

IASFM20 Podcast Series Full Transcript

Episode 15. Closing

Opening credit

Forced migration due to war, conflicts, disaster, climate change and urban development impacts is a critical issue requiring attention from multiple stakeholders. The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, or IASFM, is a global interdisciplinary association committed to advancing research, policy analysis and understanding of forced migration and displacement. The 20th Conference of IASFM was held on the 21-23 January 2025 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with a topic of “Forced Displacement in an Urbanizing World”. This audio series, supported by the Washington University in St Louis, presents various reports from this conference.

The views, opinions, and contents expressed in this podcast are solely of those of the creators and do not necessarily reflect the views or possessions of Washington University in St Louis.

Host: Dr. Realisa Massardi

Hello everyone, welcome to the last episode in the IASFM20 Podcast Series. I am Realisa Masardi, your host for today. We finally arrive at the end of this series. We have given so many things to digest about whats going on in IASFM 2025!

First, we have heard from the IASFM Executive Committee members themselves, Veronica Fynn Bruey and Staci Martin, in the opening of this series. Afterwards, we have followed some testimonies from the organizers and participants of Pre-conference Workshops: Governance of Displacement and Protection in a Chaotic World’ and ‘Utopian Imagination: the Action Researcher for Transition Change’.

To deepen our understanding on Global Agenda for International Migration, this podcast has brought you Interview with Jemima McKenna on power asymmetry and domination in bilateral asylum governance in Australia and Nauru, and Interview with Abulogn Okello on navigating challenges in education in Kenya. Regarding the (re)conception of urban displacement & the right to the city, this podcast invited interview with Craig Mortley on innovative approaches to belonging in urban spaces. This podcast also interview with a conference panel on climate change, human (im)mobilities, and spatial justice to highlight the current phenomenon on Asia Pacific climate migration. We also have an in-depth discussion with Lerato Islam on applied theatre as research approach to highlight the innovative knowledge production on urban displacement that was presented during the conference.

We hope that you are also inspired with podcast episode when we talked with Mumtaz Chopan on his art installation and with Tasnia Prova about her photovoice exhibition. So many creativities were witnessed in the conference and we also have invited amazing people who join us in side events to share their experience such as those from Pechakucha Night Jogja, ARKOM Indonesia, Wadas Melawan, Emplace initiative youth, MaaHee Craft, and Marjin Kiri Publisher. This podcast series also have brought

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your exciting and heartwarming testimony from fifteen (15) conference participants. We hope you are inspired!

In this last episode, I will present to you two things. First, I will invite you to listen to the talk with scholars from Washington University in Saint Louis about their research and why they interest to sponsor the conference and this podcast. And then, I will share with you my experience being part of the organizer of IASFM20.

Now, we will hear from Mitra Naseh and Jihye Lee from Washington University in Saint Louis. They will talk about the highlight of their panel on economic integration of refugees who are resettled in the United States. They will tell us more about multidisciplinary analysis on economic integration. Stay tuned!

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Hi, everyone. Akino here. Here with me today is Mitra Naseh and Jihye Lee, from the Washington University in St. Louis, who has kindly sponsored this Podcast series on IASFM20 Conference. Now let us start with an introduction.

Guest: Dr. Mitra Naseh

Thank you. Yes. Hi, my name is Mitra Naseh. I'm a forced migration scholar and an assistant professor and founding director of the Forced Migration Initiative at the Brown School, Washington University in Saint Louis or WashU. My research focuses on the multidimensional social and economic integration of forcibly displaced population. And my interest in research is shaped by my interdisciplinary academic training, lived experiences as an immigrant, and extensive field work with non-governmental organization and United Nations, different United Nations agencies, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia. I'm so happy to be with you today. Thank you.

Guest: Jihye Lee

I'm Jihye, a second year doctoral student in social work at Brown School, WashU. And my research focuses on economic integration of refugees using a multi-dimensional approach.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Can you tell us a little bit about your research, the one that you introduced at the conference?

Guest: Jihye Lee

So our research, conducted in collaboration with Dr. Mitra Naseh examined economic integration among refugees in the United States with a specific focus on newly resettled Afghan refugees. So we, rather than relying on narrowly defining integration from employment or income, we applied a multi-dimensional framework. This framework consider overlapping domains, including income, employment, housing, education, health, and access to public services in the economic integration of refugees.

In this study we also account for experiences of discrimination. So this study built on a prior scoping review we conducted, which analyzed how economic integration has been conceptualized and

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measured in US-based research. That revealed the field's predominant focus on single indicators like employment or income and highlighted the need for more comprehensive measurement tools to capture economic integration better. Although some household in our study captured report employment, many continue to experience multiple overlapping deprivations, such as housing, overcrowding, limited access to education and health care and ongoing economic instability. So we can say, this finding challenges the assumption that employment alone indicate successful economic integration and underscore the importance of policies that address both material hardship and broader structure barriers across various dimensions of life.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

I understand that you came together as a panel, right? What was the discussion about during the panel? And what is your impression of the conference?

Guest: Jihye Lee

For me personally, this conference was a meaningful and inspiring experience, because it brought together scholars and individuals with lived experiences from around the world to engage with the complexity of forced migration in urban contexts. And also as a second year doctoral student in social work, it was both humbling and energizing to be in a space where so many presentations challenged dominant narratives and elevated community-led approaches, ethical research practice and decolonized perspectives. The emphasis on co-production and grounded inclusive research, really resonate with me and also align deeply with my values as a social work student and researcher. It was also a meaningful opportunity to present work rooted in both empirical data and social work ethics, and to learn from others who are reimagining integration to more inclusive and community informed lenses. Presenting in this space and learning from others has deepened my own commitment to pursuing research, that not only inform policy, but also uplift the voices and agency of displaced community.

Guest: Dr. Mitra Naseh

Yeah. So I was the facilitator of the panel. And what Jihye mentioned about the emphasis on co-creating, the emphasis of inclusiveness and kind of challenging the normalized narrative around what economic integration is, how it should be measured, I think was the highlight of this panel. We had 3 presenters, and each of them focused heavily on how people with lived experiences is very involved in their design, in their research, and how their findings or research adds to the current narrative and brings more attention to what Jihye mentioned, for example, multidimensional aspects of economic integration beyond income and employment. I think at least 2 of the presentations focused on the aspects of multidimensionality of economic integration and one of them heavily focused on how it is important to involve people with lived experiences and co-creating research and findings. These were the highlights for me.

It was a very valuable experience for me, although I have been in this field for almost 10 years. IASFM is always one of my favorite conferences but I think the one in Indonesia was the most interesting one that I attended with many, many participants with lived experiences, many, many presentation, focusing on

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inclusion of people with lived experiences. And of course it was the conference being held in a Global South was an attraction by itself.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

I'm wondering, with the study that you presented in the conference, what is the next step for this study? And what does it mean for your broader initiative on integration?

Guest: Dr. Mitra Naseh

Yeah, so this study is the continuous work of multiple years. Jihye referred to a scoping review we conducted last year about what is actually economic integration, or how it has been measured or framed in the literature. But before that, 2 years prior to that scoping review, we asked service providers what economic integration means, economic integration of refugees means to them. And now we are asking refugees themselves what economic integration means to you. So all these data and information have informed the design of a multidimensional economic integration measurement tool that our initiative is putting together, and soon we will publish a paper on that.

We have piloted the tool among around 300 refugees in 2 locations in the US. And the aim is to inform policy that, as Jihye mentioned, necessarily having an employment or even having an income above the poverty line does not mean that refugees have the certain level of wellbeing, meaning that they have a standard housing or they have good health or nutrition, or education or even if they are integrated. It's much more. It's much more comprehensive. And despite having an income above poverty line, despite having an employment, they may actually experience material hardship.

So our goal is to advocate for more multidimensional indices to be used in measuring well-being and economic integration of refugees. Informed policies as you may know, although our resettlement policies in the US is currently on pause, but the traditional resettlement policy in the US is heavily focused on employment, making sure that refugees find employment as soon as possible. And many of the jobs immediately available in such short period of time do not necessarily have career mobility. So there is not much attention into that or what happens after employment, what happens after securing minimum income. So our research, our ongoing study aims to address that looks broader, looking broader to what will be the future of refugees in the country. There is evidence showing that refugees employment rate on average is proportionate or even higher than US-based or US-born population, but they still experience higher rates of poverty and multidimensional poverty, which means deprivation in health, education, standards of living or housing.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Do you have an interesting story that you found throughout your journey of doing this research that you can share to listeners?

Guest: Dr. Mitra Naseh

So interesting a story is mainly when you talk to people and you really see that they are suffering although they have decent job or decent income. It is always eye-opening, knowing that how they kind of navigate

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the material hardship they have in the US. Their level of resilience. And what are the most important factors that we don't even think of.

So I used to work with Welcome Neighbor. It's a organization in Saint Louis that matches people in the city with newcomers to help them navigate the city. The family that I was sponsoring as a volunteer and helping them navigate the city was a family of five, and only the father was working. And the main reason was that the mother needed to take care of the children, young children. Childcare is extremely expensive and unaffordable in the US. The main challenge that the family has was not the income, was not the employment, so the father was working extra hours, extensive hours per day, and they were doing fine in terms of income. (It) was the transportation. Transportation in Saint Louis is not accessible. It's not a city with public transportation. So it was close to the New Year, and we asked the children, so what do you want for for the New Year present? And all they wanted was access to transportation to be able to go to park. They were confined in their house and neighborhood, and neighborhood was not necessarily safe, so even for them, playing outside was a dream. And they only could go to a park if a relative had a big enough car to take the whole family because... three children. These things, these stories are really eye-opening, that how much material hardship is beyond having a certain level of income.

The family couldn't buy a car because they didn't have credit score. It was not about the income. In the US, you might even have some saving to put a down payment for a car. But until you have a credit score to get a loan on it, it's pretty much impossible. We ended up fundraising for them at Wash U. They ended up buying a van. I remember that children wanted a red van. They got a red van and they wrote to me that they are going to the park regularly. But these examples, these stories are just like highlighting again if a family has an employment or income above the poverty line does not mean that they are necessarily doing well or not experiencing material hardship in other areas of life.

Host: Dr. Akino Tahir

Okay Mitra, I have one last question to you. I know that the Washington University in St. Louis is one of the main sponsors of IASFM as an association, and also of course, the sponsor of this podcast which is thank you very much for making this happen. But can you tell us a little bit about the why? Why is it? What's the interest?

Guest: Dr. Mitra Naseh

So Washington University has a strategic plan and global perspective is one of the guiding principles of the university's strategic plan. The university is deeply rooted in Saint Louis. They have initiatives that are focused on the city and collaborating with the community partners here in Saint Louis. But the vision of the university extends well beyond the region and Saint Louis as a city. The university firmly believes in discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and as a global effort they have a global perspective. And and WashU itself is truly a global community. I'm at Brown School. More than half of our students are international students.

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The fund and a sponsorship for the conference and this podcast specifically is coming from the WashU Provost Office, and that office specifically has a group, an office in itself, that focuses on global initiative. That office is overseen by the vice provost of graduate education and international affairs. And I think for them, sponsoring the conference and supporting the podcast aligned with the university commitment to building a strong international partnership. They want to support rigorous global research communities like IASFM. They are invested in education and information sharing, and they want to foster meaningful exchange between WashU and the world, which this conference and the podcast that you are creating is doing. So it's well aligned with, with the commitment and values that the university believes in and invested in.

Host: Dr. Realisa Massardi

What a very inspiring talk from Washington University in St. Louis' scholars. They have emphasized on what economic integration looks like from the perspective of refugees, not only from the perspective of the service providers. It is very intriguing to reflect that employment and having salary above poverty line does not mean that one is fully integrated economically into a host country. Anyway, it is very important to mention again that Washington University in St. Louis has been supporting and financing this podcast, so we would like to say special thanks to them especially to Mitra Naseh.

Now we have arrived to the second part of this podcast. As the co-chair of IASFM 2025, I can say without a doubt that being part of this amazing conference is one of the best things happened to me this year. We have hosted about 300 conference participants from around 50 countries with diverse background: academics, activists, urban planners, artists, refugees, NGO workers, and also students. Personally, this has been an enriching and assuring journey for me as forced migration scholar. I cannot thank Akino and RDI UREF enough for inviting me and Universitas Gadjah Mada, my university, to be part of IASFM. Even before the conference started I already learnt so much from many wonderful individuals in the team, including the volunteers with all of their ideas and innovative and creative works. This is definitely the far, far opposite of a lonely journey.

For the Department of Anthropology, Universitas Gadjah Mada, being part of the IASFM organization this year is a great opportunity that comes in the right time. In the department, we are developing research cluster Anthropology of Migration, which shelters various topic of migration and mobility. In the last ten years, the interest of UGM scholars studying forced migrations in multiple settings is growing and by hosting this conference we hope that this opportunity will strengthen our academic rigours. As part of Department of Anthropology's vision, we hope to critically produce knowledge with awareness of our positionality as researchers or scholars from post-colonial society. We hope that this conference inspires us not only to analyse the cases of forced migration but also to reflect our roles as academia, activist, and displaced persons in contributing to current situation.

Many people think event management is just this one job that everyone can do. But there are a lot of challenges involved, sometimes difficult negotiations and strategic mediation between people with different ideas. And we all have our ideas. Three institutions coordinating for this conference is definitely a big challenge. But we tried our best and we have witnessed and proven that the collaborations have

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made us stronger yet humbler as we realize that we have the same goal: to make the world a better and easier place to live, particularly for displaced persons anywhere.

So on behalf of the Organizing Committee of the IASFM 20th Conference, I would like to thank you all for your participation, discussion, engagement, and feedback to the conference. We would like to thank, first and foremost, our youth volunteers who come not just from Yogyakarta, but also from other cities, for their hard work and their super extra patience in us, Akino and I, and you participants, who sometimes ask them to do the impossible. Next, we want to thank the support staffs in the Department of Anthropology, the Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, and the vendor's staffs who have been on stand by from early morning to late evening to support our event.

Next, is to our institutions, Resilience Development Initiative and Department of Anthropology, Universitas Gadjah Mada, for agreeing to co-host this conference. Thank you for letting us take this opportunity, which we learn from and value so much. Thank you IASFM for your faith in us, for the space you give to work on our ideas and for supporting the choices we made. Our huge appreciation also goes to our Steering Committee and our collaborators, who have so kindly spent their time with us in shaping the conference as you experienced it, as well as to our sponsors for their contributions to the different parts of the conference.

To all participants, thank you again for being so understanding with all the challenges and perhaps unmet expectations. Our team heard so many kind words that uplift our spirit, which leave us good feelings at the end of the day.

We also want to extend our gratitude to everyone who participated in this podcast: all the guests and the speakers who are willing to be interviewed online and offline; Emplace Youth Initiative, our social media partner who has also supported this podcast production, particularly our field hosts Marofa Sharifi and Banafsha Mudaber; also to all the Academic Production House team at UGM; to Aireen Grace Andal, Staci Martin, and Akino Tahir our wonderful hosts, and all the IASFM20 podcast production crew who cannot be individually mentioned. Thank you so much, you all have done a great job!

So this is it. Thank you very much for listening to this series. We hope to see you in IASFM21 next year. And for the listener of Memento RDI UREF podcast, see you in the next podcast series!

Closing credit

The 20th International Association for the Study of Forced Migration Conference is organized by the Resilience Development Initiative in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

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