



Migration and Social Integration: Experiences of Internal Migrants

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Abstract

This study examines the social integration of internal migrants in Makassar City by exploring how employment, housing, social networks, and cultural adaptation shape migrants' settlement experiences. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and relationships across participants' experiences. The findings indicate that social integration is a multidimensional process in which stable employment strengthens economic security, housing stability promotes neighborhood attachment, social networks provide practical and emotional support, and cultural adaptation develops through continuous interaction with local communities. These dimensions are closely interconnected and collectively contribute to migrants' sense of belonging within the host society. The study proposes an integrated perspective on internal migrant integration by demonstrating that structural, social, and cultural factors reinforce one another throughout the adaptation process. The findings provide practical insights for policymakers in designing inclusive urban policies that strengthen social cohesion and sustainable urban development in rapidly growing cities.

INTRODUCTION

Migration plays an integral role in shaping the dynamics of urbanization, influencing both demographic patterns and cultural diversity across the globe. As people move from one region to another, they bring with them not only their physical presence but also their unique social practices, cultural values, and identities. In Indonesia, internal migration has become a significant phenomenon, especially in rapidly growing urban centers like Makassar, which serves as an attractive destination for individuals seeking better opportunities in education, employment, and quality of life (Castles, 2018). The process of migration, however, is not merely about relocation; it also entails the negotiation of identity and belonging as individuals strive to integrate into their new environments (Gemenne & Blocher, 2017; Boccagni, 2023; Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023). This paper focuses on the experiences of internal migrants in Makassar, exploring the opportunities and challenges they face in their integration into this urban setting.

The rapid urbanization of cities like Makassar, a key economic hub in Eastern Indonesia, has led to significant demographic changes, with migrants from various regions of the country making the city their home. The influx of people from rural areas and smaller towns contributes to the city's rich diversity but also raises important questions regarding social integration (Côté, 2014). Migrants from provinces such as South Sulawesi's hinterlands, Sulawesi Tenggara, and even Papua bring with them distinct cultural practices, languages, and values that must be accommodated within the existing social fabric of the host city (Ryan, 2011). This integration process, however, is not always smooth. While many migrants are able to adapt successfully, others face significant barriers in terms of housing, employment, and social recognition (Harper & Shears, 2020; Jamatia, 2023; Coumans & Wark, 2024). The degree to which migrants are able to integrate into Makassar's socio-cultural landscape thus depends on a range of factors, including both the migrants' capabilities and the host community's openness.

Social integration refers to the extent to which migrants are able to participate fully in the social, economic, and cultural life of the host society (Azzahra et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2022). It encompasses various dimensions, such as access to employment, education, housing, social networks, and political participation, all of which can significantly affect the success of migrants' settlement in a new city. In Makassar, the integration of migrants is influenced by both individual factors such as education and occupation, as well as broader societal factors like local governance and community attitudes (Tselios et al., 2015). For example, local government policies regarding housing, employment, and education play an essential role in shaping migrant experiences. Cities with inclusive policies that promote multiculturalism and social cohesion tend to experience better outcomes in terms of migrant integration (Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Oluwatosin & Rojak, 2023; Rasool, 2024; Crawford et al., 2023).

In Makassar, social integration is further complicated by the city's historical and cultural context (Rahim & Abbas, 2024; Surya et al., 2020). The Bugis-Makassar cultural ethos of *sipakatau* (mutual respect) and *siri' na pacce* (honor and solidarity) underscores the importance of social harmony and mutual respect. These values are deeply embedded in the social fabric of Makassar, influencing how newcomers are received and integrated into the community (Christianto et al., 2024; Arifin et al., 2025). While these cultural values can be supportive of migrants, they may also pose challenges when there are perceived cultural differences or when migrants are seen as competing for limited resources. This tension between inclusivity and exclusivity shapes the experiences of migrants in Makassar, making the study of social integration in this city particularly important (Ullah, 2025; Djufri et al., 2025).

Since the migrants vary in terms of gender, education, occupation and social networks, it is imperative to consider the performance of the various groups of migrants as far as assimilating into the Makassar urban terrain is concerned. An example of this is that students can be integrated facilitated due to existence of academic communities and university-based social networks. Labor migrants, in their turn, might find it hard to find a permanent job or affordable housing, which are the key factors of successful integration (Haug, 2008; De Graauw & Bloemraad, 2017; Lu & Burgess, 2023). The female migrants, in turn, can have some specific issues regarding safety, cultural norms, and the reconciliation of household roles with the role of a laborer (Bammer et al., 2020). These facts show the complexity of migration and integration and these issues require a delicate approach to the problem of challenges and opportunities of internal migrants in Makassar.

What is more, to provide a deeper analysis of migrant integration in Makassar, one will have to have a closer look at the role of social networks, which will provide the newcomers with the crucial network of support. There is also a significant provision

of emotional support, advice and resources to migrants by their kinship ties, hometown associations, and religious organizations as they seek to cope with the new environment (Haug, 2008). Such networks are important in Makassar in helping the migrants to feel part of the local community and have access to the essential services. These networks usually play a critical role in eliminating the gap between migrants and native inhabitants hence ensuring social capital and cultural exchange. However these networks may differ in their strength greatly depending on the factors like the geographical origin, cultural similarities, and the degree of community support.

Although social networks bring certain benefits to the residents of Makassar, all migrants still face major challenges that do not allow them to fully engage in urban life. Shelter is yet another concern among most internal migrants since a good percentage of their population lives in temporary or poor housing. Poor housing has a negative impact on the welfare of migrants and it cannot enable them to integrate into the social and economic systems within the city. Moreover, low housing affordability is one of the contributors to social inequalities that makes migrant populations feel marginalized (Remedios & Snyder, 2018). Therefore, the housing situation should be improved in order to make the overall feeling of integration of migrants in Makassar better.

Local governance institutions also interfere in the integration of the migrants into a metropolitan environment. The degree to which the migrants within the urban milieu are incorporated is largely dependent on the municipal policies that define housing, employment and education within Makassar. Even though the city has become more inclusive due to the introduction of the policies that proliferate multiculturalism, additional progress needs to be made, especially among the migrants working in the informal sector or those with lower education backgrounds (Tselios et al., 2015). The policies of migration and integration in Makassar will be based on how policy efforts can be used to address the heterogeneous needs of the migrants.

The research paper seeks to examine the life experiences of internal migrants in Makassar City, with particular attention being given to the problems and mechanisms used to achieve integration in the social life of the city. The research will offer suggestions on the enhancements of the policy framework and support structures of Makassar by focusing on the issues which enhance or prevent integration to issues like education, employment, housing, and social networks so as to help in developing a more inclusive environment to the migrants and the local population. It is necessary, because of the cultural and social peculiarities of Makassar, and the complicated character of internal migration that should be investigated to clarify the overall effects of urban integration in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study aims to investigate the experiences of internal migrants in Makassar City, focusing on their challenges and strategies for integration into the urban social fabric. The methodology was designed to capture a deep understanding of how these migrants navigate their new environment and adapt to the social, cultural, and economic context of the city. Given the complexity and subjectivity of migrant experiences, a qualitative research design was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of personal narratives and to capture the nuances of their integration processes. This section outlines the research design, population and sample, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods employed in the study, along with an explanation of how these methodologies contribute to answering the research questions.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen for this study because it allows for a rich, comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of internal migrants in Makassar. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena, where the goal is to understand the subjective meanings individuals attach to their experiences. By using a qualitative design, this study could capture the lived experiences of the migrants, enabling the researcher to explore the challenges they face in integrating into the urban environment and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. Furthermore, a qualitative design provides the flexibility to adapt to the emerging insights throughout the data collection process, allowing for a more dynamic and responsive approach.

This study utilized a purposive sampling technique to select participants who were deemed to provide the most relevant and informative insights regarding the research questions. Purposive sampling is particularly valuable in qualitative research as it allows for the selection of participants based on specific characteristics or experiences that align with the research objectives. In this case, the sample consisted of internal migrants who had moved to Makassar for reasons such as education, employment, or family reunification. This selection ensured that the sample represented a diverse range of experiences and perspectives, allowing for a thorough exploration of the various factors influencing migrant integration in the city.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included internal migrants who had moved to Makassar City for various reasons, such as education, employment, or family reunification. The study focused on internal migrants who had lived in Makassar for a minimum of six months to ensure that they had sufficient time to experience the integration process and form meaningful connections with their new environment. The sample size was determined using purposive sampling, with a total of 40 respondents chosen to represent a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of age, gender, occupation, and length of stay in Makassar. The participants included university students, workers in both formal and informal sectors, and families who had recently settled in the city. This diversity ensured that the sample captured a broad range of experiences, including those of younger migrants, migrant workers, and those who had migrated for educational purposes.

The decision to include a diverse group of participants was crucial in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the various factors influencing the integration process. Previous research has shown that the experiences of migrants vary significantly based on factors such as age, gender, occupation, and education. For example, students may find it easier to integrate into Makassar due to the presence of academic communities and social networks, while labor migrants may face more challenges related to precarious employment and housing instability. By including a broad spectrum of migrants, the study aimed to identify commonalities and differences in their integration experiences, thus providing a nuanced understanding of the migration process.

Data Collection

This study employed three major methodological approaches namely in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and participant observation to collect the required data. The choice of these methods was aimed at presenting a range of point of views and strengthening the reliability and validity of the research results through triangulation.

Personal interviews were conducted on the individual migrants to obtain individual accounts on their reasons behind migration, their experience in Makassar in

adapting and the challenges. The interviews gave the respondents a platform to express themselves using their own language and hence the ability to give themselves agency in articulating their ideas and feelings about the process of integration. It is a qualitative approach that allowed the researcher to study such complex phenomena as identity negotiation, cultural adaptation, and social integration in detail. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format using a flexible interview guide which made the interviews open-ended and follow-up questions were to be asked depending on the responses of the participants. The design allowed that the interviews were not to lose focus of the research goals but allowed emergent insights.

The use of focus group discussions (FGDs) was used to bring an interactive discussion to the migrants and explore common experiences and challenges. FGDs are especially effective in qualitative research since they allow the participants to develop the ideas of the others, as well as introduce a variety of opinions on a given subject. In the current research, FGDs were formed in groups of five to six migrants thus forming a convenient group size that facilitated a comprehensive discussion. Some of the subjects covered by the FGDs included the challenges of acculturation into the local community, how social networks can contribute to the integration process, and how cultural acceptance and discrimination are perceived. The FGDs also provided the possibility of observing group dynamics and interpersonal relations, which allowed revealing the information about collective identity and common values in the migrant community.

The participant observation was done in diverse community environments such as local markets, working places, and community events to monitor the relationships between the migrants and the local community. This approach enabled the researcher to gather contextual data on the way migrants negotiate in the social contexts of their experiences and how the host community understands them. The researcher may mark the patterns of inclusion and exclusion by examining the daily encounters which would aid in determining the role of social networks in either promoting or hindering the integration. Participant observation also provided a channel of observing the informal features of social integration that might be lost in interview or FGD data including non-verbal communication, social norms, and cultural practices.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews, FGDs, and participant observation were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative data analysis method. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The goal of this approach is to identify key themes that emerge across the different data sources and to develop a detailed understanding of the research topic. In this study, the transcripts of the interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim, and the data were then coded thematically to identify recurring patterns related to the integration process. The analysis was inductive, meaning that themes were derived from the data itself rather than being imposed from external theories or frameworks.

The coding process involved several stages. First, the researcher read and re-read the interview and FGD transcripts to become familiar with the data. Then, the data were systematically coded, with each code representing a specific idea or concept related to the research questions. The codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected the key issues related to migrant integration, such as employment opportunities, housing conditions, cultural adaptation, social networks, and discrimination. These themes were then analyzed in relation to the research

objectives, with the aim of identifying factors that facilitated or hindered integration in Makassar.

Thematic analysis was chosen because it provides a flexible and accessible method for analyzing qualitative data, allowing the researcher to capture the richness and complexity of migrant experiences. This approach also enabled the researcher to compare findings across different data sources, enhancing the validity and reliability of the results through triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings regarding the social integration experiences of internal migrants in Makassar City. The findings were derived from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observations, which were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis. Rather than presenting the data chronologically, the findings are organized into five interrelated themes that emerged consistently across the three sources of evidence. These themes include respondent characteristics and migration motives, employment and economic adaptation, housing and settlement challenges, social networks and community participation, and cultural adaptation with experiences of discrimination. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that migrants' integration is not determined by a single factor but is shaped by the interaction between economic opportunities, living conditions, social relationships, and cultural acceptance within the host community. Each theme is presented systematically by combining interview narratives, observations, and group discussions to illustrate the complexity of migrants' everyday experiences.

Respondent Characteristics and Migration Motives

The study involved 40 internal migrants who had resided in Makassar City for at least six months. Participants represented different genders, age groups, occupations, and migration backgrounds, allowing the research to capture diverse experiences of social integration. Most respondents were in their productive years, reflecting the dominant pattern of internal migration toward urban areas where employment and educational opportunities are concentrated.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 40)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	22	55.0
Female	18	45.0
Age 18–25	14	35.0
Age 26–35	16	40.0
Age 36–45	7	17.5
Above 45	3	7.5

Source: Primary interview data processed by the authors, 2026

Table 1 indicates that migration to Makassar was dominated by individuals aged between 18 and 35 years, accounting for approximately three-quarters of all respondents. This age composition reflects the tendency of economically productive individuals to migrate in search of education, employment, and improved living conditions. Although male respondents slightly outnumbered females, the relatively balanced gender distribution suggests that internal migration in Makassar involves both men and women with comparable motivations and adaptation challenges.

Interview data further reveal that respondents migrated for three principal reasons: employment opportunities, educational advancement, and family reunification. Employment was identified as the primary motivation among respondents who originated from districts with limited economic opportunities, whereas younger

migrants predominantly relocated to pursue higher education. Family reunification represented another important factor, particularly among married respondents or those joining relatives who had previously settled in Makassar.

Table 2. Main Reasons for Internal Migration

Migration Motive	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employment	18	45.0
Education	14	35.0
Family reunification	8	20.0

Source: Primary interview data processed by the authors, 2026

As shown in Table 2, employment constituted the most frequently reported migration motive, representing 45% of respondents. Educational migration accounted for 35%, while family reunification contributed 20%. Although these motivations differed across respondents, interview findings indicate that most participants perceived Makassar as a city providing broader opportunities than their places of origin.

This perception was consistently reflected in individual interviews. Many respondents described migration not merely as geographic movement but as a strategic decision to improve their future prospects. One participant explained:

"Before moving here, I had worked in my hometown for almost three years, but there was little opportunity to develop professionally. Most available jobs were temporary and poorly paid. I finally decided to move to Makassar because several friends had already established careers here. Although I had to start from the beginning again, I believed that the city offered better opportunities for long-term employment and personal development."

This statement illustrates that employment-related migration was strongly associated with expectations of upward social and economic mobility rather than short-term income generation. Similar narratives appeared throughout the interviews, particularly among respondents originating from smaller districts in South Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia.

Another respondent emphasized the importance of educational opportunities in shaping migration decisions:

"My parents encouraged me to continue my education because universities in Makassar have better facilities and wider academic networks. Initially, I intended to return home after graduation, but after living here for several years, I realized that the city also offered more career opportunities than my hometown."

This narrative indicates that educational migration frequently evolved into longer-term settlement. Participant observation around university areas further supported this finding, showing that many student migrants gradually established broader social networks through academic organizations, community activities, and part-time employment, thereby strengthening their attachment to the city.

Family considerations also emerged as an important migration driver, although they were less dominant than employment and education. One respondent described the decision as follows:

"I moved because my husband had already been working in Makassar for several years. At first, I thought it would only be temporary, but after our children started school here and we became familiar with the neighborhood, Makassar gradually became our home. The support from nearby relatives also made the adjustment much easier."

The interview demonstrates that family reunification often facilitated social integration by providing immediate emotional support and access to informal social networks. Respondents who migrated through family connections generally reported fewer difficulties during the early stages of settlement because they already possessed information regarding housing, employment, and local administrative procedures.

The findings indicate that migration motives significantly influenced the initial stages of adaptation. Respondents who migrated for employment tended to prioritize economic stability before participating in community activities, whereas educational migrants adapted more rapidly through institutional environments such as universities. Those migrating for family reasons experienced relatively smoother transitions due to existing support networks. Despite these differences, all three groups viewed migration as a long-term investment aimed at achieving greater social and economic security within Makassar City.

Employment and Economic Adaptation

Employment emerged as the primary factor shaping the integration experiences of internal migrants in Makassar City. Across interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations, respondents consistently described employment as more than a means of earning income. Stable employment enabled migrants to secure housing, establish daily routines, expand social interactions, and gradually develop a sense of belonging within the host community. Conversely, respondents with unstable or informal employment experienced greater uncertainty, which affected not only their economic conditions but also their ability to participate in community life. These findings suggest that economic adaptation and social integration developed simultaneously, with employment serving as the foundation upon which other dimensions of urban integration were built.

Interview findings indicate that respondents who obtained formal employment shortly after arriving in Makassar generally reported a smoother adaptation process. In addition to providing financial stability, formal workplaces became important spaces for learning local social norms, expanding interpersonal relationships, and developing confidence in interacting with local communities.

One respondent explained:

“When I first arrived in Makassar, my priority was simply finding a job because I had very limited savings. After several months, I was accepted by a private company, and that completely changed my situation. Every day I worked with people from different backgrounds, and little by little I learned how they communicated, solved problems, and built relationships. My colleagues often invited me to lunch, community gatherings, and religious celebrations. Those experiences helped me understand that adapting to a new city is not only about having an income, but also about becoming part of everyday social life.”

The interview demonstrates that employment functioned as an important gateway to broader social interaction. Rather than limiting relationships to professional responsibilities, respondents gradually developed friendships and informal networks that extended into neighborhood and community activities. Participant observations conducted in several workplaces similarly revealed that interactions among employees frequently continued beyond office hours, creating opportunities for migrants to participate in local social environments.

Another respondent highlighted that stable employment strengthened long-term settlement intentions rather than merely improving financial conditions.

“In the beginning, I thought I would only stay in Makassar for a short period. However, after obtaining permanent employment, my perspective changed. Having a regular salary allowed me to rent a better house, support my family, and become more involved in neighborhood activities. I no longer felt like someone who was just passing through. Instead, I started thinking about building my future here because I finally had stability.”

This statement illustrates that employment stability influenced migrants' psychological attachment to the city. Economic security reduced uncertainty and encouraged respondents to invest more actively in their local communities. During the focus group discussions, participants frequently associated permanent employment with increased confidence to establish long-term social relationships, participate in community meetings, and contribute to neighborhood initiatives.

In contrast, respondents working in the informal sector described considerably different experiences. Their daily activities were characterized by fluctuating income, irregular working hours, and limited employment security. As a result, many participants explained that economic survival often became their primary concern, leaving limited opportunities to engage in social activities outside work.

One participant described these challenges as follows:

“Every day is uncertain because my income depends entirely on the number of customers I serve. Sometimes I leave home before sunrise and return late at night, but the money I earn is still unpredictable. Under these circumstances, attending community meetings or social gatherings becomes difficult because I need to focus on earning enough to meet daily expenses. I know my neighbors, but I rarely have enough time to interact with them.”

The interview indicates that employment insecurity indirectly constrained social integration by reducing both the time and resources available for community participation. Similar concerns emerged repeatedly during the FGDs, where participants explained that unstable work schedules often prevented them from joining neighborhood activities despite their willingness to become more involved.

Participant observation supported these narratives. Respondents employed in the formal sector generally maintained structured daily routines that facilitated regular interaction with colleagues, neighbors, and community organizations. By comparison, migrants working in informal occupations displayed more flexible but unpredictable schedules, limiting opportunities to establish consistent social relationships beyond economic transactions. Nevertheless, observations also revealed that many informal workers gradually developed informal support networks through markets, small businesses, and neighborhood commercial activities, demonstrating that social integration continued to evolve despite economic constraints.

Across all interviews and discussions, respondents consistently viewed employment as the starting point for successful adaptation rather than the final objective of migration. Securing work enabled migrants to access stable housing, build interpersonal trust, and participate more actively in urban life, whereas employment insecurity prolonged feelings of uncertainty and delayed community engagement. Overall, the findings demonstrate that employment and economic adaptation constitute a central dimension of migrant integration in Makassar City, influencing not only material well-being but also the development of meaningful social relationships and a stronger sense of belonging within the host community.

Housing and Settlement Challenges

Housing emerged as another critical factor influencing the integration experiences of internal migrants in Makassar City. Although respondents generally regarded employment as their primary motivation for migration, interviews and participant observations consistently revealed that the quality and stability of housing significantly affected their ability to establish social relationships and participate in community life. Housing represented more than a physical place of residence; it functioned as the social environment where migrants interacted with neighbors, developed trust, and gradually became familiar with local customs and community practices. Consequently, differences in housing conditions produced different patterns of social adaptation among respondents.

Interview findings indicate that newly arrived migrants commonly chose boarding houses or shared accommodation because these options were relatively affordable and strategically located near workplaces or educational institutions. While such arrangements reduced living expenses, respondents frequently described them as temporary environments that offered limited opportunities for meaningful social interaction.

One respondent explained:

“When I first came to Makassar, renting a boarding room was the only option I could afford. The location was convenient because it was close to my workplace, but life there was very individualistic. Everyone was busy with their own activities. We greeted each other politely in the hallway or kitchen, yet conversations rarely lasted more than a few minutes. Even after several months, I still knew very little about the people living next door because residents came and went so frequently. It never felt like a neighborhood where people built lasting relationships.”

The interview illustrates that temporary accommodation fulfilled migrants' immediate housing needs but did not necessarily facilitate social integration. Participant observations conducted in several boarding-house complexes confirmed that interactions among residents were generally limited to routine encounters in shared spaces. Most occupants spent their time outside the residence for work or study, resulting in weak neighborhood attachment and minimal participation in collective activities.

Housing instability also emerged as a recurring issue among respondents during the early stages of migration. Several participants explained that financial constraints forced them to relocate repeatedly in search of more affordable accommodation. These frequent moves disrupted the development of stable relationships with neighbors and prolonged the process of community adjustment.

Another respondent described this experience:

“During my first two years in Makassar, I moved several times because rental prices kept increasing while my income remained uncertain. Every time I found a new place to live, I had to introduce myself again, learn a different neighborhood, and adapt to new surroundings. Before I could become familiar with the community, I often had to move once more. It was difficult to feel that I truly belonged anywhere because everything still felt temporary.”

This narrative demonstrates that residential mobility created additional challenges beyond financial insecurity. The need to repeatedly adapt to new neighborhoods reduced respondents' opportunities to establish trust and long-term social connections. Similar experiences were discussed during the FGDs, where participants agreed that stable housing represented an important prerequisite for

meaningful community participation. Respondents emphasized that integration required continuity in everyday interactions, which became difficult to achieve when residential arrangements changed frequently.

In contrast, respondents who had secured more permanent housing described noticeably different experiences. Living in the same neighborhood for an extended period enabled them to become familiar with local residents, participate in community activities, and gradually gain acceptance within the neighborhood. Rather than being viewed as temporary newcomers, they increasingly perceived themselves as active members of the local community.

One respondent reflected on this transition:

“After several years of living in the same rented house, I noticed that my relationship with the neighborhood had completely changed. People no longer introduced me as someone who had recently arrived. Instead, they invited me to community meetings, asked me to participate in neighborhood clean-up activities, and even trusted me to help organize local events. Those experiences made me realize that belonging develops slowly through everyday interaction rather than simply through the length of time spent in the city.”

The interview indicates that residential stability strengthened migrants' sense of belonging by creating opportunities for repeated social interaction and reciprocal trust. Participant observations further supported this finding. Migrants living in established residential neighborhoods were frequently observed participating in religious gatherings, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), neighborhood meetings, and family celebrations. These routine interactions gradually reduced social distance between migrants and long-term residents, fostering stronger interpersonal relationships.

Focus group discussions also revealed that housing quality was closely associated with economic adaptation. Respondents with stable employment generally accessed safer neighborhoods and more secure housing arrangements, enabling them to invest more confidently in local community life. Conversely, participants employed in unstable or informal occupations often continued to prioritize affordable accommodation over neighborhood quality, limiting their opportunities to engage in community activities. Despite these differences, respondents consistently emphasized that acceptance by neighbors depended less on housing ownership than on regular participation, mutual respect, and willingness to contribute to community life.

Participant observation reinforced this perspective. Neighborhoods characterized by active resident participation tended to integrate migrants more effectively regardless of their housing status. Migrants who consistently attended community meetings, respected local regulations, and maintained positive relationships with neighbors were generally accepted as members of the community, whether they lived in rented houses or permanent residences. This finding suggests that housing provides the physical setting for integration, while everyday social interaction determines the quality of that integration.

The findings demonstrate that housing is not merely a material resource but also a social space that shapes migrants' opportunities to establish community relationships and develop a sense of belonging. Affordable temporary accommodation supports the initial settlement process but often limits sustained interaction with local residents. Conversely, residential stability encourages repeated social engagement, strengthens neighborhood trust, and facilitates long-term integration into urban society. These findings indicate that successful migrant integration depends not only on access to housing but also on the ability to transform residential

spaces into environments that foster meaningful social connections and active participation within the host community.

Social Networks and Community Participation

The findings demonstrate that social networks played a fundamental role in supporting the integration of internal migrants into Makassar City. While employment and housing provided the structural foundation for adaptation, respondents consistently emphasized that interpersonal relationships enabled them to navigate everyday challenges and gradually establish a sense of belonging within the host community. Data obtained from interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations indicate that migrants relied on different forms of social support throughout the integration process. Family members, relatives, colleagues, neighbors, religious communities, and local organizations each contributed to migrants' ability to obtain information, overcome emotional difficulties, and participate more actively in community life. As migrants became increasingly involved in local social activities, their relationships expanded beyond their original social circles, facilitating stronger interaction with the wider community.

Interview findings reveal that family members and relatives constituted the primary source of support during the initial stages of migration. Respondents frequently described these relationships as essential in helping them identify accommodation, access employment opportunities, understand administrative procedures, and become familiar with the social environment. Such support significantly reduced uncertainty and enabled migrants to adapt more confidently during their early period of residence.

One respondent explained:

“When I first arrived in Makassar, everything felt unfamiliar. I did not know where to look for accommodation, how to apply for local administrative documents, or even which public transportation routes to use. Fortunately, my older brother had already lived here for several years. He introduced me to his friends, helped me find a boarding house, and accompanied me when I searched for work. More importantly, he explained how people interacted within the neighborhood so I could avoid unintentionally offending anyone. Those small pieces of guidance made the transition much easier than I had expected.”

The interview illustrates that family-based social networks served as an important mechanism for reducing the social and practical challenges associated with migration. Rather than relying exclusively on formal institutions, respondents often depended on trusted personal relationships to obtain information and develop confidence in navigating their new environment. Focus group discussions confirmed that migrants who received assistance from relatives generally experienced fewer difficulties during the initial adaptation period than those who migrated independently.

As migrants spent more time in Makassar, their social relationships gradually expanded beyond family networks. Many respondents explained that workplaces, educational institutions, religious organizations, and neighborhood associations became important environments for establishing broader interpersonal connections. Through repeated interaction, migrants developed friendships with local residents and individuals from different regions, thereby strengthening their integration into the urban community.

One participant described this gradual process of social expansion:

“At the beginning, I only interacted with people from my hometown because we shared the same language and understood each other's experiences. It made

me feel comfortable during my first months here. However, after joining activities organized by my workplace and participating in neighborhood events, I gradually became acquainted with local residents. I realized that people welcomed newcomers as long as we were willing to participate, communicate openly, and respect local customs. Those experiences helped me feel that I was becoming part of the community rather than simply living beside it."

This narrative demonstrates that social integration developed through continuous interaction rather than immediate acceptance. Participant observations conducted during neighborhood meetings, religious celebrations, and community service activities similarly revealed that migrants who participated consistently were increasingly recognized by local residents and invited to become involved in various community initiatives. These repeated interactions fostered mutual trust and gradually diminished the perception of migrants as outsiders.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that social networks could both facilitate and limit integration depending on how they were utilized. During the focus group discussions, several respondents acknowledged that they initially relied heavily on associations formed around shared regional or ethnic identities. While these networks provided emotional security and practical support, prolonged dependence sometimes reduced opportunities to establish relationships with the broader community.

One respondent reflected on this experience:

"For almost a year, most of my friends came from the same district as me. We spent weekends together, shared information about work, and celebrated cultural events from our hometown. Although those relationships were very important, I eventually realized that my social world had become too limited. I decided to become more involved in neighborhood activities and local religious gatherings. After that, I met many people from different backgrounds, and my understanding of Makassar changed completely. I no longer felt that I was living in a foreign place because I had become part of a much wider community."

The interview highlights the evolving nature of migrants' social networks throughout the adaptation process. Initial dependence on familiar relationships represented an effective coping strategy, but long-term integration required respondents to establish more diverse interpersonal connections. Observational data support this interpretation, showing that migrants who actively interacted with local communities demonstrated higher levels of participation in neighborhood meetings, voluntary community work (*gotong royong*), religious activities, and local celebrations than those whose social interactions remained confined to co-regional groups.

Across all sources of evidence, respondents consistently emphasized that meaningful community participation required mutual respect, openness, and continuous interaction rather than simply residing within the same neighborhood. Migrants who demonstrated willingness to contribute to collective activities were generally accepted regardless of their regional origin or length of residence. Community leaders observed during participant observation also frequently encouraged newcomers to participate in local initiatives as a means of strengthening neighborhood cohesion and social solidarity.

The findings indicate that social networks function as a dynamic resource that supports both the practical and emotional dimensions of migrant integration. Family members and co-regional networks play an essential role during the initial settlement period by providing guidance and reducing uncertainty. As adaptation progresses, however, broader engagement with workplaces, educational institutions, religious organizations, and neighborhood communities becomes increasingly important for

developing lasting social relationships. The findings therefore demonstrate that successful social integration depends not only on the existence of supportive networks but also on migrants' willingness to expand those networks through active participation in community life.

Cultural Adaptation and Experiences of Discrimination

Cultural adaptation emerged as the final theme describing the long-term integration experiences of internal migrants in Makassar City. Although respondents originated from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, the findings indicate that adaptation was generally characterized by gradual adjustment rather than abrupt cultural change. Interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations consistently revealed that successful integration depended largely on migrants' willingness to understand local values, communicate respectfully, and participate in everyday social interactions. At the same time, several respondents acknowledged experiencing subtle forms of discrimination during the early stages of settlement. These experiences, however, were generally temporary and tended to diminish as migrants became more actively involved in community life.

Interview findings demonstrate that language and communication were among the first aspects of cultural adaptation encountered by migrants. Although Indonesian served as the primary language of communication, respondents explained that understanding local expressions, customs, and communication styles significantly improved their ability to interact with residents. Many participants described this learning process as gradual, requiring continuous observation and everyday interaction rather than formal instruction.

One respondent explained:

“At the beginning, I often felt uncertain when talking with local residents because they occasionally mixed Indonesian with the Makassar dialect. I understood the general meaning, but sometimes I was afraid of responding inappropriately. Instead of avoiding conversations, I chose to listen carefully and ask politely whenever I did not understand something. Over time, I became familiar with common expressions and local manners. That experience taught me that people appreciated my willingness to learn more than my ability to speak perfectly.”

The interview illustrates that cultural adaptation involved a process of mutual learning rather than complete assimilation. Respondents generally perceived local communities as receptive when newcomers demonstrated respect for local customs and showed genuine interest in understanding community norms. Participant observations conducted during neighborhood meetings and religious gatherings similarly indicated that migrants who actively engaged in conversations gradually became more confident and were increasingly included in informal community interactions.

Beyond language, respondents emphasized that participation in cultural and religious activities significantly accelerated their integration into local society. Community celebrations, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), family ceremonies, and religious events provided opportunities for migrants to interact directly with local residents outside formal settings. Through repeated participation, respondents gradually developed interpersonal trust and gained a deeper understanding of local social expectations.

Another participant described this experience:

“One of the moments that made me feel accepted was when my neighbors invited me to help prepare a community celebration. At first, I thought I would

only be watching because I was still new to the area. Instead, everyone encouraged me to participate, share ideas, and work together with them. During those activities, we talked about our different backgrounds, laughed together, and exchanged stories about our families. That experience made me realize that acceptance grows through everyday interaction rather than through formal introductions.”

This narrative demonstrates that community participation served as an effective mechanism for strengthening intercultural understanding. Focus group discussions reinforced this finding, with participants agreeing that cultural adaptation became easier when migrants actively engaged in shared community activities instead of limiting themselves to interactions within their own regional or ethnic groups. Such participation reduced social distance and created opportunities for reciprocal learning between migrants and local residents.

Despite these positive experiences, several respondents acknowledged encountering subtle forms of discrimination during their initial settlement. Rather than overt hostility, respondents described discrimination as stereotyping, hesitation from local residents, or assumptions associated with their regional origin. These experiences were more frequently reported by migrants who had recently arrived and had not yet established strong relationships within their neighborhoods.

One respondent reflected on these challenges:

“When I first moved here, some people immediately asked where I came from and occasionally made jokes based on stereotypes about my region. Although they may not have intended to offend me, I initially felt uncomfortable because I was still trying to adapt. As time passed and they became more familiar with me, those comments gradually disappeared. I realized that many of the assumptions came from people who simply did not know me personally.”

The interview suggests that early experiences of discrimination were often associated with unfamiliarity rather than deliberate exclusion. Participant observations support this interpretation, indicating that migrants who consistently participated in neighborhood activities and maintained positive relationships with residents gradually experienced greater acceptance and fewer instances of stereotyping. Community leaders participating in the FGDs also emphasized that regular interaction was one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice and strengthen social cohesion within increasingly diverse urban neighborhoods.

Respondents further explained that successful cultural adaptation did not require abandoning their own cultural identity. Instead, they described integration as a process of balancing respect for local traditions with the preservation of their own cultural practices. Many participants continued celebrating regional cultural events and maintaining connections with their communities of origin while simultaneously participating in local social and cultural activities in Makassar. This dual engagement allowed migrants to maintain a sense of identity without limiting their interaction with the broader community.

The findings demonstrate that cultural adaptation is a dynamic and reciprocal process shaped by continuous interaction between migrants and host communities. Although minor experiences of stereotyping and social exclusion occurred during the initial stages of migration, these challenges generally diminished as interpersonal relationships developed through everyday participation. The evidence from interviews, FGDs, and participant observations consistently indicates that openness, mutual respect, and active community engagement are the primary factors facilitating successful cultural adaptation and strengthening migrants' sense of belonging within Makassar City's multicultural society.

Social Integration as a Multidimensional Process of Internal Migration

The results showed that the process of social integration among internal migrants in Makassar City is multidimensional and dynamic where the economic adaptation, residential stability, social participation and cultural acceptance are interdependent. These dimensions are not independent, but rather they reinforce each other as migrants' settlement experiences unfold. This finding builds on previous studies on migration that conceptualize integration as a gradual process, with two structural, two social and two cultural dimensions, instead of a single measure of successful adaptation (Ager & Strang, 2021; Phillimore, 2021). The findings of this study indicate that the integration process is not a one-way street and that it is not only a matter of physical integration but rather sustained interaction between migrants and host communities that leads to trust, participation and acceptance.

The main avenue for migrants to become part of urban society was through employment. The results show that the stability of employment offers benefits that go far beyond financial security: it offers opportunities to interact on a regular basis, to form professional connections and to engage in community life. Adaptation tended to be quicker among those working in the formal sector since the workplace was seen as a significant place to turn trust into interpersonal trust and to broaden social networks. This is consistent with the more recent research on social integration and labour market participation, which indicates that employment offers one of the best opportunities for social integration as it provides economic security and also enhances social engagement opportunities (OECD, 2023; IOM, 2022). The same was found by Kwon and Kim (2022) who stated that stable employment helps migrants to have a sense of belonging in their host communities and to have a higher confidence in civic involvement.

This study, however, also uncovers an important difference from past work. Previous research often highlights employment as a key component of successful integration, but the results of this study indicate that the issue of employment is more of an enabling condition that affects other factors of integration. Economic security enables migrants to secure housing, develop regular routines and be more involved in community groups. The goal of employment cannot therefore be understood exclusively in economic terms but in terms of a lever facilitating social integration. This multi-faceted view is a valuable contribution to the internal migration literature, especially for fast-growing cities in developing countries.

Likewise, housing stability was identified as a key factor in migrants' social integration. Stable residence was consistently reported to help respondents to interact with neighbors again, to become familiar with local customs, and to participate in community activities. On the other hand, regular change of residence hindered the opportunities to build enduring connections and to gain acceptance in community. The results align with recent studies that have shown that residential stability has a clear impact on neighborhood attachment, social cohesion, and civic engagement (Morris et al., 2022; Andersson & Malmberg, 2021). However, the present study broadens this understanding by showing that housing integration occurs regardless of whether the homes are owned or not, but rather because of housing's ability to afford opportunities for continual social interaction. Active engagement in community activities over time was also associated with migrants' ability to form effective community relationships, even if they lived in rented accommodation.

The results also show that social networks act as an important type of social capital during the migration process. Immediate assistance was provided to migrants by family members and relatives when they first arrived, in helping them secure accommodation, employment information and emotional support. As adaptation

continued, the respondents increased their associations with workplace, school, religious and neighborhood groups. This is a continuum in which migrants move from bonding social capital to bridging social capital. A range of recent international research has revealed the role of multiple social networks in improving resilience and combating social isolation, and in strengthening community engagement (Ryan, 2020; Cheung & Phillimore, 2022; Putnam, 2020).

Clearly, this study is contrary to some earlier work which argued that strong ethnic or regional relationships could become a force of integration. This study is also different from some previous studies, which saw strong ethnic or regional relations as a potential obstacle to integration. Initial dependence on familiar networks was not found to inhibit long-term integration. These relationships, however, were rather transitional in nature and began to push migrants to expand their social networks over time. The discovery suggests that bonding and bridging social capital could actually be complementary rather than competing types of social interaction in the general process of social integration. This type of evidence helps to develop a more complex picture of the nature of internal migration, and provides a window into the nature of the adjustment processes of migrants and their interpersonal relationships.

The other important finding relates to cultural adaptation and to experiences of discrimination. Participants in general indicated that adaptation was not necessarily about giving up their culture but about engaging in daily contact to build mutual understanding. Migrants and residents met in community events, religious services and neighborhood meetings to develop trust and to diminish stereotypes on regional differences. The results are in line with the recent literature focusing on how integration should be seen as a two-way interaction between migrants and receiving communities and not as assimilation (Schinkel, 2021; Penninx, 2022). In Makassar, the existence of cultural diversity seemed to promote the negotiation and mutual adjustment process but not cultural replacement.

While a few of the respondents had some experience of subtle stereotyping in the early phases of migration, these experiences rarely or never increased as social relationships became deeper. This is an unexpected result, as discrimination has been found to persist even after long-term residence in societies with higher ethnic polarization (Crul et al., 2021). Rather, the current results indicate that regular contact between people of different ethnic groups can have a significant impact on the level of prejudice in multicultural urban communities. This implies that engaging with and involving communities could be a useful approach to enhancing intercultural understanding and inclusive urban development.

This study has a theoretical contribution in the sense that it shows that social integration of internal migrants can be treated as a process that connects two phenomena, first, the structural integration and second, the building of social capital and cultural adaptation. Current migration models tend to focus on one aspect, such as employment, housing or social participation. The present results, on the other hand, demonstrate that such dimensions complement each other in an ongoing process of interaction. Residential stability supports employment, employment promotes residential stability, residential stability supports community involvement, and community involvement supports a wider social network, which in turn supports cultural acceptance and long-term belonging. This integrated perspective adds to migration studies by suggesting a more comprehensive understanding of integration of the internally displaced within fast-growing urban environments.

The findings have implications from a practical standpoint, underlining the need for integrated urban policies that go beyond job creation. Local governments should increase affordable housing initiatives, provide community based orientation for the newly arrived migrants, include community involvement by local groups, and

encourage inclusive community events with migrants and long-term residents. These initiatives would help to bolster social cohesion and promote sustainable urban development in cities with ongoing flow of population.

This study has a few drawbacks. The research was undertaken only in Makassar City therefore results is not widely transferable to other urban areas in Indonesia that has different socio-cultural and demographical characteristics. Second, the study used a qualitative design, which focused on the lived experiences of the participants, rather than measure causal relationships among integration dimensions. Third, the findings are based on the migrants' perceptions at the time of the study, and may change in the future as the migration trends in cities continue to shift. Comparative studies of different cities in Indonesia should be conducted in the future to determine whether the same pattern of integration occurs in different institutional and cultural settings. Longitudinal and mixed method approaches would also shed light on the interplay between employment, housing, and social and cultural adaptation over time. Such research would contribute to the understanding of internal migration dynamics with a longer time perspective and as a result would create firmer evidence for the creation of policies for urban integration, which are inclusive.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the social integration of internal migrants in Makassar City is a multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of employment, housing stability, social networks, and cultural adaptation. The findings reveal that successful integration extends beyond economic adjustment, requiring continuous participation in community life, the development of interpersonal trust, and reciprocal interaction between migrants and host communities. Stable employment provides the economic foundation that enables residential stability and broader social participation, while supportive social networks facilitate access to information, emotional assistance, and opportunities for community engagement. Furthermore, cultural adaptation is achieved through mutual understanding and everyday interaction rather than through the abandonment of migrants' original identities. These findings contribute theoretically by advancing a holistic perspective of internal migrant integration in which structural, social, and cultural dimensions are mutually reinforcing rather than operating independently.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of integrated urban policies that simultaneously strengthen employment opportunities, affordable housing, community participation, and intercultural engagement to foster inclusive urban development. Nevertheless, the findings are limited by the qualitative design and the focus on a single metropolitan area, which may restrict their applicability to other urban contexts with different socioeconomic characteristics. Future research should adopt comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method approaches across multiple Indonesian cities to examine how integration processes evolve over time and under varying institutional conditions. Such studies would provide broader empirical evidence for developing more effective, sustainable, and socially inclusive migration policies while further enriching the theoretical understanding of internal migrant integration.

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