessity of making friends and positive affiliations with local people. However, as she also points out, refugees are often demonized by negative stereotypes.[47] Narratives in Armenia towards refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh have been increasingly negative, with a rise in instances of hate speech and discrimination from the general public[48] as well as anti-refugee messaging from government leaders.[49] Therefore, public narratives and positioning are essential parts of successful integration, as they can curb disinformation and help to prevent refugees from being stereotyped.

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[43] Basok, Tanya. 2014. Keeping Heads above Water: Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica. McGill-Queen's University Press. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/yale-ebooks/reader.action?docID=3330833&c=UERG&ppg=65#.

[44] Melkonyan, "Forcibly Displaced from Artsakh"

[45] Vartanyan, "Armenia Struggles to Cope with Exodus from Nagorno-Karabakh"

[46] Ager and Strang, "Understanding Integration."

[47] Phillimore, "From Mere Life to a Good Life."

[48] Sargsyan, Siranush. "Artsakh Armenians Face Discrimination and Hate Speech in Armenia," The Armenian Weekly, April 22, 2025.

[49] Grigoryan, Tigran, and Aram Tadevosyan. 2025. "State-Sponsored Hate: How Armenia's Ruling Party and Pro-Government Media Target Karabakh Refugees." CIVILNET. April 22, 2025. https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/946381/state-sponsored-hate-how-armenias-ruling-party-and-pro-government-media-target-karabakh-refugees/.

Conclusion

This paper argues that existing refugee integration frameworks, while valuable, require significant adaptation to accurately reflect the unique context faced by ethnic Armenian refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh in post-2023 Armenia. Drawing upon established integration models by Ager and Strang, Ndofor-Tah et al., Phillimore's wellbeing framework, and Armenia-specific insights from Hunter et al., I propose a context-sensitive approach emphasizing perceived security, linguistic and cultural preservation, and management of public narratives. Unlike traditional integration frameworks, citizenship in the Armenian scenario is not foundational due to shared ethnic and cultural identity. Instead, perceived security emerges as crucial, given Armenia's geopolitical context and recent traumatic displacement experiences. Similarly, rather than assimilating refugees linguistically, the focus should be on bridging dialectal differences, ensuring the sustainability of Karabakh Armenian as an integral part of Armenia's broader cultural heritage. Finally, managing public narratives is essential to combating rising discrimination and social tension, underscoring the critical role of media and policy in shaping integration outcomes.

While this framework offers targeted improvements for policy implementation, empirical validation remains necessary. Future research should involve long-term studies and in-depth qualitative analyses of refugee experiences to refine and validate this integration framework further. Ultimately, I believe that this approach to refugee integration has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of life and long-term stability of Karabakh Armenians living in the Republic of Armenia. But the window for building this policy may be narrowing. In July 2025, it has been over a year and a half since the beginning of the crisis, and both people and opinions are settling more and more firmly into place. Policy changes should be made soon if they are to have the most effect, particularly given the extent of the crisis, rising levels of social friction, and the hazard of ignoring one's neighbor.

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