

Obstacles and Catalysts of Integrating Young North Korean Defectors in South Korea

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Abstract

This qualitative study addresses the deficit in current Korean government policy in integrating young North Korean defectors and demonstrates the catalysts and inhibitors of young North Koreans integrating to South Korean society. It does so through secondary source, narrative analysis and by examining young North Korean defectors' responses in primary interviews in other studies on life in South Korea. The responses were coded by theme and organized into three categories of concern for young defectors based on their responses: culture and language, power, and income and housing. The results informed recommendations understood through Ager and Strang's domains of integration and are based on current practices in aiding displaced people employed by states and intergovernmental actors. These recommendations were addressed to the Korean government. The goal of this research is to improve the lives of young North Korean people in South Korea by questioning current local integration approaches which do not incorporate Forced Migration thought in their implementation.

Keywords

North Korea, defectors, integration, South Korea, reunification

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1. Background

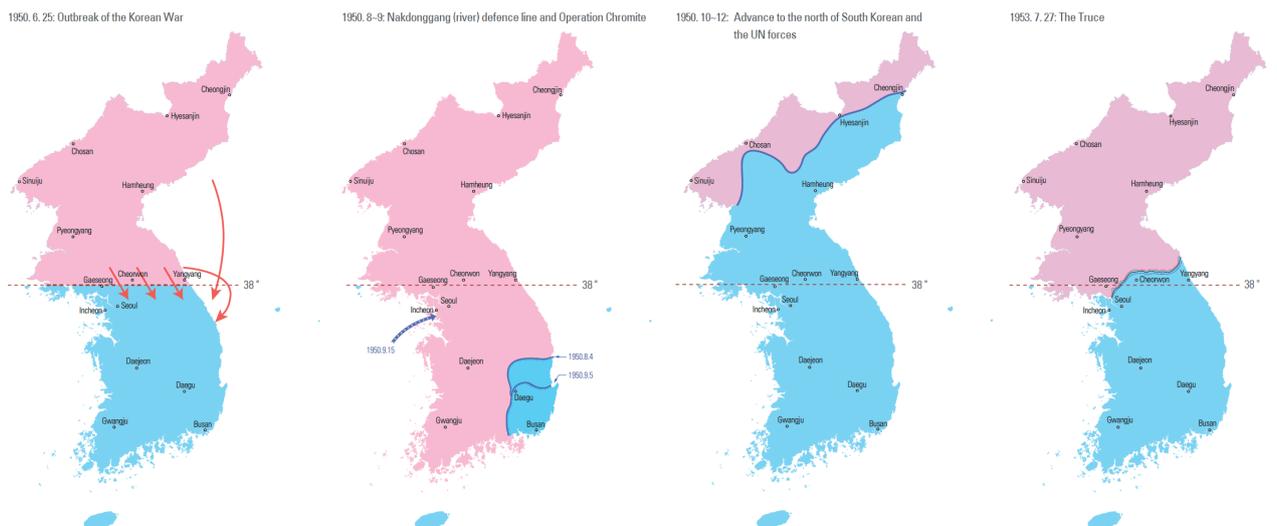
It bears mentioning the unique context in which North Koreans coming to South Korea find themselves. This is an exceptional situation when viewed through the lens of Forced Migration, and particularly through refugee law. It is therefore imperative to understand the context of the historical events regarding the separation of the Korean Peninsula. This separation affects how South Korea views and interacts with North Korean defectors. A brief history follows.

1.1 Partition of Korea

On dissolution of the territorial assets of the Empire of Japan at the end of World War II, Japan's possessions, including Korea, were given in mandate to Allies until such a time as Korea would be ready to re-establish its own governance and engage in state building activities.¹ The Korean Peninsula, which until Japanese annexation had remained a sovereign and unified nation under the Joseon Dynasty since 1392², was partitioned into northern and southern halves. The half north of the 38th Parallel was administered by the Soviet Union, and the southern half was administered by the United States of America. Many ideas for the future of the Korean nation competed in both partitioned regions.

Eventually in the south the Republic of Korea was established by Syngman Rhee, installed at the behest of the United States' precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency.³ Rhee was favored for his very public stance that Korea should become a republic at all costs, even by force and suppression of dissent for the sake of stability. The north declared, with the help of the Soviet Union, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a communist state.⁴ Each state claimed sovereignty over the entire Korean Peninsula and legitimate governance of the Korean people.⁵

Small border skirmishes grew in size until the unprecedented invasion of South Korea by North Korea. The United States called on the United Nations (UN) to enforce the non-aggression clause of the UN Charter and intervene, which was achieved. The fighting paused in a stalemate at the 38th Parallel which continues to this day with neither side having surrendered.⁶



Progression of Korean War, 1950-Present⁷

1.2 Defection

After the partition of Korea and stalemate, South Korea and North Korea had similar economic profiles despite continuing use of competing economic systems—free market capitalism and communism. Both nations exhibited pov-

1 Michael Hickey, 'History - World Wars: The Korean War: An Overview' (*BBC*, 21 March 2011) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/coldwar/korea_hickey_01.shtml> accessed 2 September 2020

2 Lorraine Murray (ed), 'Choson dynasty' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 February 2009) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Choson-dynasty>> accessed 2 September 2020.

3 Liam Stack, 'Korean War, a 'Forgotten' Conflict That Shaped the Modern World' *New York Times* (1 Jan. 2018) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/world/asia/korean-war-history.html>> accessed 2 September 2020.

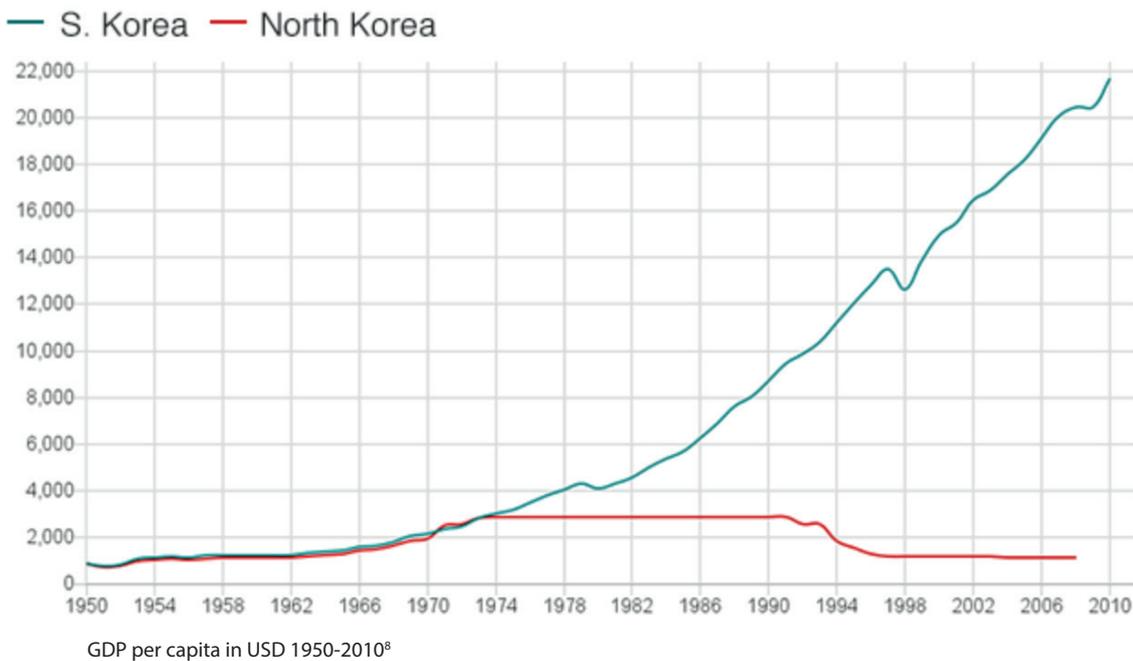
4 Hickey (n 1).

5 Stack (n 2).

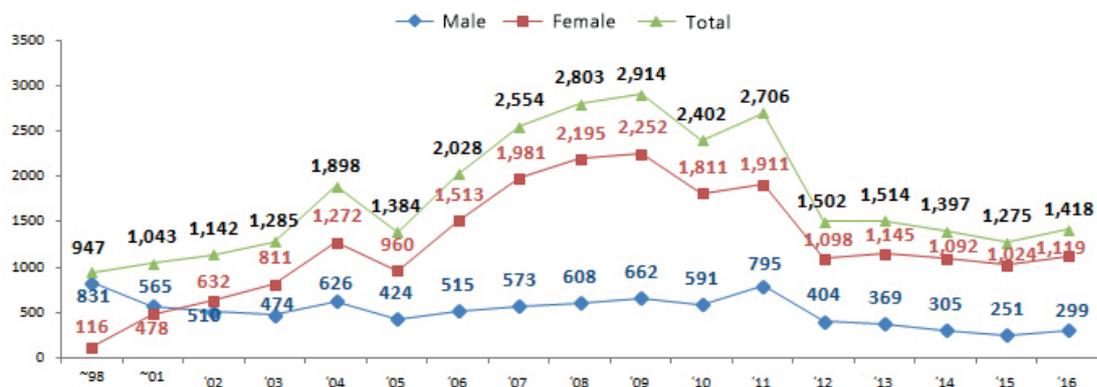
6 Richard McDonough, 'A Short History of the Korean War' (*Imperial War Museums*, 13 June 2018) <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/a-short-history-of-the-korean-war>> accessed 2 September 2020; Hickey (n 1).

7 Ministry of Land Infrastructure and Transport, *The National Atlas of Korea Volume 1*, 23.

erty and undeveloped economies in the period directly following the truce. In the seventies, Republic of Korea underwent large economic growth that catapulted it past North Korea in quality of life.



Concurrently, the political liberalization of South Korea in the 1990s⁹ contrasted with the repressive, authoritarian, and dynastic rule in North Korea committing massive human rights violations¹⁰ has motivated many North Korean citizens, including young defectors, which this paper investigates, to seek refuge in neighboring South Korea, the growth of which is demonstrated in the chart below publicly available through the Korean Ministry of Unification:¹¹



8 Alex Murray and Tom Housden (prod), 'Nine charts which tell you all you need to know about North Korea' (BBC, 10 November 2018) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41228181>> accessed 2 September 2020.

9 Anonymous, 'Freedom in The World 2019: South Korea' (Freedom House) <<https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-korea/freedom-world/2019>> accessed 7 September 2020.

10 Anonymous, 'Freedom in The World 2018: North Korea' (Freedom House) <<https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-korea/freedom-world/2018>> accessed 7 September 2020.

11 Ministry of Unification, *Settlement Support for North Korean Defectors* <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/whatwedo/support/> accessed 2 September 2020.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An Integration Framework

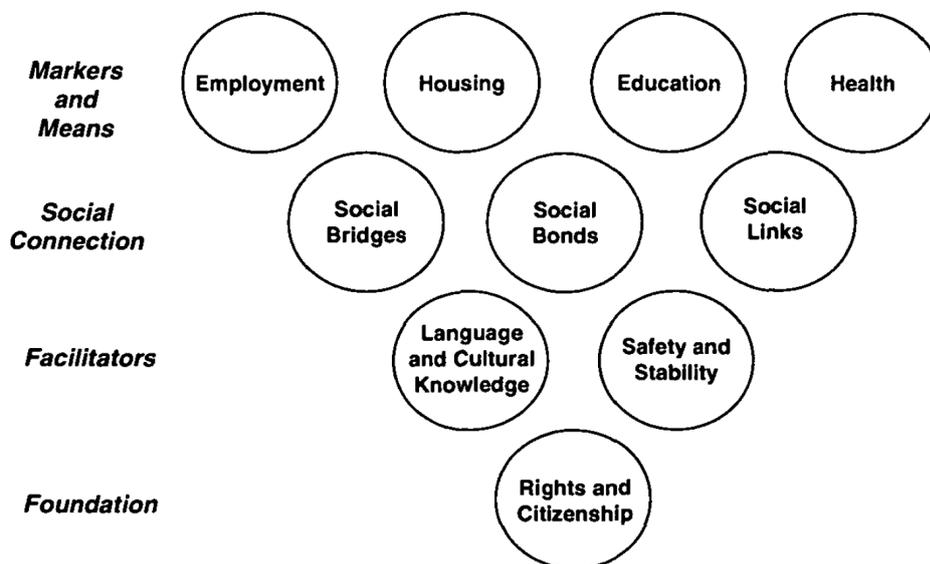
When discerning the context of integration of North Korean refugees in the literature, it is worthwhile to first consider the larger discussions of integration itself to better understand how it manifests in South Korea. Ager and Strang give an extensive overview of integration and its identifiable aspects or 'domains of integration' for further consideration by the migration field, policy makers, and stakeholders. They were careful not to place their work into the realm of pure theory on integration.

'...the domains themselves as a means to facilitate discussion regarding perceptions of integration that is accessible to policymakers, researchers, service providers and refugees themselves. The framework does not seek comprehensively to map political, social, economic and institutional factors influencing the process of integration.'

This produced what they described as 'middle-range theory' on integration with a goal of 'considering, from a normative perspective, what constitutes the key components of integration'. The domains themselves—which will inform the methodology of this project—are well-grounded and therefore beneficial/relevant because they have been suggested by Ager and Strang after literature review and an extensive data collection process involving large numbers of refugees and service providers. A secondary idea presented in their work which is directly relevant is the conception of national identity and how it directly shapes integration policy of the government.¹²

Ager and Strang developed a 'conceptual framework [of] Core Domains of Integration' in their work. These are four levels, each possessing their own sub-categories for further detail. The shape taken appears then as an inverted pyramid with the most crucial levels of successful integration markers as identified by respondents more consolidated toward the bottom, and the finer nuanced aspects of integration at the top. The bottom, and most important, integration level is called the Foundation (with a sub-category labeled Rights and Citizenship), followed by Facilitators (Language and Cultural Knowledge, Safety and Stability), then Social Connection (Social Bridges, Social Bonds, and Social Links), and finally Markers and Means (Employment, Housing, Education, and Health).¹³ A brief explanation of each level follows.

Ager and Strang's Core Domains of Integration:¹⁴



Markers and Means, note the authors, are traditionally used by many in the migration field and indeed government and policy as indicators of integration. They are "...widely suggested as indicative of successful integration... However, it is problematic to see achievement in these areas purely as a 'marker' of integration. They may serve as such, but

12 Alastair Ager, Alison Strang, 'Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework' (2008) 21 J. Refugee Stud. 166 <<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/21/2/166/1621262>> accessed 2 September 2020.

13 Ager and Strang (n 13) 170.

14 Ibid.

they also clearly serve as potential means to support the achievement of integration”.¹⁵ Moving one level downward from Markers and Means, they presented the Social Connection level. This level addressed the importance of social connections in integration policy and as a marker for how well-integrated refugees perceived themselves. It is the avenue by which the Rights and Citizenship are exercised and enables refugees to obtain the Markers and Means (jobs, housing, and other essentials). Under the Social Connections are found the Facilitators—Language and Cultural Knowledge, and Safety and Stability—which demonstrate the beginnings of how refugees connect to a wider community. The foundation at the bottom of the inverted pyramid contains the vital sub-category of Rights and Citizenship which is “...of fundamental importance to our analysis of integration because notions of citizenship shape core understandings of the rights accorded, and responsibilities expected, of refugees...Articulating refugee rights thus defines the foundation of integration policy, to which governments are accountable”¹⁶ How nations view nationality and citizenship varies from state to state, and these views and definitions of such a fundamental identity inform how states mete out rights to refugees, and how refugees measure their own integration in comparison to others in their country of protection.

The weaknesses of this framework have been addressed by its creators, and warrant mention here, namely “the challenge of any framework seeking to reflect normative understandings of integration is for it to accommodate the diversity of assumptions and values of different settings while retaining some conceptual coherence.”¹⁷ As a remedy to the myriad permutations of societal advantages and disadvantages affecting refugees and the application of the framework in many countries, Ager and Strang suggest not a legalistic conception of the framework, but a fluid one. The framework on integration suggests “domains of wide relevance”¹⁸ with the aim that “...in any given context indicators of local or national relevance be negotiated for each domain.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, the framework, as it is, has been used to inform development of local benchmarks for integrating refugees and to initiate talks on integration that is understandable to policymakers. The framework has ‘influenced national and regional policy formulation’ most notably in various localities of the United Kingdom, and, more relevant to this project, has ‘been used as a structure for commissioning and/or developing services aimed at supporting refugee integration...[and]...informed studies of local integration both conceptually and methodologically’.²⁰ Seeing as the framework has been adopted in such a fashion within the Forced Migration field, it would be highly applicable and useful in such a study as this which considers the obstacles and catalysts of integration for young people from North Korea in South Korean society.

Moving more particularly to country-specific and issue-specific literature, it is clear that past investigations on the topic of North Korean refugees, termed ‘defectors’, in South Korea have included examinations of how North Koreans adapted to South Korea in the context of a few select disciplines: education, job performance, and general overviews of the problems experienced by newcomers. There is very little literature specifically in the Forced Migration context of the experience of North Korean refugees and its relation to the settlement policy of the Korean government, or the wider discussion on frameworks of integration, such as that put forth by Ager and Strang mentioned above.

2.2 Lives of North Koreans Explained

Lankov offers an informative overview of the struggles faced by defectors, and a valuable description of the evolution of the official position of the Korean government toward the refugees. He mentions the crucial item of the constitutional status of North Korean people in South Korea as citizens because South Korea views its sovereign territory covering the entire Korean Peninsula, including the area controlled by North Korea, as defined by the constitution of the republic.²¹ The article gives important background information on the support received by defectors and how it has changed over the years, from being an astronomical monetary amount, free housing, and free university education, to a set of lump-sum payments: one settlement payment of \$9,000 and \$10,000 earmarked for housing use.

North Korean defectors are also encouraged to receive vocational skills training at an institute and receive tuition scholarships and small payments upon graduation from the program and attaining a job which uses the relevant skill learned in the program. High-profile defectors or those with intelligence information are able to receive an additional monetary benefit.²² Upon arrival they are actually detained by authorities but separated from the general justice system and are ‘debriefed’ by government officials from the Korean national intelligence arm and the Ministry of Unification. They then have to attend classes to prepare them for life in a developed, capitalist republic. The initial classes

15 Ibid 169.

16 Ibid 175.

17 Ibid 185.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Andrei Lankov, ‘Bitter Taste of Paradise: North Korean Refugees in South Korea’ (2006) 6 *Journal of East Asian Studies* 105 <www.jstor.org/stable/23418172> accessed 2 September 2020.

22 Lankov (n 22) 118.

inform them of culture in South Korea and others prepare them with skills in computer literacy, driving, cooking, riding the subway, using a smartphone, how to buy something at a store, and religion.²³

The next section in Lankov's work details problems of integration faced by defectors which include inability to adapt to a fiercely capitalist society where "a person is judged only by his money," social exclusion, insufficient employment, and even language struggles all appear.²⁴ This article offers helpful insight into the general problems faced by defectors, but it does not look at the relationship between government policy and the lived experience of integration and its influences felt by defectors aside from citing a handful of surveys which North Koreans had completed about integration factors such as employment. From the forced migration perspective, the views of North Korean defectors in a narrative format would provide more insight into how they are interacting with government integration policy, as well as give insight to the effectiveness of current policy.²⁵

2.3 Elite Defectors

Levi shows how elite North Korean defectors adapt to Korean society. He states defectors face problems in their integration, regardless of their elite or non-elite status, because South Korea is not a 'framework explicitly open to foreigners and different cultures.'²⁶ He states that non-elite defectors first navigate a cultural hurdle, while elite defectors bypass this step having had previous experience living outside of North Korea and move to a second hurdle: economic. He also mentions language difference as one obstacle. While this study provides clues to the experiences of defectors, it does not specifically focus on everyday defectors and therefore does not provide enough information on how 'normal' defectors experience integration. The integration policy is also not addressed in its relation to the adaptation of young North Koreans in its vast application since elite defectors are typically middle-aged, high ranking officials. A useful theoretical framework and insight into potential struggles for defectors can be taken from this project, but it must be supplemented by the presence of North Korean input to provide material that would be effective in informing future policy on young North Korean integration in South Korea.²⁷

2.4 Needs of North Koreans for Economic Improvement

Roh and Lee investigated what they termed as 'intervention points' with North Korean refugees, points where the refugees require support based on their survey responses. They find linguistic differences to be a major obstacle for integration of North Koreans because such a linguistic difference makes it difficult for them to attain education toward gainful employment. They connect the issue of employment to Korean government policy on supporting the integration of North Koreans.²⁸ A beneficial part of their study is the educational support model they put forward, titled a "Needs-Centered Educational Support Model for...Career Transition." This is very useful for a specific need in the North Korean defector community, but a study is also needed to address the holistic experience of defectors to better inform Korean policy on integration.

2.5 Young North Koreans in Education

Kim details experiences working with and interviewing young defectors in the education field and offers insight into the struggles faced by young North Korean people in South Korea. Kim's focus is "...cultural gaps and issues of conflict, power, and resistance and emphasizes the strategies that young North Korean settlers employ as they shape and position themselves in capitalist society."²⁹ This is of great value to gain insight into the struggles and strategies of adaptation of young people coming from North Korea to South Korea outside of the more common lens of looking at North Korean defectors as an undifferentiated group. In the study we are able to see that common strategies of adaptation used by these young people include: learning to control actions to negative emotions (such as anger) and understanding the pursuit of material wealth because South Korea uses a 'capitalized morality' where assaults, of example, are punished with monetary fines imposed by law. Adaptations also include leveraging of their identity as "North Korean" for their benefit in instances of confrontation with powerful or discriminatory South Koreans by receiving further aid opportunities and participating more fully in the capitalist system. These conclusions can inform the

23 Ibid 119.

24 Ibid 123.

25 Ibid.

26 Nicolas Levi, 'Adaptation in South Korean Society of North Korean Elite Defectors' (2017) 6(4) *Studia Humana* 62 <<https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/sh/6/4/article-p62.xml?language=en>> accessed 2 September 2020.

27 Ibid.

28 Kyungran Roh, Romee Lee 'A Needs-Centered Educational Support Model for the Career Transitions of North Korean Defectors: Implications for South Korea's Support Policy' (2016) 54(1) *International Migration* 32 <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/imig.12086>> accessed 2 September 2020.

29 Yoon-Young Kim, 'Negotiating Cultures and Identities: Education and Adaptation Among Young North Korean Settlers in South Korea' (2016) 17(4) *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 1015 <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12134-015-0450-0>> accessed 2 September 2020.

narrative analysis of this project, but the focus of Kim's project is through a cultural and sociological lens, rather than that of integration obstacles and catalysts.³⁰ A narrative approach provided intriguing insights into the daily lives of young North Korean people as they attempted to navigate their new lives in South Korean schools. There is no known evaluation of the integration of young North Koreans in South Korea from a migration policy point of view which this study proposes. A holistic overview informed by the Ager and Strang framework above would be more suitable to formation of integration policy formation for young North Koreans.

2.6 Integration Outside of Forced Migration

A final and very relevant piece of literature on the topic is Gae-Hee Song's research titled "North Korean Migrants' Integration into South Korean Society: Policies, Perceptions and Realities." This paper is the closest item to this project's proposed topic in the literature. Song investigates the perceived benefits of South Korea's settlement support policy against the realities, as well as how the policy promotes integration into South Korean society. Through interviews with North Koreans, the conclusions show that obstacles to integration included economic hardship and social discrimination. This study provides a myriad of other insights on the topic including ideas of separate identity in migrant populations, as well as policy review of the South Korean government towards North Koreans. Much of Song's research/work will inform this study, however this study will also be informed by the Ager and Strang framework to create a body of work on the topic that is brought into the field of migration studies and refugee protection by using theories already employed by governments for integration policy creation and transformation.³¹

2.7 Integrating Refugees: Applicable to Young North Koreans

The literature offerings on refugee reception and integration will also provide value by providing context to this project. Currently, English-language policy recommendations on the North Korean defector integration model appear to be nonexistent. After data collection, present refugee integration models being recommended or implemented elsewhere could provide a guide to pinpoint possible changes to South Korean policy. A discussion of this policy will be covered more in-depth in the research and recommendations chapters, but a brief overview of integration documents which may prove useful will be given here briefly.

The first of such policy documents which will inform this research[?] is the guide 'Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration' issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A section of particular note which might be especially useful in the South Korean case would be the chapter on restoring faith in government. The chapter itself reads:

"Many resettled refugees originate from countries where government officials and professionals are involved in perpetrating violence and persecution. For these reasons resettled refugees may have a heightened sensitivity to injustices in the receiving society or a fear or lack of trust of those in positions of authority... These factors may have an impact on the extent to which they feel safe... and on their interactions with key systems such as schools and social service authorities."³²

This perspective appears to be lacking from current policy, but data collected in this project can further inform whether or not such a recommendation will be advantageous. A second source for guidance on integration which may be useful is the comprehensive 'Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria' an EU funded study. In this guide, no sections of note stand out as something particularly lacking from current South Korean policy toward North Korean defectors, however the depth of material covered such as 'Employment', 'Social Engagement', and 'Subjective perspective of members of receiving society on the process of integration' could prove useful in the recommendations. Based on the already surveyed literature and initial comments from defectors the later chapter could provide insight on the situation in South Korea. "In addition to the consultations with refugees and stakeholders, it was considered useful to consult members of receiving society to reflect the two-way process of integration and that integration does not only concern refugees and persons with subsidiary protection but everybody in the receiving country."³³

The literature provides a guiding framework for discussing refugee integration issues. It also offers glimpses into the experiences of young North Koreans in South Korea. The literature does not offer the perspective of young North Koreans on what helped or hindered their integration in relation to the policy of the Korean government from a Forced Migration perspective. Handbooks on integration in other world regions could also provide useful literature for understanding how to recommend policy development on the issue in South Korea after data collections. This research project should therefore incorporate these items under a cohesive, Forced Migration-based analysis using previous

³⁰ Kim (n 30) 1027.

³¹ Gae Hee Song, 'North Korean Migrants' Integration into South Korean Society: Policies, Perceptions, and Realities (DPhil thesis Syracuse University 2012).

³² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration* (2002).

³³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria* (2013).

work from the field, not only for accurate application on a policy level, but also to introduce non-traditional migrant situations into the Forced Migration field's discussion.

3. Methodology & Design

3.1 The Problem and Questions

The problem in our current understanding is comes from a lack of research in the Forced Migration field on young North Korean defectors' experiences integrating into South Korean society and how government policy affects this. The questions which arise in relation to this are as follows:

- What do young North Korean people feel helped or impeded their integration in South Korea?
- What do young North Koreans feel is lacking from the Korean government's integration system?
- Did any widely unexplored factors in the literature, such as language problems, have a positive or negative impact on the integration of young refugees?

3.2 Theory of Research

Rather than an empirical-analytical approach, this research will take an interpretative, qualitative approach for a few main reasons. The first is the logistical environment in which the research will be conducted. In 2016, according to the South Korean Ministry of Unification, there were at least 30,000 total refugees from North Korea in South Korea.³⁴ South Korea also engages a policy of what mirrors self-settlement in the case of a traditional refugee situation, where the defectors are given support, but are not sanctioned in terms of where they begin their livelihood and life in South Korea after defecting from the North. These two factors mean it is difficult for 'outsiders' to locate and build connections with the community of North Korean defectors. There is no area of encampment in which to find them, and they are such a small population of people, ethnically and linguistically indistinguishable from the citizens of their host nation. Empirical studies which might provide quantitative data to use for answering the research questions—to be detailed below—would be difficult to distribute and elicit responses from on a large scale because of the difficulty inherent in locating members of the North Korean defector community for 'outsiders' without previous connections or near-native Korean language ability.

The second reason for preference toward an interpretive approach is an absence in the literature on the experiences of young North Korean defectors in respect to integration and their perception and reality of South Korean government integration policy toward North Korean people. An interpretive approach would allow for qualitative methods which give the opportunity for young North Korean perspectives to be introduced into the Forced Migration literature base. This allows for a more well-rounded account of migrant experiences throughout East Asia, a region not typically highly engaged in Forced Migration issues.

Finally, based on initial conversations with refugee contacts, young North Korean refugees expressed enthusiasm at the possibility of sharing their experiences with working out a livelihood in South Korea. It was important to them that people outside of Korea understand their life in South Korea after escaping the North. Empirical approach represented by surveys or other quantitative methods would not provide an opportunity that would be open-ended enough for young refugees to steer the focus toward issues they felt most strongly about. The weakness of potential empirical methods which might suitably answer the research questions in being too narrow focused outweighs the potential benefit of reliability presented by quantitative results. Therefore, qualitative methods such as interviews would be preferable to capture accurate portrayal of young North Korean refugee integration experiences.

The above reasons for choosing life history collection to address the research questions are well-reflected in the literature. Powles lists advantages of collecting life histories in refugee contexts saying life histories are beneficial since:

- "They allow for the communication of refugees' voices in a powerful and relatively direct way.
- They enable us to capture the particularity, the complexity and the richness of an individual refugee's experiences.
- They help to restore, both to the teller and to the audience, a sense of the refugee's own agency, however limited by events and external interventions.
- They highlight refugees' most serious concerns and can challenge us to think creatively about ways to address them.
- They are a means to discover unexpected gaps in our knowledge of particular situations.
- They tend to create a strong bond between the researcher and the subject, which can be empowering for vulnerable refugees.

- They can help us to understand the impact of trauma, and in some cases the process of recording may be cathartic.”³⁵

Mander offers a detailed, and relevant defense of the use of qualitative life history collection in the context of human rights research. Mander laments the fact that much social science research surrounding human rights issues is forced into positivist methods which “try to measure and survey the ‘conditions’ of people in poverty: their consumption, their livelihoods...and a range of other aspects of their lives and situation.”³⁶ Mander defends the strength of life history in qualitative research with vulnerable populations by its virtue in being able to provide insight where quantitative methods may fail:

“Conventional statistical methods are often unequal to the challenge of capturing the subjective, fluid and complex realities of people’s lives, even more so when the purpose is to study phenomena like exclusion and discrimination...Qualitative methods like life stories and life histories can enable a more complete and nuanced understanding of the social, cultural, political, and psychological dimensions of the experience of poverty.”³⁷

Whether this poverty is economic, or a poverty of experience such as situations of discrimination or disenfranchisement. It is precisely because this type of research does not make claims at being totally objective that it is effective in situations where one must ‘qualify and assess’ findings to a great degree in understanding lived realities of participants, especially to inform policy formation to improve their cause such as in Forced Migration work with refugees and other forced migrants.³⁸ Positivist methods copy and pasted onto Forced Migration study is challenged by Rodgers who claims that doing so relies on potentially harmful assumptions such as Forced Migration researchers thinking we already know the problems at hand on the ground, and ‘that knowledge generated through scientifically reliable quantitative techniques will necessarily lead to better and more ethical policy decisions than subjectively-informed and inductively-derived ‘guesses’ that are characteristic of more qualitative understandings.’³⁹

3.3 Participant Selection

This project will be focused on young refugees who have recently settled in South Korea. This is to gain an accurate perspective through recent interaction of refugees with government service providers and integration programs. This allows for a more accurate evaluation of such support programs. As such, sampling will be accomplished through snowball sampling or use of a gatekeeper. The following qualifiers will be applied when seeking out participants for the study.

Refugee participants will be selected based on age. This study focuses on ‘young’ refugees, those ideally between approximately 18 and 30 years old. The rationale for this age range is that young refugees are more open to talking about their experiences in moving to, and living in, South Korea after leaving North Korea or their former place of residence. Many young North Koreans have appeared recently on TV shows and online media to share their experiences with relocating and integrating to South Korea. Additionally, Korean culture is very age-conscious. There is an effort made to give deference to those significantly older than oneself and to keep a distance from those younger than oneself in social situations and modes of speech. Therefore, seeking out participants who are closer in age to the researcher might help to facilitate more open discussion on the topic, as opposed to a large age gap which could impede building of trust and candid conversation on integration experiences.

Refugee participants will be selected on a condition that they have relocated to South Korea within approximately 5 years of the time of the study. In order to reflect an accurate and full picture of the integration policies and the experience of North Korean refugees when interacting with the integration policy of the Korean government, it would be advantageous to work with young people who have recently interacted with the government as a service provider toward integration.

Refugee participants will be selected based on their personal interest in participating in the project. There will be no ethnography or use of deception in the course of this research. There are a few reasons for this approach. First, when working with a population from a country such as North Korea which is very closed to foreign influence, it would facilitate building of trust when interacting with a foreign researcher if all details of the project are disclosed to partici-

35 Julia Powles, ‘Life history and personal narrative: theoretical and methodological issues relevant to research and evaluation in refugee contexts’ (2004) UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit Working Paper No 106 <<http://www.unhcr.org/4147fe764.pdf>> accessed 2 September 2020.

36 Harsh Mander, ‘Words from the Heart’: Researching People’s Stories’ (2010) 2(2) *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 252 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huq007>> accessed 2 September 2020.

37 Ibid 255-257.

38 Ibid 259.

39 Graeme Rodgers, ‘Hanging Out with Forced Migrants: Methodological and Ethical Challenges’ (2004) 21 *Forced Migration Review* 48 <<https://www.fmreview.org/return-reintegration/Rodgers>> accessed 2 September 2020.

pants beforehand. Additionally, trust must be built through transparency with participants to assuage fears of 'reporting' unfavorable statements made by refugees in the course of research about the government or other third-party service providers. Explaining to participants that there is no connection between this project and any benefits they receive will lessen the apprehension of speaking freely on the topic. Finally, in the interest of mental health of the participants, building trust through selecting only willing participants will help protect them. More detail on the ethical considerations during the course of research will be elaborated on below.

The researcher may rely on snowball sampling made possible through use of personal contacts on the ground and/or gate keepers at local North Korean support nonprofits. In such a small community with no ethnic or linguistic differences from the nation in which they have settled, it is difficult to locate participants through other means. Outside of the government education center for North Koreans where they are sent upon defecting, there is no camp or central location where North Korean refugees live, work, or congregate upon escape to South Korea. It seems appropriate then to select based on snowball sampling and/or gatekeepers for the qualitative narrative analysis. For these same reasons, and the language barriers anticipated, and time frame of the dissertation allotted, this research will seek to interview 2-3 (or ideally, 5) young refugees for narrative analysis. Weaknesses of this sample size, selection methods, biases and other aspects will be elucidated below.

3.4 Method

The method of this research will be narrative analysis. A primary reason for employing narrative analysis is the lack of North Korean refugee voice in the research of the Forced Migration field, which appears absent—as far as this researcher is aware. As indicated in the literature review, research of North Korean refugees has of course been previously undertaken by others in a myriad of outside fields. These projects all offer insight into the plight of young North Koreans, or North Koreans generally, in South Korea. However, a uniquely Forced Migration approach grounded in theories of the field—namely, Ager and Strang's indicators of integration—presents the opportunity to yield results applicable in both further research in integration in East Asia which lacks a regional refugee law framework, as well as domestically in South Korea to inform policy decisions on North Korean integration and support for young defectors. As previously demonstrated, this is the ideal method for the research questions given the unique resettlement circumstances and ethnic similitude of the target population with the country of settlement. Quantitative methods calling for surveys require larger pools of participants which would not be available in such a condensed time frame.

Data collection will be through audio-recorded semi-structured interviews and creation of interview transcripts of life histories of young North Koreans only after relocating to South Korea. Interviews will be about one to two hours in a public location where the participant feels comfortable. The sessions will be audio recorded to allow for transcribing of responses and to facilitate proper understanding. This eliminates problems of a language barrier as the responses can be presented to a third party native Korean speaker for interpretation if necessary.

Data analysis will be through coding of life history interview transcripts. Narrative analysis is "employed to analyze stories that comprise public and cultural domains to explore shared cultural meanings, norms, and collective practices...A narrative approach analyzes the content of stories, how stories are told, and the way people narrate their experiences...to produce accounts that have a "temporal," "spatial," and "sequential ordering..."⁴⁰ The coding of the narratives provided through work with North Korean defectors will be done by looking over transcripts for themes presented in the life histories. After these themes are identified, a write-up of findings will be produced. The write-up will then be used to create policy recommendations. The policy suggestions will be guided and grounded in Forced Migration discourse by using Ager and Strang's indicators of integration identified in their 2008 study and cited above, as well as other relevant literature such as integration guides and backgrounders.⁴¹

3.5 Bias & Criticism

A primary weakness of this project is the inability to easily select participants for a non-native Korean speaker. The potential participants being indistinguishable from South Korean citizens and not in a state of encampment are difficult to find in large numbers. The small size of the sample may be criticized as too small to generate scalable results and reliable conclusions for policy recommendation, however, where no apparent previous research on this topic in the field exists, it is a necessary starting point. Bias may include biases held by the participants and the researcher. Since both actors are intimately involved in data generation through the nature of constructivist narrative approach, a margin of error stemming from personal bias can arise. Anticipated biases of the researcher include preconceived ideas of poverty, lack of education, or hostile opinions held by participants toward the researcher including mistrust because of nationality (American) because of national rhetoric coming from North Korean government leaders. In the same vein, the biases of the participants might indeed include this mistrust or unrealistic expectations of the power

40 Glynis George, Erwin Dimitri Selimos, 'Using Narrative Research to Explore the Welcoming of Newcomer Immigrants: A Methodological Reflection on a Community-Based Research Project' (2018) 19(2) *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* <<http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.2.2907>> accessed 2 September 2020.

41 Ager and Strang (n 13) 170.

of the researcher to significantly alter their life situation through this research.

3.6 Ethics

When working with refugees—and any human research participant—certain ethical safeguards apply which would not be typically applied in other qualitative studies, especially safeguards surrounding mental health and protection of identity when dealing with vulnerable populations such as refugees or other forced migrants. Participants will be informed verbally and in writing in English and Korean of the ethical guidelines governing this research. The ethical guidelines of this project have been submitted for review and approved by the University's ethics board and attempt as much as possible to minimize harm to participants and the researcher in the following ways.

- Anonymity – Participants will not be identified by name. Aliases will be used.
- Security – All data collected will be stored in a secured device and destroyed after completion of the project.
- Retaliation – Participants will be protected from retaliation by service providers or authorities by anonymity and nondisclosure of statements to these parties.
- Withdrawal – Participation may be terminated at any time without punishment or reason.
- Support – Participants will be provided contact information for psychological support should participation bring up unwelcome or unexpected anxiety through recalling past events.

This is an academic project and is not supported by outside funding from any sponsoring organization. Ethical issues in respect to outside sponsorship have been disregarded because of this.⁴²

3.7 Adjustments Based on Field Work

There were obstacles in seeking participants on the ground which required the methodology of the project to be revisited as will be detailed below. These changes included revisiting of the methodology itself, reexamination of the research questions, as well as revisiting the literature to evaluate its usefulness in the light of these changes.

North Korean defectors were sought out by a variety of means. Personal connections and social leverage with South Korean friends, contact with North Koreans in online forums, as well as contacting local non-governmental service providers (non-profits and similar groups) all provided viable avenues of connecting with participants. When engaging the issue of directly meeting participants for the purpose of interviewing voluntarily in an academic project, this suggestion elicited a universal, poignant, and unanticipated reaction. All potential participants were interested in the project itself only if some type of monetary compensation would be given as a direct, tangible, and instantaneous benefit to the participants themselves. The details of what this might mean will be detailed in the findings below, however, such a situation required a shift in the project's focus at the inability to acquire the data under the initial design of the project's methodology in which first-hand narratives as primary data were integral to the design. Also, such a situation of monetary compensation would have presented significant ethical issues and bias issues that were beyond the scope of the initial approval given.

Since primary data collection through interviews on the ground proved impossible, an alternative method was pursued in the same qualitative vein detailed in the article 'Secondary analysis of qualitative data: a valuable method for exploring sensitive issues with an elusive population?' This article gives a suggested and implemented model for using previously obtained data through qualitative modes and applying it to other qualitative-focused projects. It states that the value in this method is that it 'may be of benefit in situations where the topic being discussed is a sensitive one and participants may be...an "elusive" population, one that is difficult to access.'⁴³ An additional benefit mentioned, and incidentally relevant, is that this method may be more approachable for students who find time constraints and lack of connections or expertise an impediment to obtaining data through primary qualitative sets, especially when the desired participant group is difficult to locate within the population.

The first step of secondary analysis involves verifying that research questions align with the primary datasets. The questions of the primary source should be close to the present questions, and the analytic techniques should be similar—in this case, narrative analysis or qualitative interpretation of refugee responses.⁴⁴ As such, the adjusted method for this project will reflect such a comparison. The literature containing interviews of North Korean defectors will be revisited. The contents of each study deemed useful will be compared with the questions of this project. The research questions of this project might need to be adjusted to allow for incorporation of the secondary sources. Ethical

42 Ranjit Kumar, 'Research Methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners' (281–90, 4th edition, SAGE London 2014).

43 Tracy Long-Sutehall, Magi Sque, Julia Addington-Hall, 'Secondary analysis of qualitative data: a valuable method for exploring sensitive issues with an elusive population?' (2010) 16(4) *Journal of Research in Nursing* 335 <<https://www.wlv.ac.uk/media/wlv/pdf/Secondary-analysis-JRN3815531.pdf>> accessed 2 September 2020.

44 Ibid.

considerations arise when conducting secondary analysis which ensure consent of the original participants is not violated by essentially misconstruing their statements, as explained in the aforementioned article: "...a professional judgement may have to be made about whether the re-use of data violates the contract made between the participants and the primary researcher. Such judgements need to be based on the fit between the original and secondary research questions and whether the new questions in any way shift the focus of the original intention of research."⁴⁵

The final consideration to take in assessing data sets is the quality of the primary data and its ability to answer the research questions at hand. In other words, "there needs to be enough being said in the primary transcripts about the topic of interest so that it would be reasonable to assume that the secondary research questions can be answered."⁴⁶ Much of the literature on this topic, as shared above in the literature review, shows a healthy portion of interviews previously undertaken with North Korean participants on many aspects of their integration to South Korean society, for example culturally, economically, and otherwise. Such an availability of commentary can provide a wide enough scope of data to extrapolate coded responses to answer this project's current questions on obstacles and catalysts to integration in the light of Forced Migration considerations.

Originally, this thesis was to be done under the method of narrative analysis. As a full narrative analysis requires whole interview transcripts and access to respondents, this method in its purest form appears unavailable due to scarcity of full transcripts in literature as well as a lack of access to the target population. Therefore, narrative analysis techniques of classifying text will be used on the available interview responses, on a smaller level grounded in the theory that "Speech, or written texts, are not the experience itself but linguistic representations of it...[and] discourse analysis uses the philosopher Jacques Derrida's notion of 'deconstructionism' to read 'between texts' to uncover the meaning..."⁴⁷ The step-by-step analysis to be conducted includes: 1) Line-by-line inspection for words or phrases relevant to the research questions and labeling them, 2) Scanning paragraphs for units of meaning and similarly assigning descriptive words or codes, 3) Categorization of the labels into groups aiming to find the lowest number of groups possible. The final step is placing the categories in hierarchies, groups and sub-groups, if possible.⁴⁸

This method does have possible weaknesses and remaining questions on its use, including:

"(i) Is it ethical to ask the secondary research questions you are asking of the primary data? (ii) Is there enough being said in the primary transcripts about the topic of interest so that it would be reasonable to assume that the secondary research can be answered? (iii) How will the primary dataset be assessed? ... (v) How will epistemological questions regarding the context of data collection be addressed?"⁴⁹

Ultimately, answering these questions is beyond the scope of this project and these answers would most likely come through scientific and repeated application of the method of secondary analysis. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the possible shortcomings of the new methodology to account for any weaknesses of this project and defend against criticisms.

45 Ibid 339.

46 Ibid 340.

47 Thomas Harding, Dean Whitehead, *Nursing & Midwifery Research: Methods and Appraisal for Evidence-Based Practice* (Chapter 8 Analyzing data in qualitative research, 4th ed, Elsevier-Mosby, 2013).

48 Ibid 149.

49 Long-Sutehall et al (n 44) 343.

4. Findings

After secondary analysis of a collection of various primary sources, certain trends emerged based on the codification of each data set; first line by line, then paragraphs themed to respond to the research questions, and finally out of these themes categories for each sample also relating to the research questions.⁵⁰ The following are categories that emerged after analysis of the data, some of which include subcategories for distinguishing them from other issues within one broader category.

4.1 Culture

Although counter-intuitive since North and South Korea are both inhabited by ethnically Korean people, one of the most urgent hinderances to integration for young North Koreans was culture and similar sociological issues. This was a broad category including many sub-categories. Additionally, there was overlap between sub-categories at times. The statements were not discrete and distinct from other issues inside culture. There was a complex interaction between socialization, language, ethnic identity, and others.

4.1.1 Socialization

Young North Koreans at schools in Republic of Korea expressed that due to different socialization and cultural cues in North Korea, they had difficulty connecting to peers and authority figures. One such misinterpreted cue was smiling. In the mind of one defector, it was a tell for ulterior motives—it indicated that the person smiling wanted to take advantage of the North Korean person:

“Here, [South Korean] people [pause], when they say “Hi!” to me, usually with a smile, I thought their behavior was so odd. Greeting [someone] with a smile is unfamiliar to me. It makes me uncomfortable. [It seems] that [they] are trying to trick me. It seems that they have a scheme in their minds. Is this natural behavior? Or are they doing it like this because they want something from me?”⁵¹

Another difficulty of socialization was the perceived lack of closeness in interpersonal relationships by failure to express intense emotions openly. One young defector recalled that when people leave for the military in North Korea, his friends come out to meet him and cry, whereas these types of public display of deep feeling were paradoxically not present in democratic South Korea:

“In terms of material wealth, South Korea is so much better off. Actually, I think that in North Korea these days people are becoming very materialistic; especially after the Arduous March [a naem (sic) for the North Korean famine between 1994 and 1998], peoples’ relationships with their friends and family are becoming more strained. However, I do think that young people are much closer with each other. When somebody goes to the military, all of his friends come out and cry for him—maybe that has to do with the fact that military service lasts ten years in North Korea—but regardless, I feel like that is one of the main differences.”⁵²

4.1.2 Conception of Justice

Notions of just retaliation and fault were linked to emotion and instigation for young North Koreans which appeared to present difficulties for them when connecting with their peers at school. When teased by other students, North Korean students felt justified in physical retaliation because in North Korea the instigator is held liable for his own medical expenses in such a situation for provoking the assailant. Therefore, the North Korean students thought it natural that they should also physically assault the instigating South Korean students as further punishment because:

“South Korean students started it, and it was reasonable that we beat them up. It was not our fault, but their fault...If someone had started something, it is natural for them to get beaten. Because of money...If somebody hurts others physically in North Korea, the state pays for all the medical treatment, for free. Because of that, North Koreans are more focused on who is or is not at fault rather than on who uses violence. Because the injured person can [get treated and] recover under the national [health plan], if the injured person acknowledges that it was his fault, that incident is over...[In South Korea] They have to pay money, individual compensation. They don’t seem to consider who started it or who was at fault. Regardless of who started it and who was at fault, the one who uses violence has to pay money to the injured person first, individually.”⁵³

50 Harding and Whitehead (n 48) 149.

51 Kim (n 30) 1020.

52 Kate Yoon, Amanda Flores, ‘Recalling the Past While Moving Forward: Life After North Korea’ (2015) 36(4) Harvard International Review 20 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43649312>> accessed 2 September 2020.

53 Kim (n 30) 1022.

4.1.3 Language & Ethnicity

Perhaps the most shocking finding—and the most disastrous for the reunification of Korea, in the minds of some young North Koreans—was language as an inhibitor to integration due to communication styles differing, notwithstanding true linguistic differences that have developed since the partition of Korea. One young defector commented that the North Korean communication style is so abrupt and cold, as perceived by South Koreans, that it would cause many breakdowns in communication and misunderstanding: “We [North Koreans] greet each other with a snap, without smiles. Maybe if Korea is reunified all the prisons in South Korea would be filled with North Koreans.”⁵⁴

Although North Koreans are given South Korean citizenship immediately upon defecting, some young North Koreans feel more attached to the idea of Korean ethnic identity than affinity for the Republic of Korea. In this context, language was a catalyst for connecting with other Koreans around them: “If we were in China, we would become emotionally attached to the granting of South Korean citizenship. Here, we are all Korean and communicate with one another. So, I don’t have a strong feeling about South Korean citizenship.”⁵⁵

4.1.4 Perceived Prejudice & Stereotyping

Some young North Koreans feel highly discriminated against and stereotyped by South Korean people leading to breakdowns in social bonds, support, and a positive association with South Korean society. This perceived discrimination is a sensitive topic for some very young defectors. One ethnography recounts a teacher’s announcement that a handful of North Koreans had been chosen to attend an English program for free. Offended that he was singled out, one North Korean student reacted angrily: “No! I don’t want to go. Do we have to go? No, I will not go! I will study by myself. I have to study. Thanks to me, because of me, this alternative school exists here,”⁵⁶ (referring to the school they attended for North Korean defector students). Outside of academia, many refugees feel the same issue holds true: “If I say I am North Korean, people look at me differently. Many people think that North Korean migrants came to South Korea because of their hunger. That kind of image of North Korean migrants deeply engraves on people’s mind.”⁵⁷ Some defectors also see this presenting employment problems:

“I heard from the government that large enterprises were reluctant to hire North Korean migrants. In fact, North Korean migrants are incompetent and don’t have the skills that are recognized in the labor market. So, employers argue why they should hire North Korean migrants. I agree with them... they are incompetent and useless, but is there anyone who is a perfect one from the beginning?”⁵⁸

4.1.5 Civic Involvement

“I don’t get involved with any NGO here. I wonder why they help us, and how they can manage if they work for free.”⁵⁹ This is a statement which portrays some young North Koreans’ cultural view of the concept of civic involvement in democratic societies as expressed through charity work. Many young North Koreans appear to find the concept of altruism difficult to trust, and therefore tend to reject non-governmental programming or other aid. I encountered this firsthand during my field research when in South Korea. I had established many avenues of contacting young North Koreans for interview, however, all potential participants requested monetary compensation for their time. This is possibly an expression of the view above that it is right to ask for compensation for a service, rather than providing that service for the benefit of society at-large. Many young refugees also feel it an exercise in futility to participate in government or otherwise-administered research because they have no room to complain:

“Those surveys were useless. We laughed at them. We questioned why we should fill out these surveys. Frankly speaking, we didn’t pay attention to those surveys, and many fell asleep...In fact, I was very reluctant to tell my opinion. What I could say if the government says, ‘there are many poor South Korean people, but they don’t get any support from the government; however, you receive generous support. You should be grateful for what you enjoy because you were desperate in North Korea.’ In this situation, if we demanded more, the government would feel a strong antipathy toward us.”⁶⁰

4.1.6 Pop Culture

One helper for integration among young people recently was cited as the growing worldwide soft power of the pop

54 Ibid 1021.

55 Song (n 32) 140.

56 Kim (n 30) 1025.

57 Song (n 32) 101.

58 Ibid 142.

59 Ibid 104.

60 Ibid 131.

culture of South Korea. One North Korean young person claims it is a catalyst in understanding South Korea on a general level, despite cultural differences:

“Something distinct separates North Koreans from South Koreans. I cannot really describe the cultural differences in words, but I guess the best way to describe it would be that South Korea is more individualistic, although North Korea is becoming more so these days...In reality, North Korean youth enjoy South Korean music and pop culture a lot more. They even say that South Korean culture is the ‘coolest’ in North Korea (as opposed to Chinese or North Korean culture). These views are changing a lot in North Korea.”⁶¹

4.2 Power

A second variable of catalysts and inhibitors to integration of young North Korean people is under the heading of power. This includes views expressed by defectors which highlight the inefficiencies of current consultation systems the government and others employ to either control or consult (or not consult) young North Koreans in the Republic of Korea.

4.2.1 Inhibited Movement

Although, arguably, in direct contravention to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter, the Convention)⁶², movement of North Korean defectors is restricted within their first months of fleeing to South Korea when they are required to stay at a government-administered campus called Hanawon away from Seoul and designed for their accommodation and attending orientation classes. Importantly, it should be pointed out that South Korea claims the entire Korean Peninsula as sovereign territory of the Republic of Korea⁶³, and therefore all North Koreans are not defined as refugees because the South Korean state views them as Koreans returning to their country of nationality, thereby failing the test of the refugee definition as one who has crossed into a foreign state and availing themselves of protection of their state of nationality.⁶⁴ This also appears to be sociologically related to Korean conceptions of nationality and ethnicity which are well beyond the scope of this project, yet intimately tied to the refusal of the Republic of Korea to acknowledge Korean people born in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea as foreign nationals for refugee purposes, despite most other nations seeing North Korean people seeking protection in South Korea as passing the test of the refugee definition of the Convention and all its Protocols set forth.⁶⁵

Regardless of refugee status or otherwise, young North Korean people complain that inhibition of their self-settlement from the beginning is a handicap for them when integrating to South Korean society:

“The Hanawon taught us to understand the actual circumstances of South Korea a little bit, but it was completely useless, useless... Well, this is my opinion, so other people might disagree with me. However, in our opinion, this kind of support is useless. I don’t understand why the government locked us in the Hanawon for 3 months. After investigation at Daesung Gongsa, instead, it is much better for us to walk around and experience for a month. This is much faster than learning at the Hanawon.”⁶⁶

4.2.2 Involvement in Decision Making

There was a complaint from some young defectors that they are not properly consulted in decision making that directly affects them, and even when they are consulted, it is not in any long-term advisory capacity or board membership, but rather one-off, town-hall style meetings where they speak to politicians or service providers:

“When we talked about our job or other issues at the Ministry of Unification, they gave us vague ideas. What they said sounded great, but in reality, it was irrelevant...they could say that because they didn’t know about our real problems and realities here. So, we insisted that North Korean migrants should get involved in the policy making process. The government should pay attention to

61 Yoon and Flores (n 53) 20.

62 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention) art 26.

63 “Article 1, (1) The Republic of Korea shall be a democratic republic... Article 3, The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands. Article 4, The Republic of Korea shall seek unification and shall formulate and carry out a policy of peaceful unification...”, Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1948 art 1,3,4.

64 Refugee Convention (n 63) art 1(A).

65 Incidentally, this is also the Korean insistence on English terminology surrounding North Koreans moving to South Korea as ‘defectors’ rather than ‘refugees.’

66 Song (n 32) 120.

what we address.”⁶⁷

Another defector expressed the same view: “I addressed North Korean migrants’ issues at a seminar or conference. I also gave a speech at the Hanawon or other meetings. However, I did not see that they would take it seriously.”⁶⁸ Many young defectors expressed this disappointment of not being heard in a meaningful sense, but rather only superficially.⁶⁹

When services were provided for young North Korean defectors by non-governmental outlets, they expressed low benefit, and even emotional harm from their interactions with groups that failed to consult young defectors on how the content of events in programming would be received by North Koreans attending the events. At one event, North Koreans were asked to share traditional North Korean songs with South Koreans and watch movies about North Korea in order to build cultural understanding, the opposite effect was achieved for some young refugees: “[I] did not learn anything and felt homesick.”⁷⁰ And another:

“North Korean migrants are reluctant to get help from NGOs because they find it weird and unfamiliar with NGOs. For me, I haven’t received help from NGOs. The only help I got was from a community welfare center. I don’t know whether this is called help or not, the center offered a Christmas party and a flower festival, so I went there.”⁷¹

It begs the question as to whether or not any defectors were consulted at all in the planning to assess the appropriateness of such programming.

4.3 Income & Housing

The third and final category of integration factors most urgent as expressed by young North Korean refugees were issues around income and housing. This relates to many diverse areas such as job security, education, government aid and subsidies, and other similar concerns. It revealed that aid in particular can be a double-edged sword; at once both supporting and empowering defectors personally while also appearing to create dependence or undue stress for keeping young North Koreans constantly on the brink of financial instability.

4.3.1 Education & Aid

One student expressed that aid packages are not individualized enough, as a result, he had to drop out of school because of homelessness brought on by not being able to maintain a job while attending classes:

“...the current allowance is so little that many North Korean college students are prone to spend their settlement money quickly. After settlement money runs out, they return their subsidized apartments to get a housing security deposit back. After this, they not only face economic hardships, but also lose a place to live. In this situation, they should work at temporary jobs and earn money; however, they cannot neglect their studies either. Since many North Korean college students cannot reconcile their study and work, they tend to drop out of school. I hope that the government has different consideration for North Korean college students.”⁷²

4.3.2 Insufficient Resettlement Funds & Housing

Some young North Koreans expressed situations of income security, either due to insufficiency of funds dispersed for resettlement, lack of employment, or both; some young women even engaging in sex work to remain afloat after resettlement packages had run out.

“After departing the Hanawon, I worked at a wedding hall. I got paid ₩5,000 per hour and worked 15 hours a day for three days a week. It was so hard, and I was so exhausted. At that time, I talked with my friend about the job and she suggested I quit and work at a karaoke because of money. For us, money is the most important thing and we should make money. I thought that this dream would come true in South Korea. But settlement money is cut, so we are financially in trouble. Because we don’t have enough money to send out to our families in North Korea or China, we commit a crime. Because we have nothing, we work as a bar/karaoke hostess or as a prostitute in a brothel.”⁷³

67 Ibid 134.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid 131.

70 Ibid 105.

71 Ibid 149.

72 Ibid 98.

73 Ibid 123.

A more general complaint on funds dispersed were that the subsidized housing was not truly subsidized as indicated from the point of view of the North Koreans settling after their release from Hanawon. The money for a security deposit on a subsidized apartment is included in the total dispersed to defectors. The first task they complete after leaving Hanawon is attending a lease signing at a real estate office to obtain their living quarters where a security deposit around \$9,000 is paid by the defectors from their resettlement lump sum.⁷⁴ The refugees in the material reviewed were dispersed between about twelve and thirty thousand dollars with security deposits usually requiring the nine thousand dollars cash plus various fees and utilities. Many young North Korean people in the source material said this left them with very little to survive on starting out in South Korea, and some after all real estate dealings were concluded had no money:

“When I left the Hanawon, I received ₩12,000,000. They deposited it into my bank account. What we did after the “Hanawon” was to sign the lease at the leasing office and pay a housing security deposit, ₩9,000,000. On top of that, I needed to pay some utilities. So, at the end, about ₩3,000,000 was left in my hands. I was lucky because other people had nothing after paying their housing security deposit and utilities.”⁷⁵

...

“My settlement money was ₩30,000,000. First of all, I needed to pay ₩10,000,000 for a housing security deposit. ₩7,000,000 has been provided quarterly. Therefore, I only had ₩3,000,000 after all. The rest of the amount, ₩10,000,000, was used as an employment reward. In this case, the government made this system to encourage North Korean migrants’ regular employment. But most migrants do not maintain their jobs more than a year, so this reward is ineffective.”⁷⁶

4.3.3 Employment

There were many difficulties in securing employment, gaining extra resettlement funds through employment, and related programs. One interviewee admitted that the system does empower North Koreans, however it is not individualized enough as it doesn’t account for the situations of those who are unfit to participate in the systems:

“There is an employment reward for North Korean migrants, but I am not eligible because I don’t have a regular job. As I said, I am sick, so it is impossible for me to maintain a regular job. Frankly speaking, the system is good because it raises our self-esteem and empowerment but look at me... although I wish to have it, I cannot. It’s a pie in the sky to me.”⁷⁷

A view was also expressed that the government should become intimately involved in securing employment for North Korean defectors at various private companies, as had been done in previous decades:

“In the early 1990s, the government provided North Korean migrants with regular jobs in large enterprises. Although some worked hard, many left their regular jobs. I don’t want to be sympathetic about those who left their jobs because that is what they get. What I am saying is the government provided employment opportunities to North Korean migrants. We really need this benefit, but don’t have it now. Here, there are so many companies. I wonder why the government cannot offer regular jobs to over 10,000 North Korean migrants. I don’t ask the government to be responsible for those losers who left their jobs. I want the government to give us this opportunity.”⁷⁸

4.3.4 Identity Security

One defector in the literature also expressed concern at the system by which North Koreans were assigned national identification numbers, used in financial and other transactions inside South Korea. The first set of digits is assigned based on place of birth, while the other digits are related to birth date: “I have two friends who have the same resident registration numbers except the last digit. Because I know each of their birthdays, I can use their numbers for an unfaithful purpose if I want. In this case, some private lenders can also use this purposely.”⁷⁹

As is apparent, there are three main areas of concern for young refugees integrating into South Korean society. The

74 The Korean rental system differs from many Western countries in that a large, cash security deposit usually between 5-10 thousand dollars is given to the landlord, but monthly rents are much lower.

75 Ibid 121.

76 Song (n 32) 125.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid 129-130.

79 Ibid 133.

next chapter offers recommendations based on recent development in the Forced Migration field to offer possible avenues of discussion for policy makers within the Republic of Korea to better support the integration of young people defecting from North Korea.

5. Recommendations

This section details suggestions to be considered by future policy-makers and service providers (NGOs, charities, and others) when tackling issues of integrating young North Koreans to life and society in South Korea so they can lead productive, healthy, and happy lives as well as take full advantage of the rights and duties afforded to them as full citizens of Republic of Korea. The ideas put forth here come from a Forced Migration perspective—meaning based on research and practice concerning people who, for whatever reason and regardless of legal classification, have been forced from the place of their continuous residence or nationality. There is a vast body of this research and experience available to South Korean policy makers and service providers which, if considered, could improve the situation of young North Korean people defecting to the South. These are only brief suggestions based on the data found above in analysis of the narratives of young North Koreans as a starting point of discussion for future changes. It is acknowledged that there certainly are policies in place that address most of these issues. However, reconsidering the mechanisms by which they are handled in light of Forced Migration issues, particularly refugee integration schemes and indicators of integration, offer a more nuanced support paradigm rooted in past results which empowers young defectors rather than creating cycles of dependence and a breakdown of social cohesion between young North and South Koreans.

5.1 Reasons for Considering Refugee Research

An anticipated refutation of Korean decision makers on defector support for considering refugee systems for better policy formation would be that North Korean people are not refugees legally under the Korean constitution. Similarities in the experiences of North Korean defectors and refugees are in fact numerous as will be shown, which justifies formulating defector policy recommendations based on the analogous experience of displacement shared by North Korean people leaving North Korea and refugees.

First, both groups are by definition mobile and have left their area of birth or continuous residence.⁸⁰ While refugees have crossed an international border and are often resettled in a third country, North Korean people, unable to ‘repatriate’ across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) at the thirty-eighth parallel, leave through the northern border with China and Russia. Movement is a well-documented fact of the existence of both groups. Secondly, the experiences of refugees which allow them to claim refugee status are persecutory, infringing on core, unchanging facets of their identity as a person and, more importantly, individuals even not acquiring refugee status will be offered protection to avoid *refoulement*—their return to risk of torture by the state or other persecutory actors.⁸¹ Likewise, North Korean people are not returned to North Korea if they enter from non-DMZ locations, but enter the scrutinization and protection process, eventually gaining citizenship and the protection of the Republic of Korea.⁸² Both classes of people are under a protected status from state or other forces who wish them harm based on their wish to avail themselves of the protection of that state. Finally, many refugees and North Korean defectors alike appear to exhibit similar psychological dispositions after their upheaval, including high levels of anxiety or depression.^{83 84} With such similarities, it would be advantageous to consider insight on refugee support to inform defector policy. Below are specific recommendations based on findings in the previous chapter.

5.2 Culture

From the standpoint of Ager and Strang’s conceptual framework, *culture* as defined here through consideration of the testimony of young North Koreans, would probably most closely relate to the core domain of *Language and Cultural Knowledge*. The major cultural issues for young defectors included, as noted in the previous chapter, different socialization as South Korean peers, concepts of justice and fairness, language and ethnic identity rifts, perceived prejudice and stereotyping, as well as different ideas on the value and purpose of civic involvement. Previous discussions label *Language and Cultural Knowledge* as an area of competency which can effectively ‘remove barriers’ to refugees’ integration. Initial provision of services in a refugee’s local language has been proven to facilitate faster integration.⁸⁵ The shared language between North and South Koreans is mutually intelligible, yet different in terminology and tone of delivery as expressed above by defectors. As such, consideration of such a difference in the first stages of young defectors’ lives in South Korea, particularly in education, could produce positive integration effects.

80 Refugee Convention (n 63) art 1(A).

81 Ibid art 33.

82 Ministry of Unification (n 12).

83 Seul Ki Choi, Seong Joon Min, Myung Sook Cho, Hyojee Joung, Sang Min Park, ‘Anxiety and depression among North Korean young defectors in South Korea and their association with health-related quality of life’ (2011) 52(3) *Yonsei Medical Journal* 502 <<https://synapse.ko-reamed.org/DOIx.php?id=10.3349/ymj.2011.52.3.502>> accessed 2 September 2020.

84 Refugee Resettlement (n 33) 20.

85 Ager and Strang (n 13) 181.

Cultural differences between North and South Korea have developed over the decades, something also proven by the experience of young North Koreans in South Korea. This is also confirmed by Kim and Oh who state that the unification of Germany was haunted by setbacks of unanticipated cultural difference that has emerged among Koreans due to partition:

“The German experience suggests that political, ideological, and economic remedies are not, in themselves, adequate solutions leading to a successful outcome of the ultimate wish of Korean unification for both North and South Koreans...our findings demonstrate the existence of a noticeable division in implicit attitudes toward the North and the South for South Koreans and North Koreans who even voluntarily defected to South Korea. These results may imply a long journey for both Koreans to the ultimate unification of Korea...”⁸⁶

On the ground, this hinders young North Korean integration. Ager and Strang provide the insight that refugees, who in their own communities of origin enjoyed close family ties, found cultural isolation in their country of settlement as ‘isolating and depressing.’⁸⁷ There was value in refugees sharing their culture with others, and many non-refugees recognized the ‘value of refugees maintaining cultural traditions.’⁸⁸

An interesting recommendation provided by the Refugee Resettlement guide put forth by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the analysis in goals for planning a successful integration program. Due to the fact that refugee producing countries often exhibit economic, political, and socio-cultural breakdown as is apparent in North Korea, this typically leads to social exclusion and human rights violations on massive levels, causing refugees to feel helpless, shamed, and unable to trust and form new bonds. As a result, the social consequences of these factors, if left unaddressed, lead to inability to secure employment, loss of trust in institutions, and feelings of a cultural identity undermined—all expressed above by young North Korean people coming to Republic of Korea. Goal one of integration in countries of settlement is cited as ‘To restore security, control and social and economic independence by meeting basic needs, facilitating communication, and *fostering the understanding of the receiving society*’ (emphasis added).⁸⁹

Based on public information made available by the government of South Korea, there is nothing in the integration policy of North Koreans which demands any knowledge or preparation of native-born South Korean nationals to understand or accept North Korean people.⁹⁰ Rather, they are perceived as impoverished and inept, with the government doing nothing to counter these images held by the local population.

“In South Korea, there are different types of people—some think it is fascinating, some regard us with suspicion, and others feel pity or compassion. On the other hand, outside of Korea, there is less discrimination because they see us all as Koreans, whether we are from the North or South. That is something that I like about traveling outside of Korea. Of course, people outside of South Korea do ask about what it is like in North Korea, and they are fascinated, but they do not treat us differently.”⁹¹

The onus of integrating is placed totally on the shoulders of all North Korean defectors as evidenced in the structure of Hanawon and settlement fund dispersal. A first step in erasing cultural inhibitors of integrating young North Korean refugees should include informational units or workshops on defectors in South Korea in national education curriculum or laws which support its independent development, especially in textbook units which cover the Korean War. This will facilitate future generations understanding of the point of origin of the defectors and generate empathy for those North Koreans who are among their peer group. Caution must be taken not to re-traumatize young North Korean students and more on preventing this will follow below(?). Keeping in mind that pop culture was cited as a catalyst of integration by North Korean youth, Korean pop-culture figureheads well-known to youth in both regions could be used as teachers or in public information campaigns as a force for good to promote understanding of North Korean youth living in South Korea.

It is also possible for the government to facilitate understanding among the South Korean population directly interacting with young North Koreans to publish informational literature for dissemination. While being of the same ethnic background and sharing a common history and exposure to North Korean rhetoric, it might be all too easy for many South Koreans to assume they know intimately the conditions from which the defectors escaped. While this may be

86 Do-Yeong Kim, Hye-Jung Oh, ‘Psychosocial Aspects of Korean Reunification: Explicit and Implicit National Attitudes and Identity of South Koreans and North Korean Defectors’ (2001) 7(3) *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 265 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327949PAC0703b_5> accessed 2 September 2020.

87 Ager and Strang (n 13) 183.

88 Ibid.

89 Refugee Resettlement (n 33) 17.

90 Ministry of Unification, *Settlement Support Office* <<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/unikorea/about/organization/hanaone/>> accessed 2 September 2020.

91 Yoon and Flores (n 53) 21.

true, many more South Koreans might be unaware of the experiences of North Korean people in China or other countries most North Koreans initially flee to before arrival in Republic of Korea, or the conditions they experience when resettling there.

An informational piece by a US non-profit and used in the US and European Union for informing those interacting with Syrian refugees is an appropriate model of what could be used in South Korea to inform those directly interacting with North Koreans about their situation before arriving in South Korea and in-country:

“The backgrounder is intended primarily for those providing initial support and assistance to the newcomers. Others may also find the backgrounder useful. Those who work in local government—health professionals, social workers, and housing officials, among others— may use it to better understand, and thus better serve, their new clients. Teachers may use the backgrounder to educate students about a people whose plight they may have read about or watched on TV. Readers may also include members of the general public interested in learning about their community’s newest residents.”⁹²

5.3 Power

More pertinent to youth of the age of universal suffrage, there is a highly imbalanced power structure in the current scheme of integrating young North Koreans, seemingly placing them at the bottom. As citizens of South Korea, they should have rights to be consulted in the formation of policy that affects them through voting or otherwise. This would be categorized in Ager and Strang’s ‘Foundation’ domain under *Rights and Citizenship*. They state that the way in which *Rights and Citizenship* manifests in individual countries integrating refugees depends on the country’s own ideas of citizenship and nationhood.⁹³

Some nations view their national identity based on an individual conforming to the ideals espoused by the state (such as France), while others see nationhood and citizenship as confirmed by blood (*jus sanguinis*). Many nations using blood-based concepts of identity are categorized as ethno-cultural political exclusion in refugee study, meaning the models of integration they choose typically expect full and total assimilation of refugees and asks them to become indistinguishable from the host community.⁹⁴ South Korea is a homogenous society and determines citizenship by blood⁹⁵, and North Koreans are considered of the same ethnic group and already indistinguishable from South Koreans, apart from language as shown in the above interview responses. Defectors should be totally afforded equal treatment.

Many events planned by social organizations or NGOs about or with North Koreans seemed to be highly unbenevolent, or re-traumatizing for the interviewees because they were not equally consulted. Also relevant, and possibly more frustrating for North Koreans, was what they perceived as insincere and ineffective one-time meetings with policy-makers where they expressed opinions verbally in meetings. The Ministry of Unification might consider accommodating advising roles for defectors in departments that formulate defector policy to involve defector voices in decision making. This should also be mirrored in society with NGOs and other service providers following suit by including young defectors as board members or trustees and allowing their experiences and needs to inform development of programming which is both meaningful and safe for defectors. Defectors need not dominate the creation of agendas or entire operations of organizations that serve them, rather a stable and documented input such as in the report “Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria” demonstrates. A chapter is devoted to stakeholder issues in which refugees set the themes to be analyzed and experts and government weigh in on the best implementation of policies to support these issues.⁹⁶

Alternatively, the idea of integration of defectors might become as depoliticized as far as possible in South Korea. A change in presidential administrations in South Korea also reflects a change in the leader of the Ministry of Unification which sets policy toward North Korea, and thus defectors and the programs giving them support. This means that individuals responsible for providing support at a state level are structurally entangled in a conflict of interest, politically minded, and always moving toward constituents and/or the executives appointing them and unaccountable to defectors, outside of very indirect input through voting. This was expressed by defectors above who attended meetings with government policy makers only to feel it was all for show. Removal of defector support from the Ministry of Unification’s purview or creation of a quasi-public and politically independent entity for its administration managed by an ombudsman, and not the Minister of Unification would streamline service provision and allow for young defec-

92 Rochelle Davis, Raya Alchukr, Staff Resettlement MENA, Staff Resettlement Turkey, *Refugees from Syria* (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2014).

93 Ager and Strang (n 13) 173.

94 Ibid 174-175.

95 Nationality Act, Republic of Korea 2008 art 2.

96 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria* (2013).

tors needs to be met through empowerment of defectors in determining their own support's shape.

5.4 Income & Housing

The final category which young defectors expressed a need for help in were those problems dealing with monetary stability and avoiding homelessness. In housing, public-private partnerships could be considered with real estate developers or management companies to supplement the massive cash deposits required of North Koreans leasing housing. An alternative might be to involve real estate and developers on housing committees which advise the policy makers on current market trends when setting the cash stipend amount given to North Korean defectors to avoid the majority of their initial aid money going toward housing.

Ager and Strang cite *Employment and Housing* as 'Markers and Means' of integration, finding that:

"it is problematic to see the achievement in these areas purely as a "marker" of integration. They may serve as such, but they also clearly serve as potential means to support the achievement of integration...The areas of employment, housing, education and health are thus widely acknowledged by diverse stakeholders to be key aspects of integrating into a new society...However, there is a major conceptual challenge in seeing integration as principally reflected in attainments in these areas."⁹⁷

Therefore, the Korean government might consider more actively defining policy goals for these areas, rather than simply supervising attainment, it should be made so that the attainment is both sustainable and does not harm refugees financially by consuming the majority of their resettlement funds.

Jobs policy should also be more actively developed. Again, the burden is placed entirely on the young defectors to secure employment or participate in courses which teach job skills. There, currently, is no requirement of companies to provide work for the refugees who may not have the social or professional skills to compete with South Koreans for the same job openings, since refugees are typically at a psychological disadvantage following their flight to their country of settlement.⁹⁸ In this case, it is advised that:

"Particular planning considerations apply to refugee young people approaching or over the age of majority. ... they may not have had the opportunity to acquire the educational qualifications and experience required for paid work...In some countries special income support and language training provision is made for this group. In circumstances where young people are required or need to work, there may be a need to explore part-time language training and study options."⁹⁹

As such, various Korean universities or colleges might consider part-time programs designed for young defectors to attend while maintaining a part-time job to support their cost of living. This would help them to also gain valuable interpersonal skills which may have been affected during their flight to South Korea. At the secondary level, a hybrid option of educating some defectors among South Korean students while letting others study among only other North Korean students based on individual needs after evaluation might provide a more tailored educational environment before moving onto full-time work or post-secondary education.

Considering the broader picture of employing young North Korean defectors, and all North Koreans generally, a study on refugee employment by Ott is particularly helpful listing ten 'promising practices' for creating environments that foster working refugees.

(i) Research and monitoring on the needs of refugees and employers; disaggregation of current macro-data on the population in question—in this case young North Korean defectors—to understand programming gaps for certain demographic groups and adjusting accordingly. Also, researching the employment needs of the host community to understand where workers are needed and to match refugees to these openings.¹⁰⁰

(ii) Managing pre-resettlement expectations; refugees must begin pre-arrival orientations and host communities must have expectations managed to understand the obstacles resettled refugees will face and be informed to anticipate cross-cultural communication issues. Of particular note is the need to raise awareness that although a refugee may appear a perfect employee and well-adjusted, barriers may exist to employment such as lack of in-county work experience, social networks, and presence of discrimination.¹⁰¹

97 Ager and Strang (n 13) 169, 173.

98 Refugee Resettlement (n 33) 17.

99 Ibid 273.

100 Eleanor Ott, 'The labor market integration of resettled refugees' (2013) UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service PDES/2013/16 <<http://www.unhcr.org/5273a9e89.pdf>> accessed 2 September 2020.

101 Ibid 28.

(iii) Individualized employment plans-of-action; literature in nearly every country considered in the study underlined the importance of customized employment plans for each refugee. Ott stressed that the literature reviewed “noted that different demographic characteristics strongly correlated with different outcomes, backing up the policy literature that one-size-fits-all programs do not mean equal benefits.”¹⁰²

(iv) Outreach and partnering with employers/the private sector; demonstrated as a central practice in helping refugees find jobs with some governments offering trainings for employers that hire refugees, or merely directly matching them to jobs. This was echoed previously by North Korean defectors as a past catalyst for their integration in the early nineties which has since been abandoned.¹⁰³

(v) Placements with employers; initial work experiences in-country can be government subsidized paid or unpaid positions for a shorter period (six weeks, as an example) to gain initial work experience, references, and employment skills.¹⁰⁴

(vi) Vocationally-focused language courses with integrated work experience; part of a work day is spent in language classes or refugees spend merely a couple of work days at a place of employment learning work related vocabulary.

(vii) Assistance with recertification; although slightly more relevant to highly educated refugee populations, experienced North Koreans may not translate to South Korea and refugees with skills should be guided and informed in how to re-enter their previous professions for swift integration.¹⁰⁵

(viii) Partnering with the broader community; in the United States a successful model has been the Match Grant program, “a public-private partnership where resettlement agencies find donations or volunteer hours, which are matched by federal funds” which has resulted in 72% of refugees employed six months after arrival.¹⁰⁶

(ix) Microenterprise and alternative employment programs; some governments engage in investment in refugee business or set up programs to train refugees for starting businesses, taking advantage of the risk-taking and opportunity-seeking characteristics generally exhibited by refugees.¹⁰⁷

(x) Mechanisms for sharing good practices; various international meetings and groups diffuse best practices for securing employment for refugees. These can also be implemented on a national level where the government and businesses meet to share results and ideas about improving refugee employment prospects.¹⁰⁸

102 Ibid.

103 Song (n 32) 129-130.

104 Ott (n 101) 30.

105 Ibid 32.

106 Ibid 34.

107 Ibid 35.

108 Ibid 36.

6. Conclusion

The defection of North Korean young people to South Korea is a unique instance in many ways, including legal and historical. The Korean people in both regions share a common history and language, yet there are now great disparities between the two countries which results in many obstacles to be faced by youth of North Korea as they build lives in the South. The analysis in this paper has shown that the major hindrances faced by these young people are in areas of culture and language, power, and income and housing. The Korean government might consider based on the centrality of domains of integration expressed by Ager and Strang and informed by the aforementioned cases, revised approaches to policy creation and implementation that incorporates young North Korean people in meaningful ways, actively informs the local populace on the situation faced by North Koreans in South Korea, and consistently re-evaluates employment processes for individualized, effective plans informed by latest research. This hopefully alleviates difficulties for young North Korean defectors in integrating to South Korean society and gives them a stable and successful life after a difficult escape from suffering.

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