FROM MERE LIFE TO GOOD LIFE:
Shifting Refugee Integration Policy from Outcomes to Capabilities

In recent years increasing forced migration has been accompanied by growing scholarly and policy attention on integration in Western countries. Positive integration outcomes are said to denote the success of resettlement programmes while positive integration processes can mitigate trauma. Integration has attracted much critique from scholars who have expressed concerns that the very idea of integration both problematizes and others refugees. They argue that measuring normative integration outcomes establishes standards for refugees not expected of others, and sets refugees up to fail. At the same time, the concept endures because it has resonance with all parties, in an endeavour that is increasingly understood as a shared responsibility. Integration scholars and critics have tended to focus on mere self-sufficiency failing to consider refugees’ aspirations and quality of life. In this paper, the proposition is made that the outcome of integration processes can be reconfigured as a good life, a life in which refugees, and all people, flourish. Using the work of Nussbaum and Wolff and De Shalitt ten integration capabilities are outlined which require policy input to enable freedom to choose and access to resources. I show how the integration capabilities approach can offer a way to think about how unfreedoms and abilities to realise capabilities shape refugees’ lives in refuge. I argue that shifting attention from normative measurements of outcomes to freedoms and resources and the role of policy in facilitating or denying these addresses some of the key critiques around integration scholarship.

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