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Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Applicants in European Labour Markets Migrants and refugees are asked to integrate: But what does integration actually mean?

The politics of integration: adjusting to new lives in host societies SIRIUS Working Paper series By Michelle Pace and Dogus Simsek

Abstract

This paper outlines the academic debates on the topic of migrant and refugee integration. Given the diversity of migratory statuses, experiences and conditions around the world, we argue that the concept of integration needs to be carefully unpacked and contextualized. In rethinking integration, we contend that integration is not just about macro-level policy-making decisions, meso-level implementation or political discourses on these. A conception of integration must also include the perspective of those that are being told that they have to integrate. We therefore pay particular attention to the aspirations, experiences and actions of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs), whether "integration" is a concept they think about, how "integration" is interpreted by these targeted subjects and how the diverse nature of migrants and their multiple characteristics shape integration opportunities and challenges.

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Introduction

Integration is a highly contested, contentious and messy concept. As Castles et al. (2002: 112) argue "there is no single generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated". The concept is used by many policy makers, academics and migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs) themselves but understood and interpreted differently by most (Robinson, 1998). Conceptual discussions about migrant integration especially within states are mostly dominated by the framework of nation-states which highlights differences between the members of the receiving society and new comers. This understanding of integration defines the concept as a one-way process which places responsibility solely on new comers and omits the experiences of new comers throughout the so-called "integration" process. This has been challenged through a redefinition of the term as a two-way process, as multidimensional and as a long term process that involves migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs), as well as members of the receiving society, and one that incorporates the rights and obligations of both members of the receiving society as well as MRAs (ECRE, 2002; Phillimore and Goodson, 2008; EU, 2010; Simsek, 2018a). However, the concept of integration still faces methodological and analytical challenges. In this paper, we aim to revisit the concept of integration and offer an alternative methodological and analytical framework that answers the core question: integration for whom? Are we in essence discussing integration as perceived by the governments of receiving and sending countries, integration for the receiving/host societies and/or integration for MRAs themselves?

In order to answer this core question, we review the academic literature on integration; at the same time drawing upon examples from Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Denmark, Germany and Canada to show different approaches to integration. Our case selection follows a methodological reason: Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, as neighbouring countries, experienced a mass refugee intake from Syria, thus receiving the highest numbers of refugees compared

to many European countries¹. Amongst the latter (European) countries, Germany received by far the highest number of refugees from Syria. Although the number of recently (since 2011 to date) arrived refugees is not as high as in Germany, Sweden and Denmark are other European countries that did receive refugees. We would like to focus on the case of Denmark as a Nordic welfare state, because although Denmark's immigration and integration policy was traditionally built on liberal humanitarian principles, since 2015, Danish immigration and integration policy has been tightened more than 85 times, and the country is today ranked number 27 out of 38 by the Migrant Integration Policy Index.² Canada opened its borders to refugees and represents a case outside of Europe in this paper. These countries have different immigration and integration policies and have complex histories with flows of refugees.

We argue that there is a top down understanding of integration that takes into consideration the perspective of those that demand integration (states, receiving societies) but not of those compelled to encounter, live with and make sense of state-mandated processes of integration. It is our contention here that sound, nuanced policies should not only consider the needs and aspirations of MRAs but they should also take into account what integration means for MRAs and what these vulnerable groups of society aspire to achieve during their orientation processes in their new host societies.

Different Facets of Integration

In 2003 the European Commission published a comprehensive overview on integration policies in its 'Communication on Immigration, Integration and Employment' (EC, 2003). In this report, integration is defined as 'a two-way process based on reciprocity of rights and obligations of third-country nationals and host societies [and foreseeing] the immigrant's full participation'. Integration is thus conceived as a balance of rights and obligations, and integration policies include a holistic approach at targeting all dimensions (of integration including, economic, social, and political rights; cultural and religious diversity; and citizenship and participation). By placing responsibility for integration on the members of a receiving society and its institutions, the top-down/hierarchical understanding of integration was thus circumvented. Defining integration as a two-way process also highlights the importance of social connections established between MRAs and other members of the host society (Ager and Strang, 2004; 2008; Kazlowska, 2014; Phillimore, 2012).

In 2010, the European Commission insisted once again that integration requires 'not only efforts by national, regional and local authorities but also a greater commitment by the host community and MRAs' (EC, 2010). One year later, in its European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, the European Commission redefined integration as a three-way process which includes the sending state as a third factor that plays a crucial role in supporting the integration process (EC, 2011). In this way, the focus is shifted from two actors (immigrants and host community) to three actors (MRAs, receiving society and sending society). According to this new definition of integration, the sending state has a role to play in supporting the integration process of MRAs into receiving societies in three ways: 1) to prepare

content/uploads/sites/27/2018/03/Factsheet_Germany_O1_2018.pdf; Connor, P. (2018) "Most displaced Syrians are in the Middle East, and about a million are in Europe", Pew Research Centre, 29 January 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/

¹ UNHCR Country Update, Germany 2018, <u>https://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-</u>

² SIRIUS Project, 20 September 2018, "Denmark - Legal Barriers and Enablers", <u>https://www.sirius-project.eu/news/denmark-legal-barriers-and-enablers</u>

MRAs for integration into their receiving society before their departure from their country of origin through language courses, consultancy on policies and access to rights; 2) to support MRAs while they are in the EU, e.g. via Embassies; 3) to prepare for the migrants' temporary or definitive return with acquired experience and knowledge (EC, 2011:10). However, the integration processes of new comers differ due to diverse motivations for migration and different experiences in the receiving society in accordance with their migratory status (Castles *et al.*, 2002).

Consequently, even the three-way process model of integration may well not suffice for a nuanced understanding of the processes that refugees experience in their host societies: Especially those who had to flee from their country of origin, those who may not have a representative embassy in their host country and those who may not be able to return to the sending country for a long time. This three-way process model also overlooks the transnational connections that migrants may have with peers both back home but also in other countries. The three-way process is therefore not a very useful way to look at MRAs' experience in host societies since this definition omits the aspirations, experiences and actions of many MRAs in terms of how they negotiate their membership in their new society. The experience of an MRA in a host country is not a sequential single process; it starts from the very first moment of arrival in the new country and continues even if migrants return back to their country of origin. Returned migrants often need to get back into their country of origin. Return is thus one possible phase of the migratory cycle. When nuancing the latter, one has to take into account the journey an MRA experiences from a destination country to the country of origin, and what it takes to re-settle back into the country of origin. MRAs' needs should therefore be the guiding criteria for evaluating what policies should focus on when dealing with new arrivals.

In these complex processes of settling and resettling (or what the literature and policy makers refer to as integration), transnational links are vital to take into account in both sending and receiving societies.

According to Stubbs (1996: 36) "integration refers to the attempt to facilitate a sharing of resources - economic and social, an equalizing of rights - political and territorial, and the development of cultural exchanges and new cultural forms, between forced migrants and all other members of a society". At the minimum, integration involves rights, settlement and adjustment of (forced) migrants (Strang and Ager 2010). Ager and Strang (2004) developed a framework to operationalize integration processes. Their framework, which has been widely adopted, is structured around ten domains that are grouped under four headings as 'means and markers' (employment, housing, education, health), 'social connections' (social bridges, social bonds, social links), 'facilitators' (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and 'foundation' (rights and citizenship). In their later work, Ager and Strang (2008) proposed a comprehensive approach to integration by focusing on access to health services, the labour market, education and the willingness of migrants and refugees to be a part of the receiving society. Although their approach offers one way for understanding integration processes, it was developed in the context of the UK and does not take into account the specificity of the receiving society or the status, class and/or situation of refugees. Phillimore (2012: 3) highlights the importance of the development of social relationships between migrants and hosts, a sense of belonging in the host community and 'confidence to exercise rights and resources such as education, work and housing'. By defining integration as "the process of

becoming an accepted part of society", Garces and Penninx (2016:14) propose a disaggregated approach to the concept of integration, distinguishing three dimensions (the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious), two parties (the immigrants and the receiving society), and three levels (individuals, organizations, and institutions). According to their framework, the basic definition of integration encompasses three analytically distinct dimensions of the legal-political, the socio-economic and the cultural-religious which focuse on whether they are accepted and how they are positioned in each of these three dimensions (Garces and Penninx, 2016:1). With a focus on these three dimensions the light is shed on the responsibility of the state, the market and the receiving society rather than only on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and their responsibilities.

Garces and Penninx (2016)'s approach of measuring integration processes by focusing on the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious dimensions might be helpful for assessing levels of integration. The legal-political dimension refers to statuses and political rights of MRAs but excludes irregular migrants who are not part of the receiving society in the legal-political sense and might not be accepted by the receiving society; the socio-economic dimension refers to MRAs' access to institutional facilities in their search for work, housing, education and health care: the cultural-religious dimension pertains to the acceptance/otherwise of MRAs by the receiving society (which might enable/limit the participation of MRAs in their new society given their culture and religion). Consequently, processes of integration are highly dependent on structural determinants. In addition to this, MRAs themselves - with their varying characteristics, efforts and aspirations - and the members of a receiving society - with their respective characteristics and their perceptions towards and reactions to MRAs - are the main actors in this process. However, these two actor groups are fundamentally unequal in terms of power and access to resources, especially given the receiving society's institutional structure, policies and reactions to MRAs which is more decisive for the outcome of the process than the MRAs themselves are (Garces and Penninx, 2016). Garces and Penninx (2016:17-18) also include migrant organisations as well as receiving society organisations plus political institutions, labour market institutional arrangements, housing, education and public health institutions, and institutional arrangements for cultural and religious diversity that play a crucial role in processes of integration. Garces and Penninx's (2016)'s approach of measuring integration processes by focusing on the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious dimensions may be helpful for assessing the expectation of the host governments from the "integration" process. The important methodological question that arises from this approach is the way in which integration is defined generally and by whom: hence our emphasis on the need to ask integration for whom exactly? And integration seen through the perspective of the hosting governments or the MRAs themselves? That is to say, the intentions and expectations of MRAs from the receiving society, what they understand from integration, how they define integration, what they want to achieve after having lived in their host society for some years (often referred to as "successful integration" - although the time limit for measuring this success is often unrealistically set by the host countries, see Pace and Sen forthcoming), the role of countries of origin and transnational activities of MRAs might be crucial to support a "positive integration process" and to transcend a specific government focus on integration.

Transnationalism as a New Mode of Integration

Since the 1990s a transnational perspective on migration has been rapidly developing and

has been widely used across a range of disciplines to define and trace cross-border transactions. This perspective shows that people, social groups, communities and organizations function across the borders of nation-states: It also includes migrants' and nonmigrants' transnational practices, social spaces, ties, circuits, transnational communities, the cross-border transactions of goods, services, capital, ideas and examines the consequences for identity, citizenship, development and social movements in a globalized world (Glick Schiller et al, 1995; Faist et al, 2011; Faist, 1999; Levitt, 1998; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2004). The concept of transnationalism, in some definitions, stresses the relationship between the country of origin and the receiving society. For example, Portes defines transnational communities or transmigrants as people who are, "at least bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require simultaneous presence in both" (Portes, 1997: 76-77). Yet his understanding emphasizes the aspect of geographical mobility, which is limited to migrants who regularly cross borders between two or more nation-states and are often connected to more than one society economically, politically and culturally. However, those who cannot cross borders due to their status and limitations on movement might also be involved in transnational activities through familial, socio-cultural, economic and political engagement across the borders of nation-states and online social media activities (Mau, 2010; Faist, et al., 2013). Schunck (2011) defines transnational activities as specific actions of migrants which connect the receiving and the sending societies. These activities include sending remittances, physical border crossing, cultural activities, and exchanging social remittances in the forms of ideas and behaviours (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Levitt, 2001; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2003). Most research on transnational activities explores the links built with the sending country whilst the role of transnational activities in the process of integration of refugees has received little attention. In the case of many refugees, transnational economic activities mostly take place in the receiving country due to their limited geographical mobility and the on-going conflict in their countries of origin (Simsek, 2018b). Since the early 2000s, there has been a growing interest in the intersections between integration and transnationalism (Erdal, 2013; Faist, 2013; Kivisto, 2003; Levitt et al. 2003). Transnational activities have been seen as an alternative mode of integration: for example, Faist (2013) argues that integration and transnationalism should be seen as interrelated concepts. The intersection between integration and transnationalism has received controversial responses in the literature on migrant and refugee integration. Researchers who have looked at the relationship between integration and transnationalism have reported different findings based on the type of relationship between the two at the individual, micro level (Erdal 2013; Erdal and Oeppen 2013). On the one hand, some studies show that strong transnational ties correlate with weak integration; more specifically, the necessity of investing time and resources for integration might result in limiting the willingness to adapt to the receiving society, constructing strong loyalty to the sending country, and relying on transnational links to survive and to overcome discrimination in the receiving society, all of which impede the process of integration in the host country (Basch et al., 1994; Faist, 2000; Kivisto, 2001). On the other hand, some studies indicate that integration and transnationalism are mutually supportive. For instance, economic integration is an essential driver for transnational economic activities i.e. remittances and investment (Hammond, 2013; Levitt et al., 2003; Portes et al., 2002; Vertovec, 2009). The transnational perspective on integration focuses on the role of sending countries, which encourages emigrants' economic and political engagement from afar, such as remittances including economic, social, cultural and political elements. It has prompted development of sending countries through the impact of multifaceted processes of integration as well as the

continuity of transnational activities of migrants (King and Collyer 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen 2016). In the studies presented above, integration is generally state-assisted and seen as a multi-dimensional process. However, in the case of many refugees, access to fundamental rights is limited in practice (Simsek, 2018b). As stated by Ager and Strang (2008), access to rights is a fundamental aspect of integration. Without access to rights, we cannot talk about "successful integration".

The integration processes of refugees in European and non-European countries may also be differentiated in relation to legal status and access to fundamental rights. Research on refugee integration has not paid much attention to integration processes of forced migrants whose legal status is undetermined and who lack access to fundamental rights. This raises a fundamental question; can we talk about integration in the case of forced migrants whose legal status is undetermined and whose rights are limited? In this case, there is a need to focus on the intensions and aspirations of forced migrants to integration. In doing so, it is important to consider forced migrants as main agents in integration processes that help to transcend a national gaze on integration and place our focus instead on a transnational perspective. The intentions and aspirations of refugees to integrate into a receiving society, the acceptance of the receiving society of newcomers, the role of countries of origin and transnational communities (in the countries of origin and other destinations) may well be crucial in supporting integration processes.

States' perceptions on integration

Due to the ongoing global migration flows and resultant diverse societies, nation-states have paid more attention to the settlement of migrants which represent a complex and challenging issue. The concept of integration has been used by the stated when referring to migrants' adjustment and settlement. Policy makers mainly use the concept of integration to imply 'assimilation' rather than a two-way process which refers to mutual adaptation (Phillimore, 2012). The MRAs' integration in the UK and the Netherlands do not differ much in how immigrants are expected to integrate. According to Sobolewska et al. (2017:75)'s research within these countries the usual social divisions, such as education, class and existing attitudes towards immigration, matter very little to how integration is understood. That is to say, immigrants from 'preferred' backgrounds i.e. white, non-Muslim do have an advantage and are perceived as more integrated than immigrants from 'non-preferred' backgrounds, mainly Muslims (Sobolewska et al., 2017). In the case of Germany – which, as already stated, has received the highest number of Syrian refugees from the EU member states approximately 1,5 million – (since the 2015 "crisis"), most refugees have a place to live, can attend free German language courses and can work. Germany's integration system - which has been restructured since the arrival of Syrian refugees - has guickly adapted to their emergency demands and has been improving in the process. As a result of the high influx of asylum seekers in 2015, Germany has passed an Integration Act (2016). This new act does not provide a framework for extensive integration policies but contains mostly technical provisions such as those on labour market integration of refugees. By the end of 2015, Denmark proposed a new integration program that includes Danish language education and access to the labour market for refugees who have been granted asylum (Pace and Somdeep, forthcoming; Statsministeriet, 2015). In this case, the principles of refugee integration mainly focus on refugees' access to the labour market which means that successful integration is seen solely through the scope of employment – whatever that job may be (This means that an acquired job may well not reflect the skills of a refugee. See Pace and Sen, forthcoming, for more on this). In the case of Canada's immigrant integration policy, double standards between high and lower skilled immigrants compared to Canadian citizens are so visible that "they usually go unnoticed and strengthen the dependence of immigrants on their ethnic groups" (Goksel, 2018: 138).

The integration processes of refugees who recently arrived in Syria's neighbouring countries are different than those in Germany, Denmark and Canada with regards to access to rights in practice. For instance, in the case of Turkey - which hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees, the word integration is not used in policy documents. Rather, the term "harmonization" is preferred in order to highlight social harmony which means that there is no reference in official documents to access to rights when referring to integration of refugees (as integration policies until the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) was passed in 2013. Article 96 of the LFIP deliberately uses the term "harmonization" instead of "integration," which reflects a very cautious approach to integration issues. With the vast majority of refugees coming from non-European countries, Turkey did not feel obliged to develop a national integration policy until the ratification of LFIP, which, for the first time in April 2013, included provisions on migrant integration. Therefore, the integration of non-European asylum seekers is a new concept in Turkey referred to as "harmonization" (Icduygu and Simsek, 2016).

Turkish authorities followed an "open door" policy and began constructing tents in the southern provinces of Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, and Sanliurfa, and called Syrian refugees "guests," which granted them no legal rights and assumed a temporary, short stay. However, from a legal perspective, "guest" status implies unpredictability in terms of status and, therefore, this status is not internationally recognized (Simsek, 2017). Turkey is a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention Related to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Turkey signed and ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, though with a geographical limitation, which limits its responsibilities towards European refugees only. In April 2014, as mentioned above, Turkey adopted a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection that clarified the status of Syrians in Turkey, which is the temporary protection status, focusing on subsidiary protection and access to health, education, social assistance and the labour market. Access to fundamental rights (as key factors for political integration) is available for Syrian refugees in Turkey: However, access to these rights is difficult in practice. For instance, accessing work permits depends upon employers' willingness to offer contracts of employment and on refugees having held Turkish identification documents for at least six months. In most cases, employers do not want to apply for work permits for their Syrian employees because they do not want to pay a minimum wage and social security. Therefore, the majority of Syrians work in an informal economy without social security, face exploitation because of the lack of safe working conditions, overwork and are underpaid. In turn, all these factors lead to their exclusion from the wider society (Simsek, 2018a: 7). In 2016, in the context of Syrian refugees' integration, Turkey took an important step by announcing that Turkish citizenship would be granted to Syrian refugees. However, it was not clear whether all Syrians under temporary protection would be granted Turkish citizenship. According to the deputy prime minister, "citizenship will be granted initially based on criteria such as employment,

education level, wealth and urgency of one's situation".³ As highlighted by some scholars (Akcapar-Koser and Simsek, 2018 and Simsek, 2018a), the citizenship offered to Syrians is an example of selective citizenship which targets Syrians who invest in Turkey and who are professionals. This will create an unequal situation among Syrians in terms of access to their rights and will also influence the integration process of those who do not have the required economic resources, professions and skills. Therefore, Turkey's integration policy towards Syrian refugees is an example of a neo-liberal policy which favors wealthy refugees. As a result, Syrians go through a "class-based integration" process - which refers to the allocation of rights based on refugees' economic resources (Simsek, 2018a).

The recognition of refugees in the cases of Jordan and Lebanon shares similarities with Turkey. Although both countries - Jordan and Lebanon - have hosted large numbers of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees for a long time and recently Syrian refugees, neither country has ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol which resulted in these neighbouring countries viewing Syrians as guests (not as refugees). These two countries, moreover, do not recognise the rights guaranteed by the convention which cause refugees to be dependent on humanitarian assistance offered by the receiving countries and international agencies (Yahya et al., 2018). According to Yahya et al. (2018) refugees in Lebanon face considerable economic, legal, and social difficulties which is a result of Lebanon's policies on refugees: These policies effect their residence status, employment, housing, and access to services such as health and education being dictated by "security concerns". This in turn leaves refugees vulnerable to exploitation and limits their access to basic needs. Similar to Turkey, the Lebanese government prefers the use of the term "social cohesion" (instead of integration) which does not take into account refugees' access to fundamental rights (See Pace, M. and Sen, S. (ed.) (2018), esp. contribution by Khattab et al.). The case of Jordan also signifies the need for economic integration of refugees for the economic development needs of the country. Lenner and Turner (2018:25) show that Jordan's policy on the integration of refugees - which emphasises the need to 'make refugees work' - has been "successful" and the country's humanitarian obligations toward Syrian refugees and Jordan's economic development needs have thus been brought together.

In this way, humanitarian and economic actors (at both national and international, governmental and non-governmental levels) are intertwined to force refugees into the labour market. In both countries, social tensions which inevitably arise due to the need to share scarce natural resources, a highly competitive labour market and neo-liberal migration policies have led to violence and the harassment of refugees (Yahya *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, we can argue that the integration policies of countries with the highest MRAs need to consider the needs and aspirations of MRAs and also what MRAs want to achieve at the end of their lived experiences in their host countries in order for any discourses about "successful integration" in the long term.

³ DW: 'Syrian refugees express mixed feelings over Turkish citizenship offer', 14 July 2016, <u>http://www.dw.com/en/syrian-refugees-express-mixed-feelings-overturkish-citizenship-offer/a-19399783</u> (accessed November 2018).

Conclusion: Agents' perceptions on integration

This paper has revisited the concept of integration and offered an alternative methodological and analytical framework that answers the core question: integration for whom? In order to answer the core question, the academic literature on integration has been reviewed and examples from Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Denmark, Germany and Canada have been drawn upon to show different policy approaches to integration. We highlighted that there is a top down understanding of integration that takes into consideration the perspective of those that demand integration (states, receiving societies) but not of those compelled to encounter, live with and make sense of state-mandated processes of integration.

The MRAs' own perceptions on integration in both academic and policy debates are often overlooked. What migrants, refugees and asylum seekers think about integration, how they define integration, what "it" means for them are all important questions that need further nuanced explication. Integration policies have also led to MRAs' participation / entry and mobility restrictions and, feelings of insecurity, unsafety and instability. Current integration policies' (especially on the settlement of forced migrants) lack of focus on MRAs' access to fundamental rights also causes social tensions between forced migrants and members of the receiving societies.

What MRAs feel about "getting integrated", what they feel about their human security, safety and stability in the receiving countries, how they can integrate when they do not know for how long they are allowed to stay – all these issues need to be carefully reflected upon when reconceptualising integration. The voices of MRAs in academia and within policy circles are rarely heard and without knowing their needs and aspirations, and attempting to focus on these needs, it is very hard to talk about "successful" integration. Embracing diversity, emphasising equal opportunities for all and applying a bottom-up, human rights frame into integration policies would be the ideal approach for a humanitarian treatment of MRAs in receiving countries - regardless of their economic, political and socio-cultural circumstances. If policies would treat people equally, integration would not be a burden on any one selected group (host community or MRAs themselves): Rather, it would be a solution in the right direction. Cities are important spaces for MRAs and respond to some of the challenges related to their integration into society - through integrated urban planning, community engagement, policy reforms and responsive city leaders who meet the needs of migrants.⁴

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⁴ Charles, A. and Guna, D. (2017) "We need to get better at integrating migrants into our cities. Here's how", World Economic Forum, 25 October 2017, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/we-need-to-get-better-at-integrating-migrants-into-our-cities-here-s-how/

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