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# Migrants' community participation and social integration in urban areas: A scoping review

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## ABSTRACT

Social integration is a growing concern in global migration studies, and community participation is a way to promote migrants' social integration. This scoping review aims to determine how migrants' community participation influences their social integration in urban areas. A literature search was conducted to identify studies in English published between January 2011 and July 2021. Twenty-eight documents met the inclusion criteria. Three key elements of community participation were identified: 1) social capital, 2) the way of using public space, and 3) community participation strategies. Community participation assists migrants in dealing with inequality, marginalization, and rural-urban adaptation in developing countries. Furthermore, it exercises a mediating role in solving community problems and alleviating tensions between migrants and locals in developed countries. Community participation also helps international migrants tackle cross-cultural/ethnic challenges and compensates internal migrants for institutional segregation. Overall, community participation can fulfill migrants' instant needs, expand their social network, and facilitate psychological integration; however, it does not necessarily contribute to social integration when the participation environment is biased and lacks meaningful encounters. Finally, three research gaps are highlighted: the distinction between integration into a migrant community and broader society, the degree of participation, and a gender perspective.

## 1. Introduction

We are living in an age of migration (De Haas et al., 2020). As newcomers in a strange land, migrants face challenges adjusting and integrating into a receiving society. Both international and internal migrants experience similar difficult situations, including language barriers, information gaps, and discrimination. Integration into the receiving society is therefore crucial to improving the well-being of migrants and enhancing social solidarity.

There is no unified definition of *integration*, which is an individualized, contextual, and controversial concept (Ager & Strang, 2008). In this paper, we use integration as an overarching term describing the process and outcomes of migrants adjusting into a receiving society. It implies a two-way process in the change of values, norms, and behaviors for both migrants and locals (Klarenbeek, 2021). Moreover, it includes the knowledge and capacity of migrants to build a fulfilling life in the host society, for instance in terms of access to jobs and services (Castles et al., 2002; Harder et al., 2018). As one aspect of integration, social

integration concentrates on a sense of belonging, social relationships, and neighborhood social cohesion (Kearns & Whitley, 2015).

Participation in community activities has a positive influence on migrants' integration. Formal community participation refers to involvement in organized activities, emphasizing the interaction between an individual and a group, whereas informal community participation relates to the interaction between individuals, for example when neighbors offer mutual support (Ertas, 2013; Ji et al., 2020; Wen & Hanley, 2016). Informal participation has been shown to have an impact on developing a sense of belonging, security, and social integration, especially for marginalized groups (Henning & Lieberg, 1996). Valli et al. (2019) adopted participation in community decision-making and participation in community associations (under the category of social participation) within their index of social cohesion. Wang et al. (2017) applied Buckner's (1988) list of neighborhood cohesion to the Chinese context, identifying participation in community activities as one of the domains of neighborhood cohesion. In practice, community participation has been identified as an essential element in developing individual

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well-being and multicultural cohesion (Taurini et al., 2017). It has also been applied as a governmental intervention, through various forms of community services, in an effort to alleviate problems that emerge in the migrant integration process (Wen & Hanley, 2016).

This scoping review aims to ascertain how migrants' community participation influences their social integration in urban areas. Although there are numerous approaches to migrant integration, this scoping review investigates the contributions of community participation, based on the premise that the community is the starting point for migrants to enter into contact with the receiving society. In this scoping review, we define *community participation* as the process by which individuals engage in formal and informal community activities, such as decision-making processes, voluntary activities, and interactions with neighbors in the geographic communities where they dwell (Christens et al., 2016; Putnam, 2000; Vaughan et al., 2016; Zhang, 2019). Community refers to "place-based community," meaning the existence of groups with territorial interests or associations or communities based on formal local government boundaries (Jacobs, 2001, p.2383).

This scoping review identifies key characteristics of the migrant integration process and highlights research gaps covering the past ten years. The main research question is: *What is known from the previous literature about how migrants' community participation influences their social integration in urban areas?* The framework of PCC - population, concept, and context - is adopted to identify the relevant literature (Peters et al., 2020; Tricco et al., 2018). Therewith, this scoping review will 1) identify the key elements of community participation that may influence social integration, 2) evaluate how community participation may influence social integration in different contexts and migrant groups, and 3) analyze the positive and negative influences of community participation on social integration.

## 2. Methodology

We followed the framework suggested by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and the recommendations by Levac et al. (2010). The stages they identified include 1) identifying the research question, 2) identifying relevant studies, 3) study selection, 4) charting the data, and 5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. A scoping review does not require a critical appraisal of the included studies (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). In addition, we used the guidance from the Joanna Briggs Institute as a reference (Peters et al., 2020; Tricco et al., 2018), and adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist for reporting the review (Tricco et al., 2018). We applied the population, concept, and context (PCC) framework to identify the relevant literature (Peters et al., 2020), where the population was migrants, the concept was social integration and community participation, and the context was urban areas, without any restriction on region or country.

### 2.1. Search strategy

We began the scoping review in March 2021, and the protocol was submitted to Open Science Framework in October 2021.<sup>1</sup> Four electronic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and EBSCO—were used to search for documents. Then we specified the characteristics to be applied as eligibility criteria (Tricco et al., 2018): the date of publication ran from January 1, 2011 to July 31, 2021; the document type included peer-reviewed literature, preprints, journal articles, book chapters, doctoral dissertations, and reports; the publication language was set to English; and research domains were limited to social sciences, including political sciences, demography, and psychology. The whole search and

retrieval process was conducted by a professional methodologist. We used title, abstract, and keywords (or subject heading) as search content. Truncation and wildcards combining appropriate Boolean operators were implemented in the search process (Table 1).

### 2.2. Study selection

Database citations were compiled and deduplicated using reference manager Zotero and the Rayyan.ai web application. First, documents retrieved across the multiple databases were uploaded to Rayyan.ai for the purpose of removing duplicates and later screening. Second, two reviewers independently screened the titles and abstracts to assess documents for eligibility; a senior reviewer then helped resolve disagreements arising from this step until the three reviewers reached a consensus. This process yielded 106 potentially eligible documents. Third, the two reviewers independently read the full text of these documents and screened out ineligible ones. Once again, disagreements were resolved by consensus with the assistance of the senior reviewer, resulting in 28 documents being included for analysis (Table 2). For the final step, we used Atlas.ti (qualitative data analysis and research software) to analyze the findings and conclusions of the included documents.

The inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria were as follows:

#### Inclusion criteria

- Migrant type: adult, first-generation migrants (international or internal migrants);
- Community type and location: place-based communities located in urban or peri-urban areas;
- Form of community participation: formal participation (e.g., group meeting, voluntary activities) and informal participation (e.g., interaction with neighbors);
- Documents focusing mainly on social integration, including belonging, social relationships, and neighborhood social cohesion (e.g., social order and social control; social networks and social capital; and place attachment and identity);
- Documents focusing on integration at the individual level rather than at the level of the migrant group;

#### Exclusion criteria

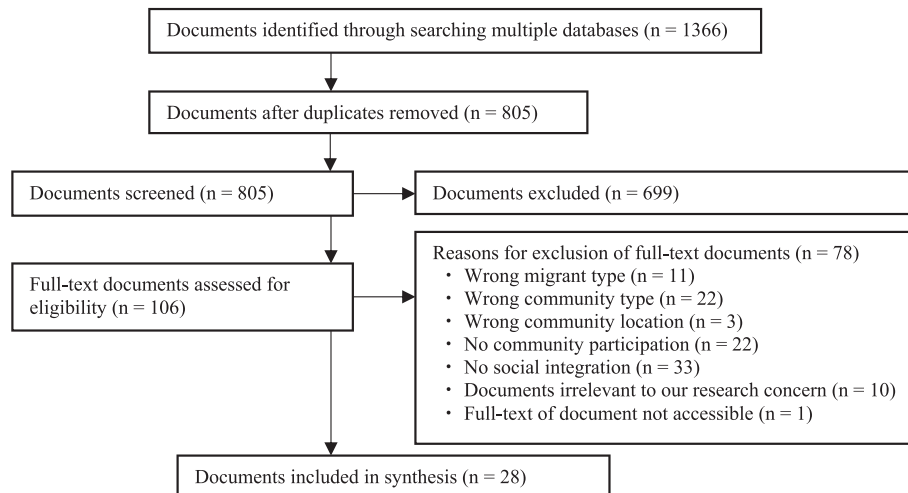
- Wrong migrant type: documents not focusing on adult and first-generation migrants but on underage migrants, migrant children, or locals;
- Wrong community type: documents not focusing on place-based communities but on communities with connotation of association, ethnic groups;
- Wrong community location: documents focusing on communities in rural areas; documents involving public places within the city rather than within the community;

**Table 1**  
Search terms.

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Migrants                | internal migrant*, internal immigrant*, migrant worker*, migrant*, immigrant*, floating population, mobile population   |
| Social integration      | social integration, social inclusion, social cohesion, social adaptation, integrat*, inclu*, adapt*, cohesi*, incorporat* participat*, engag*, involv*, community participation/ involvement/engagement, grassroots participation/ involvement/engagement, community-based participation/ involvement/engagement, neighbo(u)rhood participation/ involvement/engagement, neighbo(u)rhood-based participation/involvement/engagement |
| Community participation | participat*, engag*, involv*, community participation/ involvement/engagement, grassroots participation/ involvement/engagement, community-based participation/ involvement/engagement, neighbo(u)rhood participation/ involvement/engagement, neighbo(u)rhood-based participation/involvement/engagement   |
| Urban                   | urban area*, urban*, non-rural  |

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**Table 2**  
Flowchart of study selection.



- No community participation: documents describing migrants' interaction with the physical environment through everyday practice; documents not mentioning the community;
- No social integration: documents focusing mainly on other facets of integration, such as economic integration (e.g., housing, income, welfare, labor), political integration (e.g., voting), cultural integration, or spatial integration; documents not focusing on integration at the individual level; documents not mentioning integration.

### 3. Data information

This scoping review identified 28 documents relevant to the research question. A table of included documents characteristics was created and comprised of the following information: authors, year of publication, locations, populations, study type, aims, and main findings (Table 3). Nineteen documents were qualitative, four were quantitative, and five were mixed method. The majority of studies were conducted in China ( $n = 11$ ), followed by Canada ( $n = 2$ ), Germany ( $n = 2$ ), Greece ( $n = 2$ ), Spain ( $n = 2$ ), the UK ( $n = 2$ ), Australia ( $n = 1$ ), Chile ( $n = 1$ ), Italy ( $n = 1$ ), the Netherlands ( $n = 1$ ), Portugal ( $n = 1$ ), South Africa ( $n = 1$ ), Thailand ( $n = 1$ ), Turkey ( $n = 1$ ), and USA ( $n = 1$ ). Fifteen included documents were conducted in developing countries, including China, Chile, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey, and thirteen documents were conducted in developed countries (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022). The publication timeframe ranged from 2011 to 2021, although most of the documents ( $n = 21$ ) were published between 2016 and 2020. The study populations mainly comprised international migrants, internal migrants, migrant women, and older migrants. The included studies from China, South Africa, and Thailand were about internal migrants (\*6, \*9, \*10, \*13, \*16, \*20, \*23, \*27, \*28); the others mainly focused on international migrants.

### 4. Results

The included studies confirm that community participation contributes to the social integration of migrants in many ways; in turn, social integration inspires migrants to participate in community activities. Specifically, this section synthesizes how community participation influences migrants' social integration by focusing on three aspects: 1) the key elements of community participation that may influence social integration in different contexts and migrant groups, and 2) the positive and negative influences of community participation on social

integration.

#### 4.1. Key elements of community participation

##### 4.1.1. Social capital

Most included studies stressed the importance of support deriving from the social network, which constitutes the most critical part of social integration (\*1, \*3, \*5, \*8, \*9, \*12, \*13, \*14, \*18, \*20, \*22, \*23, \*24, \*26, \*27). The social capital theory prevailed among the included studies, which offered a theoretical scope to examine how migrants and migrant groups engaged in community networking and eventually achieved some extent of integration into the host society (\*8, \*9, \*14, \*22, \*23, \*24, \*26). Social capital and community participation reinforced each other because community participation forged more social capital (\*8, \*9, \*24, \*26), while social capital created more opportunities for community participation (\*14, \*22). The included studies mainly interpreted social capital as support, service, connection, resource, and sense of community. Three quantitative studies used neighborly relations, the usage of community services, and a sense of community respectively to represent social capital as indicators (\*8, \*23, \*24). The qualitative studies shed light on three forms of social capital: bonding social capital within the community, bridging social capital with locals and other immigrants, and linking social capital with local institutions and authorities (\*9, \*14, \*22, \*26). In line with the theory, neighboring activities and interactions with locals were put in the foreground concerning migrants' social integration in most included studies (\*1, \*2, \*3, \*5, \*6, \*8, \*9, \*10, \*11, \*12, \*18, \*19, \*24, \*25, \*26, \*27). Besides, social capital was distinguished at the collective and individual levels. Parekh et al. (2018) (\*14) explained social capital as an individual-level connection and social cohesion as a community-level social connection; Gurbés-Peco et al. (2020) (\*22) followed the explanation that collective social capital was the norm and a network facilitating collective action, while individual social capital was regarded as a resource gained by competition. Even though these included studies made a distinction, they focused more on community social capital (\*9, \*22, \*23, \*26). This distinction enhanced our understanding of how community participation contributes to social integration at the macro and micro levels.

##### 4.1.2. The way of using public space

The utility of public space was emphasized in the included studies (\*1, \*2, \*3, \*4, \*5, \*7, \*15, \*17, \*25). Lefebvre's theory - the Right to the City - had been adopted to examine migrants' spatial practice as a vital

**Table 3**  
Characteristics of studies included in the scoping review.

| Author(s) & publication year    | Location(s)      | Population(s)  | Study type   | Aim(s)  | Main finding(s)   |
|---------------------------------|------------------|--|--------------|---|---|
| Matejskova, 2011<br>*1          | Germany          | German minorities from the countries of the former Soviet Union, <i>Aussiedler</i> | Qualitative  | To understand how integration projects, as well as immigrants and local residents themselves, understand what “integration” entails and how they construct belonging in everyday urban contexts.                                    | Local integration projects in Marzahn play an important role in supporting immigrants’ process of settlement but fail in achieving their goal of providing spaces of increased contact between immigrants and local residents. Middle-aged and older <i>Aussiedler</i> perceive their long-term exclusion from the labor market as an obstacle to their feeling integrated. |
| Qian et al., 2011<br>*2         | China            | Internal migrants  | Mixed        | To investigate the interconnections between sense-of-place dimensions across different geographical scales.   | Migrants’ place dependence on the culture center significantly influences their place identity to Guangzhou, which further contributes to their place attachment to the city.   |
| Kalandides & Vaiou, 2012<br>*3  | Germany & Greece | International migrants   | Qualitative  | To explore neighboring as the space and resource of belonging and how this is related to participation and urban citizenship.   | Citizenship works at the scale of everyday life in the city and links with the right to live in it and to develop daily routines and practices that contribute to produce/create urban space and in turn mobilize processes of inclusion and belonging.   |
| Cabannes & Raposo, 2013<br>*4   | Portugal & UK    | International migrants   | Qualitative  | To ascertain the extent to which urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) can contribute to the social inclusion of migrants.   | Urban farming communities from the Cape Verde islands maintain and strengthen community bonds through their activity, but this does not necessarily lead to better social integration within the wider Portuguese society. In London, migrants of foreign origin integrate into a community on an individual basis.   |
| Oğuz & Özçevik, 2014<br>*5      | Turkey           | Migrant women (international and internal migrants)                                | Qualitative  | To understand the difficulties migrant women are facing within their city of immigration and the physical barriers to their integration into the city by studying a project called Participatory Action toward Experience Transfer. | The project ensured social and economic integration into the city by increasing the urban mobility of migrant women.  |
| Chang, 2015<br>*6               | China            | Internal migrants  | Qualitative  | To investigate how a local community in Shanghai supported migrants from other provinces in China in the process of their re-socialization.   | Three themes are relevant to the re-socialization of migrants: collaborative efforts of educational and non-educational institutions to support the integration of migrants; programs provided for migrants’ assimilation/culturalization; and migrants’ sporadic integration into the local community through limited personal networks.                                   |
| De Wilde, 2016<br>*7            | The Netherlands  | Immigrant women  | Qualitative  | To focus on how immigrant women who are subject to the policy interventionism of a community participation program make use of a neighborhood center in a Dutch urban neighborhood.   | The community participation program allows immigrant women to express their emotions, values, and morals through domesticating space, feminizing culture, and “whispering voice.” However, this does not lead to an inclusive community but often to an exclusive community.  |
| Wang, 2016<br>*8                | China            | Rural-to-urban migrants  | Mixed        | To explore the relationship between migrants and locals at the neighborhood level using Shanghai as a case study.   | Compared with local residents, rural migrants engage more in intergroup neighboring activities and have a better affective relationship with native neighbors. Neighborhoods with a higher share of migrant residents have a higher level of intergroup neighboring activities and more neighborly trust.   |
| Wen & Hanley, 2016<br>*9        | China            | Rural-to-urban migrant families  | Qualitative  | To document existing services in an urban village to explore how they can influence migrant families’ social support.   | Social support is essential for migrants’ psychological well-being in managing the ongoing challenges that arise from the migration adaptation process. An increase in formal support permits the enhancement of informal resources, social networks, and the ability of migrants to effectively solve problems and change their lives.                                     |
| Wu & Logan, 2016<br>*10         | China            | Rural-to-urban migrants  | Quantitative | To contrast the neighborhood socializing of migrant tenants with that of urban homeowners who were born in the city.  | Migrants are more likely to engage in socializing and exchange of help with neighbors, and consequently their neighboring helps strengthen their sentiment toward the neighborhoods where they live.  |
| Bronzini & Moretti, 2017<br>*11 | Italy            | International migrants   | Mixed        | To analyze an innovative intervention in the context of public housing in Italy, by exploring a two-year project of social mediation for  | The introduction of a social mediator was an opportunity and a resource for the communities and areas concerned in the  |

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued)

| Author(s) & publication year     | Location(s)  | Population(s)   | Study type  | Aim(s)  | Main finding(s)  |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---|-------------|---|--|
| Huang et al., 2017 *12           | China        | Rural-to-urban migrants                                       | Mixed       | households living in public housing, developed in the Marche region.<br>To analyze the effects of residential relocation on China's rural-urban migrants' social networks in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province; and contrast voluntary moves with forced moves driven by demolition-led redevelopment of urban villages. | project, as well as an important organizational improvement for the services involved.<br>When moving to a gated neighborhood, voluntary movers are more likely than forced movers to participate in public activities, to have more contact with new neighbors, and thereby to get more help. The demolition-led redevelopment programs do not promote migrants' integration in the city. |
| Scorgie et al., 2017 *13         | South Africa | Internal migrants   | Qualitative | To describe and reflect on the authors' experiences in designing and implementing an HIV intervention originally intended for migrant men living in single-sex hostels of inner-city Johannesburg.  | While men prioritized the need for jobs, women were more concerned about water, sanitation, housing, and poverty alleviation. "Community health clubs" were established to build residents' capacity to promote health and longer-term well-being and to initiate and sustain change within their communities.   |
| Parekh et al., 2018 *14          | USA          | Older adults (international migrants)                         | Qualitative | To reposition the concept of civic engagement among older adults to examine pathways for building age-friendly communities by using a social capital and social cohesion lens.  | Several older adults had access to social networks and socially invested resources, thereby having opportunities for civic engagement and building age-friendly neighborhoods. However, social, cultural, linguistic, and structural barriers were more evident among certain diverse ethnic populations.  |
| Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018 *15 | UK           | International migrants and refugee women                      | Qualitative | To understand the experiences of volunteers working in the women's community and voluntary sector in London by using the lens of "gendered right to the city."  | Migrant organizations are 1) places of co-optation of migrant labor, 2) places that enable the integration of migrants and make their participation in the urban fabrics possible, 3) and places that are appropriated by migrant volunteers in London as a means of enacting active citizenship.  |
| Yin, 2018 *16                    | China        | Rural-to-urban migrant workers                                | Qualitative | To explore organized and sustainable modes of alternative media production for rural-to-urban migrant workers.  | Sustainable and organized modes of alternative media production enable deliberative spaces for migrant workers' collective expression. Migrant workers' articulations through alternative media constitute a daily mode of activism and resistance.  |
| Abramovic et al., 2019 *17       | Australia    | Burmese refugees  | Qualitative | To tease out the particularities of how bodies of refugees in community gardens engage with the ecological experiences of their new homes.  | The act of gardening in a space perceived as being safe and supported by intra-human community belonging enables experimentation with the ecological conditions of the new homes of these refugees.  |
| Carrillo et al., 2017 *18        | Spain        | Moroccan migrants   | Qualitative | To address how the type of communication and the strategies implemented during the Dream (project name) process help to reduce some of the barriers that hamper the participation of Montserrat's Moroccan immigrant neighbors in dialogic spaces.  | The benefits of the process (the role of communicative acts is highlighted) are the reduction of racial tensions, the increase of participation, and the generation of in-the-community job training opportunities. The emergence of more dialogic relationships during this process has resulted in both cognitive and emotional changes in participants.                                 |
| Datta, 2019 *19                  | Canada       | First Nations, visible minorities, and non-visible minorities | Qualitative | To explore the concept of sustainability among First Nations, visible minorities, and non-visible minorities through cross-cultural activities.   | Three significant elements of community sustainability in a community garden: creating a bridge between classroom learning and practice (of nature) for children, building a sense of community belonging, and development of decolonization and reconciliation skills.  |
| Thongsrikate et al., 2019 *20    | Thailand     | Older migrants  | Qualitative | To investigate the social integration of older migrants who moved from rural to urban areas and to understand the practices they used to secure their living at their new location.   | The social integration of older migrants positively affects their quality of life at their place of destination, as they moved locations to live closer to family members. Social integration offered an opportunity for older migrants to express their identity at the new place.  |
| Bessho et al., 2020 *21          | Canada       | International migrants  | Qualitative | To identify immigrants' degree of involvement by taking a multiethnic community farm in Toronto, Canada, as a case study to discuss the scope of the long-term inclusion of immigrants.   | More than half of the immigrants at the Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF) underwent a "role shift" from recipient to take an assistant and facilitator role that required higher engagement.   |
| Girbés-Peco et al., 2020 *22     | Spain        | Moroccan migrants   | Qualitative | To delve into the potential of a school-based intervention to promote a community-led development process helping Moroccans face the consequences of long-term unemployment   | The school promoted a horizontal and dialogical organization of the development process, placing neighbors in central positions in decision-making and leadership roles.   |

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Table 3 (continued)

| Author(s) & publication year | Location(s) | Population(s)                               | Study type   | Aim(s)   | Main finding(s)  |
|------------------------------|-------------|---|--------------|--|--|
| Ji et al., 2020<br>*23       | China       | Rural-to-urban migrant workers              | Quantitative | in a locally marginalized and disadvantaged context in urban Spain.<br>To examine the role of community service use in migrant workers' life satisfaction and the potential mediating effect of identity integration in Shenzhen, China.                             | Community service use is positively associated with both identity integration and migrant workers' life satisfaction. Identity integration served as a partial mediator between community service use and life satisfaction.   |
| Liltsi et al., 2020<br>*24   | Greece      | International migrants                      | Quantitative | To develop methodological tools to estimate the impact of social capital on the integration of immigrants alongside the Rural–Urban Continuum of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki.   | “Social capital” is a key component in the structure of the relationship between natives and immigrants. Participation in community activities has a positive impact on the integration of immigrants.   |
| Liu et al., 2020<br>*25      | China       | Native and migrant residents                | Mixed        | To investigate whether the presence, perception, and use of neighborhood-scale spaces of encounter are relevant in predicting residents' attitudes toward migrant social inclusion, particularly with respect to equal access to citizenship and government welfare. | Residents' inclusiveness attitude is less associated with the physical presence of public spaces and facilities in the neighborhood, and more with actually using such spaces for neighborly encounters in daily life.   |
| Marzana et al., 2020<br>*26  | Chile       | Peruvian migrants                           | Qualitative  | To explore how the community participation of Peruvian immigrants in Chile can build processes of resilience.  | Community participation plays a role in promoting resilience by transforming immigrants' conditions and contexts while increasing their sense of mattering, and their access to resources and human rights.  |
| Xiong et al., 2020<br>*27    | China       | Young female rural-to-urban migrant workers | Qualitative  | To explore the ways in which physical activities help to fulfill the “urban dream” of this new generation of female migrant workers and promote their social integration in the Pearl River Delta.   | Participating in sport and exercise expands the scale of workers' living spaces, contributes to building social networks and self-identification, and enhances female migrant workers' individualistic values.   |
| Chiang et al., 2021<br>*28   | China       | Young migrants                              | Quantitative | To investigate the influence of subjective/objective status and possible pathways of young migrants' life satisfaction and psychological distress.   | Subjective status (subjective socioeconomic status, social adaptation, and psychological integration) had positive effects on life satisfaction, whereas social adaptation and psychological integration negatively affected psychological distress. Objective status (objective socioeconomic status and health insurance) had adverse effects on life satisfaction, whereas they positively affected psychological distress. |

part of their integration process (\*3, \*4, \*15). It emphasized the right of migrants to appropriate public spaces in urban areas. The three included studies have the common knowledge that migrants' activities in public areas, including neighboring behaviors, practice their actual rights in the city, explicitly altering the traditional usage of urban space and creating migrants' own lifestyle (\*3, \*4, \*15). Cabannes and Raposo (2013)(\*4) confirmed this theory that the community garden changed the conventional urban space of consumption to a productive space. Kalandides and Vaiou (2012) (\*3) indicated that the spatial practice, including neighboring, in turn, mobilized the processes of inclusion and belonging. Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) (\*15) pointed out that participating in voluntary activities enabled migrant women to be recognized in public spaces as well as offered them an opportunity to be recognized as active users of urban space. Through actively appropriating the public space, migrants' right to the city was claimed, by which a sense of belonging and social integration was forged.

#### 4.1.3. Community participation strategies

Some effective strategies in community participation that have a positive influence on social integration were identified in the included studies. For instance, *group meetings* can define collective needs and community priorities, making it a useful strategy for handling common challenges in the community (\*11, \*13, \*16, \*18). Group meetings were associated with various functions, including sharing information, enabling migrants to express themselves in an equal environment, building bonds with others, securing support, and thus, developing a sense of belonging (\*6, \*14, \*16, \*17). *Storytelling* was underlined as an effective technique that empowered migrants to express themselves and enabled them to cope with feelings of passivity; in addition, telling

stories created a shared experience, a collective memory, or a community culture that generated belonging and social inclusion (\*16, \*19). Sometimes, when dealing with community challenges, group meetings were held to involve migrants in the *decision-making process*, promote solutions, and achieve consensus (\*11, \*18). As a result, group meetings enabled migrants to solve problems, build self-confidence and trust, feel a sense of empowerment, and exercise active citizenship (\*13, \*16, \*18, \*22). The value of collective activities in the community is that they can transform the initial acquaintance into a mutual help partnership, especially in a gated community (\*12). Whereas group meetings represent actions in the public sphere, *mutual help* happens in the personal sphere. People who received support felt they needed to pay it forward by helping others, such as participating in voluntary activities, which advanced their own integration (\*5, \*14, \*15) and made people feel useful (\*26). Lastly, *recreational activities*, including dance, sports, travel, and other leisure pursuits, were found to provide a relaxing environment for locals and newcomers to enhance their understanding of each other, contributing to social integration in the included studies (\*6, \*9, \*12, \*15, \*17, \*19, \*26, \*27). Moreover, activities based on shared interests made it easier for migrants to converse with others, promoting trust and inclusiveness (\*27).

#### 4.2. Evaluating the influence of community participation on social integration

##### 4.2.1. Different development contexts

Rapid urbanization provided opportunities as well as barriers to migrants' integration in the studies situated in developing countries (\*2, \*5, \*8, \*12, \*13, \*20, \*23, \*25). Firstly, the included studies focused on

the integration of marginalized and vulnerable migrant groups during the process of urbanization. Scorgie et al. (2017) (\*13) discussed that the growing informal settlement in Johannesburg accommodated a large number of migrants and that public health services were inadequate. As a result, the risks of contracting HIV were high, and migrants felt marginalized. Community participation helped migrants improve the health situation in this area and offered them the opportunity to connect to broader networks in the city. Thongsrikate et al. (2019) (\*20) uncovered older internal migrants in Thailand increasingly moved to urban areas for the purpose of living with their children. In this case, community participation facilitated their social integration by offering local support. Secondly, the diversity of community participation was underlined, which increases the opportunity for migrants to integrate into urban areas. For instance, the demolition of urban villages and the move into gated neighborhoods compelled internal migrants to participate in community activities in these upgraded neighborhoods to seek new contacts (\*12). Furthermore, abundant public spaces increased the chances for migrants to interact with locals and develop an attachment to the city (\*2, \*25). Thirdly, community participation compensated for inequalities and nurtured social norms of being urban citizens, especially for rural migrants (\*6, \*9, \*23, \*27). However, such favorable circumstances might enhance the inclusiveness of communities but do not necessarily generate individual social integration (\*8, \*12, \*25). The socio-economically disadvantaged social of migrants still impeded their integration (\*10, \*12). Liu et al. (2020) (\*25) suggested that residents might develop an inter-group relationship once they have the same purchasing ability as locals. Besides, migrants who resided in spatially concentrated communities had stronger intra-group ties but experienced exclusion from mainstream society (\*8, \*13). Without ownership of the house and meaningful encounters, migrants still felt less integrated (\*10, \*12, \*25).

In developed countries, the findings on how community participation affects migrants' social integration are manifold. In comparison with the studies in developing countries, the evidence in developed countries is scattered. On the one hand, community programs can alleviate tensions between migrants and the locals, which occur in blended-living communities. The key is to involve migrants in community participation, which help both sides to build neighborhood trust (\*11, \*18, \*22). Besides, some community programs intended to tackle migrants' less optimistic social-economical situations, in which case involving migrants in the decision-making process facilitated their social integration as migrants were endowed with equal status and sense of value (\*3, \*14, \*18, \*22). In this sense, community participation not only solves community problems but also has a mediating role in de-escalating the tension between migrants and locals. On the other hand, urban agriculture and community gardening were widely mentioned to create a home-like place for immigrants (\*4, \*17, \*19, \*21). This form of community participation usually encompassed a range of planting and cultural activities. It served as an experimental ground for migrants to familiarize themselves with the local environment and norms, contributing to their integration into the host society.

#### 4.2.2. Diverse migrant groups

**4.2.2.1. International and internal migrants.** We found out that studies in developed countries focused more on international migrants, while studies in developing countries highlighted the integration issues of internal migrants. Both migrant groups in the included studies faced the challenges of language barriers (\*3, \*6, \*15, \*18, \*20, \*26) and low economic status (\*1, \*4, \*7, \*17, \*26) during their integration process. Similarly, migrants faced difficult situations stemming from prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and marginalization in the receiving society (\*1, \*3, \*8, \*12, \*18, \*19, \*25, \*26, \*27, \*28). Nonetheless, cross-cultural or cross-ethnic issues were more salient during the integration process of *international migrants* in this scoping review. For these reasons,

community participation was seen to play an essential role in helping international migrants learn the local language and social norms, share information, and secure support. *Cultural activities* to promote customs and traditions from migrants' home countries not only created a home-like atmosphere in strange lands but also enhanced racial pride as a protection against discrimination. Sharing indigenous stories helped create a sense of belonging in their new place (\*7, \*17, \*19, \*26), thereby promoting tolerance and cohesion in a multicultural society. The included studies focusing on *internal migrants* in China underlined the institutional segregation caused by the household registration (*Hukou*) system (\*2, \*8, \*9, \*23, \*28) because it "determines one's eligibility to receive and access services critical to well-being including health care, education, and social services" (\*23, p.273). The quantitative studies identified hukou status as a crucial factor affecting the inclusive attitudes of residents (\*25) and migrants' interactions with neighbors (\*8, \*12). Thus, even though internal migrants in China have the same ethnicity as the host population, they still suffer from alienation and social distance caused by institutional segregation. Community participation in China is more of a service that compensates for the inequality between people with and without hukou, which promotes migrants' social integration in urban areas.

**4.2.2.2. Migrant women.** *Migrant women* attracted the most research attention not only because they were more likely to participate in community activities and contact their neighbors but also because they were relatively vulnerable compared with migrant men (\*3, \*5, \*7, \*12, \*13, \*15, \*20, \*27). As a comparison, some migrant women were involved in community life by offering help or participating in voluntary activities (\*5, \*15). In contrast, male migrants performed as leaders in the community and tended to socialize with other men from their community or work (\*3, \*12, \*13, \*20). Huang et al. (2017) (\*12) claimed that migrant women might benefit more from community participation. For instance, when female migrants take care of their children, they need neighbors' help with childcare (\*9, \*12). Xiong et al. (2020) (\*27) added that participating in leisure activities helped rural migrant women recognize new gender values that facilitate their social integration. However, Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) (\*15) claimed that female migrants' efforts might go unnoticed by the wider society because of their relatively low socioeconomic status. De Wilde (2016) (\*7) also noticed that it was challenging for female migrants to integrate into broader society, especially when they formed tightly knit groups in exclusive, homogeneous communities through community participation. This led to an "exclusionary belonging" to the migrants' own group (p.142).

**4.2.2.3. Older migrants.** Another topic that deserves more attention is *older migrants'* community participation. Two studies emphasized older migrants' willingness to contribute to the community and society, which in turn improved their sense of well-being (\*14, \*20). Thongsrikate et al. (2019) (\*20) found that older migrants needed "comprehensive social integration" to adapt to the new place, which meant they had access to emotional support from family as well as practical support through community participation, for example by learning local dialects and traditions (p.9). Parekh et al. (2018) (\*14) discussed numerous social barriers the older migrants encountered, such as poor accessibility, limited platforms for expression, and neighborhood crime, all of which thwarted community participation when seeking civic engagement. Simultaneously, older migrants' values and their willingness to contribute to the community were largely neglected.

#### 4.3. Outcomes of community participation

##### 4.3.1. Contributions to social integration

The positive impact of community participation on migrants' social integration encompasses three important contributions: fulfilling short-



term needs, expanding social networks, and psychological integration. Wen and Hanley (2016) (\*9) indicated that the basic function of community participation is to fulfill migrants' instant needs. Services to fulfill such needs can be found widely in the included studies, like language classes, professional skills training, job-hunting skills training, offering work positions, and suggesting information (\*1, \*6, \*9, \*17, \*18, \*23). However, these services are "instrumental support" (\*9, p.85) that might not fulfill migrants' long-term requirements for further integration (\*6, \*9). Expanding social networks was considered crucial to achieving social integration in the long term (\*9, \*12). Exclusive migrant-only social networks coupled with lost former social networks limited migrants from accessing more opportunities. Migrants reported feeling isolated from the host society (\*8). Thus, community participation was a possible way to help migrants build new connections. Several articles shed light on the essential role of community participation in generating social capital for migrants, which contributed to migrants' integration and community cohesion (\*10, \*14, \*24, \*26, \*27).

Finally, community participation was found to impact migrants' psychological integration positively. One of the underlying messages in the articles reviewed was the pressure that living in an alien society can cause for newcomers. Thus, building a new social network can provide solid emotional support for migrants (\*9). Participating in community activities enabled migrants to feel supported, included, and relaxed, thus promoting positive mental health outcomes and healthy behaviors (\*1, \*4, \*9, \*14, \*17, \*26). Furthermore, participation helped individuals build confidence and preserve dignity (\*13, \*18, \*26, \*27). Community activities involving both migrants and locals provided a means through which migrants could achieve equal status and enjoy equal rights; in other words, their voices were valued, and the receiving society recognized their contributions (\*3, \*15, \*16, \*18, \*22, \*23, \*25, \*26, \*27). Meanwhile, improving relations between heterogeneous groups made newcomers feel part of the community and the city (\*2, \*10). The quantitative studies pointed to developing a sense of belonging as vital to migrant integration. A sense of belonging had different manifestations, which included a sense of community and feeling at home (\*7, \*16, \*19, \*21, \*27). For instance, Qian et al. (2011) (\*2) described how migrants' feelings of pride and happiness were forged by attending cultural community activities. Developing a sense of belonging was also related to a sense of ownership that empowered migrants to feel in control of their own lives in cities (\*17).

#### 4.3.2. The limitation of community participation

Even though community participation contributed to migrants' integration, some included articles explained how it did not necessarily guarantee successful integration. Firstly, Huang et al. (2017) (\*12) argued that an unfriendly environment might impede migrants' willingness to participate in activities and social integration. For example, organizers of activities preferred locals with hukou to participate in community activities because they can keep continuous contributions to the community. Sometimes, community activities could not reach all groups of the population in the community (\*12). Chang (2015) (\*6) claimed that entry-level community activities might not serve migrants' prolonged integration sufficiently. The capability of communities to offer lasting support was limited. In other situations, community participation might lack continuity because of migrants leaving or the absence of funding (\*1, \*13).

Secondly, lack of meaningful contact was identified as a potential factor that prevented migrants from feeling integrated. Meaningful contact means "contact that actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for - rather than merely tolerance of - others" (Valentine, 2008, p.325). Liu et al. (2020) (\*25) discovered that interactions between the locals and migrants in open spaces of their neighborhood were superficial, which at most increases the out-group tolerance of locals but not social inclusion. Some studies found that locals are not likely or indifferent to talk with migrants (\*12, \*25). In contrast, migrants seem

more inclined to interact with their neighbors and the locals; meanwhile, they are also worried about what to talk about and how to interact with people outside their group (\*8, \*12, \*25). Sometimes the spatial concentration of migrants made it hard for them to create meaningful social connections outside their migrant group (\*8). Matejskova (2011) (\*1) suggested that work relations can create meaningful contact between migrants and others, facilitating social integration.

Lastly, the declined positive influence of community participation may be attributed to individual differences between migrants. They might have no time to participate, be reluctant to participate, or stop participating in activities under the pressure of low economic status (\*6, \*9, \*12, \*13). For some migrants, participating in communal activities did not always translate into building attachments when migrants participated for pragmatic reasons. Qian et al. (2011) (\*2) discovered that community activities were replaceable, and migrants would switch if they found a more attractive option. Additionally, emotional bonding to their hometown sometimes hindered migrants from forming further attachments to the receiving society (\*2).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Identified gaps in the literature

In this review, we explored how migrants' community participation influences their social integration in urban areas. Our results have led us to identify three research topics that need further attention: 1) the distinction between integration into a migrant community and the broader society; 2) how different degrees of community participation may lead to different social integration; 3) the gender perspective.

First, relatively few studies distinguish whether migrants integrate into the migrant community or the wider society (\*2, \*3, \*4, \*5, \*7, \*15, \*26). Qian et al. (2011) (\*2) provide a sample study investigating migrants' place attachment to different geographic scales. Their study reveals how developing an attachment to a specific public place by participation can influence the attachment to the city. On the contrary, Cabannes and Raposo (2013) (\*4) discover that urban agriculture may motivate cohesion within a community but not facilitate the inclusion of the community in the receiving society. There are also different opinions over integration into a community: on the one hand, it is a first step to subsequent integration into the wider society (\*15); on the other hand, it may in fact hinder migrants from further integrating into the receiving society (\*7). Therewith, some authors stress the coexistence of both types of integration, which indicates multiple integration or multiple belonging (\*3, \*5, \*26). The distinction between integration into the migrant community and wider society should be investigated more in further studies, which would go some way to helping us understand the form of different social integration in community participation and how much it can facilitate migrants' well-being.

Second, the degree of engagement in community participation has garnered little attention. Bessho et al. (2020) (\*21) notably identify the roles of migrants in participation; and state how the shift - from recipient, assistant, to facilitator - enables migrants gradually to become more deeply involved in activities and achieve long-term integration in the community. Few included studies touch upon a relevant topic, such as leadership roles of migrants, yet do not proceed deeper (\*5, \*14, \*18, \*22, \*26). The transition of migrants' role in community participation has stayed unexplored among the included studies and is worthy of investigation concerning migrants' more active agency in community participation and their social integration.

Third, there is a lack of research on the gender perspective and male migrants. Research on the comparison of different motivations, participation behaviors, and psychological states between female and male migrants' social integration deserves more attention in the future, which will help us understand the diversity of the integration process of migrants. Further research that focuses on other sub-groups of migrants is also needed. In addition, it is important to realize that social integration

varies at the individual level in light of their socially constructed identities. Therefore, research that foregrounds the intersection of different social characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, and culture is vital to better understand migrants' community participation and social integration.

## 5.2. Strengths and limitations

An overall strength of this scoping review is that it reveals the diversity and complexity of how place-based community participation influences migrants' social integration in urban areas. This scoping review highlights the key elements in community participation that contribute to social integration. It sheds light on how community participation facilitates social integration in developing and developed settings and stresses that the influence of community participation varies among international and internal migrants. Through the analysis, the global south scope, especially the studies in China, stands out regarding rapid urbanization and internal migrants' issues. In terms of methodology, the strength of scoping review is the rigorous and transparent process. We have guaranteed a broad search by searching in four databases and reduced review bias by adhering to the accredited guidelines.

However, our study also has limitations. The scoping review methodology does not require a critical appraisal of the included studies. To overcome this limitation, a systematic review of the topic should be carried out in the future (Pham et al., 2014). Besides, it is vital to establish a scope that is not too narrow or too broad. Thus, we narrowed our scope by excluding the underage population, i.e., migrant children. This is because their social integration is likely to take shape mainly within the educational and family systems, which would bring in discussions from different research fields. Also, there are specific ethical concerns in studying underage migrants, which are beyond our scope. Furthermore, we did not find studies on specific groups of migrants, such as high-skilled migrants, which may be attributed to either a lack of relevant research on this topic or a selection bias. It could also signify that community participation and social integration are not as relevant for specific sub-groups of migrants than for others, e.g., high-skilled migrants may show less interest in integration or embrace a more diverse identity, implying a less sense of community or integration to a specific place (Geurts et al., 2021; Plöger & Kubiak, 2019). Finally, the findings cannot be generalized because of two reasons. First, eleven out of the 28 included studies were conducted in China, which has a specific migration context. Second, this scoping review has analyzed a relatively small number of relevant studies.

## 6. Conclusion

Our scoping review set out to address the central question: *What is known from the previous literature about how migrants' community participation influences their social integration in urban areas?* Firstly, the scoping review identified the key aspects of community participation that may influence social integration. Secondly, we evaluated the influence of community participation on social integration in the context of developing and developed countries and among different migrant groups. Finally, we found the positive outcomes of community participation as well as offered possible reasons why community participation is not conducive to social integration. To conclude, the effects of each community activity do not lead to a single outcome but rather have multiple consequences. Social integration is a long and extensive process, which cannot be attributed to one or two elements but is the product of multiple efforts.

## Declaration of competing interest

There are no known conflicts of interest associated with this article.

## Data availability

The analysis objects are published studies, which are properly referenced in this scoping review.

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