

# Chapter 1

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**Why is RPL important  
and its connectivity to  
inclusion**



# Definitions and Conceptual Framework of the RPL

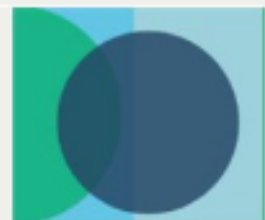
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Prior learning refers to formal, non-formal and informal learning. Formal education is received at educational and training institutions, is accredited by the pertinent national authorities and results in diplomas and qualifications.

Non-formal education is actually linked to formal education and training, but it is more adaptable. It typically occurs in workplaces, community-based settings, and via the activity of civil society organizations. Non-formal education can result in credentials and other qualifications through the processes of recognition, validation, and accreditation. Informal education takes place in everyday activities, in the community, at work, at home, and through people's interests and extracurricular activities. Competencies acquired through informal learning can be displayed through the recognition, validation, and accreditation process, and they can lead to qualifications (UIL, 2012 as cited by UNESCO, 2018).



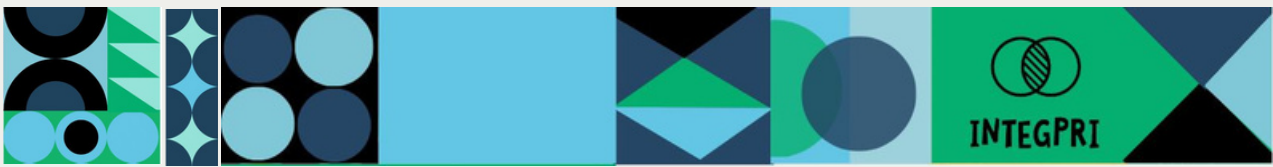
Recognition is the process of officially designating acquired skills and competencies by the awarding of qualifications (certificates, degrees, or titles); or the awarding of equivalence, credit units, waivers, or validation of acquired abilities and/or competencies (CEDEFOP, 2011 as cited by UNESCO, 2018).



Over the past few decades, recognition of prior learning (RPL) has become a topic of increasing interest as well as policy and practice around the world. RPL is also defined as accreditation of prior experience learning (APEL), prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), or validation of prior learning (VPL).

RPL is a process that identifies, evaluates, and recognizes a person's abilities, knowledge, and competencies regardless of when, how, or where learning took place (International Labour Organization, 2017, p. 16; Aggarwal, 2015, p. 3). In other words, it gives people a chance to obtain a qualification and credits acquired overseas without having to complete a formal education or training program (International Labour Organization, 2017, p. 16).

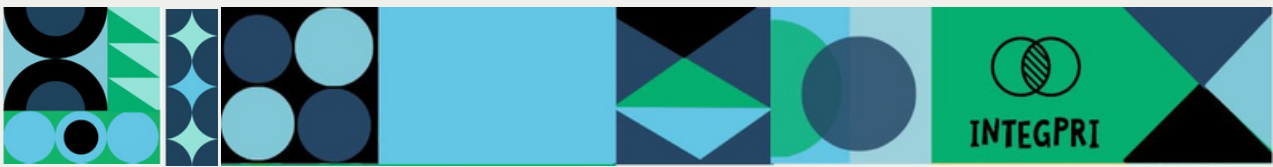
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Since the introduction of the RPL in the 1980s and its expansion in the 1990s, RPL has become the subject of many studies. After decades of RPL usage and research, it has been proven that usage of RPL benefits both society and the individual, as it increases social inclusion, mobility, employment, and self-esteem. It also promotes life learning which can produce a skilled and flexible workforce that can meet the demands of a rapidly changing labor market (Aggarwal, 2015, p. 4). This is particularly important due to the rapidly changing world and the emergence of various crises, which impact the labor market and consequently determine the required competencies that an individual must acquire while seeking employment. Therefore, according to the International Labour Organization (2017, pp. 18-19), RPL has benefits for enterprises, such as helping companies discover their skills shortages, helping accurately identify the skills of workers, boosting employee interest and motivation, reducing additional training and more.

Moreover, it reduces the marginality of disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, retrenched workers, refugees, and migrants. This was especially noticeable during the time of the Refugee and Migration crisis between 2015 and 2016 when RPL played a crucial role in the economic and social integration of migrants and refugees into the host countries. During this period the usage of RPL on migrants and refugees enhanced their career prospects and increased their self-esteem, as throughout the process it helped them acknowledge their professional and academic accomplishments. Furthermore, it encouraged former dropouts to return to school (Ibid, 2017, p. 18).

Even though RPL aims to recognize migrant and refugee skills and improve their mobility, it has also faced harsh criticism regarding its implementation, and its purpose, as in many cases RPL does not target specific competencies. Firstly, despite the wide usage of RPL across the world, it is observable that in the majority of European countries, RPL is still undeveloped. Secondly, many migrants and refugees do not understand what the RPL is and what is expected from them. Therefore, many refugees and migrants find the RPL process to be long, bureaucratic, and complicated. This occurs due to the lack of communication throughout the process from both sides.



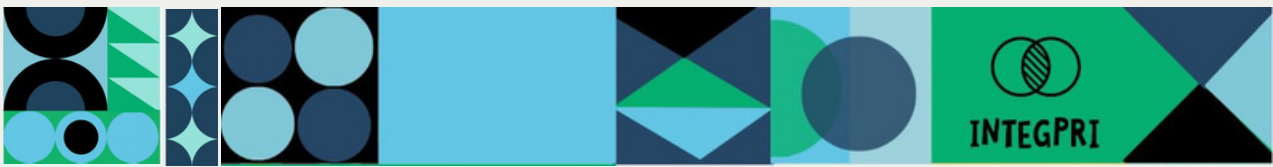
Actions in RPL often have some connection to mobility. The goal seems to be to increase education opportunities, encourage labor market mobility - especially in periods of systemic reform and unemployment - or to address the issues associated with migration and inclusion (Bucken-Knapp et al., 2019). It can be helpful and necessary for mobility from informal to formal learning contexts, while recognition results could be credits in degree programs, or formal/non-formal documentation of competence.

There is some variety in RPL methods and settings, in addition to differences in conceptions. The fundamental concept, nevertheless, remains the same: prior learning should be acknowledged whenever and anywhere it occurred.

This concept is frequently put into practice in formal evaluation systems that serve as the foundation for recognition, as well as in more informal and non-formal practices where prior learning is brought to the surface and receives recognition without a formal qualification as the final product.

Should it be stated that different entities do not recognize ones' prior learning within itself; rather, they recognize the outcomes of ones' prior learning, which are the official and/or actual qualifications, competencies, expertise, and abilities. These are evaluated in several ways, including interviews, portfolios, formal examinations, and actual evaluations in the workplace.

RPL is frequently linked to aspects of knowledge mobility both in space and/or time. To be able to apply this knowledge and abilities in new surroundings, individuals need to be recognized for the prior knowledge they have acquired, usually in a different context. Mobility among nations, workplaces, either from informal to formal learning environments could be an issue. A recognition system might use many approaches and provide various outcomes. These outcomes may include admission into higher education or the workforce, credits or course exemptions, and/or formal or informal documentation of proficiency, such as diplomas, certifications, resumes, etc. (Andersson, 2021).



## RPL and Refugees' Inclusion

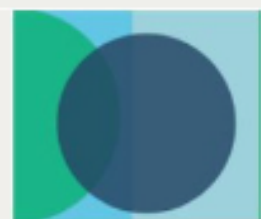
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An increasing number of people have been crossing borders recently, either voluntarily or forcibly, in quest of possibilities such as decent job or refuge seeking protection from persecutors and ongoing conflict. For migrants and refugees, education can be beneficial, but its advantages could be achieved if the knowledge and qualifications acquired before migrating are recognized internationally. All parts of the world are working to enhance the system for recognizing, validating, and accrediting prior education in order for refugees, migrants, and host countries to fully benefit from mobility.

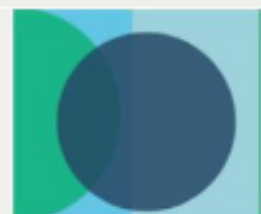
Integration of highly competent refugees depends heavily on the recognition of prior learning. The demand for, inclusion and integration of such refugees, as well as their skills and competences into the labour market, and society, should all be based on the prior learning of migrants, whether that learning came from formal or informal learning in qualified positions in their prior workplace. But when learning has taken place outside of established educational settings or when persons lack documentation of their credentials, recognition can be more difficult. Degrees and certifications are less common among people who have fled their homes or embarked on a dangerous journey. It could be difficult for their children to demonstrate what they've already learnt so they can enroll in the host nation's educational system at the appropriate level.

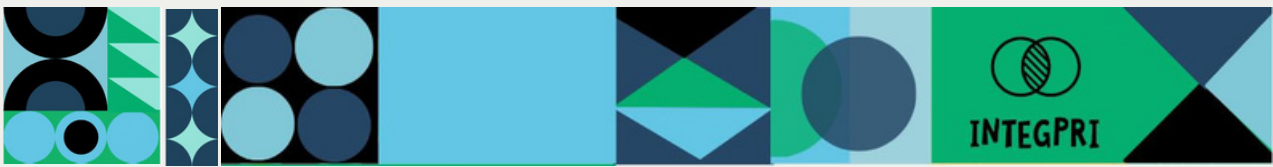


The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Article 22), states that refugees should obtain "care as favorable as possible, and, in any event, not less favorable than that attributed to foreigners generally in the same conditions with regard to...the recognition of foreign school credentials."



The Global Compact on Refugees, led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), revisits and updates these commitments (UNESCO, 2018).





The OECD (2016) has also emphasized RPL as a crucial step in the inclusion of refugees and has noted elements that make these processes especially beneficial for this population. For instance, compared to the situation for other migrants, it is far more probable that education and training as well as the labour market in their home country differ from those in the destination country. It is still more likely that these refugees lack documentation of their qualifications or had their education interrupted by war or conflict. Therefore, assistance with skills assessment and documentation as well as specialized additional education should increase the employment prospects and inclusion of refugees.

Lack of recognition is another issue mentioned, for instance, by Bauder (2003). He explains that migration involves "brain abuse" in the notion of de-skilling and non-recognition of qualifications in the destination country, in addition to a "brain drain" from the place of origin. Due to the devaluation of institutional cultural capital, migrants are excluded from regulated professions, which presents a significant job hurdle. Additionally, Bauder considers the unofficial subset of cultural capital, or local professional expertise. Experience adds another category, which makes people without such local experience unrecognized and excluded, especially in less regulated professions.

The result is that immigrants are assigned to positions with limited skills and salaries than natives with equivalent credentials and experience. Caroline et al. (2009) demonstrate how formal, official recognition of international credentials as equal to local credentials benefits the situation. Such recognition procedures help to eliminate prejudice and are crucial for treating migrant workers fairly (Andersson, 2021).

It is possible to tell whether someone has the necessary knowledge and abilities to follow a certain profession or career in the host country by recognizing their professional qualifications (OECD, 2014). Opportunities for refugees in host countries may be severely hampered by a lack of recognition as well as restrictions on the ability to work. The 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report's analysis of the European Labour Survey revealed that for nearly one in eight immigrants, limited recognition of qualifications was the biggest barrier, often ranking higher than inadequate language proficiency, discrimination, visa restrictions, or a lack of social networks (Figure 1).



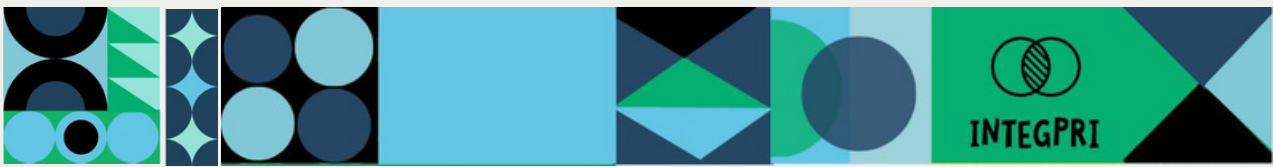
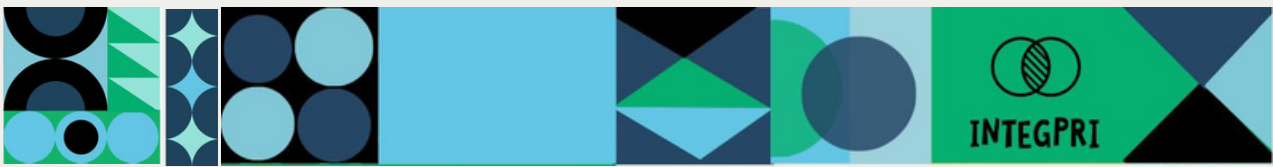


Figure 1: Source UNESCO (2018). What a Waste: Ensure Migrants and Refugees' Qualifications and Prior Learning Are Recognized. Global Education Monitoring Report Policy Paper 37 (p.10).

At the European level, several actions are being taken to enable recognition, including the online skills profile tool for self-evaluation. The specific difficulty mentioned (Konle-Seidl, 2018) is the recognition in respect to the frameworks of vocational education and training. Even in legally unregulated occupations, the emphasis on comparability to reference credentials or vocations poses a challenge in this situation. In other words, it is envisaged that the process of identification will demonstrate how the skills of refugees are equivalent to those already recognized in the host country. It has been suggested that one way to get around this problem is to recognize partial qualifications where equivalent to the full qualification is not necessary.

Brucker et al. (2018) demonstrate the importance of formal recognition of foreign vocational qualifications in the German setting. Their research shows that occupational recognition has a significant positive impact on refugee and migrant employment rates and salaries. RPL is one of the key strategies for labor market integration in Sweden. It is a part of a two-year setup program run by the Public Employment Service (PES), which largely consists of language and civic education classes but also RPL activities (Anderson, 2021).

As a matter of fact, maximizing the benefits of mobility for education and employment requires recognizing academic qualifications. In order to continue learning at the appropriate level, seek employment elsewhere that matches their expertise, and assure that any additional qualifications they gain are documented when they return home, migrants and refugees need their academic credentials to be recognized. Individuals can clearly profit economically from recognition.



Four years after their entry into the country, immigrants in Germany who had all of their qualifications fully recognized were about 45 percent likely to be offered a job and managed to make a pay rate that was about 40 percent greater than those who had no such qualifications fully recognized (Brücker et al., 2015)



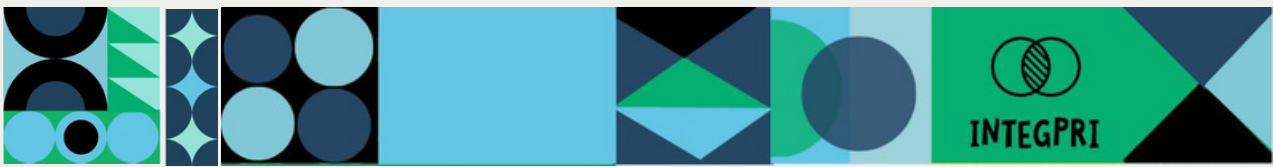
Results of a survey of 30,000 immigrants in Italy with foreign academic degrees revealed that recognizing qualifications significantly decreased unemployment. The advantages of recognition go beyond financial gains; the recognition procedure itself could be able to strengthen a person's potential for learning by boosting their sense of self-worth and confidence and motivating them to pursue lifelong learning. The optimal use of immigrants' and refugees' abilities is something that host nation governments are also interested in.



Compared to one-quarter of non-migrants, more than one-third of immigrants with higher education degree in European countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were underqualified for their job positions, meaning they were offered a job at a lower level than their official qualifications (UNESCO, 2018).







Since 2015, a large number of refugees have left their homeland to relocate elsewhere. A considerable percentage of this population is educated and wish to engage and succeed in a higher education institution (Lenette, 2016). However, only 1% of refugees in 2016 were able to enroll in college, according to the data from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (Streitwieser et al., 2019).



When refugees attempt to enroll in college, a variety of problems develop, including a lack of proficiency in the necessary language, a lack of knowledge about administrative procedures and possible pathways, the cost of tuition, a lack of social and academic support, and problems with RPL (Domvo, 2022).

Primary and Secondary education are also affected by the recognition of academic qualifications. For migratory and displaced children and youth enrolled in primary and secondary education, the recognition of educational qualifications is of vital importance, although it remains challenging. The advantages of recognizing prior learning in minors can be numerous:



- RPL makes it easier for "non-traditional" students—those who might not have had the chance to pursue additional education—to enroll and it values and recognizes learning that occurs in non-formal settings.
- RPL enables students to advance to different education and training programs by validating the value of the learning they have accomplished on their own and removes pointless repetition and duplication of information the student is already familiar with. RPL can contribute to reducing the amount of time needed to obtain a qualification; this encourages students who might otherwise be deterred by the time needed to finish a college-level course or a specific program of study.
- RPL increases students' sense of accomplishment and self-worth for what they have learned and improves the way that pupils perceive and comprehend learning as a lifelong process.

## Benefits encountered by both Individuals and Countries

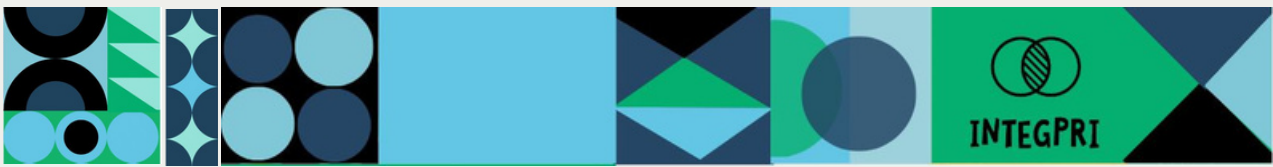
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Promoting access to higher education benefits host societies, refugees, and humankind as a whole.

According to academics and organizations, refugees who enroll in higher education benefit more economically, socially, and humanitarily. Studies show that in addition to the facilitation of access in the labour market, it lessens marginalization, strengthens social cohesion, improves health and wellbeing outcomes, and lessens xenophobic beliefs in the host population (Borsch et al., 2019).

Additionally, access to higher education is a fundamental human right, so encouraging access is vital to uphold human dignity.

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## Economic Benefits

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Costs to the economies and social systems of the host nations are significant. Economic expenditures for refugees include housing, schooling, and daily living expenses. By enabling entry into higher education and access to the labor market, as well as by involving refugees in productive economic activities like community involvement, the recognition of refugee qualifications greatly reduces the costs for the host countries.

Refugees who might have effectively adapted into their host community can also help one another as peers. The knowledge and in-depth assistance required to promote a more seamless integration process should be provided through their personal experience and empathy for their fellow refugees. Early employment enables refugees to achieve financial independence and provides them the time, effort, and resources to actually engage in their host culture. This results in a win-win situation where host countries may cut costs, improve the inclusion of refugees, and boost refugees' autonomy and capacity to offer crucial peer support to other refugees.

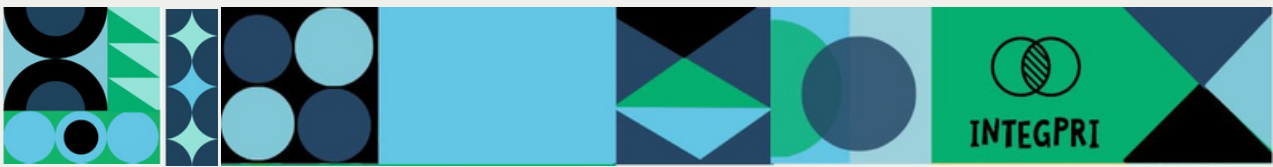
## Social Benefits

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Despite being intangible, the social benefits of recognizing refugee qualifications can be considered as having an effect on social structure and acceptance in both the host country and its local population. Inclusion of refugees into their respective countries depends on their interaction with the locals.

Long-term unemployment and hurdles to access the local labor market have serious repercussions, such as dependency on public and private subsidies, crime, and integration resistance.

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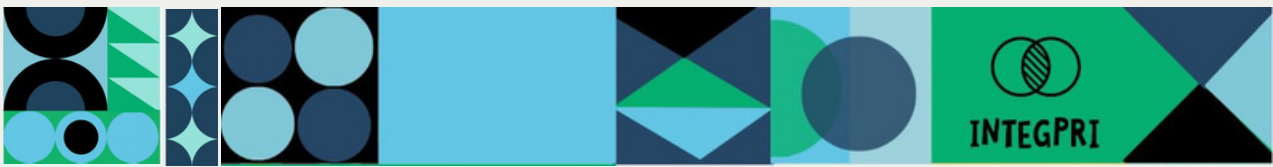
## Human Rights

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As stated in article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone, including refugees, does have the right to employment as well as the right to equal remuneration for equal work performed without discrimination. The right to education is guaranteed by article 26 as well as the general availability of technical and professional education as well as the equal opportunities to higher education based on merit. Refugees' inability to prove their qualifications shouldn't be a barrier to pursuing their human rights, especially given their current situation.

When interacting with refugees, host communities should use prudence and compassion while protecting the integrity of their fundamental human rights. Having refugee qualifications recognized makes it easier for them to access education, exercise their right to employment, and receive equal remuneration for equal effort (Kontowski & Leitsberger, 2018).

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## Conclusion

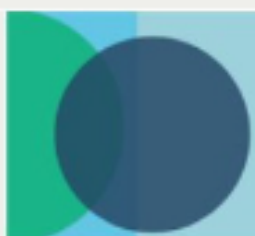
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In order to coordinate and promote the mobility of students and professionals, initiatives to recognize professional and academic qualifications have been shown crucial nationally and internationally. At the national level, qualification recognition by appropriate authorities and regional recognition conventions at the international level have been used as mechanisms to accomplish this. These programs, which center on assessing processes, have the backing of quality control systems. Nevertheless, the emphasis has been increasingly changing towards conducting assessments and recognizing prior learning, especially learning accomplished in non-formal and informal contexts, in particular because of the notion of lifelong learning's growing impact. In most nations, the creation of the necessary mechanisms is still in its infancy.

For those who have crossed the border, voluntarily or forcibly, recognition of credentials and prior learning is critical. Recognition, whether partial or complete, opens doors to higher education or employment. Migrants and refugees can contribute to the improvement of their families' and communities' quality of life by using their knowledge, abilities, and competences more effectively.



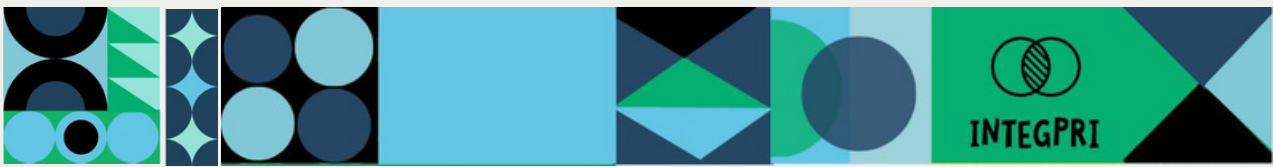
However, current systems for identification, validation, and certification are sometimes not geared toward migrants and refugees. All ages and educational levels of immigrants and refugees are impacted by the problem. Governments and the assessment, licensing, and quality assurance organizations must take decisive action in order to fully make use of their potential.



The Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration both provide a list of promises. Initiatives at the global, regional, national, and local levels can be supported and strengthened through collective action, such as that conducted through the Qualifications Passport's framework for recognizing qualifications. Ultimately, it might support crucial national and regional capacity building.

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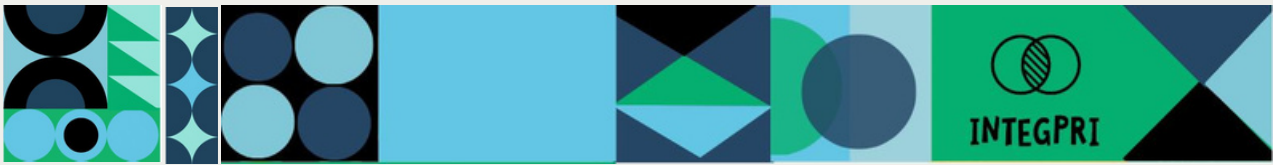
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