

# Policy perceptions of Integration Practitioners: Meeting the needs of older refugees in the European Union



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## Abstract

Refugee integration practitioners perform dynamic, fluid work that requires large discretionary freedom in order to meet the needs of their clients. This study investigates **to what extent do Integration Practitioners perceive that existing policies support or hinder their work to integrate Older Refugees and how they respond to these perceptions in their daily practices.** Findings from interviews with 15 Integration Practitioners from five EU countries show that Integration Practitioners identified Older Refugees have a lower capacity to learn and adapt in their host countries; they have the unique need of extra and more focused support to achieve integration outcomes. Integration Practitioners perceived that existing policies do not account for this and these policies set unrealistic expectations on their work towards integrating older refugees given the time frame they are allocated to work with them. Under the theoretical framework of Policy Alienation, Integration Practitioners in this study experience Policy Alienation Meaninglessness, and in response, they created external multi-actor support networks for Older Refugees to establish meaningful, long-term social supports critical for supporting the independence of Older Refugees. Life Course Theory and the emerging literature on Occupational Professionals as Hybrid Professionals offer insightful explanations for these practices. From these findings, recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and future research are made.

**Keywords:** older refugee, refugee integration, social work, hybrid professionals, policy alienation

## Executive summary

Through semi-structured interviews with fifteen refugee Integration Practitioners (IP) and managers from five EU member countries (Ireland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, UK-Scotland), this study aimed to answer the question: **To what extent do integration practitioners (IP) perceive that existing policies support or hinder their work to integrate Older Refugees (OR), and how do they respond to these perceptions in their daily practices?** In order to answer this question, the analysis focused on three main categories: 1) defining older refugees and their needs, 2) IP experiences with and feelings about existing policies when integrating OR, and 3) actions taken by IP to respond to OR needs and policy limitations. The study draws conclusions about the need for the development of specific and consistent older refugee policy.

Results show that IP felt that existing policies do not directly hinder the integration efforts of older refugees. However, they note that OR have the unique challenge of having a lower and slower capacity to learn and adapt, resulting in OR taking longer to achieve the same outcomes as other refugees. In turn, IP stated that OR need extra focus and support to achieve independence and self-reliance, which they saw as a measure of successful integration given policy did not define success outcomes for them directly.

Through the theoretical framework of Policy Alienation (PA), the study finds that IP experience PA on a Meaninglessness level (both societal and individual); they report that existing integration policy lacks a long-term focus and does not account for the unique challenge of OR needing additional time to learn and adapt. Further, IP noted that for OR, existing measures and expectations of integration – that emphasise employment, education and learning the local language – placed unrealistic expectations on OR given integration programs lasted a maximum of 18 months. IP experienced a slight degree of PA on strategic level in this respect, feeling that they were unable to contribute to national-level measures of integration. However, IP felt high amounts of discretionary freedom to interpret municipal and organisational policy in order to meet the needs of the OR with whom they worked. IP were emboldened by high levels of discretionary freedom, but also the desire to remain professional and work within policy rules to serve the long-term integration needs of OR. Yet, at a strategic level, IP felt they did not have enough time to develop localised independence in OR. To overcome these feeling of PA, IP developed localised networks through which they connected

OR in order to support the long-term integration needs of OR. I suggest that the actions and practices of IP with OR are in response to conflicts arising from Policy Alienation, given IP perceive policy to not be long-term focused as the Life Course Theory (LCT) literature suggests it should be. Viewing IP as Hybridised Occupational Professionals helps explain why IP responded to Policy Alienation in this way.

This research contributes to the literature in three primary ways. It has contributed to the Policy Alienation (PA) literature by expanding the sectors of investigation into the social service profession for the first time. It also contributes to the literature in the developing field of hybrid professionalism, as Integration Practitioners (IP) are seen from this study as a clear example of the concept in practice. Finally, given the limited existing research on Older Refugees (OR), this study has uncovered information about their unique needs that is absent in current literature. By gaining some understanding of these needs, this study contributes to developing Life Course Theory approaches to refugee integration, which can also inform policy makers and practitioners. This study concludes with suggestions to policymakers, integration organisations, and IP themselves.

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## Acronyms

EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
IP	Integration Practitioner
OR	Older Refugee
LCT	Life Course Theory
PA	Policy Alienation
PAM	Policy Alienation Meaninglessness
PAP	Policy Alienation Powerlessness
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

## Introduction

### EU refugee crisis and older refugees

The European Commission (2017) states that in 2015, “More than 1 million people arrived in the European Union, most of them fleeing from war and terror in Syria and other countries.” These horrific and thoroughly documented events unfortunately led to many asylum seekers being stranded in European Union (EU) countries that were unprepared and ill-equipped to help manage such large numbers of asylum seekers. Since then, almost 63,000 asylum seekers have obtained refugee status and are establishing new lives in their resettled locations with EU member states pledging 30,000 resettlement places in 2020. Integration of these newcomers is a key strategic goal of the EU following the release of the 2016 Action Plan on Integration by the European Commission (European Commission, 2019).

Refugee integration literature highlights that vulnerable populations are a key subset of refugees who require specific attention and specific policies built around them. Older people – commonly defined within the literature as 60 years and older – are a unique demographic within this vulnerable population subset (Edmonston, 2013; Sathiyamoorthy, 2017; World Health Organization, 2018). The UNHCR website states that older refugees account for “4 percent of the overall population of concern to UNHCR, and by 2050 more of the world will be over 60 than under 12.” With the ongoing crisis of COVID-19, studies show that older people (65 years and older) have the highest mortality rate once contracting the virus (Dowd et al., 2020; Gordon, 2020). Compared to other refugees, older refugees are often in the poorest of health conditions, less able or willing to access services due to physical limitations or cultural expectations, have little to no financial means, and little to no local language ability. Therefore, OR clearly stand out as one of the most at risk and vulnerable populations in the world (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001; Edmonston, 2013; Hatzidimitriadou, 2005; Sathiyamoorthy, 2017).

Much of the literature calls for specific older refugee integration policy to be developed (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001; Edmonston, 2013; Hatzidimitriadou, 2005; Sathiyamoorthy, 2017; World Health Organization, 2018) yet currently, there is little to none within the European Union (EU). Moreover, the existing UNHCR Policy on Older Refugees (2000) states

that: “Older refugees will always have special needs, but the High Commissioner does not call for addressing the needs of older refugees separate from those of other refugees” (p. 5).

So why does this discrepancy between policy and findings in the literature occur? While not explicitly examined within the literature, the reason could be due to the fact that Older Refugees (OR) comprise a very small percentage of the overall number of refugees and are therefore not seen as a priority cohort, or there may be the perception that their needs are not unique compared to other refugees. By capturing how OR are often overlooked due to their low numbers and unidentified potential unique needs, Hatzidimitriadou (2005) states that, “Older refugees are often put ‘at the back of the queue’ and overlooked by aid programmes due to assumptions that their needs are of ‘less importance’ than those of other vulnerable groups such as children” (p. 1). Furthermore, given the potential unique needs of OR and relatively little documentation of these needs, policy making for OR is uniquely multifaceted and difficult. Hatzidimitriadou (2005) states that policy making for OR “encapsulates a combination of migration and gerontological theoretical frameworks for considering welfare implications.” (p. 14). This means that we must understand both migration and aging theory and how these interact in order to establish OR policy: a feat that has yet to be accomplished.

### Understanding refugee integration

The definition of refugee integration is highly debated in the literature but can be broadly viewed as the long-term process post resettlement or relocation when a refugee is incorporated into an existing community system both legally and socially. Integration is not necessarily a completed application for citizenship; it involves living for an extended period of time – often until end of life – in a community foreign to one’s own, where the newcomer has varying levels of assimilation into the new society and culture. However, these concepts are broad, subjective, contextually dependent, and not clearly defined in the literature. Coming up with an exact definition and measure of what integration could mean for refugees is a challenge for scholars, practitioners and policy makers alike. The common theme throughout the debate asserts that integration is a long-term process that is dynamic and ever-changing given that there are many cultural, historical and regional differences between contexts that must be considered before concluding upon any definition of integration (Bakker et al., 2016; Beversluis et al., 2016; Puma et al., 2018).



Most governments assert that integration can only happen post-refugee status, whereas much of the academic literature and (I)NGO discourse postulates that the integration process can start while the refugee is in asylum seeking status. For example, the European Resettlement Network (2007) suggests that, “Pre-departure cultural orientation is a crucially important aspect of resettlement, both for refugees due to be resettled and for the local actors and communities that will receive them.” For example, refugees receiving information sessions about cultural expectations, differences and general way of life in the specific location they are being resettled in before they arrive there. The goal of these programs and incentives, is attempting to manage refugees’ expectations and reduce the stresses associated with moving to a completely unknown new location. Integration is a dynamic and multi-faceted concept that incorporates structural components including socio-economic aspects such as education and employment, as well as social and cultural aspects, that enables both the newcomers and existing society members to adjust and incorporate shared norms and social contracts between immigrants and natives (Robila, 2018). To account for these complexities, the IOM (2018) states that integration is best viewed as a continuum.

Broadly speaking, EU countries have specific legal requirements of newcomers in order for them to become permanent residents and/or citizens. Furthermore, each country’s national government policy outlines key and specific measures of integration for refugees such as a formal language test, labour market participation, and registration with government sponsored integration services. National level policies inform local municipal governments who are charged with the actual integration efforts for resettled refugees. In turn, the local municipalities use these policies as frameworks for the integration organisations they contract to carry out the actual integration practice with resettled refugees (Scholten, 2018; Wolfhardt et al., 2019). Integration organisations, therefore, become the front-line for contact with refugees during the integration process in their new host community and must represent and respect the integration policies from the EU, national, and municipal levels.

This long-term resettlement concept requires newcomers to integrate into the new country of residence typically through formalities such as a civic integration test. The focus of content in many of these tests is local language ability. In the Netherlands, for example, all newcomers who want to resettle and live permanently in the country – regardless of refugee status – are required to complete and pass the civic integration test. Implicitly then, in the example of the Dutch measure of a newcomer’s integration level, integration is determined by their level of

Dutch language ability both verbally and written. The case example in the Case Study below highlights this sentiment. Requiring 18-67 year olds to pass the civic integration exam, further implies that Dutch integration policy is aimed at furthering education and/or labour market access given that younger people have mandatory schooling requirements (international human rights standards) and older people are not obliged to work anymore and can accept pensions. The age limit of 67 is enforced as Dutch law states that AOW pension age will be at least 67 or old (inburgeren.nl, 2020; svb.nl, 2020).

**CASE STUDY:** The Dutch government requires that in order for refugees to remain in the Netherlands for a period longer than five years, they must take the Civic Integration Test. This test primarily focuses on developing Dutch language skills and tests verbal, written and audio comprehension skills. There is also a critical component of the test that assesses an applicant's "knowledge of Dutch society." In this test, the applicant watches audio and video vignettes of "a typical situation in the Netherlands" surrounding issues of finding work, applying for schools and or housing for example. The issues the applicant must respond to are randomized. The civic integration test is mandatory for permanent residence in the Netherlands who are 18-67 years old. If an applicant does not pass the exam, they will not be granted residency and risk deportation or fines. In order to be best prepared for the civic integration exam, language and exam preparation classes are offered in many locations around the Netherlands. Prices for classes are not regulated but range on an average hourly rate of € 11,73 to €12,99 depending on the applicant's existing Dutch language ability (high to illiterate). In order to learn more about Dutch culture, the other options are university classes which cost between €650 and €1150. However, these classes are not targeted towards the Civic Integration Exam.

*Source: access-nl.org, 2020; inburgeren.nl, 2020; ikwilinburgeren.nl, 2020; utrechtsummerschool.nl, 2020; vluchtelingenwerk.nl, 2020; vu.nl, 2020*

### Integration practitioners

Integration Practitioners (IP) come from a wide variety of backgrounds – both formally qualified (e.g. social workers, immigration program managers and staff, and aid workers) and informally qualified (e.g. volunteers) – who take on many roles during the integration process of refugees. From a functional perspective, IP take on roles of connectors and caseworkers in helping and assisting refugees in their new community and country. From this perspective then, it could be argued that IP do not have to have any formal social work qualifications. Amongst many others for example, IP could be coaches for the labour market, housing access specialists, cultural or community liaisons and officials at municipality registration buildings who aid

refugees in their activities in the new community. An example of this diversity is in the Netherlands where integration programs can be language-learning programs funded by the government. Here, the IP are Dutch language teachers where their success can be measured by the proportion of their students who complete and pass the civic integration test.

In all EU countries, integration success measures vary across countries and even within municipalities (e.g. access to housing in Austria and Italy; reducing refugee's vulnerability to crime in Germany, Greece and Austria). Typically, there is no consistency between these measures of success, and in practice, IP are left to interpret and balance what is defined within the mandated policies while also supporting the well-being of their clients at their own discretion. Wolfhardt et al. (2019) analysed integration programs and policies in the EU concluding that, inconsistent policies between regions within countries and between EU states, make IP work even more challenging suggesting that they may have to administer creative solutions for meeting their client's needs.

What is clear here is that IP have pressure to produce results in a highly publicised and politically charged sector – migration – from different sources without clear direction as to what success looks like. Therefore, understanding the motivations behind the actions and practices of IP for implementing refugee integration policy measures – such as their perceptions of accountability, existing policy effectiveness or lack of policy for subset groups within their target population – is critical for assessing existing policy strengths, weaknesses and identifying any gaps.

### Theoretical foundations

To investigate how IP use their own discretion within existing policies to meet the needs of their Older Refugee (OR) clients, this research was built on three theoretical foundations:

- 1) the well-established and highly influential public administration and organisational science work by Lipsky on Street Level Bureaucrats (SLB),
- 2) the recently developed Policy Alienation Theory which gives new perspectives into the motivation of public professionals in response to the dilemmas of new public management concepts; it offers potential insight into the processes that lead IP to be dissonant from their protocols, and

3) the emerging Life Course Theory (LCT) perspectives that take on multidisciplinary approaches for explaining how events throughout an individual's life impact their current actions and future life path.

These three theoretical foundations connect the primary factors of interest in this investigation and are particularly important in the case of OR, given they are a vulnerable group extremely reliant on IP's discretion (i.e., SLB) to survive and integrate. Lipsky's SLB offers insight into why we should regard the discretionary choices by IP as important for understanding policy implementation outcomes. Policy Alienation (PA) provides explanatory frameworks for understanding IP's feelings and motivations towards existing policies and insight into potential gaps in knowledge and implementation to inform future policy development. Finally, LCT connects these concepts to the long-term continuum perspective that the literature suggest policy developers should take when developing refugee integration policy. I will explore these themes in depth later on in the literature review section.

## Literature review

### Unique needs of older refugees

The Pew Research Centre reports that in 2015, 83% of asylum seekers arriving in Europe were less than 35 years of age. Amongst all asylum seekers in 2015, 42% were young adult males (18 to 34 years of age) compared to 11% who were young adult females in the same age bracket (PEW, 2016). In response to these statistics, the European Commission's 2016 Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals highlighted that "failure to integrate the newly arrived people can result in a massive waste of resources, both for the individuals concerned themselves and more generally for our economy and society" (EUAFR, 2019, p. 9). Therefore, successful integration became critically important from a policy perspective in Europe for this new wave of migrants.

As a result, many policies, and indeed practices, of Integration Practitioners (IP) supporting integration explicitly or implicitly focus on younger males attaining employment, local language, housing, higher education and family reunification (Scholten, 2018; Wolfhardt et al., 2019). A gap in the literature appears around integration of Older Refugees (OR) who struggle to or cannot meet existing measures of successful integration. For example, understanding and navigating government assistance programs in a new country can be very difficult for older

people who cannot read or speak the local language, especially now with many official processes becoming digitised. Specialised assistance for OR in response to this can therefore be viewed as a unique aspect for IP in their work with OR compared to younger refugees, just as practices in aged care is specialised for other older people in general.

Moreover, given that integration is a long-term process, and everyone grows older, ageing as a refugee needs to be considered and managed for successful integration. It must be considered both in terms of helping newcomers integrate, but also for those who will abruptly end their working careers due to becoming a refugee. Older refugees typically have less potential and fewer opportunities for work or other integration activities than younger refugees. Being both older and a refugee potentially makes it less likely to find a job even though they may be highly skilled. In particular, cross-cultural change for older people is often harder than for younger people since they had to give up more of their physical belongings and emotional ties through their personal history and connections than younger people had to when leaving their home country. OR are an important demographic for IP to support, as the social status of older people is very different in many home countries of refugees, to that of their resettled community. Many older refugees fear the very real prospect of ageing and dying in a foreign land (in some cases, this could be significantly culturally negative) which highlights a further big issue of mental health issues unique to OR.

Unaccompanied minors – children under 18 – have priority for asylum, followed by young mothers with children, as they are deemed more at risk and vulnerable demographics. For example, the report by Robila (2018) to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights made several recommendations including: “strengthen the position of children in the family reunification process” and “reduce practical barriers to family reunification” (p. 8). Family reunification is part of the refugee resettlement conversation and older refugees should be highlighted in these discussions. Chenoweth & Burdick (2001) emphasise that elders uphold family strength, stability and unity in very hard times of forced migration. Echoing this sentiment, the blog by Olk (2018) on the Borgen Project – a poverty reduction non-profit website – estimates “that by 2050 there will be more people over the age of 60 than under the age of 12.” The Borgen Project concludes that, “Older people should also be prioritised in reunification efforts and moving forward they should not be separated from family members.”

Additionally, definitions of what classifies an “old person” can vary from culture to culture. There is the risk of misinterpretation of expectations of refugees in a new host nation or by IP of what and how a refugee needs to be setting goals that are age appropriate.

“A 45-year-old person from Bhutan who has farmed most of her life and experienced the physical and mental trauma of war may have the same needs as an 85-year-old who worked as a receptionist in the U.S.”

*Source: Ford (2016, p. 16)*

According to the UN statistical definition, 60+ years is old age but considering new technology and expanding age expectancy, this could change in coming years. Further, the WHO (2020) suggests that “lack of Universal Health Coverage can lead to excessive costs for refugees and migrants, many of whom pay out of pocket for health services” placing them at higher risk of negative health outcomes and potentially reduced life expectancy. With this in mind, setting a specific numerical age is still appears to be an arbitrary statistical line in the sand. Different cultures regard older people differently, which has the potential to affect cultural retirement status. For example, someone who is deemed old in their home country may not be old in their new country and will have to go back to work before being eligible for social benefits. As Hatzidimitriadou (2005) describes, age definition “may be a barrier to family reunification and repatriation applications. Similarly, age limits adopted in European countries may not reflect the impact of premature ageing that a lot of refugees would experience due to the hardships they live through” (p. 5). Therefore, balancing the differences in cultural and legal expectations of “old age” is a unique challenge for OR and for IP who work with OR to achieve integration success.

OR face unique psychosomatic health problems such as feelings triggered by intergenerational tensions, nostalgia, loss of their prestige and independence, language and culture, purpose and meaning in and of their life. They may have suffered trauma pre- and post-arrival and during travel from their country of origin. Furthermore, financial insecurity, language barriers, cultural differences in attitudes towards death, lack of knowledge about available services in host country and difficulties in accessing them are all unique challenges for OR mental health wellbeing (Chenoweth & Burdick 2001). As a result, mental health services become increasingly important for OR to improve integration outcomes.

Building from a sociological-migration foundation, Hatzidimitriadou (2005) describes nine diverse groups of older migrants;<sup>1</sup> it is clear that older refugees are not a homogeneous group. OR come from different countries, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and, from a UN statistical definition perspective, arrive at different ‘stages’ of being old. Thus, older and ageing refugees present many unique challenges for IP and integration policy makers to address. Skilful needs assessments and creative program design can help to restore older refugees’ dignity and vitality, thereby strengthening the family unit and broaden the picture of successful integration. Chenoweth & Burdick (2001) state that, “The goal for service providers is to recognise the common challenges faced by all elders, place these challenges in their cultural and migratory contexts, and modify services to be respectful, culturally appropriate, useful, and life-enhancing” (p. 21). However, there is no discussion in recent literature about older refugee integration other than suggestions that older people who settle better based on their needs being met could lead to better integration between both the resettled and indigenous communities. A clear gap in the literature therefore emerges on how to best support OR integration.

### Practices of Integration Practitioners (IP)

IP are public service providers delivering policy in action to people in the highly politicised and publicly scrutinised field of migration. IP play an important role in the refugee integration process by acting as connectors, facilitators, liaisons, advocates, teachers and counsellors for newcomers to an existing society. Further, it is important that IP have a positive experience with refugees at each stage of the process to reduce the harm on refugees and thereby increase the chances of successful integration in a new host community. The literature has shown that integration is best viewed as a continuum along which IP have fluid roles and actions when they interact with asylum seekers and refugees. Integration therefore stands out as a long-term concept on a continuum and where IP actions at all stages are critical for successful outcomes of OR (IOM, 2018; Korac, 2003; Maylea & Hirsch, 2018).

IP are charged with facilitating and implementing government integration policies in practice. The literature shows that they actively and voluntarily take on many different working positions – both formal and informal – in the different stages of the refugee integration process

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<sup>1</sup> Hatzidimitriadou’s (2005) groups of older migrants include: economic/labour, dependent and refugee (at an earlier stage of life) and intending to stay in adopted country, uncertain, ‘circular’ migration visits, return to origin country, move to another third country, and move within the adopted country (at a later stage of life)

and form integral relationships and bonds are along the way (IFSW, 2015). Someone who helps an asylum seeker at one stage of their asylum-seeking journey may also be present and aiding them in another stage, or refugees may only interact with someone at one specific period and never again. As such, each interaction an IP has with a refugee potentially impacts the next step and can become critical for the long-term integration success of the refugee.

The following are key factors that stand out in the literature (European Foundation For Democracy, 2018; IOM, 2018; Lāce et al., 2018) and policy as focal points for successful refugees' integration outcomes:

**Economic:** As a primary concern, IP should connect refugees with job networks. Employment opportunities highly increase when there are multilingual training or retraining opportunities for refugees as well as clear explanations of what the local policies and community expectations are of the refugees when integrating.

**Environment/housing:** IP need to consider what housing programs are available and the context of the individual they are finding housing for. These factors can influence refugees on many levels from access to services to work opportunities, so where refugees are housed is critical. For example, where is the housing located relative to services the individual needs, are there applications costs, is the program for individual housing or group living and if so, who can qualify?

**Education:** This factor is highlighted in the literature as being a major component of successful integration for youth in particular. IP need to consider what level of education an individual has when considering how to best assist a refugee applying to refugee education programs. IP can only assist in enrolling in education programs once refugee status is acquired.

**Multiculturalism:** Balancing and bridging between different cultures is a key action for IP. The literature suggests that policy should focus more on promoting multiculturalism not just in school and education of young people, but with older people and in the community as well. This factor is different than the first three which focus on refugees, whereas this is directly related to IP practice and actions.

Integration is a two-way street where both the newcomers and the existing population need to adjust their norms slightly to accommodate the other's cultural values and societal expectations. Therefore, IP play an important role in the integration process by acting as connectors, facilitators, liaisons, advocates, teachers and counsellors for newcomers to an existing society (Korac, 2003; Maylea & Hirsch, 2018).



### Summary of recommended social worker integration best practices for the EU

- Streamlining of the asylum process to reduce the waiting period and facilitate refugees'
- Economic and social integration in the host society
- Assuring refugees access to health services and promoting their use (including mental health services)
- Assuring refugee children and adults access to the education systems
- Facilitating refugees' access to adequate employment commensurate to their qualifications
- Developing multidisciplinary professional teams to work with refugees (lawyers, social workers, family counsellors) and provision of systematic and coordinated services to facilitate refugee integration
- Promoting cultural sensitivity when interacting with the different cultural groups (e.g., using translators)
- Developing policies to facilitate families to immigrate together or/and to speed up the family reunification process

*Source: Robila (2018, p. 14)*

In the European Foundation for Democracy (2018) report of integration best practices from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden, they conclude that the goals of integration should be focused on:

- Person-centred care by addressing the needs of the individual;
- Promotion of liberal democratic values to new incoming migrants;
- Education to migrants about and facilitation into the culture and values of the settling community;
- A literal social contract with the migrants stating the intentions of both the receiving community and the migrating individual and mental health awareness training for social workers and mental health assistance in culturally appropriate conditions for refugees
- A literal social contract with the migrants stating the intentions of both the receiving community and the migrating individual and mental health awareness training for social workers and mental health assistance in culturally appropriate conditions for refugees.

Literature emphasises that IP could be expected to act as a bridge between newcomers' culture that of the local host nation and also between different ethnic groups within the integration population. With respect to these best practice recommendations, understanding how IP meet policy goals with OR and is critical for understanding effectiveness of best practices for OR as a unique cohort and scaling up programs to reduce inconsistent policies, which Wolfhardt et al. (2019) highlight as a critical flaw in existing integration efforts in the EU.

## Theoretical Framework

This research will be built on three theoretical foundations: 1) Lipsky on Street Level Bureaucrats (SLB), 2) Policy Alienation (PA) Theory, and 3) Life Course Theory (LCT) perspectives. These three theoretical foundations connect the primary factors of interest in this investigation and are particularly important in the case of Older Refugees (OR), given they are a vulnerable group extremely reliant on Integration Practitioner (IP) discretion (i.e., SLBs) to survive and integrate. PA offers insight into the processes that lead SLBs to be dissonant from their protocol and LCT connects these concepts to the long-term continuum perspective of integration that the literature suggest policy developers should take when developing integration policy.

Currently there is no explicit policy or guidelines for IP to integrate older refugees specifically which PA suggests, has the potential to result in IP not using discretionary actions positively to meet the needs of OR if they do not connect or feel motivated to do so within existing integration policies or lack thereof. SLB dissonance can lead to poor performance actions negatively impacting the service outcomes for the client, which, in the case of OR, is of crucial importance to outcomes. Given all the unique challenges OR face, they are extremely reliant on IP (as SLBs) discretion, to go above and beyond protocol, to meet their needs given that policy does not directly address them. The literature on Life Course Theory (LCT) implies that public policies impact individuals throughout their life, not just in segmented moments, which is a critical perspective for understanding how refugees integrate into their newly resettle community. Given integration is a long-term continuum impacting refugees through all stages of their life, LCT offers the ideal perspective to investigate how IP help older refugees integrate encompassing the natural aging process.

Under these theoretical frameworks, this study analysed IP perceptions of existing integration policy in contrast to their actions and practices they take in the field with respect to:

- a) Integration policy goal outcomes aligning with actual IP practice / actions / experiences;
- b) Perceptions of alienation to existing policies in order to meet the needs of OR;
- c) Existing practice / actions / experiences surrounding OR integration in contrast to best practices from the literature;
- d) IP perception of themes surrounding a need for older refugee specific policies;

- e) Analysing if IP recommendations for OR integration best practices to inform policy align or contrast with exiting literature.

#### Lipsky's Street Level Bureaucrats (SLB)

Lipsky (2010) defines Street Level Bureaucrats (SLB) as “public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work are called street-level bureaucrats” (p. 3). The integration literature clearly implies that, based on the actions of IP, they can be considered as SLB (IOM, 2018; Korac, 2003; Maylea & Hirsch, 2018).

Lipsky cautions that measures of output for SLB such as task checklists and overly pedantic protocols – commonly regarded as ‘red-tape’ (Bozeman, 1993) – can motivate SLB to focus on mandates or measures in service delivery that potentially results in reduced service quality. Lipsky is saying that if SLB are explicitly or implicitly required to perform tasks and are measured on the outcomes of these tasks based on a governing set of guidelines for example, then they risk not performing well and services to clients will decrease. In the case of IP and the recommendations of best practices in the literature, performance decline would be IP not providing person-centred care in their practices and instead providing the same service to refugees regardless of their age or unique needs.

Discretion is a fundamental component when executing work tasks for SLBs. As a result of this, SLBs develop and implement “routines and simplifications, to maximise the utilisation of resources” (Wise, 1981, p. 103) as way of acting within protocol yet achieving outcomes they deem appropriate. Lipsky summarises that SLBs should be viewed as “policymakers” themselves (Wise, 1981). What is being suggested here is that how SLBs operate in their daily actions enables them to bend rules to either improve services and serve the client most efficiently, or conversely, be dissonant from their actions and negatively impact the service outcomes for the client. In a sense, they can be gatekeepers of policy where their discretionary choices directly impact positive or negative outcomes for clients.

Lipsky says professionalism will ensure this doesn't happen. Lipsky's concept of SLB professionalism ascribes that SLBs' sense of professional pride in their work will motivate them to perform for the client's best interest. However, as Wise states, “in reality, professionals who do not work in bureaucracies also suffer a gap between service ideals and service delivery”

(1981, p. 103). Given that IP are a group consisting of both public and private service providers, discretionary outcomes are of importance for refugee integration.

### Policy Alienation Theory

Policy Alienation (PA) offers insight into the processes that lead SLB to be dissonant from their protocol. SLB dissonance can lead to poor performance actions negatively impacting the service outcomes for the client, which, in the case of older refugees, it is of crucial importance. PA is founded in the work of Karl Marx in the 1860's regarding the concept of objective work alienation. In recent years, public administration research into work alienation has adapted these foundations to incorporate psychological and sociological frameworks to investigate public professional's discretionary behaviour with regard to the policies that define their work (Tummers et al., 2009).

Tummers (2012) defines PA as “a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program being implemented by a public professional who interacts directly with clients on a regular basis” (p. 516). PA should be regarded as a multidimensional concept, rooted on three core concepts where an SLB's perception of **policy powerlessness**, **policy meaninglessness** and how social isolation within an organisation contributes to their **role conflicts** with these. These concepts explain the degree of alienation they feel towards the policy and in turn manifests in their actions (Tummers et al., 2009).

In the case of IP (as SLBs), performance actions are creative discretionary actions outside of existing policy in order to meet the unique needs of OR. PA can be used to understand how IP navigate existing policy, or perceived lack of policy, to meet the needs of OR integration. PA suggests that IP with increased perceptions of **policy powerlessness** and **policy meaninglessness** within an organisation can contribute to their **role conflicts** and result in decreases in performance. Within the context of integration work, this would lead to negative integration outcomes for OR by IP actively not (or decreasing their willingness to) meeting an individual refugee's specific needs, which would be considered a negative outcome. Given OR heavily rely on IP discretion, they are at even higher risk of not integrating into their new resettled community. This has the potential to lead to risk factors around isolation and mental health, which are highlighted in existing integration literature as particular areas of concern for OR.

### Policy Powerlessness

“Powerlessness refers to the influence (or rather lack of) that public professionals have to shape the policy programme at different policy levels” (Tummers et al., 2009, p. 696). Tummers et al. (2009) describes how policy powerlessness operates on three levels: strategic, tactical and operational.

1. *Strategic powerlessness* is the perceived influence SLB have on decisions regarding the content of a policy regarding the rules and regulations. For example, if they are overlooked and not able to contribute to a new policy when it is drafted. It is important to understand and investigate IP perceptions of what older refugee integration policy should look like and if it they believe it is even needed at all.
2. *Tactical powerlessness* is the perceived influence SLBs have (or lack thereof) over decisions concerning the way a policy is executed within their own organisation. For example, how is policy transformed into actual performance measures. Given IP are the ones implementing integration policy, it is critical to understand their perceptions of how much influence they have on measures for the work they do.
3. *Operational powerlessness* relates to the influence of professionals during actual policy implementation. For example, how much discretionary freedom do they have when delivering services or how much are they able to go beyond their performance requirements to meet the needs of a client when those needs may not be part of their job. This aspect is critical given that the existing literature suggests that IP rely on discretionary actions for meeting the integration needs of refugees.

In this study, policy powerlessness can be regarded as the degree to which Integration Practitioners (IP) perceive their strategic, tactical and operational level of influence on integration policy for Older Refugees (OR) that directly shape their work actions, practices and potential outcome measures. If SLBs – or in the case of this research, IP – have higher levels of policy alienation, their actions implementing program services directly to clients is at risk of being reduced, which can result in negative outcomes for clients. Highlighting this sentiment, Tummers (2012) states that SLB, “might feel alienated from a policy, for instance, if they cannot see how it is beneficial for their clients” (p. 518

### Policy Meaninglessness

Tummers et al. (2009) describe policy meaninglessness is in terms of the professionals’ perceptions regarding the policy’s contribution to a larger purpose. Tummers (2012) explains

that this is more to do with an “individual’s sense of understanding of the events (here, the policy) in which he or she is engaged” (p. 518) on a *societal level* and a *client level*. The larger purpose for IP in this research can be regarded as integration outcomes of OR on both the society (locally and at large) and the individual OR with whom they work.

1. *Societal level meaninglessness*: Tummers (2012) explains this is the perception of SLBs regarding the “added value of a policy to socially relevant goals” (p. 518). For example, the degree to which an IP perceives a program that aims at fostering cultural exchange between locals and newcomers aiming to reduce prejudices and racism will actually be effective and have a positive impact on helping the community at large improve integration. If the IP perceived program or policy not to be of value, a waste of resources and/or not being effective in achieving the desired societal goal of reduced prejudice, this would be societal level meaninglessness.
2. *Client level meaninglessness* is the perception of the added value a policy has on clients who the SLB’s actually implement the policy on through their actions and services. Tummers (2012) states that, “If professionals perceive that they are really helping their own clients when implementing a policy, they will probably experience a low level of client meaninglessness” (p. 518).

Therefore, if IP have high levels of policy alienation with existing integration policies and professionalism does not act as a coping mechanism to maintain their work as Lipsky would suggest it should, IP are at risk of being actively dissonant and not going above and beyond protocols to meet the needs of OR. This can occur if they perceive that existing integration policy does not incorporate OR needs specifically if they deem those needs to be unique and requiring of attention.

#### Social Isolation: Role conflicts

Extending from both policy powerlessness and meaninglessness’s contribution to the overall policy alienation felt by SLB, role conflicts arise. This can lead to SLBs physically and mentally isolating from their work practice. Social isolation can be regarded as an individual lacking a sense of belonging to the organisation they work in, and or being unable to identify with the organisation (Tummers et al., 2009). For example, an IP who has high levels of policy powerlessness and meaninglessness is more likely to not connect with an integration organisation’s goal of connecting an older refugee to a local religious centre or culturally

appropriate mental health services. This gives rise to role conflicts within the IP resulting in them socially isolating from the workplace and clients. Thus, services to refugee clients decrease and they are at a higher risk of not integrating. These risks are especially heightened for older refugees given that there is very limited existing policy framework concerning them.

### Coping Strategies

What do IP do in practice when they feel alienated given lack of policy, yet their experiences call for action? For example, if IP may be inclined to feel that given, they have no guidance for older refugee best practices, they will make their own “policy”.

Coping strategies are specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people use to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimise stressful events (Taylor, 1998). Schott et al. (2016) state that “Depending on professional work situations and organisational settings, professionals might develop the capacity to cope with conflicting work pressures” (p. 603) by reframing and restraining pressures and thereby performing tasks differently or in a more positive manner. For example, considering their discretionary power as SLBs, in the case of IP, they could develop creative actions to meet the needs of older refugees given they lack specific policies to provide practical guidelines for their unique needs.

These coping strategies can result in a huge variation of practices and understanding of integration by IP. The diverse set of IP practices to react to their lack of policy is of importance when considering how policies should be shaped and implemented. The question arises: if IP feel alienated from policy, will they give up or create new practices to “fill in the blanks”? Further, these discretionary actions might be good for some IP and bad for others; only some professionals may make new practices, whereas others may not. This may occur for many reasons such as fear of repercussion from authority holders or personal choice in how they use their discretion. In essence, will their coping mechanisms be dictated through being scared and sticking strictly to the general policy? Or through feeling alienated from policy, will they develop their own coping practices? Investigating who is doing what and the differences of coping mechanisms within organisation levels (e.g. managers giving structure) and individual structures (e.g. IP deploy their own coping mechanism) is helpful for understanding how policy alienation could be used to explain some IP doing one common thing to meet OR needs and others having a different response altogether.

## Occupational Professionals

Supported through the SLB literature, one approach to explaining coping mechanisms of SLB who have conflict with policy and implementation, is professionalism. Accountability and discretionary freedoms of IP may further help explain practices of IP in response to Policy Alienation (PA). Previous research in PA has typically investigated highly regulated organisations such as hospitals and vet clinics. These organisations have not only strong legal institutions regulating their practices, but also experience strong public demands to ensure that good practice is upheld. In other words, a hospital or vet clinic cannot risk losing business or having the reputation of poor practice because they allow too much discretion for their staff.

As Schott et al. (2016) state, “In studying what professionalism means today, therefore, we also need to consider organisational and societal factors” (p. 586). Given that IP work is both public and social in nature, the actions they take reflect the multiple contexts they must work within (legal frameworks, cultural frameworks, community level, etc.) and we can understand them as professionals who are impacted by both organisational and societal level factors. Given the changing public opinions and attitudes towards refugees (which influences political attitudes and funding towards integration programs), refugee integration workers increasingly must live up to the same social regulations as doctors and vets. However, the nature of their work is mostly hidden from public scrutiny and typically less understood by the public. Public perceptions of “good integration” are often quite visual. For example, a local community member might think to themselves, ‘how many refugee camps do I see on my walk through downtown?’ To this individual, seeing fewer could imply that IP are doing a good job and so they may be in favour of supporting integration funding in order to minimise refugee camps. This perception and their associated vote could impact the amount of funding local governments give to refugee integration organisations. Thus, although IP may not experience PA the same way as many health care workers and veterinarians did in prior literature on the topic (Tummers et al., 2009, 2012, 2015), these experiences could change if public accountability of IP changes.

Occupational professionalism suggests that when IP experience PA but also feel they have large amounts of discretionary freedom; professionalism will keep them motivated towards achieving outcomes in the best interests of the client. For IP in practice, rather than breaking the rules of the policy frameworks they operate within, IP build personal and professional networks of external services providers outside their professional requirements to connect OR



to when they feel the limited resources provided through the policy cannot meet the integration needs. With respect to integration as a LCT continuum process, IP would do this with a long-term perspective of integration support for meeting the needs of OR.

Schott et al. (2016) describe the concept of ‘new occupational professionals’ as public professionals who are the ones actually delivering services to the public. In the case of this study, IP can be considered new occupational professionals and OR would be represented as the public. Given that IP are rarely provided with any clear directions from an organisational, local government or a national policy level towards achieving integration outcomes with OR, and their working actions and procedures are not standardised for working with OR, they are afforded a large amount of discretionary freedom. This concept of ‘new occupational professionals’ (Schott et al., 2016) helps explain why IP could remain firmly within their policy guidelines and do not break rules while still keeping OR individual needs as a priority in their actions and practices.

This is in contrast with the literature on organisational professionalism, which suggests that “It is not professional values and principles, but organisational objectives that define client-practitioner relations” (Schott et al., 2016, p. 589). Organisational professionalism suggests that in order to motivate IP and counter potential diversion from PA that may occur, providing clear objectives, and rewards connected to organisational structures, strategies and reward systems will prevent deviation when discretionary conflicts occur (Schott et al., 2016). However, given that the literature shows that IP are not given clear instructive measures for carrying out integration policy at an organisational, local, or national government level, this contrast does not capture the situational context for what IP work within as is therefore not relevant.

#### IP as Hybrid Professional

IP implement multiple levels of policies (national, local and organisational) as well working in a field (immigration/integration) that is highly publicised and politically charged on an international level. The pressure from all these sources is surely immense. As Noordegraaf (2011) says, these multiple pressure systems on IP occur simultaneously and not independently. The literature suggests IP are not given strict guidelines, but they are expected to perform on multiple levels and from multiple sources that all have their own ideals of success (which are often not unified). With respect to integration outcome success measures, IP appear to have

either no target or a moving target to hit. IP have discretionary freedoms to choose which target to aim for, which potentially will please some of the pressure implementers and not others. For example, a local government policy might push them to increase the number of refugees in public events such as markets or street fairs, whereas resistance from the locals (due to anti-migrant sentiments) creates resistance and may cause IP to feel pressure from the locals more so than the government and therefore not perform the government policy.

The developing concept of hybridised professionalism could add further value in helping to explain the actions of IP in response to PA. Hybridised professionalism comes about through the co-production of both managers and professionals (occupational) being involved in decision-making. Noordegraaf (2007, 2011) expands this concept stating that hybridised professionals have neither bottom-up or top-down accountability to managers, but instead “professionalism is seen as the co-product of both parties being involved” (Schott et al., 2016, p. 590). Hybridised professionalism takes into account the capacities and skills of individual professionals as being critical factors of professionalism and necessary for their work. This is evident in the literature on integration practitioners who need to adapt and react to contextual changes in order to meet the needs of OR.

Noordegraaf (2011) suggests that, “Changing circumstances force professional services to respond to external changes that call for organisational capacities, also inside professional domains” (p.1349). In particular they: (a) develop new work *preferences* and seek organised work conditions; (b) professionals face new *cases*, which are difficult to categorise and call for well-organised multi-professional acts; (c) due to critical attention for case treatment and incidents, professionals face new *risks* that have to be managed” (p.1349). This effect is increased more when the work that professionals (occupational) do is faced with a lot of media attention, such as the politicised attention of migration that IP face. IP are constantly adapting and improvising to ever changing situations and contexts, resulting in their roles and responsibilities evolving from traditional expectations in fluid and holistic roles, responsibilities and actions. Moreover, IP have to navigate through changing policies and clients, political contexts and anticipate different policies of other EU member states. There is in essence ‘moving goal posts’ for IP aiming to integrate refugees.

Hybrid professionals are more focused work being done that produces meaningfulness for the client as opposed to products (Noordegraaf, 2015). Popescu & Libal (2018) state how refugee

social work practice is a “transdisciplinary, community-based response systems which are holistic, multi-pronged, and inclusive of migrants’ voices and strengths” (p. vii). This shows that IP are expected to provide holistic approaches that respond to specific individual and group needs, while maintaining a human-centred attitude towards integration. While these do not appear to be new concepts to that of social work or refugee work, these grand expectations infer that IP need to play multiple roles and be extremely flexible when meeting the unique integration needs of OR (Berc, 2019; Dorlet et al., 2018; Pepworth, & Nash, 2017; Valtonen, 2001; Viola et al., 2018). Given the overwhelming number of people in need and the large expectations and many challenges for both IP and OR, understanding if and how IP ascribe meaningfulness for the long-term integration needs of OR in existing integration policies is of interest.

#### Life Course Theory (LCT) Perspective

*“Life course perspective examines individual life histories in order to understand how prior events, social and economic conditions, and individual characteristics influence decisions and events over time. The life course approach emphasises the connection between individuals and the historical context in which their lives take place” (Edmonston, 2013, p. 1).*

LCT is characterised by four guiding fundamental concepts: **trajectories, transitions, turning points, and timing.**

*Trajectories* are lengthy patterns of change and stability. Edmonston (2013) gives the example of studying a person’s career. This requires investigating their occupational and employment history, which may show long periods in the same occupation or periods of time where they change jobs often.

*Transitions* are life events that may cause changes in an individual’s life and relationships. For example, changing jobs, graduating from college, or moving into a new living location.

*Turning points* “are major transitions that cause a sharp change in the trajectory of an individual’s life course” (Edmonston, 2013, p. 2). For example, a war breaking out in one’s country or community causing forced displacement.

*Timing* encompasses the historical context and characteristics of a particular period. For example, understanding the political climate that led to the war breaking out in a refugee’s home country and forces that shape the attitudes towards accepting refugees

in host communities. These forces occur at not only the time of arrival, but also how these change through time given integration is a long-term process on a continuum.

In her article investigating the social integration of Older Refugees (OR) in Canada, Sathiyamoorthy (2017) describes how successful integration is a two-way process involving, “1) refugees making active attempts to embed themselves into Canadian society, and; 2) government facilitating conditions to help refugees integrate” (p. 76). The LCT framework implies that public policies impact individuals throughout their life and not just in moments, and to understand how refugees can integrate into their newly resettled community. She concludes that given that integration is long-term process, integration policy should be developed and informed from an LCT perspective. Further, an LCT perspective is important for IP to frame and view the work they do with older and refugees who are aging and potentially ending their lives in their newly resettled community.

### Theoretical Summary

Lipsky’s SLB offers insight into why we should regard the discretionary choices by Integration Practitioners (IP) as important for understanding policy implementation outcomes. Policy Alienation (PA) provides explanatory frameworks for understanding IP’s feelings and motivations towards existing policies and insight into potential gaps in knowledge to inform future policy development. Life Course Theory (LCT) connects these concepts to the long-term continuum perspective policy developers should take when developing integration policy. Finally, hybrid (occupational) professionals therefore could help explain IP practices in response to any Policy Alienation they may or may not experience.

Given that integration is described in the literature as a long-term process on a continuum, existing integration policy currently appears too short-term focused. With insight from PA, there presents a risk that IP will experience high levels of isolation from policy and risk not best serving the unique needs of OR given the limited existing policy for this cohort. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that some IP develop their own professional practices, despite the lack of policies. This leads to investigating which IP do what and why. Finding patterns within IP actions, experiences and practice is critical for future policy development.

Importantly for this research, Tummers (2012) highlights that, “client meaninglessness dimension is closely related to the ‘social work narrative,’ as this is experienced by frontline workers, such as implementing public professionals, who focus on helping clients achieve long-term success.” (p. 518). This sentiment is highly relevant for this research given that integration is a long-term process and IP are frontline workers who aim to facilitate this for their clients. Further, given that ageing is a critical component of integrating from a life course perspective, research into specific policy for older refugees’ integration is clearly of importance for IP, program developers and policy makers. Interviews with IP investigated a need for a specific policy for older refugee integration and highlight what recommendations IP make, if any, for policy development specifically for OR integration. Figure 1 summarises these concepts.

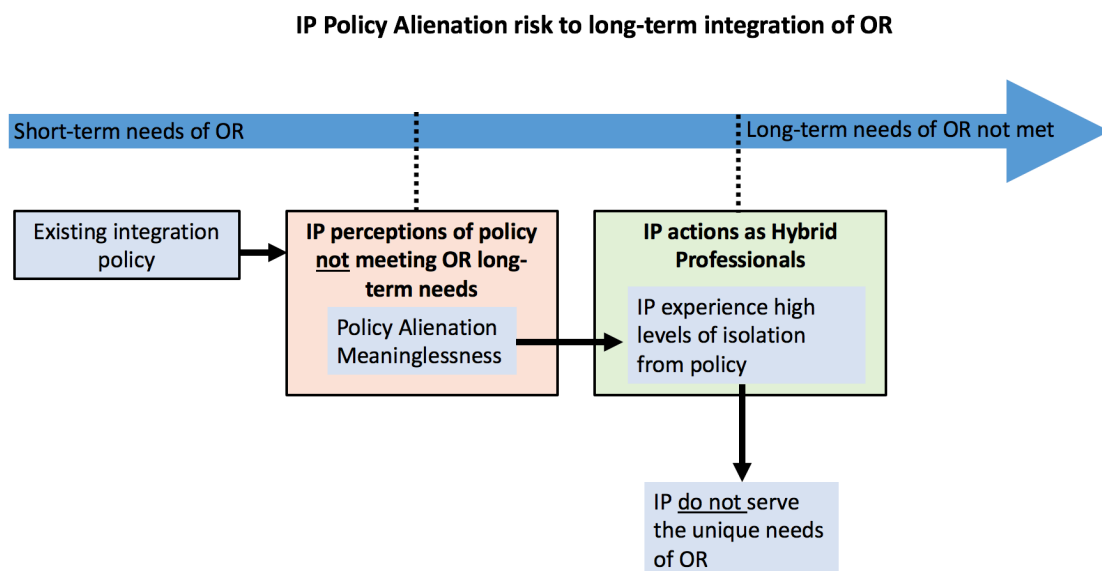


Figure 1: IP Policy Alienation risk to long-term integration of OR

### Scientific relevance

Within the outlined core tasks of Integration Practitioners (IP), there is a strong implicit focus on youth, education, employment, housing, and mental health awareness for IP working on refugee integration. Given the unique needs of Older Refugees (OR), gaps in knowledge exist about IP roles in supporting them with the core aspects of integration. While the unique needs of OR and some best practices for IP are presented in the literature, the major finding is the gap in policy specifically addressing the integration of OR. There are some existing in-depth resources offering best practices such as the WHO (2018) publication, *‘Health of older refugees and migrants: Technical guidance on refugee and migrant health’*. Also, *‘Self Improvement Resource for Community Service Providers’* developed by Wall et al. (2011),

which is a tool kit for aged care workers working in aged care facilities, to understand that elders of refugee background have unique needs. Slewa-Younan et al. (2016) concluded that Wall et al.'s publication increased, "the capacity of aged care workers to better meet the needs of older people from a refugee background" (p. 5). Critically however, older refugees have no explicit integration policy from the large internationally influential bodies such as UNHCR and, in fact, are even noted as not requiring a specific integration policy. Conversely, the literature points to a potential need due to the population's unique needs.

Further, there are other cohorts such as people on the cusp of being considered older or those who fall into the older category during the process of resettlement and relocation, as well as sub-groups of older refugees who may require even further specification. For example, female older refugees face unique challenges ageing in a different culture than their own or older refugees with existing physical disabilities (WHO, 2018). Literature shows that given older refugees are significantly fewer in number than younger ones, their needs assessments and services are often overlooked and undocumented in practice and policy (Ford, 2016; Hatzidimitriadou, 2005; Sathiyamoorthy, 2017). While this population represents a very small percentage, many would argue that their value in society and within refugee communities is significant.

Existing integration literature shows there is great focus on providing safe and developmentally fertile grounds for young refugees, which are implicitly defined as refugees under sixty years old. Yet, clearly elderly and ageing refugees present many unique challenges for IP to address with a long-term perspective of integration. While many policies, and indeed practice, of IP supporting integration appear to overwhelmingly focus around youth, a gap in the literature appears around understanding how integration policies and IP practices meet the unique needs of OR. It is critical to investigate this knowledge gap given that integration is a long-term process, and everyone ages.

Investigating the lack of specific policy for those experiencing unique needs (OR in the case of this study) and how that impacts the practices of people on the front-line meant to implement it has rarely been captured in scientific literature (Ford, 2016; Hatzidimitriadou, 2005; Sathiyamoorthy, 2017; UNHCR, 2020). Specifically, in the case of older refugees and integration practitioners, this has never been done. Thus, this study presents a new contribution to the literature on all aspects of the theoretical frameworks and the literature on refugee

integration. It makes important advancements in the literature for older refugees specifically. Incorporating the literature on Life Course Theory perspectives for policy development and offering explanations of the coping mechanism of IP through the lens of Hybrid Professionalism, this study expands the literature on Policy Alienation which has so far mainly focused on classic professionalism sectors.

Clearly there is a need for research investigating how IP are navigating existing integration policy, or lack of policy, in practice to meet the unique needs of older refugees' integration. With the foundations of Lipsky's street-level bureaucrats, the framework of Policy Alienation theory and the lens of Life Course Theory, through interviews with IP, I investigated how IP experienced meeting the integration needs of OR, if and when they experienced Policy Alienation and how they respond to this in practice. This research helps understand how IP balance out competing pressures from governmental, organisational and societal expectations through coping mechanisms and the degree to which they remain professional given their lack of guidance in policy towards the integration of OR. The emerging literature on occupational and hybrid professionalism is used to help explain findings.

### Societal relevance

Based on the gaps in the literature, questions emerge such as: how are IP dealing with older and aging refugees in practice given they are lacking explicit policies to address their unique needs; are IP supporting the achievement of the existing goals and policy objectives of integration with respect to OR; do IP perceive existing integration to be supportive of integrating OR; how do IP believe that existing policies can better support the integration of OR?

EU member states are mandated by and must adhere to EU refugee policy. However, the minimum standards and Geneva conventions regarding the humanitarian standards of refugee treatment leave significant room for interpretation of these overarching policies by each member country, which are not directly regulated by the EU in practice and implementation. Thus, IP practices while working with older refugees is dictated and driven by the local-level policy. These directions can manifest in two ways: the way IP *deliver* services or in the *resources* and funding for services that IP are provided with by local government or the organisation employing them. As highlighted in the literature, the framing of the implementation on these concepts within the policy itself can potentially have negative

consequences. In some countries for example, policy is negatively framed towards stemming and dissuading refugee applications, which may manifest in the way in which IP carry themselves and deliver services towards their refugee clients. The risk is that there is a dissonance between what government policies call for and the expectations of refugees and IP. Cameron et al. (2014) conclude that a lack of communication and appreciation between governments, social workers (who can be regarded as integration practitioners) and refugees, for what policy aims to achieve can lead to poor integration outcomes and resistance from both IP and integration program participants themselves.

Within the integration literature, there is a strong call for Older Refugee (OR) integration policy to be developed. OR must be considered both in terms of helping newcomers integrate, but also for those who will abruptly end their working careers due to being classified as a refugee and will become aged-care dependent. Most discourse agrees that while integration is complex, it is a continuum and therefore should be seen as a long-term approach yet large governing bodies – such as the EU commission and international advocacy groups such as the UN – have not developed any integration policy for older refugees. These factors have the potential to result in Integration Practitioners (IP) having to adapt their actions creatively to meet the unique needs of OR within existing policies and practice frameworks, risking the high potential for Policy Alienation. In turn, this could lead to decreased services or a wide variation of services (depending on professional coping mechanisms and power/resources for IP) provided to the highly vulnerable group of OR who are shown to have great potential for improving social integration between broader newcomer refugees and local communities.

With the background of the 2015 European Migration Crisis creating a highly politicised and publicly debated global issue around migration, coupled with the current COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacting older people, the pressure from multiple sources on IP to adapt within existing policies to meet the unique needs of OR is at greater stakes than ever. Understanding the motivations behind the actions and practices of IP supporting those who age as a refugee is a critical component that needs to be considered – both socially and economically – and managed for successful assessment of existing integration policy and informing future policy development.

This research highlights existing IP successful practices; current and emerging trends as well as themes that are in need of further research and policy developments surrounding OR



integration practice for IP. This research can be used to inform refugee integration policy makers, program developers and integration practitioners with the EU context.

## Methodology

To answer the research question: *how do Integration Practitioners (IP) navigate existing policy, or lack of policy, in practice to meet the needs of Older Refugee (OR) integration?*, this **exploratory research framework** examined how IP achieve integration policy objectives and outcomes. The study collected primary qualitative data through semi-structured key informant interviews (KII) conducted in English via video call with 15 IP respondents from five current EU member countries: France (2), Ireland (5), Luxembourg (3), the Netherlands (3), and Scotland (2). The study focused on the experiences of the IP themselves and their personal perspectives as practitioners of refugee integration.

To find relevant integration service organisations in Europe, I conducted a Google search for ‘refugee integration services’ + [country] between January-March 2020.<sup>2</sup> The countries were selected based on their current membership in the EU and strength of English language proficiency. The process was repeated again with ‘elderly refugee integration’ + [country] as the leading search term. I compiled a database based on yielded results that included integration NGOs, government departments and community-level integration groups that stated on their websites that their work involved the integration of resettled refugees. After consultation with my supervisor, I further refined the search to organisations within the designated country list that were identified on the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE),<sup>3</sup> the EU Commission on Integration,<sup>4</sup> and the European Resettlement Network.<sup>5</sup> From the information listed on each organisation’s website, I focused on those that I deemed most relevant to refugee integration and refined the database of all relevant contacts.

According to the literature, 15-20 interviews are ideal for this kind of exploratory research (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Latham (2020) states that, “less than 20 participants in a qualitative study helps a researcher build and maintain a close relationship and thus improve the “open” and “frank” exchange of information.” Given the

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<sup>2</sup> The countries searched included: Austria, Belgium, England, Europe (broadly), France, Ireland, Germany, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and Scotland.

<sup>3</sup> [asylumineurope.org](http://asylumineurope.org)

<sup>4</sup> [europa.eu/migrant-integration](http://europa.eu/migrant-integration)

<sup>5</sup> [resettlement.eu](http://resettlement.eu)

physical limitations and global uncertainty during the data collection period due to COVID-19, my initial goal was to interview at least 12 people via video call.

#### Participant selection

In April 2020, I sent out 129 emails with requests for interviews to the contacts in the database. From these requests, 23 people responded willing to participate and to be interviewed. From this group, 16 people confirmed, scheduled and completed an interview. One participant was eliminated from the final data analysis as they were from Finland, a country that is not part of the EU refugee policy framework and thus not applicable for my research.<sup>6</sup> In total, 15 interviews were used for the final data analysis.

#### Data collection

Interviews took place in May 2020 and were conducted using internet-based video conferencing applications Skype and Zoom. The majority of interviews (13) were conducted on Zoom as the default platform. Two interviews were conducted on Skype at participants' request. All interviews were one hour long, conducted in the participant's own home, and performed in a professional conversational manner. This aimed to try and ensure participants felt free and open to speak about their experiences or their opinions and not fatigue. With consent from the participants, I audio recorded the interviews digitally and transcribed them using transcription software. The Zoom interviews were transcribed using the program's built-in transcription software. The two Skype recordings and one Zoom recording – that did not transcribe correctly in the Zoom software – were transcribed using happyscribe.com. To ensure accuracy, I reviewed each transcription individually in parallel with the relevant audio recording to amend any mistakes that the software made. Mistakes were minuscule; both transcription software packages produced accurate data for analysis. During this data cleaning process, interview transcripts were coded with a unique participant number and country reference (e.g., 1NL) to protect each participant's anonymity.

#### Analysis

I coded and analysed the data in June 2020 using NVivo qualitative coding software. Each interview was classified by the IP being either native to or an immigrant into their country and

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<sup>6</sup> Initially, the search was broad to include Europe as a whole. Later, the focus was refined to only countries in the European Union. The contact from Finland was left in the database in error and was emailed for an interview. Only during the interview was it evident that the contact was located outside of the EU.

by gender (male or female). My coding and analysis of the interview transcripts was based on the theoretical framework of the study: policy alienation theory and life course theory perspectives to capture any insights which may have been deemed as relevant to the study. For example: age range of clients, perceived barriers to their work, definitions, existence and or/and need for OR policy. With these frameworks in mind, I focused on determining core categories to analyse the transcripts. I coded focusing on more refined categories of **policy powerlessness** (operational, tactical, strategic or none), **policy meaninglessness** (client, societal or none), **life course theory perspectives**, **barriers to IP work**, **IP discretionary action**, and **identified needs of older refugees** that IP describe within their **actions and practices**. The Appendix contains the interview protocol, participant referencing list and a coding scheme.

## Results

To answer the question: **how do Integration Practitioners (IP) navigate existing policy, or lack of policy, in practice to meet the needs of Older Refugee (OR) integration**, this section presents findings from the interviews with fifteen IP in three parts. The first part focuses on how IP perceived the needs of Older Refugees (OR). The second part analyses where Policy Alienation (PA) occurs for IP when they respond to meeting the perceived needs of OR. The third part reports barriers that IP perceive that hinder their work and describes how IP respond to these barriers in order to meet the perceived needs of OR. Findings are further interpreted within the theoretical framework of Street Level Bureaucracy (SLB) discretionary actions, Life Course Theory (LCT) approaches to integration, and Hybrid Professionalism. This framework will help to answer the research question because it will support the understanding of whether or not IP feel alienated from policy on any level, which will be supported through the PA framework. Then, we can interpret the subsequent actions they take in order to integrate OR through the SLB, Hybrid Professionalism, and LCT frameworks.

### PART 1: Defining Older Refugees and Their Needs

#### Distribution of age

At the start of each interview, IPs were asked about the typical age of the refugees with whom they work. Gathering this data was important to assess their capacity to speak about their experience with OR. IPs worked with a wide age range: from newborn babies to people in their mid-to-late sixties, though the majority of refugees they worked with were young adults in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. IPs consistently reported that the proportion of those who they considered to be older was very small: typically, between 5-10 percent. This age distribution is consistent with the existing literature. Moreover, a common theme IPs stated was that their interactions with ORs were typically few and far between compared to other age groups.

#### Definition of an older refugee

Given that the literature shows there are many different definitions of age – for example, cultural and legal – understanding which of these definitions IPs subscribe to was important for understanding how IPs frame the actions taken in their integration work.

From the interviews, IP varied on how they defined an older person. Individual interpretation of a person’s age – whether the IP viewed the person as old or not – impacted the integration services IP provided to a refugee.

Definition of old (years)	60+	50+	45+	30+	18+
Number of IPs	9	3	1	1	1

Three aspects shaped IP definitions and in turn their actions with a refugee, of who would be categorised as an older refugee: legal, cultural, and contextual. There seemed to be a fusion between these factors, which made reaching consensus on a shared definition of what makes a refugee ‘older’ tricky. Although, overall, despite IP stating that being old is context-dependent and difficult to define, the majority regarded 60 years and above to be considered old.

#### Legal definition of ‘old’

The majority of IPs used numerical definitions rooted in legal frameworks for age. IPs reported that the national policy in their country dictated who was and was not old. As IP12 in the Netherlands stated: “...*from the context of the Dutch understanding of elder people, [OR begin] at 18, and everybody under 18 is under-age.*” What he means here is that someone he is able to define as an ‘elder’ change with legal context. In turn, this legal policy influenced the way in which IP could deliver or not deliver some services to clients. However, even within this frame, age distinction was dependent on the specific aspect of integration (e.g., legal status assistance, housing acquisition, education, etc.). Thus, IP definition of age varied again to adhere to a specific policy framework.

For example, age defined by legal status dictated when an IP could either begin or end work with a refugee for some integration services. Legal age as defined by host countries was important for IPs in their work to support ORs in accessing services. Overall, when defining an older person, the IP started from a formal, internationally recognised perspective then into a more localised national perspective. The perceived western cultural expectation of who is old also factored into IPs’ definitions. However, this western cultural definition of an older person has rooted itself in some existing legal frameworks. Access to social benefits in particular defined when a person is legally considered old in many EU countries. Access to education funding, retirement pensions, job seeker assistance programs, transport funding programs or particular types of housing for example, were all noted as being numerically aged based and

set in legal frameworks. This individualistic interpretation of who is old stood out as a common factor between all the participants.

*“So, for me, I would say, old people would be at 65 because in France, people get to retire at the age of 65 [...] So, there are other government regulations that, yeah, you can get your pension from 65 or 60 onwards.”* – IP8 in France

*“We would we would regard 65 as eligible for what’s called aged pension and age supports.”* – IP5 in Ireland

*“[Older refugees are] generally in their 60s, 70s. That’s the kind of distinction I would make. I would say anybody who’s under pension age in Ireland, which would be under 65, would generally be on a job seekers entitlement and would be as part of the integration kind of encouraged to try and take up employment or education or something like that.”* – IP14 in Ireland

#### Cultural definition of ‘old’

In line with the existing literature (Bakker et al., 2016; Beversluis et al., 2016; European Resettlement Network, 2007; Robila, 2018; Puma et al., 2018) differences between IP and refugees’ personal or their (host vs. native) national definition were apparent. The position of the refugee within their immediate family structure was the most important factor within cultural definitions of age according to IP. Most IP described the grandparents of young children as OR. Again, there was often a specific number attached to this being roughly 55 years old and above. For example, cultural definitions of an “old” person ranged from the marital status of the person (regardless of their numerical age), differences in age based on gender, having grandchildren, and how much an individual has experienced in life such as employment history and their individual journey through resettlement.

This highlighted how IP had to consider intersectionality in the way they define an individual as old. International mandates and family structure sometimes contrasted each other, and IP sometimes struggled reconciling on which one they would focus. Consistent with the literature, IP were constantly switching and adapting their actions as situational context changes. The

following quote is an example of how IP often switch between definitions of who – by legal or cultural definition – is considered old depending on the context in which they are working with an individual.

*“I think most of the women coming from Syria, most not all, are married very early at the age of 16. Probably earlier, because some of them at that age have already a kid or two. With a husband, a guy sometimes at home is a little bit older [than his wife]. When they ask for asylum, the woman is considered underage. So, naturally, the system had to separate them. But that was a conflict because these are people that are coming [with] their family, their unit.”* – IP12 in Netherlands

This example shows how an IP would consider an individual legally young in the context of Netherlands, but when working with the same person in a different capacity of integration, has to consider the same person as culturally old or rather, adult. Switching between these perspectives was noted by IP as a key aspect of cultural sensitivity and critical for any success in their work.

Contextual definition of ‘old’

Old age definitions were not consistent for all government assistance programs with which IP often connected refugees. This concept was exemplified clearly with respect to education, which is a commonly used barometer of integration. One IP who specialised in education and English language services for refugees, explained how the definition of who is old varied within the type of integration services that IPs provided.

*“In our field, which is all to do with supporting the refugees’ access to the university, [it] is 30. That’s old. [...] you will need to have another calculation for yourself to the finance above 30.”* – IP9 in Netherlands

This example highlights that while a refugee might be considered young and therefore eligible for some types of integration services – or particular financial support for furthering their education – there is a cut-off point to where they can be considered old. These cut off points



vary depending on context. This implies that for IP in this context, a 30-year-old person wouldn't always be considered 'old', but rather just too old to receive a student loan. This shows how IP often have to reframe their own perceptions of age definitions not only in a macroscopic sense, but also sometimes for each micro action of the individual refugees' integration.

Interestingly, a Dutch IP stood out as a good example of individualistic interpretation of who is old. In this case, the western cultural definition of old (in line with the WHO and UNHCR 65+) was not the basis of his definition.

*“I would say probably like 45 and above. ...This is how I define it. If you look at my work and tasks we have to do where everybody from 40 and above 45 has way more with learning a language with making friends. With building up a new life. So, I think we can say 40-45 this is an older person. If you go over it, it gets more and more difficult to find your place to get your own feet on the ground in the Netherlands.”*

– IP11 in the Netherlands

The overall theme surrounding age definitions was that from a legal definition perspective, who is old and who is not old can vary between integration service contexts that IP have to adapt and change their own definitions of old in parallel with the specific context. Each age range could have specific and/or competing needs which IP have to respond to on an individual level.

#### Intersectionality of gender and age

Elderly men stood out as having particular mental health needs to focus on for IP to support. In line with the literature, elderly refugees face the challenge of having to deal with loss on many levels: loss of physical belongings, friends and family members, and importantly loss of self-worth and community status. Further, the lack of recognitions of previous education or skills also contributed to the loss of self-worth in male OR.

An IP from Ireland stated, *“What I find with men, they get extremely frustrated because their role as kind of the chief in the local area back in Syria is gone. They're not the head man and you know, pride, and all that is associated with that is a big blow to them.”* In many countries

where refugees come from, traditional gender roles play a big part in one's identity. This IP continued, *“So older men find that kind of adapting quite difficult. They find the loss of status quite difficult. And it's very difficult for them to refine that status in a culture where they are linguistically quite challenged and for their skills may not be the most valuable skill.”* Clearly, it is a big mental adjustment for OR who often place value in these gender roles for their own identity but when they move to a new country that has different values or perspectives on these traditional gender roles. This presents unique social status dissonance that can be difficult for OR to resolve.

However, the IP from Ireland noted that there were commonalities between Irish older men and OR men. Older men in general were noted as feeling frustrated with having to deal with new bureaucracy and legislation that was not around when they were young and in the case of OR males, did not exist in their native country. The example the IP gives is the ‘red tape’ people have to go through just to build a wall around their garden on their property or place of residence.

*“Another thing which I can absolutely identify with, because I can identify with my own father and they get very frustrated when they're waiting for a house [...] and we're telling them, you're gonna have to wait another two months and they say, ‘Well, I was a builder!’ [...] why do I have to wait for students to do it?!’ So, this sense that they come from a culture where they wanted to build that, they went out and built the wall. Now they gotta wait for health and safety to build a wall...”* – IP4 in Ireland

IP explained that this further contributed to their sense of loss of self-worth. The new red tape that OR face not only seemed irrelevant, it also devalued their previous skills and expertise.

*“So, if you come from Syria and you were the top mason in the village, you know, earning a lot of money and now suddenly you're in a rural town in Ireland waiting to build walls, your whole sense of worth and status [is gone].”* – IP4 in Ireland

## Unique Needs of Older Refugees

*“The special needs of an elderly refugee are: more time to learn the language, better help [with] learn[ing] the language. They need to be helped with getting out of the door, making friends, going places, build[ing] up a network... and it's way more difficult to find a job for them in the future, especially when the job they had in their home country cannot be done in the Netherlands or anywhere else. So, most of the time if they had a pretty good job before, now they have to start all the way at the bottom and that's emotionally heavier, more difficult for them to make to make a change. So yeah, they do need a very different type of the approach.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

All fifteen IP stated that – to at least some extent – older refugees had unique needs. The IP that stated that OR have few unique needs were from Ireland and the UK. Both of these countries had pre-resettlement family reunification policies. This means, OR in Ireland were only ever part of integration family units. Therefore, Irish IP were not primarily focused on individual needs of integration to the extent that IP from other countries were.

Three IP reacted initially that OR do not have unique needs, but throughout the interview their discussion shifted toward a mixed response. When IP said no initially, they said OR have same basic needs that are in the same direction towards integration of all refugees. But, given ORs' physical and mental capacity differences, they did not follow the same path to integration outcomes as younger people. In essence, to reach point 'A', older people had to meet different (smaller) points first, which makes the next steps toward point 'B' more difficult and/or take longer achieve. Also, point 'B' often looks completely different for OR than for other refugees. This dynamic resulted in IP feeling that some of the integration policies they had to implement with OR – in particular those surrounding economic, employment and education efforts – were meaningless for OR. IP felt that each aspect of integration is just way more difficult for OR, which in and of itself was not reflective of a unique need of the OR cohort, but rather demographic challenge. This unique challenge for OR required IP to adjust their practices, which is in line with the literature on practitioners relying on their professional vales to meet the needs of an individual.

Interestingly, two-thirds of the IP interviewed stated that OR only sometimes had unique needs. These IP suggested that while OR do have unique needs, there is crossover between common needs that all refugees have but that some of those needs are heightened in OR and need a more unique focus. In essence, IP suggested that not all OR needs are completely different; rather, they require IP to address certain needs in a different way than they would with a younger refugee. Moreover, of the IP that said OR have unique needs, they saw them more as vulnerable populations more so than with specific requirements for policy. Therefore, this suggests that OR may fit best within the category of vulnerable populations broadly.

*“For older people, I think in consideration of their age, I'm going to do most more things for them, [rather] than younger people. Younger people, I would push them more.”* – IP8 in France

*“The communication and information needs to be done by somebody that understands where they come from. [...] From a cultural perspective and that is seldom the case. We don't think about the cultural aspect of things.”* – IP12 in the Netherlands

The common themes that IPs identified as unique needs for older refugees included: language learning ability, special attention to placement with consideration of physical mobility, physical health, mental health, and social interaction and facilitating community bonding. Within these unique needs, IP made it clear that OR needed extra support from them adapting into their new society. Further, given that the integration policies only allowed for a maximum of 18 months work with OR, this had unrealistic expectations for OR and for IP to address all of OR needs. As one IP plainly stated, *“the older we get, I believe, the less we are able to adapt.”*

#### Language

An older refugee's capacity to learn the new local language was the overwhelming unique need expressed by all but two IP. In particular, the difficulty for older refugees to learn a new language was a major challenge. IP identified this as the main connector between all the other factors.

*“The big issue is the language. That's the real problem. The capacity to engage with the community is very limited.” – IP4 in Ireland*

*“They can't learn English very well. So, they learn English but not very well. So, if they learn very well, I think they would integrate more into the society [...] So language is a problem for from older people. Because they all cannot learn easy. They went to the classes, they were about two years, but they couldn't they couldn't learn very well.” – IP3 in Ireland*

IP thought that existing teaching programs were too broad and did not adequately account for OR learning capacities. IP stated that it was harder for older people cognitively as many language classes are not developed for them. In particular, the speed at which classes were taught and the relevance of the material in classes made it difficult for OR to comprehend and relate with.

*“I think there should be a specific [course] in terms of language. It's not the same as teaching a child or teaching someone in their 20s as teaching someone in their 60s and 70s. Especially when there's a higher chance with the people that I work with, that the older they are, the less literate. They may be [illiterate] in their own language.” – IP14 in Ireland*

Further, unwillingness or lack of interest to learn the new language was a factor for older refugees. IP noted that often OR did not want to lose their connection to their homeland, and their native language was a strong connection to this. Also, sometimes they simply did not have the interest in learning a new language because they did not feel it would be necessary in their new lives.

*“There's a couple of older people in the community who have basically refused to go to English classes [...] I've taken the view that this man is done, he's been through enough in his life. He's tired. His children are scattered about the globe know he's been to hell and back. You know, he's not required to be looking for work due to the*

*age through the benefits is done [...] we don't see any point in trying to force him into learning” – IP15 in Scotland*

#### Housing and placement

The location of where OR were housed impacted not only OR integration, but the services provided by IP. OR were described as less physically able, and so getting to integration services such as language class or doctor appointments sometimes presented unique challenges for them. IP were required to assist them with these types of needs based on the proximity of their placement to services.

*“If somebody is older, you have to make sure that they are close to a doctor, you have to make sure that they are close to a shop. You have to make sure that they are close to other people who can help them out, you must make sure that they are close to a bus stop now. All these things are some things to keep in mind before you give them a house.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

Location of housing intersected with the challenge of access to public transport. OR often did not have the means to drive themselves, so they relied heavily on public transport. In countries such as Ireland, where refugees are often resettled in rural communities outside of large metropolitan cities, this was a major concern for IP.

*“I'm in rural Ireland as well, like, public transport routes are non-existent really. Very poor. For example, for a person from [where I live] to get to the hospital and or even to the local county town, the bus route only goes two days a week! At quarter past 8 in the morning and I think, at one o'clock in the afternoon as well [...] I think to it expect older people to do that will be quite unfair and I don't think realistic as well and I know there's a there's a lot of walking demanded as well.” – IP4 in Ireland*

Housing was noted as an area of concern but was not as dominant as the other needs. This could be because most elderly refugees were noted as having family members of which they were already housed with. However, social housing specifically for older and ageing refugees

who did not have any family members to rely on was noted as being an issue in Luxembourg and France. This could manifest into a challenge for IP when assisting OR to move from their initial resettled location to a new ‘permanent house.’ When OR are awaiting housing and still in refugee camps, they sometimes settle into camp life. For example, in Luxembourg, these camps are centrally located in metropolitan city centres and they build up their network from having no other connections before, so they don’t want to leave. This presents even more complex challenges for IP.

*“We have many of these elderly people who get blocked in the camps. And yeah, it's very complicated and also, the camp becomes their comfort zone, of course. [...] We have some camps that are well located in the middle of Luxembourg city. Very convenient. With everything close by and yeah, they have their own space there and they make their life there. But sometimes it's very, as far as I see I don't know that population so well, but the few that I know better, they hardly have any relatives and family around here because they came, tried to organise the family reunification and for some reason it didn't work out. And so, they end up being on their own here in a pretty difficult distress.” – IP10 in Luxembourg*

#### Physical health

Like older people generally OR had many physical health issues that IP helped to address. The physical toll of completing a journey from one’s own native country through the asylum and resettlement process on the body stood out as critical unique need for OR.

*“One person from Tongo, if you meet him, you think he's over 70, but in fact he's only 56. And he has some serious health issues recently. And I think yes, he's HIV positive as well. So, there's a lot of health issues accumulated.” – IP10 in Luxembourg*

#### Mental health

All but three IP reported that mental health issues were a core issue for OR. This stemmed from trauma, loss of identity, self-worth, and OR capacity to bond with local community members and develop meaningful social connections and friendships.

IP noted that the psychological impact on OR from of the physical journey, previous horrific experiences in their native country, dealing with loss of family members and having your life plans and hopes for you family were all contributing factors to psychological trauma in OR. In line with the literature, OR noted as often the ones for whom mental health issues – for example psychological trauma – given the compounding effects of being exposed to horrific events for longer and being able to understand the events that led them to becoming a refugee, more so than younger people or children. IP noted that this would impact OR’s mental health issues in unique ways, and therefore required IP to interact with OR more carefully.

*“You want to be surrounded by your children and your grandchildren. This is probably not what you imagined for yourself and that’s all been smashed to pieces. [...] you’re living in this new country without any of those conflicts around you, so I imagine the journey for them is even harder than for the younger generations.” – IP15 in Scotland*

IP also spoke of how providing meaning for OR was a critical aspect of their work. For example, one IP in Ireland spoke of how an OR from Syria could not join in with local Irish dance lessons because of cultural differences. According to their culture, it was not permitted for men and women who were not married to each other to dance with others or, in some cases, to dance in public at all. Although this is one small example, the IP struggled to help the OR to find purpose and meaning in their new resettled life given these cultural constraints coupled with legal constraints.

Loss of identity was common issue particularly surrounding finding new meaning and purpose in their resettled location. IP noted that many times OR were at the top of their career field in their native country but were forced back to the bottom upon resettlement.

*“Big time big loss of identity, in many cases, and we well we try to build up that up. [...] If they had a pretty good job before, now they have to start all the way at the bottom. And that’s emotionally heavier more difficult for them to make to make a change.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*



OR were noted as struggling with feeling self-worth and a sense of purpose that also contributed to IP being concerned about specific mental health needs with OR. IP noted that even when OR couldn't work, sometimes they wanted to get involved with the local community as volunteers. Given the language barriers, this proved very hard for OR. For OR, not having a goal every day or sense of self within the new community contributed to mental health concerns by IP.

*“They [OR] may not be possible to work and I think also voluntary works are very nice for the people to have a goal to do something too, but it's not that easy in Luxembourg with the voluntary work because you need an insurance. Also, it's not easy [to do] volunteer work when you're not speaking one of the languages of the country. It's complicated.” – IP13 in Luxembourg*

Interestingly, even though IP noted that trauma and mental health issues were a unique need for OR, one IP noted that it was not his job help resolve them. This quote reinforces the theme that IP see their roles as connectors to further services that could assist OR's unique needs.

*“They have a lot of psychological problems [...] They leave a lot of collapsing things: war, rape, a lot of really heavy, heavy situation[s]. Very difficult to understand [for] us as [in] my position as a social worker, because my job is to help them to get better and to have a job and to have a place. But, we can't, and we don't have the ability to [read] their mind. It's like a code and it's very difficult to decrypt this code, to crack this code, and in fact, it's not our job to crack.” – IP6 in France*

#### Community and social bonding

IP noted the importance of OR joining in with locals as not only a measure and definition of integration success, but a way of developing OR's independence. OR were perceived to be at risk of lacking social connections to local community and peers outside their direct family members, which could contribute to the risk of further social isolation and mental health issues for OR. In response to this conflict – and again with seemingly natural insight into LCT turning

points and transitions theory – IP have taken a slow and steady approach to fostering community bonds through shared values.

IP noted that when OR are able to join in “normal” local community groups and activities, it fostered friendships and recognised previous skills that the workforce or education systems may not. In turn, this helped reduce the issues surrounding mental health such as isolation and loss of meaning. Bridging cultural differences and facilitating socialisation was seen as an important aspect of IP work with OR.

In Ireland and Scotland, IP supported OR women to join local knitting and women’s group meetings and OR men to similar ‘men’s shed’ groups that about sharing construction and farming experiences. In Luxembourg and France, IP facilitated community events and escorted OR to them where possible. In the Netherlands, IP facilitated connections between OR, churches and mosques, and, where appropriate, facilitated group learning events where refugees of all ages learnt about the cultural behaviours and expectations of the Dutch people.

While IP did note that some OR did not always stick with the groups once the IP stopped attending with them, they could see potential for these types of activities to be influential. In order to respond to OR needing extra support on developing community bonds, IP have to think creatively outside-the-box and beyond specific policy mandates to for commonalities between locals and OR. Again, IP noted they needed more time to help facilitate bonding within the community groups between OR and locals, but integration policy did not afford them enough time to do so.

*“And my vision, they would have local friends, people that could go and visit who are English speaking Scottish, not just Syrian families or Sudanese families. That they can join in activities. You know, when maybe women's groups or men’s groups or exercise classes or craft classes or, you know, they've got up at a social life. That kind of thing.” – IP15 in Scotland*

However, this was not always successful. IP noted that integration program policy tended to force IP to push OR into these local groups even if the OR did not want to or feel comfortable with this – particularly due to language barriers. Given the lack of time that IP had to work

with OR (18 months maximum) IP noted this policy was not always helpful for the long-term integration of OR.

*“I asked him if he wants to join like a group of other people doing activities. But yeah, he's not really [interested] because of the language! He doesn't feel very able to integrate in a group like this [...] For older people, it's more complicated.” – IP13 in Luxembourg*

*“They're embarrassed to speak [...] You are not a native speaker and this you will understand that you are not a native speaker, you will do a mistake.” – IP1 in Scotland*

*“Most of these young people, they are working hard. They are not in the home for these older people in the home. So, we have to find a way that these older people make them busy.” – IP3 in Ireland*

Furthermore, IP noted that integration policies were targeted towards broad demographics with particular focuses on employment and education primarily. The groups and activities that they were “forced” to push OR into or that were offered in resettled communities were not specifically designed for or meeting the needs of OR.

Community bonding with a focus on multi-ethnic groups and the native local population was highlighted as an area still needing further development. IP reported a need for community centres that specifically focused on bridging and facilitating intercultural exchange between multiethnic communities, and not just physical activities such as sewing or gardening, could increase positive integration efforts. The sentiment was around fostering deeper cultural exchange between OR and local native community members to bridge differences and promote integration efforts. An IP from Ireland who was himself an older refugee captures this sentiment in the following quote:

*“I suggested [to] the government, [they] all prepare something for these people [...] We want to have some resource centre, and that in this resource centre, not just Afghan and Irish but all nationalities come together, and they will integrate better!” – IP3 in Ireland*

### Unrealistic expectations

The overall common theme IP noted was that existing policy put unreal expectations on OR given the short time that they had to work with them (a maximum of 18 months). IP emphasised that every aspect of life takes longer to do for OR and thus expectations of what achieving integration was, how long it would take, and what support OR needed along the way to get there, was unrealistic under existing policy frameworks. An example of this was the Dutch Civic Integration test that refugees needed to complete in order to maintain their legal status in the Netherlands. IP recounted how the civic integration test requires adults regardless of age, to complete it in Dutch. IP however, noted that OR capacity to learn the Dutch language to the degree required to pass the test was unrealistic. Furthermore, the information in the test was often deemed irrelevant for OR specifically.

*“The elderly people, they don't get any different than all the others. And they also have to do the same schooling. They need to do the same in integration test. It's a test of the Netherlands and they say, you have to integrate. And for this you will get an assignment and a test, you have to go to school, you have to learn about our history, you have to learn our language and you have to learn about our rules. And then you have to take a test: you can fail or you can pass. Which for the elderly refugees, is way more difficult than for the young ones. [...] So, an elderly person also has to learn how our primary school works, which is useless for them. And you can fail a certain amount of times and then you have to ask that you don't have to do it anymore. But then you have to prove a lot of things, that you are mentally disabled or that you cannot read and write properly or that you have too much mental problems, that you cannot take the test proper which is a very long... Which brings, of course, a lot of stress, a lot of depression with it!” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

### Definition of integration

In line with the literature, the definition of integration for Older Refugees (OR) varied amongst Integration Practitioners (IP) interviewed. IP noted that they did not have specific key performance measures of successful integration with OR. However, there was a strong emphasis that came through on social bonding and community connections as the most

important from a long-term perspective. Thus, the overall common theme that IP regarded as successful integration for OR was the development of strong community bonds and the ability to live independently without the help of the IP. Independence was regarded by IP as the ability of OR to complete fundamental life tasks such as paying bills, connecting with other services, recognising government mail and respond to the letters appropriately (e.g., calling the correct department or booking and attending an appointment on their own, etc.) and developing meaningful social bonds with local community members which overlapped with many of the unique needs of OR that IP noted. For example, many OR experienced cultural differences such as mistrust of government stamped letters. IP noted having to constantly point out to OR that a letter with the government seal on it was not a threat, but in fact in their best interest to respond to. Often OR had negative and dangerous experiences with governments in their home country and would perceive a government stamped letter to be a threat to them or their family. As such, IP again had to manage cultural expectations surrounding this and aid in developing trust over time with the OR towards the government in the resettled country. To achieve these tasks on their own was noted as a challenge because of ORs' expectation of what IP would do for them, how long IP would support them, and language barriers.

IP recognised that they would not be working with the OR forever, so ensuring they had their own solid connection with their new community and services who could help them if they needed to seek assistance in the future was a primary long-term goal. IP felt that community members would take on the integration support role naturally.

*“Friends and people, they [OR] know that they have a network. And that they can read their own post they get from the government or they get from the rental company. [...] Integration really starts with having a good connection with the other culture. You cannot integrate through [a] book, you cannot integrate by getting a house.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

*“[Integration is] to be part of the of the country and also to participate in the things. I think it doesn't mean for me that you that you lose your own traditions, your habits, but I think to understand how the life is in Luxembourg.” – IP13 in Luxembourg*

*“I suppose seeing people out and about or part of their community. That's the kind of success indicator [for integration].” – IP14 in Ireland*

IPs regarded local language as critical for OR ability to integrate successfully but recognised that learning a new language was extremely difficult for OR. Learning the local language was seen to “*open the doors for people just to meet other people and they can ask, ‘[what] is this, this...?’ I think it makes very positive outcomes!*” (IP1 in UK Scotland). In particular, IP recognised that OR capacity to learn the local language enabled them to form local bonds with the community and seek out further services that arise in the future. Language proficiency was seen as critical to being independent and OR being able to find and connect with any services that they may need in the future.

*“And actually, they would be able to look things up online that they're interested and source things for free or cheaply that they're looking for. You know, the sort of integration is you know you don't want everyone live in the same sort of life, but they can access the services that they [want to] use with ease.” – IP15 in Scotland*

With regard for defining integration and the actions that IP took, facilitating, supporting and working towards independence of OR was the common factor. IP saw the ability to live independently as a ‘local person lives,’ as the real measure of integration. The degree of independence varied between person to person and IP regarded this as important to distinguish. Coming from a needs-based approach, independence for one OR would not look the same as another OR, but importantly, the individual would be able to live comfortably without having to rely on the IP for help. Independence was summarised well by an IP from France.

*“Who, at the end of my job, will be independent. Will be able to deal with his bills, to be able to. If there's a problem in the house or a problem, with something that he doesn't understand with the income he can call on his own and ask for information, for example. Yes. But I think someone who would be independent at the end. Won't need my help” – IP8 in France*

Integration was not cut and dry, even for IP who worked in an organisation with a specific focus such as education.

*“Of course, we focus on people getting qualifications, but we know that there are so many things that affect a very successful person. A person who is a proper candidate for an equivalent degree in a better life, there are so many factors that come into the picture and might disturb outcomes.” – IP9 in Netherlands*

Surprisingly, employment and education were not noted as being of great importance in integration for older refugees’ integration. This contradicts much of the integration literature which has a strong focus on both education and employment improvement for individuals, being critical for the long-term success of resettled refugees. IP stated that these factors for integration, were not relevant or regarded as important for OR.

*“This [employment] does not obviously apply too much to the older generation because we wouldn't really expect them to work and some of them aren't fit for work anyways.” – IP15 in Scotland*

#### Existing policy for OR

For Older Refugees (OR) social engagement with locals in the community was the major theme of successful integration throughout every country. IP felt this was a key factor in not only what positive integration should look like, but critical for OR in achieving independence and developing their own personal network that they could call upon for support in the future when the IP was no longer working with them. IP noted this was not explicitly written in any policy, but they deduced this integration success measure in response to the lack of policy acknowledgement of the lower and slower capacity of OR to learn and adapt.

*“It's not so specific. So, it's in terms of what I do, again, it's, it's just linking people into society and day to day life in the county. I'm sure there are lots of policies that I have to work according to, but I can't think or name them at the moment. And, it's not like I have a rule book out that I'm kind of going through on a daily basis and reading.” – IP14 in Ireland*

Every participant reported that there was no existing policy specifically for older refugees that guided their work. This was in line with the literature. IP also reported that given this, they did not actively amend their integration practices towards OR and treated each client the same.

*“As far as I know they don't, there's no policy different. I've never seen a policy that is directed specifically at older the refugees. So, we don't we don't differentiate either they all get... we support we put in home visitors, the same way as we do with any other refugee family that's coming in.” – IP15 in Scotland*

IP perceptions if the policies support the needs of the older refugees

Overall IP felt that existing policies supported the needs of OR and were inclusive but were written broadly to account for all refugees in general. Arcing back to the IP feelings of flexibility and freedom to take discretionary actions in their work, IP did not feel that there were policies or mandates that especially enabled or restricted services to OR specifically.

The common theme throughout each country was IP knowing when and where to sign post the unique needs for OR. For example, if an OR was illiterate in their own language, IP would sign post this as a unique challenge when it came to that OR learning the new local language. Similarly, if an OR was physically disabled and had mobility issues, IP would make notes of this during intake and housing applications. To resolve these issues, IP needed to make sure a translator was accessible for literacy needs and to use common sense or personal experiences to help choose appropriate housing that would accommodate the mobility needs of an OR.

IP believed that there was a grey area related to age requirements for services. For example, job-seeking benefits, education funding, housing financing, disability services funding all relied on a person meeting specific requirements. PAM slightly occurred at an operational level when an OR met only some (but not enough) of the criteria for obtaining such assistances, even if the IP perceived them as in need of the services. Given that IP stuck to the rules and did not report falsifying any OR information in order to meet qualifications, PAM at an operational level manifested when IP perceived an OR was deserving of certain services but the IP was not able to connect them to those services since the OR did not meet the required qualifications. As a result, IP experienced PAM at an individual level. At this point was when they



implemented a great amount of discretionary action through outsourcing long-term integration responsibilities to external services and family members of OR.

IP beliefs if older refugees need a specific mandate or policy  
IP have mixed opinions about whether OR needed a separate integration policy. Given the numbers of OR are so small relative to all refugees, IP overall feeling was uncertain, and they often said ‘maybe’. IP did feel that there could be a need in the future for a policy, but that overall, they felt that was out of their role. They instead felt that this was the responsibility of the government to develop.

*“Our capacity to integrate older people is quite limited. We don't have specific policies for the integration of older refugees, for example, it's something that will be worth looking at. But we don't have a particular approach. Our approach is as a family. So, from that perspective, it's, it's a challenge for the individual, but not necessarily for the state.” –*

IP6 in Ireland

Of the IP that said OR needed a specific integration policy, they justified this because OR required extra supportive attention within the existing frameworks. They felt that it would be nice for OR to have a specific policy to make explicit pre-existing services for them. This could help IP better serve OR because then IP would not need to seek these services out themselves. IP shared resources about services through their professional and personal networks, but only at local levels. IP said sharing of knowledge and best practices between countries and municipalities was very much welcomed, but in practice was very rare and was not mentioned in policy either. Overall, IP acknowledged that structural supports for meeting the extra needs unique to OR exist, but they were not clearly defined through policy for IP to connect OR with. IP said that they were more concerned about the psychologically and physically vulnerable refugee groups; they felt these groups should have a specific policy developed towards. If these vulnerable groups had a specific policy, IP thought that such a policy could likely capture the older cohort as well as being vulnerable individuals.

Of the IP that said definitively no specific OR policy should exist, they thought that the risk of having a special policy for OR may create a new ‘service group box’, which could risk reducing person-centred care. By creating additional categories or cohorts, it would result in further

qualifications and requirements in order to obtain services and, in turn, risk excluding those in need. IP said these extra categories could be helpful on some levels, but potentially harmful on others. In particular, they were worried that health care of OR could be a major risk. Therefore, the risk is assuming homogeneity of all OR – which IP clearly believed they are not – was too high in their view if an OR policy would be created.

The idea for policy a to recognise different integration expectations for OR was suggested. For example, IP thought that OR could have different expectation for outcomes in specific circumstances to account for their unique slower capacity to learn and adapt. Specific adjustments and expectations could instead be made to existing integration frameworks, which could be formatted to promote and aid OR independence following their allotted time with IP. For example, the civic test could be presented to OR in their native language instead since they tend to take longer to learn the new host language. This way OR will still be able to learn the cultural and social aspects of living in the host community and be able to respond confidently or explain these in concepts in their own language on a test. Language learning programs could be adjusted to focus on aiding OR to connect with community-based services and age-appropriate health and mobility services instead of learning other types information that are irrelevant for OR. Overall, IP experienced PA meaningless again with the unrealistic expectations that policy placed on OR, but still adhered to the policy. They felt that services provided through the policy in general were useful, but that OR services needed to be adapted and delivered differently in some respects. This tailored approach is in line with the literature on integration best practices suggesting that needs-based approaches with an individual focus should be incorporated into integration policies.

## PART 2: Experiences of Policy Alienation for IP

Overall, while IPs perceived some degree of Policy Alienation (PA) on varying levels, it generally did not negatively impact the quality of services they provided to OR nor did it seem to increase their propensity to bend the rules. When the policy could not directly support long-term OR needs, instead of bending the rules, they looked for external solutions outside of their organisation or policy to which to connect the OR. A common theme amongst IP experiencing PA was the lack of long-term planning in existing integration policy.

### Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM)

All IP experienced some degree of *client-level* Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM) and 11 IP experienced some level of *societal-level* PAM.

Interestingly, there were some elements of PAM both on the client and societal level that no IP experienced. These results suggest that IP experience different levels of PAM in different aspects of their work. Given this this variation, understanding where it does and does not occur is of interest. No significant difference could be found between those experiencing societal-level PAM or not based on the characteristics of the IP (e.g., gender or status as an immigrant or host country native).

### Client-level Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM)

Client-level PAM generally occurred in the context of perceived unrealistic integration policy expectations on OR, unreal expectations about integration outcomes for IP, under-staffing, and lack of follow-up services and reassessment of integration.

In particular, IP expressed PAM specifically towards language learning measures. Unrealistic expectations about language learning was an important theme given that OR were noted as having more difficulty learning a new language than other refugees and that there are no specific language classes tailored to their learning capacities. As such OR were perceived to

### Policy Alienation (PA) Concepts:

*Policy Alienation (PA)*: when Integration Practitioners (IP) feel disconnected from the integration policy program that they are implementing with Older Refugees (OR).

*Policy Alienation Powerlessness (PAP)*: the degree to which IP perceive their strategic, tactical and operational level of influence on integration policy for \OR that directly shape their work actions, practices and potential outcome measures.

*Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM)*: IP sense of understanding that the policy they are implementing on a *societal-level* and a *client-level* have purpose for serving the long-term integration needs of OR and the community.

be often more disadvantaged in the language programs than other refugees. As a result, their ability to communicate with locals does not improve and reduces their overall integration chances.

IP expressed PAM regarding the amount of time they had to work with their clients. Many reported that due to the funding restrictions and the lack of adequate staffing, they are expected to integrate refugees (regardless of age) in a very short amount of time. Yet, they are also expected to work with the refugees through an individual needs-based approach.

*“I don't think that's at all sufficient for families that have had such intense support for 18 months and then just all of a sudden here's the booklet [and they're exited from services].” – IP7 in Ireland*

These two factors present in policy – OR capacity to learn a new language and the short time frame in which IP have to work with them – were perceived by IP to contradict each other. This perceived policy contradiction left IP feeling overwhelmed and incapable of providing the quality of services for which they professionally strived. In the following example, one French IP describes her actions in terms of a machine-like process.

*“With my older people, when we arrive to our, I don't know, six months or 18 months of help I will have to let him go. I can try to call a social worker from the town that he lives in to tell him that I have to let this family go. But I'm afraid it's going to be difficult. They don't understand yet how to pay their bills, stuff like that. But the other social worker, she would do with what she had. If she doesn't have time, she won't be able to do any miracles. But I have nothing. But there's nothing more I can do. I would have to let him go, even if I know after that, he won't know how to pay his bills and he's going to have a lot of that stuff like that. This is the kind of thing that they impose to us. [...] So, after the six months, I have to let him go and I have to take someone else and do the same work.” – IP8 in France*

The relevance of existing integration support services is also questioned many IP. In particular, there is dissonance between educational services leading to employment of refugees, and the

lack of recognition of existing OR skills. While OR may not have university qualifications or even formal schooling, they often bring many valuable skills with them. For example, OR may have manual labour experience or culinary experience from owning businesses back in their native land. PAM emerged in IP when they perceived policy did not recognise these skills.

**Box A: Case example of PA meaninglessness regarding informal education and experience in Ireland**

*“We had a case where there was an older man who had a garden. And when he moved into the state that he lived in, the neighbours weren't very happy about having refugees living in there. They were, you know, they were I suppose fearful and the usual issues that you have in a rural Irish community when these people from outside are coming in. But this man, there was a lot of stones in his garden. The house had been left vacant for a long time and the garden was very, very rough and not tidy at all. This man was from a farming background. Slowly every day, he went out to his garden and he gathered all these rocks that were in the garden and just started to clear up his property. The neighbour was looking over the fence and initially the neighbour was making complaints to the Council going ‘what's going on this guy? What is he doing in his garden?’. But slowly, he began to see the work that man was doing. And in time he had taken all the rubble and pushed them to one side of the garden. The next-door neighbour said, “He's done a great job. Well, look, he's done to that garden, it used to be such a mess.” He [the neighbour] actually helped him take away the stones and the rubble that he [the OR] had gathered and helped him take it [away]. Then they put a tunnel in the garden and started planting stuff and that actually became a kind of over the fence garden. The two neighbours began to kind of go, ‘Oh, you're, you're growing that’. And even without language, they were in communication and it's kind of helped him settle. That took that took a long time, and it took a long time to go from that neighbour being suspicious of what's this guy was doing in his garden to [saying] well done, he's done a great job.”*

– IP15 in Ireland

All IP reported that existing policy does not account for ORs' previous employment history and typically disregards their education both formal and informal (through cultural apprenticeships or years working in a sector). One example shared was about an OR who was a stone mason in his home village since he was twelve years old. He is now 55 and views himself, culturally, as old and an extremely experienced professional. Yet, the policy in the resettled country regards him as neither old nor professionally qualified. IP experienced PAM at both an individual and societal level in this case because the OR had great potential and capacity to work and contribute to society as a stone mason, yet legally, he would need to complete an apprenticeship in the new country, receive formal qualifications, and register with a trade union to be able to practice. The IP felt this was extremely unrealistic for an OR to achieve.

Often instead IP are pushed or strongly persuaded to support refugees, regardless of age, on pursuing higher education as a way

to make a new start. From the IP perspectives, policy does not empower OR without higher education degrees. The following quote from an IP in Scotland captures this sentiment perfectly.

*“Some people are ready for a good job or something and need to be like learning careers, not like education, maybe to become like labourer, or butcher maybe. [...] Or sometimes if we need like to help people who have already experienced their careers, because firstly they were a blacksmith, people they have experience, they have everything, just need like short courses to start working.” – IP1 in Scotland*

A common example of unrealistic policy expectations on OR was regarding employment. IP noted that OR sometimes wanted to continue working in the newly resettled community even though they lacked the formal qualification to do so. Moreover, it was highly unlikely that they could attain those qualifications needed. IP found that the integration policies related to re-education with the goal of a degree leading to employment opportunities was broadly written for all refugees but was particularly meaningless and unrealistic for OR. Many OR were in a somewhat grey area with employment abilities; many IPs said these OR were fifty and above. Fifty years old in Europe is still considered working age but factoring in cultural differences of age definition and the compounding physical and mental stress of the asylum process (which IPs noted tended to age refugees more), resulted in a difficult situation for these ageing refugees. IP saw that the policy frameworks obliged OR to be active job seekers in order to comply with the integration housing program in which they were enrolled. This was often unrealistic for them.

*“Someone [else] on the housing list would have a priority because of their age profile. They are elderly, they're infirm or they exhibit a lot of the same needs and they just don't qualify because they just haven't reached a certain age. And that's where it becomes difficult or when they're at that elderly stage, they're still drawing down on social welfare for job-seekers allowance. You know, so they're technically supposed to be working because they're under 65. They just, you know, they may be 60 years of age [and there] is no way they're going to retrain to enter the labour market.” – IP5 in Ireland*

### Societal-level Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM)

At a societal-level, IP showed PAM with regard to their perception of policy being too short-term focused. The theme of reactionary rather than planned comes through in their perceptions of the integration policies, which they felt impacted their work.

*“The whole integration process does not look at you on the virtual level nor on a group level, they look at you at a wave level. So, this year we have these numbers, we're going to give this it's and most of the time, it doesn't make sense because it's such a political discourse.”*

– IP9 in Netherlands

The importance of OR developing strong social connection, either at a local community-level or within the migrant community, is a large overall theme from the interviews. IP did not think existing integration policy focuses enough on this. IP felt PAM at a social (and individual level) towards policies that called for social and community connections between refugees and locals to be facilitated by IP when the cultural constraints made this difficult. IP regarded it very hard for OR to continue with their passions and find purpose and meaning. Again, arching back to the theme of short-term focused approaches.

*“It's hard for them because there's always that that kind of fear, you know, to not fit in the group. I think that in France there is a lack of stuff like that, that is dedicated or open to every everyone.”*

– IP8 in France

IP also experience PAM regarding follow-up services, reassessment of OR needs, lack of established best practices resources, and lack communication between municipality-level government and national-level government.

*“There's no comparisons done throughout the counties. And you know there's no feedback, to my knowledge, about the refugees back to the Department of Justice or to any county at any point.”*

– IP7 in Ireland

*“I think one of the big, big drawbacks to the resettlement program nationally is that there's not really any follow up as such and so when the program ends, it just ends and that's it. And there's, to my knowledge there's not a review of the program. And yeah, which is quite shocking.” – IP7 in Ireland*

#### No Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM)

Interestingly, IP reported confidence in transparency at the organisational level and, to some extent, the local municipality level. All IP felt that they were actively encouraged through their organisation to think outside the box and focus on client-based solutions. Collaboration was seen to be encouraged between external services and non-network organisations with an overall client solution-based approach to service delivery as a consistent theme in every country.

*“Yeah, yeah, we will do whatever is needed, you know, again, that's [how] we operate very, very collaboratively with anybody [...] If there's an ideological difference you just leave that out the door. Yeah. And so, you know, we would, we would have no hesitation in working with yeah and trying to do the best for the client. So yeah, that'd be kind of general across that kind [integration] of NGO.” – IP5 in Ireland*

Further, typically IP were not interested in developing any kind of measure of success for OR specifically within their organisation.

*“INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that you will be able to have influence over developing any meaningful successful measures KPIs for integration should that come up?*

*IP14 in Ireland: No.*

*INTERVIEWER: You wouldn't want to influence that, or you don't feel your organisation will let you?*

*IP14 in Ireland: I don't think this role would be able to kind of feed into anything like that. I couldn't see. I couldn't see an avenue for that to happen.”*



### Policy Alienation Powerlessness (PAP)

Overall, IP did not perceive much Policy Alienation Powerlessness (PAP) at all. IP noted high degrees of discretionary freedom with interpretation of policy, implementation of policy and transparency between organisational authorities and their local municipality government.

IP in Ireland and Scotland noted that they felt they could influence national level policy more so than the other countries. However, all IP noted that influencing national level policy was not of concern for them and perceived it would not impact their daily practices and was not of a direct hinderance to them meeting the needs of OR. If conflicts between their work and national policies did emerge, they would not break national level policies even when these policies were not in the best interest of an OR. While some rule bending did occur, every IP also adhered to organisational and municipality policy rules even when they perceived them to conflict or contrast with the goal of meeting OR needs.

### Strategic Policy Alienation Powerlessness (PAP)

IP Strategic PAP was perceived at a national government-level mostly. In particular, IP again noted the theme of a lack of long-term strategies in the policies that shaped their work. Generally, IP also reported good transparency between them and national-level governments in Scotland. Perhaps this is because it is such a small population. Similar sentiments were held in Ireland, which also has a comparatively small population compared to France or the Netherlands.

*“The government here tries quite hard to involve us on those kinds of discussions, you know, actively seek us out to explore, you know, find out our views, we get a little bit of funding, which is administered by another charity but it comes from the government as an equality kind of, ‘pot of funding,’ and I go to meetings to do with that funding and there's often a Scottish government office there and they're mining us for information about what are the big things coming up. So, for instance, during the pandemic, we got some consultation for them about what were the big issues coming up for refugee families. What could the government be doing to help. And that was around things like sourcing food, I.T., isolation, and that kind of thing.” – IP15 in Scotland*

In countries with a larger population, it seemed that the opposite occurred. IP in France and the Netherlands reported perceptions of transparency and feelings of an ability to have impact on their national a great deal less than these smaller countries.

*“INTERVIEWER: What about policies at the municipality level or the state level. Do you feel that you have influence on this at all?”*

*IP9 in the NETHERLANDS: No, we are too far, no. [...] At a municipal level at a European level, level. I mean, yeah, it's just not working. [...] I think the biggest barrier is that everyone left the non-profit to fix a problem that takes a whole country to solve. I mean the non-profit is based on charity [...] I think its absence of logic. It's a collective logic that is completely absent out there!”*

#### Tactical Policy Alienation Powerlessness (PAP)

The extent to which they felt ‘tactical’ PA was primarily related to specifics of national policies. The issues they had with PAP were about the lack of guidance on measures of successful integration. They often reported that programs typically only lasted from 6-18 months and ended with them (IP) giving clients an information booklet. Again, this arcs back to IP feeling that there is lack of long-term tactics for integration broadly and in particular, when it comes to OR, these booklets or information “support resource guides” are inadequate for OR to live independently. They felt frustration with ORs’ ability to be accepted into specific systems OR needed to pass red tape gatekeepers. IP stated that there are policy supports in place for OR, but in order to connect OR to them IP felt that they had to constantly prove that OR were vulnerable enough to qualify for them. IP also reported that they felt ‘tactical empowerment’ with regard to sharing of information and policy recommendations with municipal-level government policy makers. IP often reported actively advocating for policy change at the local government levels. The common theme with many of the IP was that when they perceived a barrier or a they felt a policy was interfering with their work, they would not just give up: they would advocate for change locally.

At a tactical level, IP reported that there were not many measures of successful integration in their organisations. However, they did perceive that their ability to independently assess a client’s independence was generally supported by their organisations. However, this could be

because they were getting no clear guidance from their policy or superiors as to what success should look like, and therefore took it upon themselves to develop personal performance measures for OR. IP did feel that they had a great amount of discretionary freedom to determine what success for each client would look like the majority of the time.

*“Unless you were in a particular project, whether it was, you know, the KPIs needs to be measured for funding reasons or, you know, some sort of research paper or something like that. But across, across the board, we would work, you know, we’d have the same collaborative approach to that particular piece of work.” – IP5 in Ireland*

#### Operational Policy Alienation Powerlessness (PAP)

Every IP reported that they had a lot of discretionary freedom at a client level to achieve the goals that OR identified and wanted to achieve. This indicates very low levels of operational-level policy alienation.

In every country, IP consistently reported to feel a lot of transparency with municipalities and local government. Many IP noted that information sharing, best practice experiences and, at times, policy recommendations were free flowing between them and municipal government powerholders. This could speak to Ips’ positive feelings towards feeling of operational empowerment and large discretionary freedoms. Where there was PAP, it was mostly about IP interpretation of policy goals as unrealistic for older refugees.

*“Technically [they are] supposed to be working because they’re under 65. They just, you know, they may be 60 years of age, [there] is no way they’re going to return or enter the labour market, but they’re getting hassled from job welfare support for employment, it’s called jobseekers allowance, So you’re supposed to be seeking a job. And so sometimes trying to get a delegation from that can be difficult.” – IP5 in Ireland*

IP reported that many of the existing integration structures or frameworks of success were also unrealistic for OR.

*“Because they don’t have the, let’s say the required skills to enter an apartment or a house that we rent out because they lack language skills. Well, they don’t have the required skills to work. They close to retirement age. So, it’s very difficult to see perspective or financial perspective that they can improve their financial situation.” – IP10 in Luxembourg*

The lack of time working with clients again rises as a key operational PAP.

*“I have one, the person is 58, for example. When I tried now to find somebody else who can who can assist this person, because at this moment, I’m seeing [them] every nearly every week and yeah, I don’t have the time for this. Also, I’m feeling, not feeling good, because I think because this person needs more help, but I cannot. I cannot give this.” – IP8 in France*

However, to resolve this, IP do feel that they have large discretionary freedoms when delivering services and often go beyond their performance requirements (if any specific ones are given within their organisations) to meet the needs of a client when those needs may not be part of their job. This freedom of discretion comes in the form of connecting them to further services, outsourcing integration activities to family members, or referring and enlisting OR in external social services that are specific to their needs.

*“I suppose a lot of what I do is linking people into bigger organisations, as I’ve said this is time limited what I do. So, it’s integrating people into an ongoing organisation or something sustainable that’s there. That they can help support and you know facilitate the refugees needs.” – IP14 in Ireland*

Connecting OR to further services was common in all countries. For example, homeless services or community activity groups focused on elder social events that may be better suited to supporting the long-term needs of the OR. In particular, circumstances where an OR has needs that the program does not cover or that the OR does not qualify for, IP outsourced to other local services.

*“In that particular case we outsourced, in a sense, to another organisation which is more focused on homeless people. Homeless people that got integrated into private homes working on the principle of housing first. The person there, the guy from Tongo, is not really the same profile but, the social follow up is a bit similar to, you know, vulnerable people. [Ips alone are] not reliable, you have to be present at least three, four times a week, you know, [and I] just cannot do that. So that’s, that’s a good practice. We already did that recently. So, we outsource the follow up of that person to more let’s say yes specialised organisation which is a good thing.” – IP10 in Luxembourg*

While there were not any formal networks mandated in policy, IP in every country noted the importance of developing localised networks of other services within their community. They also noted that all of their actions were extremely local, municipally based. Only two Irish IP noted that inter-municipality communication or sharing of knowledge occurred and when it did, it was an active choice that they made and was not mandated from policy.

*“Oh absolutely, the job will be very difficult if you didn’t have that ability to think outside the box. And yeah, there’s no real choice. [...] We want the program to be successful and we want to be able to share stories with other counties, and every county is at a different stage as well.” – IP7 in Ireland*

*In sum*, all IP felt that they understood the policies that shaped their work at an organisational and local level very clearly. They also understood that integration policy development occurred at all levels: national level, local government level and organisational level. All IP noted that they did not actively think about any particular policy level when they were working directly with OR until a conflict arose between their roles or capacities to provide services to OR and the limits their organisational policy framework had on their actions. This sentiment was captured well by one IP who reported that the government sets the rules for integration and they, as IP, execute them with the resources they can gather.

*In sum*, Policy Alienation (PA) on tactical and strategic levels were not major issues for IP largely because did they feel these concepts related directly to impacting the work they did with OR. IP felt that it was not really their role to influence the development of success metrics of integration. Some IP reported that they did, but only at an organisational level and, to a limited extent, contribute to the local municipality level. None felt they had responsibility for this at a national level. IP reported that the overall integration policy that frames their work does not treat ages differently, so their overall actions do not either. Instead, IP reported that their work is needs-based, focused on individual approaches to integration. Consideration for unique needs of any refugee, including OR, were managed through their individual practices so tactical and strategic PAP conflicts did not arise.

### PART 3: Actions Taken by IP to Respond to OR Needs and PA

#### Barriers to IP work

Overall, much of the operational PAP surrounded Integration Practitioners (IP) perceiving barriers to their work. The main theme of barriers to integration practice for IP centred on government funding and a lack of clarity on what integration outcomes in policy and guidelines should look like. Further, a lack of adequate staffing and difficulties navigating through ‘red tape’ compounded their lack of clarity on integration outcomes.

*“While the whole of government approach in the one hand is good, it means that every department has provided services. No one department is responsible for the integration and therefore health will give the older person the health services, housing probably get the house, but there’s no [one] responsible for actually overseeing that the refugee does integrate and does get [integrated] once they finish the resettlement program, which is about 18 months.” – IP4 in Ireland*

Often there appeared to be intersectionality between government financing a program and an organisation managing the program. IP noted that both the national and local government played an important role in many of the integration organisations funding. This was typically direct funding stemming from a national budget to a municipality budget, which then funded tender-winning organisations.

*“Well, because it’s a big organisation it is pretty difficult to say if it’s a governmental level or that it is organisation because, of course, the organisation is paid by the government. And their finances are for big part are coming from the government. And so of course a little bit of force. [...] but they have to work on the goals that are provided for by the government, the government provides the goal. They make sure it happens, how it happens. They decide themselves.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

Staffing shortages due to lack of funding was also noted by IP as key barriers for completing their integration actions.

*“We’re saying we’re dealing with two part-time, two full time of staff, 75 volunteers and 150 people, and refugees in 36 households. I could probably keep, we could probably get four full time staff busy full time. Easy. Absolutely. Easy. But, you know, we’re just, we’re right hand to mouth of charity you suffer from the same problems that a lot of small-town charities have, you know short term funding.” – IP15 in the Scotland*

In this quote, while there is PA, the IP is active in understanding the need for change. This seems to be a common theme with many of the IP as well. When there is a barrier or they feel a policy is interfering with them delivering good results, they don’t just give up: they advocate for change. This could be a trait of integration workers compared to other sectors where PA has been studied.

*“[We don’t] really [have the resources we need] because the government, the priority for the government is definitely to get the people out of the camps into private homes. But once these people, the families or whoever, are in private homes, then the actual work only starts. Because they’re not really prepared to live on their own and to manage a household and to manage your housing with all the administrative stuff including school schooling day care. But that was not a priority for the Luxemburg government. Our agreement that we*

*have with the Ministry of Family, we only have two social workers plus me, and one being responsible for the social area and one person responsible for the issues related to work. [...] We have more than 120 families that we actively follow up. So, you see the ratio is pretty. Very high. [...] So, I'm currently arguing with the government to get more. That we can hire more social workers to push the ratio down but, well, now we have the COVID, we have to see what it what comes out of the negotiations.” – IP10 in Luxembourg*

Clear direction from government as to what exactly are measures of successful integration was also a barrier that IP noted. While no specific measures of integration or program success were known by IP, to some extent IP would determine their own based on the policies at national, municipal, and organisational levels. Essentially, IP interpreted the policies as setting the time limits for their integration work, providing their organisations with funding, and giving broad targets aimed at all refugees attaining education, housing, employment and health services. Otherwise, the policies left IP to figure out themselves how to achieve those goals. IP did not report many key performance measures that their funding was dependent upon, nor did they mention that reporting to any hierarchical structure shaped their actions with OR. In limited cases, IP said that they created success metrics for themselves. For example, IP in France were evaluating existing integration policies; this effort was driven by IP themselves, independent of their organisation or municipality. They felt that success measures should be individual achievements towards OR gaining independence even though this was not explicitly written in policy. This is compounded when the staffing is not sufficient enough to reach successful integration outcomes that are desired by the government.

*“Of course, the government always wants integration. That’s a very big, big point of course for the government, but nobody exactly knows how you make sure that somebody integrates good and that’s a difficult one. Especially when you are a big organisation. It’s difficult to work one person at a time. It’s difficult when you have case load of 40 people, it’s difficult to give them all the personal attention that that they really deserve. Now, if you have to work forty people in a week, the danger in this is that you will work on the system, but you just repeat every time again and that brings in chance of bad integration*



*with it because maybe you don't get the, the one to one person, not what they need.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

This sentiment was common throughout the different countries. An IP from France noted that because she was the only integration practitioner in her county OR were often treated as just another refugee and she could not afford to provide them with specific services.

*“IP8 in France: And [I] treat them that like other refugees, because I don't have enough time.*

*INTERVIEWER: Oh, interesting. So even if you wanted to give them extra services, you still have just treat them as a normal person?*

*IP8 in France: Sometimes I have to have to rely on their children here. I have to rely on them because there's a lot of other people who also need my help. So, you know, I just [have] five days a week to do my job, so...”*

Red tape and managing expectations of OR was a key barrier that IP noted. A good example of this was the following quote from an IP – a former refugee himself – reflecting on the experience he had working with IP when he first resettled in the Netherlands.

*IP12 in the Netherlands: It's the system, the way the system works. You know, the bureaucracies is foreign to us (refugees) in the Netherlands, we don't understand why five people have to decide whether I can get something or not. And that experiences is, how do you say, sometimes we think, oh, they don't want to help us. As in opposed to understanding that it has to go through many people before a decision is made, so that also, the way the system works it to be explained properly to the newcomer and that is a difficult thing.*

*INTERVIEWER: And I guess maybe, do you need to manage these people's expectations of what they can expect. Therefore?*

*IP12 in the Netherlands: That's a, that's a good one you say! Yeah, manage in the sense that let them know what is, what can they expect and what cannot be expected."*

IP also noted that red tape barriers arose in many aspects of their work. For example, they could be working on housing or health care applications with an OR, and each aspect of these tasks came with bureaucratic challenges. However, when working with OR specifically, they reported that sometimes, given the fact they the client is an older person, this could reduce the red tape in practice with other services and gatekeepers.

*"It's sometimes... It's, you know, it's bureaucracy, it's sometimes just silly. But ... with that particular cohort of people [OR], there's not too many structural barriers and you know you'll never be refused access to medication for someone at that age, even if they don't have the right paperwork, you'll never be refused. And you know form of accommodation, you'll always find somewhere to accommodate those particular needs."* – IP5 in Ireland

Different cultural expectations of how to integrate and the actions IP would do for OR also contributed to unrealistic integration policy measures for OR.

*"For people over 50 coming from Africa, you know, talking of themselves as old and that in the African cultural context. It's true. At that age in Africa, Africa is big though you understanding? But generally, people younger than you take care of you. Okay, you know, so you're cared for after a certain age. And coming over here, they expect the same, you know, when they talk to somebody like you. They'll call you my son. Just because of the differences because you could be somebody who could be his son, and then by that they also expect you to go more than just talk to them. Really give them more information. Go with them for appointments, you know, they need extra in that sense. But again, we think of, you're supposed to do things for yourself, you know, and it's also the same thing we do with elderly people."* – IP12 in the Netherlands

In practice, and in line with the European Foundation for Democracy (2018) report of integration best practices, IP in France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands created social contracts or goal sheets with refugees upon their primary intake session with them. The goal sheets were developed with the refugees themselves and were personalised and needs based. IP felt that OR often had similar goals as other refugees such as attaining stable housing, and, like other refugees, OR were limited to completing their goals within the program time limit (maximum of 18 months in all countries). Yet, the time limit of current policy frameworks that dictate how long IP have to integrate OR was a key barrier. IP stated that the programs do not allow enough time to meet the needs of OR, who are slower at adapting and learning.

*“It takes such a long time for them to get used to the system. They get in the time that they are with me and there’s not time enough to do the count down from the package. They stay with us an estimation is between three months to a year [...] They have to start up a new life and this takes so much [more] time than they have. No time for social interaction and they have to do a bunch of the paperwork [...] and they have to do it all at once. All in one year and this is too much.” – IP11 in the Netherlands*

Finally, IP reported how much of the work they do is framed by policy with a seemingly short-term context and has a sense that policy lacks long-term vision for integration services. IP talked of how there is need for follow up and reassessment from a long-term perspective, especially for OR and ageing refugees who would soon be classified as OR.

*“IP12 in the Netherlands: generally, all this stuff done for a few years, just not enough, you know? They get help, to the extent that they settle somewhere, but the real challenges occur five years into living in the country!*

*INTERVIEWER: Oh, like a follow up treatment centre?*

*IP12 in the Netherlands: Exactly. A follow up treatment, but something which we don’t do, and that’s something that’s really needed because if when I know it from my own experience. The first 10 years in this country were the worst.”*

### IP Response to PA and Integration Barriers

Every IP answered with a resoundingly strong ‘yes’ to having to think outside the box to solve issues with OR. IP said that it was an integral aspect of their job to find innovative solutions to meet the unique needs of OR.

In response to the challenges they identified, IP wanted to achieve individual goals for the OR and clearly expressed that they really do want to help them achieve independence and long-term support systems, even if their policy framework does not specifically allow them to directly. Through the lens of Lipsky’s work on discretionary actions for analysis, rule bending came in the form of IP developing formal and informal networks and outsourcing OR clients. Every IP noted that this occurred when OR did not meet their specific policy guidelines or organisational mandates for services. IP connected these specific OR to other service providers who could help (e.g., homeless services or shelters) and also with existing family members and/or other refugee community members who have resettled within their service area already.

### Networking and connecting

When IP perceived that they were not able to meet the needs of OR due to policy constraints or on the capacity they could provide in terms of services to an OR, they would look into their extended professional and informal networks to connect OR to other services that could meet their needs. Policy constraints included eligibility requirements of programs, for example age requirements, extent of disability, financial savings etc. Often this was to do with an OR being only slightly ineligible (slightly too young or considered not vulnerable enough with their disability) to meet housing requirements. Reflecting on this, an IP in Luxembourg spoke of how an OR was not eligible for housing under his refugee integration program policy, so he (the IP) used his professional local network to a local homeless shelter service and thereby outsource the need of attaining housing to still meet the integration need of the OR. This involved the IP slightly bending the rules of their policy framework and IP reframing the OR as a homeless person and not a homeless refugee. By reframing the OR’s situation, IP were able to connect the OR to local external services and the IP was still able to complete the integration task of finding accommodation for the client. The IP explains how when the governing integration policy did not accommodate the unique need of the OR, the IP connected the OR with other an external organisation whose policies would capture his needs.

*“It’s really up to how to be resourceful. You are yourself and what kind of supports you have found within a community or you can redirect somebody to, or you yourself whatever kind of support you can find.” – IP14 in Ireland*

IP in all countries reported a lack of established resource guides or connections between counties/municipalities. As a result, IP developed these professional networks themselves independently in response to the perceived need to serve OR. Development of informal networks at a community level was a common theme with every IP. Informal networks were not defined specifically by any IP, but can be regarded as connections that IP made with the local community members in order to either connect OR to community events, activity groups or source items required by OR that the IP program could not directly fund or formally connect OR with. For example, to try and reduce the mental health issues surrounding loneliness and social isolation that IP noted was a unique challenge facing OR, IP encouraged and facilitated OR to join pre-existing local community and activity groups that were focused on supporting elderly people socially.

IP saw value in ORs’ ‘informal’ education or ‘education through experience’ that policy did not recognise. IP responded to this by connecting OR to community groups and other people in their network who had similar career backgrounds. Recognising OR as having the potential to act as ‘informal educators’ was a means that IP used to bridge cultural and language barriers between OR and locals. IP recognised that OR were not always able to learn the local language to a productive or meaningful level, but they could bond with locals through recognition of common work values gained through informal education. The story of the OR (see box A) clearing his field to build a wall and start farming his land captures this example of PA well. In this example, we see the intersection between integration policy not recognising informal education and experiential skills of OR, IP acknowledging this gap, and the resulting IP feeling of policy alienation on a meaningless level.

IP noted that technical tools such as laptops, smart phones or medical aids to increase mobility such as wheelchairs were not in the funding or policy mandates for IP to purchase for OR. IP felt that these were often required tools for OR to achieve independence. To overcome this, IP used creative solutions while still sticking within their policy regulations. For example, IP would take OR to public libraries and work outside of their hours to help them with technology-

based applications and services. They would help OR set up email accounts and online billing services on smart phones outside of their regular work hours. However, sourcing items that OR required was done more often through informal networks and connections such as online message boards or even IP's own personal social media accounts. An example of this was an IP in Scotland who used her own personal social media network to source a mobility scooter for an OR. Then, she used her professional network to source further spare parts in order to meet the mobility need of the OR.

*“We had a guy who managed to source a mobility scooter for him, an older guy, and the mobility scooter, amazingly, we got it donated and those things cost a fortune! [...] And I think it needed a new battery or something? So, what we did was we phoned that mobility shop and asked for some advice about it and they again were very helpful. We tap into my colleagues who's set up another colleague of mine, you know... we know how to tap into our network locally amongst our communities if we need help for something.”* – IP15 in Scotland.

#### Outsourcing

With a long-term perspective of supporting OR's needs once they had to let an OR go from their services (a maximum of 18 months) IP also note that they often relied on resettled family members of the OR and established community groups of other resettled refugees and migrants of similar ethnic and or cultural backgrounds.

*“Luckily for me, they came in France with their children or they came to join their children. So, their children are helping me to help them.”*

– IP8 in France

IP noted this was useful for OR as often IP did not have enough time to build a relationship of trust with OR given their overload of cases, and the slower pace at which OR needed to attain integration outcomes (e.g., step by step walk through of online billing services). The extra time needed by OR would have required IP to sacrifice services to other clients, so outsourcing to other organisations or family members helped them balance time on their caseload. Moreover, OR did not always want support and service from IP. To resolve this conflict OR called upon family members to complete some of their integration program tasks.

*“They have their own children. They have their son or their daughter, they are integrated to the society. They don’t need me to do that.” – IP3 in Ireland*

This outsourcing of help often centred around tasks outside the realm of legal obligations that they themselves (the IP) may be required to do. Instead, these are life essential tasks such as help with setting up internet, paying bills, understanding postage system, learning bus routes, booking doctor appointment, etc. For example, IP would schedule and attend an initial doctor appointment with an OR and a family member and help bridge communication barriers of language barriers that may arise.

*“I know they have phone and they know I know they have their phone, but they’ll give me, “Oh, here, take my son’s phone number take my daughter in those you call her.” [...] They’re not that confident again with mobile phones and WhatsApp and text messaging and this kind of thing. [...] They’re comfortable to do it in their own language with their own family, but not with any outsiders. They don’t really wish to share their number.” – IP14 in Ireland*

### Results Summary

IP noted most refugees they worked with were between 18-35 years old. The majority of IP defined OR as people over 60 years old, but noted there were legal, cultural and contextual variations within this definition that impacted how they delivered services. All IP stated that OR were very low in numbers and working with this population was rare for them. Overall, they felt that OR did not necessarily have any uniquely different needs than other refugees. However, OR needed extra support to achieve the same integration outcomes as other refugees, which required different support from IP. Further, it should be reflected in different expectations for IP themselves, OR, and even integration policy. Specifically, OR take longer to achieve the same results and require individualised needs-based support to achieve integration outcomes. IP perceived that if OR do not receive extra individualised needs-based support, they were at greater risk of becoming socially isolated. This was perceived to contribute to further mental health problems and reduced integration outcomes.

Thus, IP felt that existing policies did not respond sufficiently with a long-term perspective to OR needs. IP perceived integration policies to be too localised and too short-term focused. Specifically, IP perceived existing integration policies as lacking follow-up supports. IP felt that they could influence and contribute to integration policy development at a local level. IP from Ireland, Scotland and to some extent Luxembourg, perceived that they had the potential to influence national integration policy, whereas IP in more populous countries (France and the Netherlands) did not.

To respond to perceived lack of long-term support in existing integration policies, IP developed localised resource networks – both formal and informal – through which they outsourced and connected OR to external services and further community networks. IP also did this when they felt their program policy could not directly meet the unique needs of OR. These networks were mainly resettled family members of OR, established community groups of other resettled refugees and migrants of similar ethnic and or cultural backgrounds, and personal semi-professional networks of the IP.

## **Discussion**

This research set out to answer two specific questions within the main research question:

- 1) **To what extent do integration practitioners (IP) perceive that existing policies support or hinder their work to integrate Older Refugees (OR)?**
- 2) **How do IP respond to these perceptions in their daily practices with OR?**

Understanding the degree to which Integration Practitioners (IP) experience Policy Alienation (PA) serves as a meaningful theoretical framework for assessing the first question. The literature on refugee integration policy calls for Life Course Theory (LCT) approaches to be used as a foundation for policy development. Thus, LCT provides a supplemental framework for understanding IP perceptions of the unique needs of Older Refugees (OR) and how IP perceive whether – or to what extent – existing policy meets the needs of OR, or not. These two theoretical frameworks help explain the results of how IP respond in practice if or when they experience PA. With these theoretical foundations, alongside Lipsky's contribution on discretionary actions of Street Level Bureaucrats, I suggest that the developing literature on Hybrid Professionalism offers further insight to explain the perceptions, actions and coping



mechanism responses to PA that IP experience when they perceive existing policy does not meet the needs of OR.

### To what extent do Integration Practitioners (IP) perceive that existing policies support or hinder their work to integrate Older Refugees (OR)?

Do Integration Practitioners (IP) feel that Older Refugees (OR) have unique needs?

Overall, the findings in this research align with the UNHCR sentiment that addressing the needs of older refugees separate from other refugees is not necessary. All IP felt that there are critically fundamental elements towards any refugee's capacity to integrate into a resettled community. What was common throughout the IP interviews, though, was that IP saw the unique needs of OR as their individual capacity to learn and adapt being much lower than younger refugees and existing policies do not take these factors into account. As a result, IP often have feelings of meaninglessness in the policies and program services their organisations and governments implement.

Life Course Theory (LCT) shows how *turning points*, which “are major transitions that cause a sharp change in the trajectory of an individual's life course” (Edmonston, 2013, p. 2), could contribute to OR reduced capacity to adapt and remaining ‘stuck in limbo’ between the camps and host communities. The hesitation of OR to face this turning point could cause them to resist moving into society in a legal capacity and contribute to IP feelings of PA. LCT also suggests that implementing too many forced transitions (e.g., integration policy mandating IP find housing for OR which could be regarded as forcing OR to adjust again) between camps and homes may present further strain on ORs' mental health and further reduce their competencies to integrate over the long-term. IP eluded that given these considerations, it may potentially be more ethical to allow some OR to live out their remaining lives in the camps given the extra stress and challenges moving presents for OR. This may align with recommendations based on the long-term perspective of LCT: policy that forces OR to move into what policy denotes as “suitable housing” risks creating yet another *turning point* in an already tumultuous life.

Further, IP inferred that LCT's concept of *trajectories* – lengthy patterns of change and then stability – can potentially cause further detriment to the mental health and social integration outcomes unique to OR. Yet, the policy implications and implementation would be challenging

to determine who should qualify for this exemption to remain in the camps. Finally, given that IP claimed that end of life preparations and setting up a new life for their children was actually the main priority in resettlement expressed by OR, rather than their own well-being, presents a big ethical question for future research to investigate.

Do Integration Practitioners (IP) experience PA?

As highlighted in the findings, IP chose to stick to the rules rather than bend them when they faced conflicts; however, they depended on resource gathering through networks and connections in order to meet OR needs even if the policy framework that the IP is mandated to work within was supposed to be able to meet those needs on its own. In other words, IP often supplemented policy at any level to address its shortcomings rather than challenging it. From their position as public and organisational employees, while IP did experience Policy Alienation on a Meaningless (PAM) level to some extent, they outsourced and created networks to services better suited to support the long-term integration needs of OR as a coping mechanism. In this sense, as Lipsky's work on Street Level Bureaucrat (SLB) professionalism suggests, they acted as policy makers – as well as front line workers – in order to meet OR needs.

From their perspective, as 'front line' SLB, policy decisions at a national level did not directly impact their daily work discretionary freedoms and so were deemed not their business or concern. As a result, did not feel it was their responsibility to comment or push back against any national policies with which they might not agree. This could be because they were very focused on local engagement and that local successes were monitored and reported at a local level.

Extending on from this, the concept of Hybrid Professionals (Schott et al., 2016) – which suggests that IP are the ones who are directly delivering services to OR and in order to do so act as both SLB and managers – could also help explain IP's lack of worry about national level policy. Given they are primarily 'frontline' service delivery providers, it makes sense that they would be more focused on policy that they directly are impacted by on a daily basis and not the overall big picture policy that national level integration policies focus on. IP are instead more focused on the local municipal and organisational levels of policy and they had more interaction and transparency with the stakeholders and gate keepers at these levels. It seems reasonable then to expect that through this interaction would come disagreement and more in-

depth understandings of integration policy development. As noted earlier, each IP seemed to have ‘pet peeves’ with particular aspects of integration policy and they wanted to raise issues or debate them with their local leaders. Potentially, the very fact that IP reported so much communication with local integration policy makers impacted the degree to which they experienced PAM.

However, what stands out was that IP felt that while there was an overarching national approach to integration in their country, there is not a unified approach between different municipalities in practice. This could be due to the lack of communication between IP from different counties/municipalities. Despite this, IP were not concerned with this lack of cohesion – they reviewed the national and municipal policies as a ‘big picture’ approach to the wider issues of integration, whereas the work that IP do on a day-to-day basis was extremely localised. IP noted that national governments provide the integration goals, and then they (the organisations and local municipalities) decide how this occurs in reality (practice) with refugees. IP felt that there is transparency to a degree between them and local governments and organisational leadership. This could speak to IP’s positive feelings towards feeling of operational empowerment and large discretionary freedoms and in turn, low feelings of Policy Alienation on a Powerlessness (PAP) level.

It makes sense that they would be more focused on local or organisational policy that directly impacts them on a daily basis. This is evident given that all IP noted they had good communications and transparency with local government. It seems reasonable to expect that through this local-level communication would come more in-depth understandings of local integration policy development. Potentially, the fact that IP reported so much communication with local integration policy makers impacted the degree to which they experienced PA. As noted earlier, each IP personally seemed to focus on specific issues with particular aspects of integration policy and mentioned that they wanted to raise or debate them with their local leaders. Therefore, their role as hybrid professionals may explain the low levels of PAP experienced by the IP in this study.

All IP reported that individual person-centred actions were their primary motivation behind any interpretation of policy while working with OR. By this, they meant that they felt free to interpret policy and implement their actions as they wished, as long as they were doing so with the ORs’ best interests in mind. This seems to indicate that they use their professional

autonomy to prioritise their professional values – serving the individual OR’s long-term integration needs – over any (local or organisational) policies. Again, IP noted that they were vigilant and did not actively break organisational policies in order to meet OR needs. These findings are in contradiction to Wise (1981), who suggested too much discretionary freedom will result in IP reducing professionalism, which in this study would have been IP not using discretionary freedoms to support OR. Results support the work by Lipsky (2010) who predicted that if IP have too many regulations or perceived ‘red-tape’ (Bozeman, 1993) professionalism will ensure demotivation of SLBs (IP in this case) and negative effects of policy alienation does not happen.

PA also arose from IP feeling that being old often was not enough from a legal perspective for some OR to qualify for long-term support services – such as priority housing with mobility support built in – that IP deemed essential for the long-term integration of OR. This sentiment of IP is in line with Life Course Theory (LCT) literature and integration best practice literature which both call for the individual’s long-term integration be considered in policy. What is happening here is that IP were seeing bureaucratic ‘red tape’ as inconsiderate of the unique needs of OR and feeling alienation from the policy as it conflicted with their professional values of meeting an OR long-term need. This aligns with SLB literature on red tape requiring street level bureaucrats to take discretionary actions. The theme of professionalism of IP as potential ‘mediators’ of their values emerges. Alternatively, this could be a common trait of people who choose to become IP rather than professionalism broadly as a concept.

IP experience of Policy Alienation Meaninglessness (PAM) was about perceived unrealistic expectations that existing policies impose on OR to gain employment, achieve further education, learn the local language, and join in with the resettled local community activities. IP felt that OR did not seem focused on their personal needs, but more so on the needs of the younger generation and their family members. This makes sense given that the literature shows that the majority (83% in 2015) of refugees are 35 years and younger (PEW, 2016) and thus existing integration policy is focused around these younger refugees establishing employment and economic stability as key measures of integration success (EUAFR, 2019; PEW, 2016; Scholten, 2018; Wolfhardt et al., 2019). As the article by Robila (2018) on best practices for integration workers suggests, integration efforts by IP should be person centred and facilitate refugees’ access to adequate employment commensurate to their qualifications. Unfortunately, education in a formal sense was not always a recognised legally for OR. Considering the LCT

concept of *timing*, which encompasses the historical context and characteristics of a particular period of a person's life, IP felt that ORs' previous life experiences through their previous working life was important to foster even if the government policy did not formally recognise it.

As Edmonston (2013) shows, from an LCT perspective, IP are considering the aspects of *timing*, *transitions* and *turning points* to compensate for integration policy not recognising ORs' previous work experience. With respect to *timing*, what the IP is saying in the story (see Box A), is that her PA meaningfulness is coming from feeling that integration policy is not honing in on the right capacities of OR. In regard to the LCT factor of *transitions*, IP noted the slower capacity for ORs' to adapt into a new society makes integration outcomes very difficult to achieve in the short time that they have to work with them. This influences the effect of the *turning point* for OR, where they are rehoused, often in remote rural communities where locals can be hostile or scared of newcomers, which again decreases the chance of community bonding. Community bonding represents a factor of high importance according to IP as not only a measure of integration, but critical for ORs' mental health and long-term integration. These LCT factors combine to form a new *trajectory* framework for an OR's integration. Again, IP again feel PA meaningless towards perceived short-term efforts of existing integration policy frameworks. As such, IP feel this new *trajectory* does not position the OR well for long-term integration efforts for OR and they (IP) need to respond to this conflict.

In line with LCT perspective, IP perceived integration and an OR's capacity to be a long-term continuum. As such, IP knew that OR would need support after their program ended and they turned to the network of the OR's family or local community for continued support. Given IP stuck with the rules and importantly didn't see it as their place to contest national policy rules – to extend working with OR beyond 18 months – these actions can be viewed as IP bending the rules and going above and beyond their policy to meet the long-term needs of OR. What we see is that IP responded to conflict arising from PAM by seeking to reduce, or minimise stressful events IP outsourced to family members who were better positioned to support the long-term integration needs of OR. These findings are in line with the literature on professional coping behaviour (Taylor, 1998; Schott et al., 2016), which suggest that in order to resolve conflict and remain professional, SLB reframe and restrain pressures by performing tasks differently or in a more positive manner.

In a sense, IP can be gatekeepers of policy where their discretionary choices directly impact positive or negative outcomes for clients. This made it relatively simple for IP to consistently stick to policy guidelines with little incentive to break them. Again, this firmly aligns with the literature which states that SLB develop and implement “routines and simplifications, to maximise the utilisation of resources” (Wise, 1981, p. 103) as way of acting within protocol yet achieving outcomes they deem appropriate. Lipsky’s concept of SLB being viewed as “policymakers” as suggested by Wise (1981) explains how IP practice of bending rules to improve services for OR and serve them in the most efficiently and with a long-term perspective in line with LCT which states that integration is a continuum.

### How do IP respond to these perceptions in their daily practices with OR?

The literature on street level bureaucrats shows that dissonance can lead to poor performance actions (of IP) that negatively impact the service outcomes for the client (OR). Policy Alienation (PA) suggests that there is a potential that IP will not use discretionary actions positively to meet the needs of older refugees if they do not connect or feel motivated to do so within existing integration policies (or lack of policies). Given that there is no explicit policy or guidelines for IP to integrate older refugees specifically, and that IP felt that OR do face some unique needs, OR are often extremely reliant on IP to go above and beyond protocol to meet their needs. IP did indeed do just this. Therefore, what this study shows is that policy dissonance that IP experienced did not (in their perception) negatively impact the service they provided their clients and in fact IP went out of their way to use discretionary actions within the bounds of legal framework to meet the needs of OR. They did this through outsourcing and connecting OR with external services and family members better positioned to assist the long-term integration needs of OR.

### Sticking with the rules and creative solutions

The common theme was that every IP, while they may experience some degree of PA, they always felt that they could be creative and think outside the box to get things done for their clients. No IP reported feeling 100% completely bound to act *only* within policy; however, connecting OR to external services that are not within their mandate but are in the best interest of the older refugee is common practice. While their organisation helped them to cope with challenges, what they did in practice was very individual; they were not supported by bigger institutions that train them to do specific tasks or develop precise tools. This is unlike doctors

and lawyers who have significant institutional support mechanisms, for example, on which prior studies on PA have focused.

As Lipsky's work on the coping mechanisms of Street Level Bureaucrats (SLB) suggests, professionalism will ensure services to the clients prevail. Viewing IP as SLB, results clearly show that IP were striving for professionalism and meeting the integration needs of the OR even when they experienced a degree of PAM in their actions. As a result, each IP tends to have very individualistic perceptions of challenges and support-system needs. For example, one IP felt strongly about the need for better cultural communication trainings for IP, while for another that they needed more support with housing, and others were concerned that there was not enough funding and that they are short-staffed. Overall, while there is a degree of PA in every IP, it seems to be counteracted by IP having high levels of motivation and alignment with the overall mission in their actions. Regardless of the country, IP can be frustrated with some components of the policies at an organisational-level to national- level, or even with specific components of their work, but they do not diminish the quality of service delivery to clients in protest as other PA research has shown. Instead, IP respond by bending the rules and going outside of their normative frameworks to make different connections to external services, advocating for policy change, or just getting on with their work. Therefore, it seems we should consider IP as hybrid professionals in order to help explain their coping mechanisms of connecting OR to external services and support in order to better guarantee OR long-term independence and support for future integration needs.

Interestingly, Irish IP seemed to intuitively take on LCT perspectives in their approaches to OR. In particular, they followed the LCT concept of 'timing,' which suggests that IP need to encompass the historical context and characteristics of an OR when they are working on any aspect of integration with them. For example, they spoke of taking into consideration all the potential horrific life events OR could have gone through before arriving to Ireland and how they needed to be mindful of this along their integration process. This link to LCT theory is noteworthy because Irish IP noted that they were new to refugee work – Ireland is a smaller EU state and has not had much experience with refugee integration prior to the 2015 migration crisis.

Results showed that the strongest emergent theme about IP's defining integration was overwhelmingly OR ability to engage with services locally (formal and informal) on their own

without an IP assisting them. Life Course Theory (LCT) suggests that the results in this study show that IP had instinctively have the goal of aiding OR into a new trajectory towards independence. In order to do this, IP act as cultural bridges to foster and support social and community bonds between OR and locals which they hope will remain intact post services. A community connection focus for IP work is consistent with the literature and existing best practice recommendations (European Foundation for Democracy, 2018; Robila, 2018). Even though social bonding is promoted through policy, there did not seem to be enough social activities that were culturally or linguistically accessible to OR for IP to.

The focus on social engagement as self-devised measure or aspect of independence by IP is in line with the Lipsky's literature on Street Level Bureaucrats (SLB) coping mechanisms which suggests too many guidelines and rules can reduce SLB professionalism and willingness to focus on client needs. Given that social engagement had no clear guidelines or measurements in policy for IP to adhere to, they freely enacted on this concept themselves. This response is further explained through the emerging literature on new professionals which suggests viewing IP as hybrid professionals which shows how IP both adhering to rules and having large amounts of discretionary freedom to interpret policy and act on these interpretations.

In her article investigating the social integration of Older Refugees (OR) in Canada, Sathiyamoorthy (2017) describes how successful integration is a two-way process involving, "1) refugees making active attempts to embed themselves into Canadian society, and; 2) government facilitating conditions to help refugees integrate" (p. 76). In line with the findings from Sathiyamoorthy (2017) IP in this study described social integration as not only critical for OR, but a two-way street which involved community acceptance as well. The story of the man clearing stones and making a garden (see Box A), which generated the common cultural connection of farming between the 'scared local' and the 'timid newcomer' importantly took time. The IP uses the story to express that the integration policy she works within is too short-term focused; she believes it should be long-term focused and account for older people's previous skills. However, the IP remains positive and professional, as she does not feel that her work is meaningless for the individual or society. As a means of coping with this conflict, she responds by fostering community bonds through shared skills that do not require a common language (in this case, building a garden). This is a common theme that occurred throughout the interviews.



Extending on from these concepts, the findings are also consistent with much of the literature, which highlights the importance of multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity in integration work. The literature suggests that policies should focus on promoting, educating and facilitating the multiculturalism ideals not just in school and education of young people but with older people as well (Korac, 2003; Maylea & Hirsch, 2018). This was clear in practice with the IP who showed that their actions and long-term perspective on integration helped them bridge and facilitate bonds between different cultures with older refugees. At the same time, integration is a two-way street, where both the newcomers and the existing population need to adjust their norms slightly to accommodate the other's cultural values and societal expectations. Therefore, IP play an important role in the integration process by acting as connectors, facilitators, liaisons, advocates, teachers and counsellors for newcomers to an existing society for both the OR and the community itself.

Cooperative skills are highly important for IP given addressing the multifaceted needs of OR requires IP to find solutions that can only be provided through multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams networks, often consisting of both professionals and informal connections. Noordegraaf (2015) captures the importance of the networks that IP establish in or to meet the integration needs of OR stating that, "Because real phenomena can no longer be tackled by individual professionals who merely treat cases, teams of professionals and professional groups have to respond" (p. 220). Moreover, given the constantly changing contextual challenges that IP face when working with OR, hybridised professionalism presents an additional explanation for the way IP conduct their work. Schott et al. (2016) elaborate, "Professionals must establish standards that go beyond rendering effective and efficient services, linking professional practices to organisational objectives, as well as to broader social and economic developments, in order to strengthen the viability and legitimacy of professional services." (p. 590). IP in this study exemplify exactly this: they have developed a blend of professional standards (sticking to policy rules) but also going beyond to meet OR needs. Therefore, this study can complement the literature on hybridised professionalism with IP being regarded as hybrid (occupational) professionals.

Given they have such large discretionary freedoms, lack of clear guidelines, multiple pressure sources and striving to find meaningfulness in their work, hybrid professionalism is good explanation for their practices in response to role conflicts and PA. While the exact concept of Lipsky's concept of SLB professionalism ascribes that an SLB sense of professional pride in

their work will motivate them to perform for the client’s best interest, might not be the best explanation for these connective actions that IP did. There was not a huge variation in practices, IP from all countries all went down the same path and outsourced and connected to external sources and family members. This is interesting given IP noted there was not communication between different countries or municipalities to share best practices. Clearly then this was a natural phenomenon occurring. In support of Lipsky, and in contrast to Wise (1981), what did occur was IP remaining professional yet also going beyond the rules to create new informal policies in order to meet OR needs. Therefore, if IP have high levels of policy alienation with existing integration policies and, professionalism does not act as a coping mechanism to maintain their work as Lipsky would suggest it should, IP are at risk of being actively dissonant and not going above and beyond protocol to meet the needs of OR. Hybrid Professionalism (IP as both SLB and managers) helps explain this and Figure 2 helps visualise these conclusions.

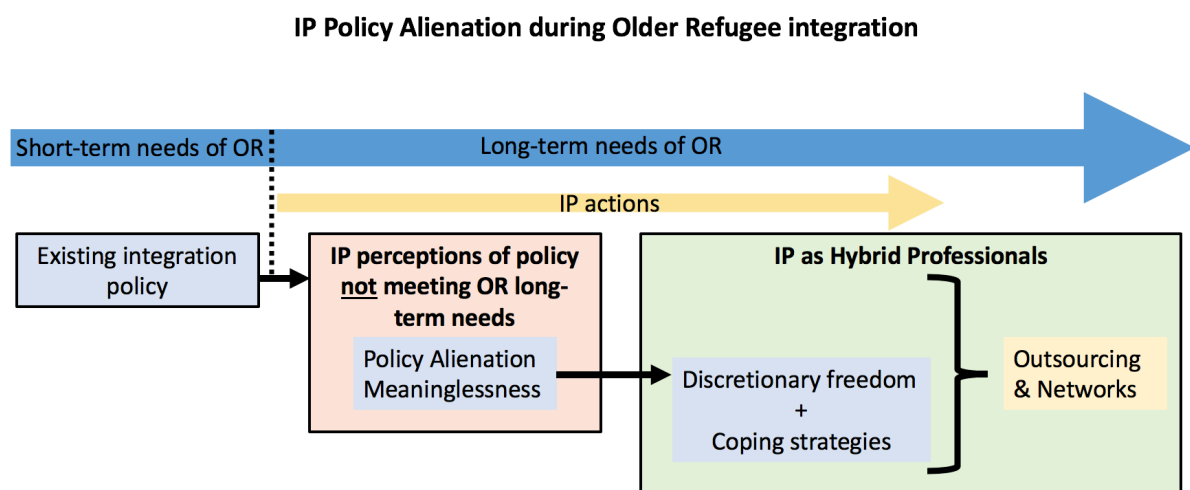


Figure 2: Model of IP Policy Alienation during OR integration

## Conclusion

### Summary of the principal implications

Integration Practitioners (IP) perceive local and organisational-level policy to impact their actions and practices, but rarely feel concerned about national-level policy. Because they have such large caseloads and were focused on delivering local organisational and municipal policy outcomes, they felt that they did not have time to worry about trying to fix the “big picture” of refugee integration, for which they believe national-level policy is responsible. IP note that they rarely interact with Older Refugees (OR) because they are a very small cohort amongst

the overall refugee population. These perceptions are in line with the existing integration policy literature.

IP regard OR as having a lower and slower capacity to learn and adapt compared to younger refugees and take longer to achieve the same outcome. Moreover, to achieve integration outcomes, they need further support and long-term follow up assessments. IP note these factors make them a unique cohort amongst refugees, aligned with their perceptions of other vulnerable refugee cohorts. Further, IP felt that existing integration does not allow for IP to provide the extra focused support that the perceive OR need in order to meet these unique needs of OR. IP regarded successful integration for OR as achieving independence but did not feel that there were specific performance measures for successful integration within existing policy. As a result, they have a large amount of discretion in order to achieve and assess the success of their integration work with OR. Thus, IP do not experience policy alienation at a **powerlessness** level (PAP). IP do not break policy rules; they stick to the mandates of their national, local, and organisational policies.

Existing integration policy only allows IP a maximum of 18 months to achieve integration outcomes with OR. IP perceived this to be too short-term focused, which restricted their ability to aid OR long-term integration efforts and independence. Moreover, IP perceived integration policies to have unrealistic expectations on OR given this short time frame and limitations of OR capacities. As a result, IP experienced policy alienation on a **meaningless** level (PAM) at both the individual and societal levels. IP are concerned with addressing the immediate and long-term needs of OR and feel that taking into account OR past experience and future goals is critical for the OR to integrate well. IP further place high value on OR establishing strong communal bonds with the local community and developing a support network that will enable OR to access services and support once the IP can no longer work with them after 18 months. Given IP do not break their policy rules, IP develop networks where they outsource services and connect OR to external services providers that are better positioned to support OR long-term integration needs.

To explain the actions IP took in reaction to the PAM that they experienced, the literature on occupational professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2011, 2015; Schott et al., 2016) suggests that IP can be viewed as Hybrid Professionals. This developing field provides insight into how IP respond to PAM while not experiencing PAP, and why they do not reduce service quality

to their clients as previous work on Street Level Bureaucrats and PA warned may have occurred.

Given that IP are a group consisting of both public and private service providers, discretionary outcomes are of importance for refugee integration. While IP experienced some degree of PAM professionalism did act a coping mechanism. The common factor associated with PAM was IP perceiving that existing policy essentially did not account for these things which were the basis of their PAM at a societal and individual OR level. In response to this, as a coping mechanism, they created formal and informal networks to fill in the perceived gaps in their policies. In contrast to coping mechanism work, this was consistent through each country. In this way we can clearly see IP as SLB and indeed hybrid professionals. LCT perspectives were naturally occurring in IP. They all noted that independence was a key guide to what they defined integration success as for OR.

Lipsky (2010) summarises that SLBs should be viewed as “policymakers” themselves. Given IP had so much discretionary freedoms to interpret policy, as Lipsky's work suggests, they did become policy makers and their policy was to connect OR to community and social support systems. These actions were in response to their perceived lack of policy (no long-term support for OR) and this response was consistent throughout every country. Findings were in line with the literature professionals coping with conflicting work pressures by reframing and restraining pressures and thereby performing tasks differently or in a more positive manner (Schott et al., 2016; Taylor, 1998). As Wise (1981) described results showed was that by outsourcing and networking, IP were developing “routines and simplifications, to maximise the utilisation of resources” (Wise, 1981, p. 103).

Overall, IP suggested that while OR may not need a specific policy written to address their unique challenges, existing policy could be adapted to reflect OR unique needs such as lower and slower adaptability. This policy could support OR who are working towards integration tasks such as language and civic tests. Further, IP suggest that ORs’ previous skills should be recognised and included in efforts to develop social bonds within the community. For example, shared physical skills should be used to promote social connects between OR and locals. In turn, these social bonds can turn into long-term support networks for OR independence. This focus on long-term integration support is in line with Life Course Theory (LCT)

recommendations about integration policy needing to consider individuals' trajectory, transition, turning points and time.

### Contribution to the literature

This research contributes to the literature in three primary ways:

- 1) It has contributed to the Policy Alienation (PA) literature by expanding the sectors of investigation. Previous PA studies have only looked at classical / technical professionals such as hospital workers and veterinarians, which are highly regimented and have clear, quantifiable measures of success. This study is a unique look at the concepts of PA in the social service profession. It shows that PA still applies, but manifests in different ways. For example, this study shows that in the social service profession, there is an abundance of discretionary freedom and therefore PA manifests most strongly as PAM but rarely as PAP. In previous studies, both PAM and PAP were typically more evenly balanced.
- 2) This study also contributes to the literature in the developing field of hybrid professionalism. Integration Practitioners (IP) are seen from this study as a clear example of the concept in practice. As hybrid professionalism is a newer field of study, this study can help build the literature base. This study, through the lens of hybrid professionalism, also contributes to further research into uncovering best practices for IP in the European Union.
- 3) Finally, given the limited existing research on Older Refugees (OR), this study has uncovered information about their unique needs that is absent in current literature. By gaining some understanding of these needs, this study contributes to developing Life Course Theory approaches to refugee integration, which can also inform policy makers and practitioners.

### Limitations

This study included participants from five countries that all had unique national refugee policies, which could impact results. Ireland was unique within the participating countries due to its pre-resettlement family reunification policy, whereas other countries' integration policies focused primarily on the individual's integration. Where family reunification occurred – if it did at all – post-resettlement and was encompassed as part of the integration process. These

types of differences across countries were not analysed in depth and should be considered when interpreting results.

The data collection was conducted in May 2020 during the COVID-19 global pandemic when all participants were in a state of lockdown/quarantine. Participant responses may be influenced from the social isolation they were experiencing at the moment from both clients and colleagues given that they had (and still were at time of interview) all been working from home since March 2020. Their physical, social, and emotional distance altered their typical working interactions. The removal from their regular routine coupled with isolation could have biased their responses. For example, memory of interactions may have been skewed or inaccurate over time, or they may have ruminated on negative aspects of their work, which under normal circumstances would not have been discussed.

Related, due to COVID-19, all interviews were conducted via digital technology. This type of interview style is new and potentially uncomfortable to people. Also, the interview was audio recorded (with consent). Both the remote data collection and audio recorded could have also positively biased the types of responses that participants provided.

Finally, the relatively small sample size of the participants limits the generalisability of the study. This is relevant both for overall results, but especially related to country-specific results. Therefore, any country-specific findings in particular should be treated as exploratory in nature.

## Recommendations

Policy makers:

This research suggests that there is not a need to develop a specific integration policy for older refugees. This sentiment is aligned with the UNHCR's Policy on Older Refugees (2000). However, what this research has clearly shown is that Integration Practitioners (IP) feel that that existing integration policies do not adequately address the unique long-term challenges that Older Refugees (OR) face. Existing policy should be amended to reflect more appropriate and individualised expectations for older refugees and other vulnerable populations to provide these groups with a longer timeframe for integration services and consideration for special adaptations where possible. Specifically, accommodate differences in language learning abilities by creating adapted civic tests. Also, consider long-term informal work experience

with regard to assigning qualifications and employment expectations. Policy should be amended to account for the extra support and time that vulnerable people, such as OR, need to accomplish the same integration outcomes as others. In particular, policy should:

- Define older refugees and include them into existing vulnerable population frameworks that currently only address children, women and those with disabilities.
- Extend the timeframe that IP are able to work with OR from a maximum of 18 months to at least 24 months. This would help account for the extra support IP need to provide to OR and the longer time it takes for OR to achieve integration outcomes and independence.
- Incorporate follow-up monitoring and evaluation of OR and ageing refugees who recently become legally old (e.g., 65) in their resettled country.

A knowledge base of best practices as well as documentation of specific services available for vulnerable people in each country and municipality should be developed for IP and their organisations to access.

IP organisations:

As was evident from this research, IP had to identify and develop their own professional networks. It was not common to share best practices and resources with other IP in their municipality or country. Country and local municipality level-based resource guides need to be developed to aid IP in connecting with more partners to develop their existing networks. Such guides could save IP valuable time that could be used in supporting OR if these types of resources already existed and were updated systematically and regularly by their organisations. These need to contain information and contacts for services who specifically specialise in older person support and services outside the field of traditional integration workers that can support independence for OR. For example, elderly community groups, technological support agencies, geriatric health professionals, mental health specialists, transport and mobility services, etc. In addition, setting up regional or national networking events where IP could come together across organisations and municipalities to share learning, experiences, and best practices could support more effective and efficient integration efforts in the long-term.

IP:

Clearly there is a need for open communication and shared best practices between integration practitioners not just within countries but between. IP would benefit from developing an online

open resource guide where registered they could share resources from their existing network, search locally and abroad for resources when they needed, read and directly contribute to best practices discourse and literature. Given the limited time IP have to do research, perhaps, easily accessible summary ‘how-to guides,’ podcasts or instructional online videos would be valuable for communicating new information efficiently.

Further trainings for IP on accommodating for the unique needs of older and ageing adults would also be of benefit as well as further cultural awareness trainings to help IP manage integration expectations better.

### Future research

- IP in Ireland and Scotland felt that older people are held in high esteem in every context and people in the community and service providers are more likely to go out of their way to support their needs. However, as I have shown, integration policy is seemingly youth focused which could reflect a culture in Europe in which old people are perceived as superfluous and needy. Perhaps the attitudes of IP personally about OR also impacted their professionalism and willingness to connect OR to future services. Future research should investigate the extent to which the concepts of hybrid occupational professionalism in IP are present when working with younger refugees or other vulnerable refugees such as unaccompanied minors, family reunification and refugees with existing physical disabilities. This could help distinguish the work of IP specific to OR compare to other categories of vulnerable populations.
- Future research could investigate the extent to which engagement with local policy makers leads to PA in occupational new professionals and integration practitioners. This study found that IP felt they had good communications and transparency with local government, which could mean that they have in-depth understandings of local integration policy development. Does this level of communication with local integration policymakers impact the degree to which IP experience PA?
- Investigations should be conducted with integration practitioners from non-EU countries to compare and or validate results from this study. Interviewing IP from countries outside the EU who are in close proximity to the Schengen region and also directly involved in responding to the “European migration crisis” – such the ‘Baltic Route’ states and Finland – would also be of interest. Such a study could inform both



practitioners' best practices and policy given that non-Schengen countries do not have to follow the broader UN governing policies or EU-mandated resettlement quotas of refugees. This may reveal different IP practices and different responses to Policy Alienation from IP.

- IP were all very clear in understanding the policies that shaped their work at an organisational and local level. Future investigations could look at the correlation between the degree of policy knowledge contributing to the degree of policy alienation IP experience. Potentially, policy knowledge may contribute to their motivation or reduce the amount of tactical and strategic PA they experience. Objectively measuring to what extent, they know how the policy system is set up could be potentially correlated against how confident they feel about their ability to make policy recommendations.
- To complement previous literature showing OR are often under reported and at risk of not being captured in official statistics, future investigations could delve into the concept of hospitalisation of OR in refugee and asylum seeker camps. Such an investigation could provide insight into factors that contribute to OR being overlooked or 'hidden' in refugee data.
- With respect to LCT concepts of transitions, timing and trajectories, investigation into the extent to which 'hospitalisation' occurs for OR in refugee camps and the impact it has on their ability to integrate into their host country. This study could contribute to the discussion surrounding best practices for IP when integrating OR.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Anonymised participant codes

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Native /Migrant</b>
IP1	UK - Scotland	Support Worker	M	Migrant
IP2	Luxembourg	Social Workers	F	Migrant
IP3	Ireland	chairperson	M	Migrant
IP4	Ireland	Support Worker	F	Native
IP5	Ireland	Integration Projects Manager	M	Native
IP6	France	Deputy Head of Service	M	Native
IP7	Ireland	Resettlement worker	F	Native
IP8	France	Social Workers	F	Native
IP9	Netherlands	Integration worker	M	Migrant
IP10	Luxembourg	Social Workers	M	Native
IP11	Netherlands	Resettlement worker	M	Native
IP12	Netherlands	Resettlement worker	M	Migrant
IP13	Luxembourg	Social Workers	F	Native
IP14	Ireland	Resettlement Support Worker	F	Native
IP15	UK - Scotland	Volunteer and Project Coordinator	F	Native

## Appendix 2: Interview protocol

### Disclosure statement:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences working with refugees and integrating them into your community. As I have mentioned previously, my research is investigating the practices and experiences of Integration Practitioners and how they are currently meeting the integration needs of older refugees. Specifically, this study aims to answer the question: **To what extent do integration social workers (ISW) believe that existing policies support or hinder their work to integrate older refugees, and how do they respond to this in their daily practices?**

Firstly, I would like to talk about your direct daily practical experiences and secondly, hear your thoughts surrounding the guidelines and policy frameworks that you personally work within.

The recording will be destroyed once I have captured the data in written form for analysis.

All your responses throughout this interview will be kept confidential in the final report.

Meaning, I will not use your name or tie any personal information that can be linked back to your responses. I will not be distributing any of your personal information or responses back to your organisation or sharing with anyone else. In other words, everything you share today will be made anonymous for the final report.

As such, do you consent to having this interview recorded for the sole purpose of this research study? I will use the recording to transcribe the interview for analysis. The recording will be kept securely and then deleted as soon as it is transcribed.

Consent received? YES NO

To begin, I would like to talk about your direct, daily practical experiences in your work.

	Practice/Actions/Experiences		
	Questions	Rationale	Response Notes
1	<p>What is the age distribution of your clients?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: Which age cohort do you work with the most?</li> <li>- Probe: What proportion of your clients are over 60?</li> </ul>	Practice	
2	<p>Please describe a typical day for you when working with older refugees? What specific activities do you do with them?</p>	Actions	
3	<p>Do you feel that older refugees have any unique needs that differ from other refugees?</p>	Experience Meaningless - Client level	
4	<p>To what extent do you feel you have the resources you need to assist older refugees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: For example, is there sufficient funding?</li> <li>- Probe: For example, is there sufficient staff capacity?</li> <li>- Probe: For example, are there necessary services (e.g., mental health, etc.)</li> <li>- Probe: For example, do you have access to a broader network of service providers to support?</li> <li>- If resources are lacking, what do you do to help support their needs?</li> </ul>	Actions Powerless - Operational	
5	<p>Do you feel encouraged to “think outside the box” to find solutions for client’s needs or problems?</p>	Powerless - Operational	
6	<p>What do you see as barriers in your work that slow or prevent you from doing your job related to older refugees specifically? What are enablers or things that help you do your work well?</p>	Experience Powerless - Operational	

For this next section, I would like to talk about your understanding of and experiences with the policies that shape your daily work activities.



Integration policies & Policy Alienation			
	Questions	Rationale	Response Notes
7	<p>What are the policies that shape your work with integrating refugees? For example, I am referring to policies at the EU-level, country-level, municipality-level, or within your organisation. [Note: a list of every policy is not necessary, rather, the intent is to get a sense of how many policies they understand and their relationship across the policies.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: Are there policies that are different for older refugees?</li> <li>- Probe: Do these policies align or do any of them contradict each other?</li> </ul>	<p>Powerlessness-tactical  Meaninglessness-Societal level</p>	
8	<p>Do the policies support the needs of the older refugees you work with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: Are there services that older refugees need or request that are not covered by the policies?</li> <li>- Probe: Do you ever have to take steps outside of the mandated policies to meet their needs?</li> </ul>	<p>Actions  Powerless – Operational  Experience  Meaningless - Societal level</p>	
9	<p>What are measures of success for your work related to integrating older refugees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: Are these measures dictated by policy? If so, at which level?</li> <li>- Probe: Are they personal? Meaning, success factors you realise through your own practice?</li> </ul>	<p>Practice  Experience  Meaningless -Client level</p>	
10	<p>Do you feel you have any influence over developing the measures of success of integration?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: Within your organisation?</li> <li>- Probe: At the municipal or country level?</li> </ul>	<p>Powerless – Strategic/ Tactical</p>	
11	<p>Do you think older refugees need a specific mandate or policy to address their unique needs?</p>	<p>Experience  Meaningless -Client level</p>	
12	<p>Do you feel your work with older refugees is meaningful and actually helping with integration?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probe: the clients themselves?</li> <li>- Probe: the community overall?</li> </ul>	<p>Meaningless -Client level  Meaningless - Societal level</p>	

### Appendix 3: Coding sheets

Name	References
Age group	0
Age Majority	17
Age Range	14
Proportion older	22
Barriers to IP work	0
Funding	23
Government (Local)	10
Government (national)	32
Organizational	14
Red tape	22
Staffing	18
Unreal expectations on older refugees	29
Definition - Integration	31
Definition - who is old refugee	28
Do OR have unique needs	0
No unique needs	4
Sometimes - Unsure	21
Yes, unique needs	40
IP Action	0
+	89
-	7

Name	References
Advocate for change	18
Community bonding	22
Connect to other services	38
Education	3
Emotional support	6
Employment	4
Family support	20
Finance	4
Goal setting	6
Home maintenance	5
Housing allocation	21
Language assistance	15
Legal work	14
Life fundamentals (bills, internet, postage)	22
Location	3
Mental Health	7
Mobility	4
Physical Health	13
Social focus	24
Technology assistance	5
Transportation	5

Name	References
LCT	0
Long term focused	40
Short term focused	16
Timing	35
Trajectories	30
Transitions	40
Turning points	39
Need for older refugee policy	0
no need for ORP	14
unsure on need for ORP	11
Yes, need for ORP	15
Older refugee needs	0
+	14
-	55
Access to food	4
Community bonding	28
Connecting to further services	8
Education	11
Emotional support	9
Employment	13
Finance	6
Housing	16
Language	35

Name	References
Location	11
Mental Health	27
Mobility	12
Physical Health	23
Social focus	34
Technology assistance	8
Transportation	8
Older refugee policy	0
Existing ORP	1
NO Existing ORP	20
ORG as Vulnerable	47
PA Meaninglessness	2
Client	71
NO PAM	46
Societal	31
PA Powerlessness	2
NO PAP	56
Operational	43
Strategic	20
Tactical	28
Role conflicts	17
SLB Discretion	0
+	33
-	2
Bend the rules	27
Firm with policy	29