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Sense of community and psychosocial adjustment of Syrian immigrants

SUMMARY

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1. Introduction

Migration has become one of the most significant social phenomena shaping contemporary societies. During recent decades, increasing levels of displacement, forced migration, asylum seeking, and international mobility have attracted growing attention from policymakers, researchers, and international organizations. Migration is no longer understood merely as a geographical movement from one place to another, but rather as a complex process that affects individuals, families, communities, and institutions across multiple dimensions.

For migrants, relocation often involves profound changes that extend beyond physical movement. Entering a new social environment requires continuous efforts to rebuild daily routines, establish social relationships, navigate unfamiliar institutional systems, and adapt to different cultural norms and expectations. Consequently, migration represents not only a spatial transition but also a psychological, social, and cultural transformation that unfolds over time.

Within this context, psychosocial adaptation and sense of community have emerged as central concepts in understanding migrants' experiences. Adaptation involves individuals' attempts to achieve psychological well-being, social participation, and functional stability within their new environments, while sense of community reflects feelings of belonging, acceptance, membership, and emotional connection to the host society. Together, these dimensions provide a broader understanding of integration that extends beyond traditional economic and legal indicators.

The importance of these issues becomes particularly evident in relation to Syrian migration following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. As one of the largest forced displacement movements in recent history, Syrian migration has generated complex adaptation experiences across a wide range of national contexts. Millions of Syrians have been required to reconstruct their lives within new social, cultural, legal, and institutional environments, creating challenges and opportunities that continue to attract scholarly attention.

Against this background, the present study explores psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among Syrian migrants living in Germany, Sweden, and Romania. Through a comparative qualitative approach, the study seeks to understand how migrants experience adaptation within different European contexts and how individual, social, and institutional factors interact in shaping these experiences. The study is situated primarily within the field of sociology while drawing on perspectives from migration studies, community psychology, and psychosocial adaptation research.

2. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized into six main chapters, in addition to the abstract in English and Romanian, bibliography, appendices, list of publications, and statement of authenticity.

The Introduction presents the general context of the study and introduces the relevance of examining psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among Syrian migrants in different European contexts.

Chapter One presents the theoretical framework of the study. It discusses the concept of migration, classifications of migration, and major migration theories. It also examines psychosocial adaptation and its explanatory theories in the context of migration, the concept and components of sense of

community, migration-related policies in the selected host countries, and previous studies related to migration, adaptation, and Syrian migration.

Chapter Two presents the research problem and study framework. It includes the research problem, objectives, research questions, theoretical and practical significance, key concept definitions, and the spatial, temporal, conceptual, and methodological delimitations of the research.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology. It presents the methodological approach, data collection tools, research procedures, interview process, sample size and data saturation, participant characteristics, data analysis, translation procedures, researcher positionality, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and research limitations.

Chapter Four presents the results of the study. It is organized around positive experiences and facilitating factors, negative experiences and hindering factors, and an integrative synthesis of the findings. This chapter also examines the role of social support, absence of alternative options, language, child-rearing gap, absence of social life, discrimination and social acceptance, psychological challenges, and differences across sociodemographic groups. It concludes with an interpretive model of psychosocial adaptation and sense of community based on the study findings.

Chapter Five develops a guiding framework for strengthening integration policies for Syrian migrants. It includes the objectives and guiding principles of the framework, areas of intervention and evaluation indicators, country-specific recommendations for Germany, Sweden, and Romania, cross-national lessons and transferable practices, expected outputs and outcomes, implementation and monitoring mechanisms, strategic prioritization of actions, potential challenges, and the framework conclusion.

Chapter Six presents the final conclusion of the thesis, followed by the bibliography, appendices, list of publications, and the statement of authenticity.

3. Theoretical background and previous studies

Understanding psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among migrants requires a multidimensional theoretical perspective that takes into account the complexity of migration experiences and the diversity of factors shaping them. Migration is not limited to the act of relocation itself but involves a series of interconnected psychological, social, cultural, and institutional processes that continue long after arrival in the host country. Consequently, the present study draws upon several complementary theoretical perspectives that contribute to understanding migration, adaptation, integration, and community belonging.

In addition to the theoretical foundations, a review of previous studies was conducted to identify the main findings, methodological approaches, and research gaps within the existing literature. Together, the theoretical and empirical literature provide the conceptual basis for examining the experiences of Syrian migrants in Germany, Sweden, and Romania and for interpreting the findings of the present study.

3.1 Migration and migration theories

The migration experience has been examined through a wide range of theoretical perspectives seeking to explain why people migrate, how migration processes unfold, and what factors influence

migrants' decisions and trajectories. Contemporary migration research increasingly recognizes that migration is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical lens. Migration decisions are often shaped by the interaction of individual motivations, social relationships, economic opportunities, political circumstances, institutional conditions, and broader global structures. Consequently, recent scholarship has moved beyond purely economic explanations and toward more comprehensive approaches that acknowledge the dynamic interplay between personal agency and structural influences.

Accordingly, the present study draws on several complementary migration theories. Push–Pull Theory explains migration as the result of interactions between unfavorable conditions in the country of origin and attractive opportunities in the destination country. Network Theory highlights the role of family, friends, and social connections in facilitating migration and reducing its risks and costs. Human Capital Theory views migration as a strategic investment through which individuals seek to maximize the returns on their education, skills, and professional qualifications. In contrast, World-Systems Theory shifts attention toward global inequalities and structural relationships between economically dominant and dependent regions, emphasizing the influence of broader political and economic systems on migration flows. Similarly, Dual Labour Market Theory explains migration through the persistent demand for migrant labor within advanced economies, particularly in sectors characterized by labor shortages and less desirable working conditions.

Although each of these theories emphasizes different dimensions of migration, none is sufficient on its own to explain the complexity of contemporary migration experiences, particularly in situations involving forced displacement and refugee movements. For this reason, the current study adopts an integrative perspective that combines insights from multiple theoretical approaches. This allows migration to be understood not only as a decision to relocate but also as a process embedded within broader social, economic, political, and historical contexts that continue to influence migrants' adaptation experiences after arrival.

3.2 Psychosocial adaptation and integration

Psychosocial adaptation represents one of the central concepts in migration research because it focuses on how migrants adjust to new social, cultural, and institutional environments after relocation. Rather than being understood as a single outcome, adaptation is generally viewed as a dynamic and ongoing process through which individuals attempt to achieve psychological well-being, social participation, and functional stability within their host societies. This process involves both internal dimensions, such as emotional adjustment, coping strategies, identity reconstruction, and psychological resilience, and external dimensions related to social relationships, community participation, and interaction with institutions.

The literature suggests that adaptation is influenced by a wide range of factors operating at different levels. Individual characteristics such as age, gender, educational background, migration motivation, and previous life experiences can affect migrants' adaptation trajectories. At the same time, structural factors—including immigration policies, labor market opportunities, welfare systems, legal stability, and access to services—play a significant role in shaping opportunities for successful adaptation. Consequently, adaptation cannot be understood solely as an individual responsibility or

achievement but rather as the result of continuous interaction between migrants and their surrounding environments.

To explain these processes, the study draws on several complementary theoretical frameworks. Berry's Acculturation Model emphasizes the strategies migrants adopt when interacting with a new cultural environment, while Ager and Strang's Integration Framework highlights the importance of employment, education, housing, social connections, and rights as interconnected dimensions of integration. The Life Course Perspective further contributes to understanding adaptation as a cumulative process shaped by timing, life transitions, and previous experiences. Social Capital Theory emphasizes the role of social networks and support systems in facilitating adaptation, while theories of integration and segmented assimilation demonstrate how institutional structures, discrimination, and opportunities can generate different integration trajectories among migrants. Together, these approaches provide a multidimensional understanding of psychosocial adaptation and integration as dynamic and context-dependent processes.

3.3 Sense of community

In addition to psychosocial adaptation, the present study places particular emphasis on the concept of sense of community. Originating within community psychology, this concept refers to individuals' perceptions of belonging, membership, emotional attachment, and mutual commitment within a particular community. Unlike traditional indicators of integration that focus primarily on objective outcomes such as employment, income, or legal status, sense of community emphasizes the subjective and relational dimensions of migrants' experiences.

The study relies primarily on the model proposed by McMillan and Chavis, which conceptualizes sense of community through five interrelated dimensions: membership, influence, reinforcement, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Together, these dimensions capture individuals' feelings of belonging, mutual influence, perceived support, satisfaction of personal and collective needs, and emotional attachment to their communities.

Within migration contexts, sense of community is particularly important because successful adaptation cannot be reduced to legal security or economic stability alone. Migrants may achieve employment, housing, and legal residence while still experiencing feelings of isolation, exclusion, or social distance from the host society. Conversely, strong social relationships, meaningful participation, and a sense of belonging may significantly enhance well-being even in the presence of structural challenges. For this reason, recent migration research increasingly recognizes sense of community as a crucial dimension of long-term integration and social inclusion.

3.4 National contexts: Germany, Sweden, and Romania

Because adaptation experiences are strongly influenced by social and institutional environments, the present study adopts a comparative perspective involving three European countries: Germany, Sweden, and Romania. These countries were selected because they represent different integration contexts, migration histories, welfare systems, and institutional approaches to migration and refugee reception.

Germany has developed one of the most structured integration systems in Europe, characterized by formal language courses, employment programs, and institutional support mechanisms. While these

structures provide important opportunities for migrants, participants frequently encounter challenges related to administrative complexity, bureaucratic procedures, and the recognition of qualifications. Consequently, adaptation within the German context often involves navigating a highly organized but demanding institutional environment.

Sweden has traditionally been associated with an extensive welfare model that provides broad access to social support, healthcare, education, and integration services. For many years, Sweden was considered one of the most welcoming destinations for refugees and migrants. However, recent legislative changes and increasingly restrictive migration policies have introduced new forms of uncertainty regarding legal stability and long-term settlement. This creates a complex context in which strong welfare support coexists with concerns about legal security and social belonging.

Romania represents a significantly different context. Compared to Germany and Sweden, its integration infrastructure remains less developed and relies more heavily on local initiatives, civil society organizations, and informal support networks. Although migrants often encounter fewer bureaucratic barriers and may experience positive interpersonal relationships, access to specialized integration services is generally more limited. As a result, adaptation pathways in Romania often depend more strongly on individual efforts and informal sources of support.

These differences provide an important comparative framework for understanding how national contexts shape migrants' experiences of adaptation, integration, and sense of community.

3.5 Previous studies and research Gap

Previous research has generated substantial knowledge regarding migration, adaptation, and integration processes. Many studies have emphasized the importance of employment, education, language proficiency, legal stability, and social participation as key indicators of successful integration. Research has also demonstrated the positive effects of social networks, institutional support, and community participation on migrants' well-being and long-term settlement outcomes.

Studies focusing specifically on Syrian migrants have highlighted the complex interaction between forced migration experiences, psychological challenges, social relationships, and institutional environments. Existing findings consistently indicate that language acquisition, access to employment, social support, and legal security play important roles in shaping adaptation trajectories. Research has also shown that migrants' experiences vary considerably across different host countries, reflecting differences in national policies, welfare systems, and societal attitudes.

Despite these contributions, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, much of the existing research continues to focus primarily on objective indicators of integration, while subjective dimensions such as belonging, acceptance, emotional attachment, and sense of community receive comparatively less attention. Second, many studies rely on quantitative approaches that are less suited to exploring the lived experiences and personal meanings attached to migration and adaptation. Third, comparative qualitative studies examining Syrian migrants across different European contexts remain relatively limited. Finally, the Romanian context remains substantially underrepresented compared to countries such as Germany and Sweden, despite its growing relevance within contemporary migration patterns.

The present study addresses these gaps by providing a comparative qualitative analysis of Syrian migrants' experiences in Germany, Sweden, and Romania. By simultaneously examining psychosocial adaptation and sense of community and exploring variations across demographic and contextual factors, the study seeks to contribute a more comprehensive understanding of migrants' lived experiences and the processes shaping their adaptation and integration outcomes.

4. Research problem and study framework

Despite the substantial expansion of migration and integration research during recent decades, important knowledge gaps remain regarding migrants' subjective experiences, particularly in relation to psychosocial adaptation and sense of community. A large proportion of previous studies have focused on objective indicators of integration, such as employment, income, education, legal status, and language proficiency. While these indicators provide valuable insights into structural integration, they often offer limited understanding of migrants' subjective experiences, including feelings of belonging, social acceptance, community participation, and psychological well-being.

In addition, much of the existing literature on Syrian migrants in Europe has concentrated on specific national contexts, particularly Germany and Sweden. Other European contexts, such as Romania, remain comparatively underrepresented despite their growing relevance within contemporary migration dynamics. Furthermore, studies that simultaneously examine psychosocial adaptation and sense of community within a comparative framework that takes into account differences related to gender, age, marital status, migration type, migration duration, and country of residence remain relatively limited.

Accordingly, the present study addresses the need for a deeper understanding of how psychosocial adaptation and sense of community are experienced and shaped among Syrian migrants living in different European contexts. More specifically, the study seeks to explore the factors that facilitate or hinder these processes and to identify similarities and differences in migrants' experiences across diverse demographic, social, and institutional settings.

Therefore, the study pursued two main objectives:

- 1) To identify the positive aspects of the migration experience as perceived by Syrian migrants living in different European countries and to explore the factors that facilitate psychosocial adaptation and the development of a sense of community within their host societies.
- 2) To identify the negative aspects of the migration experience and to explore the factors that hinder psychosocial adaptation, integration, and sense of community among Syrian migrants in different European contexts.

4.1 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perceived positive aspects of the migration experience among Syrian migrants, and what factors facilitate psychosocial adaptation and sense of community within their host societies?
- 2) What are the perceived negative aspects of the migration experience among Syrian migrants, and what factors hinder psychosocial adaptation and sense of community within their host societies?

4.2 Significance of Study

The significance of the present study is both theoretical and practical.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to addressing an important gap in migration research by bringing together psychosocial adaptation and sense of community within a comparative qualitative framework involving three different European contexts. It expands current understanding of migrants' lived experiences by moving beyond traditional structural indicators of integration and examining the subjective, relational, and community dimensions of adaptation. The study also contributes to the literature by incorporating the Romanian context, which remains relatively underrepresented in research on Syrian migration in Europe.

From a practical perspective, the study provides a deeper understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder adaptation, integration, and community belonging among migrants. By drawing directly on migrants' lived experiences, the findings offer evidence-based insights that may assist policymakers, governmental institutions, municipalities, civil society organizations, and practitioners working in migration, integration, and psychosocial support. Furthermore, the study translates its findings into a practical guiding framework aimed at supporting the development of more inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainable integration policies and interventions.

5. Methodology

5.1 Methodological approach, data collection, and research procedures

The present study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach aimed at understanding the lived experiences of Syrian migrants in Europe and analyzing the ways in which psychosocial adaptation and sense of community are shaped within different social and institutional contexts. A qualitative methodology was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the meanings participants assign to their experiences and facilitates the examination of psychological, social, and relational dimensions that cannot be fully captured through quantitative indicators alone.

The study was guided by an emergent and flexible research design. Rather than following a rigid and fully predetermined analytical structure, the research process evolved progressively throughout data collection and analysis. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, the expansion of emerging analytical categories, the comparison of different experiences, and the identification of relationships between themes and concepts. Consequently, the analysis moved beyond descriptive thematic categorization toward the development of more complex interpretive patterns and explanatory relationships associated with psychosocial adaptation and sense of community.

The complete analytical sample consisted of 33 cases, including 25 semi-structured interviews with Syrian migrants and 8 supporting secondary qualitative materials. The cases were distributed across three European countries—Germany, Sweden, and Romania—allowing for a comparative analysis of different institutional, legal, and social contexts. The inclusion of these three countries provided the opportunity to examine adaptation experiences within settings characterized by different integration models, levels of welfare support, legal stability, and opportunities for social participation.

The sample was intentionally diverse in terms of sociodemographic characteristics in order to capture a broad range of migration experiences and adaptation pathways. Participants included both men and

women, individuals from different age groups, and both single and married migrants. The sample also incorporated migrants with different migration trajectories, including refugees, family reunification migrants, and study migrants. In addition, participants varied in terms of length of residence in the host country, ranging from relatively recent arrivals to long-term residents who had spent more than a decade in their host societies. To facilitate comparative analysis, participants were categorized according to gender, age group, marital status, migration type, country of residence, and years since migration. This diversity made it possible to explore not only common adaptation experiences but also differences associated with these variables and the intersections between them.

The inclusion of participants with varied migration backgrounds was particularly important for the analytical objectives of the study. Rather than treating Syrian migrants as a homogeneous group, the research sought to explore how adaptation experiences differ according to migrants' life circumstances, migration motivations, family situations, and settlement histories. Consequently, the sample design supported both within-group and cross-group comparisons, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns as well as important variations across different demographic and contextual categories.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Personal and social networks facilitated access to additional participants who met the study criteria and possessed diverse migration and adaptation experiences within the three selected countries. This recruitment strategy was particularly suitable given the personal and sometimes sensitive nature of migration experiences, which may make direct recruitment methods less effective.

Semi-structured interviews constituted the primary method of data collection. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, the participants' native language, enabling them to express their experiences, emotions, perceptions, and evaluations of migration and adaptation in a natural and detailed manner. The interview guide was developed on the basis of the research objectives, research questions, and theoretical framework while maintaining sufficient flexibility to follow issues and themes introduced by participants during the interviews. The interviews explored four principal areas: the perceived benefits and positive aspects of migration, factors facilitating adaptation, perceived disadvantages and negative consequences of migration, and challenges and obstacles that hinder adaptation and integration.

In addition to the interviews, the study incorporated eight supporting secondary qualitative materials, including case studies, interviews, and publicly available published materials. These materials were not analyzed separately from the interview data but were integrated into the broader analytical process to strengthen interpretation, enrich contextual understanding, and support comparisons across different sources. Their inclusion contributed to expanding the analytical perspective on Syrian migration experiences within the selected European contexts.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 14 software. The software facilitated data organization, coding procedures, category development, and the exploration of relationships between themes. The analytical process began with repeated readings of the data, followed by initial coding and the gradual grouping of codes into broader categories. These categories were subsequently developed into major themes and interpretive patterns. As the analysis progressed, the focus moved beyond thematic description toward the examination of relationships between categories, the comparison of experiences across countries and sociodemographic groups,

and the construction of conceptual models illustrating the factors and processes influencing psychosocial adaptation and sense of community.

The diversity of the sample and the recurrence of key patterns across different cases contributed to achieving an appropriate level of thematic saturation. Core themes began to appear consistently across interviews and supporting materials, while subsequent data primarily contributed additional depth, contextual clarification, and a more refined understanding of variations between cases and settings rather than generating entirely new central themes.

5.2 Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

Several strategies were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. These included systematic documentation of the research and analytical processes, the use of direct participant quotations to maintain a close connection between interpretation and data, and ongoing comparisons across cases, groups, and national contexts. Credibility was further strengthened through triangulation, combining interview data with secondary qualitative materials, comparing findings across three European contexts, and drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives when interpreting the results.

From an ethical perspective, the study adhered to established principles of scientific research. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, participation was entirely voluntary, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and all data were used exclusively for research purposes. The shared linguistic and cultural background between the researcher and participants contributed to building trust and facilitating communication, while continuous reflexive awareness helped maintain critical analytical distance throughout the interpretation process.

The analytical process was guided by the study's two main research questions concerning the positive and negative dimensions of migration experiences. However, consistent with the exploratory nature of the study, the analysis gradually generated additional comparative and interpretive dimensions that extended beyond the initial analytical structure. As patterns emerged across interviews and supporting materials, themes related to social support, language, family dynamics, social participation, absence of alternatives, and sociodemographic variations became increasingly prominent. These themes contributed to a deeper understanding of psychosocial adaptation and sense of community and informed the development of the interpretive models presented in the findings.

6. Research findings

The findings of the study are based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews and supporting qualitative materials. Consistent with the study objectives and research questions, the findings are organized around two broad analytical areas: positive experiences and facilitating factors on the one hand, and negative experiences and hindering factors on the other.

Although the analysis was initially guided by these two overarching areas, the inductive and iterative nature of the research process allowed additional themes, relationships, and comparative dimensions to emerge. As data collection and analysis progressed, patterns related to social support, language, family dynamics, social participation, absence of alternatives, and sociodemographic differences became increasingly visible. These themes contributed to a deeper understanding of psychosocial

adaptation and sense of community and ultimately informed the development of the interpretive models presented in the final section of the chapter.

The findings are presented through a combination of thematic analysis, comparative interpretation, and cross-context examination, highlighting both shared experiences and variations across different demographic groups and national contexts.

6.1 Positive experiences and facilitating factors

The findings indicate that participants generally evaluated their migration experiences positively despite the numerous challenges associated with adaptation and integration. Positive evaluations were linked to a combination of individual, family-related, social, legal, and practical factors that contributed to improving quality of life and increasing feelings of security and stability.

Several facilitating factors emerged as particularly important in supporting psychosocial adaptation. These included legal stability, access to employment and educational opportunities, economic security, language learning, supportive institutional environments, and opportunities for participation in community life. Participants frequently described adaptation as a gradual process that became easier when basic needs and long-term stability were secured.

At the individual level, participants referred to personal characteristics such as adaptability, patience, perseverance, flexibility, openness to learning, and the ability to focus on future opportunities rather than current difficulties. These characteristics often helped migrants navigate the challenges associated with relocation, uncertainty, and the need to rebuild different aspects of life. The findings suggest that adaptation was not solely determined by external conditions, but also by the way individuals interpreted and responded to these conditions.

Social support emerged as one of the most influential facilitating factors. Support provided by family members, spouses, friends, members of the Syrian community, supportive local residents, and community organizations contributed to reducing uncertainty, enhancing emotional well-being, and increasing confidence in navigating the new social environment. Social support functioned not only as a practical resource but also as a source of emotional security, belonging, and psychological resilience.

Institutional and contextual factors also played a significant role. Legal residence permits, citizenship opportunities, healthcare services, educational opportunities, welfare systems, and access to employment were frequently described as sources of stability and reassurance. Participants often linked legal and institutional security to their ability to plan for the future, make long-term decisions, and gradually establish stronger connections with the host society.

The findings further revealed the importance of comparative evaluation processes. Participants frequently assessed their current circumstances in relation to their previous experiences in Syria or during earlier stages of displacement. For many, particularly refugees, the perceived advantages of safety, stability, legal protection, and future opportunities outweighed the difficulties encountered during adaptation. This comparative perspective contributed to a more positive evaluation of migration despite ongoing challenges.

Related to this, the absence of realistic alternatives emerged as an important facilitating factor. Particularly among refugees, adaptation was often reinforced by the perception that returning to

previous living conditions was either impossible or highly undesirable. Rather than functioning as passive resignation, this perception often operated as a motivational mechanism that encouraged persistence, acceptance of challenges, and continued investment in integration efforts.

The comparative analysis revealed that facilitating factors were not experienced uniformly across participants but varied according to demographic characteristics and migration contexts. Women more frequently emphasized family-related factors, children's well-being, and supportive interpersonal relationships, whereas men tended to focus on practical opportunities, independence, and employment-related achievements. Differences also emerged across age groups. Younger participants often highlighted educational opportunities, personal development, and future aspirations, while older participants placed greater emphasis on stability, security, and long-term settlement. Variations were also observed according to migration type. Refugees frequently described safety, legal protection, and the absence of viable alternatives as major facilitating factors, whereas study migrants more often emphasized educational opportunities, skill development, and career prospects. Family reunification migrants highlighted the importance of existing family networks and emotional support. At the contextual level, participants in Germany frequently referred to institutional opportunities and structured integration pathways, those in Sweden emphasized welfare support and social security, while participants in Romania highlighted social acceptance, accessibility, and the supportive role of local communities and interpersonal relationships.

Participants identified a wide range of benefits associated with migration. These benefits extended beyond economic improvement and included psychological, social, family-related, legal, and practical dimensions. At the individual level, migration was associated with greater feelings of safety, freedom, personal development, self-confidence, and independence. At the family level, participants emphasized better educational opportunities for children, access to healthcare, improved family stability, and greater capacity to support relatives remaining in Syria. At the structural level, migrants frequently referred to legal rights, organized public systems, institutional protection, freedom of movement, and greater predictability in everyday life.

The analysis also demonstrated that perceived benefits and facilitating factors varied across sociodemographic groups. Women more frequently emphasized family-related benefits, including children's future opportunities, educational possibilities, maternity protections, and family well-being, whereas men more often highlighted individual achievements, professional opportunities, financial stability, and practical aspects of migration. Differences also emerged across age groups. Younger participants tended to emphasize opportunities for self-development, education, and exploration, whereas older participants more frequently valued security, stability, healthcare, and long-term protection.

Migration type also influenced the way participants evaluated their experiences. Refugees often highlighted safety, protection, and the possibility of rebuilding life after experiences of conflict and insecurity. Participants who migrated through family reunification more frequently emphasized family stability, emotional support, and the importance of preserving family unity. Those who migrated for study purposes often referred to educational opportunities, personal development, and future career prospects as central benefits of migration.

The findings further revealed contextual differences between the three countries. Participants in Sweden frequently emphasized social welfare provisions, legal stability, healthcare services, and

extensive social protections. In Germany, positive evaluations were often linked to the availability of structured institutional support, integration programs, employment opportunities, and clear administrative pathways. In Romania, participants more commonly highlighted positive interpersonal relations, social acceptance, and supportive interactions within local communities, despite the comparatively less developed integration infrastructure.

Overall, the findings indicate that positive evaluations of migration and successful adaptation were shaped by a dynamic interaction between personal resources, social relationships, institutional support, and broader contextual conditions. These factors operated together rather than independently, creating diverse pathways through which migrants developed psychosocial adaptation and a sense of community within their host societies.

The findings suggest that positive adaptation cannot be explained solely through the presence of favorable objective conditions such as employment, legal residence, or access to services. Rather, these factors appear to acquire greater significance when combined with supportive social relationships, psychological resilience, and a meaningful sense of future orientation. In many participants' narratives, adaptation was not described as the absence of difficulties, but as the ability to maintain stability, purpose, and hope despite the existence of ongoing challenges. This observation highlights the active role of migrants in interpreting and responding to their circumstances rather than merely reacting to them.

The results also indicate that migrants' evaluations of migration were often shaped through processes of comparison between life before and after migration. Positive assessments frequently emerged not because the host context was perceived as ideal, but because it offered advantages that participants considered important in relation to previous experiences of insecurity, instability, limited opportunities, or restricted future prospects. This finding suggests that adaptation is influenced not only by present living conditions but also by migrants' personal histories, expectations, and reference points. Consequently, adaptation should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by both objective opportunities and subjective interpretations of those opportunities.

6.2 Negative experiences and hindering factors

Despite the numerous benefits associated with migration, participants also described a wide range of challenges and difficulties that affected their psychosocial adaptation and sense of community. The findings indicate that adaptation was rarely experienced as a smooth or linear process. Instead, participants often described it as a continuous negotiation between opportunities and obstacles, stability and uncertainty, belonging and alienation.

Several factors emerged as important barriers to adaptation. These included language difficulties, limited social relationships, bureaucratic and administrative challenges, uncertainty regarding the future, financial pressures, cultural differences, experiences of discrimination, family-related difficulties, and the emotional consequences of displacement and separation from familiar social environments. While the relative importance of these challenges varied across participants, they collectively contributed to shaping adaptation experiences in the host countries.

Among all identified barriers, language emerged as one of the most frequently mentioned challenges. Participants described language as a key factor influencing access to employment, education, healthcare, public services, and social participation. Difficulties in communication often restricted

opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with members of the host society and limited migrants' ability to fully engage in community life. The findings indicate that language barriers were particularly evident during the early stages of settlement, although their impact often persisted over longer periods.

The findings further revealed that adaptation difficulties were not distributed equally across participants. Women more frequently referred to challenges associated with cultural differences, child-rearing, family responsibilities, and concerns regarding children's socialization within different cultural environments. Men more commonly emphasized administrative procedures, employment-related difficulties, and institutional barriers. These differences suggest that adaptation challenges are experienced differently according to social roles, responsibilities, and life circumstances.

Age-related differences also emerged. Participants aged between 30 and 39 years appeared to report the widest range of adaptation challenges, including language barriers, discrimination, family pressures, and difficulties balancing professional and family responsibilities. Younger participants more frequently discussed uncertainty regarding the future, educational pathways, and economic stability, whereas older participants emphasized challenges associated with aging, limited opportunities for professional advancement, and difficulties adapting to new social and cultural systems.

Migration type also shaped adaptation experiences. Refugees frequently described uncertainty, legal concerns, economic pressures, and social isolation. Participants who migrated through family reunification more often referred to cultural tensions, parenting challenges, and difficulties associated with rebuilding family life in a new context. Study migrants highlighted language barriers, limited social connections, and concerns related to long-term settlement and future opportunities.

Beyond practical and institutional difficulties, participants frequently described emotional and psychological challenges associated with migration. Feelings of loneliness, alienation, uncertainty, homesickness, and emotional exhaustion appeared across many narratives. For some participants, these experiences persisted despite achieving objective indicators of integration such as employment, legal residence, or financial stability. This finding suggests that successful adaptation cannot be fully understood through structural indicators alone.

The findings also identified several perceived disadvantages of migration. These disadvantages extended beyond practical difficulties and included emotional losses associated with separation from family members, reduced social connectedness, loss of familiar cultural environments, and disruptions in established social roles and identities. Participants often described migration as involving both gains and losses, with positive opportunities coexisting alongside significant emotional costs.

Two themes emerged as particularly important across participants' narratives: the child-rearing gap and the absence of social life. The child-rearing gap referred to tensions experienced by migrant parents when attempting to reconcile their cultural values and parenting practices with the norms, expectations, and legal frameworks of host societies. Many participants expressed concerns regarding intergenerational differences, cultural transmission, parental authority, and the challenges of raising children between different cultural systems.

The absence of social life represented another recurring challenge, particularly among participants living in contexts characterized by weaker interpersonal relationships or limited opportunities for social interaction. Many participants described difficulties establishing deep friendships, developing stable social networks, or achieving the level of social connectedness they had previously experienced in Syria. This issue was especially prominent in discussions related to belonging and sense of community.

Country-level differences were also evident. Participants in Sweden frequently referred to social isolation, limited social interaction, parenting challenges, the mechanized nature of daily life, taxation, and weather conditions as sources of dissatisfaction. In Germany, administrative complexity, bureaucratic procedures, and institutional demands emerged more prominently. In Romania, language barriers and limited social networks appeared among the most commonly reported challenges, although these difficulties were often accompanied by more positive descriptions of interpersonal interactions and social acceptance.

Experiences of discrimination and social acceptance further revealed important gendered patterns. Women more frequently discussed concerns related to cultural and religious differences, visibility, and social perceptions, whereas men more often described challenges related to employment, professional recognition, and institutional interactions. Although participants did not generally describe widespread overt discrimination, many referred to subtle forms of exclusion, social distance, or perceived differences in acceptance.

Differences also emerged between single and married participants regarding psychological challenges. Married participants more frequently described pressures associated with family responsibilities, parenting, and balancing adaptation demands with family obligations. Single participants, in contrast, often emphasized loneliness, limited emotional support, uncertainty regarding future relationships, and difficulties establishing stable social connections.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that negative experiences and adaptation barriers were multidimensional and interconnected. Rather than resulting from a single factor, adaptation difficulties emerged through the interaction of personal, social, cultural, institutional, and contextual influences. These challenges not only affected psychosocial adaptation but also shaped migrants' sense of belonging, participation, and community membership within their host societies.

The findings indicate that adaptation difficulties rarely emerged as isolated problems. Instead, participants frequently described chains of interconnected challenges in which one difficulty contributed to the development or intensification of others. For example, language barriers often limited access to employment opportunities, reduced social interaction, and complicated communication with institutions. Similarly, legal uncertainty frequently affected future planning, psychological well-being, family stability, and community participation. These patterns suggest that adaptation challenges should be understood as interconnected processes rather than independent obstacles.

The results further reveal that achieving success in one domain of adaptation does not necessarily eliminate difficulties in other domains. Several participants reported stable employment, legal residence, or satisfactory living conditions while simultaneously experiencing loneliness, weak social belonging, or continuing psychological strain. This finding highlights the multidimensional nature of

adaptation and supports the argument that integration cannot be adequately evaluated through structural indicators alone. Sustainable adaptation appears to depend on the combined presence of legal stability, social participation, supportive relationships, psychological well-being, and opportunities for meaningful community membership.

6.3 Integrative synthesis of the findings

The findings of the current study indicate that psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among Syrian migrants cannot be understood as isolated outcomes determined by a single factor. Rather, they emerge through the continuous interaction of multiple personal, social, institutional, legal, cultural, and temporal dimensions. The experiences described by participants reveal a dynamic process in which adaptation develops through ongoing negotiation between available resources and existing challenges, between opportunities and constraints, and between migrants' personal capacities and the characteristics of the host society.

6.3.1 Dimensions shaping psychosocial adaptation

The analysis identified several interconnected dimensions that collectively shape psychosocial adaptation. These dimensions include personal factors related to individual characteristics and coping capacities, social factors linked to relationships and support networks, institutional and legal dimensions associated with rights, residency status, and access to services, economic dimensions related to employment and financial stability, and contextual dimensions reflecting the characteristics of the host society and its integration policies.

The findings suggest that adaptation cannot be attributed to any single dimension in isolation. For example, economic stability alone was often insufficient to ensure positive adaptation outcomes when accompanied by social isolation or weak community belonging. Similarly, supportive social relationships were often unable to compensate entirely for prolonged legal uncertainty or institutional barriers. Instead, successful adaptation appeared most likely when several facilitating dimensions operated simultaneously and reinforced one another.

The results further indicate that adaptation is not a static achievement but a dynamic and evolving process. Participants frequently described periods of progress followed by setbacks, reflecting the changing nature of personal circumstances, family situations, institutional conditions, and social relationships throughout the migration journey.

6.3.2 Interrelated dimensions of sense of community

The findings also reveal that sense of community extends beyond simple participation in social life or residence within a particular country. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of several dimensions that correspond closely to the components proposed in the literature while also reflecting the specific realities of migration.

Participants' narratives indicate that membership was closely connected to feelings of acceptance and recognition within the host society. Influence was reflected in migrants' perceptions of their ability to participate, contribute, and have their voices heard within community life. Fulfilment of needs was associated with access to resources, opportunities, rights, and institutional support.

Shared emotional connection emerged through meaningful relationships, accumulated experiences, and the development of emotional attachment to people and places within the host society.

Importantly, these dimensions were highly interconnected. A lack of acceptance could weaken participation. Limited participation could reduce opportunities to build meaningful relationships. Weak relationships could in turn undermine feelings of belonging and emotional attachment. Thus, sense of community appeared as a cumulative and relational process rather than a single psychological state.

The findings further suggest that sense of community can coexist with successful structural integration. Several participants reported stable employment, legal security, and satisfactory living conditions while simultaneously experiencing limited belonging, weak social attachment, or persistent feelings of alienation. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between structural integration and subjective experiences of community membership.

6.3.3 Pathways leading to adaptation difficulties and weak sense of community

The analysis identified several pathways through which adaptation difficulties and weak sense of community may emerge. These pathways did not operate independently but interacted with one another throughout the adaptation process.

One pathway originated from legal and institutional uncertainty. Difficulties related to residency status, family reunification, bureaucratic procedures, and future planning often generated feelings of insecurity and reduced migrants' willingness to invest emotionally and socially in the host society.

A second pathway was associated with limited social relationships and weak community participation. When migrants experienced difficulties establishing meaningful social connections, opportunities for support, belonging, and community involvement became restricted, increasing feelings of isolation and social distance.

A third pathway involved cultural and family-related tensions, particularly those associated with parenting, intergenerational differences, and navigating multiple cultural systems simultaneously. These challenges often generated stress that extended beyond the individual and affected family adaptation.

A fourth pathway emerged from the interaction between discrimination, perceived exclusion, and limited social acceptance. Even when subtle rather than explicit, these experiences contributed to weakening trust, reducing participation, and undermining feelings of community membership.

Together, these pathways illustrate how adaptation difficulties may accumulate over time and affect both psychosocial adjustment and sense of community.

6.3.4 Interpretive model of psychosocial adaptation and sense of community

Based on the findings, an interpretive model was developed to explain the relationship between psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among Syrian migrants in the three studied contexts.

The model proposes that adaptation outcomes are shaped through the interaction of facilitating and hindering factors operating at multiple levels. Personal resources, social support, legal stability, economic opportunities, and supportive institutional environments function as facilitating forces that

strengthen adaptation and community belonging. Conversely, language barriers, social isolation, discrimination, legal uncertainty, cultural tensions, and family-related difficulties function as constraining forces that may weaken adaptation and reduce community attachment.

The model further suggests that psychosocial adaptation and sense of community influence one another reciprocally. Higher levels of adaptation facilitate social participation, relationship building, and community engagement, thereby strengthening sense of community. At the same time, stronger community belonging enhances psychological well-being, emotional security, and resilience, thereby supporting adaptation efforts.

Rather than representing a linear progression, the model conceptualizes adaptation as an ongoing and multidimensional process shaped by continuous interaction between individual characteristics, social relationships, institutional conditions, and broader societal contexts. Consequently, successful integration is understood not merely as the achievement of economic or legal stability, but as the development of meaningful participation, social connectedness, psychological well-being, and a sustainable sense of belonging within the host community.

7. Guided framework for enhancing psychosocial adaptation and sense of community

Building upon the findings of the current study, a guided framework was developed to translate the empirical results into practical recommendations that can support adaptation, sense of community, and integration among migrants. The framework represents one of the principal applied contributions of the research and was designed to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and policy implementation.

The framework is grounded in the experiences and perspectives of Syrian migrants living in Germany, Sweden, and Romania. Rather than relying exclusively on theoretical assumptions or institutional priorities, it draws directly on the factors identified by participants as facilitating or hindering adaptation and community belonging. Consequently, the framework seeks to provide context-sensitive recommendations that address the multidimensional realities of migration experiences.

7.1 Guiding principles

The framework is based on several core principles derived from the study findings.

First, adaptation and sense of community are understood as multidimensional processes involving psychological, social, cultural, legal, educational, and economic dimensions. Effective interventions therefore require integrated approaches rather than isolated measures targeting a single aspect of migrants' lives.

Second, adaptation is viewed as a dynamic and long-term process rather than a single outcome achieved shortly after arrival. Accordingly, interventions should address immediate settlement needs while simultaneously supporting long-term participation, belonging, and stability.

Third, the framework adopts a strengths-based perspective. While acknowledging the challenges faced by migrants, it also recognizes migrants' personal resources, resilience, agency, and adaptive capacities. Policies and interventions should therefore build upon migrants' strengths rather than focusing exclusively on deficits or vulnerabilities.

Fourth, the framework emphasizes shared responsibility. Successful adaptation depends not only on migrants' efforts but also on the responsiveness of institutions, local communities, service providers, and policy environments. Integration is therefore conceptualized as a reciprocal process involving both migrants and host societies.

7.2 Target groups and stakeholders

The framework addresses multiple target groups and stakeholders involved in migration and integration processes.

At the institutional level, recommendations are directed toward national governments, local authorities, municipalities, migration agencies, and public service providers. At the community level, the framework addresses civil society organizations, educational institutions, community associations, employers, and local initiatives working with migrant populations. Finally, several recommendations are relevant to migrants themselves and to informal support networks such as families, friends, and community groups.

The involvement of multiple actors reflects the findings of the study, which demonstrated that adaptation outcomes emerge through interactions between individual experiences and broader structural conditions.

7.3 Domains of intervention

The proposed framework is organized around three interconnected domains that emerged directly from the empirical findings and the interpretive analysis. Although presented separately for analytical purposes, these domains are closely related and influence one another. Improvements in one domain may contribute to positive developments in the others, while challenges in one area may negatively affect adaptation outcomes across multiple dimensions. Together, these domains provide a comprehensive perspective on the factors shaping psychosocial adaptation, integration, and sense of community among Syrian migrants.

7.3.1 Psychological adaptation

The first domain focuses on strengthening psychological well-being, emotional stability, resilience, coping capacities, and access to psychosocial support. The findings revealed that psychological adaptation is influenced not only by past migration experiences and exposure to stressors but also by legal security, social relationships, family circumstances, economic stability, and perceptions of future opportunities. Participants frequently described adaptation as an ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome, highlighting the importance of maintaining psychological resources throughout different stages of migration and settlement.

The findings also demonstrated that psychological challenges are not limited to the early phases of migration. Feelings of uncertainty, loneliness, emotional strain, identity-related concerns, and worries about family members may persist even after migrants achieve legal or economic stability. Moreover, experiences varied according to age, marital status, migration type, and country of residence, suggesting that psychological adaptation is shaped by a combination of personal and contextual factors.

Accordingly, recommended interventions include expanding access to psychosocial support services, increasing awareness of available mental health resources, developing culturally sensitive psychological interventions, supporting resilience-building initiatives, strengthening early identification and referral mechanisms, and integrating mental health considerations into broader integration programs. Particular attention should be given to preventive approaches that support migrants before psychological difficulties become severe, as well as to interventions that recognize the long-term and evolving nature of adaptation.

7.3.2 Social adaptation

The second domain focuses on migrants' ability to establish social relationships, participate in community life, access educational and employment opportunities, and interact effectively with institutions and members of the host society. The findings demonstrated that social adaptation plays a central role in shaping both practical integration outcomes and migrants' overall well-being. Participants frequently linked successful adaptation to opportunities for meaningful interaction, supportive social networks, access to information, and the ability to navigate everyday life within the host society.

At the same time, the findings revealed that social adaptation may be hindered by language barriers, weak social ties, limited opportunities for participation, experiences of exclusion, and difficulties in accessing institutional resources. Significant variations also emerged across demographic groups and national contexts, suggesting that social adaptation is influenced by the interaction between individual circumstances and broader social environments.

Recommended interventions therefore include language-learning programs integrated with social and cultural activities, employment and educational support initiatives, mentoring programs, peer-support groups, family support initiatives, intercultural dialogue activities, and opportunities for volunteering and civic participation. Because social relationships emerged as one of the most important facilitating factors across participants' narratives, interventions should move beyond information provision and actively create opportunities for meaningful social interaction between migrants and members of host communities.

7.3.3 Sense of community

The third domain addresses belonging, participation, recognition, influence, and emotional attachment to the host society. The findings demonstrated that sense of community cannot be achieved solely through economic or legal integration but requires meaningful social participation, reciprocal relationships, and experiences of acceptance and recognition. Participants frequently distinguished between living in a country and feeling part of it, indicating that formal integration outcomes do not necessarily translate into a genuine sense of belonging.

The results further showed that sense of community develops gradually through everyday interactions, opportunities for participation, trust in institutions, positive social experiences, and the perception that one's presence is valued within the broader community. Conversely, experiences of discrimination, weak social ties, social isolation, or exclusion from decision-making processes may weaken migrants' sense of membership and attachment even when other adaptation indicators appear positive.

Recommended interventions therefore focus on strengthening community participation, promoting inclusive public spaces, encouraging intercultural interaction, supporting local community initiatives, increasing opportunities for civic engagement, and fostering environments that facilitate mutual recognition between migrants and host communities. Particular attention should be paid to initiatives that enable migrants to move from passive recipients of services to active contributors within their communities, as participation itself emerged as an important pathway toward stronger belonging and long-term integration.

7.4 Levels of intervention

The framework proposes interventions operating at multiple levels.

At the individual level, interventions aim to strengthen personal coping capacities, language acquisition, psychological resilience, and awareness of available resources.

At the family level, interventions focus on parenting support, family well-being, intergenerational communication, and challenges associated with raising children in multicultural contexts.

At the community level, interventions seek to enhance social participation, intercultural dialogue, community engagement, and relationship building.

At the institutional level, recommendations address access to services, legal stability, administrative procedures, employment opportunities, and the responsiveness of public institutions.

At the policy level, the framework emphasizes long-term planning, sustainable funding mechanisms, evaluation systems, and evidence-based integration strategies.

7.5 Comparative lessons from Germany, Sweden, and Romania

One of the distinctive strengths of the framework is its comparative foundation. The findings generated several transferable lessons from the three national contexts.

The German experience demonstrates the importance of clear institutional pathways, organized integration programs, and structured support mechanisms. At the same time, it highlights the need to reduce unnecessary bureaucratic complexity and administrative burdens that may hinder adaptation.

The Swedish experience illustrates the value of legal stability, comprehensive welfare systems, and sustained investment in integration policies. However, it also emphasizes the importance of addressing social isolation, parenting challenges, and long-term belonging alongside structural support.

The Romanian experience highlights the positive role of community acceptance, interpersonal relationships, and local participation. It demonstrates that supportive social environments can significantly facilitate adaptation even when formal integration structures remain less developed.

Taken together, these experiences suggest that effective integration policies require a balance between institutional support, community engagement, social participation, and long-term belonging.

7.6 Implementation and monitoring mechanisms

To ensure practical applicability, the framework includes recommendations related to implementation and evaluation.

Implementation should involve cooperation between governmental institutions, municipalities, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and migrant communities. Responsibilities should be clearly defined, and interventions should be supported by realistic implementation plans and sustainable funding structures.

Monitoring and evaluation should be based on measurable indicators linked to psychosocial adaptation, social adaptation, and sense of community outcomes. These indicators may include participation rates in integration programs, language acquisition outcomes, community participation levels, access to services, perceived belonging, and other adaptation-related measures identified within the framework.

7.7 Strategic prioritization of actions

Recognizing the practical limitations of resources and implementation capacities, the framework proposes a phased approach to intervention.

Short-term priorities include multilingual information resources, legal orientation services, access to essential services, psychosocial support, specialized psychological services, language-learning opportunities, anti-discrimination mechanisms, and awareness of rights and responsibilities.

Medium-term priorities focus on educational and labor-market integration, peer-support initiatives, family support programs, intercultural dialogue, volunteering opportunities, civic participation, and improvements in administrative procedures.

Long-term priorities include sustainable multicultural community centers, programs addressing long-term integration challenges, policy reforms informed by ongoing evaluation, sustainable funding structures, and coordinated partnerships between institutional and community actors.

Through this phased approach, the framework seeks to support both immediate adaptation needs and long-term processes of belonging, participation, and integration.

8. Scientific contributions, limitations and future research

The present study offers several theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to the fields of migration studies, sociology, community psychology, and psychosocial adaptation research.

One of the main contributions of the study lies in its comparative qualitative design, which examines the experiences of Syrian migrants across three distinct European contexts: Germany, Sweden, and Romania. While previous research has frequently focused on individual national contexts, particularly Germany and Sweden, comparative qualitative studies that simultaneously explore multiple European settings remain relatively limited. The inclusion of Romania is particularly important given the limited representation of this context in the existing literature despite its increasing relevance within contemporary migration dynamics.

Another important contribution of the study lies in its integration of psychosocial adaptation and sense of community within a single analytical framework. Although both concepts have been widely

examined in migration research, they are often studied separately or treated as parallel outcomes. The present study demonstrates that the relationship between adaptation and sense of community is reciprocal and dynamic, with each process influencing and reinforcing the other. By examining these concepts simultaneously, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of migrant integration that extends beyond traditional structural indicators and captures the interaction between psychological well-being, social participation, belonging, and community attachment.

A second contribution concerns the central role assigned to the concept of sense of community. Although many migration studies focus primarily on economic integration, legal status, employment, education, or language acquisition, the current research highlights the importance of subjective dimensions of adaptation, particularly belonging, participation, social connectedness, and community membership. The findings demonstrate that objective indicators of integration alone are insufficient for understanding migrants' lived experiences and long-term adaptation outcomes.

The study also contributes to existing literature by examining the interaction between psychosocial adaptation, sense of community, and a range of sociodemographic variables, including gender, age, marital status, migration type, country of residence, and years since migration. Rather than treating migrants as a homogeneous group, the findings reveal important variations in experiences, challenges, resources, and adaptation pathways across different demographic categories. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of migrant adaptation processes and highlights the importance of context-sensitive approaches in both research and policy development.

The study further contributes by systematically exploring variations across sociodemographic groups. Rather than limiting the analysis to overall migration experiences, it examines differences associated with gender, age, marital status, migration type, years since migration, and country of residence. This comparative perspective highlights how adaptation processes are shaped by the intersection of personal characteristics and contextual conditions, revealing patterns that may remain invisible in more generalized analyses. In doing so, the study contributes to a more differentiated and context-sensitive understanding of migrant experiences.

Methodologically, the study contributes through its qualitative exploratory design, which enabled an in-depth examination of migrants' subjective experiences and interpretations. The use of semi-structured interviews, purposive and snowball recruitment strategies, thematic analysis, triangulation procedures, and comparative analysis across multiple contexts facilitated the development of a rich and detailed understanding of adaptation processes. The study further contributes by integrating individual narratives with contextual and structural factors, allowing for a multidimensional interpretation of migration experiences.

Another important contribution is the development of conceptual and interpretive models derived directly from participants' narratives. These models illustrate the relationships between facilitating and hindering factors, psychosocial adaptation processes, and dimensions of sense of community. By moving beyond descriptive findings, the study provides an interpretive framework that helps explain how adaptation and belonging develop through interactions between personal, social, institutional, and contextual factors.

The interpretive models developed in this study represent an additional theoretical contribution. Rather than merely describing facilitating and hindering factors, the analysis advances toward

explaining the relationships between these factors and the mechanisms through which they influence psychosocial adaptation and sense of community. By identifying interconnected dimensions, pathways leading to adaptation difficulties, and reciprocal relationships between adaptation and belonging, the study moves beyond thematic description toward a more explanatory understanding of migrant experiences.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, the study offers practical value through the development of a guided framework for enhancing psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among migrants. The framework translates empirical findings into context-sensitive recommendations and implementation strategies that may support policymakers, practitioners, service providers, and organizations working in migration and integration contexts.

Unlike many studies that conclude with general recommendations, the present research translates its findings into a structured guiding framework grounded directly in participants' experiences. The framework incorporates psychological, social, and community dimensions and proposes intervention domains, implementation mechanisms, monitoring indicators, and context-sensitive recommendations for different stakeholders. This applied component strengthens the practical relevance of the study and enhances its potential contribution to policy development and integration practice.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The qualitative nature of the study prioritizes depth of understanding over statistical generalization. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as providing analytical insights into adaptation experiences rather than representing all Syrian migrants residing in the selected countries. Although the sample included participants with diverse demographic characteristics and migration backgrounds, it cannot fully capture the diversity of experiences that may exist within broader migrant populations.

The study also relies primarily on self-reported narratives, which may be influenced by memory, personal interpretation, and subjective evaluation. While triangulation with secondary qualitative materials contributed to strengthening the credibility of the findings, participants' accounts remain shaped by individual perceptions and retrospective interpretations.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the research captures experiences at a specific point in time. Adaptation and sense of community are dynamic processes that evolve throughout migrants' lives. Consequently, some experiences, perceptions, and evaluations may change as migrants' legal status, social relationships, economic circumstances, and life situations develop over time.

Building upon these limitations, several directions for future research emerge. Future studies could expand the comparative scope by including additional European contexts and migrant populations in order to further explore how different institutional and social environments shape adaptation trajectories. Comparative studies involving both established and emerging migration destinations may be particularly valuable.

Longitudinal research designs would also contribute significantly to understanding how psychosocial adaptation and sense of community evolve over time. Such studies could examine how migrants' experiences change throughout different stages of settlement, integration, and long-term residence.

Future research may additionally benefit from mixed-methods approaches that combine the depth of qualitative inquiry with the broader analytical possibilities offered by quantitative methods. Such

approaches could strengthen understanding of the relationships between structural conditions, individual experiences, and adaptation outcomes.

Finally, further research focusing on Romania remains particularly important. Given the limited body of literature addressing this context, additional studies could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of migration experiences, integration processes, and community belonging within emerging migration destinations in Eastern Europe.

9. Final conclusion

The present research explored the psychosocial adaptation and sense of community of Syrian migrants in Germany, Sweden, and Romania through a comparative qualitative approach that sought to understand migrants' lived experiences within different European contexts. By examining both facilitating and hindering factors, as well as the perceived advantages and disadvantages of migration, the study provided a multidimensional understanding of adaptation processes and the ways in which migrants negotiate belonging, participation, and integration in their host societies.

The findings demonstrate that adaptation is not a linear or uniform process, but rather a dynamic and evolving experience shaped by continuous interactions between personal characteristics, social relationships, institutional structures, legal conditions, and broader societal contexts. The study further confirms that migrants' experiences vary considerably according to gender, age, marital status, migration type, length of residence, and country of settlement, highlighting the importance of moving beyond generalized understandings of migrant populations and recognizing the diversity of adaptation pathways.

A central conclusion emerging from the research is that successful integration cannot be adequately understood through economic, legal, or educational indicators alone. While these dimensions remain important, they do not necessarily guarantee psychosocial well-being or a strong sense of community. The findings indicate that social relationships, feelings of acceptance, opportunities for meaningful participation, trust in institutions, and experiences of belonging play equally important roles in shaping migrants' adaptation outcomes.

The comparative analysis also demonstrates that national contexts significantly influence adaptation experiences. Although Germany, Sweden, and Romania differ in their institutional structures, welfare systems, and integration approaches, the findings suggest that no single context offers a complete solution to the challenges of migration. Rather, effective adaptation emerges when institutional support, legal stability, social participation, community acceptance, and individual agency operate together in mutually reinforcing ways.

Beyond its theoretical and empirical contributions, the study sought to translate research findings into practical applications through the development of a guided framework designed to enhance psychosocial adaptation and sense of community among migrants. This framework reflects the study's commitment to linking academic research with policy development and practical interventions, providing recommendations that are grounded in migrants' lived experiences and sensitive to different integration contexts.

Ultimately, the research highlights that migration is not simply a process of relocation or legal settlement, but a complex human experience involving identity, relationships, participation, and

belonging. Understanding adaptation therefore requires attention not only to the structural conditions that shape migrants' opportunities but also to the subjective experiences through which they construct meaning, develop social connections, and establish a sense of community within their new societies. By foregrounding these dimensions, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of migration and offers insights that may support the development of more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable integration policies and practices.