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# More than Welcome

Intercultural integration of migrants  
in and through higher education





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# SHORT SUMMARY

## Intercultural integration as a new paradigm for migrant inclusion

As global displacement reaches unprecedented levels—with 123.2 million people uprooted by conflict, environmental disasters, and economic instability ([UNHCR, 2025](#))—there is an urgent need to rethink approach integration. Migration should be embraced as an opportunity for human and cultural development, social cohesion, and economic growth. To realise this, societies must transition from outdated integration models to a new paradigm of intercultural integration—a multidirectional process engaging all community members.

*More than Welcome* offers a framework for intercultural integration, founded on five principles with intercultural competence at its core. It highlights the unique role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in fostering mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration. By actively addressing xenophobia and cultural discrimination, HEIs can become catalytic spaces to help migrants reach their full potential in diverse societies.

Through research and practical examples, the publication provides actionable strategies for policy-makers to create a higher education sector that not only educates but also cultivates active, intercultural citizens. By embracing this framework, we can build more inclusive societies and unlock the full potential of migration for the benefit of all.

**Only 7%**  
of refugees  
pursue higher  
education



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*"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"*



# **More than Welcome**

**Intercultural integration of migrants  
in and through higher education**

# Foreword

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Migration has been a defining feature of the human experience throughout history—a complex and dynamic phenomenon that presents both opportunities and challenges, depending on how it is governed. The world currently grapples with a staggering number of displaced people—123.2 million as of the end of 2024—driven by conflicts, environmental disasters, and economic instability (UNHCR, 2025). Effective and inclusive migration governance, however, serves as a catalyst for long-term resilience, fostering human development, social cohesion, cultural richness, and sustainable economic growth. Achieving these outcomes requires moving beyond reception alone, toward the creation of enabling environments in which migrants can live in safety and dignity and fully contribute to the societies they are part of.

Integration models that rely predominantly on newcomers adapting independently have shown significant limitations. A more effective and sustainable approach is one that reflects the principles articulated in the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018), which calls for integration to be grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility. As affirmed in paragraph 32(a) of the Compact, successful integration entails “promoting mutual respect for the cultures, traditions and customs of communities of destination and of migrants... to facilitate social cohesion and inclusion.” Hence, to truly harness the benefits of cultural plurality, we need a more balanced approach—one rooted in the principles of interculturalism.

In this spirit, building on the two-way model of mutual adaptation, integration should be viewed as a multi-directional effort in which both newcomers and host communities (and their institutions) actively contribute to and from which they all benefit. This model of intercultural integration fosters mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation, thereby building a shared sense of belonging that enriches the entire community.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are strategically positioned to promote an inclusive paradigm of intercultural integration. They are not just places of learning but spaces for welcome and belonging, where learners and educators alike can come together to embrace shared values that bind our communities together. By fostering intercultural, multi-directional integration, higher education institutions influence wider societal dynamics, impacting

social cohesion and fuelling economic growth by preparing global-ready graduates. Research shows that inclusive HEIs can drive economic success, since interculturally integrated individuals are more likely to contribute to innovation and economic resilience (Ratha *et al.*, 2011). However, significant gaps remain: only 7% of refugees accessed higher education in 2023 (UNHCR, 2023), compared to a global gross enrolment ratio of 42% (UNESCO-UIS, 2022). Addressing this disparity requires targeted strategies, through which higher education institutions not only educate but also serve as spaces where diverse perspectives and experiences are celebrated and harnessed for the greater good of society.

*More than Welcome* introduces a unique framework of intercultural integration, built on five core principles with intercultural competence at the heart, to help higher education institutions maximise the strategically catalytic impact that they can have in creating inclusive and supportive communities for migrants. In line with the 2021 UNESCO's *Futures of Education Report*, higher education institutions must be active in every aspect of building a new social contract for education. We put forth the argument that by improving practices through the adoption of this framework, institutions can strengthen their endeavours in dismantling barriers such as xenophobia, language, and cultural discrimination that migrants often have to endure, both as learners within their institutions, and in the wider community. This publication provides actionable recommendations and examples to show how institutions can lead the way in these efforts and the benefits they can have on society at large.

We believe that this publication will serve as a valuable resource for policy-makers and educators to take bold steps toward holistic intercultural integration. By transforming higher education into a space where all learners—irrespective of their background—can flourish, we pave the way for a more inclusive and robust society. We trust these recommendations will inspire action and foster a higher education sector that embraces difference, cultivates understanding, and prepares all students to become active, intercultural citizens who see themselves as one shared humanity.



**Lidia Brito**  
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This publication was shaped by the input and insights shared by a wide range of colleagues including educators, experts, and students who generously shared their experiences and perspectives in interviews and focus group meetings. Their stories, reflections, and firsthand accounts provided the real-world contexts for better understanding challenges and successes in integrating diverse learners interculturally within and through higher education. Special appreciation goes to the following for their time and insights: David Barrutia (LH Global), Koyali Burman (Vancouver Local Immigration Partners), Santhi Corcoran (Mary Immaculate College), Niva Dolev (Kinnaret Academic College), Jane Drake (Center for Systems Awareness), Didem Ekici (University of San Francisco), Aerial Ellis (Advisory 83), Beatriz Gomez Moreno (GORM), Joann Halpern (Hasso Plattner Institute), Rodolfo Hernandez (University of Texas-Dallas), Savo Heleta (Durban University of Technology), Divinia Jithoo (Durban University of Technology), Andri Kadaifciu (Duke University), Ashima Kaul (Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network), Chrispinus Mkado (Organization for Identity and Cultural Development), Della Llorente Leonor (Filipino Anti-Poverty Commission), Mamobo Ogoro (GORM), Christa Olson (World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence), May Owen (Solent University), Jan Peng (New York University), Papa Balla Ndong (AICOSMO), Seema Srivastava (World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence), Felisa Tibbitts (Utrecht University), Stephanie Tilley (Prairie State A&M University/University of Johannesburg), Colleen Thouez (Refugee Resettlement Initiative), Mizuho Tatebayashi (North Carolina State University), Bruce White (Organization for Identity and Cultural Development), and Global Migration Working Group of the World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence.

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## **A note about the title of this publication:**

“More than Welcome” intentionally uses the term “migrants” to stimulate conversation. Recognition is made that using the term “migrants” may be considered derogatory in some contexts and may even evoke certain potentially negative images. Yet, given that this publication is written to specifically address “mobile populations” whether permanent or temporary, many of whom are vulnerable populations, “migrant” was determined to be the most effective term to use throughout this publication and is used to encompass all learners who have either voluntarily or involuntarily moved to a different location that is not their home.

Statistics referenced in this publication are drawn from a variety of sources, some of which are on migrant populations in general and not specifically migrant student populations. This is relevant in part due to the fact that often, migrant adult learners need to enrol in higher education in order to better prepare or qualify for jobs in their new home.

It is acknowledged that the perspectives reflected in this publication are predominantly those from the Global North and examples found in this publication should not be construed as benchmarks.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Summary of Key Points

- ◆ Intercultural integration occurs within multiple levels of higher education institutions.
- ◆ Intentionally supporting educators, staff, and students in their intercultural competence development becomes key in intercultural integration efforts.
- ◆ While numerous challenges and barriers exist within higher education institutions for migrants, there are some success factors that ensure some degree of intercultural integration within higher education institutions, including leadership from the top, intentional supportive policies, practices and programmes that emphasise intercultural competence development of all stakeholders, affordability, adequate investment of resources (including increased financing to higher education) and long-term commitment to intercultural integration that is multidirectional and at all levels of education.

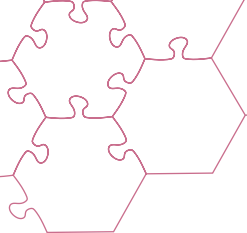
### Introduction

#### Contextualisation and Overview

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the latest statistical trends on refugees include a record number of displaced people, with 123.2 million people worldwide forcibly displaced as of the end of 2024 due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2025). At the same time, the 2024 World Migration Report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlights that “international migration remains a driver of human development and economic growth, highlighted by a more than 650 per cent increase in international remittances from 2000 to 2022, rising from USD 128 billion to USD 831 billion” (IOM, 2024). Despite this increase in global migration, the vast majority continue to live in countries in which they were born, with only

1 in 30 becoming a migrant. Nonetheless, this increase in global migration and the anticipated continued upward trajectory, points to the need for policy-makers to be proactive in addressing the implications of increased migration.

One of the policy-making areas concerning global migration requiring address is that of higher education, and, in particular, the intercultural integration of migrants in higher education and beyond. With less than five years remaining for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, there is an increasing need to turn attention to vulnerable groups’ access to higher education to reach SDG 4.3’s aim of “equal access for all women and men to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” and target 4.5 to “eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.”



In fact, higher education is one of the areas where there is the greatest potential to support such intercultural integration, thus becoming a key means of combatting societal discrimination. The roadmap of the 2022 World Higher Education Conference, entitled “Beyond Limits: New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education” (UNESCO 2022), pinpointed key transitions that higher education systems and institutions must undertake to transform, from inclusion to lifelong learning and flexible and integrated models based on the recognition of social, cultural, and educational differences. It underpinned that higher education is integral to the right to education and a public good. And yet, in many countries, tuition fees are on the rise, and only the privileged have access to—or succeed in completing—higher education, making it difficult to argue that there is an actual right to higher education to be enforced. However, international human rights law is clear: the right to education includes the obligation of states to ensure that higher education is made accessible to all based on capacity. In addition, states have an obligation to progressively introduce free higher education, an obligation which is yet to be implemented globally (UNESCO, 2022b).

Given the growing percentages of immigrant-origin students (including first and second-generation immigrant youth) within the higher education sector, it becomes imperative for higher education institutions to succeed in integrating students with multiple and intersecting identities into their institutions and local society, since preparing these global-ready graduates to be interculturally competent holds the key for driving global citizenship and economic growth. Research shows that those who achieve some higher education level often have a pathway to higher income and better well-being and are less likely to be in need of public support (Evans, Connors, and Unangst, 2023). However, in 2023, only about 7% of refugees were enrolled in higher education, a stark contrast to the global gross enrolment ratio of 42% in 2022. In comparison, enrolment figures for refugee students in primary and secondary education were 68% and 34% respectively given the often compulsory nature of pre-tertiary education (UNESCO, 2021, p. 50). To address this gap, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) set the 15by30 target, aiming for 15% of refugees to access higher education by 2030. Most refugee students who manage

to enrol do so in their host countries, with 83% of refugee youth in higher education studying within those nations. Improving access to higher education in host countries is therefore critical to reaching this goal (UNESCO, UNHCR, 2022). According to the European Commission, “The educational system for countries represents perhaps a main possibility to reach the goal of an integrated society, and there are research studies that suggest the design of educational systems to be important for migrant students. To ensure that migrant students can fully develop their potential in education is vital, not only for societies’ level of social cohesion and the general economy, but also for individuals’ further opportunities. Education might be argued to be the central resource for allowing participation in political, cultural, economic and social life and determines at large both achieved status and possibility for social mobility” (Wiren, 2012). Given the prominent role that education systems—in this case, higher education—can have in the intercultural integration of migrants and given the dearth of resources on this topic, more focus is needed on intercultural integration within and through higher education, ultimately for the betterment of society. This publication provides an overview of the context of addressing intercultural integration of migrants in and through higher education, including the impact that such institutions can have beyond their immediate sphere of influence, emphasising the importance of intercultural competence and intercultural dialogue, and concludes with specific recommendations for policy-makers. The focus of this publication is on a newly created integration framework ([Chapter 1](#)), developed from current literature and theories to holistically address intercultural integration of migrants within ([Chapter 2](#)) and through higher education, including how higher education systems can support improvements to intercultural integration within society in general ([Chapter 3](#)). This framework will be discussed further and underlies the analyses and recommendations contained in this publication.



## Who are Migrants?

There is not one internationally recognised definition of “migrants.” A broad textbook definition of “migrant” (summarised from dictionary definitions) is one who relocates temporarily or permanently to another location or country for perceived better opportunities. As noted by the International Organization for Migration, “the common lay understanding” of “migrant” is “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.” (IOM, n.d.) This broad definition of migrants includes voluntary and forced migrants, highly skilled economic migrants, and other categories of economic and political migrants, all of whom may face discrimination by virtue of stigma, lack of enabling environments and lack of social capital. The latter, migrant workers, cover all skills and educational levels and comprise 5% of the global workforce. Based on estimates from the International Labour Organization, the majority of migrant workers can be found in the lower-skill sectors such as agriculture, tourism and construction (Batalova, 2022), although there are also increasing numbers of highly skilled migrants. UNESCO acknowledges that the term “migrant” is not considered a positive term in all contexts (see note at the beginning of this publication). In addition, it is important to note that while this publication discusses vulnerable populations such as refugees and displaced persons as part of the migrant discussion, the intercultural integration framework proposed in this publication extends beyond vulnerable populations to including all migrants,

including minoritised learners, defined as groups of learners who are marginalised or persecuted due to systemic oppression. This term “minoritised” is preferred given the emphasis of oppression caused by others (including a smaller group oppressing a larger group given power imbalances), rather than on a permanent label or category.

It would be challenging for one overview to cover the full scope of ways in which higher education systems contribute to broader intercultural integration of migrants within society as well as specific ways of integrating migrants interculturally within higher education, given the vast number of local contexts around the world, different educational systems and policies, as well as the complexities of the issues. Thus, within the scope of this publication, the focus is on migrant students, who have either temporarily or permanently relocated, either voluntarily or forcibly, with [Chapter 3](#) and [Chapter 4](#) focusing primarily on migrants forcibly relocated, in particular refugees, with some mention of people seeking asylum (in [Chapter 2](#)), given that these students face particular challenges in continuing their studies after being forcibly uprooted. In 2023, the global enrolment of refugees in higher education increased to 7 percent, continuing year-on-year gains over the previous four years. This is a significant increase from 1 percent, reported in 2019. Factors contributing to this rise include continued commitment of governments leading to an increase in support from higher education institutions in host countries (through reduced fees to ensure more equitable access for refugee students, improved data collection, and expansion of scholarship programmes). For example, in 2022, 43 % of those receiving the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship—a UNHCR programme that provides higher education opportunities to refugees—were women, representing the highest rate ever (UNCHR, n.d.). For a comprehensive study on tertiary refugee students, see Baak *et al.*, 2021; Baker *et al.*, 2019; Berg, 2023; Burke *et al.*, 2023; Cox, 2023; Kindon *et al.*, 2020.

## 1 Definitions

### Migrants, refugees, or displaced persons?

**Migrant:** There is no legally accepted definition of the term “migrant” at the international level. According to the United Nations’ International Organization for Migration (IOM), it refers to “any person who has resided away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, regardless of the person’s legal status; whether the movement is involuntary or voluntary; what the causes for the movement are; or, what the length of the stay is.” However, it is common to include certain categories of short-term migrants, such as seasonal agricultural workers, who migrate at planting or harvest time.

**Refugee:** As defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention, the term applies to “any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion,

nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality...and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”.

**Displaced persons:** Persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters. This definition covers both internal and cross-border displacement.

**Asylum seeker:** An individual who is seeking international protection. According to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, the term is used to define “someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed”.

Source: [IOM](#), 2019; [UNESCO](#), 2021

## What is Intercultural Integration?

Intercultural integration, as proposed in this publication, is defined as the multidirectional co-creation of a welcoming shared social environment where all can flourish. This integration process fosters mutual understanding and respect, promotes cooperation, belonging, and positive interactions and inspires collective action for well-being through the creation and/or transformation of inclusive systems, policies, and practices that recognise the value of cultural difference while affirming individual and collective identities. A prerequisite to intercultural integration is intentionally addressing hate and discrimination at all levels on an ongoing basis. Note that intercultural integration emphasises the social dimensions of integration and does not mean a one-way adaptation or assimilation of newcomers

to the host culture, but rather the multidirectional intercultural integration of all groups, including the host society. This means that it is not a question of who is adapting to whom but how all groups adapt together to a third space (Kramsch, 2012), defined as “in between space” where individuals can freely express their identities beyond constraints of their heritage and dominant cultures through new cultural hybridities, which enable the blending of different cultural elements into a unique intercultural space. Further, since overall integration is crucial to intercultural integration, this paper will make reference to both.

In line with the [New Scots Integration Strategy](#) (a strategy supporting the integration of refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants within Scotland communities) this multidirectional integration requires active involvement from all stakeholders, including migrants, communities, and institutions. This is reflected in the six

principles of the New Scots Strategy, which emphasise the importance of early integration, a rights-based approach, trauma-informed practices, the involvement of people with lived experiences, the fostering of inclusive intercultural communities, and the essential role of partnership and collaboration. Together, these principles help to ensure that integration efforts are not only inclusive but sustainable, benefiting both individuals and the wider society.

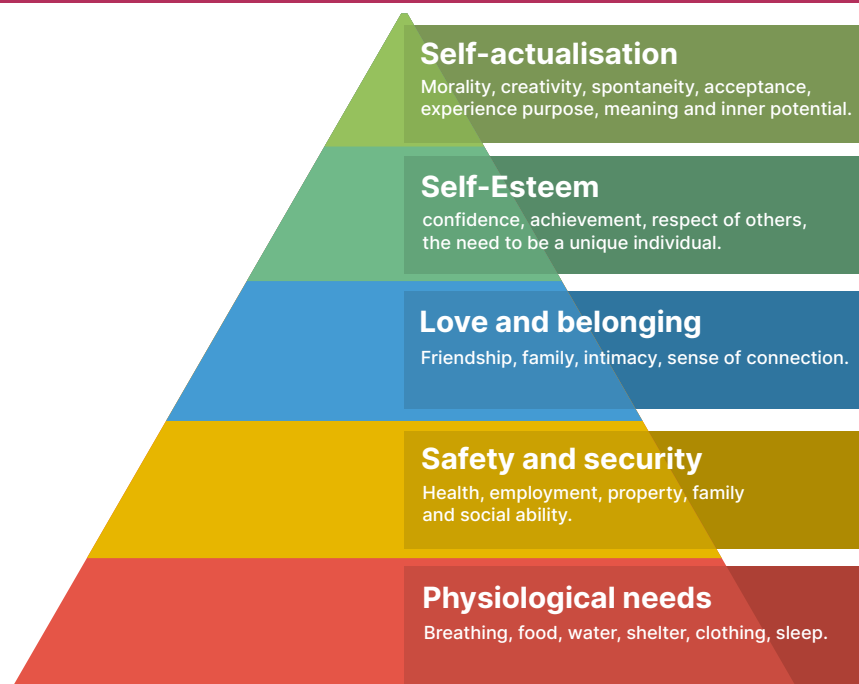
## Why Intercultural Integration?

In today's rapidly globalising world, higher education stands as foundational in developing the future workforce as well as shaping the leaders and thinkers of tomorrow. It is paramount for policy-makers to recognise the pivotal role that intercultural integration plays within this educational landscape. Given that the mosaic of cultures often found within higher education institutions mirrors the diverse tapestry of our interconnected world, fostering intercultural integration is not merely an option but a necessity for preparing all students to thrive in an increasingly diverse world. For adult migrants, in particular, this becomes even more

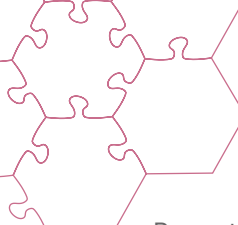
urgent as they often struggle with inclusion in local communities and face increased challenges such as underemployment, often due to language and cultural barriers.

The challenges faced by vulnerable learners, particularly migrants, have been well documented, starting with ensuring that basic physiological needs such as housing and food are met (Maslow, 1954). Other challenges that will be discussed in further detail in this publication include various structural barriers such as linguistic and financial difficulties, policies that advantage the majority learners, personal challenges related to identity and differences in values, and ultimately the risk of societal exclusion. Yet, when such challenges are not addressed, these migrant and minoritised learners remain at risk for continued marginalisation within society, unable to compete successfully in the labour market, with potentially more dependence on government support. It becomes imperative, then, to address such challenges through support of intercultural integration of these learners and, in particular, through specific policies aimed at addressing structural barriers. It is interesting to note that intercultural integration falls within both the category of "Safety and security" and "Love and belonging" (see Figure 01 below) which also points to how fundamental such integration is within the hierarchy of human needs.

**Fig. 01** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: Maslow, 1954



Promoting intercultural integration for all students in higher education aligns with broader societal goals of fostering social cohesion, combatting prejudice and discrimination, and promoting inclusive and equitable societies. In an era marked by increasing cultural complexity and global migration, nurturing intercultural understanding and respect within higher education institutions serves as a bulwark against xenophobia, hate speech, and intolerance.

Moreover, from an economic standpoint, intercultural integration in higher education contributes to enhancing competitiveness in the global marketplace. Graduates who possess intercultural competencies are better equipped to collaborate across differences, negotiate cultural differences and effectively engage with diverse stakeholders in both local and global contexts (Starr, Yngve & Jin 2022). Thus, investing in intercultural integration not only enriches the educational experience for learners but also enhances graduates' employability, ultimately contributing to individual and national prosperity. "For the host community, increasing access to higher education for refugees and displaced persons can increase the richness of the academic community, the labour market and enhance social cohesion. Ultimately, the inclusion of these groups in higher education creates the 'critical link between learning and earning' " (UNHCR, n. d.) (UNESCO, 2022: 50).

It is incumbent upon policy-makers to prioritise and support initiatives that promote intercultural integration within higher education institutions, especially for those in countries impacted by forced migration due to war and crisis, including the impacts of climate change. This entails fostering a culture of inclusivity, providing support services (such as language classes) as well as resources for intercultural programming and initiatives, providing adequate professional development to educators, integrating intercultural learning opportunities into the curriculum and co-curriculum and connecting learners more deeply to the broader community.

Among the primary challenges immigrants often face when pursuing higher education is first and foremost that of language, financing, and navigating different cultural systems. In regard to financing through adequate financial resources, there are often competing financial demands of housing, food, and healthcare among other basic needs (Evans, Connors, and Unangst, 2023). Second, credential recognition issues, where their qualifications are not fully acknowledged in the host country, leads

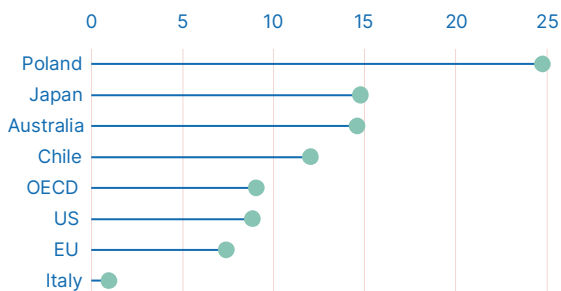
to challenges in higher education accessibility as well as in underemployment despite their skills and expertise, often at the cost of their dignity and the full realisation of their professional and economic potential. Moreover, "even if the barriers of financial resources and qualifications are addressed, many refugees accessing higher education will still have to overcome language barriers, xenophobia, discrimination, and trauma (UNESCO, 2017a). As a result, they end up re-entering the education system or accepting jobs for which they are overqualified (RTE, n. d.)" in order to earn a basic living (UNESCO, 2022: 50). These kinds of issues are complex and multifaceted, significantly impacting their overall integration into the education systems and labour markets. While migrants have made strides in education, they often still lag behind native-born populations. In the European Union, for example, over one-third of foreign-born individuals have not progressed beyond primary education, a rate nearly double that of native-born individuals. This abyssal education rate is due in part to European prioritisation on low skilled labour. Furthermore, migrants often face challenges in being given legal employment or even the right to work by the host governments, as well as afterwards finding employment that fully utilises their skills. Even among those with tertiary education, these immigrants are less likely to be employed in roles matching their qualifications compared to their native-born counterparts across all countries, and they are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs in nearly all contexts (OECD, 2023). The economic costs of excluding migrants are significant. A World Bank Policy Research Working Paper (Ratha *et al.*, 2011) highlights that immigrants bring valuable skills and fill labour shortages, boosting Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Conversely, their exclusion leads to underemployment and unrealised economic potential.

The social costs of failing to integrate adult learners, defined as those generally older than 25 years of age who seek education for professional growth, career changes or personal development (Jobs for the Future, 2024), are equally concerning. [An OECD report on "Indicators of Immigrant Integration"](#) demonstrates a positive correlation between integration efforts and social cohesion noting that "the perception of discrimination is a key indicator of social cohesion." (OECD, 2023). Lack of intercultural integration can lead to social unrest and hinder societal progress. In extreme cases, social exclusion can even have security implications, as highlighted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (Blaustein *et al.*, 2020) which stresses the link between social marginalisation and recruitment by extremist groups.

**Fig. 02** Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2023

**Immigrant populations have become more educated in most countries**

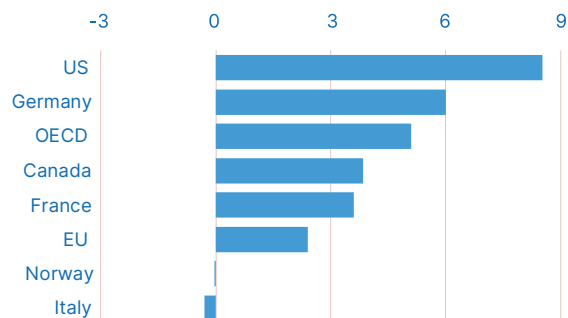
Increase in share of highly educated immigrants between 2010 and 2020, change in % points



Immigrant women are on average more educated than their male peers.

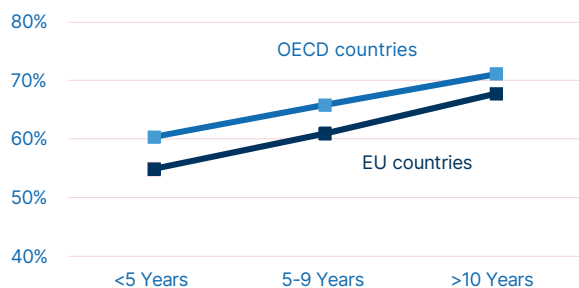
**Students with immigrant parents perform better than a decade ago in most countries**

Change in PISA reading scores shown in equivalent months of schooling (2009 vs. 2018), 15-year-old children of immigrants



**Labour market outcomes for immigrants improve over time**

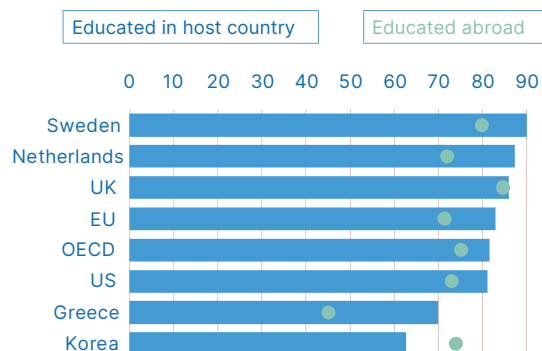
Employment rates of immigrants by duration of stay



Despite starting at lower levels, immigrant women progress more quickly.

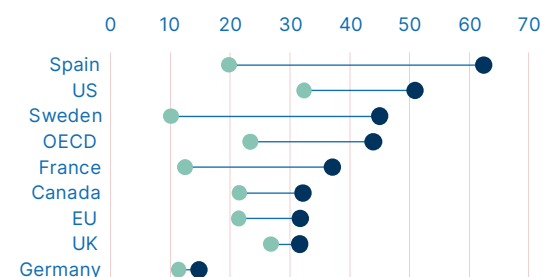
**Highly qualified immigrants find it harder to get a job when educated abroad**

Employment rates for tertiary-educated immigrants



**Poverty rates for immigrants and their children still far exceed native-born**

Relative child poverty rates (%), children under 16 living in immigrant households and native-born households, 2019



This is despite a drop in child poverty rates in 3 out of 5 countries over the past decade.

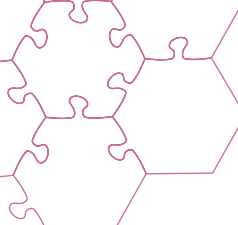
**Immigrants are much more likely to live in overcrowded housing than native-born**

Overcrowding rates across OECD countries



In two-thirds of EU and OECD countries, overcrowding among immigrants is at least twice as likely as among the native-born and the differences have widened over the past decade.

Source: [OECD](#), European Commission, 2023



While higher education is not for all learners, higher education qualifications often signify the opportunity to earn higher levels of income (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). UNESCO, in its 2021 report “Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education,” notes that education occurs across all ages, increasingly with adult learners, and not always in formal, traditional learning spaces such as universities. The number of first-generation students, who may often represent minoritised learners, has increased globally—applications from first-gen students increased by 67% over 2019-2020, almost twice the rate of those from continuing-generation students (Gordon, 2024). In addition, international student mobility has more than tripled in the last 25 years and continues to generally increase (Chankseliani *et al*, 2024). In 2021, there were 6.4 million internationally mobile students (out of 254 million students) compared to 4.8 million in 2015: an increase of 32%, which is even more impressive considering the number was just 2 million in 1998 (when UNESCO records began) (UIS, 2023; British Council, 2024).

UNESCO’s recognition of conventions in higher education call for the recognition of qualifications for refugees and displaced persons, in order to facilitate these groups’ access to higher education and the labour market. This is embedded in Article VII of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, which aims to promote recognition, mobility and inter-university cooperation on a global scale, as well as the five “second generation” regional recognition conventions, which promote the same within their respective regions. Going one step further, UNESCO introduced the Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants to support the implementation of this article, building on the European Qualifications Passport led by the Council of Europe. These conventions, which nearly 100 countries have ratified, seek to facilitate refugees’ and displaced persons’ access to higher education and the labour market, and thus their overall integration into host countries, while also providing capacities for host countries.

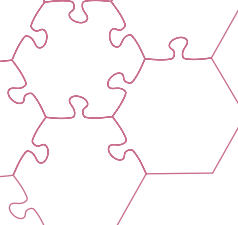
For years, many higher education institutions have put programmes and policies in place to help support first-generation and international students to varying degrees of success, often highly dependent on a variety of factors

including geographic location, language needs, degree of heterogeneity of local communities, and institutional resources. Immigrants and their children typically face socioeconomic disadvantages compared to native-born individuals, but these disparities often lessen over generations and with increased time in the host country. Recent improvements in immigrants’ labour market integration and their children’s educational outcomes have been observed over the past decade. However, living conditions for immigrants have not universally improved, and disparities still exist (see Figure 2: OECD, EC, 2023). Recent immigrants have seen increased employment rates in many countries, attributed in part to higher levels of educational attainment compared to previous cohorts.

There are numerous societal reasons for why intercultural integration is so important to address, as discussed here. And yet, this question of “Why intercultural integrate?” can also be viewed from multiple perspectives, including that of migrants. While many learners are motivated by desires for well-being and future success in the workplace, it is important to acknowledge that for some migrants, there may not be motivation to intercultural integrate. For some, well-being may be found in staying within their own group, or if their plans include returning to their home country, it may not seem worth the effort to intercultural integrate.

## Exploring Intercultural Integration

Intercultural integration is ultimately a facet of social integration, a concept that has been theorised and researched for well over one hundred years. Thus, it is important to examine this existing scholarship, as it provides the context and foundation for exploring intercultural integration in higher education. Social integration theory, as described by Durkheim (1893) explains how different groups come together to form a cohesive society, including ways in which minority groups integrate into mainstream society, and attain acceptance for all. According to Durkheim, there are two types of social integration: mechanical



solidarity, based on kinship and shared beliefs, and organic solidarity, based on interdependence through a complex division of labour. A lack of such integration, or anomie, can lead to social disconnection and ultimately conflict. While there is a whole body of work and research in sociology around social integration, this publication is concerned with intercultural integration primarily from an educational lens. Intercultural integration in this case means looking at efforts defined as including a “both/and approach” of maintaining one’s identity while embracing others’ identities, often through shared values. Intercultural integration can be particularly evident at the city-level, where policies are conducive for facilitating successful integration of immigrant populations. Such policies may include educational access as well as the creation of welcoming public spaces (this topic will be further explored in [Chapter 3](#)). According to the Copenhagen Declaration (United Nations, 1995), social integration occurs and is achieved through inclusion, participation and social justice that focus on engagement in a common future. Much work from global organisations such as the United Nations and UNESCO, has focused on promoting inclusion and social integration (International Organization for Migration, 2019; UNESCO, 2016; UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2024a; United Nations, 2006; United Nations Development Programme, 2013).

From the literature, integration in a higher education context can be defined as “an intentional process to create community, by encouraging...students to engage with each other in ongoing interaction, characterised by mutual respect, responsibility, action, and commitment” (Kappler *et al.*, 2014, 2). In the end, intercultural integration involves embracing pluralism and the coexistence of diverse groups without losing one’s own identity. Benefits of intercultural integration include increased respect for all, as well as increased productivity and knowledge, and in particular, increased intercultural competence, which is ultimately key to successful intercultural integration.

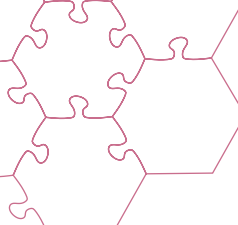
While the term “intercultural integration” is not traditionally used in international higher education, it could serve as an overarching approach that promotes inclusivity and avoids dichotomies of, for instance, domestic vs. international students. This concept is particularly relevant in light of

changing migration patterns, which forecast trends such as forced internationalisation, which in turn references the increase in refugee students (Deardorff *et al.*, 2022), or that of skilled migration within higher education (Hawthorne, 2012). This multifaceted and complex relationship between global migration, higher education and internationalisation makes such an “intercultural integration” approach all the more compelling.

To date, intercultural integration as an approach has been more prevalent in specific geographic regions, such as Europe, and particularly within the urban realm (e.g., Intercultural Cities as highlighted further in [Chapter 3](#)). The focus in the case of Intercultural Cities is on creating inclusive urban spaces and policies that embrace difference and foster social cohesion among different cultural groups (Bartlett, 2003). Taking inspiration from this approach, this publication envisions how applying similar principles to higher education institutions can lead to a more inclusive and enriching learning environment where all students can thrive and have a greater sense of belonging.

## Introducing A New Intercultural Integration Framework

Taking into account UNESCO publications on intercultural integration, competence, dialogue and understanding (UNESCO, 2013; UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2022a; UNESCO, 2022b) along with diverse literature on this approach, a synthesis emerges around some key principles and related concepts that can be proposed through a new intercultural integration framework. A prerequisite to these principles as the foundational imperative is a whole-of-society approach to address discrimination and hate speech (UNESCO, 2023). Based on a growing body of literature and studies around well-being as an increasingly prominent concern among educators (OECD, n.d.; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021; Douws *et al.*, 2023), and given that intercultural integration cannot exist in a vacuum, it is important to place it within the broader goal of well-being. This is particularly important for migrants, who often face even greater barriers



to higher education than other students. The proposed framework on intercultural integration adopts a more holistic well-being lens, which encompasses not only physical and mental well-being, but also spiritual and social well-being, resilience, and holistic student development, ultimately resulting in human flourishing (see Figure 2: reference II framework), a complex construct broadly defined as the conscious process of developing individuals' capacities, strengths, and virtues to live well (Harvard, 2016; de Ruyter, Oades, & Waghid, 2021). UNESCO notes that flourishing is a "hybrid-concept" both objective and subjective, naturalistic, culture-dependent, and agent-relative (de Ruyter, Oades, & Waghid, 2021). With this overarching theme, or lens, of **well-being** and with **intercultural competence** at the core (which will be discussed further later on), **five key principles** from intercultural integration approaches and related theories, applicable to higher education institutions, emerge. These principles, along with corresponding concepts which are foundational to each principle and essential to address in the intercultural integration process within higher education institutions, include the following (and are outlined in Figure 1), (Ester-Sanchez, 2016; Mondaca Rojas & Gajardo Carvajal, 2015; Allport, 1954; King, 1956; Friere, 1970; Deardorff & Charles, 2018; Deardorff & Jones, 2022):

### 1 Shared responsibility for integration

This concept emphasises that successful integration of students from diverse backgrounds into a higher education institution is a responsibility that should be shared among various stakeholders, including administrators, professors, staff beyond the students themselves, and the local communities in which students live and often work. This multidirectional approach highlights the need for collaboration and collective effort to create inclusive environments where all members feel valued and supported. *Belonging* is an underlying focus of shared responsibility of integration.

### 2 Reciprocity in intercultural integration

Reciprocity in intercultural integration refers to the idea that integration efforts should be mutual and multi-dimensional, particularly in regard to adaptation. It emphasises that both the higher education institution and students should contribute to and benefit from the integration process itself. This involves fostering intercultural competence, understanding, respect, and cooperation between different student groups, supporting the professors and staff as well as students, which leads to a more cohesive learning environment where students learn from and with each other. Such reciprocity means being willing to be changed by the other. *Mutual learning* is a core concept within reciprocity.

### 3 Inclusive education policies and practices

Inclusive education policies and practices are built on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and aim to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, gender, abilities, or disabilities, receive quality education within higher education institutions. These policies and practices promote success for all students which means ensuring inclusive access and equitable learning environments by providing necessary support, resources, and accommodations to meet the needs of all learners—both before and during their time at the institution—thereby fostering a learning environment where every student can thrive. To ensure inclusive practices, professional development for educators becomes crucial. *Student success* is a key facet of inclusive education policies.

#### 4 Promotion of civic and human rights education through shared values

This involves initiatives and educational programmes designed to raise awareness among all stakeholders connected to higher education institutions (including those in the local communities) about individuals' rights and responsibilities as citizens, as well as to promote understanding and respect for human rights principles, including the right to education (UNESCO, 2022). It aims to empower individuals to participate actively in civic life, uphold democratic values, and advocate for social justice within their communities and beyond. *Shared values* are a key focus in the promotion of civic and human rights, as well as key to successful intercultural integration.

#### 5 Citizenship re-imagined

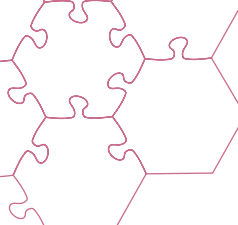
The reconceptualisation of citizenship challenges standard definitions of national citizenship by expanding the understanding of citizenship to include active participation, belonging, and identity that is situated within our shared humanity. This more expansive notion of citizenship encourages a broader view that encompasses cultural, social, economic, spiritual, and environmental dimensions, aiming to create more inclusive and equitable societies where all members have a sense of belonging and agency in shaping their communities so that poverty and injustice are addressed and eliminated. Recognising that migrant populations, particularly refugees, often face precariousness of their immigration status, this reimagined citizenship invites active participation in the host society as empowered global citizens working together toward a more equitable and just world. UNESCO envisions reimagined citizenship as global citizenship with education focused on three key domains of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural learning; the three core notions of global citizenship education being respect for diversity, solidarity, and a shared sense of humanity (UNESCO, 2018). Education therefore must be centred on developing critically conscious learners who take collective action through solidarity. Such collective actions could

include not only becoming active civic participants in local communities but also acting to transform the societies that forced migrants to flee. *Pluralistic identity* and agency are essential concepts towards reconceptualising citizenship, and includes taking collective action within complex dimensions as a desired outcome. Another part of reconceptualising citizenship is through other perspectives such as in the South African perspective of *ubuntu*, which states that we are humans through other humans along with a recognition that what we each do impacts others (UNESCO, 2018). And given the other principles in this framework, this conceptualisation of citizenship is not just for students, but for all, including community citizens.

At the core of the five principles of intercultural integration is **intercultural competence**, which has been defined broadly by UNESCO as “abilities to adeptly navigate complex environments marked by a growing diversity of peoples, cultures and lifestyles” (2012, p. 5). To delve deeper into intercultural competence, which has been the focus of scholarly pursuit for over sixty years (Byram, Hofstede, Bennett, Arasaratnam-Smith, Ang, Spencer-Oatey to name a few), the framework in [Annex](#) by Deardorff (2006, 2020) further explores this concept within the context of the proposed intercultural integration principles. This deeper examination is crucial, as intercultural competence is essential for the successful achievement of intercultural integration.

Noting that intercultural competence is a lifelong process, rather than a static set of skills, Deardorff's research (2006, 2020) led to the first research-based definition of this competence. Intercultural competence is defined as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people across differences, encompassing essential attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes, and external outcomes, as briefly summarised here:

- ◆ **Attitudes:** The foundation of intercultural competence begins with having the key attitudes of openness, curiosity, and respect which empower individuals to enter into intercultural interactions with a willingness to learn and engage.



- ◆ **Knowledge:** This involves understanding one's own culture as well as cultures of others, including cultural norms, worldviews, and communication styles. Cultural self-awareness and understanding other worldviews are crucial components.
- ◆ **Skills:** Intercultural competence requires key skills for engagement, in particular listening for understanding. Other key skills include critical thinking, observation, and connecting.
- ◆ **Internal Outcomes:** As individuals develop intercultural competence, remaining open to learning, they begin to internalise cultural knowledge and skills, leading to an internal frame of reference shift that is more flexible, adaptable, and open to different perspectives.
- ◆ **External Outcomes:** The ultimate goal of intercultural competence is the ability to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately across differences and in diverse contexts. This involves adjusting one's behaviour to different settings in ways that demonstrate respect and understanding.

Deardorff's framework is often visualised as a pyramid with the foundational attitudes at the base, followed by knowledge and skills, which lead to internal outcomes (such as a flexible worldview), and ultimately, to the external outcomes of effective and appropriate behaviour in intercultural situations. However, it is important to note that there is no point at which one becomes interculturally competent given that such development is a lifelong process. This comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals develop intercultural competence over time relates well to the intercultural integration framework proposed in this publication in that it emphasises specific attitudes, skills and knowledge needed for belonging to occur.

Deardorff emphasises that intercultural competence is not a fixed state but a continuous process of development involving ongoing learning and self-assessment. This process requires ongoing reflection and engagement, as individuals must adapt their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to different contexts. In her research, Deardorff also points out that intercultural competence

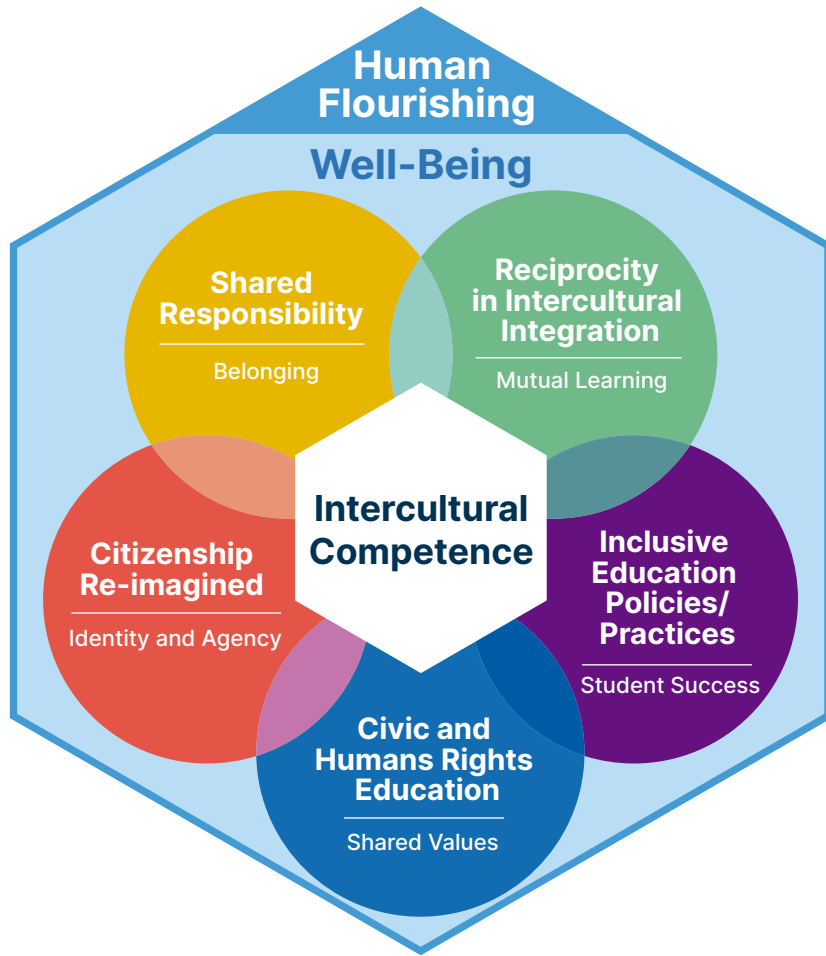
is context-dependent, meaning that what may be considered appropriate or effective in one context may not be so in another. This highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in all interactions, given this dynamic and evolving nature of intercultural competence. Through this process-oriented approach, individuals can develop the ability to navigate intercultural encounters successfully and contribute to more harmonious and inclusive environments.

Given the centrality of intercultural competence in support of intercultural integration principles in higher education, implications at both the individual and systems level will be further explored in [Chapter 2](#).

Foundational to all five principles in this proposed intercultural integration framework is the concept of **well-being**. Well-being, according to the OECD (n.d.) consists of key dimensions of income/wealth, work/job quality, housing, health, knowledge/skills, environment quality, safety, work-life balance, social connections and civil engagement (which align quite well with Maslow's hierarchy of needs presented earlier). Learners often experience significant stress during integration and educational processes, making it crucial to prioritise well-being (OECD, 2020) due to its role in fostering resilience. Further, basic needs (per Maslow, 1954) must be met before learners are able to effectively engage in intercultural integration, which in particular involves the social connections and civil engagement dimensions of well-being. Within higher education, well-being can also be addressed at both the individual and institutional systems levels. This overall goal of well-being ultimately leads to **human flourishing**, a concept rooted in ancient philosophical traditions (Aristotle, Aquinas). Though it includes multiple components, concepts and definitions, human flourishing broadly refers to living positively within an optimal range of human functioning, with an emphasis on overall life well-being and the ongoing fulfilment of human capacities within given contexts, all with a focus on common good.

**Fig. 03**

Intercultural Integration Framework



Five Key Principles in Intercultural Integration in Higher Education Institutions With Corresponding Concept

Principle	Corresponding Concept
Shared Responsibility for Integration	Belonging
Reciprocity in Intercultural Integration	Mutual Learning
Inclusive Education Policies and Practices	Student Success
Civic and Human Rights Education	Shared Values
Citizenship Re-imagined	Identity and Agency



## Limitations of Role of Higher Education within Intercultural Integration

While higher education plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural integration, preparing global citizens for the future workforce, and promoting active citizenship in an inclusive society, it also has several inherent limitations that affect intercultural integration both within higher education and through these institutions into local society:

- ◆ **Limited reach:** Higher education institutions do not reach all segments of society equally, especially given that higher education may not be appropriate or needed by all, leading to disparities in access which perpetuate and exacerbate social inequalities. Yet in some cases, as in the United States, community colleges are becoming increasingly important in addressing this gap. These institutions exemplify how higher education can evolve to meet the needs of a more diverse and underserved population by providing accessible pathways for non-traditional students, such as those who begin their post-secondary education later, who may already have families and who may already be working full-time.
- ◆ **Racial homogeneity** of the student body as well as staff/professors/administrators: Despite some effort on the part of higher education institutions to broaden the cultural and demographic representation of students as well as institutional employees, many institutions are still largely racially and culturally homogeneous, which can hamper efforts toward inclusion and belonging.
- ◆ **Cultural assimilation pressure:** Higher education institutions may inadvertently exert pressure on students and stakeholders to conform to dominant cultural and academic norms and expectations, which can limit the

celebration of diverse identities and ways of being and knowing among stakeholders connected to the institutions, especially those with a strong desire to maintain their own cultural backgrounds and identities.

- ◆ **Resistance to change:** Higher education institutions are notorious for maintaining traditions, some dating back to the Middle Ages. Further, culturally dominant academic systems resist other forms of knowledge and knowledge production, resulting in dominant knowledge hegemonies and a diminishment of non-European epistemological worldviews and methods. Combined with institutional inertia, a lack of motivation to confront and challenge the status quo, including knowledge production, can greatly impede efforts toward intercultural integration within institutions.

Beyond these limitations, other broader forces such as geopolitics, as discussed earlier, can greatly impact the degree to which intercultural integration can be achieved in higher education. Regardless, addressing these limitations requires a multi-faceted approach at different levels that prioritises policies and programmes aimed at fostering inclusive institutions where all students can thrive. The proposed Intercultural Integration Framework offers one such approach, offering and applying a multi-faceted strategy across different levels within universities.

## Current Approaches In Supporting Migrants

Higher education opportunities for migrant and minoritised learners encompass a wide array of options beyond traditional to 2-3 or 4-year degree programmes; these opportunities can also include certificates, micro-credentialing and badging, language training, lifelong learning options, internships, and special job training. To effectively support these migrant and minoritised learners, higher education institutions around the world have implemented various approaches, including:

- language support,
- specialised academic support such as tutoring sessions and study groups,
- access to mental health resources such as counselling (while recognising that some students may not feel comfortable in counselling settings),
- promotion of project-based learning,
- incorporation of ed-tech and adaptive learning tools,
- pre-orientation programmes,
- tailored approaches to teaching and learning, including trauma-informed approaches and
- de-centering the dominant group from the curriculum.

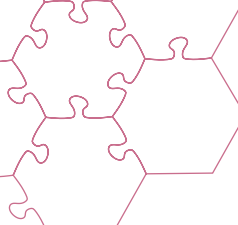
In exploring a more appropriate approach to integrating migrants interculturally within higher education, one can turn to international higher education for what has worked in integrating international students. Within higher education institutions, the support and integration of international students have most often resided within internationalisation initiatives. Comprehensive internationalisation of higher education has been defined as “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (de Wit *et al.*, 2015, p. 29; Knight 2004). This broad internationalisation umbrella encompasses various approaches including:

- **Internationalisation at Home (IaH)** (Beelen & Jones, 2015) which refers to initiatives that focus on infusing international perspectives, cross-cultural experiences and intercultural understanding into the curriculum, campus life, and overall learning environment for all students, regardless of their origin. It aims to foster global citizenship and intercultural competence without necessarily requiring physical mobility to other countries.
- **Internationalisation of the Curriculum** (Leask, 2015) which focuses on integrating international, intercultural and global content, perspectives, and approaches into teaching, learning, and assessment practices. This can involve incorporating global case

studies, comparative analyses, and diverse viewpoints into the curriculum, as well as engaging in such methods as service learning with diverse groups in the local community, Collaborative Online Intercultural Learning (COIL) and virtual exchange.

Within UNESCO, internationalisation of higher education has focused on several key areas that emphasise humanistic values, solidarity, and intercultural cooperation. Internationalisation, according to UNESCO, centers around increasing academic mobility, ensuring equitable access to international learning opportunities, and promoting global citizenship. Internationalisation is often linked with enhancing the quality of education and research by incorporating global perspectives into curricula, fostering cross-cultural exchanges, and encouraging collaboration between institutions across borders. Several key areas of focus for UNESCO include (Parra-Sandoval, 2022; Uvalić-Trumbić, 2009; UNESCO, 2020; 2022, 2024):

- 1 **Promoting Higher Education as a Human Right and Public Good:** UNESCO views higher education as a human right and public good, as embedded in the Roadmap of the 2022 World Higher Education Conference. UNESCO’s approach stresses that higher education should be accessible to all, particularly through policies that prioritise equity, access, and quality. This contrasts with market-driven approaches where education is treated as a tradable service. UNESCO advocates for the integration of higher education into international frameworks that promote collaboration and peace rather than competition.
- 2 **International Cooperation and Solidarity:** UNESCO emphasises the importance of fostering international collaboration through research and academic mobility. This includes efforts to increase student and staff exchanges, develop joint research initiatives, and promote the global sharing of knowledge. A key feature of this is the organisation’s commitment to reducing the “brain drain” by encouraging the development of local talent and ensuring equitable partnerships between higher and lower-income countries.



**a Global Academic Mobility:** UNESCO emphasises the importance of mobility through its recognition conventions that allow students, educators, and researchers to move across countries, facilitating cross-cultural exchange and knowledge-sharing between education systems. This aspect of internationalisation aims to broaden academic perspectives and cultivate intercultural understanding.

**b Multilateral Research:** There remains a great need for mutual and reciprocal multilateral research in higher education and while this occurs to some degree, the United Nations Pact for the Future calls for more focus on these research partnerships.

### 3 Humanistic and Inclusive

**Internationalisation:** Rather than focusing purely on economic benefits, UNESCO's vision of internationalisation is closely tied to its broader mission of promoting peace, human rights, and sustainable development. The organisation's framework is rooted in intercultural dialogue, global citizenship, and solidarity, with a strong focus on fostering mutual understanding and cooperation across borders.

**a Equitable Access to Higher Education:** Recognising that higher education opportunities are often concentrated among privileged groups, UNESCO's internationalisation agenda seeks to bridge the gap by offering support to underrepresented populations, such as displaced persons and refugees. This aligns with broader goals of social inclusion and the right to education for all, regardless of background.

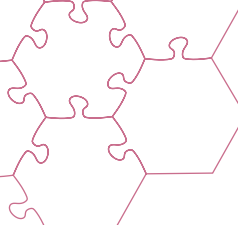
**b Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications:** Internationalisation also focuses on harmonising quality standards across institutions and ensuring the recognition of foreign qualifications, including for refugees and displaced persons even in cases where documentary evidence is lacking, which is critical for student access, mobility and career prospects. **The Global Convention**

**on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education** and five UNESCO regional recognition conventions create frameworks that support the fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education.

**4 Addressing Global Inequities:** UNESCO has consistently worked to address the imbalances in internationalisation, particularly those that favour North-to-South academic mobility and reinforce the dominance of Western institutions and knowledge production systems. The organisation promotes South-South cooperation and regional exchange programmes to strengthen local higher education systems and reduce dependence on institutions in developed countries.

These themes are recurrent in various UNESCO (2020, 2022, 2024) reports and surveys, reflecting a commitment to fostering educational systems that are globally interconnected and inclusive, with key documents highlighting the need for internationalisation strategies that are explicitly linked to the social and economic development of societies, as well as an emerging theme around global digital citizenship and the complexities related to responsibilities and ethics within the Global Digital Age.

In some higher educational contexts, such as in the United States, domestic minoritised students have traditionally been supported through multicultural initiatives. These often focus on celebrating cultural plurality and shared values within a national context and promoting understanding and respect between different ethnic and religious groups. The American Council on Education conducted an initiative looking at the historical contexts, programmes, and efforts of both international and multicultural education. The researchers found that while these efforts originated from very different histories, the bridge between the two lies with intercultural competence (Olson *et al.*, 2007). Regardless of location, though, higher education institutions have struggled with how to more purposefully and intentionally integrate all students into the educational community so



as to foster stronger social bonds and a sense of belonging. International research indicates that educationally disadvantaged students face more challenges at and outside of school or university (e.g., Lamb & Markussen, 2011; OECD, 2017a; OECD, 2017b). For example, students with a migrant family background (i.e., students whose parents immigrated) or with a non-academic family background (i.e., students whose parents do not hold any college or university degree) have a higher probability of facing mental health problems like depression and anxiety (WHO & CGF, 2014) and are less satisfied with their life than other students (OECD, 2017a). Moreover, these students have a higher risk of leaving school before obtaining an upper secondary qualification (Lamb & Markussen, 2011, p. 2). This is likely in part a result of their impaired sense of belonging at educational institutions (e.g., OECD, 2017a), which refers to the feeling that one is accepted, included, respected, and valued in the respective social environment (cf. Walton & Brady, 2017; Willms, 2003). Prior research has shown that sense of belonging is crucial for the development of well-being (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Further, a decrease in sense of belonging can reduce students' persistence intentions (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009).

Thus, fostering social and intercultural integration and a sense of belonging for all students is crucial for several reasons. A diverse and inclusive learning environment prepares students for a globalised world, equipping them with the skills needed to collaborate effectively with people from different backgrounds, leading to increased innovation, creativity, and economic prosperity (McKinsey & Company, 2010). Furthermore, feeling welcomed, valued, and supported is essential for student success. Such intercultural integration fosters a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of isolation, which in turn contribute to higher retention rates and improved academic performance (Tinto, 2009). In the end, prioritising intercultural integration in higher education has the potential to be a powerful tool for promoting intercultural understanding and social cohesion within a broader society. By fostering empathy, mutual respect, and inclusive learning environments, institutions can contribute to a more just and equitable world (Council of Europe, 2018).

## Overview of this publication



Given that intercultural integration plays such a key role in students' success both in higher education and later in the workforce and inclusion in society, this publication provides a synthesis of current approaches in higher education for supporting minoritised students, including migrants, displaced, and international learners. Building on lessons learned from these approaches, this publication proposes a new framework, termed here as "intercultural integration", which has been explored in this chapter. The aim of this publication is to put forth an approach that promotes inclusive environments within higher education institutions, particularly for those who may be disadvantaged and often excluded. Supporting a cultural shift towards comprehensive inclusion of all students, will in turn help to dismantle persistent structural barriers both within and beyond institutions of higher learning.

Building on the proposed intercultural integration approach within higher education institutions, this publication also explores how broader society can benefit from more interculturally integrated institutions of higher education, and how these systems can better support broad intercultural integration within societies. How this approach plays out within higher education and in society at large will be explored in the next two chapters. Based on these discussions of implications within higher education institutions and the impact on society, this publication concludes with recommendations for policy-makers on how to take this intercultural integration approach forward within their own contexts.





# Chapter 2

## Supporting Intercultural Integration Within Higher Education Institutions

### Summary of Key Points

- ◆ Multidirectional intercultural integration within higher education institutions, utilising the 5 principles of the framework, is a multi-layered process that involves the intentional engagement of educators, staff, and students in developing intercultural competence.
- ◆ The successful integration of diverse cultural perspectives requires a systemic approach, incorporating all levels of the institution—from leadership to day-to-day practices, to academic programmes and student support aimed at the relational (individual) level—which creates an ecosystem in which intercultural integration can thrive.
- ◆ Challenges and barriers inherent in fostering intercultural integration in higher education include language barriers, limited institutional support, gaps in capacity-building of academic staff, financing, and intensity factors.
- ◆ Several success factors driving meaningful intercultural integration include strong leadership, adequate investment in resources, staff training/professional development and a long-term commitment to holistic intercultural integration for all including intentional development of intercultural competence within all sectors of the institution, which is a critical element in overcoming barriers and fostering successful integration.

### Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the reality for many migrant students while pursuing higher education is that beyond the academic challenges, they are also grappling with cultural dissonance, language barriers, financial and housing difficulties and, in some cases, lingering effects of past trauma-informed experiences that further complicate their adjustment. Of these, navigating cultural differences and interculturally integrating into the intercultural fabric of the university community can be daunting, both for the students and for the educators and staff who support them. Given these

multifaceted challenges, it becomes imperative for higher education institutions to adopt a structured approach to intercultural integration—one that is informed by a comprehensive framework encompassing the various levels of the institution. Thus, it is incumbent upon higher education institutions to intentionally and holistically emphasise the intercultural integration of migrant and minoritised students through intentional support and programmes for students as well as for educators and staff. To that end, [Chapter 1](#) proposed a framework of five principles (figure 1) within overall well-being and with intercultural competence at the core. This framework serves as a lens through which to engage in intercultural integration within higher education institutions. This chapter thus builds on the framework's five

principles of Shared responsibility of integration, Reciprocity in intercultural integration, Inclusive education policies and practices, Promotion of civics and human rights education, and Reconceptualisation of citizenship, each serving as a pillar for fostering intercultural integration.

What does intercultural integration look like within higher education institutions? This chapter applies the five principles and corresponding concepts to three levels of a higher education institution: **institutional/policy level, academic level and individual/relational level**. Through a series of questions, policy-makers and university administrators are guided on how to address intercultural integration at each level. Understanding how this framework could actually be operationalised across these levels will help institutions better support the intercultural integration of all students, ultimately ensuring that institutions educate global-ready graduates who successfully engage actively in society through their local communities (Deardorff, *et al.*, 2022).

This chapter begins with a summary of the context before describing what intercultural integration looks like at each level, followed by some key questions that policy-makers and university administrators can explore further in addressing how higher education institutions can support intercultural integration efforts at three levels within higher education institutions—the Institutional level, the Academic (programme/department) level and the Relational level. This is followed by a cursory discussion on challenges faced by higher education institutions, and ends with a brief highlight of success factors needed to ensure that such efforts are effectively implemented within higher education institutions. Examples are shared throughout.

## Context

All students, including migrant ones, need to be better interculturally integrated into higher education institutions so as to ensure their overall success, which stems from student well-being and a sense of belonging through shared values and opportunities to engage and take action.

## Historical Context of Intercultural Integration in Higher Education

For nearly 100 years, higher education institutions have been intentionally addressing some of this intercultural integration through what is broadly known as internationalisation of higher education (although within African contexts, it becomes Africanisation of higher education given the dearth of resources from within and about the continent). Internationalisation of higher education, as noted in [Chapter 1](#), has been defined as the intentional integration of intercultural, international, and global dimensions into all functions of higher education including the curriculum (Knight, 1994) which is also known as Internationalisation at Home (Nilsson, 2003; Beelen, 2015) and Internationalisation of the Curriculum (Leask, 2015). There is a whole body of research and work around this comprehensive internationalisation of higher education (Deardorff, de Wit, Leask and Charles, 2022; Hudzik, 2015). And it is important to acknowledge that even within these internationalisation efforts, there has still remained discrimination of learners within higher education (including gender, race, language, etc.).

## The Limitations of Traditional Internationalisation Approaches

While these efforts have laid the groundwork for intercultural integration, the increasingly varied student populations—including refugees and migrants—necessitate a more nuanced and inclusive approach that extends beyond traditional models of internationalisation. In fact, the work mentioned too often focuses predominantly on the dichotomy of international and domestic students when, in fact, the realities of the 21st century higher education environment mean that there is an ever-growing number of diverse students that are no longer served solely through internationalisation efforts.

Refugees and asylum-seekers are increasingly comprising stakeholders in higher education. Scholars at Risk, for example, is a network that seeks to protect and support scholars facing grave threats to their lives, liberty, and wellbeing and seek asylum in host countries (see box below for more details on SAR).

## 2 Scholars at Risk

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of institutions and individuals committed to protecting scholars and promoting academic freedom worldwide. The organisation works to safeguard threatened scholars by offering temporary research and teaching positions at universities and colleges, enabling them to continue their academic work in a safe environment. SAR also advocates for the freedom to think, question, and share ideas, while raising awareness about threats to academic freedom.

One concrete example of a scholar rescued through Scholars at Risk (SAR) is Dr. Farai Gonzo who earned her MA in International Relations and National Security Studies at

the University of Zimbabwe and her PhD in Social Justice Education at the University of Toronto. She worked as a journalist in Zimbabwe until her safety was no longer assured. Thanks to SAR, she is now safely relocated to Canada where she teaches courses on global citizenship, human rights, and political development. SAR's mission goes beyond rescuing scholars; it fosters a global community where academic freedom is respected, and scholars can pursue their work without fear of repression.

Source: [Scholars at risk, 2023](#)

### Intensity Factors Affecting Migrants

Migrants, in addition to many coming out of trauma-informed experiences, face intensity factors that other students may not necessarily face unless they are also sojourners (Paige, 1993). According to Paige (1993), there are ten factors that diverse students may encounter which can psychologically intensify learners' experiences within a university and increase students' stress in attempting to interculturally integrate within the university community. These intensity factors actually apply in varying degrees to any sojourner, although migrants often face them more strongly. The ten intensity factors include the following:

#### The Ten Intensity Factors Impacting Migrant and International Students

- 1 **Cultural differences:** This has to do in particular with the degree of perceived differences in values, beliefs and behaviours.
- 2 **Ethnocentrism:** This has to do with the degree of openness to outsiders.

- 3 **Cultural immersion:** Increased opportunities to interact with those from the host culture increases the stress of the student.
- 4 **Cultural isolation:** This has to do with limited opportunities to interact with those from the host culture which increases stress.
- 5 **Prior intercultural experience:** This has to do with the degree, amount and quality of one's prior experience in cross-cultural situations with usually those from more limited experience having greater stress.
- 6 **Expectations:** This has to do with the degree of one's realistic expectations of the situation and of oneself in that situation.
- 7 **Visibility (and invisibility):** This has to do with the degree to which one "blends" into the learning environment, with the stress going both ways—either in expectations that come with blending in too well or expectations that come from not blending in enough.

- 8 **Status:** This has to do with the degree of respect one receives based on perceived markers of status which can vary based on culture (i.e., age, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, etc).
- 9 **Language:** This is one of the biggest stressors and has to do with the degree to which one is fluent in navigating the language(s) used in the learning and living environment(s).
- 10 **(Loss of) power and control:** Generally sojourners experience some degree of loss of power and control, with personal efficacy being diminished, causing stress. The less power and control the person has, the more psychologically stressful the situation will be.

### Applying the Intensity Factors to the Intercultural Integration Frameworks

These intensity factors, when viewed through the lens of the five principles outlined in [Chapter 1](#), highlight the areas where higher education institutions must focus their support efforts to foster true intercultural integration. Understanding these intensity factors and the historical context of internationalisation efforts is crucial as we consider how to apply the framework of five principles to support migrants effectively. Awareness of these intensity factors can be of considerable value to students (in developing coping strategies) as well as to educators and staff working with migrants. Thus, it is important for higher education institutions to construct support services and programmes to address these factors, as well as to raise greater awareness among other stakeholders on how to work with migrants around these factors. Educators and administrators must not only be aware of these intensity factors but also be equipped with the tools and training necessary to mitigate their impact. This includes developing culturally responsive pedagogies, creating inclusive learning environments, and advocating for policies that prioritise the well-being of migrants.

**Fig. 04** Intercultural Integration Framework



Five Key Principles in Intercultural Integration in Higher Education Institutions With Corresponding Concept

Principle	Corresponding Concept
Shared Responsibility of Integration	Belonging
Reciprocity in Intercultural Integration	Mutual Learning
Inclusive Education Policies and Practices	Student Success
Civic and Human Rights Education	Shared Values
Citizenship Re-imagined	Identity and Agency

## Levels of Intercultural Integration Within Higher Education Institutions

Migrants face challenges at the Institutional/policy level (i.e., application and entrance), at the Academic level once admitted (i.e., different classroom pedagogies) and also at the Relational level (i.e., social integration). Thus, within higher education institutions, there can be

### Three distinct levels of intercultural integration:

**1 Institutional/policy level:** Refers to the regulations, rules, and practices that govern the operation of higher education institutions. This includes financial aid, as

well as administrative factors/policies, such as admission policies (including document validation for admittance into the institution as well as Visa regimes).

- Policies at this level can either mitigate or exacerbate the stress related to power and control, visibility, and status that migrants experience.

**2 Academic level** (programme/department level): Encompasses all aspects and processes of teaching, learning and research within higher education institutions including curriculum and co-curriculum, academic mentoring, and pathways programmes. This also has implications for professional development of educators who teach students.

- At this level, curriculum design and teaching methods can address or ignore the cultural differences and language barriers that migrants often struggle with.

## 3 Links to Professional Pathways - Examples

Among case studies that provide concrete models for how higher education institutions can design support structures that help refugees integrate academically, there are *Kompetenz Kompakt* in Germany and *OsloMet* in Norway. They are structured programmes that provide tailored preparatory education and professional pathways for refugees. These programmes help bridge academic and professional gaps for refugee students, making it easier for them to transition into higher education. Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet) in Norway, for example, has developed tailored programmes aimed at refugees who have prior qualifications in nursing, teaching, or engineering from their home countries. A similar course for bioengineering is planned for the near future. The primary goal of these programmes is to help refugees become authorised to practice their professions in Norway.

Applicants first need to submit their qualifications to the relevant authorities for recognition: the Department of Health for nursing credentials and the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) for teaching and engineering. If their applications are denied, they can enrol in the bridging courses offered by OsloMet. These initiatives provide an alternative pathway to professional integration and exemplify flexible approaches to recognising prior learning in higher education systems, especially for refugees who face challenges documenting their qualifications due to disruptions in their educational and professional paths.

This illustrates the potential for flexible pathways that make use of prior learning, including informal and non-formal learning experiences, which is crucial for many refugees facing interrupted academic trajectories.

Source: [HAW](#), 2024; [OsloMet](#), 2024

**3 Relational level** (individual level): Involves individual interactions and relationships within the university and local communities, aimed at developing and sustaining connections between migrants with other students and community members including through support programmes and networks, intercultural dialogues, UNESCO Story Circles, local community initiatives, community projects, and policies related to creating and sustaining a psychologically safe campus climate and environment.

- The success of intercultural integration at the relational level directly impacts migrants’ sense of belonging and their ability to form and access supportive networks, which are crucial for overcoming cultural isolation.

Specifically, the relational level can be viewed through the lens of **FOSTER** (Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorff, 2022) which provides concrete strategies to educators working with migrants to ensure their success. (See Box 4)

## 4 The FOSTER Lens

- F** Facilitate belonging and collaboration among all learners
- O** Observe actively dynamics between learners and other stakeholders, reflecting on one’s own intercultural competence
- S** Seek first to understand learners as a requisite first step in identifying learners’ needs and determining needed support
- T** Teach to intentionally address key intercultural outcomes in both formal and non-formal contexts so as to facilitate learners’ engagement with identity, similarity and difference
- E** Empower learners to become partners in their own learning and to take action on matters of meaning to them
- R** Reflect on the extent to which learners are integrated interculturally into the educational environment and community, identifying ongoing challenges and barriers and addressing those through changes to policies, practices, programmes, and curricula

Source: Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorff, 2022.

These levels of intercultural integration may incorporate one or more of the five principles outlined in the intercultural integration framework. In the end, successful intercultural integration within higher education institutions requires a holistic approach that spans multiple levels (institutional, academic and relational) engaging

all key stakeholders (learners, professors, staff, policy-makers, administrators, local citizens) within specific contexts unique to locale and institutional-type. Each level of intercultural integration is interconnected; success in one area supports and reinforces efforts in the others, leading to a more cohesive and inclusive educational environment.

## For Policymakers: Guiding Questions and Considerations for Intercultural Integration at the Three Levels

So, what does intercultural integration look like at higher education institutions at these three levels?

### Institutional/Policy Level

At the institutional/policy level, intercultural integration means all students are able to access the institution with few barriers, have access to financial aid to support their education, encounter and engage with staff and professors who are welcoming to all, and discover an inclusive campus culture and environment, grounded in shared values, that nurtures all learners and provides multiple opportunities to connect. This also means that student well-being and student success are cornerstones that drive all institutional policies. Questions for policy-makers to explore further at this level, based on the proposed intercultural integration framework, are on how institutions can better support intercultural integration broadly.

Here are some questions that administrators and policy-makers can explore further:

#### Questions

- To what extent are policies driven by student well-being and student success? And what does student success and well-being look like—to administrators? To students themselves?
  - What are the barriers for students to accessing education at this institution? To what extent do minoritised students and migrants receive financial aid? What other barriers exist to student access?
  - What are the shared values of the institution? What are ways to ensure that these values are indeed shared by all stakeholders, especially students?
- What constitutes an inclusive campus/institutional culture within this institution?
  - How would students describe the campus culture and would they say that the culture is inclusive? Why or why not? What needs to change at the policy and institutional level to ensure an inclusive culture for all?
  - To what extent are staff and professors welcoming to all? What support and/or professional development and training do staff and professors need to better understand and work with diverse students?
  - In what ways do institutional policies and practices empower student agency and develop active citizens?

### Academic Level

At the academic level, intercultural integration would mean available pathways programmes that help nurture students prior to matriculation, regularly refreshed and relevant academic curricula that integrate a variety of perspectives throughout courses (in both content and delivery and from both Global North and Global South perspectives), and that intentionally address intercultural competence (skills as well as knowledge) beyond one course or module. It would also mean providing academic mentoring tailored to students' unique academic needs, offering substantial intercultural training and development for professors and staff, providing ample opportunities in the co-curricula for intercultural dialogue and relationship-building across differences, and, throughout, offering students a balance of challenge and support as they work together toward common goals. Also, at the academic level, the hidden curriculum, defined as the implicit messages conveyed through course content and delivery related to norms, values, and beliefs, is made transparent so that all voices are heard (especially minoritised voices), multiple perspectives are considered, multiple ways of knowing are valued, and course delivery accounts for a wide range of learning styles. In the end, students are viewed as partners in the co-creation of their own learning experiences and work together to achieve relevant learning goals (See Leask, 2015 for more on this).

Questions to further explore at this level on how institutions can better support intercultural integration include the following:

### Questions

- What pathways programmes are available to students who may need extra support before matriculation?
- To what extent do curricula in all departments and schools address a variety of perspectives (from Global North and South)? Do textbooks and course resources include a wide range of diverse authors, examples, and contexts? What group(s) are being privileged through the content and examples?
- To what extent do professors and staff regularly reflect on their own intercultural competence development and interactions with diverse students, and are provided with ongoing training to continue to hone their own intercultural competence?
- To what extent has the hidden curriculum been addressed including whose voices are missing, whose knowledge counts, who is being advantaged in what and how the course is taught, and whose learning styles are being prioritised?
- What support systems and programmes exist for minoritised students, refugee students, migrant students, and international students to ensure that they are able to learn from and with other students and to succeed in their education?
- To what extent are students viewed as partners in the co-creation of their own learning experiences?
- To what extent do students work together (in and out of the classroom) to achieve relevant goals?
- What opportunities and programmes exist for students to explore their evolving identities, similarities and differences through authentic dialogue, to develop deeper relationships with those different

from themselves, and to grow holistically in their moral and social development beyond their academic curricula?

### Relational Level

While institutional and academic policies set the foundation, the success of intercultural integration is ultimately reflected in the day-to-day interactions and relationships at the interpersonal, relational level. It is here that the true impact of institutional efforts is most keenly felt by students. At the relational level, intercultural integration at a higher education institution would mean that students are drawn into programmes and networks that enhance their sense of belonging, that safe and brave spaces exist for students to explore their identities in relation to others, that an inclusive intercultural campus environment invites frequent intercultural dialogue among all stakeholders at the institution, that students feel welcomed in the local community and engage in relationship building with local citizens through community projects, and that students feel supported and nurtured as they develop deeper relationships with each other and with staff.

Questions for administrators and policy-makers to explore further on what intercultural integration looks like at the relational/individual level include the following:

### Questions

- What programmes and networks exist at the institution that help connect students to each other, as well as to staff and professors, and enhance their sense of belonging?
- What safe and brave spaces exist at the institution that invites students, staff, and professors to engage with those different from themselves?
- To what extent are biases, microaggressions and discrimination proactively addressed, including bias demonstrated even toward students' names?

- To what extent does intercultural dialogue occur within the institution and what changes occur as a result of these dialogues?
- To what extent do students, staff, and professors engage with local citizens, particularly through mutual community projects?
- How are students, staff, and professors' intercultural competence and deeper connections being facilitated (i.e., through UNESCO Story Circles)?
- In what ways are students, staff, and professors being changed through intercultural integration efforts and in what ways are they changing others they encounter?
- What collective actions are students, staff, and professors undertaking as a result of intercultural integration efforts?

These and other similar questions are illustrative of a multi-level approach that is essential for effectively supporting migrant and minoritised students in higher education and ensuring that they are better able to interculturally integrate within the education community.

## Supporting Intercultural Integration in Higher Education Institutions

To effectively support intercultural integration at the relational/student level, it is beneficial to explore various theoretical frameworks that provide insights into human behaviour and interaction. These theories offer foundational principles that can guide the development of practical strategies for university administrators and policy-makers.

## Theoretical Frameworks

In fact, delving further into the relational/student level, there are several theories that address this level directly in implementing the proposed intercultural integration framework. These theories can be translated into specific strategies that can be considered by university administrators and policy-makers at the personal/relational level of intercultural integration in higher education. Some of those theories are summarised briefly here:

- ◆ **Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954)** Allport's Contact Hypothesis (or intergroup contact theory) states that positive experiences with members of the outgroup reduce prejudice when several criteria are in place, including working toward common goals. This theory can guide the creation of programmes that facilitate meaningful interactions among students from diverse backgrounds.
- ◆ **Challenge and Support (Sanford, 1967)** According to Sanford, all students need a balance of challenge and support in their learning and with too much of one or the other, learning does not occur. Institutions, for example, can use this principle to design programmes that offer both rigorous academic challenges and supportive resources for migrants.
- ◆ **Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993)** Based on Bennett's theoretical model, individuals develop through six stages in response to difference—from denial to integration. Understanding these stages helps in designing interventions that cater to varying levels of intercultural development among students, academics and administrative staff.
- ◆ **Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)** This theory posits that the formation of groups causes prejudice; specifically, we use groups to form our social identity given the groups to which we belong and perceive those groups as being more

positive than those to which we do not belong. Universities can leverage this by promoting inclusive practices that minimise group biases and foster positive intergroup relationships. Sports teams become one example of promoting inclusive group social identity.

- Theory of Belonging (Adler, 1979)** Adler's theory subscribes to the notion that an individual is motivated to meet the fundamental need to belong by achieving meaningful social relations and contributing to others as a means of creating a sense of worth. Institutions should implement programmes that help students develop deeper social relationships among peers such as through peer-to-peer programmes, to help students feel more integrated and valued within the university community.

These are just a few of the relevant theories that relate to intercultural integration (See Figure 4 for the connection to the Intercultural Integration Framework and example strategies). However, it is important to note that like many of the education-related theories, these reflect the dominant Global North context and may need to be adapted to contexts beyond the Global North. Regardless, many of these theories speak to aspects of intercultural integration at the relational level, all of which intersect ultimately with intercultural competence as described in the previous chapter. In the end, intercultural integration is about the degree to which migrants develop meaningful relationships with others.

**Fig. 05** | Chart of Theories/Connection to Framework/Sample Strategies

Theory	IC Integration Framework Concept	Sample Strategies/ programmes In Action
Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954)	Reciprocity/Mutual Learning	Project-based learning that encourages collaboration between diverse student groups.
Challenge and Support (Sanford, 1967)	Inclusive Education Policies and Practices/Student Success	Mentoring programmes that provide both academic guidance and emotional support
Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993)	Inclusive Education Policies and Practices/Student Success; Promotion of civics and human rights education/Shared Values	Training programmes that address different stages of intercultural development for academics and admin. staff
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)	Reconceptualisation of citizenship/ identity and agency; Promotion of Civics and Human Rights Education/ Shared Values	Initiatives that celebrate diverse identities and promote cross-cultural understanding
Theory of Belonging (Adler, 1979)	Shared Responsibility of Integration/Belonging	Community-building activities and support networks that enhance students' sense of belonging

Having explored theoretical frameworks and their practical applications, the next section addresses the challenges faced by higher education institutions in implementing intercultural integration strategies and highlights key success factors for overcoming them.

## Challenges for Intercultural Integration within Academic Institutions

Achieving effective intercultural integration in higher education institutions is fraught with complex challenges across financial, political, institutional, and social dimensions. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students. Even with the recognition of its importance, higher education institutions still face significant hurdles in achieving true intercultural integration. As noted by UNHCR and UNESCO (2022), “Refugees face many obstacles when trying to access their host country’s higher education system. These include host country legal restrictions, for instance on movement or on access to labour markets, information barriers, constraining language requirements, psychosocial and newcomer obstacles, difficulties in getting often incomplete credentials recognised, financial barriers, and physical and connectivity issues. Together these add up to a ‘super-disadvantage,’ which makes access to host country higher education more than difficult.” (UNHCR/UNESCO 2022)

### Overarching Challenge: Categorisation

To begin with, it is important to note that words themselves matter in how students are being categorised and described. For example, the term “migrants” is increasingly being viewed in some contexts as derogatory, thus further decreasing the possibilities of intercultural integration. The broad categorisation of “domestic” and “international” students already sets up a somewhat false dichotomy of two separate

groups of students. Therefore, some institutions have gone to broadly naming migrant students, refugee students, vulnerable student populations and international students simply as “newcomers” which has created a more welcoming climate and in other cases the term “student mobility” is used for mobile students entering into a university from beyond the geographic region. Institutions and policy-makers should take a careful look at the categories and terms used to describe students, as well as what is most appropriate in specific contexts that would allow for fewer barriers to the intercultural integration of all students.

Some of the top obstacles for higher education institutions include the following three:

#### ◆ Financial

**Lack of Financial investment** and adequate resources that would be required for truly inclusive policies and infrastructures. This can include funding for additional staff, curriculum development, international partnerships, and support services for students from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, insufficient support services designed for the needs of specific student populations (including language support) such as migrant students, refugee students, international students, and so on can impede the degree of intercultural integration, as well as academic success and a sense of belonging. As noted in a report by the American Council on Education (2017) on the challenges of internationalisation in higher education, a lack of dedicated funding can be a major barrier to achieving inclusive learning environments. Further, an overall lack of funding for higher education results in higher tuition fees and increase in student loans, and thus impedes educational access, with vulnerable groups the most likely to suffer.

#### ◆ Language

**Lack of language resources** that can greatly hinder effective navigation of higher education environments, as well as social integration. Given that language is often cited as a primary barrier for migrants, it becomes imperative that universities offer adequate language resources including courses, as well as signage, websites, and other materials in other

languages as needed. In addition, language sensitivity is helpful in providing a more welcoming climate, which could mean other stakeholders at the institution also learn some basic words in languages most frequently spoken by students (Frimberger *et al.*, 2018)

#### External

**Geopolitics and external influences** that prioritise nationalistic tendencies manifested through higher education policies that restrict international collaboration and support for minoritised students and make it more difficult for these students to access higher education, or to receive the support they need to succeed in higher education.

## 5 Recognising Qualifications across Borders

Ensuring access to higher education for vulnerable groups, including displaced persons and refugees, remains a key challenge globally. Considering how interconnected our world is, it is crucial that students and faculty can move across borders to pursue higher education without unnecessary barriers.

One of the key obstacles preventing these groups' access to higher education and employment opportunities is a lack of recognition of their qualifications. As a result, individuals' right to have foreign qualifications evaluated in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory way has been firmly established throughout UNESCO's five "second-generation" regional recognition conventions and most recently in the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education unanimously adopted by UNESCO's Member States in 2019.

The conventions' main principle is that foreign higher education qualifications, as well as qualifications giving access to higher education, as a general rule should be recognised. Recognition should only be denied if the recognition authority can demonstrate that there are substantial differences between a foreign qualification and the corresponding

national qualification. If such differences are identified, recognition authorities are encouraged to grant partial recognition. If recognition of a foreign qualification cannot be granted, it is the recognition body's responsibility to explain why, and applicants have the right to appeal an unfavourable recognition decision.

The Global Convention as well as the regional conventions give special attention to the situation of refugees and displaced persons in their respective Article VII. States that are parties to the conventions commit to establish special procedures for the assessment of refugees' qualifications, taking into account the circumstances mentioned above, such as missing diplomas and other documents attesting to the completion or partial completion of studies.

As of 2024, close to 100 different countries have joined one or more of UNESCO's recognition conventions and have thus committed to put in place special procedures for the recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications. This has led to initiatives to improve national systems' capacity to assess refugees' qualifications, and to improve global regional cooperation on recognition of refugees' qualifications.

In the European region, for example, to better prepare national authorities for assessing qualifications of refugees arriving in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, the Convention Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention adopted in 2017 a Recommendation on Recognition of Qualifications Held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation, containing general principles for assessing such qualifications. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Committee of the Buenos Aires Recognition Convention issued basic guidelines for the recognition of Venezuelan academic degrees and diplomas.

Meanwhile, the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention foresees the development of a subsidiary text to the convention by 2027 focusing on the recognition of refugee qualifications, with due consideration of gender equality, and the development of complementary pathways.

Recognising the severity of the same issue, the Council of Europe also developed the **“European Qualifications Passport”**, a document that explains the qualifications a refugee is likely to have, based on available information on the applicant’s educational level, work experience and language proficiency. By assessing available documentation and conducting structured interviews, the document evaluates the refugees’ likely qualification, which can then be used for applications for employment, internships, qualification courses and admission to studies.

Building on these experiences, much like its European counterpart, the **UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants (UQP)**, one of UNESCO’s flagship initiatives contributing to the Global Compacts on Refugees and on Migration, is a concrete tool for recognition that contributes to improving access to tertiary and higher education for refugees and vulnerable migrants.



## UNESCO Qualifications Passport in Uganda - Restoring Hope through Recognition (UNESCO, 2025)

In February 2025, 49 refugees living in Uganda were awarded the UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP), marking a significant step forward in promoting inclusive access to higher education. Introduced in 2022, the UQP offers a standardised, internationally recognised tool for assessing refugees’ and vulnerable migrants’ qualifications—even in the absence of complete documentation.

Implemented in alignment with Uganda’s national education policies and frameworks, the initiative enables recipients to pursue further studies and employment opportunities. The programme has also helped catalyze the development of the **Uganda Qualifications Framework**, which aims to standardise procedures for recognising qualifications, learning, and skills of refugees and displaced individuals.

By reducing barriers to education and employment, the UQP is helping displaced individuals rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities. It represents a meaningful pathway toward long-term integration, social inclusion, and future opportunity.

Source: UNESCO, 2025.



## Case Study On Legislative Measures in Belgium, Ethiopia, Germany and Peru

Among other examples, countries such as **Belgium, Ethiopia, Peru and Germany** have introduced proactive legislative measures to remove systemic barriers that disproportionately affect minoritised students, such as refugees and migrants, in gaining access to higher education. In these countries, policies focus on providing financial assistance, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and recognising the qualifications of migrant students. These initiatives include flexible procedures for evaluating qualifications, financial support, orientation programmes, and language courses. These efforts are vital in enabling refugees to integrate into higher education systems and contribute to societal development.



**Belgium:** The Flemish Community implemented legislation in the 1990s focused on refugee students, improving their access to higher education and providing financial support. Additionally, Belgium increased staff at the National Academic Recognition Centre to address the higher number of refugees seeking academic recognition and provided them with specific training to properly address academic files brought by refugees. Belgium is a State Party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention for the European region.



**Ethiopia:** Through a partnership with UNHCR, in Ethiopia, Eritrean refugees are offered free scholarships from the Ethiopian government to attend various public universities in the country (UNHCR, 2018b in Tamrat, W. *et al.*, 2019, Tamrat, 2020 and Woldegiyorgis, 2020). Note: See further Ethiopia example in this chapter.



**Peru:** Peru adopted a flexible approach to recognising the qualifications of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, reducing fees of the recognition procedure by half, through its National Superintendence of University Education (SUNEDU) and simplifying the documentation requirements to ease their integration into higher education (i.e., “adopting a flexible approach is adopted regarding the Hague apostille requirement for professional degrees and degree certificates, as long as the information on the degree awarded can be corroborated in the Venezuelan database (UNESCO, 2020e).” (UNESCO, 2022). Peru is a State Party to the Buenos Aires Recognition Convention for Latin America and the Caribbean.



**Germany:** The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) created procedures for integrating refugees into higher education. In 2015, they developed a method to assess refugees who could not provide original or certified documents, with steps to verify their academic history. Germany also offers scholarships and preparatory programmes to facilitate refugee integration (UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative (UK), 2022). Germany is a State Party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention for the European Region.

These countries illustrate that when governments and institutions work together to remove obstacles—whether financial, administrative, or related to the recognition of qualifications—migrant and minoritised students are more likely to successfully integrate into higher education. Their policies provide a blueprint for how institutions and countries can support the full participation of migrants, fostering greater equity in education.

Sources: UNHCR, 2018; UNESCO, 2020, 2022; Tamrat, 2019, 2020; Woldegiyorgis, 2020.



## Case Study On Refugees' Access to Higher Education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, a signatory of the 2017 Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, has made significant strides in expanding access to higher education for refugees, particularly from South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea. Following the 2016 Refugee Summit, Ethiopia introduced progressive policies, including the out-of-camp policy, which allows refugees to live outside camps and access education. The 2019 Ethiopian Refugee Law, one of the most extensive on the African continent, further grants refugees equal rights to education, including scholarships and tuition fee waivers.

Ethiopia's Refugee Education Strategy (2015) aims to increase scholarships, promote open and distance learning, and provide broadened access to professional training in refugee camps and harmonise tertiary education scholarship programmes. Key initiatives include the DAFI scholarship programme and a governmental scholarship covering up to 75% of tuition fees. A cost-sharing model allows refugees to defer 75% of their tuition until after employment.

The government also supports refugees through preparatory programmes, placement exams, and flexible credential recognition, making Ethiopia a leader in integrating refugees into higher education. This inclusive approach provides a strong model for other nations.

Source: UNHCR, UNESCO, 2022.



## Case Study on Mechanisms for Recognising Prior Learning (RPL)

There is a need for flexible mechanisms for recognising prior learning (RPL), especially for refugees who often lack proper documentation. France and Finland are highlighted for their approaches, including the French Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) and Finland's efforts to assess and recognise the prior learning of highly educated immigrants.

### Recognising prior learning in France with special provisions for refugees

France has created the Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE — Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience), a tool for recognising academic, professional or personal skills which allows direct integration into a training programme or occupation (subject to a minimum of one year of experience directly related to the targeted certification). The objective is to bring the targeted certification in line with the level of responsibility already acquired by the candidate, to have their skills recognised, and to obtain a certification that can take the form of a diploma, a title, or a certificate of professional qualification. Since 2020, the National Agency for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA — Agence nationale pour la formation professionnelle des adultes) has established a more flexible and simplified procedure for refugees who cannot document their experience. This specific system, which is still in the experimental stage, enables them to be assessed and supported in their certification project through interviews, support workshops, and 'job dating' sessions, when refugees are able to meet with employers. This flexibility in the examination of refugees' files allows them to be integrated more easily and with less discrimination with regard to their situation. In October 2020, 1,000 validations of prior learning courses were implemented for newcomers, that is to say those who have held a residence permit for less than five years.

Source: [UNESCO](#), UNHCR, 2022.

## Institutional Challenges:

In addition to these top three challenges related to integration in general, there are many other challenges within the institution itself that inhibit overall integration efforts including the following:

- **Affordability:** Escalating tuition fees, burgeoning student loan debts, and rising living costs erect formidable barriers to access and completion, particularly for vulnerable students and those from lower-income backgrounds. The challenge of equity remains acute. Despite some progress, only a quarter of countries have implemented affirmative action programmes to support vulnerable groups in accessing higher education according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report.
- **Lack of institutional commitment** to inclusive values and intercultural engagement efforts (Association of American Colleges and Universities – AAC&U). The AAC&U advocates for equity, diversity and inclusion as essential components of academic excellence and has identified institutional commitment as a key factor in student belonging and success (AAC&U, n.d.). This commitment, or lack thereof, manifests through an institution's mission statement, core values and strategic priorities. Given the many competing priorities within an institution of higher education, it often becomes challenging for leadership to prioritise such an institutional commitment to inclusion efforts, despite benefits to students' well-being and ultimate academic and employment success.
- The prevalence of **power dynamics** which leads to imbalances within the institution based on cultural, linguistic, racial, religious or socioeconomic factors that can greatly impact the degree of intercultural integration, leading to unequal participation and representation of all students within the institution.

- **Institutional policies, structures and practices** inadvertently favour certain groups over others, usually the dominant group holding power, which hinders equitable access and integration of minoritised students.
- **Fixed challenges:** Challenges that are typically a given include geographic location and institutional type and size. These pose their own limitations and challenges in terms of intercultural integration.
- **Additional challenges** for higher education institutions resistance from faculty and staff who are not comfortable teaching in diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), lack of motivation among some groups to interculturally integrate, and the ever-present necessity to address the specific needs of a growing number of refugee and migrants through sustainable policies, and trauma-informed programmes and practices.
- **Ongoing challenges:** In addition, there remain ongoing institutional challenges such as adequate resourcing, discrimination and bias (in staff, in other students, in curriculum, in policies), and the need for ongoing intercultural competence development among all stakeholders.

## Social and Psychological Challenges:

- The extent of **voluntary social segregation**, given that studies have shown that students naturally gravitate to those with similar backgrounds has, for example, made integration of domestic, international, and migrant students challenging for higher education institutions around the world. International, migrant and minoritised students may also experience increased social isolation as a result of **involuntary social segregation**, ultimately impacting their health and wellness. There is also the reality of cultural parameters/preferences of individual students within diverse student groups which maintain social segregation.

- Psychological challenges**, particularly for migrants, include ongoing trauma and re-trauma, contribute to psychological challenges for learners, along with the overall adjustment issues of having to live in a different and often unfamiliar cultural and societal context. Trauma-informed services, which embody safety, collaboration, trustworthiness, empowerment, and choice, become crucial (Harrison *et al.*, 2016).

Understanding these challenges is critical for developing effective strategies, programmes, practices and policies to help create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students. The following section explores key success factors that can help institutions overcome these obstacles and advance their intercultural integration efforts.

## Success Factors

For higher education institutions to overcome some of these challenges and barriers in support of intercultural integration at all three levels within their institutions, literature and research have indicated that the following success factors, defined as aspects contributing ultimately to student success, need to be in place so that such integration can indeed occur at the institutional, academic and relational levels (Deardorff *et al.*, 2022; Kappler *et al.*, 2014):

- Increasing financing** Policy-makers and institutions should explore a mix of cost-sharing models, improvements in tax systems, and strategic public-private partnerships. These mechanisms can increase higher education systems' overall capacity while improving quality and equity.
- Committed Leadership from the top** Strong committed and strategic leadership from key university leaders is essential for the vision of intercultural integration to be implemented at all levels of the institution, especially at the broadest level. Empathy is noted as an important quality of university leaders in general and is crucial when it comes to understanding and supporting migrants (King and Mitchell, 2022), setting a strategic vision and actively supporting policies and practices that facilitate their integration.
- Alignment with institutional vision, mission, and goals/strategic plan** Strategic leadership is based on overall alignment of the institutional vision, mission, goals and strategic plan. Supporting and integrating migrant and minoritised learners needs to be integrated into the institution's visions/mission/strategic plan for efforts to succeed.
- Policy review at all levels** Regularly reviewing policies at all levels of the institutions through the intercultural integration lens becomes crucial for efforts to succeed.
- Intentional intercultural competence development for all stakeholders** Given that intercultural competence is core to all five intercultural integration principles of the framework, it becomes imperative for institutions of higher education to intentionally prioritise the ongoing development of such competence for all stakeholders, from students to educators to governing boards (beyond one workshop, training, or course).
- Dedicated support services and programmes** Given the barriers and challenges that migrant and minoritised students face, support services and programmes, such as language support, play an important role in intercultural integration efforts.

## 6 Celebrating Academic and Cultural Contributions

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) pioneered an initiative to include CARA Fellows as Young Academicians, a model that has since spread across Europe. Their At-Risk Academic Refugees (ARAR) initiative, launched in 2016, supports young professionals from refugee and displaced migrant communities by facilitating their inclusion in academic cohorts.

In 2019, the RSE commissioned portraits of ARAR members for public exhibition, highlighting their achievements and contributions. Displayed in the esteemed halls of RSE's headquarters in Edinburgh, this project raised awareness and celebrated the enriching impact of academic refugees on society, fostering greater intercultural understanding.

Source: [RSE](#), 2019.

- Dedicated programmes, curricula and opportunities that bring students together in meaningful ways** Harkening back to some of the theories outlined in this chapter, it becomes crucial to have dedicated programmes, curricula and opportunities that bring all students together in meaningful ways through common goals so that they can develop deeper interpersonal relationships and a stronger sense of belonging.
- Safe and brave spaces** Psychological safety is paramount for overall wellbeing and thus it is incumbent upon higher education institutions to ensure the creation and sustainability of safe and brave spaces within the institution, while also maintaining freedom of speech.
- Mutual community engagement** Higher education institutions can partner with organisations in the local community to ensure mutual community engagement between diverse students and local citizens as a means of furthering intercultural integration efforts beyond the institution.

## 7 Stellenbosch University: Community Engagement

Stellenbosch University students—domestic and international—actively engage in the local community through a variety of volunteer programmes aimed at addressing social challenges and fostering positive change. The Social Impact Office on campus facilitates initiatives for all students that include tutoring and mentoring in local schools, providing educational support to children, and participating in health and wellness programmes in nearby communities. Students also contribute to environmental conservation projects, assist in local food security

initiatives, and work with NGOs on issues such as homelessness, gender equality, and mental health awareness.

Stellenbosch University International (SUI) has also developed its own set of community initiatives framed within the Global Learning Outcomes of the institution. The Voluntary Community Engagement (VCE) Programme is a set of community-based interactions open to international students who are interested in participating in impactful and responsible engagement with communities in the areas

immediately surrounding campus. The programme is structured in a way to allow for the development of both theoretical and practical concepts of Global Citizenship, and responsible volunteerism in a South African context. There are in-person holding sessions that occur throughout the semester with guest speakers, and integration opportunities with domestic students, that allow for international students to unpack their experiences as volunteers in a post-apartheid and transforming South Africa; experiences that can be both profound and

challenging. This self-reflection in tandem with the volunteer sessions themselves, allow for the emergence of skills unique to the South African context, as well as growth in intercultural competences. The relationships between SU and the community stakeholders have been carefully maintained over the last decade to ensure that it is a longitudinal and co-created process that benefits everyone involved, most importantly the communities themselves.

Stellenbosch University is located near Cape Town, South Africa.

Source: [Stellenbosch University](#), n.d.

#### ◆ Evaluation and continuous improvement

It behooves higher education institutions to engage in ongoing evaluation at all levels of intercultural integration efforts with a growth mindset to implement continuous improvement.

#### ◆ Long-term vision and commitment to intercultural integration at all levels of the institution

Institutional long-term vision and commitment to intercultural integration at all levels come back to leadership and institutionalised policies to ensure the sustainability of such efforts.



## Case Study On Intercultural Twinning for Immigrant Integration at Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

### Context

Immigration is a significant topic in Quebec, prompting debates about integration and language proficiency. Government policies often focus on integration challenges, recognising the importance of linguistic integration for immigrants' cultural, social, economic, legal, and political integration. Despite concerns about immigration, many Quebecers support integration efforts, acknowledging the benefits immigrants bring to society.

However, discrimination based on language, accent, phenotype, or skin color remains a significant barrier, particularly for visible minorities. Limited interaction between immigrants and the majority population can

exacerbate integration challenges, leading to social isolation and identity issues. To address these challenges, initiatives like intercultural twinning have been developed to promote understanding and cooperation.

The Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), a large, public university located in Montreal, Quebec, has implemented intercultural twinning initiatives to address the integration challenges faced by immigrants. These initiatives pair immigrant students learning French as a second language with francophone students from various teaching programmes. This approach aims to enhance intercultural communication skills and promote the harmonious integration of immigrants into the university setting and broader society.

## Summary of Intercultural Twinning Initiatives

The concept of intercultural twinning involves creating a structured environment and opportunities for interaction between immigrant students and francophone students, fostering dialogue, cultural exchange, and social interaction, which are crucial for successful integration. This initiative began in the early 2000s at UQAM and has since expanded to include students from multiple disciplines, such as social work, education, career development, psychology, language education, sociology, and communication.

The twinning activities focus on fostering language practice, cultural exchange, and mutual respect. Immigrant students benefit from practicing French, expanding their social networks, and combatting social isolation. Francophone students gain insights into the challenges faced by immigrants, which helps them combat prejudice and play an active role in integration efforts. Both groups develop valuable intercultural communication skills.

**Intercultural Training:** The concept of intercultural training originated in the United States in response to large waves of immigration in the 1930s. Different perspectives on intercultural training have evolved over time, including traditional, liberal, and radical approaches. Traditional approaches tend to view culture as fixed and predetermined, while liberal perspectives promote cultural pluralism and challenge power dynamics. Radical perspectives aim to eliminate oppression and redesign educational programmes to reflect diverse cultural concerns. Effective intercultural training often involves combining cognitive (factual information) and affective (empathetic) approaches. Training programmes should address prejudice, discrimination, and social inequities while promoting understanding and appreciation of diversity.

UQAM's intercultural twinning initiatives incorporate elements of these approaches by

providing both cognitive and affective learning opportunities. The structured interactions are designed to challenge preconceived notions and power dynamics while fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity.

## Outcomes

The outcomes of these initiatives have been overwhelmingly positive:

- 1 Improved French Proficiency: Immigrant students significantly improve their French language skills.
- 2 Expanded Social Networks: Both immigrant and francophone students expand their social circles, fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- 3 Reduced Prejudice: Evaluation studies show measurable reductions in prejudices and discrimination among participants.
- 4 Mutual Respect and Understanding: Participants develop greater respect for and understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds.

## Conclusion

Intercultural twinning initiatives at UQAM provide a valuable model for promoting immigrant integration through structured intercultural interactions. By facilitating language practice, cultural exchange, and mutual respect, these initiatives help reduce prejudice and foster harmonious integration. Continued institutional support and efforts to combat discrimination are essential for sustaining and expanding these initiatives, contributing to better coexistence in Quebec's diverse society.

This case study reflects the key themes discussed in the chapter by highlighting the importance of structured intercultural interactions, the role of institutional support, and the need for ongoing efforts to combat prejudice and promote integration.

Source: Bourhis, Carignan and Sioufi, 2015.

## Chapter Summary

Multidirectional intercultural integration within higher education institutions, utilising the 5 principles of the framework, is a multi-layered process that involves the intentional engagement of educators, staff, and students in developing intercultural competence. This chapter emphasises that the successful integration of diverse cultural perspectives requires a systemic approach, incorporating all levels of the institution—from leadership to day-to-day practices, to programmes and support aimed at the relational (individual) level.

One of the key insights of this chapter is the crucial role of leadership from the top. Institutional leaders must actively support and prioritise intercultural initiatives. This can be done through the creation of intentional policies, practices, and programmes that not only promote intercultural understanding but also facilitate the continuous development of intercultural competence across the institution. Such efforts help foster an inclusive environment where all stakeholders—students, faculty, and staff—can effectively engage with and learn from diverse perspectives.

The chapter also acknowledges the challenges and barriers inherent in fostering intercultural integration. Migrants, in particular, often face significant hurdles, ranging from language barriers to limited institutional support. Despite these challenges, the chapter highlights several success factors that can drive meaningful intercultural integration. These include strong leadership, adequate investment in resources, and a long-term commitment to holistic intercultural integration for all. Moreover, the intentional development of intercultural competence within all sectors of the institution is identified as a critical element in overcoming barriers and fostering successful integration.

The chapter concludes by underscoring that sustained efforts and investments are required for institutions to achieve genuine intercultural integration. By creating a supportive and intentional ecosystem, higher education institutions can

become spaces where a wide range of cultural perspectives and lived experiences are not just acknowledged but also fully integrated into the academic fabric.

In sum, this chapter provides a roadmap for higher education institutions seeking to support multidirectional intercultural integration that is shared, reciprocal, and inclusive, that values civic and human rights and reimagines citizenship. Through these efforts, academic institutions can create environments that not only recognise and engage with cultural difference, but also equip all stakeholders with the intercultural competence and skills to thrive in a globally interconnected world.

## Conclusion

Although higher education institutions since their inception have included students and scholars from a range of backgrounds—recognising that varied experiences enrich the learning process—they have also been historically shaped by exclusionary practices. Too often, newcomers may encounter barriers, remain segregated and feel unwelcome. The lack of integration, especially intercultural integration, can hinder learning and result in students leaving the institution without a degree, thus often becoming even more isolated within larger society. It becomes imperative then, for higher education institutions to focus on overall well-being of migrants and all students, through an emphasis on belonging, mutual learning, student success, shared values, and pluralist identity that empower agency and action. Intercultural integration needs to occur at multiple levels, including the institutional level through policies and practices, the academic level through curriculum and co-curriculum and the relational level through programmes and services. In the end, student success is indeed about educating global-ready graduates who are prepared for the workforce and ready to take up their role as active global citizens who can integrate and help others integrate into the diverse societies in which they live and work.

## 8

## Summary of Social Integration Strategies of Refugee Students

This table summarises examples from several European countries, along with Australia and North American countries on social integration strategies provided with the higher education community, specifically for refugee students. It encapsulates much of what this chapter addressed.

Source: [Abamosa](#), 2021.

Countries	Integration Strategies	Resources to read
Australia 	Several Universities - Fee-waiver scholarships, - Discounted application fees, - English language courses, - Paid work opportunities to students with refugee backgrounds	Baker <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Webb <i>et al.</i> , 2019
Austria 	- Language and integration courses, - Recognition of prior learning, - Academic preparation, - Mentoring through buddy system	Kontowski & Leitsberger, 2018
Belgium (Flemish Region) 	-Implementation of a “bottom-up approach” - proactive initiatives to include refugees - One-year preparatory programme including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language training,</li> <li>• cultural events,</li> <li>• dissemination of information on the higher education system in Flanders,</li> </ul> - Assistance with admission processes, - Information on study programmes, - Study-skills training, - Guidance and counselling, -Optional modules in English, mathematics, and research skills	Jungblut <i>et al.</i> , 2020
Canada 	Some universities - Bridging programme - Process for admission to undergraduate degrees	Villegas & Aberman, 2019, p. 79
Finland 	- Universities act as societal actors rather than educational actors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in the work of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)</li> <li>• Promoting interaction between asylum seekers and the Finnish community</li> </ul>	Vaarala <i>et al.</i> , 2017

<p>France</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adapted admission processes,</li> <li>- French language training,</li> <li>- Tuition fees waivers,</li> <li>- Ad hoc preparatory programmes</li> <li>- Recognition of previous educational documents,</li> <li>- Cultural events,</li> <li>- Provision of information on the French higher education system in various languages</li> </ul>	<p>Goastellec, 2018 Sontag, 2019</p>
<p>Germany</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language courses,</li> <li>- Preparatory academic programmes</li> <li>- Bridging courses,</li> <li>- Peer and academic mentoring,</li> <li>- Psychological support to refugees</li> </ul>	<p>Jungblut <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Streitwieser &amp; Brück, 2018; Streitwieser <i>et al.</i>, 2017).</p>
<p>Greece</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide education to refugees in order to enhance their linguistic and computer skills</li> </ul>	<p>Tzoraki, 2019, p. 7</p>
<p>Ireland</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarships,</li> <li>- Other assistance to aid overcoming the significant financial, structural, cultural, and digital equity barriers to accessing higher education</li> </ul>	<p>Brunton <i>et al.</i>, 2019, p. 398</p>
<p>Netherlands</p> 	<p>Some universities offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognition of previous studies,</li> <li>- Financial support,</li> <li>- Preparatory and bridging courses targeting refugees</li> </ul>	<p>Unangst, 2020</p>
<p>Spain</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide education to refugees in order to enhance their linguistic and computer skills</li> </ul>	<p>Marcu, 2018 Siviş, 2019</p>
<p>Türkiye</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free language courses,</li> <li>- Scholarships,</li> <li>- Lifting tuition fees</li> </ul>	<p>Cin &amp; Doğan, 2021</p>
<p>United Kingdom</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarship opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>Toker, 2019</p>
<p>United States</p> 	<p>(Only some universities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scholarships,</li> <li>- Tuition waivers,</li> <li>- Housing,</li> <li>- Flexible admission requirements</li> </ul>	<p>Streitwieser <i>et al.</i>, 2020</p>



# Chapter 3

## Supporting Intercultural Integration Through Higher Education Institutions

### Summary of key points:

- ◆ **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as Catalysts for Intercultural Integration in Society**  
HEIs play a strategic role in fostering intercultural integration beyond their campuses, serving as bridges between diverse communities and contributing to broader societal cohesion. By engaging with local populations, shaping public discourse, and informing policy, HEIs help reduce social divisions, promote cultural exchange, and strengthen community well-being. Their role extends beyond education, positioning them as drivers of economic, social, and cultural integration at local, national, and international levels.
- ◆ **Addressing Societal Challenges to Intercultural Integration**  
HEIs operate within complex social and political environments, where structural barriers—such as economic disparities, restrictive policies, and limited access to essential services—can hinder intercultural integration efforts. Additionally, public narratives on migration and diversity often reinforce divisions rather than foster inclusion. HEIs have a responsibility to challenge exclusionary discourses, engage in public education, and provide platforms for dialogue that promote a shared sense of belonging within wider society.
- ◆ **Strategic Approaches to Strengthening HEIs' Societal Impact**  
Successful intercultural integration requires a systems-thinking approach, ensuring that HEIs' engagement with migration issues is coherent, sustainable, and aligned with broader community needs. Through intentional partnerships with governments, civil society organisations, and businesses, HEIs can contribute to workforce inclusion, equitable urban development, and the creation of welcoming public spaces that support diverse communities. By embedding intercultural integration into their civic missions, HEIs amplify their role as agents of social transformation.
- ◆ **HEIs as Key Influencers in Public Discourse and Policy on Integration**  
HEIs are uniquely positioned to shape societal attitudes and policies that support intercultural integration. By producing research-based insights, fostering informed discussions, and engaging with media and policy-makers, universities help shift public narratives on migration and diversity toward inclusion and mutual respect. HEIs also serve as spaces for intercultural dialogue and public engagement, ensuring that communities have the knowledge and tools needed to build more cohesive, resilient societies that embrace diversity as a strength.
- ◆ **Harnessing Intercultural Integration to Strengthen Economic and Social Outcomes**  
HEIs enhance societal resilience and economic development by advancing intercultural integration as a driver of opportunity and growth. By equipping migrants and minoritised groups with language skills, professional training, and cultural competencies, HEIs expand access to employment, entrepreneurship, and civic participation. Strengthening intercultural integration in this way ensures that all members of society contribute to and benefit from economic and social progress, reinforcing inclusive prosperity and long-term social stability.

## Introduction



### 2022 World Higher Education Conference

The 2022 World Higher Education Conference highlighted the critical transformations needed within higher education systems, emphasising greater inclusion, lifelong learning, and flexible, integrated educational models. It reaffirmed that higher education serves as a fundamental public good. By prioritising equity and non-discrimination, higher education can positively reshape the educational experience, fostering a more inclusive and cohesive society.

UNESCO advocates for fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory evaluation of higher education qualifications, ensuring equal opportunities for all, including vulnerable groups such as refugees and displaced persons who may lack documentation. Recognising qualifications facilitates international academic mobility, promotes knowledge exchange, and supports global higher education collaboration. This is particularly important given the increasing pressure on higher education institutions to enrol more students, especially in countries facing declining youth populations. To address this, national policies, international frameworks, and institutional regulations must prioritise equity and non-discrimination. Higher education institutions must ensure equitable access to quality education, reflecting this commitment through their curriculum, research, community engagement, and institutional practices.

Higher education significantly impacts society by driving economic growth, enhancing social mobility, and developing human capital. It fosters innovation, critical thinking, and creativity, which are crucial for addressing complex societal challenges. In particular, intercultural integration within higher education has gained importance as globalisation and migration patterns bring diverse populations into academic institutions. Integrating people from various cultural backgrounds, including migrants, not only promotes cultural exchange but also enhances intercultural competence through skills such as perspective-taking. This leads to a more interconnected global community, fostering a broader understanding of citizenship rooted in shared humanity and solidarity. Such integration empowers collective action, benefiting societal and economic well-being.

HEIs are uniquely positioned to promote intercultural integration, which contributes to community cohesion and economic growth. By nurturing inclusive environments, universities help bridge cultural divides, reduce social tensions, and enhance community engagement. Intercultural integration within higher education also strengthens local economies by creating a diverse, globally competitive workforce. These contributions align with national priorities for economic development and social stability.

This chapter builds upon the foundation laid in [Chapter 1](#), which introduced the intercultural integration framework, and [Chapter 2](#), which contextualised this framework within higher education institutions through strategies, examples, challenges, and success factors. In this chapter, the focus expands beyond the campus to explore how HEIs can facilitate intercultural integration for the benefit of broader communities and society. It examines key theories and practical strategies to support intercultural integration, highlighting the societal impacts and policy implications. This exploration lays the groundwork for policy recommendations in [Chapter 4](#) which aim to shape local and national integration policies that strengthen both academic institutions and local communities.

## From Higher Education to Society: Extending the Benefits of Intercultural Integration

Migrants, refugees, and minoritised students face unique challenges within higher education institutions, extending into broader society. These challenges include language barriers, cultural adjustment difficulties, social isolation, and limited integration within local communities. Additionally, they often experience discrimination, housing instability, economic hardship, mental health issues, and limited access to community services. These factors can contribute to a mismatch of skills within the labour market, further complicating their integration journey.

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by intentionally promoting intercultural integration. Maintaining relevance remains key to reimagining higher education's role (UNESCO, 2021), especially given the increasing tensions around higher education by a growing number of populists movements around the world and the subsequent need to rethink higher education's role and impact on society. As such, supporting intercultural integration within these institutions for the benefit of society is one way of maintaining such relevance. Through strategic policies and targeted initiatives, HEIs can create inclusive environments that enhance educational experiences and foster community cohesion. This approach not only supports migrant and minoritised students but also contributes to social stability and national unity by building bridges between diverse groups.

Policy-makers and HEIs must recognise the broader societal context impacting migrants and minoritised students. This awareness enables the development of effective intercultural integration strategies that address systemic barriers and combat prejudice. By fostering inclusive communities, HEIs can facilitate smoother transitions for migrant students, empowering them to contribute positively to local economies and social well-being.

Intercultural integration within higher education extends beyond the campus, benefiting broader

society by promoting community harmony, economic growth, and social stability. As universities engage with diverse populations, they are uniquely positioned to bridge cultural divides and support social cohesion. This chapter explores key theories and frameworks that guide intercultural integration for societal benefit, illustrating strategies that strengthen community ties and enhance social and economic well-being.

By intentionally promoting intercultural integration, HEIs contribute to broader societal benefits, including economic development, cultural enrichment, and social responsibility. These initiatives foster inclusive communities where diversity is valued as a strength. This interconnected approach aligns educational efforts with community needs, reinforcing the social contract of higher education while driving sustainable development and social cohesion.

## Key Impacts on Society: Intercultural Integration of Migrants through Higher Education

The intercultural integration of migrant and minoritised students in and through higher education generates wide-ranging benefits—not only for students and institutions, but also for the broader society. The five key impact areas below illustrate how this process can foster inclusive communities, strengthen social cohesion, stimulate local development, and support more equitable and responsive policy environments:

- 1 Cultural and Social Development:** HEIs promote cultural diversity and inclusivity by attracting students and academics from varied backgrounds. They serve as cultural hubs, fostering cultural exchange through community engagement, international student participation, and study abroad programmes, as well as bringing in music, film, theatre or other arts of various genres from around the world, and speakers that encourage a diversity of perspectives. These initiatives encourage mutual respect and understanding, enhancing social cohesion within local communities. Universities also engage in social research and

innovation on issues relevant to migrants, such as social justice, healthcare, and economic equity. By promoting cultural awareness and social integration, HEIs contribute to more harmonious and interconnected communities.

## 2 Educational and Service Outreach:

Universities provide community education programmes, workshops, and adult learning opportunities that enhance the skills and knowledge of migrants not formally enrolled in higher education. Migrant and minoritised students can also engage in community service and cultural events and celebrations, fostering the inclusivity and well-being of the local community. Collaborations between civil society organisations and universities strengthen community ties, promoting a sense of belonging for all and shared responsibility for social development. These initiatives enhance educational equity and empower migrants to contribute positively to their communities.

## 3 Infrastructure and Local Development:

HEIs enhance community infrastructure by making their facilities, like libraries and event venues, accessible to local citizens. These spaces are designed to be inclusive and welcoming, promoting community engagement and social interactions. Universities can align these spaces with intercultural integration guidelines (see box below) to ensure they are welcoming spaces for all and support diversity, accessibility, and social inclusion. Beyond campus, HEIs contribute to local development by advocating for inclusive public infrastructure, working alongside local governments and civil society organisations to create environments that reflect intercultural values. They can also empower students to utilise these spaces for community outreach, promoting dialogue, knowledge exchange, and cultural events that strengthen community ties. By fostering inclusive public spaces, HEIs promote social connections and community resilience.

# 10

## Some Guidelines for Public Spaces/Places of Interculturality

**Note:** There is no standard model of what an intercultural space should be, although such space is defined as “any space where there is an underlying philosophy that cultural mixing is more desirable than separation... and that a deliberate, sustained approach is needed for this to occur” (Bloomfield and Wood, 2011, p. 1).

- There is an underlying philosophy that cultural mixing is more desirable than separation and that cooperation is a higher priority than integration of the minority.
- The space is flexible, closely aligning with and sensitive to local shifting demographics and relationships of their various constituencies.
- The space is context-specific to the locality and local/national conditions (note-if a more hostile condition, then the space may serve as a more functional one in countering threats to migrant communities and addressing day-to-day needs).

- There is recognition and celebration of the benefits and contributions of diverse groups living within the local community.
- Policies work to intentionally extend the intercultural ethos of the public space to other places and spaces within the local community so that places for interculturality do not become “intercultural ghettos” or islands.
- The space is open to everyone (and a wide range of stakeholders are consulted regularly in developing and maintaining a welcoming space for all).
- The space seeks out and highlights common elements of humanity across differences and is based on a non-ethnic concept of culture including a composite of influences and confluence of routes and passages.
- There is an intergenerational nature of interculturality infused within the space.

- History is reconstructed from multiple perspectives, beyond the dominant narrative, where all voices are included and valued.
- There is open access to public dialogue and debate for all.
- The space is viewed as a community resource by all where there is high-

quality and artistic excellence, which puts differences to work creatively to produce new outcomes.

- The space is viewed as a safe space which is reflective in nature and invites more open positions by getting to know and respecting others within that space so that all feel heard and seen.

Source: [Eastside for All](#), 2011.

**4 Economic Impact:** Higher education institutions contribute significantly to local economies through job creation, local business support, and infrastructure investments. They are major employers, providing diverse job opportunities (including through business that cater to students and staff, including retail, food, and transportation) that stimulate economic activity and foster community interactions. Additionally, international students contribute substantially to local economies, promoting economic growth and cultural exchange. For example, international students in the U.S. contributed nearly \$44 billion to the economy (NAFSA, 2024), demonstrating the substantial economic benefits of intercultural integration. By integrating diverse populations into the workforce, HEIs enhance economic productivity and competitiveness.

**5 Policy Impact:** Through research and social innovation, universities influence local and national integration policies. HEIs can provide evidence-based policy recommendations that advocate for inclusive policies supporting migrant and minoritised populations. Larger academic institutions often engage in policy advocacy at multiple levels, contributing to societal change and promoting inclusive community narratives. By shaping public policies that promote equity and social justice, HEIs support long-term social cohesion and community well-being.

## Connecting Higher Education Institutions to Society: Theories and Strategies for Intercultural Integration

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are uniquely positioned to bridge cultural divides, fostering social cohesion, economic growth, and community well-being. Through intentional intercultural integration, HEIs enhance educational experiences while contributing to societal harmony, community vitality, and economic resilience. To fulfil this strategic role, HEIs must intentionally align institutional practices with societal needs, promoting inclusive education and community engagement that extends beyond campus boundaries.

By implementing targeted intercultural strategies grounded in robust theoretical frameworks, HEIs can foster environments where diversity is celebrated and social stability is strengthened. These strategies bridge HEIs and society, supporting community development, economic prosperity, and social cohesion.

Intercultural integration in higher education serves a dual purpose: enhancing social cohesion within communities while promoting more just societies where civic and human rights are respected and shared values are celebrated.

This approach empowers students to engage as active citizens, promoting community harmony and economic growth. By fostering inclusive communities and reducing social tensions, HEIs contribute to economic vitality and cultural enrichment, strengthening the social fabric. This interconnected approach positions HEIs as catalysts for positive societal change, leveraging education as a tool for community development and social stability.

## Visions of an Intercultural Community/Society:

### Summary of Relevant Theories, Strategies, and Tools

The following five theories have been selected for their strategic relevance in leveraging HEIs to support intercultural integration with wider society. They offer actionable approaches that empower HEIs to build cohesive, inclusive, and resilient communities while maximising their impact as community and economic catalysts. They are followed by table listing their connections to the framework along with some practical examples/strategies (see figure 5):

**1 Beloved Community** Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., the concept of the Beloved Community envisions a society where all individuals thrive through mutual respect, diversity, and inclusion, following principles of Kingian non-violence and meeting the needs of all (Marsh, 2008). This philosophy emphasises non-violence, social justice, and the eradication of poverty, hunger, and hate. It advocates for recognising mutuality and interdependence, fostering communities where differences are celebrated, and social justice is actively pursued.

Strategies to support implementation include:

- **Radical Hospitality and Community Sponsorship Models:** Establish programmes that offer a multidirectional welcome to all community

members, ensuring newcomers feel valued and included. This can include dedicated sponsorship groups that facilitate social integration through cultural events, mentoring programmes, and community support networks.

- **Conflict Resolution Training:** Provide conflict resolution and peace-building workshops for students, faculty, and community stakeholders to promote peaceful dialogue and resolve cultural misunderstandings.
- **Addressing Poverty and Social Inequities:** Support vulnerable students by offering food pantries, clothes closets, and secure housing initiatives, ensuring that economic hardships do not hinder educational success.

**2 Rx Racial Healing** Gail Christopher (2022) emphasises Racial Healing through storytelling as a powerful tool for flattening perceived hierarchies of human value and fostering social equity. This approach leverages personal narratives to build empathy, challenge stereotypes, and promote cultural understanding.

Strategies to support implementation include:

- **Racial Healing Circles:** Offer Racial Healing Circles within the local community (see example below)—facilitate safe spaces for open dialogues that allow participants to share personal experiences, fostering empathy and cultural understanding within the community.
- **Transformational Dialogues:** Engage students, educators, and community members in transformational dialogues that define desired outcomes and actionable steps for social cohesion and community building (see dialogue example in this chapter).

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## Rx Racial Healing Circles

Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) is a comprehensive, multi-year national and community-based process launched in 2016 by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in partnership with higher education institutions in the United States to bring about transformational and sustainable change on 150 college and university campuses. Through TRHT, partners address the historic and contemporary effects of racism in their communities and institutions. Without racial healing and building trust, changes in policies or practices are short-lived. Through healing and relationship-building, we can collectively develop new values that affect our everyday decisions in areas of policy-making, hiring, education and housing – to name just a few. At the heart of TRHT are Rx Racial Healing Circles. The Racial Healing Circles methodology is a designed process to provide participants from diverse backgrounds with a structured co-facilitated story-telling experience leading towards a path of full humanity. Moreover, Racial Healing Circles are opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to come together and connect their shared humanity through storytelling. It is a safe, brave, and responsible space—a place where people recognise they have more in common than what separates them. It is the beginning process of dismantling our biased belief system through a shared humanity perspective.

Source: [Emory University](#), 2024.

**3 Positive Peace** According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2024), Positive Peace refers to the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. It emphasises eight pillars: well-functioning governance, sound business environment, equitable resource distribution, acceptance of rights of others, good relations with neighbours, high levels of human capital and low levels of corruption. Positive Peace promotes social stability and economic growth by creating environments where all community members can thrive.

Strategies to support implementation include:

- **Strength-Based Programming:** Develop community programmes that emphasise self-determination and future outcomes, and celebrate diversity by focusing on each person's strengths, skills, and cultural assets, shifting from a deficit-focused perspective to an asset-framing approach.
- **Systems-Thinking and Strategic Planning:** Use systems-thinking to address interconnected challenges within the HEI ecosystem and broader community, promoting holistic solutions that enhance community resilience, rather than focusing on isolated programmes or units.
- **Building Coalitions:** Establish coalitions within and beyond the academic institutions, with stakeholders, community leaders, and organisations to advocate for social justice, inclusive policies, and community development initiatives.

## 12 Example of Positive Peace

Western Sydney University (WSU) and Multicultural New South Wales (MNSW) in collaboration with the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) selected five New South Wales communities to deliver an educative framework to enhance social cohesion and build youth agency. The project was named 'Positive Peace, Cultural Wellbeing and Youth Agency Initiative: Exploring peaceful solutions to living well in diverse communities'. The project is designed to adapt IEP's Positive Peace framework (PPF) to each targeted community in order to foster cultural wellbeing. Similarly, the project aims to support the development of community-led projects aiding the agency and resilience of each community, contributing to broader social cohesion in an effort to counteract fear, hate, racism and societal discord.

This initiative brings together leaders, educators, activists, and community members, particularly from Pacific Islander and Indigenous backgrounds, to explore how positive peace can be applied in local, national, and global contexts. Key components of this community initiative include the following:

- 1 Positive Peace Framework:** Participants are introduced to the Eight Pillars of Positive Peace, which include factors such as good governance, equitable distribution of resources, and acceptance of the rights of others. These pillars provide a foundation for building peaceful communities and societies.
- 2 Workshops and Discussions:** The initiative features interactive sessions where participants engage in discussions around the challenges facing their communities, including social justice, inequality, and

climate change. These discussions are paired with problem-solving workshops designed to help participants develop local peacebuilding strategies.

- 3 Cultural Integration:** This initiative incorporates Pacific Islander traditions and cultural practices into the learning experience. This fusion of cultural identity with peace education strengthens participants' sense of purpose and community, promoting peace through respect for cultural diversity and heritage.
- 4 Action Planning:** One of the core outcomes of the initiative is the development of community action plans. Participants work in groups to create specific strategies they can implement in their own communities to enhance positive peace, such as initiatives focused on youth empowerment, environmental sustainability, and conflict resolution.

This positive peace community initiative has had a significant impact on Pacific Islander and other community leaders in Australia, empowering them to take concrete steps toward building more inclusive, peaceful, and resilient communities. This also serves as a model for how university-community partnerships can foster culturally inclusive and community-centered approaches which contribute to broader peacebuilding efforts, both in Australia and globally. It has also strengthened ties between participants, fostering networks of peacebuilders who are committed to applying the principles of positive peace in their respective fields and communities.

Source: [Vision of Humanity](#), IEP, 2022

#### 4 Internationalisation for Society (IHES)

Emphasises higher education's social contract with communities by benefiting the public through intercultural education, research, and community engagement (Brandenburg *et al.*, 2019). This approach focuses on local impact, connecting internationalisation with social responsibility and community development. In fact, activities and strategies of IHES adhere to 3 criteria: 1) that it is explicit about goals to benefit the wider public (beyond the university) with the target group focus being outside the university (i.e. municipalities, school pupils, civil society representatives, migrant workers, public service providers), 2) that it happens locally, and 3) that it connects with a higher education internationalisation function (education, research, service and social engagement). Specific IHES initiatives depend on the needs of the local community and the HEI's strengths and resources.

Strategies to support implementation include:

- **Collaborative Community Projects:** Engage in community-based projects such as refugee support, mentorship programmes, and partnerships with local schools to promote social integration and educational equity.
- **Regional Economic Support:** Develop workforce development programmes, business incubators, and community partnerships that enhance economic opportunities for migrants and local citizens. These initiatives also support local industries, including tourism and hospitality, contributing to regional prosperity.
- **Promoting Arts and Culture:** Host cultural exhibitions, performances, and community festivals that celebrate cultural diversity and foster community connections.

#### 5 Intercultural Dialogue and Intergroup Dynamics

involves open and respectful exchanges that deepen understanding between cultural groups, fostering cooperation and reducing prejudice. UNESCO developed a UNESCO Framework for Enabling Intercultural Dialogue comprising nine domains and measured through twenty-

one indicators (UNESCO, 2022). Intercultural dialogue can be a powerful tool leading to greater understanding and cooperation between different groups of people, especially when there are clearly stated outcomes and sustained follow-up and support over time, both from the HEI and the local community.

Intergroup Dynamics Theories from social psychology explore how perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours influence intergroup interactions, highlighting strategies to reduce social tensions and promote social cohesion. Such theories include intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954)—criteria including shared goals for optimal intergroup contact, intergroup threat theory (Stephan and Stephan, 2000)—encompassing realistic and symbolic threats of one group to another along with intergroup anxiety and negative stereotyping all which lead to prejudice between social groups, and intergroup conflict theory (Esteban *et al.*, 2012; Gat, 2008)—perceived incompatibility of goals or values emerging from individuals classifying themselves as members of different social groups.

Strategies to support implementation include:

- **Structured Dialogues and Workshops:** Organise intercultural dialogue sessions and conflict resolution workshops that promote understanding and cooperation among diverse community members.
- **Intercultural Competence Training:** Offer training programmes that enhance cultural awareness and empathy among students, educators, and community leaders, fostering inclusive educational and social environments.
- **Collaborative Community Projects:** Facilitate collaborative initiatives addressing community challenges, encouraging diverse groups to work together and develop shared solutions.
- **Intercultural Exchanges:** (even between different groups within the HEI and local communities) which include intentional intercultural training and opportunities for dialogue



## Intercultural Village: Universidad Veracruzana (UV), Mexico

The Intercultural Village is an educational initiative designed to bring together diverse environments, ecosystems, traditions, languages, and individuals from various cultural backgrounds. It facilitates activities aimed at promoting the recognition and inclusion of human diversity through the participation of different social stakeholders. The initiative seeks to encourage knowledge exchange among local, national, and international participants, including organisations dedicated to supporting indigenous communities and fostering regional development.

The first phase of the project takes place at Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI), Las Selvas campus, located in Huazuntlán, within the municipality of Mecayapan, one of the most culturally diverse regions.

Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) is a key division of Universidad Veracruzana (UV), committed to promoting social, cultural, and gender equity. It treats local knowledge as an essential component of scientific learning and actively supports the preservation of indigenous languages. UVI offers innovative, flexible, and student-centered educational programs that integrate professional training with sustainable human development. Through community engagement projects, UVI students collaborate with local communities to improve quality of life, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

The institution is dedicated to fostering respectful coexistence in diversity and equipping its academic staff and students with the skills needed to engage effectively in local, national, and international contexts. UVI provides a Degree in Intercultural Management for Development (LGID), with five specialised tracks: Languages, Communication, Sustainability, Law and Health.

UVI promotes democratic coexistence in Veracruz and facilitates the production of knowledge within intercultural communities, such as villages in the Intercultural Regions. The university trains professionals who are devoted to advance their communities, regions and countries economically and culturally. Their work contributes to the preservation and revitalisation of indigenous cultures and languages, guided by the core principles:

- Health and sustainability of regions of interest.
- Promoting human rights.
- Creating roots in local communities to avoid migration and
- Participation in actions of communication and cultural management.

A defining advantage of UVI's degree program is its community engagement model. Taking place in their third or fourth semester, students begin working directly in communities under the supervision of their professors. They select a particular issue to research, and in their final semesters, they include their findings into their graduation thesis.

Looking ahead, the plan is to expand the Intercultural Village across all four UVI campuses—Huasteca (Ixhuatlán de Madero), Totonacapan (Espinal), Grandes Montañas (Tequila), and Las Selvas (Mecayapan). By changing the Intercultural Village's location, the initiative will offer fresh perspectives, as each campus builds relationships with its local community in unique ways, addressing different regional challenges.

The Intercultural Village educational initiative arises from the need to establish a platform where diverse worldviews can intersect and contribute to the exchange of knowledge.

A List of Workshops and Courses at the Intercultural Village:

- Spanish course;
- Local indigenous language course;
- Traditional medicine course;
- Son Jarocho traditional music workshop;
- Regional cuisine workshop;
- Local Crafts workshops;
- Workshop on traditional methods and materials for housing construction.

Additionally, students, professors, researchers, and participating organisations will have the opportunity to offer training for local community members in areas such as:

- Agronomy;
- Law (community land rights are an issue in the region);
- Water Management;
- Training on production processes and quality standards for marketing and commercialising local crafts;
- Elaboration of diagnoses of regional and community problems and needs.

Source: [Intercultural Village – International Office](#)

These are but just some of the theories, frameworks, and tools, connected to the Intercultural Integration Framework proposed in this publication, that can point to specific strategies that can be implemented within local

communities. Many of these theories are related to societal themes around inclusion and belonging, while at the same time, some of these also point to systemic structural and policy ramifications.

**Fig. 06** Table of Theories/Framework/Sample Strategies resulting from Intercultural Integration

Theory	IC Integration Framework Concept	Sample Strategies/ Programmes In Action
Beloved Community	- Shared responsibility of integration	Welcome Corps
Rx Racial Healing	- Inclusive education policies and practices, - Promotion of civics and human rights education	Racial Healing circles
Positive Peace	- Inclusive education policies and practices, - Promotion of civics and human rights education, - Reconceptualisation of citizenship	Express Yourself Mural, Positive Peace World Cafe
Internationalisation for Society	- Inclusive education policies and practices, - Promotion of civics and human rights education, - Reconceptualisation of citizenship	Refugee support project
Intercultural Dialogue	- Promotion of civics and human rights education, - Reconceptualisation of citizenship	Structured dialogue in the community
Intergroup Dynamics Theories	- Promotion of civics and human rights education, - Reconceptualisation of citizenship	Intercultural exchange

## Strategic Policy Reflection for Intercultural Integration:

### Guiding Considerations for Policy-makers

To effectively leverage Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as drivers of intercultural integration within society, policy-makers must translate theoretical frameworks into actionable policies. This section provides strategic reflection points to bridge theory and practice, ensuring that HEIs actively promote intercultural integration in the wider community.

For intercultural integration efforts to be successful within HEIs and their surrounding communities, three cross-cutting strategic success factors must be considered: systems thinking, intentionality, and relationship-building. These factors provide a foundation for sustainable, impactful change.

A systems-thinking approach ensures that intercultural integration is not treated as an isolated initiative but rather as a comprehensive strategy embedded within the institution's broader mission and societal role. Drawing on Positive Peace Theory, Beloved Community, and Internationalisation for Society, this perspective highlights the interconnectedness of HEIs with their surrounding communities, ensuring that integration efforts address structural gaps and create synergies across policies, programmes, and institutional practices.

Equally crucial is intentionality in policies and practices, recognising that intercultural integration does not happen organically but requires deliberate efforts. Grounded in Intergroup Dynamics Theories, intentionality involves embedding intercultural competence in all aspects of HEI operations—from recruitment and admissions to curricula, student support services, and community partnerships. Clear goals, leadership commitment, and dedicated resources ensure that diversity and inclusion are prioritised within institutional strategies, shaping policies that actively foster equitable access and belonging.

Finally, focusing on relationships is essential to fostering intercultural understanding and reducing prejudice. Theories such as Racial Healing, Intercultural Dialogue, and Intercultural Competence emphasise the importance of meaningful interactions that build trust and mutual respect across different cultural groups. HEIs play a key role in creating environments that encourage these connections, both within academic settings and in the broader community.

Rooted in these cross-cutting factors for success, below are a set of guiding considerations for policy-makers, informed by the theories and frameworks previously discussed, and organised into two key categories: **Community Integration and Cultural Development and Policy** and **Structural Transformation**. These considerations are intended to enable policy-makers to critically evaluate current policies and craft forward-looking strategies that maximise the impact of HEIs as catalysts for social change, using education as a tool for intercultural integration.

## Community Integration and Cultural Development: Guiding Considerations

This section explores how HEIs can actively promote intercultural integration within society by acting as connectors between academic environments and local communities. By fostering social cohesion, educational inclusion, and community-based transformation, HEIs can bridge cultural divides and create pathways for meaningful engagement. These guiding

considerations support policy-makers in designing intercultural policies that strategically leverage HEIs to enhance social harmony, promote cultural exchange, and cultivate a sense of belonging, thus strengthening the social fabric of diverse communities.

- **Aligning Higher Education with Community Transformation:** How are HEIs leveraging intercultural integration frameworks (including principles of *Beloved Community* or *Rx Racial Healing*) to proactively address social issues like poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion? What measures are in place to ensure long-term sustainability and shared responsibility between HEIs and local communities?
- **Addressing Local Needs:** What collaborative initiatives have been implemented by local communities, governments, and HEIs to address pressing issues like hunger, poverty, and discrimination affecting migrants and minoritised populations? How are policies linking academic efforts with community needs, and what successful models can be replicated?
- **Celebrating Difference and Promoting Diversity:** What policies actively celebrate cultural diversity as a community strength? How do HEIs promote positive narratives about migrant and minoritised students, moving beyond token representation to create environments where diversity is valued as an asset?
- **Shifting Public Narratives and Cultural Perceptions:** How are HEIs using *Intercultural Dialogue* and *Intergroup Dynamics Theories* to counter stereotypes and shift public narratives about migrants and minoritised groups? What mechanisms ensure positive representation within institutional and public discourse?
- **Implementing Change through Dialogue:** How frequently do intercultural and intergenerational dialogues occur between HEIs and local communities, including diaspora groups? What measurable policy changes have resulted from these dialogues? (See this chapter for concrete examples of intercultural dialogue) How do these initiatives contribute to reconceptualising citizenship and fostering a sense of belonging?

- **Initiating Joint Community Projects:** What successful community collaborations have emerged from partnerships between HEIs and local groups to promote intercultural integration? What specific policies and infrastructure support have enhanced these joint projects?
- **Extending Welcome and Belonging:** How do local communities and HEIs communicate messages of belonging and inclusion? What effective policies have reshaped narratives to promote intercultural integration? How is the impact of these initiatives measured in terms of social cohesion?
- **Collective Action and Solidarity:** How often do collective actions occur between university communities and local residents in solidarity on key societal issues? To what extent do institutional and government policies support these initiatives?
- **Promoting Environmental Sustainability Together:** What collaborative practices have been implemented by HEIs and local communities to address environmental sustainability in ways that benefit all citizens? How do these initiatives promote intercultural integration through shared environmental goals?
- **Involving All Voices in Decision-Making:** What strategies are in place to ensure that all community stakeholders, particularly women and migrants, have a voice in policy-making processes? What challenges have been encountered, and how have they been overcome? How have inclusive governance models contributed to more representative institutional leadership?

## Policy and Structural Transformation: Guiding Considerations

This section examines how strategic policy development and structural reforms can leverage HEIs to promote intercultural integration within society. By designing equitable policies, building

inclusive infrastructures, and establishing governance structures that reflect and empower community diversity, HEIs can serve as catalysts for social change. These guiding considerations help policy-makers bridge institutional practices with societal needs, driving systemic changes that foster social equity, stimulate economic growth, and enhance community resilience through the strategic role of HEIs.

- **Ensuring Equitable Support:** To what extent do current policies provide equitable support for all community members, especially migrants and minoritised groups? What measurable improvements have been observed, and how can policies be enhanced to address gaps?
- **Dismantling Unjust Systems:** How do university policies, informed by Intergroup Dynamics Theories, ensure that anti-racism and intercultural integration are embedded in hiring practices, curricula, and governance structures? What examples demonstrate the successful dismantling of unjust systems?
- **Ensuring Fair Treatment and Access:** How accessible are justice entities, ombuds, and advocacy organisations for migrants, and what is concrete evidence of this accessibility? What policy reforms are needed to ensure fair treatment and effective redress for discrimination?
- **Protecting Migrant Student Rights:** Which anti-racism initiatives have successfully advanced intercultural integration while protecting migrant student rights? What evidence supports the impact of these initiatives within academic institutions?
- **Creating Welcoming Public Spaces:** How effectively are shared public spaces designed to promote human connections across cultural differences? (See Guidelines in box 10). How are HEIs collaborating with municipalities to design inclusive public spaces that promote belonging and human connections across differences?
- **Promoting Civic and Human Rights Education:** What concrete policy examples promote civic and human rights for all

community members, particularly migrants? How are these policies implemented through education, research, and community service?

- **Protecting the Most Vulnerable:** How do policies protect vulnerable community members, including migrants, from discrimination, poverty, and other social inequalities? What role do HEIs play in supporting these policies?
- **Connecting Policies to Community Impact:** How do policies explicitly connect education, research, and community service to broader social and economic impacts? In what ways do HEIs function as think tanks that influence local and national migration policies?
- **Connecting Policies to Community Impact:** How do policies explicitly connect education, research, and community service to broader social and economic impacts? In what ways do HEIs function as think tanks that influence local and national migration policies?
- **Embracing Shared Values and Mutual Goals:** How are policies shaped by shared community values? To what extent do policies facilitate mutual goals and collaborative projects that bring together diverse community groups?

## Challenges

### Encountered in Supporting Intercultural Integration through Higher Education

Despite the significant benefits of fostering intercultural integration through higher education, several persistent challenges continue to hinder these efforts at both the societal and individual levels. These barriers can limit the ability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to fully realise their role as catalysts for inclusive, cohesive communities. However, recognising these challenges alongside key success factors enables policy-makers and institutions to craft targeted,

actionable strategies that promote meaningful intercultural integration both within academic spaces and in the broader society.

## Societal Challenges

At the societal level, unjust systems and practices continue to privilege certain groups over others, creating barriers that hinder the full participation of migrants and minoritised communities. No matter how intentional an HEI is in its intercultural integration efforts—whether through more accessible admissions policies, language support services, or community partnerships—universities must still navigate broader societal challenges that may resist change. This includes addressing discriminatory policies, language barriers, and the structural challenges surrounding employment and housing, all of which affect the social and economic mobility of migrants. In this context, HEIs have a responsibility not only to foster inclusion within their own institutions but also to advocate for policies that enable equitable participation in society more broadly.

The media also plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse around migration and integration. At times, political rhetoric and media representations—particularly in an era where migration policy is a contentious issue—have reinforced divisive narratives rather than fostering inclusion and shared humanity. Public discourse often centres on reinforcing borders and distinctions rather than highlighting the contributions of migrants and the benefits of intercultural exchange. However, media can also be leveraged as a tool for positive change by amplifying success stories, sharing the outcomes of intercultural dialogue, and promoting narratives that emphasise common ground rather than division.

Additionally, HEIs are spaces for critical engagement and reflection, which means they often become sites where students and faculty challenge societal norms. While universities themselves are not governments or policy-making bodies, they are reflective of broader social realities and often serve as spaces where pressing social issues are debated. However, some institutions may hesitate to engage deeply in intercultural dialogue or migration-related advocacy due to concerns about political

sensitivity, public backlash, or donor influence. There may also be a fear that amplifying the voices of minoritised communities could surface deeper social justice concerns that institutions feel ill-equipped to address. This underscores

the need for HEIs to develop the capacity to facilitate constructive, solution-oriented engagement with complex social issues while ensuring that intercultural integration efforts remain a core priority.



## Case Study On Mosaik Education

Mosaik Education provides guidance services in Jordan, Lebanon, Uganda, and Egypt using a student-led model that helps refugees navigate the range of online courses and scholarship opportunities. This approach emphasises the important role that higher education institutions play in recruiting and integrating refugees on campus. It ensures that scholarship programmes are both accessible and effective for refugee students. Although there has been an increase in tertiary education opportunities for refugees - online and in-person - young refugees are often unaware of these opportunities or lack the prerequisites to access them. Mosaik programmes address these barriers by providing refugee youth with academic guidance and counseling, English language skills, and mental health and psychosocial support. These programmes use open online tools, on-site facilitation, and critical pedagogies to ensure they are accessible and contextually relevant to the participants.

Source: [EducationLinks](#), 2024.



## 13 The Tent Partnership for Refugees

The Tent Partnership for Refugees emphasises the importance of creating pathways for refugee learners and professionals to integrate into local job markets and education systems. One of their key initiatives involves overcoming language barriers, a significant challenge faced by refugees as they enter new communities. Tent's guide on "Bridging Language and Work" suggests that employers should not just offer language training but also create supportive environments where refugees can work while improving their language skills. This approach helps refugees start jobs sooner and continue learning while on the job, fostering quicker integration into the workforce.

Additionally, Tent's mentoring programmes, such as those targeting LGBTQ and women refugees, are designed to help refugees navigate local job markets. These programmes pair refugees with professional mentors from leading companies to help them understand workplace norms and expand their professional networks. The aim is to support refugee learners by building their skills and helping them re-establish their careers.

Source: [TENT](#), 2024.

## Individual-Level Challenges

At the individual level, migrants and minoritised students continue to face stereotyping, discrimination, and social isolation, which can create significant barriers to their sense of belonging and academic success. Language

differences further contribute to these challenges, making it difficult for students to fully engage in coursework, build relationships, or access institutional resources. These factors, combined with broader social attitudes toward migration, can leave students feeling marginalised within academic spaces.

Additionally, many migrants and minoritised students experience mental health challenges stemming from past trauma, displacement, or the pressures of adapting to a new social and academic environment. Meeting basic needs—such as securing stable housing, financial resources, and legal protections—adds further stress, particularly in contexts where government

policies do not provide sufficient support for migrant students (see [Chapter 1](#)). Without strong institutional and community-based support systems, these challenges can compound, making successful integration more difficult. For further reading on these individual-level challenges faced by migrants, see example below and resources in [Appendix](#).

## 14 Name Bias

What comes to mind when you read the following names? Jorge, Giorgio, George, Maria, Mary, Miki, Shanequa, Lee, Sarah Jane, John, Juan, Jun, Precious, Mohamed, Thomas, Logan, Fatima, Patel, Jordan, Quinn, Imani, River.

There are often many assumptions made around students' given and family names including ethnicity, gender, geographic home, and even social class and religion. Name bias refers to the tendency people have to judge others based on their names and to prefer people with certain types of names, with preference often given to names that are viewed as belonging to the dominant group. Migrants frequently encounter such bias, with name discrimination taking the form of misspellings, mispronunciations, and unwanted nicknames, sometimes with names even being used as racial slurs. Such name bias is a common form of unconscious bias and can have negative consequences, not only on individuals but also on institutions through the limiting of diversity. Name bias can impact many areas of life, including missed opportunities, denial of loans and even denial of admission to academia. To avoid name bias, it is often recommended to omit or block out students' names when reviewing applications and grading, and to intentionally call students as they wish to be called, making every effort to pronounce names correctly. In addition, staff and student awareness/training about name bias and discrimination can be quite helpful in creating a more welcoming environment. Periodic external reviews of bias within the institution are also recommended.

Source: Essamuah, 2023.

### Synthesis:

#### Success Factors in Higher Education Intercultural Integration *within wider society*

In reviewing some of the relevant theories and real-life examples in relation to the proposed intercultural integration framework, three themes emerge as potential success factors. These success factors help to address these societal

and individual-level challenges so that society can benefit from intercultural integration efforts within higher education institutions:

**1 Utilise systems-thinking:** In a systems-thinking approach, the “big picture” is considered, per *Positive Peace Theory, Beloved Community and Internationalisation for Society*, in which change needs to happen on multiple levels and where understanding the complexity of context is essential. Thus, this holistic approach recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of various components within a system, including higher education's relationship to and influence

on society. The implication of systems-thinking is that it moves beyond isolated initiatives, programmes, units, and policies to fostering a comprehensive strategy that aligns with the institution's broader mission and societal goals. Such a comprehensive strategy helps identify existing gaps and potentially creates synergies in ensuring and sustaining the intercultural integration of migrant and minoritised learners within an institution and beyond into the local community, beyond a focus on just one programme or support service. These comprehensive strategies will reflect the specific HEI and community infrastructure of each unique context.

**2 Commit to intentionality (in policies and practices):** Intercultural integration does not usually occur naturally. This means,

per *Intergroup Dynamics Theories*, that there must be deliberate efforts to foster an inclusive environment. This requires a proactive approach to embedding intercultural competence into every aspect of the institution's operations, from recruitment and admissions to teaching and student support services. Intentionality involves setting clear goals, allocating resources, and implementing policies that support diversity and inclusion of all students. Clear goal setting leads to specific initiatives, programmes and policies within institutions and communities that demonstrate a commitment to intentional intercultural integration. Leadership is key within this commitment to intentionality. The Intercultural Cities Initiative mentioned in [Chapter 1](#) provides a good example of what this can look like (See case study below)



## Case Study On Intercultural Cities

In 2008 the Council of Europe implemented Intercultural Cities (ICC), an initiative that supports cities and regions in reviewing and adapting their policies through an intercultural lens which views diversity as a societal advantage and emphasises intercultural integration through upholding equal human dignity for all, seeing diversity as a positive resource, and embracing a pluralistic identity. Impact studies on Intercultural Cities efforts have demonstrated improved trust between population groups from different cultural backgrounds, better neighbourhood relations, improved openness, decreased intensity of conflicts, improved urban safety, positive public image of diversity and minoritised citizens feeling empowered with the same rights and duties as other local citizens (Council of Europe portal, n.d.).

Some specific challenges identified through ICC with corresponding solutions include the following:

**1 Challenge:** Social Fragmentation

**Solution:** Promote intercultural governance by involving diverse communities in decision-making processes. This includes creating platforms for dialogue and participation among residents, local authorities, and civil society.

**2 Challenge:** Prejudice and Discrimination

**Solution:** Implement anti-discrimination policies and educational programmes that promote tolerance and understanding among different cultural groups. This includes awareness campaigns and training for public service employees.

**3 Challenge:** Economic Inequality

**Solution:** Facilitate access to economic opportunities for marginalised communities through targeted employment programmes and entrepreneurship support. This can include mentoring programmes and skills development workshops.

**4 Challenge:** Limited Community Engagement

**Solution:** Foster community engagement through cultural events and intercultural festivals that celebrate diversity and encourage interaction between different cultural groups. This helps build relationships and mutual understanding.

**5 Challenge:** Lack of Access to Services

**Solution:** Improve access to public services for all residents by ensuring language accessibility and cultural competency among service providers. This includes training programmes and the development of multilingual materials.

**6 Challenge:** Urban Planning and Integration

**Solution:** Incorporate intercultural perspectives into urban planning to create inclusive spaces that cater to the needs of diverse communities. This involves consulting with residents from different backgrounds in the planning process.

The Intercultural Cities initiative emphasises that addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves multiple stakeholders, including local governments, civil society, and the communities themselves. By implementing these solutions, cities can create more inclusive and cohesive societies that celebrate diversity and promote intercultural dialogue.

Sources: Council of Europe, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

**3 Focus on relationships:** Several of the theories pointed to the importance of relationships including *Racial Healing*, *Intercultural Dialogue* and *Intercultural Competence*, which is foundational to the proposed framework and to this publication. Building and sustaining relationships across difference are foundational to a socially and

interculturally integrated community, whether within the university or beyond. It is imperative that all students feel valued and respected. Institutions must create environments that facilitate meaningful interactions between individuals from different backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding while reducing prejudice.

## 15 UNESCO Story Circles in Communities

UNESCO Story Circles, a highly impactful intercultural methodology which utilises a structured yet adaptable protocol, has been used successfully in bridging divides between students and local citizens. One of the UNESCO pilots of this intercultural methodology was held in San Jose, Costa Rica, in which participants were indigenous community leaders (UNESCO, 2020). Once trained to facilitate UNESCO Story Circles, these leaders took the methodology back to their respective communities and engaged their youth in UNESCO Story

Circles which empowered young people, especially young women, through intercultural competence development. Other uses of UNESCO Story Circles within universities have involved connecting university students and staff with local citizens through UNESCO Story Circles as a way for each constituency to get to know each other better. Other times, local citizens have volunteered as participants in UNESCO Story Circles that have been organised within the university.

Here is a concrete example of how one university utilises UNESCO Story Circles in the local community:

Cornell University in the United States has embraced the UNESCO Story Circles methodology in building social cohesion and inclusion among its domestic and international student populations. The inclusive nature of these circles fosters a safe and respectful environment for sharing stories. Participants are invited to share stories that reflect their cultural backgrounds or experiences related to Indigenous issues. This sharing fosters mutual understanding and allows participants to learn from each other's perspectives. After sharing, the group engages in reflective discussions,

exploring themes and connections within the stories shared. This dialogue helps participants to delve deeper into cultural understanding and highlights the importance of storytelling as a tool for connection.

The use of UNESCO Story Circles at Cornell exemplifies how storytelling can serve as a powerful tool for intercultural dialogue and understanding within university communities. By fostering a space for shared narratives, Cornell promotes respect and empathy, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all participants.

Source: [Cornell University](#), 2022.

In summary, the success of intercultural integration in higher education, with its broader impact on society, depends on higher education institutions' utilising systems thinking, committing to intentionality, and focusing on relationships. Systems thinking provides the framework for understanding how different components of the institution interact and influence intercultural integration within and through the institution. Intentionality ensures that efforts to promote diversity, inclusion and belonging are deliberate and aligned with the institution's goals. Focusing on relationships brings these efforts to life, creating a supportive community where all individuals feel seen, heard, valued and that they belong.

By synthesising these three success factors into the Intercultural Integration Framework proposed in this publication, higher education institutions can create a holistic and sustainable strategy for intercultural integration that benefits not only the campus community but also wider society. Students who are exposed to diverse perspectives, who engage in meaningful intercultural dialogue, and who learn to work collaboratively with others from different backgrounds are better equipped to build inclusive communities, engage as active citizens, and navigate and contribute to an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

## Chapter Conclusion/Summary

Higher education institutions' efforts toward intercultural integration of migrants can significantly benefit local communities and broader society by fostering diversity, understanding, and social cohesion through intentional outreach and community service initiatives to promote diverse perspectives within the local community. These dedicated efforts, which are undergirded by the principles of the proposed intercultural integration framework—especially shared responsibility of integration and reciprocity—enable society to benefit from the facilitation of the exchange of different perspectives, the reduction of prejudice in policies and practices, and the promotion of mutual respect for all through intercultural dialogue that emphasises shared humanity. As migrants are embraced in local communities through shared responsibility of integration, they gain a deeper understanding of the local context while contributing their own unique skills and viewpoints, enriching the local workforce and cultural landscape. This kind of mutual intercultural integration not only strengthens community ties but also enhances societal innovation and resilience, ultimately leading to more inclusive and harmonious environments that can indeed result in a reconceptualised citizenship, promoting human rights for all.



# Chapter 4

## Recommendations for Policymakers

### Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in promoting intercultural integration on two levels: first, by fostering inclusion within their institutions, and second, by acting as catalysts for intercultural integration in wider society. To maximise this dual impact, policy-makers must implement targeted, evidence-based policies that enable HEIs to both enhance their internal intercultural environments and extend their influence beyond campus boundaries.

This chapter complements the guidance provided in [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 3](#) by focusing on actionable policy recommendations and measurable indicators of success:

- [Chapter 2](#) explored institutional-level strategies for advancing intercultural integration within HEIs, covering areas such as curriculum, student support, and governance structures.
- [Chapter 3](#) examined how HEIs contribute to intercultural integration in society, addressing their role in shaping public narratives, engaging with communities, and influencing policy.
- [Chapter 4](#) now translates these insights into practical, operational recommendations for policy-makers to develop structured, systemic approaches that support HEIs in both capacities.

Each section of this chapter provides:

- Specific policy recommendations that strengthen HEIs' ability to promote intercultural integration within institutions and across society.

- Indicators of success to assess the impact and effectiveness of these policies in creating inclusive, cohesive, and equitable environments.

### General Strategic Considerations to Promote Intercultural Integration:

For HEIs to be effective drivers of intercultural integration—both within their institutions and in the wider society—policies must be designed with intention, inclusivity, and equity in mind. Successful intercultural integration is not just about access; it requires mutual learning, shared values, and a sense of belonging for all students and communities involved.

Before drafting or implementing policies, policy-makers must first ask critical strategic questions to ensure their approaches reflect the principles of effective intercultural integration. These considerations help prevent exclusionary practices, address systemic barriers, and reinforce policies that promote long-term cohesion and participation. They also align with the core principles of intercultural integration outlined in this publication, ensuring that policies foster identity, agency, and shared responsibility across diverse communities.

The following strategic questions are adapted from the Intercultural Cities initiative of the Council of Europe and correspond to the five foundational principles of intercultural integration (see Figure 3). By engaging with these questions, policy-makers can ensure that policies:

- Are developed through participatory processes that involve all key stakeholders.
- Encourage mutual learning and collaboration rather than one-directional assimilation.
- Create environments that support student success through inclusive educational policies.
- Promote shared civic values that strengthen democratic participation.
- Empower students and communities to redefine belonging in ways that support social cohesion.

## Key Strategic Considerations for policy-makers

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** What mechanisms exist to ensure that all key stakeholders—including migrants, minoritised students, host communities, faculty, and policy-makers—are actively involved in shaping intercultural integration policies? Are multiple engagement formats (e.g., virtual consultations, focus groups, community forums, written input) available to facilitate broad participation?
- **Inclusive Participation:** Are there clear procedures to ensure all individuals—regardless of background—feel equally welcome and empowered to express their perspectives?
- **Policy Development Teams:** Is the policy being developed by a team that includes migrants, minoritised students, refugees, and academic staff?
- **Recognition of Cultural Diversity:** Are policies designed with criteria that value

cultural differences in planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting processes?

- **Equity in Policy Impact:** Which groups benefit most from the proposed policy? Which groups may be unintentionally disadvantaged? How can policies be adjusted to ensure fair and equitable outcomes?
- **Training and Professional Development:** What training or professional support is needed—and for which groups—to foster an interculturally inclusive environment within HEIs and broader communities?
- **Effective and Appropriate Communication and Accessibility:** Does the policy use multiple communication channels, languages, and culturally appropriate visuals to ensure broad accessibility and engagement?
- **Barrier Identification and Mitigation:** Have potential barriers—whether physical, cultural, linguistic, or procedural—been considered and addressed to maximise policy effectiveness?

## Why Higher Education Institutions Matter in Intercultural Integration

Building on these strategic considerations, the following two paragraphs underscore the dual role of HEIs as both internal environments for inclusive education and key actors in shaping broader societal integration. These insights reinforce why a policy approach must be multidimensional—addressing both what happens *within* HEIs and how they engage with their surrounding communities and systems.

To clarify the scope of the recommendations that follow, the **Table** below groups them into two main categories based on the primary target audience:

- Policy-makers **working within higher education institutions**, responsible for shaping institutional cultures, procedures, and support systems.

- Policy-makers **influencing higher education at national or systemic levels**, whose work impacts how HEIs operate and connect with broader societal goals.

This structure reflects the shared responsibility of fostering intercultural integration across multiple policy domains.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a critical role in fostering intercultural integration, not only by creating inclusive learning environments within their institutions but also by contributing to broader societal cohesion. Successfully integrating migrants and minoritised students into higher

education requires a comprehensive and intentional approach that prioritises student success, social engagement, and workforce readiness.

These institutions can lead by example by promoting mutual learning, civic participation, and cross-cultural engagement—all of which contribute to stronger communities and economic resilience. When policies support HEIs in facilitating intercultural dialogue, expanding access, and ensuring equal opportunities, they help create an environment where students from diverse backgrounds thrive and contribute meaningfully to society.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS WORKING WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION (THESE ACTORS SHAPE POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES WITHIN HEIS).			
<b>Shared responsibility for integration &amp; Reciprocity in intercultural integration</b>		<b>Inclusive education policies and practices</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop Policies to Enhance Language Support Services within Higher Education Institutions and Local Communities</li> <li>■ Develop Policies that Foster Intercultural Competence among Staff, Academics, and Students, as well as local citizens</li> <li>■ Promote Policies of Social Integration and Community Building through Inclusive Programmes and Events and Social Support Services</li> <li>■ Promote Policies on Dedicated Support Services for Migrants, Minoritised students and Those Working with Migrants</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop Inclusive Recruitment, Admission and Retention Policies</li> <li>■ Ensure Policies that Provide Financial Assistance and Scholarships for Migrant and Minoritised Students</li> <li>■ Implement Academic Support Programmes for Migrant and Minoritised Learners</li> </ul>	
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS WORKING ON HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY WITH POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO WIDER SOCIETY (THESE ACTORS SHAPE NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES THAT INTERSECT WITH HE)			
<b>Inclusive education policies and practices</b>	<b>Shared Responsibility of Integration</b>	<b>Reciprocity in intercultural integration</b>	<b>Promotion of Civic and Human Rights Education &amp; Citizenship Reimagined</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop Comprehensive Inclusion Policies for Migrant and Minoritised Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop Policies to Strengthen Collaborations Between Higher Education Institutions with Local Community Organisations, Supporting Intercultural Integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support Policies that Strengthen Career and Employment Support for Migrant Learners</li> <li>■ Develop Policies that Encourage Global and Regional Collaboration in Addressing Higher Education Among Migrants and Minoritised Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop Policies that Foster Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility Among Higher Education Institutions and Local Communities</li> </ul>

## Recommendations for Policy-makers Shaping Institutional Policy and Practice in Higher Education

This publication introduced an intercultural integration framework of five principles that have implications for policies that can be introduced and implemented at various levels. Given the urgent need for the multidirectional integration of migrants and minoritised students within higher education institutions, this section presents key recommendations for policy-makers—compiled from previous chapters and supporting research—along with indicators to measure progress and success.

Each subsection below corresponds to one or more of the five principles of the framework, beginning with:

**Shared responsibility for integration**

**Reciprocity in intercultural integration**

### Develop Policies to Enhance Language Support Services within Higher Education Institutions and Local Communities

#### Recommendations:

- Fund and support language learning opportunities for students, local community members, educators, administrators, and university staff, including courses and resources in the most commonly spoken languages of migrants to local citizens and university staff.

- Provide funds and in-kind support for volunteer language exchange groups, informal meetups and community-led initiatives that promote mutual learning and the sharing of language skills among students (including migrant and minoritised students), local citizens, and university staff.

- Provide funds for translation and interpretation services for university and community administrative processes, including signage and communication materials in multiple languages within the HEI and local community

#### Indicators of Success:

- Increased participation of migrant and minoritised learners in academic and extracurricular activities, demonstrating engagement with the broader campus community.
- Higher satisfaction rates reported in student surveys regarding language support services.
- Local citizens able to speak some words in migrants' languages.

#### Contributions to Wider Society include:

- The facilitation of effective integration and academic success of all students, leading to a more educated and skilled workforce.
- Promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in professional fields.

## Develop Policies that Foster Intercultural Competence among Staff, Academics, and Students, as well as local citizens

### ◆ Recommendations:

- Fund and implement regular training and professional development opportunities on intercultural communication and inclusivity for all academics, staff, and local citizens in the onboarding process.
- Promote policies to recruit, hire and retain academics and staff from various backgrounds to enrich the educational experience for the student body, including those from migrant backgrounds when possible.
- Fund intercultural competence development training and programmes for students, including migrant students, staff, instructors, and administrators, as well as local citizens.
- Develop policies that offer resources to bring together students and local residents, such as [UNESCO Story Circles](#) both on campus as well as within the community, as well as use such resources as tools that can help raise awareness on the issues faced by migrant and minoritised students.

### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Positive feedback from students regarding interactions with staff and professors and vice versa.
- Thoughtful reflections from participants following their participation in intercultural opportunities such as UNESCO Story Circles, intercultural dialogue and other trainings in regard to intercultural changes that have occurred for them.

- Focus groups of all stakeholders reflecting on aspects of interactions and the extent to which key intercultural elements are present in those interactions (such as respect, openness, listening for understanding, etc).
- Increased number of interculturally competent staff, academics, and students, as measured by training participation rates and follow-up assessments involving a multi-method, multi-perspective approach.

## Promote Policies of Social Integration and Community Building through Inclusive Programmes and Events and Social Support Services

### ◆ Recommendations:

- Fund and organise intercultural events, intercultural dialogues, workshops, and peer support groups that intentionally bring students from different backgrounds together to learn from each other.
- Promote policies that encourage student organisations, especially sports clubs, community service organisations, and outdoor activity clubs, to include activities and events on intercultural exchange and social integration in their programme.
- Establish and fund dedicated offices, roles, or services focused on the wellbeing of migrant and minoritised students, including access to multilingual, trauma-informed counselling and mental health support that addresses both general student needs and those specific to displacement.
- Promote policies that ensure student bodies (committees, societies, clubs, fraternities, sororities, etc.), represent the interests and voices of all students, including those coming from migrant and minoritised backgrounds.

◆ **Indicators of Success:**

- Higher levels of participation in intercultural events and activities.
- Improved sense of belonging and community reported in student surveys.

◆ **Contributions to Wider Society include:**

- Strengthens community ties and fosters mutual understanding between different cultural groups.
- Enhances social capital and community resilience.



## Awareness Programmes In The Community

Promoting the following guidelines

- 1 Educate yourself, family, neighbours, and colleagues on immigrant integration and its benefits. Read resources such as [Immigrant and Community Integration Step by Step Guide to Local Integration Programming](#), which can help you think about the process of designing, implementing, evaluating, and assessing an integration initiative.
- 2 Challenge unwelcoming remarks about immigrants in your community, at work, and at home. Use facts and resources from nonpartisan sources. Ask: “How do you know what you know about \_\_\_\_ (insert group of people)?”
- 3 Become friends with a newcomer(s) and learn a few words in their first language.
- 4 Volunteer your time. There are many opportunities and ways to contribute back to your community while engaging with newcomers. Volunteer to mentor language learners or help with citizenship test preparation or at a [local refugee resettlement agency](#) in your community to help newly arrived refugees learn the local language, find a job, and adjust to their new home. Check with the local university to see ways in which you can volunteer to support migrants (often through language exchange/conversation programmes, friendship programmes, etc) and/or find an organisation in your area seeking volunteers.
- 5 Organise, host, and/or participate in local welcoming events. Sign up for newsletters of immigration legal service providers in your community to stay abreast of any community events that promote immigrant inclusion and celebrate those from diverse backgrounds.
- 6 Ask your local library, museum, and community center to include perspectives of immigrants in planned public events, classes that are offered (ask for basic intro classes in immigrants’ first languages so community members can learn basics), and resources that are purchased. Purchase and donate a book about immigrants or an immigrant story to your local library.
- 7 Consider organising a potluck/meal/social event where residents can eat a meal together, share life stories/experiences with each other (possibly using UNESCO Story Circles) and/or organise a town hall event where residents and immigrants can talk about how immigration affects them.
- 8 Hold your elected leaders accountable. Write or call your policy-makers to encourage action on policies that will support immigrants and help them build a better life.
- 9 Collaborate with your local community leaders and elected officials to create an inclusive community. Uplift and implement initiatives that highlight your community's

desire to create a welcoming place for all residents. Encourage your local community to join the Intercultural Cities Network.

- 10 Celebrate Citizenship Day/Week with your community every year.
- 11 Offer to host a naturalisation oath ceremony or naturalisation application workshop in your community. Contact your

[local authorised immigration legal services provider](#) for more information.

- 12 Donate to local immigration legal service providers to help them increase their integration efforts.

Source: [Clinic](#), 2024.

## Promote Policies on Dedicated Support Services for Migrants, Minoritised students and Those Working with Migrants

### Recommendations:

- Fund both in-person and digital platforms for wellbeing (counselling), and career development (mentorship, career guidance) tailored to the challenges faced by migrant and minoritised students.
- Fund tailored services, platforms and programmes, recognising that a “one-size-fits-all” approach does not recognise the “nuanced experiences of all students” to ensure success for all students, especially those with refugee backgrounds (Naidoo *et al.*, 2018, p. 160).

### Indicators of Success:

- Increased utilisation of support services by migrant and minoritised students.
- Enhanced overall well-being and academic satisfaction as reported by all students, including migrant and minoritised students.
- Improved employment rates of migrant and minoritised students after graduation.

## Inclusive education policies and practices

## Develop Inclusive Recruitment, Admission and Retention Policies

### Recommendations:

- Create specific policies and strategies to recruit potential migrant students, including refugee students and asylum seekers.
- Establish policies that provide special support for potential learners and migrant and minoritised learners applying to HEIs, such as orientating them on application processes, language support and more.
- Promote policies to establish admission criteria that acknowledges a wide variety of educational backgrounds and life experiences of migrant and minoritised students and offer flexible procedures for credential recognition, including systems for non-traditional educational pathways, especially for refugee students.
- Develop policies that combine preparatory university programmes for migrant and minoritised students with opportunities for social integration with locals (i.e., language cafes, inclusive social activities) per UNESCO/UNHCR policy paper (2022).

- Increase the affordability of higher education to make it accessible for all, including migrant and minoritised students, by supporting policies that lowering tuition fees, such as a [Quota Scholarship for international students in Russia](#) or the use of international branch campuses for displaced or refugee students ([Bard College](#), USA).

#### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Increase in number of applications from migrants and minoritised students.
- Usage of support services.
- Increased enrolment rates of migrants and minoritised students.



## Case Study On Germany's Kiron Open Higher Education Programme

Open Education is a pioneering initiative founded in Germany in 2015 by Kiron, a nonprofit organisation dedicated to offering free, accessible and flexible education opportunities to refugees and underserved communities worldwide. The programme operates on the belief that education is a fundamental right and should be accessible to all, regardless of circumstances or background. Kiron leverages the power of digital learning to empower individuals who face barriers to traditional educational institutions, particularly displaced persons. Below are some key features of this initiative:

**1 Online Learning Model:** Kiron offers a fully online platform where students can access a wide range of massive open online courses (MOOCs) from top universities and institutions globally. These courses are available in various disciplines, including business, computer science, engineering, social sciences, and more, providing students with the opportunity to build the skills they need for personal and professional growth.

**2 Blended Learning Pathways:** Kiron students can choose from structured blended learning pathways, combining online learning with the potential to transfer credits to partner universities. This unique model enables students to start their studies online and eventually transition to accredited university programmes where they can earn formal degrees.

**3 Recognition of Prior Learning:** Kiron supports recognition of prior learning (RPL) to help refugees and displaced learners continue their education even if they cannot provide documentation of previous qualifications due to displacement. The programme works closely with partner institutions to facilitate credit transfer agreements and ensure that students' prior knowledge is acknowledged.

**4 Support Services and Mentoring:** Kiron goes beyond offering courses by providing comprehensive support services to its students. This includes academic mentoring, career counselling, language training, and peer-to-peer support networks, helping learners navigate the challenges of their education and integration into new environments. Kiron's student-centered approach ensures that learners receive the guidance and resources they need to succeed.

**5 Focus on Empowerment and Inclusion:** Kiron is deeply committed to promoting equity in education, focusing on marginalised populations, particularly refugees and underserved communities. The programme is designed to empower individuals by giving them the tools to access education, improve their career prospects, and integrate into their host countries. Kiron's platform fosters a sense of belonging and provides learners with an opportunity to rebuild their lives through education.

**6 Global Network and Partnerships:** Kiron has established a network of partner universities across the globe, enabling students to transfer their online credits toward accredited degree programmes. Through collaborations with leading educational institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, Kiron is able to expand its reach and impact, continually enhancing the quality and accessibility of its offerings.

Since its inception, Kiron has empowered thousands of refugees and disadvantaged students from around the world by providing free access to higher education. The programme has become a model for using digital education to bridge gaps in educational access for displaced learners,

offering them hope, opportunities, and pathways to build a better future.

Kiron Open Education represents a revolutionary approach to addressing educational inequality, particularly for refugees and underserved communities. By combining flexible, high-quality online learning with robust support services and pathways to formal education, Kiron is transforming the lives of individuals who face significant barriers to education. The programme continues to expand its reach, contributing to the global movement for inclusive education and helping learners rebuild their futures through knowledge and opportunity.

Source: [Kiron](#), 2024.

## Ensure Policies that Provide Financial Assistance and Scholarships for Migrant and Minoritised Students

### Recommendations:

- Increase the overall funding to higher education at the policy level.
- Fund scholarships, grants, fellowships, and financial aid specifically for migrant and minoritised students, such as the German state-funded [Philipp Schwartz Initiative for researchers at risk](#) or [Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students](#) (USA), and provide loans and other financial assistance specifically to migrant and minoritised students, etc. in order to make higher education more accessible.
- Designate or create offices that can offer guidance on accessing external funding opportunities and navigating the financial system in the local community, with special support for students coming from migrant backgrounds.

- Ensure policies that facilitate legal and administrative processes for migrant and minoritised students in easily opening bank accounts, obtaining necessary drivers' licenses, signing rental leases, and obtaining other identification and legal documents.
- Implement policies for migrant and minoritised students and family members that would allow legal employment in the local community.
- Ensure policies that provide non-financial support services, such as relocation services and support for family members of migrants and minoritised students, dedicated supplemented housing, and subsidised childcare.

### Indicators of Success:

- Increased financial support received by migrant and minoritised students.
- Improved academic performance and retention rates of migrant and minoritised students, correlated with financial aid.
- Reduced student debt among migrants and minoritised students.

- Gainfully employed family members.
- Ease of obtaining legal paperwork (banking, renting, etc).

◆ **Contributions to Wider Society include:**

- Reduction of economic barriers and promotion of educational attainment among diverse populations.
- Contribution to economic mobility and reduction of income inequality.

◆ **Indicators of Success:**

- Regular usage of academic advising and tutoring services by migrant and minoritised students.
- Better academic performance in courses and higher completion rates of orientation programmes.
- Positive feedback from students about the usefulness of orientation and advising/academic services and related programmes.

## Implement Academic Support Programmes for Migrant and Minoritised Learners

◆ **Recommendations:**

- Fund the development of interculturally sensitive orientation programmes that cover academic expectations, cultural norms, and institutional resources, some of which can be conducted in advance and online (See [Chapter 2](#)).
- Fund the development of “departmental ambassador” programmes, in which already established students serve as mentors to the newly arrived students to help them navigate academic and social life, or student-to-student mentoring programmes, such as the [Boise State Refugee Alliance](#) at Boise State University (USA), which offers mentorship to refugee students.
- Fund and provide additional academic advising and tutoring services, with specially trained advisors and tutors who have been through training for intercultural competences and trauma-informed counselling.

These recommendations, when implemented effectively, can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for migrants in higher education. Regular evaluation and adaptation based on feedback and data will ensure that these efforts continue to meet the evolving needs of migrant and minoritised students. To that end, it would be helpful to encourage the development of a standardised monitoring framework to ensure consistency in how data on migrant and minoritised students is collected, analysed and used to inform policy changes. It will also be very important to promote research and data collection on the experiences and needs of migrants and minoritised students, and to use such data to inform policy changes and improve institutional practices and services. It will also be important to regularly monitor and evaluate all integration efforts and resulting student outcomes through surveys, focus groups, and performance metrics, and adjust policies and strategies as needed based on feedback and learners’ evolving needs.

## Recommendations for Policy-makers Shaping Higher Education Systems and Societal Integration

Policy-makers play a pivotal role in shaping higher education systems that not only support the success of migrant and minoritised students but also contribute to stronger, more inclusive societies. Drawing on the intercultural integration framework presented in this publication, the following recommendations offer practical guidance for advancing equitable policies. Each is aligned with one or more of the framework's five principles and is intended to support broader societal impact:

### Inclusive education policies and practices

#### Develop Comprehensive Inclusion Policies for Migrant and Minoritised Students

##### ◆ Recommendations:

- Create policies that ensure equitable access and support for migrants and minoritised students at all stages of their higher education journey, from admission to graduation and beyond into lifelong learning opportunities.

An illustrative example of such an initiative is France's national strategy, coordinated by [Campus France](#), which offers a holistic support system for students in exile. This includes tailored admission procedures based on legal status, exemption from tuition and student life fees, access to French language courses,

and recognition of foreign qualifications. Additionally, specialised programmes like the DU Passerelle (Gateway Diploma) provide academic and linguistic preparation, while partnerships with networks such as MENs (Migrants in Higher Education) and initiatives like the AIMES programme facilitate integration into academic and social life.

- Implement policies and practices that address and prevent bias in the higher education environment.
- Fund welcoming public spaces open to students and local citizens where they can connect and interact.
- Monitor and raise awareness of the implementation (or non-implementation) of explicit laws and policies to enable the inclusion of migrant and refugee learners within the higher education system (recommendation from UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, 2023) and in particular, streamline procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications, including those of migrants and refugees, in accordance with the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#) and regional conventions.
- Establish clear and transparent policies (in multiple languages) and accessible processes for evaluating credentials including alternative assessments for those with incomplete documentation, by utilising [UNESCO's Qualifications Passport \(UQP\)](#).
- When inclusive policies for refugees are not explicit, framing refugees as part of the larger set of marginalised groups may help facilitate their inclusion (recommendation from UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, 2023).
- Take a whole system-wide perspective to policy to ensure that policies outside the education sector are not creating barriers to access and progression of policies related to migrant and minoritised students in HEIs (recommendation from UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, 2023).

- Invest in using data to ensure inclusion and building evidence on what works for migrant and minoritised student inclusion to scale such educational inclusion initiatives (recommendation from UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, 2023).
- Leverage criteria and practices from [Universities of Sanctuary](#) to foster welcoming campuses and actively engage refugees in academic and community life.

For example, the University of Glasgow (UK) includes refugees and asylum seekers in its Young Academicians programme under the At-Risk Academic Refugees initiative, which celebrates their contributions through an impactful portraiture project (University of Glasgow, 2020). Similarly, Dublin City University (Ireland) has established a dedicated [Sanctuary programme](#) offering scholarships, mentorship, and advocacy for refugee and migrant and minoritised learners (Dublin City University, 2023).

#### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Increased enrolment, retention and graduation rates of migrants and minoritised students in HEIs.
- Higher reported rates of intercultural dialogue and collaboration by migrants and minoritised students.
- Greater participation in intercultural events and activities by stakeholders within the higher education community.
- Increase in number of inclusive practices and policies that help create a welcoming environment.
- Increase in number of reported positive interactions that occur across difference in specifically developed public spaces.

#### ◆ Contributions to Wider Society include:

- Promotion of social cohesion and diversity by ensuring all students have equal opportunities as well as enhancing social justice and equality within the education system.

## Shared Responsibility of Integration

### Promote Public Awareness and Advocacy of Benefits of Migrant and Minoritised Students

#### ◆ Recommendations:

- Fund public campaigns (such as through social media, community events, partnerships with local media) to raise awareness about the benefits of a diverse and inclusive higher education system and society.
- Promote policies that support the intercultural integration and success of migrants within and beyond higher education institutions, e.g. in their local communities through community welcome programs that pair new migrants with local residents.

#### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Increased public and institutional support for initiatives that enhance a welcoming environment for all, including migrants and minoritised students.
- Positive media coverage and public discourse on the value of intercultural integration.
- Local citizens can articulate the value of diverse local citizenry.

#### ◆ Contributions to Wider Society include:

- Increases public support for diversity and inclusion in education and in society.
- Helps to normalise and celebrate cultural diversity within society.

## Develop Policies to Strengthen Collaborations Between Higher Education Institutions with Local Community Organisations, Supporting Intercultural Integration

### ◆ Recommendations:

- Develop partnerships between higher education institutions and local organisations (local governments, NGOs, think tanks, volunteer groups, etc.), especially those that specialise in migrant support and community services.
- Support connections between students, especially migrant and minoritised students, and external support networks within the local community and beyond, including through special welcome programmes in the community, such as an event at Mae Fah Luang University (Thailand) “[International Migrants Day Activity: Raising Awareness about Migrants’ Rights and Challenges through Documentary Screening and Discussion](#)”.

### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Increased partnerships and collaborative programmes between higher education institutions and community organisations in support of migrants and minoritised students.
- Higher rates of successful referrals and support connections for migrant and minoritised students.

## Reciprocity in intercultural integration

## Support Policies that Strengthen Career and Employment Support for Migrant Learners

### ◆ Recommendations:

- Fund career services that specifically address the needs of migrants, including interculturally competent teamwork, internship placements, job search assistance, and networking opportunities (See earlier chapters for more intercultural competence).
- Fund paid training programmes through partnerships with employers to facilitate the transition from education to employment, including through specific internships and job placements, while funding intercultural and language programmes that train local employers on working more effectively and appropriately with migrant employees. Examples include the [Co-operative Education Programme](#) at University of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan) or China’s state-funded [graduate employment promotion campaign](#).
- Fund long-term career mentorship programmes for migrants that start early in their higher education journey.

### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Higher employment rates and successful career placements among migrant graduates.
- Positive feedback from employers and students about career services and support.
- Improved retention rates of migrant graduates in jobs matching their skills.

### ◆ Contributions to Wider Society include:

- Enhances employability and economic contributions of migrant graduates.
- Addresses labour market needs by integrating diverse talent.

## Develop Policies that Encourage Global and Regional Collaboration in Addressing Higher Education Among Migrants and Minoritised Students

### ◆ Recommendations:

- Develop policies that foster partnerships with national, international, and regional institutions to share best practices and resources for integrating migrants into society in and through HEIs. An example could be "[Programme AIMES](#)" (Reception and integration of migrants in higher education) by the Francophone University Association.
- Fund cross-border educational initiatives and exchange programmes, such as [Erasmus+ programme](#).

### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Increased number of international and regional collaborations and exchange programmes, as well as increased numbers of exchange students from the migrant and minoritised student populations.
- Positive outcomes and feedback from participants of global educational initiatives.

### ◆ Contributions to Wider Society includes:

- Enhances regional and global cooperation and understanding, benefitting international relations and collaboration.
- Enriches the educational experience and prepares students for global citizenship.

## Promotion of Civic and Human Rights Education

## Citizenship Reimagined

## Develop Policies that Foster Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility Among Higher Education Institutions and Local Communities

### ◆ Recommendations:

- Develop policies that encourage higher education institutions to integrate local community service and civic engagement into their curricula and campus culture for all students including migrants and minoritised students, to engage with local residents around community issues, in order to foster shared social responsibility and promote civic rights.
- Fund academic, extracurricular and civic programmes at the local level that promote social responsibility, ethical leadership, and community involvement.
- Fund celebrations of migrants' cultural contributions and community service through public events and media campaigns which celebrate migrant and minoritised students as global citizens.
- Clarify policy pathways to citizenship that are accessible to migrants, especially refugees.

### ◆ Indicators of Success:

- Increased student participation in community service and civic engagement activities.
- Positive impact on local communities, as measured by feedback and community development metrics.

These policy recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and effective higher education environment for migrants, while also contributing positively to broader societal goals such as social cohesion, economic development, and global cooperation. Success can be measured through a combination of quantitative data, qualitative feedback, and broader societal impacts. It will be important for policy-makers to engage regularly in data-collection to drive policy decisions and to review, monitor, and update policies based on emerging needs, challenges and opportunities for migrants in the local community. This means engaging all stakeholders including community organisations, families, university leaders, and learners themselves (i.e. through focus groups and surveys). This also means that policy-makers must ensure that education policies, immigration policies, and other relevant policies at the national and local levels remain coherent and coordinated, which points to the importance of collaboration between government agencies, universities and other stakeholders. In the end, these policy recommendations show that it is imperative to engage all stakeholders (migrants, local residents, students, staff and faculty) in shaping intercultural integration policies, promoting equitable dialogue and active participation to ensure all voices are heard and valued, addressing (systemic) disadvantages through proposed policies to ensure fairness for all, providing adequate intercultural competence training and support for all stakeholders in providing a welcoming environment, and removing as many physical, cultural and linguistic barriers as possible that may hinder intercultural integration.

## Conclusions

The right to education for all, including migrants, minoritised students and refugees, is a fundamental human right. Intentional intercultural integration of all students, as discussed throughout this publication, becomes imperative within and through higher education and must not rest solely on the migrants and minoritised students, especially with an expectation for them to assimilate. Rather, given

that a student population comprising many different backgrounds brings many benefits, it becomes incumbent on all stakeholders in higher education, including those in the local community, to engage in mutual and reciprocal intercultural integration. This requires changes in policies and infrastructure, which point to the key role policy-makers have in ensuring the success of intercultural integration efforts. Such efforts are likelier to succeed when policy-makers prioritise policy recommendations that promote belonging and intercultural integration promote intercultural competence and dialogue for all (especially for teaching staff), develop intercultural exchanges through workshops, seminars, movies and the arts, and collaborative projects between higher education institutions and the local community, enhance tailored trauma-informed support services for migrants and minoritised students including career services, and foster meaningful community engagement. By embracing and welcoming learners from a wide array of backgrounds, institutions not only enhance the educational experience based on mutuality, reciprocity, inclusion, civics and human rights, but also prepare students to thrive in a globalised society as citizens who understand and act on their social responsibilities, ultimately leading to greater societal cohesion and innovation.

Through the exploration of these four chapters of *“More than Welcome: Intercultural Integration of Migrants in and through Higher Education”*, it is clear that the integration of migrants and minoritised students into higher education is not simply a matter of providing a welcoming environment—it is about creating a truly intercultural space and community where diverse learners are not just accepted, but valued for the unique perspectives and experiences they bring. This means it is incumbent on staff, academics, administrators, and yes, other students, to engage fully in intercultural integration within higher education institutions.

This publication underscores the importance of understanding that intercultural integration is a complex, multifaceted and long-term process that requires institutions to move beyond surface-level inclusion. It calls for systemic shifts in policies, teaching practices, and campus cultures to foster environments where migrants and minoritised

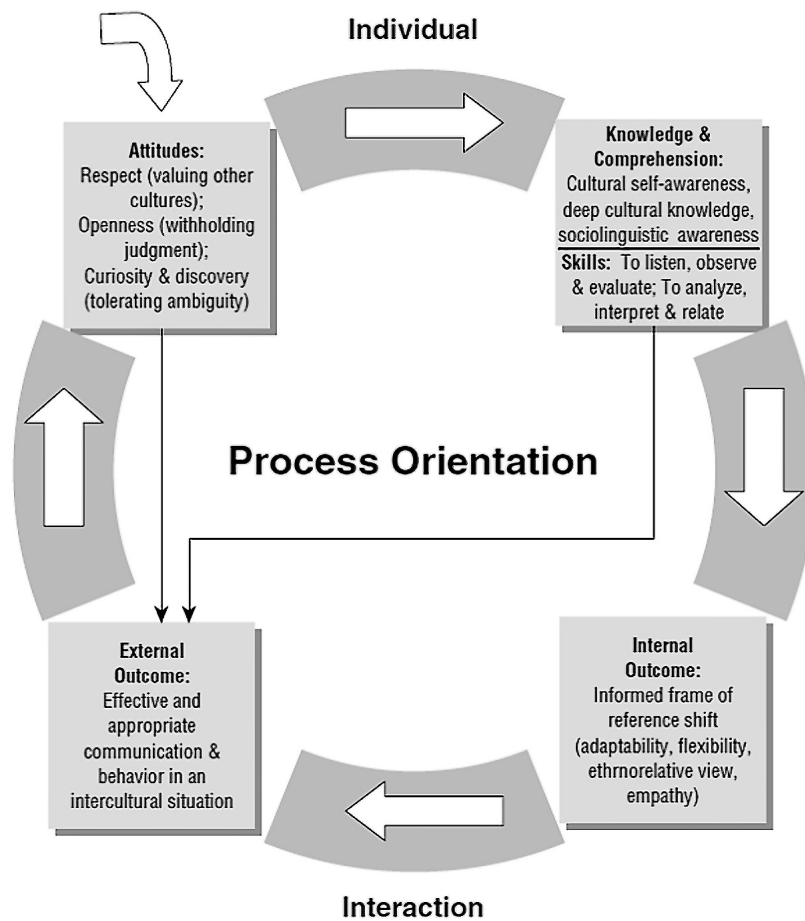
students can thrive academically, socially, and personally. The recommendations shared in this publication offer guidance for policy-makers to make crucial and much needed changes to policies so that all may truly belong. In addition, some practical guidance is provided for universities and educators to develop strategies that build bridges between cultures, promote mutual understanding, and create spaces of belonging with classrooms and campus communities.

We are at a pivotal moment in higher education where we must not only acknowledge the increasing global migration of students—both voluntary and forced—and, at the same time, recognise the profound role that higher education can play in shaping a more inclusive, peaceful, and equitable world. By embracing intercultural integration as a core overarching framework, higher education institutions can lead the way in supporting migrants and minoritised students and, in turn, contribute to the development of

engaged global citizens who are equipped to navigate and positively impact society, moving from polarisation to inclusion. As UNESCO proposed in its 2021 report “Reimagining Our Futures Together”, we all need to accept the call to actively engage “in the dialogue and practice to build a new social contract for education that we can renew to make just, equitable and sustainable futures possible...” (p. 146), giving “impetus to the call to come together and build new and brighter educational futures” (p. 158).

As we look toward the future, let us continue to challenge ourselves and our institutions to go beyond simply welcoming migrants and commit to building an interculturally rich, inclusive, and empowering educational environment where all belong and thrive. Higher education and our global society will certainly benefit immensely from the diverse voices and talents of all learners who are leading the way into the future, a future that can embrace the shared humanity of us all.

# Annex:



Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006 , 2009, 2012, 2020) Source: Deardorff, D.K. 2020. Manual on Developing Intercultural Competences: Story Circles. Paris: UNESCO/London: Routledge.

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# Appendix:

## Resources For Better Understanding Migrants in Higher Education

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Here's a resource list of some key books and articles on the challenges faced by migrants in higher education:

### Books

**Carter, L., & McCormack, C. (2017).** *Access to Higher Education for Migrants: Policy and Practice*. Sage.

- ◆ This book provides a critical look at policies designed to increase access to higher education for migrant populations, with a focus on challenges related to integration, language barriers, and discrimination.

**Kano, M. (2020).** *Migrant Students and Globalized Higher Education*. Springer.

- ◆ This book examines the educational challenges faced by migrant students in higher education, exploring issues like academic achievement, integration, and identity.

**Nóvoa, A., & Yariv-Mashal, T. (Eds.). (2016).** *Higher Education and the Global Challenge of Migration*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- ◆ A comprehensive overview of how global migration impacts higher education, this book includes insights into policy development and strategies to address the challenges faced by migrant students.

**Pitt, R. (2018).** *Educational Inequality and Migrant Learners: Navigating the Boundaries of Belonging in Higher Education*. Routledge.

- ◆ This text explores how migrant learners face structural inequalities within higher education systems and offers case studies on strategies to foster inclusion and support.

## Journal Articles

**Chavez, C. (2017).** "Language Barriers in Higher Education: The Struggles of Migrant Students." *Journal of Language and Education*, 34(2), 211-228.

- Focused on language barriers, this article examines how limited proficiency in the language of instruction affects migrant students' learning experiences and outcomes.

**Gandhi, S. (2022).** "Migrant Students and the Intersection of Social Class and Immigration Status in Higher Education." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(4), 789-806.

- This article analyses the intersection of social class and immigration status, exploring how both factors complicate migrant students' educational experiences in higher education.

**Hernandez, A., & Lopez, C. (2020).** "The Mental Health of Migrant Students in Higher Education: Navigating Stress and Resilience." *Journal of Higher Education Research*, 91(1), 12-28.

- This article reviews the mental health challenges migrant students face in higher education, including stressors from social isolation and the pressures of academic adjustment.

**Koehler, L. (2021).** "Migrant Students in Higher Education: Addressing Barriers to Academic Success." *Journal of International Students*, 11(2), 331-349.

- This article investigates the academic struggles faced by migrant students, including language barriers, cultural differences, and social integration.

**Sánchez, M., & White, K. (2019).** "The Impact of Cultural and Social Barriers on the Academic Success of Migrant Students in Higher Education." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 68, 122-133.

- This study explores how cultural and social barriers affect migrant students' academic outcomes and suggests strategies to mitigate these challenges.

**Simpson, L., & McGrath, R. (2018).** "The Role of Universities in Supporting Migrant Learners: Challenges and Opportunities." *Higher Education Quarterly*, 72(3), 335-351.

- This article discusses the role universities play in supporting migrant students, focusing on the challenges of creating inclusive environments and promoting academic success.

## Reports and Policy Documents

**European Commission. (2021).** *Migrant Learners in Higher Education: Challenges and Strategies for Inclusion*. European Commission.

- ◆ This policy document provides an in-depth look at strategies that can support migrant students' integration in higher education within the European context.

**OECD. (2019).** *Higher Education and the Integration of Migrants and Refugees: Key Challenges and Policy Responses*. OECD Publishing.

- ◆ A detailed report outlining the policy challenges and responses to integrating migrant students into higher education, offering comparative insights from different countries.

## Online Resources

**1 UNESCO (2020).** *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and Education of Migrant Students*. UNESCO.

- A global report that addresses the educational needs of migrant students, focusing on how inclusion practices can be implemented in higher education systems worldwide.

**2 International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2018).** *Supporting Migrant Students in Higher Education: Best Practices and Guidelines*. IOM.

- This resource offers practical guidelines and case studies on how higher education institutions can support migrant students, including through student services, mentorship programmes, and peer support initiatives.

This resource list covers a wide range of perspectives on the challenges faced by migrants in higher education, from policy and practice to personal experiences and strategies for improving outcomes.



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# More than Welcome

Intercultural integration of migrants  
in and through higher education

As global migration reaches historic levels, *More Than Welcome: Intercultural Integration of Migrants in and through Higher Education*, developed by UNESCO, calls for a shift from outdated integration models toward intercultural integration — a multidirectional process where migrants and host communities learn, adapt, and grow together. Highlighting the unique role of Higher Education Institutions, this publication shows how universities can serve as catalysts for inclusion by fostering intercultural competence, addressing discrimination, and creating spaces of belonging. Blending research with practical guidance, *More Than Welcome* offers policy-makers and educators a clear framework to build inclusive, resilient societies where diversity drives innovation, understanding, and shared progress.

