

## Roomies for Life? An Assessment of How Staying With a Local Facilitates Refugee Integration

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**Abstract**

In light of failing integration policies and practices, we provide a qualitative evaluation of a social innovation that aims to facilitate integration by providing refugees an opportunity to reside temporarily with locals. Our analysis of the experiences shared by refugee guests and local hosts provides insight on the theory and practice of refugee integration in three ways: we (1) inform research and policy on the effectiveness of staying with a local as a means for integrating refugees, (2) unpack the mechanisms through which staying with a local facilitates refugee integration, and (3) theoretically enrich the literature on indicators of integration.

*Keywords:* Refugee integration; Refugee housing; Social innovation; Social bridges; Indicators of integration

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### Integration

In response to the insufficient governmental policies and practices (Engbersen *et al.* 2015; Konle-Seidl and Bolits 2016; Sijbrandij *et al.* 2017), in recent years across Europe there was a widespread increase in efforts by members of communities to address refugees' plights and worries (Thomas *et al.* 2019). Many citizen empowerment and socio-structural change mechanisms in the form of *social innovations* have emerged, aiming to facilitate the integration of refugees (Kornberger *et al.* 2018; Nicholls and Ziegler 2015). Social innovations (SIs) are novel solutions created and implemented by citizens to address social problems (Cajaiba-Santana 2014; Mulgan 2006; Tracey and Stott 2017). The rapidly growing scholarly works (van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016) and European Commission practice guides (European Commission 2013) on SI have been accompanied by an increased policy interest (Adams and Hess 2010), indicating that SIs are significantly shaping governmental policy. Indeed, instead of governments and local councils developing their own ideas and programs to advance society, governments are increasingly trying to identify effective SIs (Edwards-Schachter *et al.* 2012) with the aim of supporting them to deal with grand societal challenges, such as refugee integration (Urama and Acheampong 2013).

There has been a particular sharp rise of SIs that aim to facilitate refugee integration in recent years (e.g., Patuzzi *et al.* 2019; Schreiner 2018). However, empirical research on SIs with a primary goal of integration is scarce, particularly SIs focusing on *refugee* integration within new host communities. Therefore, in this paper, we present a study on the SI TakeCareBnB that aims to facilitate refugee integration by letting refugees temporarily reside with local residents. We consider this particular SI as highly relevant because it has been implemented in several countries around the world. Moreover, given that social isolation of refugees in host countries is one of the primary reasons why integration fails (Strang and

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3 Quinn 2019), and that contact between refugees and residents plays a prominent role in  
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5 reducing negative attitudes towards refugees among citizens (De Coninck *et al.* 2020;  
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7 Knappert *et al.* 2020), the approach of this SI by matching a refugee with a local host is one  
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9 that has the potential to greatly benefit integration.  
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12 In examining how TakeCareBnB fosters refugee integration, we delve deeper into SI as  
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14 a form of social and societal change and answer calls for more research focusing on “what  
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16 causal role social innovation plays in shaping, accelerating or decelerating change  
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18 trajectories” (van der Have and Rubalcana 2016: 1933). Furthermore, by focusing on the  
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20 process of *how* TakeCareBnB facilitates integration in the everyday practices that take place  
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22 between refugees and locals, we contribute to theory on factors that foster refugee integration  
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24 (Ager and Strang 2008).  
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28 In the following, we first review theory on refugee integration, after which we argue  
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30 how this kind of SI can foster refugee integration. We subsequently introduce TakeCareBnB,  
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32 explain the methodology of our study, and then provide an overview of our findings regarding  
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34 how TakeCareBnB fosters refugee integration and how our findings enrich theory on refugee  
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36 integration.  
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### 40 **Conceptualizing Refugee Integration**

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42 There has been little agreement on what integration comprises, and debates have particularly  
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44 focused on what constitutes ‘successful’ integration. To provide a structure for understanding  
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46 what constitutes integration as well as normatively evaluating integration efforts and  
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48 initiatives, we draw upon Ager and Strang’s (2008) Indicators of Integration (IoI) framework.  
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50 Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) developed their IoI framework by suggesting that there are ten  
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52 main domains or indicators of integration. These domains are distributed across four  
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54 categories.  
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3 The first category is *Markers and means*, which consists of four domains that are  
4 considered indicative of successful integration and that are known to facilitate further  
5 integration. The first of these is Employment, which refers to work at an appropriate level and  
6 enables a refugee to contribute to the host society. The second domain is Housing, which  
7 provides the refugee with physical and emotional wellbeing as well as the ability to feel at  
8 home. Education, the third domain, enables refugees to contribute to the host society and  
9 educational institutes provide contexts where refugees can establish relationships with  
10 members of local host communities. Fourth, Health is considered to be an indicator of  
11 integration because good health and access to health services enables active engagement in a  
12 host society.  
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26 The second category is *Social connection*, which refers to three different types of  
27 relationships that enable integration in different ways. The first, Social bonds, refers to  
28 relationships with family and like-ethnic groups. Social bonds prevent isolation and offer  
29 refugees the chance to maintain their own customs and maintain familiar patterns of  
30 relationships. Second, Social bridges represent relationships between refugees and local  
31 communities and enable integration by increasing social harmony and making refugees feel at  
32 home in an area. The third domain, Social links, involves relationships between refugees and  
33 structures of the state and generally focuses on the extent to which refugees have access to a  
34 variety of services.  
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47 The third category, *Facilitators*, consists of the removal of two main barriers that  
48 obstruct integration. The first domain under this theme is Language and cultural knowledge.  
49 Speaking the main language of the host country is “consistently identified as central to the  
50 integration process” (Ager and Strang 2008: 182; cf. van Tubergen 2010), but the related  
51 issue of having a broader knowledge of the host culture is also considered to be crucial for  
52 integration. Second, Safety and stability refers to how much refugees feel safe and at home. A  
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3 perceived lack of safety and stability tends to obstruct integration, which is why it is  
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5 considered a barrier that needs to be removed.  
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8 *Foundation*, which is the fourth category, only has one domain: Citizenship and rights.  
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10 This refers to the extent to which refugees exercise the same rights and responsibilities as  
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12 other residents in a host society. The category for this domain is called foundation because not  
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14 being granted rights equal to host country nationals tends to negatively affect all other  
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16 domains, for example by limiting refugees' access to subsidized health care and prohibiting  
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18 them to find employment.  
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22 The IoI framework has sparked many debates about the suitability of the framework in  
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24 capturing and assessing integration as well as about the nature and meaning of integration in  
25  
26 general. One central point of critique is that the framework focuses on integration efforts by  
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28 refugees only, thus providing a somewhat one-sided view on integration (Phillimore 2012;  
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30 Spencer and Charsley 2016). In contrast, more holistic conceptualizations of societal  
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32 integration suggest mutual accommodation by refugees and residents (Carrera and Atger  
33  
34 2011). In his seminal acculturation model, Berry (1997) proposes that adaptation by host  
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36 country institutions is critical for integration, which he defines as the only acculturation  
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38 strategy that maintains the newcomers' integrity while allowing them to be an integral part of  
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40 the larger society. Later, also Strang and Ager (2010) indicated that the host government is the  
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42 actor that determines refugees' citizenship and rights, and that various other elements of the  
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44 IoI framework require adaptation from host institutions, organizations, and residents (cf.  
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46 Losoncz, 2015; 2017). However, such two-sided relationships remain underspecified and  
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48 understudied in the IoI framework. To address this gap, this study sheds light on how  
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50 TakeCareBnB facilitates integration via adjustments by local hosts as well as refugee guests.  
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55 Another point of debate is related to repeated suggestions for adding or altering domains  
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57 in the IoI framework. For instance, several studies have assessed whether some social  
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3 connections are more important than others, with mixed outcomes: Gilmartin and Migge  
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5 (2015) suggest that social bonds may come at the expense of social bridges, but other studies  
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7 found that social bonds are really important for integration (e.g. Phillimore 2012; Wilmsen  
8  
9 2013), and yet others claimed that social bonds provide the capacity to build social bridges  
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11 (e.g. Grzymala-Kazłowska 2015; Pittaway *et al.* 2016). Furthermore, two studies suggested  
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13 that recreational sports may be an additional marker and means of integration (Block and  
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15 Gibbs 2017; Spaaij 2012), one study suggested that having a social anchor (i.e. socio-  
16  
17 psychological stability and security) should be included as an additional domain (Grzymala-  
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19 Kazłowska 2018), and another study suggested that trust should be added as a facilitator  
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21 (Strang and Quinn 2019). We contribute to these debates by making our own assessment of  
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23 the importance of social bonds versus social bridges for refugee integration, examining the  
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25 centrality of specific domains in facilitating refugee integration, and exploring potentially  
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27 undiscovered domains of refugee integration.  
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33 Finally, Ager and Strang (2008) themselves indicated that much room for development  
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35 lies in understanding the links and relationships among the domains. Phillimore (2012: 543)  
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37 concurred by stating that the IoI framework “did little to aid understanding about the  
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39 interlinkages between domains”, and that “further work is needed to (...) record, analyze and  
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41 theorize such interaction”. A number of studies have done this. For example, Phillimore and  
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43 Goodson (2008) showed that housing and health affects progress in areas such as employment  
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45 and education. Li and colleagues (2016) argued that mental health is affected by citizenship  
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47 and rights via employment, housing, and social bridges. Bakker *et al.* (2016) also showed that  
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49 housing affects health, and found a link between language ability and social bridges. In  
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51 examining how TakeCareBnB facilitates refugee integration, we also pay attention to  
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53 relationships among domains that may emerge out of our findings.  
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3 In sum, the specificity of the IoI framework makes it useful for evaluating policies,  
4 practices, and SIs aimed at facilitating refugee integration (e.g. Phillimore 2012; Platts-Fowler  
5 and Robinson 2015). However, there are various debates about the suitability and possible  
6 advancements of the IoI framework. Next to addressing whether and via which process  
7 staying with a local facilitates refugee integration, we thus also use our findings to address  
8 these questions and advance the IoI framework.  
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### 16 **The Role of Social Innovations in Refugee Integration**

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18 Social innovation as a concept has endured a plethora of definitions across various disciplines.  
19 However, it is generally understood as civil society's creation and implementation of new  
20 solutions to social problems that government has been unable to sufficiently tackle (Mulgan  
21 2006; Tracey and Stott 2017). In their bibliometric analysis and synthesis of the SI literature,  
22 van der Have and Rubacaba (2016) have shown that four research clusters can be  
23 distinguished: community psychology, creativity research, social and societal challenges, and  
24 local development. TakeCareBnB is located in the third theme, given that social and societal  
25 challenges are concerned with innovative solutions to social challenges. This theme fits well  
26 with our study given that our paper shows how TakeCareBnB is a bottom-up SI that provides  
27 a platform that empowers locals to contribute to the integration of refugees.  
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42 In the first 9 months of 2015, 487,000 people seeking refuge entered Europe, doubling  
43 the number from the whole of 2014, leading the European Commission to call this the largest  
44 global humanitarian crisis of our time (McNally *et al.* 2020). The vast scope of this crisis in  
45 combination with the diverse stakeholders in society and their corresponding interests in such  
46 a crisis makes it difficult for governments to meet the needs of those seeking refuge in such  
47 large numbers. Governments therefore increasingly turn to SIs to meet such societal needs  
48 (Grimm *et al.* 2013). Indeed, research has illustrated how local communities and civil society  
49 actors create numerous social innovations during such crises. They evidence how they  
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3 embody a bottom-up approach and rely on the fundamental understanding that communities  
4 and citizens can interpret their own lives, recognize problems and competently find solutions  
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6 (e.g., Kornberger *et al.* 2018; McNally *et al.* 2020).  
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10 Whilst governments have relied on SIs in addressing the most deep-rooted ‘problems’  
11 of society such as poverty and inequality (Stott and Tracey 2018; Tracey and Stott 2017), SIs  
12 continue to lack in sustainable government support. It is argued that this is due to a lack of  
13  
14 “clear criteria or indicators for evaluating SI and its real effects on well-being and quality of  
15 life” (Edwards-Schachter *et al.* 2012: 681). Furthermore, the measured criteria and ‘output’ of  
16 the SI preferred by large government or EU grants (McNally *et al.* 2020) hardly assess how SI  
17 contributes to ‘subjective outcomes’ such as wellbeing (Dolan and Metcalfe 2012; Vickers et  
18 al. 2017). Therefore, using the IoI framework (Ager and Strang 2008) in our study gives us  
19 clear indicators for assessing TakeCareBnB’s influence on refugee integration.  
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### 30 ***Staying With a Local as a Means to Facilitate Refugee Integration***

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32 The potential appeal of staying with a local in facilitating refugee integration is evidenced by  
33 the sheer number of similar SIs that have emerged in recent years. There are at least 18  
34 different countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece,  
35 Italy, Japan, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands,  
36 UK, USA) in which a similar SI has been founded, of which several liaise with a global  
37 homesharing organization by using their website infrastructure to match refugees seeking  
38 temporary accommodation with residents offering accommodation.  
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49 There are various reasons why staying with a local could facilitate refugee integration.  
50 Among others, in staying in the house of locals, it can benefit the refugee’s integration  
51 regarding the domains of housing and safety and security. Furthermore, in being around and  
52 living with locals, it can also improve locals’ integration attitudes and refugees’ social bridges  
53 (cf. the contact hypothesis, Allport, 1954; Knappert *et al.* 2020; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008) as  
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3 well as language and cultural knowledge. However, staying with a local can also be invasive  
4 and intense for the refugee as well as the local. Given the widespread use of this SI, the likely  
5 benefits in terms of refugee integration but also the potential downside of it, we consider an  
6 evaluation of its effectiveness high time.  
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## 11 **Method**

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13 Our study focuses on the SI TakeCareBnB, which operates in The Netherlands. We first  
14 provide some background information on Dutch integration policy and the functioning of  
15 TakeCareBnB, followed by a description of the data, participants, and analysis.  
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### 21 ***The Dutch Context***

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23 While applying for a residence permit, refugees in The Netherlands have to stay in an asylum  
24 accommodation center (AZC), which tend to be in remote locations and during which  
25 refugees generally are not allowed to work. When they receive their residence permit, they are  
26 assigned to a municipality, which is responsible for allocating accommodation to the refugees  
27 (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). However, the average waiting time is 20 to 24 weeks,  
28 during which refugees generally remain at the AZC due to a lack of alternatives. With the  
29 initial goal of increasing the capacity of the AZCs, the Dutch government introduced the  
30 “*logeerregeling*” [lodging arrangement] in 2015 and 2016, which enables refugees to  
31 temporarily reside with family, friends or a host family until they are assigned a house (de  
32 Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019).  
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47 At the end of 2016, the government determined that the capacity of the AZCs was  
48 sufficient to shelter all refugees, which made the *logeerregeling* redundant for this particular  
49 goal (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). However, research continued to conclude that Dutch  
50 integration policies were failing, with only half of the refugees passing their integration test in  
51 time, primarily because of their insufficient language skills and the bureaucratic nature of the  
52 Dutch system (Boot *et al.* 2020). Because reports suggested that staying with others while  
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3 waiting for accommodation can foster integration (van Dijk *et al.* 2017; de Gruijter and van  
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5 Rooijen 2019), the primary goal of the *logeerregeling* shifted from facilitating housing to  
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7 facilitating all facets of integration and participation (Rijksoverheid 2020).  
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### 10 ***Background of TakeCareBnB***

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12 Founded in 2015, TakeCareBnB enables refugees in the Netherlands who hold a residence  
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14 permit to temporarily stay with a local host while waiting for their allocated accommodation.  
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16 In light of the *logeerregeling*, the basic aim of TakeCareBnB was to connect refugees who are  
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18 waiting for a house with locals who are willing to temporarily host refugees. However, at a  
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20 deeper level, TakeCareBnB from the beginning aimed to do so because they believe that such  
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22 a stay “creates mutual understanding and removes fear, “helps the process of integration”,  
23  
24 “may turn into friendship”, and thereby can have “positive effects on the guest and host”  
25  
26 (TakeCareBnB, 2020; cf. de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). As such, TakeCareBnB  
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28 considers refugee integration to represent a two-way relationship that involves adjustments  
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30 from refugees as well as locals.  
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35 When a refugee or a host registers with TakeCareBnB, a so-called ‘matchmaker’ will  
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37 personally meet with them for an intake conversation, during which both parties can indicate  
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39 their wishes and preferences. After the intake, a team of TakeCareBnB matchmakers meets to  
40  
41 discuss possible matches. When a match is identified and suggested to the refugee guest and  
42  
43 local host, they will meet together with a matchmaker at a neutral location for a first meeting.  
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45 If that first meeting is evaluated well by both parties, the refugee will stay for one weekend at  
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47 the accommodation of the host. If that also goes well, the refugee will move in with the host  
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49 for a maximum of three months, depending on whether the refugee is appointed their own  
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51 housing in the meantime. If the guest no longer is able or willing to stay with the host after  
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53 three months, the guest has to return to the AZC until a house is appointed.  
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3 When refugees decide to stay at a local host (or friends or family) instead of at an AZC,  
4 they receive an extra 25 euro per week for ‘housing’, on top of the financial provision all  
5 refugees are entitled to, to make a decent living (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). However,  
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7 TakeCareBnB policy is that guests do not need to pay rent. Instead, hosts and guests can  
8 informally arrange a contribution for household necessities or share efforts in cooking and  
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10 grocery shopping. Hosts do not receive any (financial) compensation.  
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17 In their first year, TakeCareBnB solely relied on volunteers. In 2017, TakeCareBnB  
18 managed to attract enough funds and financial stability to provide a salary for a director and  
19 to professionalize further. In March 2017, a co-founder of TakeCareBnB contacted the first  
20 author with the request to conduct an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of  
21  
22 TakeCareBnB in facilitating refugee integration. Based on the report (van Dijk *et al.* 2017),  
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24 TakeCareBnB started a one-year pilot study in close cooperation with the Dutch government  
25 in 2018, receiving financial support for every successful match made between host and guest.  
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27 After a positive evaluation of the pilot (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019), the cooperation  
28  
29 between TakeCareBnB and the Dutch government has continued indefinitely (Rijksoverheid  
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31 2020).  
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### 34 ***Data Collection and Participants***

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36 Data was collected in April-May 2017 via an online survey containing closed as well as open-  
37 ended questions among all TakeCareBnB hosts and guests. With this format, respondents  
38 were ensured sufficient time and anonymity such that we could expect honest and rich  
39 answers (cf. Hoggart *et al.* 2002; Van Selm and Jankowski 2006). In line with the Declaration  
40 of Helsinki, respondents were informed at the beginning of the survey about the study’s  
41 purpose, the way their data would be used, and that they could skip any question or stop at  
42 any time. Respondents had to provide their consent in order to start with the survey.  
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3 In total 53 refugees (68%) and 51 hosts (68%) responded. Refugees were aged 21 years  
4 or older (a requirement by TakeCareBnB), with a mean of 31 years. This is roughly in  
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6 accordance with the distribution of age across all refugees in the Netherlands in the beginning  
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8 of 2017, since the vast majority was between 25 and 35 years old (CBS 2017). Hosts were on  
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10 average 50 years old. Whereas 75% of the hosts were women, 96% of the refugees were men  
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12 (compared to 57% of the refugees in the Dutch population; CBS 2017). Most of the refugees  
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14 and hosts were relatively highly educated: 79% of the refugees and 82% of the hosts held a  
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16 degree in higher vocational education or university. With regard to ethnicity and religion,  
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18 90% of the refugees were Syrian (compared to roughly half of the refugees in the Dutch  
19  
20 population; CBS 2017) and 62% were Muslim, whereas 96% of the hosts were Dutch and  
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22 none were Muslim. Further, 76% of the hosts had children, of which 40% was living at home  
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24 while one or more guests stayed with them.  
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31 We lack data to determine the educational and religious background of all refugees in  
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33 the Netherlands at the beginning of 2017 specifically, but Dagevos *et al.* (2018) conclude that  
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35 of all Syrian refugees who received a residence permit between 2014 and 2016, 20% held a  
36  
37 degree in higher vocational education or university and 76% were Muslim. We therefore  
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39 (carefully) conclude that male, higher educated and Syrian refugees were overrepresented in  
40  
41 our sample, while Muslims were somewhat underrepresented. The strong overrepresentation  
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43 of higher educated hosts could be due to the fact that a higher education generally leads to a  
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45 more positive attitude towards immigrants (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2016). Income-related  
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47 factors could also play a role, such that hosting a refugee at minimum requires having a spare  
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49 room available.  
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54 The survey was distributed in Dutch and in English, optionally. After securing informed  
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56 consent from all individual participants included in the study, the first set of questions focused  
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58 on demographics and other background information. The second set of questions aimed at  
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3 understanding the motivations to be host/guest and the participant's experiences. The third set  
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5 of questions was about the refugees' and hosts' (dis)satisfaction with TakeCareBnB. The last  
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7 set of questions focused on the consequences of being a refugee/host.  
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### 10 ***Data Analysis***

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12 To analyze the rich answers to the open-ended questions, a three-step approach was used. The  
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14 first step consisted of inductive thematic coding (Braun and Clarke 2006), i.e., we stayed  
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16 close to the interview material when identifying and naming codes. Second, after having  
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18 become familiar with the answers, a number of latent patterns (i.e. themes) were identified. In  
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20 order to decide what counted as a theme, the 'keyness' of the pattern was critical. That is, we  
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22 categorized codes into themes based on their importance rather than based on their  
23  
24 prevalence. The list of themes emerged after a series of iterations which ensured that the  
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26 themes are broad enough to capture a coherent pattern, but that each theme is distinctive  
27  
28 enough to not overlap with other themes. Eventually, fourteen themes were obtained, and  
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30 after helpful suggestions from the reviewers regarding ways in which hosts made adjustments  
31  
32 to foster refugee integration, we arrived at our final selection of fifteen themes. The 3rd  
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34 author, who conducted the first and second step, was blind to Ager and Strang's IoI  
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36 Framework (2008). Finally, to evaluate the influence of TakeCareBnB on integration, these  
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38 themes were contrasted and matched with the domains of the IoI framework. This  
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40 categorization was discussed within the research team and rearranged several times until  
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42 consensus was reached. A theme was categorized into a framework domain if it captured one  
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44 or more issues of that domain, regardless of its positive or negative association with  
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46 integration. Other themes, particularly those that emerged around links and mechanisms  
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48 between the domains, were not fitting in the existing framework and hence indicate a possible  
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50 extension of it.  
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### 58 **Results**

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Figure 1 presents our findings along the data structure. Because the aim of TakeCareBnB as well as the *logeerregeling* is to facilitate integration in general, we first examine TakeCareBnB's influence on integration by reporting themes per domain of the IoI framework and indicating how TakeCareBnB contributes to integration regarding those domains. We subsequently present additional findings that contribute to the debates about the IoI framework. We use "power quotes" in which "the informant is so poetic, concise, or insightful, that the author could not do a better job of making the same point" (Pratt 2008: 501) in addition to the codes listed in our data structure. For each domain and theme we first discuss responses by guests and then by hosts.

### ***TakeCareBnB's Influence on Refugee Integration***

#### ***Employment***

A number of refugees were stimulated by their hosts to get involved in volunteering, which tends to be a good step towards employment (cf. Rodell 2013). Some refugees indicated that staying with a local helped them to find an internship or a job: "Through TakeCareBnB, I could find a place to stay in Amsterdam for three months with awesome people, and learned a lot through them. I started from there to know the city and I got my first work" (Guest 25).

Various hosts criticized the current integration policies, which they perceived as not helping refugees to find a job: "We had discussions about how to budget money. Getting paid weekly as a refugee is not stimulating in actively looking for a job" (Host 3). Hosts also indicated that they helped refugees in various ways in their trajectory towards finding a job, ranging from theoretically discussing the usefulness of (volunteer) work to practical assistance in crafting a CV: "Thought about what kind of job he would like to have, and created a CV together" (Host 16).

### *Housing*

In providing accommodation, an obvious way in which TakeCareBnB facilitates refugee integration is in providing temporary residence. Refugees predominantly emphasized how staying with a local overall represented an improvement compared to staying in an AZC: “*I was in the camp, had 'bad feeling', so for sure it is better than camp!!*” (Guest 34). Hosts also mentioned that they had the impression that staying with a local in terms of housing is better for a refugee: “*I believe that large-scaled, centralized sheltering is an inhumane approach that definitely does not benefit integration*” (Host 32).

In addition to providing temporary residence, hosts also helped refugees with their permanent residence: “*She also was very persistent and patient with contacting the municipality to get them finding me a house*” (Guest 37). Hosts also indicated that they helped refugees with finding a place for themselves and moving there.

### *Education*

Given that AZCs tend to be located in remote parts of the Netherlands whereas 68% of the TakeCareBnB accommodations are in (the vicinity of) a city, refugees indicated that staying with a local helped them to get access to education: “*I signed up for Amsterdam, because it was closer to the university, so I saved transportation costs*” (Guest 14).

Hosts did not mention that the specific location of their accommodation helped refugees get access to education. However, they did indicate that they supported refugees in a variety of other ways regarding their (access to) education, ranging from discussing the usefulness of (more) education and explaining specific rules of educational institutes to practical support in preparing entry-exams, going to the library, and finding a suitable school.

### *Health*

Refugees indicated that staying with a local improved their psychological health and well-being. Some refugees were quite specific on this matter by indicating that having more

1  
2  
3 privacy helped them sleep better: *“I had a room with my sister in the camp, but there was no*  
4 *privacy or feeling comfortable there. [At our host's] we felt like normal people and not in a*  
5 *camp full of people that annoy us. At least, I could sleep better”* (Guest 2), or by indicating  
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7  
8 that hosts supported them emotionally as well as practically in their health by, for example,  
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11  
12 accompanying them to a General Practitioner. Other refugees more generally indicated that  
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14  
15 staying with a local helped them feel better and become happier: *“I could get out of the AZC,*  
16 *I am way happier here”* (Guest 52).

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19 Hosts' responses were similar in indicating that they had the impression that staying  
20  
21  
22 with them provided refugees with more rest compared to staying in an AZC. Furthermore,  
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24  
25 hosts indicated that they supported their guests in their health in a variety of ways, e.g., going  
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28 to a GP and to the hospital, filling out healthcare administrative documents, providing  
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30  
31 emotional support.

### 32 *Social Bridges*

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35 An important way in which TakeCareBnB facilitates refugee integration is in creating social  
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38 bridges between refugees and hosts. There are three themes that fit with this domain: Contact  
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41 with host country nationals, social capital, and adjustment by host.

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44 Regarding contact with host country nationals, nearly all refugees indicated that staying  
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47 with locals helped them to meet Dutch people, and even to make friends or find a partner: *“I*  
48 *became friends with them, so we help each other by all means possible when one needs help”*  
49  
50  
51 (Guest 1). Hosts also indicated that hosting refugees helped hosts and refugees to really get to  
52  
53  
54 know one another and that it helped refugees to become part of family life: *“I am convinced*  
55 *that when a host family and a guest are living together so intensively at such a crucial*  
56 *moment in the guest's life, connectedness and companionship arise”* (Host 17).

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59 Regarding the social capital theme, refugees indicated that they received support from  
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62 their hosts in a variety of ways. Some were very specific in indicating how their hosts helped

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3 them: *“getting a bike”* (Guest 27), *“visiting many places in Amsterdam”* (Guest 41); whereas  
4  
5 others indicated that they received help *“in general”* (Guest 36) or *“with everything”* (Guest  
6  
7 52). Hosts were equally specific in indicating how they assisted refugees, ranging from  
8  
9 *“meeting new people”* (Host 14) and *“taking guest to family and friends”* (Host 46) to *“doing*  
10  
11 *activities together”* (Host 33) and using one’s personal network *“to create opportunities for*  
12  
13 *the guest”* (Host 48).  
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16  
17 As for the theme ‘adjustments by hosts’, hosts and guests reported several instances of  
18  
19 mutual accommodation. For instance, hosts indicated that hosting a refugee came at the  
20  
21 expense of their own privacy: *“You are close to each other, especially mentally. Our house is*  
22  
23 *reasonably large, but you still hear everything from each other”* (Host 4), which was not  
24  
25 always comfortable: *“it is not always convenient to be considerate”* (Host 47). Many steps  
26  
27 towards integration that refugees could make were thus the result of their hosts adjusting in  
28  
29 numerous ways to refugees. In addition, many hosts indicated that their lives were enriched in  
30  
31 various ways by hosting a refugee. Examples include friendship (*“They both became friends*  
32  
33 *for life I think”* - Host 4), improved attitudes (*“The children now look positively towards*  
34  
35 *refugees (...). They also changed their attitudes towards Islam as a religion”* – Host 10),  
36  
37 gratitude (*“Even more grateful for everything around me, freedom, family, peace etc.”* – Host  
38  
39 13), tolerance (*“My understanding for people with different ideas has been enlarged”* – Host  
40  
41 15), cultural awareness (*“Learn about a new culture and habits (which also confront you with*  
42  
43 *your own culture and habits)”* – Host 20), and understanding of the plight of refugees (*“More*  
44  
45 *insight into/respect for their situation”* – Host 36).  
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### 50 51 *Social Bonds*

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53 Refugees indicated that staying with a local actually hurt their social bonds because at the  
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55 AZC they would be more among people from their own ethnic group. Interestingly, they  
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57 indicated that getting away from their own ethnic group facilitated integration: *“Basically,*  
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3 *living in the AZC, especially in a village, kept me staying in my traditional Arabic zone which*  
4  
5 *didn't improve me in any aspect (language or Dutch culture), because I 'only' have a*  
6  
7 *connection with Arab guys” (Guest 26).*  
8  
9

10 A number of hosts also perceived that staying in an AZC inhibits refugees' integration  
11 because it keeps them in their own culture: *“We think that refugees should get a home as soon*  
12 *as possible to enable them to get familiar with the Netherlands and the Dutch language. This*  
13 *goes way faster when they are among other people, instead of in a shelter endlessly” (Host*  
14 *31). At the same time, various hosts indicated that they helped refugees with getting in touch*  
15 *with their family. For example, Host 43 indicated that they “Bought plane tickets for a family*  
16 *reunion”.* These findings thus suggest that staying with a local compared to staying in an  
17 AZC decreases social bonds with like-ethnic groups, whereas it can contribute to contact with  
18 their own family. Being less around people from their own ethnic group and more in touch  
19 with their own family were both perceived to contribute to integration.  
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### 32 *Social Links*

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35 Refugees indicated that they tend to struggle with communication with governmental  
36 organizations, and that the locals they stayed with assisted them in their communication with  
37 those organizations: *“I asked questions about everything in- and outside the house: how to*  
38 *contact the municipality, information about stores” (Guest 53).*  
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44  
45 Hosts concurred by asserting that there is a lot of bureaucracy that refugees are  
46 confronted with and that they frequently assisted refugees in those matters *“We helped our*  
47 *guest getting through the mess of Dutch rules and regulations. The Netherlands is such a*  
48 *bureaucratic country” (Host 8).*  
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### 53 *Language and Cultural Knowledge*

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56 The primary motivation for most refugees to stay with a local was to learn the Dutch language  
57 and learn about the Dutch culture: *“Get acquainted with Dutch traditions and habits to gain*  
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3 *an insight in the life and the social codes in the Netherlands. I wanted to not learn the Dutch*  
4 *language in an abstract way, but actually, know the history and culture behind the language*  
5 *and its people” (Guest 23). In line with this motivation, refugees indicated that staying with a*  
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10 local strongly contributed to this domain of integration.

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12 Hosts similarly indicated that they helped refugees with learning the Dutch language  
13 and culture. A number of hosts also indicated that they occasionally struggled with the  
14 cultural differences, including religion: *“We had a 'religious clash' (he, a peaceful Muslim,*  
15 *me, agnostic). His habit to involve religion in everything every day annoyed me, together with*  
16 *his attempts to convert me to Islam” (Host 32).*

### 17 *Safety and Stability*

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Refugees indicated that staying with a local provided them with a feeling of being part of a  
family and of having a home. Some explicitly contrasted it with staying at the AZC, which  
they perceived to be a more unsafe and difficult environment: *“Because I am gay and I had a*  
*lot of problems in the camp because of that. That is why I moved to that house until I got*  
*mine” (Guest 15).*

Several hosts explicitly mentioned that they offered accommodation to refugees because  
they want to offer a safe place that makes refugees feel at ease and have a home feeling: *“To*  
*offer him a home, someone who listens to him, and the freedom to act how he feels” (Host 7).*  
Some also indicated that the refugees who stayed with them became like family to them:  
*“Our son enjoyed the presence of the boys. He considered them foster-brother and -nephew*  
*respectively. He was cherished by the boys and all of a sudden, our family was even more*  
*'typically male-dominated'. Amazing, such an enriching experience” (Host 17).*

### 53 *Rights and Citizenship*

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Refugees can only sign up for TakeCareBnB when they received their residence permit,  
which entails that technically they have the same rights as Dutch citizens. However, many

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3 refugees indicated that their refugee status did not make them feel like they were equal  
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5 citizens. In that subjective sense of looking at rights and citizenship, refugees indicated that  
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7 staying with a local enabled them to live a more normal life, improved their experience of  
8  
9 being a regular person, and facilitated tolerance: *“Everything [made it a nice experience]. For*  
10  
11 *example, I lived with a Jewish family and I am a Muslim, so we knew that nothing can be*  
12  
13 *against a good and peaceful life between people”* (Guest 17). However, some guests indicated  
14  
15 that being a guest in someone else’s house still limited their freedom: *“Not being totally*  
16  
17 *comfortable at the host’s house, not feeling free to do everything you want. Sometimes there*  
18  
19 *was some differences in eating habits, I was shy to say that the food is not enough for*  
20  
21 *example.”* (Guest 29).  
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27 Hosts indicated that they offered accommodation to refugees in order to provide them  
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29 with a more humane living situation (compared to living in an AZC) and help them to build  
30  
31 up a new life: *“I wanted to do something for people in a horrible situation: they fled the war,*  
32  
33 *after which they are put in a camp here without the possibility to start their lives again”* (Host  
34  
35 21).  
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### 37 ***Refugee Agency***

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39 Our findings revealed two additional themes (motivation to integrate and helping the host)  
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41 regarding refugee integration that did not fit under any of the IoI domains. Given that both  
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43 pertain to the intentional enactment of refugees towards integration, we bundled those themes  
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45 in the new dimension *Refugee agency*.  
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50 First, many quotes from refugees as well as hosts alluded to a factor that seems absent in  
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52 the IoI framework, namely the motivation of the refugee to integrate. For example, Guest 27  
53  
54 indicated: *“If the guest doesn't personally believe in the core values of the Dutch society, then*  
55  
56 *he/she should try to learn/respect them, or at least not deny/fight them. Otherwise, it's almost*  
57  
58 *impossible to cope with a host family or even with life here in general”*. Host 23 illustrated  
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3 how they experienced that their guest was not motivated enough to put in the effort to  
4 integrate, which led to a number of problems: “*We set clear rules in advance about the*  
5 *necessity to go to school to learn the language and to find a (volunteer) job: sitting at home*  
6 *was not an option. He went to school every now and then and he thought too highly of himself*  
7 *to go volunteering. We were not able to find him a job either. This resulted in boredom and*  
8 *caused tension in the house*” (Host 23). Host 7 explicitly indicated that a crucial factor in the  
9 integration process is “*the motivation of the guest to actively participate in society*”.

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Second, refugees as well as hosts named numerous ways in which guests were helping  
hosts. Refugees predominantly mentioned specifically practical help, for example by painting,  
helping in the house, and cooking. Refugees as well as hosts thus pointed at many instances  
where the refugees contributed to the household, showing that refugees were not just mere  
recipients of the hospitality of their benefactors (cf. Ortlieb *et al.* 2020), but that the hosts also  
received a lot in return.

### Discussion

Overall, our findings indicate that a temporary stay of refugees with locals via TakeCareBnB  
contributed to refugees’ integration on all ten domains of Ager and Strang’s (2008) IoI  
framework. As such, our evaluation of TakeCareBnB is very positive regarding its potential to  
facilitate refugee integration in a host society. In a context where reviews indicate that  
integration has been failing (Konle-Seidl and Bolits 2016; Sijbrandij *et al.* 2017), this is very  
welcoming news that can help shape policies aimed at improving refugee integration.

It is however equally important to understand *how* this SI shapes refugee integration. In  
essence, the core services that TakeCareBnB provides are hosting a platform where refugees  
and potential hosts can find each other, and facilitating in the matchmaking. For this SI to  
work, it depends on the hosts who subscribe to TakeCareBnB and decide to welcome a  
refugee in their home. As such, we argue that the main function of TakeCareBnB is that it

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3 empowers and mobilizes locals to act and that the hosts' actions, in turn and over time, affect  
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5 other crucial aspects of the refugees' lives. Indeed, our results indicate that social bridges  
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7 affected *all* other domains because they provide the network and support for refugees to seek  
8  
9 and find volunteer work and employment, find a home, think about and find education, use  
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11 health services, get in touch with their families, contact governmental organizations, learn the  
12  
13 Dutch language and culture, feel like being part of a family, and feel like a normal human  
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15 being. In addition, hosts shared their houses which helped some refugees to be closer to  
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17 educational institutions, offered a more peaceful environment, brought the refugee out of a  
18  
19 network with ingroup people and into a network with outgroup people, provided a safe  
20  
21 environment, and helped refugees to live a normal life. We therefore argue that the process  
22  
23 via which TakeCareBnB influences the domains of refugee integration works through the  
24  
25 domains of social bridges and housing.

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30 Building on this observation, we argue that the main reason why social bridges are so  
31  
32 influential is because of the support function they provide. This is not unique to the social  
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34 bridges category, as social bonds can also provide support. However, given the centrality of  
35  
36 social bridges in our findings, it seems difficult to overstate the importance of the support of  
37  
38 the local(s) with whom the refugees stayed in facilitating their integration. Our data also  
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40 indicates that this support does not come effortless, but consisted of a multitude of ways in  
41  
42 which hosts adjusted themselves and their environment to accommodate their guests and  
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44 contribute to refugee integration.

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49 Taken together, this entails that locals can play a much larger role in refugee  
50  
51 integration than credited for in the IoI framework. Ager and Strang (2008: 180) proposed that  
52  
53 friendliness of local communities towards refugees is the main way in which social bridges  
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55 can contribute to refugee integration. Whereas they did mention that "more intense  
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57 involvement with the local people (...) may be crucial in bridging longer-term social and  
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3 economic benefits”, they did not explicate that further. Our findings thus provide a more  
4  
5 substantial understanding of how social bridges – through their own adjustment and support in  
6  
7 all other domains of integration – can facilitate refugee integration, which enables an  
8  
9 understanding of how integration can be understood and filled in as a two-way relationship  
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11 regarding this domain of integration (Carrera and Atger, 2011; Phillimore, 2012). We  
12  
13 recommend future research to explore how adaptation from host institutions, organizations,  
14  
15 and residents may take shape in the other domains of integration in the IoI framework.  
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19 Furthermore, our data revealed an additional domain of integration: refugee agency.  
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21 This domain was composed out of the additional themes motivation to integrate and helping  
22  
23 the host. Whereas the original domains of the IoI framework provide a summary of structural  
24  
25 conditions that facilitate refugees’ societal integration, they do not consider how refugees  
26  
27 engage with these structures. Therefore, we believe that research and policy can learn a lot  
28  
29 from shedding light on how refugees act as “agents who actively resist and/or comply with the  
30  
31 constellation of controls they are subject to” (Zanoni and Janssens 2007: 1371), and as such  
32  
33 make sense of and shape their host environment. To our best knowledge, refugee agency is  
34  
35 highly understudied in both refugee integration (Ghorashi *et al.* 2018) as well as refugee  
36  
37 employment research (Essers *et al.* 2010; Zanoni and Janssens 2007). Indeed, our study is one  
38  
39 of the first to show the potential of SIs in empowering not only locals but also refugees  
40  
41 themselves in ‘doing integration’. We therefore propose to expand the IoI framework with  
42  
43 refugee agency as an additional dimension that we would locate at the foundational level of  
44  
45 the IoI framework, next to rights and citizenship, as these dimensions are fundamental in  
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47 shaping the outcomes on other dimensions.  
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54 Another key finding of our study revolves around insights on the nature of and  
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56 relationships among the different domains of integration that advance the IoI framework. Our  
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58 findings suggest that there are many relationships among the domains of integration. Above  
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3 we specified how social bridges and housing affect all other domains, and there are many  
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5 more relationships that we could highlight here. Most important however is that these  
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7 relationships suggest that progress in one domain is likely to facilitate progress in other  
8  
9 domains. There is a great potential promise here: if integration in some domains seems  
10  
11 difficult to accomplish, it may help to focus on other domains. By addressing more easily  
12  
13 accessible domains of integration first, other domains may indirectly be addressed as well.  
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17 In light of the discussions about the role of social bonds in integration, our findings  
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19 suggest that there is a tipping point to the merit of social bonds. Up to a certain point social  
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21 bonds – in our data especially those related to family – might leverage integration. However,  
22  
23 after that point, more social bonds keep refugees in their own culture, which comes at the  
24  
25 expense of building social bridges (Gilmartin and Migge 2015; Kalter and Kogan 2014).  
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27 Whereas for all other domains of integration higher levels equal more integration, for social  
28  
29 bonds the optimum level seems more a matter of balance. There may be a qualitative  
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31 difference between family bonds versus bonds with people from one's ethnic group, such that  
32  
33 family bonds overall are more helpful than bonds with people from one's ethnic group. We  
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35 call for more research to examine if differences between these groups are meaningful enough  
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37 to separate them as two distinct types of social bonds.  
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43 Despite the overall positive influence of TakeCareBnB on refugee integration and that  
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45 refugees in particular but also hosts in general indicated their satisfaction with TakeCareBnB,  
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47 it should be noted that there were exceptions to this rule. In those cases in general a lack of a  
48  
49 match was indicated as the underlying reason (cf. Röder and Mühlau 2014). More specific  
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51 experiences participants struggled with involved clashes due to cultural differences, a  
52  
53 perceived lack of motivation to integrate, a lack of privacy, not always feeling comfortable,  
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55 and limited freedom. In part, such issues are likely to emerge among any group of strangers  
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57 who live together for a couple of weeks or months. But at least part of those issues can  
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3 probably be resolved with some more professional support and guidance. For example,  
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5 cultural awareness training may help prevent cultural clashes, and counseling can help  
6  
7 identify the source of motivational problems and/or provide more understanding for  
8  
9 motivational issues. The lack of such professional support and guidance in TakeCareBnB is  
10  
11 mainly due to a lack of financial means, which tends to be the bottleneck for many SIs  
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13 (Edwards-Schachter *et al.* 2012; Urama and Acheampong 2013). As such, it is not only in the  
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15 interest of the government that they identify SIs that successfully address social and societal  
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17 problems, but also in the interest of those SIs, because governmental support enables them to  
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19 professionalize further.  
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24 A final point worth mentioning is that the majority of guests in TakeCareBnB and in  
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26 our sample are highly-educated Syrian men, and that the majority of hosts are highly-  
27  
28 educated. This may limit the generalizability of our findings (cf. de Gruijter and van Rooijen  
29  
30 2019). We therefore call for future research to examine whether and, if so, how different  
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32 characteristics of hosts and guests in social innovations such as TakeCareBnB influence  
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34 refugee integration.  
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### 37 **Conclusion**

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40 At a time when the number of refugees is at an all-time high (UNHCR, 2021) and  
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42 countries are struggling with integration (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016), our paper provides  
43  
44 hopeful insights regarding ways in which refugee integration can be fostered. Specifically, our  
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46 paper shows that temporarily staying with a local helps refugees integrate into the host  
47  
48 country. The primary way in which this happens is by locals adjusting their environment and  
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50 themselves to the refugee. As such, an important theoretical contribution of our paper  
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52 involves the crucial role that locals (can) play in refugee integration.  
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56 An important practical contribution is that little investments are needed to make  
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58 refugees staying with locals happen: In many countries, (small-scale) social innovations that  
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3 facilitate such temporal stays of refugees with locals already exist. Our findings suggest that  
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5 in supporting those social innovations, governments can help foster refugee integration in a  
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7 more impactful manner or on a larger scale. It is our hope that our theory and findings are  
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9 picked up by researchers and practitioners in their efforts to further enhance refugee  
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11 integration.  
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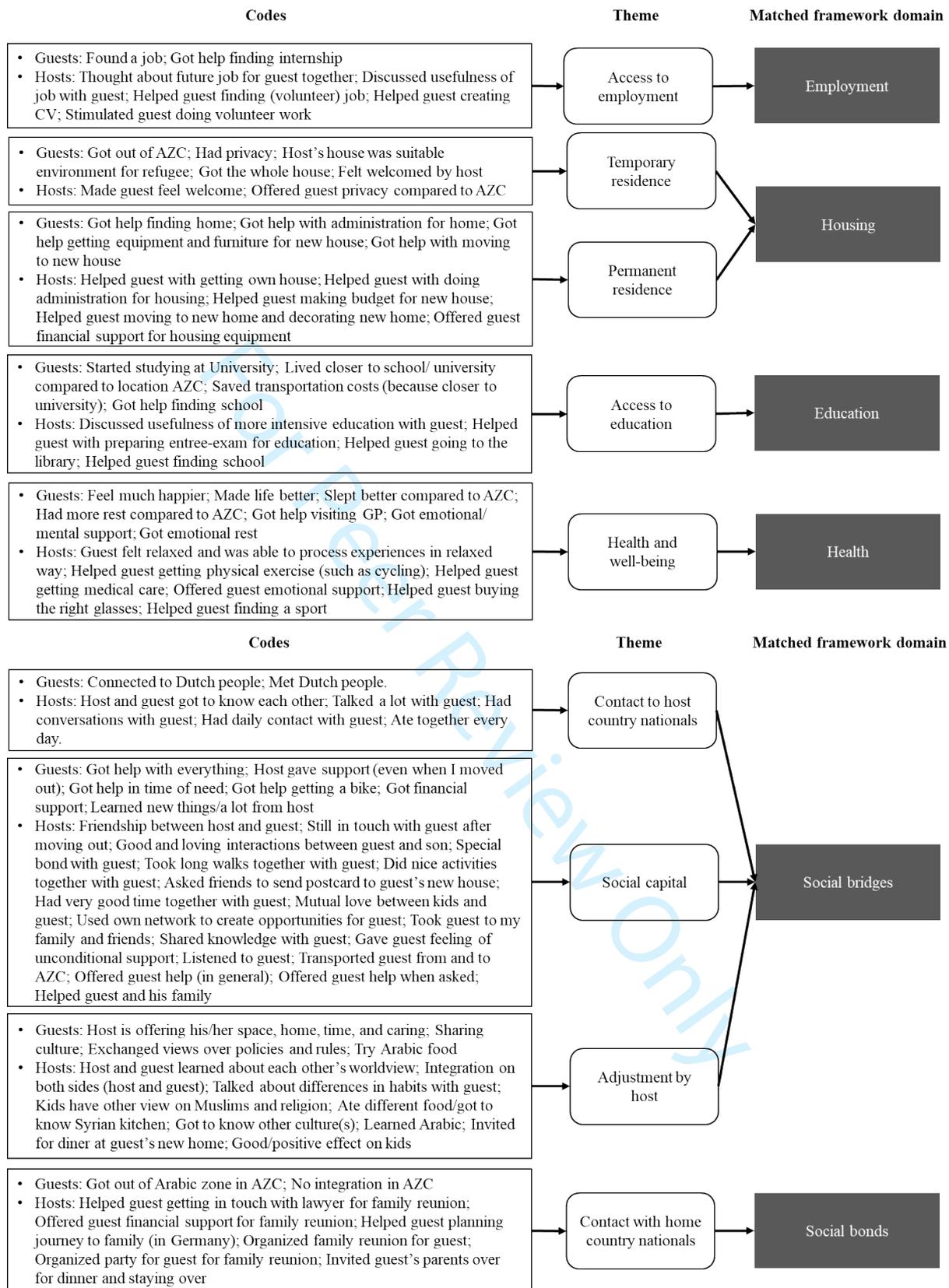
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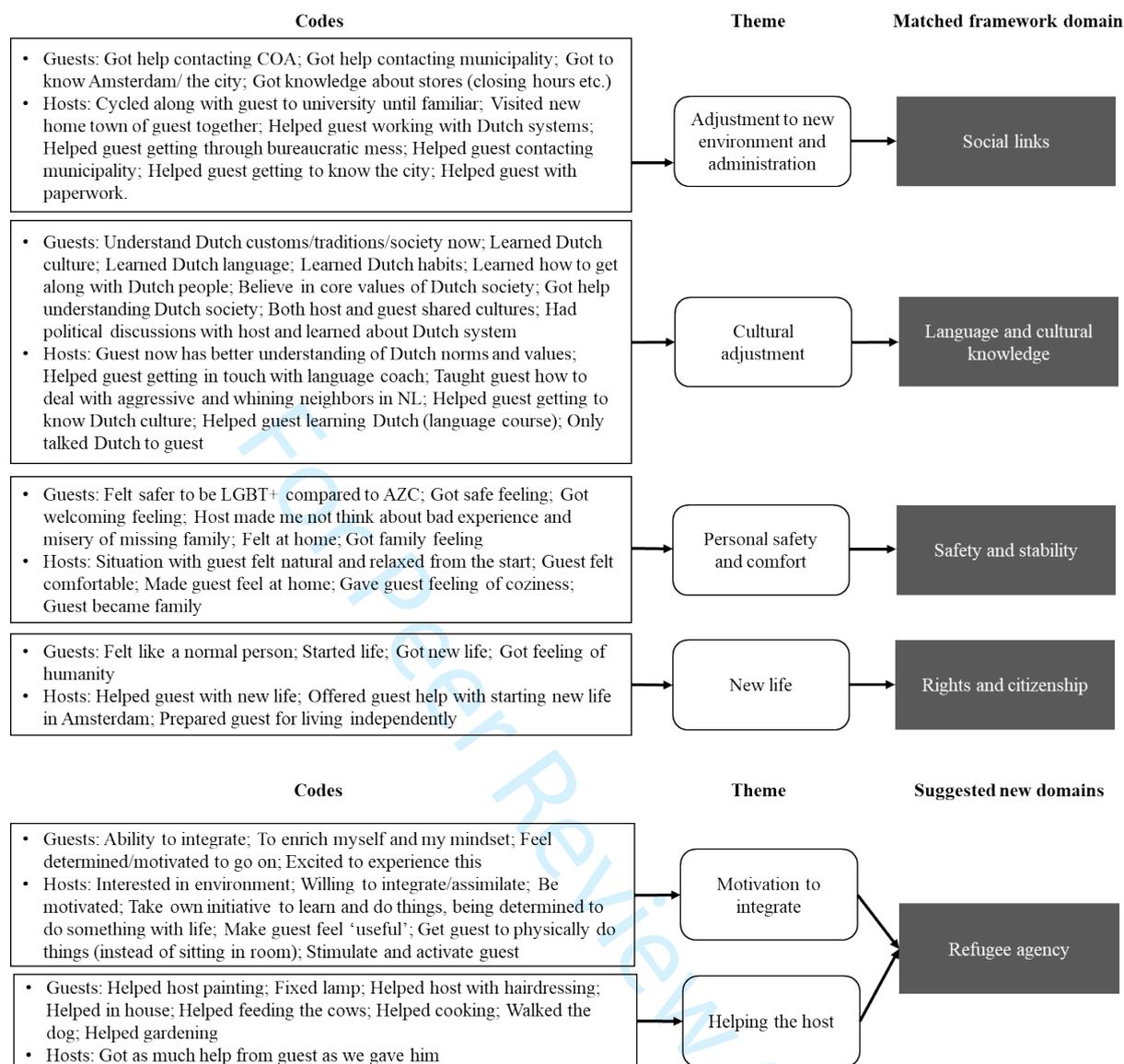
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**Figure 1.** Data structure.

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10 **Abstract**

11 In light of failing integration policies and practices, we provide a qualitative evaluation of a  
12 social innovation that aims to facilitate integration by providing refugees an opportunity to  
13 reside temporarily with locals. Our analysis of the experiences shared by refugee guests and  
14 local hosts provides insight on the theory and practice of refugee integration in three ways: we  
15 (1) inform research and policy on the effectiveness of staying with a local as a means for  
16 integrating refugees, (2) unpack the mechanisms through which staying with a local facilitates  
17 refugee integration, and (3) theoretically enrich the literature on indicators of integration.  
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26 *Keywords:* Refugee integration; Refugee housing; Social innovation; Social bridges;  
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## Roomies for Life? An Assessment of How Staying With a Local Facilitates Refugee

### Integration

In response to the insufficient governmental policies and practices (Engbersen *et al.* 2015; Konle-Seidl and Bolits 2016; Sijbrandij *et al.* 2017), in recent years across Europe there was a widespread increase in efforts by members of communities to address refugees' plights and worries (Thomas *et al.* 2019). Many citizen empowerment and socio-structural change mechanisms in the form of '*social innovations*' have emerged, aiming to facilitate the integration of refugees (Kornberger *et al.* 2018; Nicholls and Ziegler 2015). Social innovations (SIs) are novel solutions created and implemented by citizens to address social problems (Cajaiba-Santana 2014; Mulgan 2006; Tracey and Stott 2017). The rapidly growing scholarly works (van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016) and European Commission practice guides (European Commission 2013) on SI have been accompanied by an increased policy interest (Adams and Hess 2010), indicating that SIs are significantly shaping governmental policy. Indeed, instead of governments and local councils developing their own ideas and programs to advance society, governments are increasingly trying to identify effective SIs (Edwards-Schachter *et al.* 2012) with the aim of supporting them to deal with grand societal challenges, such as refugee integration (Urama and Acheampong 2013).

There has been a particular sharp rise of SIs that aim to facilitate refugee integration in recent years (e.g., Patuzzi *et al.* 2019; Schreiner 2018). However, empirical research on SIs with a primary goal of integration is scarce, particularly SIs focusing on *refugee* integration within new host communities. Therefore, in this paper, we present a study on thea SI (~~in this paper referred to as RefStayTakeCareBnB~~) that aims to facilitate refugee integration by letting refugees temporarily reside with local residents. We consider this particular SI as highly relevant because it has been implemented in several countries around the world. Moreover, given that social isolation of refugees in host countries is one of the primary

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10 reasons why integration fails (Strang and Quinn 2019), and that contact between refugees and  
11 residents plays a prominent role in reducing negative attitudes towards refugees among  
12 citizens (De Coninck *et al.* 2020; Knappert *et al.* 2020), the approach of this SI by matching a  
13 refugee with a local host is one that has the potential to greatly benefit integration.  
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17 In examining how [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) fosters refugee integration, we delve deeper  
18 into SI as a form of social and societal change and answer calls for more research focusing on  
19 “what causal role social innovation plays in shaping, accelerating or decelerating change  
20 trajectories” (van der Have and Rubalcana 2016: 1933). Furthermore, by focusing on the  
21 process of *how* [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) facilitates integration in the everyday practices that take  
22 place between refugees and locals, we contribute to theory on factors that foster refugee  
23 integration (Ager and Strang 2008).  
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29 In the following, we first review theory on refugee integration, after which we argue  
30 how this kind of SI can foster refugee integration. We subsequently introduce  
31 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#), explain the methodology of our study, and then provide an overview  
32 of our findings regarding how [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) fosters refugee integration and how our  
33 findings enrich theory on refugee integration.  
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### 38 **Conceptualizing Refugee Integration**

39 There has been little agreement on what integration comprises, and debates have particularly  
40 focused on what constitutes ‘successful’ integration. To provide a structure for understanding  
41 what constitutes integration as well as normatively evaluating integration efforts and  
42 initiatives, we draw upon Ager and Strang’s (2008) Indicators of Integration (IoI) framework.  
43 Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) developed their IoI framework by suggesting that there are ten  
44 main domains or indicators of integration. These domains are distributed across four  
45 categories.  
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10 The first category is *Markers and means*, which consists of four domains that are  
11 considered indicative of successful integration and that are known to facilitate further  
12 integration. The first of these is Employment, which refers to work at an appropriate level and  
13 enables a refugee to contribute to the host society. The second domain is Housing, which  
14 provides the refugee with physical and emotional wellbeing as well as the ability to feel at  
15 home. Education, the third domain, enables refugees to contribute to the host society and  
16 educational institutes provide contexts where refugees can establish relationships with  
17 members of local host communities. Fourth, Health is considered to be an indicator of  
18 integration because good health and access to health services enables active engagement in a  
19 host society.  
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28 The second category is *Social connection*, which refers to three different types of  
29 relationships that enable integration in different ways. The first, Social bonds, refers to  
30 relationships with family and like-ethnic groups. Social bonds prevent isolation and offer  
31 refugees the chance to maintain their own customs and maintain familiar patterns of  
32 relationships. Second, Social bridges represent relationships between refugees and local  
33 communities and enable integration by increasing social harmony and making refugees feel at  
34 home in an area. The third domain, Social links, involves relationships between refugees and  
35 structures of the state and generally focuses on the extent to which refugees have access to a  
36 variety of services.  
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43 The third category, *Facilitators*, consists of the removal of two main barriers that  
44 obstruct integration. The first domain under this theme is Language and cultural knowledge.  
45 Speaking the main language of the host country is “consistently identified as central to the  
46 integration process” (Ager and Strang 2008: 182; cf. van Tubergen 2010), but the related  
47 issue of having a broader knowledge of the host culture is also considered to be crucial for  
48 integration. Second, Safety and stability refers to how much refugees feel safe and at home. A  
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10 perceived lack of safety and stability tends to obstruct integration, which is why it is  
11 considered a barrier that needs to be removed.

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13 *Foundation*, which is the fourth category, only has one domain: Citizenship and rights.  
14 This refers to the extent to which refugees exercise the same rights and responsibilities as  
15 other residents in a host society. The category for this domain is called foundation because not  
16 being granted rights equal to host country nationals tends to negatively affect all other  
17 domains, for example by limiting refugees' access to subsidized health care and prohibiting  
18 them to find employment.  
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24 The IoI framework has sparked many debates about the suitability of the framework in  
25 capturing and assessing integration as well as about the nature and meaning of integration in  
26 general. One central point of critique is that the framework focuses on integration efforts by  
27 refugees only, thus providing a somewhat one-sided view on integration (Phillimore 2012;  
28 Spencer and Charsley 2016). In contrast, more holistic conceptualizations of societal  
29 integration suggest mutual accommodation by refugees and residents (Carrera and Atger  
30 2011). In his seminal acculturation model, Berry (1997) proposes that adaptation by host  
31 country institutions is critical for integration, which he defines as the only acculturation  
32 strategy that maintains the newcomers' integrity while allowing them to be an integral part of  
33 the larger society. Later, also Strang and Ager (2010) indicated that the host government is the  
34 actor that determines refugees' citizenship and rights, and that various other elements of the  
35 IoI framework require adaptation from host institutions, organizations, and residents (cf.  
36 Losoncz, 2015; 2017). However, such two-sided relationships remain underspecified and  
37 understudied in the IoI framework. To address this gap, this study sheds light on how  
38 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) facilitates integration via adjustments by local hosts as well as refugee  
39 guests.  
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10 Another point of debate is related to repeated suggestions for adding or altering domains  
11 in the IoI framework. For instance, several studies have assessed whether some social  
12 connections are more important than others, with mixed outcomes: Gilmartin and Migge  
13 (2015) suggest that social bonds may come at the expense of social bridges, but other studies  
14 found that social bonds are really important for integration (e.g. Phillimore 2012; Wilmsen  
15 2013), and yet others claimed that social bonds provide the capacity to build social bridges  
16 (e.g. Grzymala-Kazłowska 2015; Pittaway *et al.* 2016). Furthermore, two studies suggested  
17 that recreational sports may be an additional marker and means of integration (Block and  
18 Gibbs 2017; Spaaij 2012), one study suggested that having a social anchor (i.e. socio-  
19 psychological stability and security) should be included as an additional domain (Grzymala-  
20 Kazłowska 2018), and another study suggested that trust should be added as a facilitator  
21 (Strang and Quinn 2019). We contribute to these debates by making our own assessment of  
22 the importance of social bonds versus social bridges for refugee integration, examining the  
23 centrality of specific domains in facilitating refugee integration, and exploring potentially  
24 undiscovered domains of refugee integration.

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36 Finally, Ager and Strang (2008) themselves indicated that much room for development  
37 lies in understanding the links and relationships among the domains. Phillimore (2012: 543)  
38 concurred by stating that the IoI framework “did little to aid understanding about the  
39 interlinkages between domains”, and that “further work is needed to (...) record, analyze and  
40 theorize such interaction”. A number of studies have done this. For example, Phillimore and  
41 Goodson (2008) showed that housing and health affects progress in areas such as employment  
42 and education. Li and colleagues (2016) argued that mental health is affected by citizenship  
43 and rights via employment, housing, and social bridges. Bakker *et al.* (2016) also showed that  
44 housing affects health, and found a link between language ability and social bridges. In  
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10 examining how [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) facilitates refugee integration, we also pay attention to  
11 relationships among domains that may emerge out of our findings.  
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13 In sum, the specificity of the IoI framework makes it useful for evaluating policies,  
14 practices, and SIs aimed at facilitating refugee integration (e.g. Phillimore 2012; Platts-Fowler  
15 and Robinson 2015). However, there are various debates about the suitability and possible  
16 advancements of the IoI framework. Next to addressing whether and via which process  
17 staying with a local facilitates refugee integration, we thus also use our findings to address  
18 these questions and advance the IoI framework.  
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#### 24 **The Role of Social Innovations in Refugee Integration**

25 Social innovation as a concept has endured a plethora of definitions across various disciplines.  
26 However, it is generally understood as civil society's creation and implementation of new  
27 solutions to social problems that government has been unable to sufficiently tackle (Mulgan  
28 2006; Tracey and Stott 2017). In their bibliometric analysis and synthesis of the SI literature,  
29 van der Have and Rubacaba (2016) have shown that four research clusters can be  
30 distinguished: community psychology, creativity research, social and societal challenges, and  
31 local development. [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) is located in the third theme, given that social and  
32 societal challenges are concerned with innovative solutions to social challenges. This theme  
33 fits well with our study given that our paper shows how [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) is a bottom-up  
34 SI that provides a platform that empowers locals to contribute to the integration of refugees.  
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43 In the first 9 months of 2015, 487,000 people seeking refuge entered Europe, doubling  
44 the number from the whole of 2014, leading the European Commission to call this the largest  
45 global humanitarian crisis of our time (McNally *et al.* 2020). The vast scope of this crisis in  
46 combination with the diverse stakeholders in society and their corresponding interests in such  
47 a crisis makes it difficult for governments to meet the needs of those seeking refuge in such  
48 large numbers. Governments therefore increasingly turn to SIs to meet such societal needs  
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(Grimm *et al.* 2013). Indeed, research has illustrated how local communities and civil society actors create numerous social innovations during such crises. They evidence how they embody a bottom-up approach and rely on the fundamental understanding that communities and citizens can interpret their own lives, recognize problems and competently find solutions (e.g., Kornberger *et al.* 2018; McNally *et al.* 2020).

Whilst governments have relied on SIs in addressing the most deep-rooted ‘problems’ of society such as poverty and inequality (Stott and Tracey 2018; Tracey and Stott 2017), SIs continue to lack in sustainable government support. It is argued that this is due to a lack of “clear criteria or indicators for evaluating SI and its real effects on well-being and quality of life” (Edwards-Schachter *et al.* 2012: 681). Furthermore, the measured criteria and ‘output’ of the SI preferred by large government or EU grants (McNally *et al.* 2020) hardly assess how SI contributes to ‘subjective outcomes’ such as wellbeing (Dolan and Metcalfe 2012; Vickers *et al.* 2017). Therefore, using the IoI framework (Ager and Strang 2008) in our study gives us clear indicators for assessing [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#)’s influence on refugee integration.

#### ***Staying With a Local as a Means to Facilitate Refugee Integration***

The potential appeal of staying with a local in facilitating refugee integration is evidenced by the sheer number of similar SIs that have emerged in recent years. There are at least 18 different countries (Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK, USA) in which a similar SI has been founded, of which several liaise with a global homesharing organization by using their website infrastructure to match refugees seeking temporary accommodation with residents offering accommodation.

There are various reasons why staying with a local could facilitate refugee integration. Among others, in staying in the house of locals, it can benefit the refugee’s integration regarding the domains of housing and safety and security. Furthermore, in being around and

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10 living with locals, it can also improve locals' integration attitudes and refugees' social bridges  
11 (cf. the contact hypothesis, Allport, 1954; Knappert *et al.* 2020; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008) as  
12 well as language and cultural knowledge. However, staying with a local can also be invasive  
13 and intense for the refugee as well as the local. Given the widespread use of this SI, the likely  
14 benefits in terms of refugee integration but also the potential downside of it, we consider an  
15 evaluation of its effectiveness high time.  
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## 20 **Method**

21 Our study focuses on the [Dutch-SI RefStayTakeCareBnB, which operates in The Netherlands](#).

22 We first provide some background information on Dutch integration policy and the  
23 functioning of [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#), followed by a description of the data, participants, and  
24 analysis.  
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## 29 ***The Dutch Context***

30 While applying for a residence permit, refugees in The Netherlands have to stay in an asylum  
31 accommodation center (AZC), which tend to be in remote locations and during which  
32 refugees generally are not allowed to work. When they receive their residence permit, they are  
33 assigned to a municipality, which is responsible for allocating accommodation to the refugees  
34 (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). However, the average waiting time is 20 to 24 weeks,  
35 during which refugees generally remain at the AZC due to a lack of alternatives. With the  
36 initial goal of increasing the capacity of the AZCs, the Dutch government introduced the  
37 “*logeerregeling*” [lodging arrangement] in 2015 and 2016, which enables refugees to  
38 temporarily reside with family, friends or a host family until they are assigned a house (de  
39 Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019).  
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48 At the end of 2016, the government determined that the capacity of the AZCs was  
49 sufficient to shelter all refugees, which made the *logeerregeling* redundant for this particular  
50 goal (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). However, research continued to conclude that Dutch  
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10 integration policies were failing, with only half of the refugees passing their integration test in  
11 time, primarily because of their insufficient language skills and the bureaucratic nature of the  
12 Dutch system (Boot *et al.* 2020). Because reports suggested that staying with others while  
13 waiting for accommodation can foster integration (~~i.e. Blinded for peer review~~ van Dijk *et al.*  
14 [2017](#); de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019), the primary goal of the *logeerregeling* shifted from  
15 facilitating housing to facilitating all facets of integration and participation (Rijksoverheid  
16 2020).

### 22 **Background of [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#)**

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24 Founded in 2015, [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) enables refugees in the Netherlands who hold a  
25 residence permit to temporarily stay with a local host while waiting for their allocated  
26 accommodation. In light of the *logeerregeling*, the basic aim of [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) was to  
27 connect refugees who are waiting for a house with locals who are willing to temporarily host  
28 refugees. However, at a deeper level, [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) from the beginning aimed to do  
29 so because they believe that such a stay “creates mutual understanding and removes fear,  
30 “helps the process of integration”, “may turn into friendship”, and thereby can have “positive  
31 effects on the guest and host” ([RefStayTakeCareBnB](#), 2020; cf. de Gruijter and van Rooijen  
32 2019). As such, [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) considers refugee integration to represent a two-way  
33 relationship that involves adjustments from refugees as well as locals.

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41 When a refugee or a host registers with [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#), a so-called  
42 ‘matchmaker’ will personally meet with them for an intake conversation, during which both  
43 parties can indicate their wishes and preferences. After the intake, a team of  
44 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) matchmakers meets to discuss possible matches. When a match is  
45 identified and suggested to the refugee guest and local host, they will meet together with a  
46 matchmaker at a neutral location for a first meeting. If that first meeting is evaluated well by  
47 both parties, the refugee will stay for one weekend at the accommodation of the host. If that  
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10 also goes well, the refugee will move in with the host for a maximum of three months,  
11 depending on whether the refugee is appointed their own housing in the meantime. If the  
12 guest no longer is able or willing to stay with the host after three months, the guest has to  
13 return to the AZC until a house is appointed.  
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17 When refugees decide to stay at a local host (or friends or family) instead of at an AZC,  
18 they receive an extra 25 euro per week for 'housing', on top of the financial provision all  
19 refugees are entitled to, to make a decent living (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). However,  
20 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) policy is that guests do not need to pay rent. Instead, hosts and guests  
21 can informally arrange a contribution for household necessities or share efforts in cooking and  
22 grocery shopping. Hosts do not receive any (financial) compensation.  
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28 In their first year, [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) solely relied on volunteers. In 2017,  
29 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) managed to attract enough funds and financial stability to provide a  
30 salary for a director and to professionalize further. In March 2017, a co-founder of  
31 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) contacted the first author with the request to conduct an independent  
32 evaluation of the effectiveness of [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) in facilitating refugee integration.  
33 Based on the report ([van Dijk et al. 2017](#)*blinded for peer review*), [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#)  
34 started a one-year pilot study in close cooperation with the Dutch government in 2018,  
35 receiving financial support for every successful match made between host and guest. After a  
36 positive evaluation of the pilot (de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019), the cooperation between  
37 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) and the Dutch government has continued indefinitely (Rijksoverheid  
38 2020).  
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#### 46 ***Data Collection and Participants***

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48 Data was collected in April-May 2017 via an online survey containing closed as well as open-  
49 ended questions among all [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) hosts and guests. With this format,  
50 respondents were ensured sufficient time and anonymity such that we could expect honest  
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10 and rich answers (cf. Hoggart *et al.* 2002; Van Selm and Jankowski 2006). In line with the  
11 Declaration of Helsinki, respondents were informed at the beginning of the survey about the  
12 study's purpose, the way their data would be used, and that they could skip any question or  
13 stop at any time. Respondents had to provide their consent in order to start with the survey.  
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17 In total 53 refugees (68%) and 51 hosts (68%) responded. Refugees were aged 21 years  
18 or older (a requirement by [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#)), with a mean of 31 years. This is roughly in  
19 accordance with the distribution of age across all refugees in the Netherlands in the beginning  
20 of 2017, since the vast majority was between 25 and 35 years old (CBS 2017). Hosts were on  
21 average 50 years old. Whereas 75% of the hosts were women, 96% of the refugees were men  
22 (compared to 57% of the refugees in the Dutch population; CBS 2017). Most of the refugees  
23 and hosts were relatively highly educated: 79% of the refugees and 82% of the hosts held a  
24 degree in higher vocational education or university. With regard to ethnicity and religion,  
25 90% of the refugees were Syrian (compared to roughly half of the refugees in the Dutch  
26 population; CBS 2017) and 62% were Muslim, whereas 96% of the hosts were Dutch and  
27 none were Muslim. Further, 76% of the hosts had children, of which 40% was living at home  
28 while one or more guests stayed with them.  
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31 We lack data to determine the educational and religious background of all refugees in  
32 the Netherlands at the beginning of 2017 specifically, but Dagevos *et al.* (2018) conclude that  
33 of all Syrian refugees who received a residence permit between 2014 and 2016, 20% held a  
34 degree in higher vocational education or university and 76% were Muslim. We therefore  
35 (carefully) conclude that male, higher educated and Syrian refugees were overrepresented in  
36 our sample, while Muslims were somewhat underrepresented. The strong overrepresentation  
37 of higher educated hosts could be due to the fact that a higher education generally leads to a  
38 more positive attitude towards immigrants (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2016). Income-related  
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10 factors could also play a role, such that hosting a refugee at minimum requires having a spare  
11 room available.

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13 The survey was distributed in Dutch and in English, optionally. After securing informed  
14 consent from all individual participants included in the study, the first set of questions focused  
15 on demographics and other background information. The second set of questions aimed at  
16 understanding the motivations to be host/guest and the participant's experiences. The third set  
17 of questions was about the refugees' and hosts' (dis)satisfaction with [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#).  
18 The last set of questions focused on the consequences of being a refugee/host.

#### 21 22 23 *Data Analysis*

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25 To analyze the rich answers to the open-ended questions, a three-step approach was used. The  
26 first step consisted of inductive thematic coding (Braun and Clarke 2006), i.e., we stayed  
27 close to the interview material when identifying and naming codes. Second, after having  
28 become familiar with the answers, a number of latent patterns (i.e. themes) were identified. In  
29 order to decide what counted as a theme, the 'keyness' of the pattern was critical. That is, we  
30 categorized codes into themes based on their importance rather than based on their  
31 prevalence. The list of themes emerged after a series of iterations which ensured that the  
32 themes are broad enough to capture a coherent pattern, but that each theme is distinctive  
33 enough to not overlap with other themes. Eventually, fourteen themes were obtained, and  
34 after helpful suggestions from the reviewers regarding ways in which hosts made adjustments  
35 to foster refugee integration, we arrived at our final selection of fifteen themes. The 3rd  
36 author, who conducted the first and second step, was blind to Ager and Strang's IoI  
37 Framework (2008). Finally, to evaluate the influence of [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) on integration,  
38 these themes were contrasted and matched with the domains of the IoI framework. This  
39 categorization was discussed within the research team and rearranged several times until  
40 consensus was reached. A theme was categorized into a framework domain if it captured one  
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10 or more issues of that domain, regardless of its positive or negative association with  
11 integration. Other themes, particularly those that emerged around links and mechanisms  
12 between the domains, were not fitting in the existing framework and hence indicate a possible  
13 extension of it.  
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## 16 Results

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23 Figure 1 presents our findings along the data structure. Because the aim of  
24 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) as well as the *logeerregeling* is to facilitate integration in general, we  
25 first examine [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#)'s influence on integration by reporting themes per  
26 domain of the IoI framework and indicating how [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) contributes to  
27 integration regarding those domains. We subsequently present additional findings that  
28 contribute to the debates about the IoI framework. We use "power quotes" in which "the  
29 informant is so poetic, concise, or insightful, that the author could not do a better job of  
30 making the same point" (Pratt 2008: 501) in addition to the codes listed in our data structure.  
31 For each domain and theme we first discuss responses by guests and then by hosts.

### 32 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#)'s Influence on Refugee Integration

#### 33 *Employment*

34 A number of refugees were stimulated by their hosts to get involved in volunteering, which  
35 tends to be a good step towards employment (cf. Rodell 2013). Some refugees indicated that  
36 staying with a local helped them to find an internship or a job: *"Through  
37 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#), I could find a place to stay in Amsterdam for three months with  
38 awesome people, and learned a lot through them. I started from there to know the city and I  
39 got my first work"* (–Guest 25).  
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10 Various hosts criticized the current integration policies, which they perceived as not  
11 helping refugees to find a job: *“We had discussions about how to budget money. Getting paid*  
12 *weekly as a refugee is not stimulating in actively looking for a job”* –(Host 3). Hosts also  
13 indicated that they helped refugees in various ways in their trajectory towards finding a job,  
14 ranging from theoretically discussing the usefulness of (volunteer) work to practical  
15 assistance in crafting a CV: *“Thought about what kind of job he would like to have, and*  
16 *created a CV together”* –(Host 16).

### 22 *Housing*

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24 In providing accommodation, an obvious way in which [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) facilitates  
25 refugee integration is in providing temporary residence. Refugees predominantly emphasized  
26 how staying with a local overall represented an improvement compared to staying in an AZC:  
27 *“I was in the camp, had 'bad feeling', so for sure it is better than camp!!”* –(Guest 34). Hosts  
28 also mentioned that they had the impression that staying with a local in terms of housing is  
29 better for a refugee: *“I believe that large-scaled, centralized sheltering is an inhumane*  
30 *approach that definitely does not benefit integration”* –(Host 32).

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32 In addition to providing temporary residence, hosts also helped refugees with their  
33 permanent residence: *“She also was very persistent and patient with contacting the*  
34 *municipality to get them finding me a house.”* –(Guest 37). Hosts also indicated that they  
35 helped refugees with finding a place for themselves and moving there.

### 43 *Education*

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45 Given that AZCs tend to be located in remote parts of the Netherlands whereas 68% of the  
46 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) accommodations are in (the vicinity of) a city, refugees indicated that  
47 staying with a local helped them to get access to education: *“I signed up for Amsterdam,*  
48 *because it was closer to the university, so I saved transportation costs”* –(Guest 14).

Hosts did not mention that the specific location of their accommodation helped refugees get access to education. However, they did indicate that they supported refugees in a variety of other ways regarding their (access to) education, ranging from discussing the usefulness of (more) education and explaining specific rules of educational institutes to practical support in preparing entry-exams, going to the library, and finding a suitable school.

### Health

Refugees indicated that staying with a local improved their psychological health and well-being. Some refugees were quite specific on this matter by indicating that having more privacy helped them sleep better: *“I had a room with my sister in the camp, but there was no privacy or feeling comfortable there. [At our host's] we felt like normal people and not in a camp full of people that annoy us. At least, I could sleep better”* – (Guest 2), [or by indicating](#) [and](#) that hosts supported them emotionally as well as practically in their health by, for example, accompanying them to a General Practitioner. Other refugees more generally indicated that staying with a local helped them feel better and become happier: *“I could get out of the AZC, I am way happier here”* – (Guest 52).

Hosts' responses were similar in indicating that they had the impression that staying with them provided refugees with more rest compared to staying in an AZC. Furthermore, hosts indicated that they supported their guests in their health in a variety of ways, e.g., going to a GP and to the hospital, filling out healthcare administrative documents, providing emotional support.

### Social Bridges

An important way in which [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) facilitates refugee integration is in creating social bridges between refugees and hosts. There are three themes that fit with this domain: Contact with host country nationals, social capital, and adjustment by host.

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Regarding contact with host country nationals, nearly all refugees indicated that staying with locals helped them to meet Dutch people, and even to make friends or find a partner: *“I became friends with them, so we help each other by all means possible when one needs help”* –(Guest 1). Hosts also indicated that hosting refugees helped hosts and refugees to really get to know one another and that it helped refugees to become part of family life: *“I am convinced that when a host family and a guest are living together so intensively at such a crucial moment in the guest's life, connectedness and companionship arise”* –(Host 17).

Regarding the social capital theme, refugees indicated that they received support from their hosts in a variety of ways. Some were very specific in indicating how their hosts helped them: *“getting a bike”* –(Guest 27); *“visiting many places in Amsterdam”* –(Guest 41); whereas others indicated that they received help *“in general”* (Guest 36) or *“with everything”* (Guest 52). Hosts were equally specific in indicating how they assisted refugees, ranging from *“meeting new people”* (Host 14) and *“taking guest to family and friends”* (Host 46) to *“doing activities together”* (Host 33) and using one's personal network *“to create opportunities for the guest”* (Host 48).

As for the theme ‘adjustments by hosts’, hosts and guests reported several instances of mutual accommodation. For instance, hosts indicated that hosting a refugee came at the expense of their own privacy: *“You are close to each other, especially mentally. Our house is reasonably large, but you still hear everything from each other.”* –(Host 4), which was not always comfortable: *“it is not always convenient to be considerate”* –(Host 47). Many steps towards integration that refugees could make were thus the result of their hosts adjusting in numerous ways to refugees. In addition, many hosts indicated that their lives were enriched in various ways by hosting a refugee. Examples include friendship (*“They both became friends for life I think”* - Host 4), improved attitudes (*“The children now look positively towards refugees (...). They also changed their attitudes towards Islam as a religion”* – Host 10),

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10 gratitude (“*Even more grateful for everything around me, freedom, family, peace etc.*” – Host  
11 13), tolerance (“*My understanding for people with different ideas has been enlarged*” – Host  
12 15), cultural awareness (“*Learn about a new culture and habits (which also confront you with*  
13 *your own culture and habits)*” – Host 20), and understanding of the plight of refugees (“*More*  
14 *insight into/respect for their situation*” – Host 36).

### 18 *Social Bonds*

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20 Refugees indicated that staying with a local actually hurt their social bonds because at the  
21 AZC they would be more among people from their own ethnic group. Interestingly, they  
22 indicated that getting away from their own ethnic group facilitated integration: (“*Basically,*  
23 *living in the AZC, especially in a village, kept me staying in my traditional Arabic zone which*  
24 *didn't improve me in any aspect (language or Dutch culture), because I 'only' have a*  
25 *connection with Arab guys*” – (Guest 26).

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31 A number of hosts also perceived that staying in an AZC inhibits refugees' integration  
32 because it keeps them in their own culture: (“*We think that refugees should get a home as*  
33 *soon as possible to enable them to get familiar with the Netherlands and the Dutch language.*  
34 *This goes way faster when they are among other people, instead of in a shelter endlessly*” -  
35 (Host 31). At the same time, various hosts indicated that they helped refugees with getting in  
36 touch with their family. [For example, Host 43 indicated that they](#) (e.g., “*Bought plane tickets*  
37 *for a family reunion*” – Host 43). These findings thus suggest that staying with a local  
38 compared to staying in an AZC decreases social bonds with like-ethnic groups, whereas it can  
39 contribute to contact with their own family. Being less around people from their own ethnic  
40 group and more in touch with their own family were both perceived to contribute to  
41 integration.

### 48 *Social Links*

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Refugees indicated that they tend to struggle with communication with governmental organizations, and that the locals they stayed with assisted them in their communication with those organizations: *“I asked questions about everything in- and outside the house: how to contact the municipality, information about stores”* –(Guest 53).

Hosts concurred by asserting that there is a lot of bureaucracy that refugees are confronted with and that they frequently assisted refugees in those matters *“We helped our guest getting through the mess of Dutch rules and regulations. The Netherlands is such a bureaucratic country”* – (Host 8).

#### *Language and Cultural Knowledge*

The primary motivation for most refugees to stay with a local was to learn the Dutch language and learn about the Dutch culture: *“Get acquainted with Dutch traditions and habits to gain an insight in the life and the social codes in the Netherlands. I wanted to not learn the Dutch language in an abstract way, but actually, know the history and culture behind the language and its people”* –(Guest 23). In line with this motivation, refugees indicated that staying with a local strongly contributed to this domain of integration.

Hosts similarly indicated that they helped refugees with learning the Dutch language and culture. A number of hosts also indicated that they occasionally struggled with the cultural differences, including religion: *“We had a ‘religious clash’ (he, a peaceful Muslim, me, agnostic). His habit to involve religion in everything every day annoyed me, together with his attempts to convert me to Islam”* –(Host 32).

#### *Safety and Stability*

Refugees indicated that staying with a local provided them with a feeling of being part of a family and of having a home. Some explicitly contrasted it with staying at the AZC, which they perceived to be a more unsafe and difficult environment: *“Because I am gay and I had a*

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10 *lot of problems in the camp because of that. That is why I moved to that house until I got*  
11 *mine”* (–Guest 15).

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13 Several hosts explicitly mentioned that they offered accommodation to refugees because  
14 they want to offer a safe place that makes refugees feel at ease and have a home feeling: *“To*  
15 *offer him a home, someone who listens to him, and the freedom to act how he feels”* (–Host  
16 7). Some also indicated that the refugees who stayed with them became like family to them:  
17 *“Our son enjoyed the presence of the boys. He considered them foster-brother and -nephew*  
18 *respectively. He was cherished by the boys and all of a sudden, our family was even more*  
19 *‘typically male-dominated’. Amazing, such an enriching experience”* (–Host 17).

#### 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 *Rights and Citizenship*

27 Refugees can only sign up for [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) when they received their residence  
28 permit, which entails that technically they have the same rights as Dutch citizens. However,  
29 many refugees indicated that their refugee status did not make them feel like they were equal  
30 citizens. In that subjective sense of looking at rights and citizenship, refugees indicated that  
31 staying with a local enabled them to live a more normal life, improved their experience of  
32 being a regular person, and facilitated tolerance: *“Everything [made it a nice experience].*  
33 *For example, I lived with a Jewish family and I am a Muslim, so we knew that nothing can be*  
34 *against a good and peaceful life between people”* (–Guest 17). However, some guests  
35 indicated that being a guest in someone else’s house still limited their freedom: *“Not being*  
36 *totally comfortable at the host’s house, not feeling free to do everything you want. Sometimes*  
37 *there was some differences in eating habits, I was shy to say that the food is not enough for*  
38 *example.”* (–Guest 29).

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Hosts indicated that they offered accommodation to refugees in order to provide them  
with a more humane living situation (compared to living in an AZC) and help them to build  
up a new life: *“I wanted to do something for people in a horrible situation: they fled the war,*

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10 after which they are put in a camp here without the possibility to start their lives again” (Host 21).

### 13 **Refugee Agency**

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15 Our findings revealed two additional themes (motivation to integrate and helping the host)  
16 regarding refugee integration that did not fit under any of the IoI domains. Given that both  
17 pertain to the intentional enactment of refugees towards integration, we bundled those themes  
18 in the new dimension *Refugee agency*.

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22 First, many quotes from refugees as well as hosts alluded to a factor that seems absent in  
23 the IoI framework, namely the motivation of the refugee to integrate. For example, a guest  
24 [27](#) indicated: “If the guest doesn't personally believe in the core values of the Dutch society,  
25 then he/she should try to learn/respect them, or at least not deny/fight them. Otherwise, it's  
26 almost impossible to cope with a host family or even with life here in general” (Guest 27). A  
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Host [23](#) illustrated how they experienced that their guest was not motivated enough to put in  
the effort to integrate, which led to a number of problems: “We set clear rules in advance  
about the necessity to go to school to learn the language and to find a (volunteer) job: sitting  
at home was not an option. He went to school every now and then and he thought too highly  
of himself to go volunteering. We were not able to find him a job either. This resulted in  
boredom and caused tension in the house” (Host 23). Another host [7](#) explicitly indicated  
that a crucial factor in the integration process is “the motivation of the guest to actively  
participate in society” (Host 7).

Second, refugees as well as hosts named numerous ways in which guests were helping  
hosts. Refugees predominantly mentioned specifically practical help, for example by painting,  
helping in the house, and cooking. Refugees as well as hosts thus pointed at many instances  
where the refugees contributed to the household, showing that refugees were not just mere

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10 recipients of the hospitality of their benefactors (cf. Ortlieb *et al.* 2020), but that the hosts also  
11 received a lot in return.

### 12 13 **Discussion**

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15 Overall, our findings indicate that a temporary stay of refugees with locals via  
16 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) contributed to refugees' integration on all ten domains of Ager and  
17 Strang's (2008) IoI framework. As such, our evaluation of [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) is very  
18 positive regarding its potential to facilitate refugee integration in a host society. In a context  
19 where reviews indicate that integration has been failing (Konle-Seidl and Bolits 2016;  
20 Sijbrandij *et al.* 2017), this is very welcoming news that can help shape policies aimed at  
21 improving refugee integration.  
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25 It is however equally important to understand *how* this SI shapes refugee integration. In  
26 essence, the core services that [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) provides are hosting a platform where  
27 refugees and potential hosts can find each other, and facilitating in the matchmaking. For this  
28 SI to work, it depends on the hosts who subscribe to [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) and decide to  
29 welcome a refugee in their home. As such, we argue that the main function of  
30 [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) is that it empowers and mobilizes locals to act and that the hosts'  
31 actions, in turn and over time, affect other crucial aspects of the refugees' lives. Indeed, our  
32 results indicate that social bridges affected *all* other domains because they provide the  
33 network and support for refugees to seek and find volunteer work and employment, find a  
34 home, think about and find education, use health services, get in touch with their families,  
35 contact governmental organizations, learn the Dutch language and culture, feel like being part  
36 of a family, and feel like a normal human being. In addition, hosts shared their houses which  
37 helped some refugees to be closer to educational institutions, offered a more peaceful  
38 environment, brought the refugee out of a network with ingroup people and into a network  
39 with outgroup people, provided a safe environment, and helped refugees to live a normal life.  
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10 We therefore argue that the process via which [RefStayTakeCareBnB](#) influences the domains  
11 of refugee integration works through the domains of social bridges and housing.  
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13 Building on this observation, we argue that the main reason why social bridges are so  
14 influential is because of the support function they provide. This is not unique to the social  
15 bridges category, as social bonds can also provide support. However, given the centrality of  
16 social bridges in our findings, it seems difficult to overstate the importance of the support of  
17 the local(s) with whom the refugees stayed in facilitating their integration. Our data also  
18 indicates that this support does not come effortless, but consisted of a multitude of ways in  
19 which hosts adjusted themselves and their environment to accommodate their guests and  
20 contribute to refugee integration.  
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27 Taken together, this entails that locals can play a much larger role in refugee  
28 integration than credited for in the IoI framework. Ager and Strang (2008: 180) proposed that  
29 friendliness of local communities towards refugees is the main way in which social bridges  
30 can contribute to refugee integration. Whereas they did mention that “more intense  
31 involvement with the local people (...) may be crucial in bridging longer-term social and  
32 economic benefits”, they did not explicate that further. Our findings thus provide a more  
33 substantial understanding of how social bridges – through their own adjustment and support in  
34 all other domains of integration – can facilitate refugee integration, which enables an  
35 understanding of how integration can be understood and filled in as a two-way relationship  
36 regarding this domain of integration (Carrera and Atger, 2011; Phillimore, 2012). We  
37 recommend future research to explore how adaptation from host institutions, organizations,  
38 and residents may take shape in the other domains of integration in the IoI framework.  
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48 Furthermore, our data revealed an additional domain of integration: refugee agency.  
49 This domain was composed out of the additional themes motivation to integrate and helping  
50 the host. Whereas the original domains of the IoI framework provide a summary of structural  
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10 conditions that facilitate refugees' societal integration, they do not consider how refugees  
11 engage with these structures. Therefore, we believe that research and policy can learn a lot  
12 from shedding light on how refugees act as "agents who actively resist and/or comply with the  
13 constellation of controls they are subject to" (Zanoni and Janssens 2007: 1371), and as such  
14 make sense of and shape their host environment. To our best knowledge, refugee agency is  
15 highly understudied in both refugee integration (Ghorashi *et al.* 2018) as well as refugee  
16 employment research (Essers *et al.* 2010; Zanoni and Janssens 2007). Indeed, our study is one  
17 of the first to show the potential of SIs in empowering not only locals but also refugees  
18 themselves in 'doing integration'. We therefore propose to expand the IoI framework with  
19 refugee agency as an additional dimension that we would locate at the foundational level of  
20 the IoI framework, next to rights and citizenship, as these dimensions are fundamental in  
21 shaping the outcomes on other dimensions.  
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31 Another key finding of our study revolves around insights on the nature of and  
32 relationships among the different domains of integration that advance the IoI framework. Our  
33 findings suggest that there are many relationships among the domains of integration. Above  
34 we specified how social bridges and housing affect all other domains, and there are many  
35 more relationships that we could highlight here. Most important however is that these  
36 relationships suggest that progress in one domain is likely to facilitate progress in other  
37 domains. There is a great potential promise here: if integration in some domains seems  
38 difficult to accomplish, it may help to focus on other domains. By addressing more easily  
39 accessible domains of integration first, other domains may indirectly be addressed as well.  
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47 In light of the discussions about the role of social bonds in integration, our findings  
48 suggest that there is a tipping point to the merit of social bonds. Up to a certain point social  
49 bonds – in our data especially those related to family – might leverage integration. However,  
50 after that point, more social bonds keep refugees in their own culture, which comes at the  
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10 expense of building social bridges (Gilmartin and Migge 2015; Kalter and Kogan 2014).  
11 Whereas for all other domains of integration higher levels equal more integration, for social  
12 bonds the optimum level seems more a matter of balance. There may be a qualitative  
13 difference between family bonds versus bonds with people from one's ethnic group, such that  
14 family bonds overall are more helpful than bonds with people from one's ethnic group. We  
15 call for more research to examine if differences between these groups are meaningful enough  
16 to separate them as two distinct types of social bonds.

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22 **Finally,** despite the overall positive influence of **RefStayTakeCareBnB** on refugee  
23 integration and that refugees in particular but also hosts in general indicated their satisfaction  
24 with **RefStayTakeCareBnB**, it should be noted that there were exceptions to this rule. In those  
25 cases in general a lack of a match was indicated as the underlying reason (cf. Röder and  
26 Mühlau 2014). More specific experiences participants struggled with involved clashes due to  
27 cultural differences, a perceived lack of motivation to integrate, a lack of privacy, not always  
28 feeling comfortable, and limited freedom. In part, such issues are likely to emerge among any  
29 group of strangers who live together for a couple of weeks or months. But at least part of  
30 those issues can probably be resolved with some more professional support and guidance. For  
31 example, cultural awareness training may help prevent cultural clashes, and counseling can  
32 help identify the source of motivational problems and/or provide more understanding for  
33 motivational issues. The lack of such professional support and guidance in  
34 **RefStayTakeCareBnB** is mainly due to a lack of financial means, which tends to be the  
35 bottleneck for many SIs (Edwards-Schachter *et al.* 2012; Urama and Acheampong 2013). As  
36 such, it is not only in the interest of the government that they identify SIs that successfully  
37 address social and societal problems, but also in the interest of those SIs, because  
38 governmental support enables them to professionalize further.

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A final point worth mentioning is that the majority of guests in TakeCareBnB and in our sample are highly-educated Syrian men, and that the majority of hosts are highly-educated. This may limit the generalizability of our findings (cf. de Gruijter and van Rooijen 2019). We therefore call for future research to examine whether and, if so, how different characteristics of hosts and guests in social innovations such as TakeCareBnB influence refugee integration.

### **Limitations**

The overrepresentation of highly-educated Syrian men as guests and highly-educated hosts limits the generalizability of our findings to similar SIs in other countries, and the specific structure of RefStay limits the generalizability of our findings to contexts where refugees stay with hosts with the involvement of an SI such as RefStay. We therefore call for future research to examine whether and, if so, how alternative structures and different characteristics of hosts and guests influences refugee integration.

Conclusion Another limitation is that we did not have a comparison group of refugees that remained in an AZC until they were assigned their own accommodation. However, the fact that all refugees in our sample have stayed in an AZC and several explicitly contrasted their current experiences of staying with a local with their stay in an AZC, in combination with prior research showing the detrimental effects of staying in an AZC on refugee integration (e.g., Bakker *et al.* 2016), makes us confident that our conclusion overall is justified.

At a time when the number of refugees is at an all-time high (UNHCR, 2021) and countries are struggling with integration (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016), our paper provides hopeful insights regarding ways in which refugee integration can be fostered. Specifically, our paper shows that temporarily staying with a local helps refugees integrate into the host country. The primary way in which this happens is by locals adjusting their environment and

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10 themselves to the refugee. As such, an important theoretical contribution of our paper  
11 involves the crucial role that locals (can) play in refugee integration.  
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13 An important practical contribution is that little investments are needed to make  
14 refugees staying with locals happen: In many countries, ~~there are~~ (small-scale) social  
15 innovations that facilitate such temporal stays of refugees with locals already exist. Our  
16 findings suggest that in supporting those social innovations, governments can ~~relatively~~  
17 ~~easily~~ help foster refugee integration in a more impactful manner or on a larger scale. It is  
18 our hope that our theory and findings are picked up by researchers and practitioners in their  
19 efforts to further enhance refugee integration.  
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