Migration Dynamics: Navigating Challenges, Seizing Opportunities, and Enhancing Emotional and Social Well-being[1]

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Abstract

Migration is a complex and multifaceted process that significantly impacts the emotional and social well-being of individuals. This paper explores the dynamics of migration, focusing on navigating the challenges and seizing the opportunities it presents. Migrants often face significant pre-migration stressors, including exposure to armed conflict and economic hardships, leading to trauma and long-term psychological issues. The migration journey itself is fraught with dangers, including violence, exploitation, and separation from family, further exacerbating emotional distress. Post-migration barriers, such as difficulties in accessing healthcare, poor living conditions, and discrimination, contribute to ongoing stress and anxiety among migrants. Despite these challenges, migration also offers substantial opportunities for both migrants and host societies. Migrants contribute to economic growth through their labor and entrepreneurial activities, enrich host societies with cultural diversity, and foster social integration through community support and engagement. Case studies from Europe and the Middle East illustrate the varied experiences of migrants and the responses of host countries. This study emphasizes the need for inclusive policies and accessible mental health services to address the unique emotional and social needs of migrants, fostering their successful integration and overall well-being. By recognizing and valuing the contributions of migrants, societies can create more inclusive and resilient communities that benefit everyone.
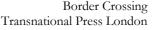
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Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon involving the movement of people across borders for various reasons, including economic opportunities, conflict, and environmental factors. As of 2024, there were approximately 281 million international migrants, representing 3.6% of the global population (Migration Data Portal, 2024). Migration has been a part of human history for centuries, shaping societies and cultures worldwide. In recent years, the scale and complexity of migration have increased due to globalization, technological advancements, and geopolitical changes. For instance, the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, has led to one of the largest displacement crises in modern history, with over 13 million people forced to flee their homes (World Health Organization, 2021). This crisis highlights the urgent need to address the emotional and social well-being of migrants.

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Economic factors are a significant driver of migration. Many individuals migrate in search of better job opportunities and improved living standards. For example, economic migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe has been driven by high unemployment rates and poverty in the region (World Migration Report, 2024). Migrants often undertake perilous journeys, facing life-threatening conditions and exploitation, to reach their destinations. The Mediterranean Sea crossing is one of the most dangerous migration routes, with thousands of migrants losing their lives each year (World Migration Report, 2024).

Environmental factors also play a crucial role in migration. Climate change and natural disasters force people to leave their homes in search of safer environments. For instance, the Pacific Island nations are experiencing rising sea levels, leading to the displacement of entire communities (World Migration Report, 2024). These environmental migrants face unique challenges, including loss of cultural identity and difficulties in adapting to new environments.

Migration is not only an international phenomenon but also occurs within countries. Internal migration, such as rural-to-urban migration, is common in many developing countries. In China, for example, millions of rural residents migrate to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities (World Migration Report, 2024). This internal migration has significant implications for social and emotional well-being, as migrants often face challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and social services.

The emotional and social well-being of migrants is profoundly affected by the migration process. Pre-migration stressors, such as exposure to armed conflict and economic hardships, can lead to trauma and long-term psychological issues. The migration journey itself is often fraught with dangers, including violence, exploitation, and separation from family. Post-migration barriers, such as discrimination, poor living conditions, and legal uncertainties, further exacerbate the emotional and social challenges faced by migrants (World Health Organization, 2023).

Despite these challenges, migration also presents opportunities for both migrants and host societies. Migrants contribute significantly to the economies of host countries through their labor and entrepreneurial activities. They also enrich host societies with cultural diversity and new perspectives. Social integration and community support are essential for enhancing the well-being of migrants, fostering a sense of belonging and life satisfaction (Song, Corcoran, & Zahnow, 2024).

In conclusion, migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with significant implications for emotional and social well-being. Addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with migration requires comprehensive policies and support systems that promote integration, protect rights, and enhance the overall well-being of migrants. By recognizing and valuing the contributions of migrants, societies can create more inclusive and resilient communities that benefit everyone.

Conceptual of Immigrants

Immigrants are individuals who move from one country to another with the intention of settling there permanently. This movement can be driven by various factors, including economic opportunities, family reunification, education, or a desire for a better quality of life. Immigrants typically undergo legal processes to obtain residency or citizenship in their new country, which can involve visas, work permits, and other legal documentation (Encyclopædia

Britannica, 2023). Immigrants can be categorized based on their reasons for migration and their legal status in the host country. Here are the main categories:

1. Economic Immigrants

Skilled workers are individuals with specific skills, qualifications, or expertise that are highly sought after in the host country, often migrating through skilled worker programs or employment-based visas. Examples include engineers, doctors, IT professionals, and other highly skilled professionals. Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, are immigrants who move to start businesses and contribute to the host country's economy. They typically enter through investor or entrepreneur visa programs designed to attract individuals capable of creating jobs and stimulating economic growth.

2. Family-Sponsored Immigrants

Family-sponsored immigrants include both immediate relatives and extended family members of citizens or permanent residents. Immediate relatives, such as spouses, children, and parents, often migrate for family reunification, a common reason for migration supported by specific visa categories in many countries. Extended family members, including siblings, aunts, uncles, and other relatives, are also sponsored by family members already residing in the host country. However, the immigration process for extended family members can be more complex and may involve longer waiting periods due to lower priority in immigration systems.

3. Humanitarian Immigrants

Humanitarian immigrants include refugees, asylees, and individuals granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Refugees flee their home country due to persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and are protected under international law with assistance from organizations like the UNHCR. Asylees, similar to refugees, seek asylum due to fear of persecution but apply for asylum after arriving in the host country, whereas refugees are granted status before entering. TPS is granted to individuals from countries experiencing ongoing armed conflict, environmental disasters, or other extraordinary conditions, allowing them to stay in the host country temporarily until it is safe to return home.

4. Diversity Immigrants

Diversity immigrants are individuals who migrate through programs like the Diversity Visa Lottery, which is designed to promote immigration from countries with historically low rates of immigration to the host country. For example, the United States conducts a diversity visa lottery where applicants are selected randomly and must meet specific eligibility criteria to qualify. This program aims to enhance the cultural diversity of the host country by providing opportunities for individuals from underrepresented nations to immigrate.

5. Non-Immigrants

Non-immigrants include students, temporary workers, and tourists or visitors who move to another country temporarily. Students hold student visas to pursue education and may be allowed to work part-time. Temporary workers move for short-term employment opportunities, such as seasonal or contract work. Tourists and visitors travel for short periods

for tourism, business, or family visits, holding temporary visas without permission to work or stay long-term.

6. Undocumented Immigrants

Undocumented immigrants include individuals who enter a country without legal permission, often crossing borders illegally, and visa overstayers who enter legally on temporary visas but remain after their visas have expired.

Refugees as a Type of Immigrant

Refugees are a specific category of humanitarian immigrants. They are individuals who are forced to flee their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees are unable to return home safely and often seek asylum in other countries. They are protected under international law, specifically the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (United Nations, 2021).

Challenges of Migration

Migration is a multifaceted process that presents numerous challenges for individuals and communities. These challenges can be broadly categorized into pre-migration stressors, difficulties encountered during the migration journey, and post-migration barriers. Each of these stages has significant implications for the emotional and social well-being of migrants.

1. Pre-Migration Stressors

Exposure to Armed Conflict and Violence: Many migrants flee from regions affected by armed conflict, violence, and persecution. These experiences can lead to trauma and long-term psychological issues. For instance, the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, has displaced over 13 million people, many of whom suffer from PTSD and other mental health conditions (World Health Organization, 2021). The trauma from such experiences can have lasting effects, making it difficult for migrants to adjust to new environments.

Economic Hardships: Lack of educational and economic opportunities in home countries often drives migration. Economic instability can cause significant stress and anxiety. In sub-Saharan Africa, economic migration is a common response to poverty and unemployment (World Migration Report, 2024). Migrants from these regions often leave their homes in search of better job opportunities and improved living standards, but the uncertainty and risks associated with migration can exacerbate their stress levels.

2. Migration Journey

Life-Threatening Conditions: Migrants often face dangerous conditions during their journey, including violence, exploitation, and detention. These experiences can exacerbate pre-existing mental health issues. For example, migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe frequently encounter life-threatening situations (World Migration Report, 2024). The journey can be perilous, with many migrants facing physical harm, abuse, and even death. These traumatic experiences can have severe psychological impacts, leading to conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Separation from Family: The journey often involves separation from family and support networks, leading to feelings of isolation and helplessness. This separation can have long-term emotional impacts, particularly on children. Migrants may be forced to leave behind loved ones, creating emotional distress and a sense of loss. The lack of familial support can make it challenging for migrants to cope with the stresses of migration and adaptation to new environments (World Migration Report, 2024).

3. Post-Migration Barriers

Access to Healthcare: Migrants frequently encounter difficulties in accessing healthcare and basic services in host countries. This can lead to untreated health issues and deteriorating mental health. In the United States, undocumented migrants often avoid seeking medical care due to fear of deportation (World Health Organization, 2023). The lack of access to healthcare services can result in untreated physical and mental health conditions, further exacerbating the challenges faced by migrants.

Living Conditions: Poor living conditions, social isolation, and legal uncertainties contribute to stress and anxiety among migrants. Many migrants live in overcrowded and substandard housing (World Migration Report, 2024). These living conditions can negatively impact their physical and mental health, leading to increased stress and a lower quality of life. Social isolation, resulting from language barriers and cultural differences, can further exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression.

Discrimination and Racism: Migrants often face discrimination and racism, which can negatively impact their mental health and hinder social integration. Studies have shown that discrimination is a significant predictor of poor mental health outcomes among migrants (Vaquera, Aranda, & Sousa-Rodriguez, 2017). Discrimination can take various forms, including verbal abuse, exclusion from social and economic opportunities, and systemic biases. These experiences can lead to feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and depression, making it difficult for migrants to integrate into their new communities.

4. Mental Health Implications

Prevalence of Mental Health Issues: Studies show that migrants have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD compared to host populations. Women and children are particularly vulnerable. For example, a study found that 30% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon suffer from depression (World Health Organization, 2021). The cumulative effect of pre-migration stressors, traumatic migration journeys, and post-migration barriers can lead to significant mental health challenges for migrants. Addressing these mental health issues requires comprehensive support systems and accessible mental health services tailored to the unique needs of migrant populations.

Opportunities for Migration

Migration, while presenting numerous challenges, also offers significant opportunities for both migrants and host societies. These opportunities can be broadly categorized into economic contributions, cultural enrichment, and social integration. Each of these areas highlights the positive impacts of migration and underscores the potential benefits that can be harnessed through effective policies and support systems.

1. Economic Contributions

Labor and Entrepreneurship: Migrants contribute significantly to the economies of host countries through their labor and entrepreneurial activities. For example, migrants accounted for 13% of the U.S. labor force in 2023 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Migrants often fill labor shortages in various sectors, including agriculture, construction, healthcare, and technology. Their participation in the labor market helps to sustain economic growth and productivity.

In addition to their contributions as employees, many migrants become entrepreneurs, starting businesses that create jobs and stimulate economic growth. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that immigrant-owned businesses in the U.S. are more likely to export goods and services, thereby contributing to the country's international trade (Kerr, Kerr, & Lincoln, 2015). These businesses not only provide employment opportunities but also foster innovation and competitiveness in the market.

Remittances: Migrants often send remittances to their home countries, providing financial support to their families and contributing to the economic development of their communities. According to the World Bank, global remittances reached $714 billion in 2024, with low- and middle-income countries receiving $540 billion. These remittances help to reduce poverty, improve access to education and healthcare, and support local businesses (World Bank, 2024).

2. Cultural Enrichment

Diversity and Exchange: Migration fosters cultural diversity and exchange, enriching host societies with new perspectives and traditions. For instance, cities like New York and London are known for their cultural diversity, largely due to migration (Vertovec, 2007). Migrants bring with them unique cultural practices, languages, cuisines, and art forms, contributing to the cultural mosaic of their new communities.

Cultural diversity enhances social cohesion and mutual understanding, promoting tolerance and respect among different groups. It also provides opportunities for cultural exchange and learning, allowing individuals to experience and appreciate different ways of life. Festivals, cultural events, and community activities organized by migrant groups help to celebrate and preserve their cultural heritage while fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Innovation and Creativity: Migrants often bring innovative ideas and creative solutions to their host countries. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences can lead to new approaches to problem-solving and innovation. A study by the National Foundation for American Policy found that immigrants have founded more than half of the U.S. startups valued at $1 billion or more. These startups are at the forefront of technological advancements and contribute to the country's economic dynamism (Anderson & Platzer, 2020).

3. Social Integration

Community Support: Social networks and community support play a crucial role in the well-being of migrants. Engaging in community activities enhances a sense of belonging and life satisfaction. For example, community centers and migrant organizations provide essential support and resources to new arrivals (Song, Corcoran, & Zahnow, 2024). These organizations offer language classes, job training, legal assistance, and social services, helping migrants to navigate their new environment and integrate into society.

Transnational Networks: Migrants often maintain connections with their countries of origin, creating transnational networks that facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and opportunities. These networks can benefit both the host and home countries. For instance, diaspora communities often engage in philanthropic activities, supporting development projects and humanitarian efforts in their home countries. They also serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between nations (Levitt, 2001).

Personal Development: The experience of migration can lead to personal growth and development. Migrants often develop resilience, adaptability, and cross-cultural competencies, which can be valuable assets in an increasingly globalized world. These skills enhance their employability and enable them to contribute effectively to their new communities. Programs that promote social integration and mental health awareness can significantly improve migrants' well-being and help them to achieve their full potential (Vaquera, Aranda, & Sousa-Rodriguez, 2017).

Implications for Emotional and Social Well-being

Migration has profound implications for the emotional and social well-being of individuals. These implications can be categorized into emotional challenges, coping mechanisms, social connectedness, and policy recommendations.

1. Emotional Challenges

Fear and Anxiety: Migrants often experience fear and anxiety due to their uncertain status and the challenges of adapting to a new environment. The fear of deportation, uncertainty about the future, and the stress of navigating a new cultural and social landscape can lead to significant emotional distress. For instance, undocumented migrants in the United States frequently live in fear of being discovered and deported, which can exacerbate anxiety and stress (Vaquera, Aranda, & Sousa-Rodriguez, 2017).

Trauma and PTSD: Many migrants have experienced traumatic events before and during their migration journey, such as violence, persecution, and life-threatening conditions. These experiences can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related mental health issues. For example, Syrian refugees who have fled conflict zones often suffer from PTSD and require specialized mental health support to address their trauma (World Health Organization, 2021).

Depression and Loneliness: The separation from family and support networks, coupled with the challenges of integrating into a new society, can lead to feelings of depression and loneliness. Migrants may struggle with a sense of loss and isolation, particularly if they are unable to maintain connections with their cultural and social roots. Studies have shown that migrants have higher rates of depression compared to host populations, highlighting the need for targeted mental health interventions (Song, Corcoran, & Zahnow, 2024).

2. Coping Mechanisms

Community Support: Positive coping mechanisms, such as community support and engagement in social activities, are essential for emotional resilience. Community centers, migrant organizations, and support groups provide a sense of belonging and help migrants navigate the challenges of their new environment. These organizations offer language classes,

job training, legal assistance, and social services, which can significantly improve migrants' well-being (Song, Corcoran, & Zahnow, 2024).

Cultural Preservation: Maintaining cultural practices and traditions can provide a sense of continuity and stability for migrants. Cultural events, festivals, and community gatherings allow migrants to celebrate their heritage and connect with others who share similar experiences. This cultural preservation can enhance emotional well-being and foster a sense of identity and belonging (Vertovec, 2007).

Access to Mental Health Services: Access to culturally sensitive mental health services is crucial for addressing the unique emotional needs of migrants. Mental health professionals who understand the cultural and social contexts of migrants can provide more effective support and interventions. Programs that promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma can also encourage migrants to seek help when needed (World Health Organization, 2023).

3. Social Well-being

Social Connectedness: Social connectedness is vital for the well-being of migrants, providing emotional support and enhancing life satisfaction. Building social networks and forming connections with others in the community can help migrants feel more integrated and supported. Social connectedness can also mitigate the negative effects of discrimination and social isolation (Song, Corcoran, & Zahnow, 2024).

Reducing Discrimination: Efforts to promote inclusivity and reduce discrimination are crucial for improving the social well-being of migrants. Anti-discrimination policies, diversity training, and public awareness campaigns can help create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for migrants. Reducing discrimination can enhance migrants' sense of belonging and improve their overall quality of life (Vaquera, Aranda, & Sousa-Rodriguez, 2017).

4. Policy Recommendations

Inclusive Mental Health Services: There is a need for inclusive and accessible mental health services tailored to the needs of migrants. Policies should promote social integration and reduce discrimination. For example, the implementation of culturally sensitive mental health programs can help address the unique needs of migrant populations (World Health Organization, 2023).

Support for Family Reunification: Policies that support family reunification can help mitigate the emotional challenges associated with separation from family members. Reuniting families can provide emotional support and stability for migrants, enhancing their overall well-being. Family reunification policies should prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups, such as children and elderly migrants (World Migration Report, 2024).

Community Engagement Programs: Community engagement programs that promote social integration and cultural exchange can enhance the well-being of migrants. These programs can include language classes, cultural events, and volunteer opportunities that encourage interaction between migrants and host communities. Community engagement can foster mutual understanding and respect, creating a more inclusive society (Song, Corcoran, & Zahnow, 2024).

Past Case Studies

1. Internal Migration in Ghana

A study on North-South migration in Ghana revealed that while migrants reported improved living standards, many could not attain overall well-being due to low health and education scores. This highlights the need for a multidimensional approach to assessing migrant well-being (Darko, Schech, & Saikia, 2024). The study found that migrants who moved from the northern regions to the southern cities of Ghana experienced better economic opportunities but faced challenges in accessing healthcare and education. The lack of social services and support networks in urban areas contributed to their overall lower well-being.

2. Impact on Family Relationships

Research on the effects of migration on family relationships found that migration can lead to the splitting and forming of emotional bonds, psychological illness, and transgenerational conflicts. These findings underscore the importance of addressing the emotional and social impacts of migration on families (Bucher-Maluschke, Gondim, & Pedroso, 2017). The study highlighted that prolonged separation from family members can strain relationships and create emotional challenges for both migrants and their families. Reunification and support for family cohesion are essential for the well-being of migrant families.

3. Parental Migration and Child Well-being

A study on the impact of parental migration on children's psychosocial well-being showed that prolonged parent-child separation can lead to emotional challenges for children. This emphasizes the need for policies that support family reunification and child well-being (Bucher-Maluschke, Gondim, & Pedroso, 2017). The study found that children left behind by migrating parents often experience feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and depression. Providing support for these children and facilitating family reunification can help mitigate these emotional challenges and improve their overall well-being.

4. The 2015 European Refugee Crisis

In 2015, a record 1,005,504 asylum seekers and migrants reached Europe in search of security and a better future. The majority of these individuals came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, fleeing conflict and persecution. The crisis highlighted the urgent need for coordinated responses and support systems to manage the influx of migrants and refugees.

Migrants faced perilous journeys, with many crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Almost 4,000 people went missing during the journey, presumed to have drowned. Most arrivals landed in Italy and Greece, while others trekked from Turkey through the Balkan states into Hungary. The crisis exposed the weaknesses of the EU's legal and operational framework, as well as the differences in interpretation and application of the principle of solidarity between member states.

Germany's announcement in August 2015 to suspend the Dublin Regulation for Syrian asylum seekers allowed people to claim asylum in Germany, rather than in the country where they first reached Europe. This policy change, along with the establishment of "hotspots" for identifying, registering, and relocating or returning migrants, aimed to manage the crisis. However, the level of success of these interventions has been questioned, given the low

relocation numbers and criticisms of the EU-Turkey Agreement for its alleged violation of International Refugee Law (Open Case Studies, 2023).

5. Migrants and Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece

The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, has led to the displacement of over 4 million Syrians to neighboring countries. Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece have been significantly impacted by the influx of refugees, with each country hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees.

Jordan: Hosts approximately 639,000 UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees, accounting for 8% of its population. The influx has strained the country's resources, including healthcare, education, and housing.

Lebanon: Hosts around 1 million Syrian refugees, making up 17% of its population. The high number of refugees has placed immense pressure on the country's infrastructure and social services.

Turkey: Hosts 2.7 million Syrian refugees, representing 3.5% of its population. The country has faced challenges in providing adequate support and integration opportunities for refugees.

Greece: As a primary entry point for migrants and refugees, Greece has struggled with overcrowded reception centers and limited resources to support the influx.

Each country has implemented various policies and programs to address the needs of refugees. These include providing access to healthcare, education, and social services, as well as efforts to integrate refugees into local communities. However, the scale of the crisis has highlighted the need for greater international support and cooperation to manage the challenges effectively (IEMed, 2023).

6. Libya, Tunisia, and Niger: Anti-Migration Policies

Libya, Tunisia, and Niger have implemented anti-migration policies aimed at curbing the flow of migrants to Europe. These policies have had significant consequences for migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Libya: The country has become a major transit point for migrants attempting to reach Europe. Anti-migration policies, including detention and deportation, have led to human rights abuse and dire conditions for migrants in detention centers.

Tunisia: Like Libya, Tunisia has faced challenges in managing the flow of migrants. Anti-migration policies have resulted in increased risks for migrants, including exploitation and abuse by smugglers.

Niger: As a transit country, Niger has implemented policies to prevent migrants from crossing into Libya and onward to Europe. These policies have led to increased dangers for migrants, including exposure to harsh desert conditions and exploitation by traffickers.

The anti-migration policies in these countries have been criticized for their counterproductive effects, leading to increased risks and human rights violations for migrants. The high number of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean since 2014, estimated at over 25,000, underscores the need for more humane and effective migration policies (Middle East Institute, 2023).

Conclusion

Migration presents both significant challenges and substantial opportunities that profoundly impact the emotional and social well-being of migrants. The pre-migration stressors, perilous journeys, and post-migration barriers that migrants face can lead to elevated risks of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive support systems and accessible mental health services tailored to the unique needs of migrant populations.

Despite the difficulties, migration also brings economic benefits and cultural enrichment to host societies. Migrants contribute to economic growth through their labor and entrepreneurial activities, and their diverse backgrounds and experiences foster innovation and creativity. Cultural diversity enhances social cohesion and mutual understanding, promoting tolerance and respect among different groups. Social integration and community support are essential for enhancing the well-being of migrants, fostering a sense of belonging and life satisfaction.

Effective policies that promote social integration, reduce discrimination, and support family reunification are crucial for improving the overall well-being of migrants. Community engagement programs that encourage interaction between migrants and host communities can foster mutual understanding and respect, creating a more inclusive society. By recognizing and valuing the contributions of migrants, societies can create more inclusive and resilient communities that benefit everyone.

In conclusion, migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with significant implications for emotional and social well-being. Addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with migration requires coordinated efforts and comprehensive policies that promote integration, protect rights, and enhance the overall well-being of migrants. By fostering inclusive environments and providing accessible mental health services, host societies can help migrants achieve successful integration and improve their quality of life..

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