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Integration of High Skilled Third
Country Nationals in Europe.
A new proposal for circular talent
management
Dutch workshop report

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INTEGRATION OF HIGH SKILLED THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS IN EUROPE A NEW PROPOSAL FOR CIRCULAR TALENT MANAGEMENT DUTCH WORKSHOP REPORT

*Ricky van Oers & Paul Minderhoud**

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The present report was written in the framework of a comparative study undertaken in Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain entitled 'Integration of Highly Skilled Third Country Nationals in Europe. A new Proposal for Circular Talent Management'. The project, which is funded by the European Integration Fund, aims to define integration processes adapted to different highly skilled immigration patterns and the socio-economical needs of European countries.¹ The present report, which contains the results of interviews with nineteen highly skilled immigrants, aims to contribute towards achieving this aim. Comparable reports have been drafted for Finland and Spain, where similar empirical research has been conducted in the framework of this study.

According to the project's general work plan, the aim of the interviews was to analyse migration plans of highly skilled immigrants which would enable an identification of so-called patterns on highly skilled immigration. A 'migration plan' can be described as the outcome of the decisions a migrant will make previous to moving to a certain country which is (potentially) influenced by both personal and contextual circumstances. Personal circumstances which will be taken into account in the present report can be of social, economic or cultural nature. Examples are the country of origin, gender, age, the fact that someone intends to exercise a regulated profession, the mode of entry to the Netherlands, and the requirements regarding access to the labour market (work permits). As regards contextual circumstances, the present report looks at the influence exercised on someone's decisions related to migration by Dutch policies regarding migration (i.e. entry and residence), access to the labour market, and policies related to the recognition of qualifications. Based on the different 'migration plans' which will be discerned, the report intends to dis-

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1 Explanation taken from the project's website <https://sites.google.com/site/integration-qualification/home>, accessed 6 September 2012.

cover several 'patterns of high-skilled immigration' by highlighting cases where individual immigrants follow similar migration plans.

Furthermore, the report will elaborate on the respondents' integration, in the broadest sense of the word. What experiences have these immigrants had in dealing with Dutch government and society? What problems have they encountered, and how have they solved these? Examples of issues which have been discussed during the interviews concerned the acquisition of visa, residence and work permits, and the acknowledgement of diplomas. More practical issues, such as registering with the municipality, arranging health insurance, or opening a bank account also received attention. Special attention was moreover paid to the language: is the Dutch language considered as a barrier to integration? And if yes: in what way, and how do respondents tackle this barrier? Lastly, the report will elaborate on the plans the respondents have regarding the future.

2. THE WORKSHOPS

In total, nineteen persons have been interviewed for the purpose of this report. The respondents have either been interviewed 'collectively', i.e. in the framework of a focus group, or individually.² The reason why these two different tactics have been employed is that some of the respondents were unable to join the focus groups, either because they did not sufficiently master the language used, being English, or because they had been approached to participate in the research only after the focus groups had taken place. In total, fifteen respondents were interviewed in the framework of a focus group, and four respondents were interviewed individually. The interviews with individual immigrants were conducted in Dutch, whereas the language spoken during the focus groups was English.

Two different focus groups have been organised. One took place at the law faculty of the Radboud University Nijmegen on 15 August 2012. The other took place at the Rabobank office in Utrecht a week later. There were ten participants in the first workshop, compared to five in the other work shop. The reason why two different focus groups were organised in two different places is that this allowed the respondents to participate in the work shop in the vicinity of their homes, which encouraged their willingness to participate. Furthermore, inviting all participants to one workshop would have meant that the ad-

2 Focus groups or group discussions are a method to retrace collective experiences, orientations and attitudes that helps to understand behaviour of certain actors who belong to a specific milieu, i.e. how they give meaning to certain phenomena. The aim of focus groups is to identify rules, norms and structures of communication by analysing the way experiences are represented and communicated by the participants of a group.

vised maximum number of participants to the focus group, which would ideally consist of between five to twelve persons, would have been seriously exceeded.

Prior to the interviews, whether conducted individually or in a group, the respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire.³ All but four participants completed this questionnaire, which formed the basis for the discussions. The discussions focused around three distinct topics, being

- 1) Moving to the Netherlands. This topic focused on the expectations and ideas the respondents had of the Netherlands prior to their move. Why did the highly skilled immigrants chose the Netherlands as their country of destination, what were their expectations and have these materialised? Were they aware of the Dutch residence and labour market requirements, and the possible challenges to obtaining employment matching one's level of education?
- 2) Challenges to the integration on the Netherlands. This topic included discussions about the issues and problems respondents had to tackle once arrived in the Netherlands. Did they experience problems related to acquiring visa, residence and work permits, and the acknowledgement of diplomas? If so, what kinds of problems, and how did they tackle these problems? More practical problems, such as problems related to registering in the municipality, arranging health insurance, or finding appropriate accommodation, were also discussed.
- 3) Recommendations on how to improve integration of highly skilled third country nationals. In the final topic which was chosen for discussion, respondents were asked to reflect on recommendations to improve the integration of highly skilled third country nationals, as well as to optimise chances of getting (appropriate) employment and progress in one's career.

The interviews conducted during group meetings lasted about two hours and were recorded with an audio recording device. At the same time, notes were taken. The meetings which took place with individuals lasted about one hour and were not recorded, as interviewing one person at a time allowed the interviewer enough time to make all the notes required to compile an interview report.

Respondents were contacted on the basis of a mailing list containing email addresses of all foreign employees of the Radboud University Nijmegen, via the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF), via the HR departments of multina-

3 See annex.

tional companies,⁴ or indirectly, via colleagues or acquaintances of the drafters of the report. Respondents had to meet the following criteria:

- 1) Be highly skilled, i.e. have completed higher education in the country of origin or in the Netherlands;⁵
- 2) Be a third country national;
- 3) Be between 25 to 45 years of age.

To qualify as a participant in the research, it was not required that the respondent was actually employed as a knowledge migrant under the Dutch Highly Skilled Migrant (HSM) Scheme. To be qualified as a knowledge migrant under the Scheme, immigrants need to fulfil an income requirement and work for an employer who has been admitted to profit from the Scheme.⁶ Knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme do not have to fulfil an education requirement. Allowing only immigrants qualifying as knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme to participate in the research would therefore create the risk of excluding highly skilled migrants who were working below their level of education, i.e. those in a situation of over-qualification, whereas interviewing immigrants in such situations was one of the aims of the qualitative part of the research. Respondents were hence not required to conduct work matching their level of education, or even to be employed at all. Furthermore, to be able to participate in the research, respondents were not required to have entered the Netherlands for the sole purpose of conducting highly skilled labour. Highly skilled migrants who entered the Netherlands for another reason, for example as students, family migrants or refugees, were equally encouraged to participate, as the expectation was that immigrants in situations of over-qualification could mainly be found among immigrants who entered the Netherlands along these modes of entry. As we will see below, the majority of the respondents can be ranged in the first category, i.e. highly skilled immigrants who performed work matching their level of education. The reason why relatively few (i.e. five)

4 Special thanks go out in this regard to Fia Loozen of the CGB secretariat, who forwarded our request to the relevant persons at multinational companies employing third country nationals.

5 Those who completed studies at a University (bachelor or master) or higher education institute are regarded as having completed higher education.

6 The salary criterion singles out three different categories: immigrants aged under 30, who, as of 1 January 2012, need to earn at least €37.575, those aged over 30, who need to earn at least €51.239, and immigrants who graduated from a Dutch University or higher professional education institute. Immigrants in the latter category need to have found employment within less than one year after having completed their studies, and need to gain a gross annual salary which is at least equal to the income requirement applicable to recently graduated students who will qualify for residence as a Highly Educated Migrant (€26.931). Scientific researchers and doctors who are studying to become specialists are exempt from the salary criterion.

highly skilled migrants from the second category, i.e. those in a situation of over-qualification, were interviewed, is that the organisations focusing (inter alia) on immigrants in situations of over-qualification did not co-operate, or came up with possible candidates that turned out not to belong to the target group.⁷

3. THE RESPONDENTS

The respondents were aged between 29 and 49 years old. They had been residing in the Netherlands for a period varying between one and twelve years. Among the respondents were ten men and nine women. Four respondents had US nationality, and four were Turkish citizens. Two respondents had Zimbabwean nationality, and two had Chinese nationality. One of the respondents had Armenian nationality, one was an Australian citizen, and one respondent had Indian nationality. Lastly, among the respondents, four had obtained Dutch nationality. These respondents originally were Sudanese, Russian, Azerbaijani and Iraqi nationals.

As regards the *highest level of completed education*, six respondents finished a PhD, among whom one in the Netherlands. For eleven respondents, masters level was the highest level of completed education. Three of these respondents attained their masters degree in the Netherlands. For two respondents, an education at bachelors level was the highest level of completed education. Three respondents were currently following education at masters level.

Among the respondents, six reported to have been required a *work permit* to be able to start working in the Netherlands, whereas eleven stated not to have needed such a permit.⁸ All but two of the respondents were currently employed. One of the respondents who was unemployed was following University education at masters level, to be able to in future be employed as an advocate, which is a regulated profession in the Netherlands. The other respondents did not exercise a regulated profession, although one of them had in the past been employed as a high school teacher in the Netherlands. This respondent had been offered this job on a provisional basis; after a year, the Ministry would issue the required qualification.

⁷ An exception is the UAF, via whom we approached two respondents.

⁸ It is doubtful whether the respondents gave a correct answer to the question whether or not they needed a work permit. Among the immigrants who obtained a residence permit as knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme, two claimed to have been required a work permit, whereas immigrants who have been admitted under this Scheme are exempt from the work permit requirement. At the same time, the immigrant who has acquired a residence permit on asylum grounds stated to not need a work permit in order to have access to the labour market, whereas such a permit is normally required in such cases.

Six respondents had jobs in the *private sector*, among whom three in the banking sector, and one in the technological industry.⁹ The other respondents were either working in the public sector (eleven in total), or unemployed (two respondent). Those working in the public sector were either employed as PhD or post-doc/senior researchers at a University (ten respondents) or in the health care sector (one respondent).

Eleven respondents stated to have jobs entirely *matching their level of education*. Among these respondents were all but one of those employed as scientific researchers. Four respondents, among whom one scientific researcher, stated to have a job somewhat matching their level of education.¹⁰ One of these respondents was currently following studies at masters level in order to in future be able to acquire a job matching her intellectual capacities. Four respondents did not have a job matching their level of education. Two of these respondents were currently unemployed. Two were following studies at masters level.

As regards *reasons for migrating to the Netherlands*, the majority (ten) of the respondents had come to the Netherlands for employment purposes. Most (nine) of these respondents had already found a job prior to moving to the Netherlands. Only one of the respondents who came to the Netherlands for employment purposes did not have a job prior to the move to the Netherlands. As reasons for coming to the Netherlands to work, most (eight) respondents indicated they chose to immigrate for the purpose of career development. Especially for academics, this proved to be an important reason. According to one of the respondents, who was working at a University as a post-doc researcher, going abroad 'is something you have to do as a researcher'. Five respondents mentioned the ability to gain new experiences as a reason for going abroad to work, whilst three respondents referred to improvement of their professional skills. Lastly, four respondents mentioned better living conditions or better pay (two respondents) or the difficulties of getting employment in the home country (two respondents) as reasons for moving to another country. Seven of the respondents who came to the Netherlands for employment purposes had obtained a residence permit for knowledge migrants in the framework of the

9 Among the respondents who were working at a bank, one actually crossed the box 'technological industry' when answering the question in the questionnaire regarding the professional field. This person was working as a database administrator (IT).

10 Why this respondent, who was currently working as a post-doc researcher after having completed a PhD abroad, stated to have a job that did not entirely match his level of education is not entirely clear.

Highly Skilled Migrants (HSM) Scheme.¹¹ Of two immigrants, the type of residence permit was unknown. One of the respondents had in the meantime obtained Dutch nationality. Compared to the other respondents who came to the Netherlands for employment purposes, this respondent had come to the Netherlands to look for work. Unlike the others, she hence did not have a job when arriving in the Netherlands.

For three of the respondents, not employment, but reunion with their partners was the main reason for coming to the Netherlands. None of these respondents had however obtained a residence permit for the purpose of family reunification. Currently, they were all in possession of a residence permit for knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme. Previously, two of these respondents had entered the Netherlands as students, one in the framework of an Erasmus programme, and one to follow a masters. When this respondent wanted to continue staying in the Netherlands after finishing her masters, she was surprised to find out that this was much easier as a (highly skilled) labour migrant, than as a family migrant married to a Dutch national. As it turned out, the fact that her husband did not have a permanent contract stood in the way of her right to stay in the Netherlands as a family member. The other respondent who came to the Netherlands to reunite with her partner had previously studied in Germany. This respondent had subsequently found a job as a researcher in the Netherlands.

For two respondents, study was the main reason to come to the Netherlands. After their studies, these respondents decided to stay and start their careers in the Netherlands. Both had obtained a residence permit for employed persons. Lastly, four of the respondents entered the Netherlands as refugees. Three of these respondents had in the meantime obtained Dutch nationality, whereas the other one had obtained a residence permit for refugees with the validity of a period of five years.

4. MIGRATION PLANS

4.1 Moving to the Netherlands

In this section, we will explain the reasons why the respondents, all being highly qualified migrants, chose the Netherlands as their country of destination, while taking account the influence exercised by their personal circumstances as well as Dutch policies regarding immigration, access to the labour market and the

¹¹ Immigrants who entered under the HSM Scheme are referred to as 'knowledge migrants'. They profit from speedy procedures regarding the application of visa and residence permits, and are exempt from the work permit requirement.

qualification of diplomas (contextual circumstances), to identify their 'migration plans'.

Prior to making any statements regarding the reasons why the respondents chose the Netherlands as their country of destination, it is important to note that several migrants did not come to the Netherlands on an (entirely) voluntary basis. This applies to the refugees (four respondents) and those who came to the Netherlands primarily for reasons of family reunification (three respondents). The refugees would probably not have left their countries of origin would the political situation in their home countries not have forced them to. Neither did they make a deliberate choice for the Netherlands. One of the refugees explained that he was actually on his way for Canada when he arrived in Amsterdam for a transit. As he did not have the right papers to continue his journey, he stayed in the Netherlands. As for those who came to the Netherlands primarily for reasons of family reunification, the choice to live in the Netherlands was solely based on the fact that their partners lived in the Netherlands.

What conclusions can be drawn regarding the migration plans of these respondents? In all of the above mentioned situations, it was not the Dutch policies regarding migration, access to the labour market or the qualification of diplomas that made these respondents choose the Netherlands as their country of destination. As one of the respondents, a former refugee, explained: 'I did not search the computer for information regarding the Netherlands.' Neither was the decision to come to the Netherlands of those who came as refugees or to join their Dutch partners influenced by personal circumstances of social, economic or cultural nature. Other important variables appeared to have played a decisive role: the place of residence of the partner or the fact that the country of origin was no longer safe. We can conclude that, as the choice these immigrants made to come to the Netherlands was not made deliberately or entirely voluntarily, no migration plan can be drawn up for those highly skilled immigrants who either came to the Netherlands as refugees or as family migrants.

Contrary to the seven respondents mentioned above, the choice of the other twelve highly skilled immigrants interviewed for the purpose of this research to live in the Netherlands was made voluntarily. They were not 'forced' to come to the Netherlands, i.e. their decision to come to the Netherlands was not primarily inspired by the country of residence of their partners or the political situation in their home countries. In how far was the decision these immigrants made to come to the Netherlands influenced by external circumstances related to the Dutch policies regarding immigration, access to the labour market or the acknowledgement of diplomas? And to what extent did personal circumstances play a role?

Among those respondents who chose the Netherlands ‘out of their own will’, ten came to the Netherlands mainly for employment purposes. The remaining two respondents were currently also working in the Netherlands, but originally entered the Netherlands on a student visa. Due to the lenient Dutch policy regarding highly skilled migration and the policy for third country national students, these immigrants did not encounter major problems acquiring residence permits. Most of them did not require a work permit, but those who stated that they did (five respondents), did not report any problems regarding the acquisition of this permit either. Nevertheless, it was not the lenient policy towards highly skilled immigrants or third country national students which exercised a decisive influence on the decisions these immigrants made when choosing the Netherlands as their country of destination. As was the case with those who entered the Netherlands for reasons of family reunification or as refugees, other variables appeared to have played a role. For those who came to the Netherlands as students, the Dutch offer regarding higher education appeared to have played a decisive role, whereas those who came to the Netherlands mainly for employment purposes were mostly guided by the Dutch labour market situation, i.e. the availability of jobs for the highly skilled, advertised on the internet. As one of the respondents who in the first instance came to the Netherlands to study explained:

‘I have been told by my lecturers in Turkey that the university education is good in the Netherlands. This is the primary reason [why I came to the Netherlands to study]’.

Another respondent, who came to the Netherlands to work, stated that

‘After my master in Turkey I started looking for a place in Europe together with my girlfriend and the Netherlands was one of the countries we were willing to move to because of good master’s programmes and jobs.’

The majority of the immigrants who came to the Netherlands for reasons of employment or study first found a job or a study of interest in the Netherlands only to discover the relative ease with which they were able to obtain residence permits and permission to work then.¹² As one of the respondents said: ‘Once I got a job, I assumed that I would be able to get a visa and a residence permit’; an assumption which appeared to have been correct, as this respon-

12 Immigrants either found jobs via websites advertising vacancies for highly educated immigrants, after writing open job applications, or were transferred internally within their companies.

dent, like the majority of the respondents who came to the Netherlands to work, was able to profit from the lenient provisions of the HSM Scheme. The lenient policies towards highly skilled immigrants hence did not appear to have formed a major 'pull factor' for these immigrants to come to the Netherlands. The primary reason why the respondent who came to the Netherlands to study or work chose the Netherlands as their country of destination appears to have been the good reputation of the Dutch higher education and the job offer for the highly skilled.

Only one of the respondents who came to the Netherlands to work appeared to have taken policies regarding admission and access to the labour market into account when determining her new country of residence. Contrary to the other respondents who came to the Netherlands with the purpose to work there, this respondent did not come to the Netherlands as a knowledge migrant under the HSM Scheme, and only started looking for a job in the Netherlands after arrival. Besides the Netherlands, this respondent, whose decision to migrate was mainly influenced by poor labour market perspectives in the country of origin (Russia), thought of Germany and the UK as possible countries of destination. According to her, in all three countries similar policies applied, in the sense that in all three countries, she would be able to live and work. The respondent eventually chose the Netherlands because of its liberal reputation:

'The Netherlands was the most democratic country in the sense that someone from a foreign country would be welcome there. You would not be regarded as a foreigner, or a second-class citizen. I based this assumption on the image created of the Netherlands in the media, the papers.'

It was hence in the end the image of the Netherlands which was decisive for this respondent.

In sum, the majority of the respondents did not appear to have made a conscious decision, influenced by external as well as personal circumstances, to migrate to the Netherlands. In the case of those highly skilled migrants who came to the Netherlands as refugees, or for reasons of family reunification, the choice for the Netherlands was not made intentionally, but rather the result of coincidence. The majority of those immigrants who came to the Netherlands to work or study did not appear to have made a conscious choice for the Netherlands, based on a deliberate weighing of pros and cons related to Dutch policies or personal circumstances, either. Their choice for the Netherlands was rather based on the offer of jobs for the highly skilled, or the reputation of Dutch Universities. Only one of the respondents who primarily came to the Netherlands to work appeared to have informed herself of policies regarding immigration and access to the labour market prior to choosing the Netherlands

as the country of destination. It is interesting to note that exactly this respondent, as opposed to the majority of the other respondents who came to the Netherlands to work and who had not taken policies into account when making their decision to come to the Netherlands, could not profit from the lenient provisions provided for under the HSM scheme. The fact that she had to rely on the policies applying to 'ordinary' labour migrants had apparently not scared her off.

Based on the above, the conclusion can be drawn that the majority of the respondents did not consciously take Dutch policies into account when making a decision to come to the Netherlands. From the answers to the questionnaire it appeared that a majority (ten) of the respondents were either not or only partially aware of the conditions for working and staying in the Netherlands. Other external factors, such as the offer of jobs for the highly skilled, the reputation of Dutch Universities, the place of residence of the partners or the situation in the country of origin, appear to have played a much larger role. However, reasoning *a contrario*, and excluding the situation of the refugees and those who came to the Netherlands to be with their loved ones, one could say that the respondents would not have ended up in the Netherlands would the Dutch policies regarding immigration and access to the labour market for highly skilled migrants have been less lenient than is currently the case. In case employers would face problems arranging residence and work permits for their foreign employees, they would probably not recruit in third countries. The same applies to those respondents who initially came as students: would they have faced (more) difficulties acquiring the required visa and residence permits than they did, they would probably not have chosen to come to the Netherlands to study. From the story of one of the respondents who came to the Netherlands primarily to reunite with her (then) Dutch boyfriend appears that the *a contrario* reasoning can also apply to those whose choice for the Netherlands was not made entirely voluntarily. This respondent in the first instance came to the Netherlands as a student. Towards the end of her studies, she found out that she could not continue her stay in the Netherlands as a family migrant. The Dutch policy for highly skilled migrants however did enable her to stay in the Netherlands. Saying that the Dutch policy regarding the highly skilled is what made this respondent choose the Netherlands as her country of destination would be inappropriate. But the Dutch rules for highly skilled migrants eventually kept this respondent from moving to another country, thereby playing an important role on a second level.

4.2 Challenges to integration in the Netherlands

This paragraph will elaborate on the respondents' experiences once arrived in the Netherlands. In the questionnaires as well as in the interviews, the respon-

dents were asked what kind of problems they encountered once they arrived in the Netherlands, and to what extent these problems had hampered their (professional) integration in the Netherlands. The respondents were asked to reflect on (possible) problems they encountered that related to practical issues, such as opening a bank account, registering in a municipality and obtaining health insurance. They were furthermore asked to comment on more 'fundamental' problems related to obtaining the permits required to reside and work in the Netherlands. Lastly, respondents were asked to talk about possible problems related to the Dutch language. Do the respondents use the Dutch language? Has their inability to speak Dutch hampered their integration in the Netherlands?

Prior to making any statements about the problems experienced by highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands, it is important to note that these problems have seriously diminished over time. Compared to the experiences of those respondents who came to the Netherlands about a decade ago, those who entered with the purpose of working more recently have experienced far less obstacles settling in the Netherlands. Whereas those respondents who entered the Netherlands in 2000 or 2003 found that their employers were badly informed and were expected to sort things out by themselves, those who came to the Netherlands to work more recently received ample support from their employers, as well as the authorities. According to a respondent who came to the Netherlands more than a decade ago to work at a University, employers have learned through experience how to assist their foreign workers:

'I was one of the first international researchers in my faculty and they were not prepared at all. They had no knowledge of how to help me. Permits and everything took very long. Sofi [social security] number took six months to obtain. I only found out about the 30% tax reduction after three years. There was no information, no willingness and no ability to help people in my position, but I did the best I could. It was a drawback though. In 2000, there was much less information in English than there is today. The learning curve has risen in that respect. There now is more help for international workers.'

Another respondent, who came to the Netherlands for the first time in 2007, came to the same conclusion. As this respondent had left the Netherlands for a period of two years to return there last month, he could compare the current policy to that which applied five years ago. According to him, 'everything is 100 times easier this time' than five years ago. In the words of this respondent:

'Back then [i.e. five years ago] there were no branch offices. I had to go to many different places to sort things out: Rijswijk for the residence permit [Im-

migration and Naturalisation Service], the tax authorities, city hall, it took forever. [...] It took me one and a half months before I had a social security number.'

Being a knowledge migrant under the Highly Skilled Migrants Scheme, this respondent could this time profit from the 'one-stop-shop' procedure at the expat centre, meaning that he could both collect his residence permit and register with the municipality, which allowed him to start working immediately after his visit to the expat centre. The respondent was very happy with the treatment he received at the expat centre, both because of the speed of the procedure ('within two hours, we had everything arranged') and the hospitality displayed by the expat centre staff ('they were bowing down for us').

The other nine respondents who had obtained a residence permit for knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme did not use the services of the expat centres, probably because they either arrived to the Netherlands before such centres had been set up (May 2008), or because they lived in an area which is not covered by one of the four expat centres. They nevertheless stated to have encountered no or only minor problems, which will be discussed below, settling in the Netherlands. These respondents appeared to have received much support from their employers, who helped them obtaining residence permits and explained the steps to take to settle in the Netherlands. As one of these respondents explained:

'Getting a residence permit was arranged by my own institute, I didn't have to do much myself except applying. I went to the Dutch embassy in Turkey to apply for my residence permit on Saturday, and on Wednesday I got it. After I came I did not have any problems with the administration either, I got help also from the institute because there's a lot of international people there.'

Another respondent explained that her employer hired an external agency to deal with her application for a residence permit. And yet another respondent explained how his company took care of the required visa and residence permit, and how he was subsequently helped by the HR department:

'HR gave me a huge list, a step by step approach of what I needed to do, where I needed to go, whether it was required to make an appointment or not. I needed a week to get everything sorted out. They learned from colleagues who came here five years ago. In case I had a question, I called HR.'

One of the respondents explained the privileged position knowledge migrants can be in compared to other (labour) migrants:

'If I get any question, I call the company. Let HR worry about it. You can't solve it, OK, then I'll go back to the USA.'

It is clear that not all highly skilled migrants profit from the privileged position this respondent found himself in. Not all highly skilled migrants have the choice to return to their home countries when they so desire, or are in the same way supported by HR departments having the skills to deal with questions which specifically deal with foreign employees. Furthermore, as not all highly skilled migrants entered via the HSM Scheme, they do not all profit from the privileged treatment in terms of speedy procedures regarding the application of visa or residence permits, or in terms of being exempt from the work permit requirement. Below, an overview will be given of the problems those highly skilled migrants can face. A difference is made between problems related to problems of a 'fundamental' nature, related to issues such as residence, and access to the labour market, and more practical problems related for instance to such issues as taxes, obtaining health insurance and registering at municipalities. Whereas the problems in the first category are mainly suffered by highly skilled immigrants who do not fall under the HSM Scheme, the problems in the latter category will also affect those who did come as labour migrants under the Scheme. Special attention will be paid to the issue of language.

4.2.1 Problems related to working and residing in the Netherlands

Residence and work permits

When answering the question whether the respondents encountered any difficulties obtaining the required permits to be able to reside and work in the Netherlands, a difference needs to be made along the type of residence permit which has been awarded.¹³ The respondents who have been awarded residence permits as knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme generally had positive experiences regarding their immigration to the Netherlands, stating that they did not face mayor problems related to obtaining the required documents to be admitted to and reside in the Netherlands.¹⁴ They thereby praised the support they received from their employers and colleagues, which has already been discussed above. In similar vein, the respondent who had come to the Netherlands to work, but who did not fall under the HSM Scheme,

13 Problems related to acquiring the required residence permits experienced by the respondents who are former refugees are not of interest to the present research, as these problems will not relate to them being highly skilled immigrants. They will therefore not be considered here.

14 As they do not require work permits, they did not experience any problems obtaining these.

stated to have encountered only minor problems related to acquiring the required visa and residence permits.¹⁵

Some of the respondents who had obtained an 'ordinary' residence permit for labour migrants however did report problems. Being a 'regular' labour migrant instead of a knowledge migrant under the HSM Scheme, one of these respondents criticised the fact that this entailed being required to apply for a residence permit every year, whereas knowledge migrants are awarded residence permits for the duration of their contracts. This respondent also criticised the lack of support from his employer. He concluded that

'if the government wants to promote highly skilled migrants to come to the Netherlands, something needs to be done with the employers too. It is not only the IND.'

Above we have indeed seen that help and support received from the employers is highly appreciated. Absence of such help can be problematic, and perhaps even constitute a reason for highly skilled migrants not to come to or stay in the Netherlands. Another respondent who obtained an ordinary residence permit for labour migrants rather than a permit for knowledge migrants complained about the incorrect information she had been given by the IND when applying for a residence permit on several occasions. This led this respondent to

'not trust any live source anymore. I had a lot of negative feedback, but I don't believe that anymore. I do not trust any governmental statement if it is not written.'

Currently, this respondent did not have a residence permit. One of the other respondents seconded the statement this respondent made regarding the provision of information by the authorities, claiming that 'depending on who you talk to they give you different information'. Another respondent explained that the information provided on the internet in this respect does not offer any help either. This respondent explained that, whereas the information on the internet explains the rules, the exact rules are never given, meaning that it is very hard for people to draw conclusions regarding their personal situations based on the information provided:

'You never know whether the rules apply to you. People can never draw any clear conclusions about what the rules mean for them. On the internet, there

15 This respondent stated to have not needed a work permit.

never is specific info. You need to go to a lawyer, because the system is too complex.'

Apparently, according to the experiences of some of the respondents, the system can be too complex for IND employees as well.

As regards the ability to work in the Netherlands, we have seen that those who obtained residence permits as knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme do not need a work permit. Those who did need a work permit in order to access the Dutch labour market however did not report major problems acquiring such a permit. Only one of the respondents had been subject to a limited access to the Dutch labour market. Being a student from outside the EU, this respondent was only allowed to work ten hours a week or fulltime during three months in summer. This respondent circumvented these limitations regarding her access to the Dutch labour market by starting her new job in June. By the time the three month period was over, she had graduated and was allowed to work in the Netherlands full time without restrictions.

Highly skilled immigrants in situations of 'over-qualification'

The fact that they were allowed access to the Dutch labour market did not prevent some of the interviewed respondents to have a job which was (well) below their level of education. Five of the interviewed respondents were currently in a situation of over-qualification. In all cases, the diplomas these respondents had obtained in third countries were qualified as having a lower value than their Dutch equivalents. Three of the respondents were currently studying in the Netherlands in order to in future be able to get a job matching their level of education and skills. Two of these respondents were also working, in order to be able to pay for their studies. One of the respondents feared that she might face problems financing her studies. The other two respondents, both former refugees, received financial assistance from the UAF.

One of the over-qualified respondents explained that his master's diploma in political science and strategic studies was qualified as equal to following (i.e. not completing) two to three years of bachelor studies in the Netherlands. This respondent, who had been involved in all kinds of low-skilled jobs such as cleaning and car spraying ('anything which produces money'), mentioned that besides his diploma being only partially acknowledged, there were other reasons for him not being able to find a job matching his level of education. One of these reasons is the fact that employers do not acknowledge the official acknowledgement of his diploma. And another reason is the fact that he did not master the Dutch language at a high enough level:

'this is a problem you continue to drag along with you'.

The masters diplomas in medicine and psychology of another respondent were qualified as equalling bachelors diplomas in the Netherlands. To obtain the Dutch equivalents of the diplomas obtained in her home country, this respondent would have needed to do internships for two years in both psychology and medicine, and to follow specialised training for six years (medicine). As the respondent reckoned this would take too much time and cost too much money, which she could not invest as she needed to support a family, she initially engaged in employment which was below her level of education when she arrived in the Netherlands. In the end she managed to find several positions on bachelors (HBO) level. This respondent recently started studying psychology. She realised that

'if I do not want to remain stuck in jobs between bachelors and masters level, I will actually need to do a master. That and improve my language skills.'

A third interviewed respondent was a woman (45 years old) who came to The Netherlands in 2004 as a refugee from Iraq. She holds a university degree in history and has been teaching history in a secondary school in Iraq. At the moment she is unemployed. In the Netherlands her degree was not fully recognised. It was qualified as equalling two years of university in the Netherlands. She has held several jobs (in child care, with a municipality, with a secondary school), but has been unable to hold on to any of these. She started a course to get a degree in child care, but did not finish it because she could not find an internship, which was an obligatory part of the course.

More or less the same experience had a fourth respondent, a man, 41 years old who came to The Netherlands as a refugee from Azerbaijan. He got his refugee status in 2005 and has Dutch nationality since 2009. He has a university degree in law in his home country. In the Netherlands he started a course for administrative work, but could not finish this because he could not find an internship. He has a social assistance benefit and is now (obligatory) working at a very low level with Post NL via an organisation the municipality uses for disabled persons. He wants more opportunities for education, but this is refused by the municipality. He speaks Dutch rather well. He is very disappointed in the Dutch authorities, who do not give him a chance to get better qualified work. He sees education as his only way to a meaningful existence.

One of the interviewed migrants in a situation of over-qualification suggested that the Dutch government needed to adopt a different way of looking at those highly skilled migrants who did not come to the Netherlands as knowledge migrants or as students. Instead of approaching them in the same way as the so-called unskilled 'guest workers' who entered the Netherlands in the sixties and seventies had been approached, these immigrants needed to be con-

sidered as 'a gift sent from heaven' instead. Setting up barriers for these highly qualified immigrants in the form of, *inter alia*, the requirement to have their diplomas acknowledged, will only force them to leave the country and try their luck elsewhere. The respondent stated to know several highly skilled migrants who, due to problems finding work at their level in the Netherlands, moved to the UK.

None of the immigrants who found themselves in a situation of over-qualification had been admitted as knowledge migrants under the HSM Scheme.¹⁶ As the employers of the knowledge migrants did not require them to get their diplomas acknowledged, they did not experience any problems in this area.

4.2.2 Practical problems

Several respondents reported to have had practical problems settling in the Netherlands. These problems however did not appear to be related to the fact that they were highly skilled migrants. They mainly related to registering at the municipality and opening a bank account, and appeared to be interrelated. Immigrants settling in the Netherlands need to follow a certain sequence: first, they will need to report at the IND, after which a residence permit can be collected a few weeks later.¹⁷ After the immigrant has reported at the IND, he can go to the municipality to register, after which he will get a social security number. With this number, the immigrant can open up a bank account.

Problems will occur when this sequence cannot be followed, for instance if the appointment at the IND is postponed. In such cases, an immigrant will not be able to register at the municipality, and consequently not be able to open up a bank account where his salary can be paid into. One of the respondents explained that she initially received her salary in cash in an envelope, as she had not been able to open up a bank account. Another respondent explained that his bank had made an exception for him. He could open a bank account without having obtained a social security number.

Problems related to registering at the municipality were also reported. These problems mainly had to do with the fact that, in order to be able to register at a municipality, you will need to submit a birth certificate. Whereas ob-

16 Nevertheless, three immigrants falling under the HSM Scheme stated to have jobs 'somewhat matching their level of education'. The difference between the level of education of these immigrants and the job they were currently doing was however not so big that they were in a situation of over-qualification.

17 If the immigrant can make use of the services offered by the expat centre and the 'one-stop-shop' procedure, the residence permit can be collected at the expat centre immediately. Furthermore, at the expat centre, the immigrant will also be able to register at the municipality.

taining such certificates can be quite straightforward in countries in the European Union, it can be rather problematic for those immigrants originating from a non-EU country. Furthermore, supplying the mere certificate is not enough, as the municipalities will also require the certificate to have been legalised. Lastly, certificates may not be older than one year. One of the respondents, originating from China, explained that

'I had a lot of problems getting a birth certificate. It needs to be double legalised, hence both by China and the Netherlands, as well as translated. It took me half a year to arrange the birth certificate, as we first approached the wrong Chinese institute. [...] Then the first certificate I obtained was refused by the municipality of Utrecht, because they changed the rules for the form to comply with. [...] This whole thing drove me crazy. I contacted the Dutch embassy and the IND that in China this is very difficult, just to give feedback but they didn't really respond to that.'

Another respondent explained that his wife, who joined him in the Netherlands, had problems registering at the municipality, as she could not submit proof regarding the changes that were made regarding her last name.¹⁸ She currently is not registered in the municipality. Another respondent explained that, in order for her to get married with her boyfriend, he has to submit proof that he has not been married in any of the countries he stayed in at an age 'where he was eligible to get married', something they experienced as a barrier.

Furthermore, some of the respondents referred to problems they encountered when filling out their tax forms, or choosing the appropriate health insurance. These problems appear to mainly relate to lacking Dutch language skills, an issue which will be dealt with below.

To help them face these practical problems, the respondents pleaded for extra help, in the form of the appointment of an expert in the company to help the immigrants with these problems. Guidelines explaining what they are entitled to in terms of social security benefits or pensions were also welcomed.

4.2.3 Language

Research has shown that highly skilled migrants, who can mostly cope perfectly using English, experience language as an important barrier to integration (Van

18 The wife of this respondent had changed her last name three times: once when she got married to her former husband, once when she divorced, and another time when she married respondent.

Bochove, Rusinovic & Engbersen 2010).¹⁹ Due to their lacking Dutch language skills, immigrants felt that they were disconnected from important aspects of life, such as contacts with Dutch citizens (Van Bochove, Rusinovic & Engbersen 2010: 39). This conclusion appears to be supported by the statements made by some of the respondents in the framework of the current research, the majority of whom only had low language skills. As one of the respondents explained

'I feel like I am missing life. I don't have the feeling I participate in life.'

All respondents had followed language classes and agreed that there were plenty of opportunities to learn the Dutch language. Those immigrants who were working as highly skilled migrants had been offered to follow courses by their employers. However, at a certain point, most respondents had stopped following these courses. One of the respondents stated that he no longer felt inclined to learn Dutch as he reasoned that, even if he would learn Dutch, he would never be part of 'them', i.e. the Dutch society. This respondent explained that

'the norms and values are not made explicit, but you have to abide by them. You will never be part of the in-group. It is about social dynamics, not just language.'

Another respondent explained that he stopped following courses once he realised that he would never reach a level where he would be able to speak Dutch with everyone.

At the same time, the respondents lamented their lacking Dutch language skills for creating problems in the practice. They mentioned problems they experienced dealing with 'bureaucratic stuff', such as understanding letters from the IND or the tax authorities, which are drawn up in Dutch. One of the respondents said that she has on several occasions been required to sign forms which she did not understand, as they were drawn up in Dutch. Another respondent lamented the fact that she was not able to understand the signs in Dutch hospitals.

Practical problems or the feeling of disconnectedness however appeared not to form big enough incentives for the respondents to improve their language skills. This mainly had to do with the fact that most respondents were able to manage perfectly in their jobs using English. For most respondents, Eng-

19 Another barrier that was mentioned was the fact that the Dutch, in the eyes of the highly skilled migrants, apply a strict separation between work and private life, and the 'closedness' of groups of friends (Van Bochove, Rusinovic & Engbersen 2010: 38).

lish was the language spoken at work, either because they were surrounded by many other non-Dutch speakers, or because they were working in a department which was dealing with international, i.e. border-crossing, affairs.

At the same time, the fact that most Dutch people speak English well is also considered an impediment for them to learning Dutch. Two of the respondents, who spoke a little bit of Dutch, complained that they never got the chance to improve their language skills by practicing, because Dutch people would switch to English the moment they heard that their Dutch was not fluent. One of the respondents explained that

'to be nice, people start to speak English. But that's not being nice.'

This respondent concluded that

'the advantage that Dutch people speak English well is also a disadvantage.'

Whilst the fact that English is spoken widely among Dutch nationals is experienced by some respondents as a barrier to improve their Dutch language skills, it at the same time constituted a reason for two of the respondents to come to the Netherlands. Both respondents were reassured by the fact that English is spoken in the Netherlands. One of the respondents explained that

'I knew that a lot of English was spoken in the Netherlands. This made the choice for the Netherlands less scary, I knew that I would be able to get by.'

Not all of the interviewed respondents had low language skills. Six respondents spoke Dutch, among whom four fluently. The two respondents who spoke Dutch, but not fluently, had Dutch partners. They wanted to learn Dutch to be able to talk with their families in law. These respondents however did not need to speak the Dutch language in their jobs. Unlike the other respondents, those who spoke fluent Dutch did need the Dutch language to be able to find a job matching their level of education. They had not been recruited in a foreign country to come to the Netherlands to perform highly skilled labour. Nor did they primarily come to the Netherlands to study, after which they had found a job matching their level of education. Three of these respondents were former refugees, whereas one of them had come to the Netherlands to look for a job matching her level of education.²⁰ The reason why they started to learn Dutch is that they were unable to find jobs without improving their language skills. This

20 The other former refugee interviewed in the framework of this research did not speak Dutch fluently. This respondent was currently following a study at master's level in English, after which he intended to look for a job where speaking Dutch would not be required.

however did not appear to be sufficient in order to find suitable work, as mastering the Dutch language at a high enough level proved to be problematic, especially in writing.. As one of the respondents explained:

'I often hear that I have good ideas, and a good vision, but language is the problem. Especially writing. It costs me too much time to put something on paper the way it is in my mind. I need to practice more. I feel the lack of Dutch language skills really is a handicap or an impediment. It keeps me from applying for certain jobs. The level of these jobs I can handle, but I fear I will not be able to handle the writing skills that come along with the function. It is an impediment in my career.'

Apart from the problems with the Dutch language, these respondents also experienced the fact that their diplomas were not fully acknowledged as a barrier (see above). Ironically enough, all of the respondents who spoke Dutch fluently were in a situation of over-qualification, whereas those who only had very low language skills were employed in jobs matching their level of education.

Nevertheless, also in jobs where knowledge of the Dutch language is not required can lacking Dutch language skills form a barrier. Two respondents, who were both working at large Dutch multinationals, explained that without good Dutch language skills, moving forward in their careers was not possible. As one of these respondents explained:

'You will hit a glass ceiling in your company in case you don't speak fluent Dutch. You will never get to the director's level unless you speak good Dutch and are familiar with Dutch culture.'

This respondent at the same time however added that

'if you are planning to stay for 5-10 years only, don't bother.'

5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

When asked about their plans for the future, the majority (twelve) of the respondents indicated to have plans to move from the Netherlands. Three respondents stated that they intended to only stay in the Netherlands for the period of their current employment contract. Nine respondents indicated that they were unsure when they would move from the Netherlands. Two respondents did not know whether they would stay in the Netherlands or not. When asked where they intended to move, five respondents thought they would return to their home countries, whereas four respondents did not intend to go back to

their home countries. Three respondents indicated to have another EU country in mind when they thought of leaving the Netherlands, whereas two respondents thought of a country outside the EU to settle in.

Among the respondents who indicated to have plans to move from the Netherlands, two had Dutch nationality. Both of these respondents were former refugees.

Four respondents indicated to intend to stay in the Netherlands permanently. Two of these respondents had Dutch nationality, and either came to the Netherlands as a refugee, or with the purpose of finding a job matching the level of education. The other respondents who indicated to intend to stay in the Netherlands permanently either found a job matching the level of education prior to coming to the Netherlands, or initially came to the Netherlands to study.

6. CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions can be drawn regarding the migration projects of the highly skilled immigrants interviewed for the purpose of this research? And what migration patterns can be drawn up on the basis of these individual plans? As we have seen, most of the interviewed immigrants did not make a conscious choice to migrate to the Netherlands, based either on individual circumstances or on external circumstances regarding Dutch policies on residence, access to the labour market and the acknowledgement of diplomas. This however does not mean that no patterns can be drawn up. In fact, three different patterns can be discerned. These patterns concern three different categories of highly skilled immigrants, divided along the different modes of entry:

- 1) Immigrants who did not make a voluntary choice to come to the Netherlands.
- 2) Immigrants who have been recruited abroad to perform highly skilled labour in the Netherlands, or who entered as students.
- 3) Immigrants who came to the Netherlands with the purpose of looking for a job matching their level of education.

The differences between these categories of highly skilled migrants are depicted in the table below:

Category	Nr. of respondents	Migration to NL voluntary?	Taken policies into account when making decision to come to the Netherlands?	Situations of over-qualification?	Speak Dutch language?	Dutch nationality?	Stay in NL permanently?
1	7	No	No	Yes	Yes or more or less	Yes	Generally: no
2	11	Yes	No	No	No	No	Generally: no
3	1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Only immigrants in the first category have migrated to the Netherlands involuntarily. Immigrants in this category either came to the Netherlands as refugees, or in order to be able to join their partners. Immigrants in the second and third categories came on a voluntary basis: to look for highly skilled work (category 3), or to start studying or working as a highly skilled migrant (category 2). In the second category, immigrants who have been recruited abroad and who have entered the Netherlands under the HSM Scheme can be found. Interestingly enough, these immigrants do not appear to have taken this policy, under which they receive a (much) more beneficial treatment than ‘ordinary’ third country national labour migrants, into account when making their decision to come to the Netherlands. Only immigrants in the third category appear to have consciously taken policies related to, inter alia, residence, access to the labour market, and the acknowledgement of diplomas, into account when making the decision to settle in the Netherlands. Among the respondents, one can be placed in the third category. Ironically enough, this respondent did not profit from a privileged treatment under the HSM scheme. Apparently, the policy applying to ‘ordinary’ third country national labour migrants did not lead this respondent from refraining to come to the Netherlands.

Even though immigrants in the second category have not taken policies into account when making their choice to come to the Netherlands, reasoning *a contrario*, these policies do appear to play an important role at a second level. Would the policies regarding highly skilled migrants and students not be as lenient and enabling as they are, employers would not bother recruiting in foreign countries, immigrants would not be triggered to come to the Netherlands, and students would not consider following education in the Netherlands.

As regards over-qualification, only immigrants in the first and third categories appear to run the risk of being employed at a level which is not (at all) matching their level of education. Over-qualification appears to be connected

to problems related to the acknowledgement of diplomas obtained abroad. An explanation for the fact that immigrants in the second category are less likely to find themselves in a situation of over-qualification is that they were either not required to have their diplomas acknowledged, or did not experience problems when they were.

Lastly, compared to highly skilled immigrants in the first and third categories, those in the second category are less likely to speak Dutch and to have obtained Dutch nationality. The reason why immigrants in the second category of highly skilled immigrants generally have low Dutch language skills is that they are well able to speak English at work. The fact that lacking Dutch language skills can be a problem in the practice and might stand in the way of a feeling of 'connectedness' to the Dutch society does not appear to form an incentive for these immigrants to start learning Dutch.

Apart from those respondents whose primary reason to come to the Netherlands was to reunite with their partners, the immigrants in categories 1 and 3 generally spoke good Dutch. The reason is that they needed Dutch language skills in order to find a job matching their level of education. They have however not yet managed to find such jobs as they still did not master Dutch at a high enough level, especially in writing, and because their diplomas were not fully acknowledged.

Compared to immigrants in the second category and those in the first category who came to the Netherlands to reunite with their partners, immigrants in the first and third categories appeared to have all acquired Dutch nationality. Does this fact, combined with the fact that immigrants in these categories master the Dutch language at a higher level than those in the second category, say anything about their inclination to settle in the Netherlands? Judging from the answers respondents gave to the question related to their plans for the future, this does not appear the case. Among the four immigrants who indicated they wanted to stay in the Netherlands permanently, two found themselves in the second category. At the same time, two of the immigrants who had obtained Dutch nationality and who spoke fluent Dutch, indicated to intend to leave the Netherlands.

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ANNEX

QUESTIONNAIRE for the purpose of the research into the integration of highly skilled migrants

- **Background information at present:**

Country of Origin _____

Nationality*

Dutch

Other _____

Age:

Sex: Male Female

Marital status/family situation _____

Type of residence permit if not Dutch national

Residence permit of highly skilled immigrant

Residence permit of an employed person

Residence permit based on family reunion

Student

Other. What? _____

Length of the residence permit if not Dutch national

Temporary

If temporary please specify:

- The permit was issued on:

- The permit is valid until:

- Has the permit been renewed? Yes/No

Permanent

- **How long have you been living in the Netherlands?**

Has your legal situation changed in the time you have been in the Netherlands?

Yes No

If yes, please explain

- **Did you require a work permit in order to be able to work in the Netherlands?**

Yes

No

- **Education:**

What university degrees (please make a difference between bachelor, master and doctorate levels) do you have and where have you gained them?

How many years did/does your education last? _____

Have you taken up further study in the Netherlands?

Yes No I am in further study at the moment

Not applicable: N/A

If yes, what further studies have you taken/are you taking up? Why?

If no, do you have plans to take up further study?

Yes No

N/A

Has your degree been equated/validated/acknowledged in the Netherlands?

Yes No

I have graduated in the Netherlands

N/A

If yes or no, please mention any problems you (possibly) encountered

If you had your degree equated/validated/acknowledged, were there any costs involved?

Yes (please specify amount):

No

What did these costs consist of (getting documents legalised, translated, etc.)?

• **Living abroad:**

In how many countries have you lived prior to your move to the Netherlands?

If you have lived elsewhere prior to moving to the Netherlands, please indicate where:

Other EU-country, namely:

A country outside the EU, namely:

What were the reasons previously for your move? Was it, for example, studies or work?

This time, did you come to the Netherlands specifically for employment purposes?

Yes

No

If no, please specify briefly for which reasons you originally came to the Netherlands (e.g. seeking asylum, living with family):

If you came to the Netherlands to work, please specify what motivated you to migrate:

New experience

Career development

Improve professional skills

Better living conditions and/or better pay

Difficulties getting employment in the home country

• **Employment before and after the move to the Netherlands:**

How many years of job experience did you have before your move to the Netherlands? _____

What was your profession (job title) before moving to the Netherlands?

What is your job title now in the Netherlands?

In what sector do you work?

- Public sector
 - Third sector (societies and associations)
 - Private sector

What is your professional field?

- Government sector
- Council
- Business and trade
- Social and health care sector
- Education and teaching
- University or Research
- Technology industry
- Other industry (eg. lumber or metal industry)
- Something else, What? _____
- N/A

What is your employment situation compared to your education?

- I have a job entirely matching my level of education
- I have a job that somewhat matches my level of education
- My job does not match at all my level of education
- N/A

Please explain briefly

Is equivalence of degrees important for you to get employment matching your level of education/has equivalence of degrees been important to get employment matching your level of education?

- Yes No, because

- N/A, because

Does your profession have professional qualification standards in the Netherlands?*

Yes No

Yes, for some fields in my profession but not in the field I am in.

N/A

* Professional qualification standards apply in cases of regulated professions (for example nurse, doctor, teacher, lawyer (advocate)). In order to practise a regulated profession, a competent authority needs to equate the professional qualifications.

Would/Did you need to equate your professional qualifications in order to get employment in matching your professional qualifications?

Yes No

N/A

Have you progressed in your career while in the Netherlands?

Yes No

N/A

Is progress in your career possible given the qualifications and experience you currently possess? If no, please explain why not.

Have you been in professional training related to your job while in the Netherlands?

Yes No

N/A

Please explain what kind of training and why:

Do you have plans for further professional training while in the Netherlands?

Yes No N/A

Have you thought of a career change?

Yes No

I have already changed my profession N/A

Is a career change possible with the qualifications and experience you currently possess?

Yes No

• **Integration and awareness:**

Were you aware of the conditions for working and staying in the Netherlands (obtaining work and residence permits, skills and qualifications required to conduct your profession) prior to moving to the Netherlands?

Yes, both

Partially

No

N/A

Please explain briefly

If yes, have the conditions for working and staying in the Netherlands affected your decision to move to the Netherlands?

Yes

No

N/A

Please explain:

Have you taken part in information sessions and/or actively gathered information of how to start your (professional) life in the Netherlands?

Yes No

If yes, what kind of information did you obtain/gather?

From whom did you get support for integrating into the Netherlands?

Educational organisations such as Universities

Societies and different projects, namely:

Initiatives funded by the Dutch state, namely:

I took the integration abroad examination

- Trade Unions
- Your employer
- Own family
- Friends
- Others?

Whom? _____

- No-one

Have you had problems of getting or obtaining the following things?

- Equivalence of your degree
- Equivalence of your professional qualifications
- Residence permit
- Health insurance
- Work permit
- Registering for residence in a certain municipality
- Opening a bank account
- Day care/a school for child(ren)
- Residence permit for spouse/partner
- Work permit for spouse/partner
- Problems with something else, what? _____
- No problems

Please explain:

Have these problems hampered your professional integration (i.e. getting a job matching the level of your education, moving forward in your career)?

Have these problems influenced your plans for the future? If yes, in what way?

Has the Dutch language been a problem to you in getting a job or moving forward in your career?

- Yes, both situations
- Only in moving forward in my career
- Only in getting a job

No problems

N/A

Have you experienced discrimination in the Netherlands?

Yes No

If yes, where did you experience discrimination?

At work place

In services

As general atmosphere

Please explain:

• **Future plans:**

Are you planning to stay in the Netherlands?

Yes, permanently

Yes, but only for the period of my current residence permit (if not a permanent residence permit)

Yes, but only for the period of my current employment contract (if not permanently employed)

No, my plans are to move from the Netherlands someday but I am not sure about when

I do not know

My plans are to leave in _____ time

If you plan to move away from the Netherlands at some point, have you planned to move/would you like to move:

To another EU country

Outside EU but not home country/country of origin

Back to home country/country of origin

- **Final questions and recommendations:**

Overall, how would you evaluate your professional integration in the Netherlands? Did you have problems realising your (work-related) aims for migrating?

How would you evaluate your social integration (contacts with Dutch people (structural contacts and casual encounters), membership in associations, contacts with neighbours, etc.)?

What recommendations would you like to make, based on your own experiences, to improve the overall 'migration experience' of highly skilled immigrants?
