

New steps to measure local integration

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When does a refugee feel integrated in his or her host community? When are durable solutions achieved? What impact do the interventions implemented by UNHCR have on this process? Questions such as these prompted the UNHCR operation in Ecuador to develop a Local Integration Index, an innovative way to measure the level of integration of refugees in their host country. In 2014, as part of the Comprehensive Solutions Initiative, UNHCR Ecuador conducted a major data gathering process which provided comprehensive baseline data. This data was then used to design an index to measure the three main dimensions of local integration: legal, economic and socio-cultural. This document summarizes the main steps of the process and the conclusions reached.

Introduction

Ecuador has the largest recognized refugee population in Latin America. Out of approximately 60,000 refugees, 98% are from Colombia.¹ Refugees and asylum-seekers have

¹ According to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility.

² "Fifty-four percent of refugees say they have good relations with their neighbours and 59% feel fairly integrated into their neighbourhoods" (p. 21). *Urban Refugees in Ecuador: A study*

freedom of movement within Ecuador and access to basic rights and services according to Ecuadorian law.

Several studies have shown that most refugees in Ecuador prefer local integration over other durable solutions such as resettlement to a third country and voluntary repatriation to their country of origin².

Language, proximity to their own country and cultural similarities are some of the factors that motivate the refugee population to stay in Ecuador. Nonetheless, there are obstacles like discrimination and socio-economic conditions that need to be overcome to achieve full integration.

In 2013, UNHCR Ecuador developed a multi-year strategy focused on strengthening access to durable solutions refugees and asylum seekers. The Comprehensive Solutions Initiative (CSI) was developed in line with the National Plan for Well-Being (2014-2017), and will be implemented through 2018 in coordination with Ecuadorian institutions, civil society and the private sector. It includes three distinct dimensions: legal, social and economic.

In order to assess improvements in local integration as part of the CSI, UNHCR Ecuador designed a Local Integration Index, which allows to objectively measure the degree of local integration, and will therefore also serve as an important targeting tool to direct efforts to the most vulnerable cases.

First step: the Baseline

In 2014, UNHCR Ecuador commissioned an extensive study of statistical information on the socio-cultural, economic and legal situation of individuals of concern to the organization, which provided valuable *baseline data*.

From the onset, one of the major challenges was how to obtain sensitive, detailed and correct information from people who are generally unwilling to share personal information, and who may prefer to remain "invisible" or

on urban integration processes of the Colombian refugee population in Quito and Guayaquil. Executive summary FLACSO, 2011.

“hidden”³ because of their deep-seated fears of persecution and concerns over security, even in the country of asylum.

To overcome this challenge, the study applied a specific methodology developed to gather information from “hidden” populations known as *Respondent-Driven Sampling*⁴. According to this methodology, the best person to gather reliable data belongs to the same group being surveyed. Therefore the initial group of selected people would refer other participants, thereby creating a chain of information.⁵

The survey consisted of 130 questions (or variables) categorized according to legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, and addressed specific issues such as migratory status, documentation, access to work/employment, education and health-care services, and economic conditions.

Results of the Baseline

The survey was conducted mostly in urban areas, which are known to have the highest concentration of refugees and asylum seekers, and covered 3,649 households, comprising 9,392 people. Of these, 50.1% of the participants were men and 49.9% were women. Sixty-four percent of the participants were in the age range from 18 to 65 years old. The following is a summary of the main data collected:

Documentation: 78.8% of households had applied for refugee status. From those who applied, 43.0% were recognized as refugees and given a refugee visa, 7.8% hold a MERCOSUR⁶ visa, 4.7% a dependent⁷ visa, 8.7% have other⁸ types of visa, and the remaining ones are either going through the application process or have

been denied refugee status. Of the population recognized⁹ as refugees by the Ecuadorian Government, 48.6% entered the country between 2006 and 2010.



Education: 82.3% of refugee and asylum seeker children (5 to 14 years old) attend basic education compared to 94.2% of Ecuadorian children¹⁰. The school attendance rate is slightly higher for female students (83.2%) than for males (81.6%). Secondary school attendance for refugee and asylum seeker students from the age of 15 to 17 years old drops to 68.5% compared to 75.5% for Ecuadorian children.

Health: 77% of people who need medical care have access to public health-care services, and 12% access private health-care services. The remaining 11% of the population of concern does not access formal health-care services. The female population has more access to public health services (80.45%) than the male population (72.9%), which might be explained because of pre-natal care.

Disabilities: 4.3% of the population of concern has some type of permanent disability, while the rate among Ecuadorians is 5.6%. (INEC¹¹, 2010)

³ Hidden populations have two characteristics. Firstly there is no sampling framework, so the size and boundaries of the populations are unknown; secondly, privacy is a particularly sensitive issue, because belonging to this population often entails stigma and illegal behaviour, leading individuals to refuse to cooperate or to provide information. (Heckathorn, 1997, pág. 174)

⁴ Heckathorn, D. D. (1997). Respondent-Driven Sampling: A New Approach to the Study of Hidden Populations. *Social Problems*, 174-199.

⁵ The survey methodology was adapted by the Centre for Planning and Social Studies (CEPLAES), in coordination with UNHCR Ecuador (CEPLAES, 2014).

⁶ The MERCOSUR visa allows for citizens of MERCOSUR and its associated states the freedom to work and live within

the territory of the State Parties, provided that they have no criminal record within the past five years.

⁷ An Economic Dependant Visa is granted to an Ecuadorian citizen for his foreign spouse, children, parent, grandparent, or sibling

⁸ Refers to other types of visa granted by the Ecuadorian Government that were not explored in the baseline study given that they represent a small percentage.

⁹ In Ecuador the recognition of the refugee status takes the form of a visa.

¹⁰ Education data for the Ecuadorian population come from Ecuador's Integrated System of Social Indicators (SIISE, 2015): a governmental database which includes social indicators and which collects information from different official sources.

¹¹ National Institute of Statistics and Census.

Housing: 51.5% of all interviewed households consider their housing-conditions to be adequate¹². In provinces such as Esmeraldas, Santo Domingo, Sucumbíos and Orellana, however, this figure drops to under 40%. The level of access to basic services (water, sewerage, electricity, and others) is not significantly different from the urban local population at large. Overcrowding¹³ affects 12.7% of the surveyed population of concern, versus 10.8% of Ecuador's urban population. The average number of persons per room in the population of concern is 1.79, versus 1.70 in Ecuador overall (INEC, 2013).

Interpersonal relations: When asked about their relations with neighbours and Ecuadorians in general, nearly 85% of households surveyed rated these relations as good, very good or excellent.



Employment: 62.1% of refugees and asylum seekers are not adequately employed, meaning they receive less than the minimum wage¹⁴ and work less than eight hours a day; this compares to 46.7% inadequate employment among the Ecuadorian population.¹⁵

¹² The study also created and applied a concept that approximates "adequate housing" complementing the head of household's perception, with objective parameters such as access in the home to electrical energy, water, sewerage, waste disposal system, and crowding. According to Habitat Agenda, a definition adopted by all United Nations member states, "adequate housing" is defined as "more than a roof over one's head. It also means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; security of tenure; structural stability and durability; adequate lighting, heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure, such as water supply, sanitation and waste management facilities; suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and

Income and poverty: According to official data, 22.49% of the Ecuadorian population lives under the poverty line, and 7.65% in extreme poverty.

For the population surveyed, these figures are 24.9% and 14.2%, respectively. Forty three and a half percent earn less than the minimum wage, compared to 36% of Ecuadorians. The average monthly per capita income is USD 209.45. However, in female-headed households, this average drops to USD 181.99, while male-headed households average USD 223.08.

Solutions: Only 9% of the households surveyed expressed an interest in eventually returning to their country of origin.

The above data show that access to rights and enjoyment of services is, in general, available to UNHCR's population of concern in Ecuador, while economic factors still present challenges.

Local Integration Index

While success of local integration depends to a large extent on objective criteria (such as legal status, access to adequate employment, basic services...), there is also a subjective element related to the personal perception of individuals. The Local Integration Index seeks to combine the objective and subjective elements and thus calculate the extent of local integration across legal, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions.

To determine the perception of integration each respondent was read the following definition of local integration:

Local integration means forming part of a society where you have access to your rights to education, health, housing and employment, among others, and where you are able to maintain good relations with the

adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities, all of which should be available at an affordable cost." Source: http://www.globalhousingfoundation.org/adequate_shelter.html

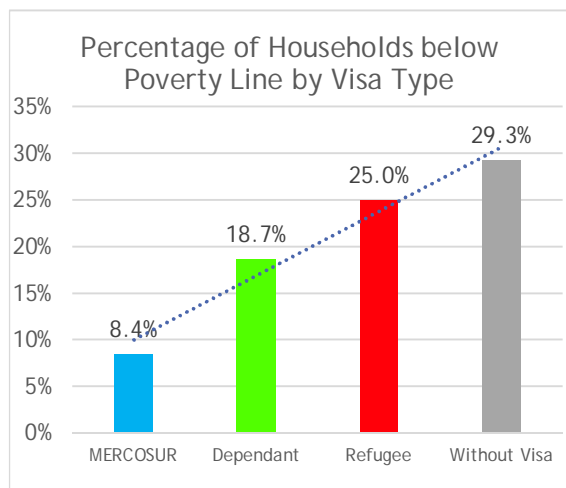
¹³ A home is considered overcrowded if more than three people share one bedroom.

¹⁴ According to the Ministry of Labour 2015. The minimum wage in Ecuador is USD354 per month; this is equivalent to USD135 in per capita terms.

¹⁵ INEC, December 2014.

people around you, in your neighbourhood and civil society organizations.¹⁶

Respondents were then asked whether they felt integrated or not. The responses were used to



determine which variables (i.e. legal migratory status, access to education, health, income level, among others) influence people in their answers on whether they feel integrated and to what extent. The degree of influence of each of the variables on perception of local integration formed the basis for how much weight each

variable was given within the Local Integration Index.

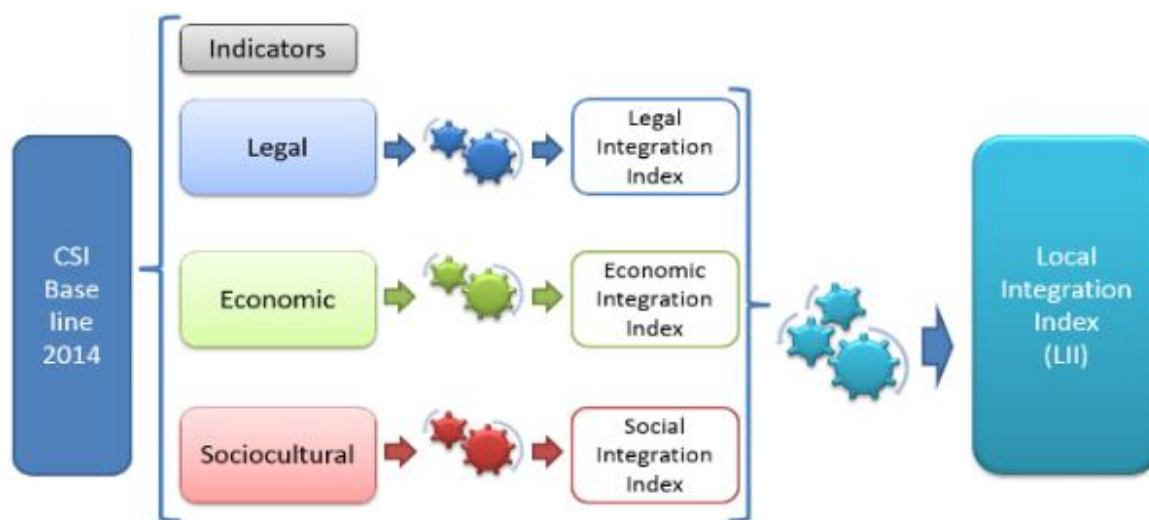
The weighing of the variables is an essential element of the Local Integration Index and is bound to this specific context and time. Therefore, the variables considered and their weight will be different in other operations.

Based on the results of the survey, the weight assigned to the legal dimension was 25.8%, the socio-cultural dimension 33.4%, and the economic dimension 40.8%.¹⁷ In spite of the relative low weight of the legal dimension, it should be noted that among all the individual variables used, the most important variable for the perceptions of local integration was whether or not the person was in possession of a legal migratory document.

To highlight the importance of the legal dimension it is interesting to see that the percentage of households falling below the poverty line increases in the absence of migratory documents.

Findings

Finally, these weights were applied to the baseline data to obtain the Local Integration Index, which indicates that the average level of



¹⁶ This definition takes elements from various definitions of local integration, so as to be as inclusive as possible, and was presented in the most accessible terms to the people who participated in the survey.

¹⁷ For further explanation over the methodology and calculations made to determine the weights, please refer to the complete document "New steps to measure local integration" (Cordova, 2015).

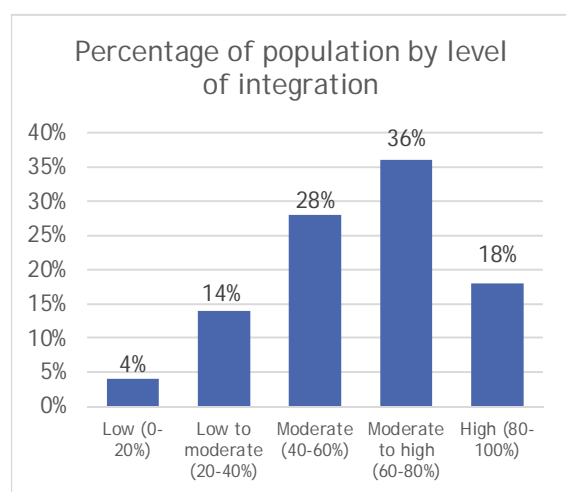
integration of the entire population of concern in Ecuador is 59.7% which could be considered a relatively high level of integration.

With respect to the separate dimensions, the average level of legal integration is 50.6%, socio-cultural integration was assessed at 67.0%, and economic integration at 59.5%¹⁸.

While the Local Integration Index represents the average level of local integration for the whole population of concern, it is also possible to divide the population among segments with a very high LII (of 80-100%), high (60-80%), moderate (40-60%), low (20-40%) and very low (<20%). This yielded the following results:

While the overall results are encouraging and show that over 50% of the population has a LII of high to very high, almost 20% are far from being considered as locally integrated.

The versatility of the Local Integration Index allows for group and individual level analysis. For example, the average local integration for male-headed households is 61.6%, while for female-headed households is 56.0%.



Conclusions

Local integration largely depends on the perception of each individual. However, this

¹⁸ To go from the level of integration in each dimension to the global Local Integration Index, it is necessary to apply the specific weights calculated for each dimension at an individual level and then calculate the average for the whole population.

study shows the possibility to estimate a measurement of local integration by using objective criteria relating to the legal, economic and socio-cultural situation of each individual.

In Ecuador, the Local Integration Index shows that the population of concern to UNHCR has achieved high levels of integration. At the same time, there is progress to be made for a significant proportion of the population.

The Index provides an opportunity for targeted interventions, in particular through inclusion in the Graduation Model¹⁹, a powerful tool to eradicate extreme poverty which the Office will implement from 2016, following promising results of pilot projects.

Targeting programmes to benefit individual and communities will be possible through linkages between the Local Integration Index and the forthcoming case management system, which will include specific protection considerations.

In this line, the Graduation Model's participants will be selected based on the household score in the Local Integration Index. The maximum score set to be part of the programme is 35%. However, this threshold should be evaluated during the implementation. To simplify the application of the index, the Office has created a Local Integration Index Calculator, through 20 simple questions.

The Local Integration Index can be applied on an individual/household basis as well as on a specific group basis. Given its versatility, the Local Integration Index enables the targeting and design of programmes aimed at improving integration for a given population, for a specific dimension, or for a specific sector of the population. Regular calculation to update the Index will show how local integration evolves in time within a specific operation.

The Local Integration Index can be used in a variety of contexts and will be a useful tool to UNHCR operations worldwide working to measure and make interventions relating to self-reliance, local integration, and the enjoyment of rights and thus improve the situation and well-being of refugees.

¹⁹ Further information about Graduation Model <http://trickleup.org/graduation/>