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Migration Motives of Highly Skilled Migrants; a case study of Highly Skilled Migrants in Groningen

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Table of Contents

Colophon.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Summary	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	5
1.1 Background to the importance of Highly skilled migrants for developing countries	5
1.2 Research Problem	6
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework.....	7
2.1 Defining highly skilled migrants	7
2.2 Migration motives.....	8
2.2.1 Social Factors	8
2.2.2 Life-course as an approach to migration motives	8
2.2.3 Institutional and political factors	9
2.4 Application of theories and concepts	9
2.5 Conceptual model.....	9
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	10
Chapter 4. Results.....	11
4.1 Social factors influencing highly skilled migrant migration decisions.....	11
4.1.1 Language	11
4.1.2 Ethnicity	12
4.1.3 Gender	12
4.2 Life-course events influence on migration motives:.....	13
4.2.1 Career progressions	13
4.2.2 Migration distance	13
4.2.3 Linked lives.....	14
4.3 Political and institutional Factors.....	14
4.3.1 Bureaucratic.....	14
4.3.2 Knowledge of highly skilled migrants’ benefits and visa limitations	15
4.3.3 30 percent ruling.....	15
4.4 COVID-19.....	16
Chapter 5. Conclusion	16
5.1 Discussion and Conclusion	16
5.2 Reflection	18
5.3 Recommendations	18
Reference List.....	18

Appendices.....	22
Appendix 1: Interview Guide	22
Appendix 2: Code map.....	25

Summary

Highly skilled migrants (further referred to as HSM's) are rising to become a dominant force in current global migration patterns. Not only are they of importance on a global scale for the transfer of knowledge but also to fill in gaps of human capital in destination countries. HSM's have been found

to provide economic growth and innovation to developed countries. The Netherlands, which is suffering from an ageing population is falling behind in the global competition for these HSM's.

Economic motives are excluded as previous studies already identify these as a core interest for HSM's. Previous studies also mention tendency to underestimate the 'human face' of migrants. This research explores the 'human face' of migrants as suggested by previous research. This is done with the help of three main themes, namely social factors, life-course events, and political and institutional challenges. To explore these themes the following research question was formed;

“What motives besides economic influence HSM's in choosing the Netherlands as a location to migrate to?”

The motives are investigated qualitatively through a series of in-depth interviews. Results show the most influential motivational factors to be Language, Linked lives, Career progression, Migration distance. Less influential factors include Bureaucratic challenges, Highly Skilled Migrant financial benefits, gender, ethnicity and visa's and permits. Additionally while not the focus of the study the COVID-19 crisis proved to have a be major factor and bias in HSM's past and future migration patterns.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the importance of Highly skilled migrants for developing countries

HSM's are becoming increasingly important in current global migration patterns. According to a migration data brief by the OECD, the periods between 2000 and 2001 and 2015 and 2016 saw a rise of the share of highly educated migrants from 27% to 35% for those originating outside of the OECD

area and a rise from 21% to 30% for those originating from within an OECD country (OECD, 2019). The data shows there were “more tertiary-educated immigrants in OECD Countries than low-educated immigrants” in 2015/16 (OECD, 2019). A shift can be seen where skilled migrants are participating in the concept of brain circulation. The migration of HSM is not a sudden increase but rather a continuous flow of human capital.

In 2016 and 2018, about 4,2% (or 383,000 people) of the Dutch population were classified as “kenniswerkers” or skilled migrants, an increase of 1,5% from the 2.7% in 2003 and 2005 (CBS et al., 2020). The Netherlands, however, has a significantly lower growth in HSM than some comparable countries. Belgium, the neighbouring country saw an increase from 3,8% to 7,2% in the same period. This is still relatively low as countries such as Luxemburg, Switzerland, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Sweden all saw an increase of more than twice that value (CBS et al., 2020). The Netherlands is therefore clearly lagging compared to its neighbouring countries. The global competition for HSM has increased due to importance of these migrants providing economic growth and innovation for developed countries (Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

This study aims to contribute to discussions regarding migration motives of HSM, Looking at it from a holistic view as suggested by Bailey and Mulder (2017). Previous research views HSM’s mainly economic agents and how to maximise the return on their human capital (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Economic and financial motives are often referred to but “there has been a tendency to underestimate the “human face” of “elite” migrants (Kõu et al., 2015). The human face includes social and cultural elements such as family dynamics and social networks and looks at HSM’s as not just labour or economic efficiency but as people.

Economic motives will not be addressed in great detail. This is due to there already being an abundance of prior research on the topic and is often viewed as a given for HSM’s. An article by Salt explains the economic motive of HSM’s well by stating; “The core of the interest in the migration of the highly skilled is economic”, due to modern industries and services requiring their expertise (Salt, 1997). Instead, this research has an emphasis on other more personal motives than economic to identify what influence these have.

1.2 Research Problem

The Netherlands is lagging in attracting HSM’s compared to similar OECD countries (OECD,2019; CBS et al., 2020). The EU Commission recently proposed a new pact on Migration and Asylum, addressing migration, asylum, integration, and border management of the EU member states. It aims to “create more efficient and fair migration processes, reducing unsafe and irregular routes and promoting sustainable and safe legal pathways to those in need of protection” (The European Union, 2021). In it, the European Commission mentions the importance of skilled workers, noting “Europe has an ageing and shrinking population and skills shortages that need to be addressed” (ShengenVisaInfo, 2020). Migration is needed to keep Europe competitive as it’s currently “losing the global race for talent” compared to non-EU OECD countries such as Canada, USA and Australia (ShengenVisaInfo, 2020). In 2014, CBS states the Netherlands is also suffering from an ageing society: “the Dutch population is ageing more and more rapidly...half of the Dutch adults will be over 50 in 2019” (CBS, 2014). Up to date data by CBS shows their prediction was correct and currently more than 50% of the adult Dutch population is older than 50 (CBS, 2021). These combined factors show the importance of attracting HSM’s to tackle the problem of an ageing society and lack of immigrant skilled workers in the Netherlands.

This research serves as a case study on HSM's (which will be elaborated on and conceptualized in the theoretical framework) present in the Netherlands as teaching professionals, the largest category of key workers in the European Union (ShengenVisaInfo, 2020). The aim of this exploratory research is to identify what motives HSM's have when choosing a country to migrate to. The research area of interest will be situated in Groningen, the Netherlands.

The central research question for this study is: *"What motives besides economic influence HSM's in choosing the Netherlands as a location to migrate to?"*. Three sub-questions will help answer this central research question:

1. What social factors influence HSM's migration motives?
2. To what extent do life-course events influence HSM's motives?
3. What are political or institutional challenges HSM's face when choosing the Netherlands as a location to migrate to?

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining highly skilled migrants

As HSM's are a recurring concept, a definition will first be constructed for this research. In general, HSM's are defined as individuals with tertiary education or an equivalent specialized work experience (Iredale, 1999; Kõu et al., 2015). As the focus of this research is based around the Netherlands however it's also essential to look at how HSM's are defined in this institutional context. The research by the CBS uses the following definition for "kenniswerkers", translated from Dutch; "International knowledge workers are individuals from private households who belong to the labor force, who are born in a country other than they are currently residing, and who have a high level of education." (CBS, 2020; translation). Key aspects of this definition are they are part of the labor force which is important to note for HSM's as they are often employed in sectors of economic or social importance. The high level of education aspect of this definition follows the UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) international standard classification of education abbreviated as ISCED-2011 (UNESCO, 2015). ISCED-2011 is the statistical framework for organizing information on education used by UNESCO.

ISCED-2011:

ISCED 0	Early childhood education
ISCED 1	Primary education
ISCED 2	Lower secondary education
ISCED 3	Upper secondary education
ISCED 4	Post-secondary non-tertiary education
ISCED 5	Short-cycle tertiary education
ISCED 6	Bachelor's or equivalent level
ISCED 7	Master's or equivalent level
ISCED 8	Doctoral or equivalent level

Figure 1.1: ISCED-2011 (UNESCO, 2015)

ISCED 5, 6, 7 and 8 are all regarded as a high level of education. A key difference of this definition is it does not use HSM's but rather international knowledge workers, these two concepts are interchangeable as their definition is similar. This research will use the term HSM and assume they

have completed ISCED 5 or higher and will therefore be based on qualifications rather than working experience.

2.2 Migration motives

As this research is looking at motives it's important to conceptualize what motives migrants might have besides economic. Three themes are identified in the paper 'Highly skilled migration between the global north and south: gender, life-courses and institutions. These have been identified as "important to highly skilled migrations but have remained underemphasized" (in research) (Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

2.2.1 Social Factors

The first theme sees migrants as not just economic agents, but also social, cultural and political marked by race, ethnicity, class and gender, which is abbreviated in Bailey and Mulder's paper as 'gender, identities and social inequality' (2017). HSM's cannot be viewed as a single identity, gender is an example of an identity which is often underrepresented. The dominant image of HSM's is often of a male and sees women as the co-movers (Iredale, 2015; Kōu and Bailey, 2017; Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Gender norms also play a role as they may act as push or pull factors for migrants' decisions to migrate or to stay (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Social inequality may cause a 'culture of migration' where "skilled migration becomes the norm to the extent that it influences the choice of higher education and occupation" (Bailey and Mulder, 2017; Ali, 2007). This is also relevant for the privileged middle class who do not depend on remittances but see international migration as moving up in social hierarchy (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). HSM's may also face inequalities regarding gender, ethnicity, and class in the form of 'othering' in the labor market or social spaces.

Another potential migration motive is language. Linguistics are important for a migrant's well-being in a foreign country, and affect "disparities in terms of educational attainment, earnings and social outcome" (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015). The ability to learn a foreign language quickly can be an important factor in potential migrants' decision-making (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015). Studies also show it's easier to learn a language if the native language is like the foreign language (Chiswick and Miller, 2005; Isphording and Otten, 2011). Another pull factor for migrants is when there is a "widely-spoken native language in the destination country" (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015), for example, in the Netherlands this would be English. While it isn't the native language English proficiency is known to be of a high standard which could result in pull factors for migrants. Additionally, "learning/practicing/improving the skills of widely spoken languages in the destination countries may serve as a pull factor especially for temporary migrants" (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015),

2.2.2 Life-course as an approach to migration motives

The second theme is life-course choices and linked lives. The life-course approach focuses on life events and transitions of individuals, for example entry into partnership, having a child, becoming homeowners, entering or leaving the labour market, enrolling in education and retirement plans, which all shape their migration decisions (Bailey and Mulder 2017). When examining life-courses of HSM's it's important to investigate current as well as previous life-course events and the possible impacts this might have on their current trajectory (Feijten, 2005; Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Linked lives looks at the aspect of family dynamics, such as sharing households, tied movers, tied stayers, and kin relationships. Family dynamics as well as relationship considerations also play a major role for migration decisions (Geddie, 2012; Clark and Withers, 2007; Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

The Life-course theme is also tackled by Kõu et al. which explore life-course and migration of the HSM's. Their research points out "highly educated people are more likely to move more often over longer distances" and "migration propensity depends on family status and composition" (Kõu et al., 2015). Kõu et al. also state family formation occurs less among HSM's, however, some studies have concluded migration is shortly followed by childbirth (Kõu et al., 2015). Migration decisions are intrinsically linked to life-course events, however, not all migration decisions depend solely on this and "contextual factors such as economic development, social inequalities, degree of gender equity, cultural norms and value systems" all influence life-course decisions as well as the migration trajectory (Kõu et al., 2015).

2.2.3 Institutional and political factors

The final theme of institutions and policies focusses on labour market policies and migration policies. This could include categorisation on whether migrants fall into the skilled migrant category (which differs per country). Two notable examples are the UK with its Points-Based Tier system and the EU with its Blue-Card system and visas for Skilled Worker (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Policies play an important role in shaping skilled migration from a macro-perspective (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Migration policies depend on the political climate as well as economic factors. Additionally, the role of the employers is of more importance as well. In the Netherlands, employers are required to report any changes in a highly-skilled employee's contract or length of stay (Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

A potential influential policy is the 30% facility, which allow for individuals who are eligible to benefit from a 30% tax exemption of their salary. This measure was put into place to help expats cover the additional costs they incur from working in the Netherlands, such as travel expenses, additional housing costs and day-to-day expenses (Vankan et al., 2017). Recently in 2019 this benefit was reduced from 8 years to 5 years. This change could have certain impacts for migrants looking to move to the Netherlands but there was limited further research about the effect of this change due to the change being recent.

2.4 Application of theories and concepts

The concepts and theories from the texts above will be used in the research is the conceptualization of the term HSM's as well as the three themes of *social factors*, *Life-course events*, *political and institutional* (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). The themes will mostly be used as a guide to understand the motives of HSM's. They identify useful topics and categories allowing for a contextual approach during data collection and analysis. The interview guide will also be guided by these three themes.

2.5 Conceptual model

The conceptual model which will be used for this research is based mostly on the three themes of highly skilled migration by Bailey and Mulder (2017). Gender and ethnicity and their possible inequalities are split as two concepts as these differ from each other and tackling them separately will be more valuable. The economic motive is also mentioned but as evident by the main research question will be minimally covered, hence the grey highlight. The model's central theme is migration motives. The first two concepts aim to establish HSM's by mentioning the ISCED classification of highly skilled conceptualized earlier in the theoretical framework. The model will mostly be used to fall back on the migration motives and to keep the research structured around these 3 main motives.

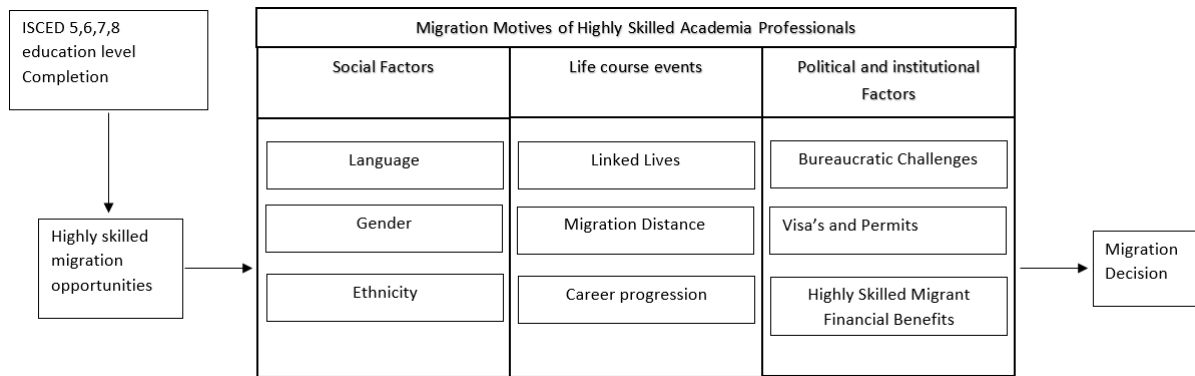


Figure 2.1 *Conceptual model*

Chapter 3. Methodology

As the research was mostly focused on interviews with skilled migrants it will be qualitative. The interviews were semi-structured. Interviewees were from the RUG (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen). As the interview questions primarily addressed the experiences of the participants, a phenomenological approach was used. This approach focusses on ‘phenomena’ or the experiences of individuals and the meaning behind these experiences (Paley, 2016). This research is a case study on teaching professionals as they are the largest category of key migrant workers in the European Union (Schengen visa info, 2020). Contacting individuals from the RUG was done through mail as contact information was readily available. If responses through mail were limited, an adapted snowball technique was used, asking participants if they know any further contacts which could be interviewed.

An Interview guide was created which covered all relevant guiding questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in ATLAS.ti. This program was used to create a clear overview of the interview data and identify what themes were most occurring. The coding was primarily deductive but had some inductive aspects. The primary codes and variables were based on the main concepts of this research as illustrated in the theoretical framework and conceptual model. A certain aspect of inductive coding, however, was used when migration motives were identified which did not correlate with prior deducted codes. For example, “social” could be a main group code, then sub-categories based on the social can be created, namely, family dynamics, housing situation, inequality, gender or language (barriers).

For the first theme, *social factors*, topics such as social inequality, gender, identity, language were of importance. These topics and questions about prior social interactions and challenges was the basis to help identifying what value HSM’s place on social factors. For the second theme, *Life-course events*, topics such as family dynamics, relationships and career goals were of importance to cover all main aspects of the life-courses of the HSM’s. Finally for the theme, *political or institutional challenges*, questions were asked regarding their potential prior knowledge of the Dutch political and institutional aspects of HSM’ to identify if this played a role in their migration decision.

This research also followed the European code of conduct for research integrity (ALLEA 2017). An informed consent form was given before interviewing. Data given by interviewees was given anonymity for privacy protection. Interview data was stored safely and viewed only by the researcher and supervisor when necessary. The well-being of the participants is of importance and therefore they

were able to freely withdraw from the research process at any time without having to provide a reason. Additionally, clarity and transparency were key points of importance when communicating with participants before and after the interview was conducted to keep participants updated with their role in the research process. Interviews were also planned at times participants were comfortable with by allowing them to offer time options to avoid pressuring them.

Eight interviews were conducted. An overview of when the Interviews were conducted can be seen in Table 3.1. As the interviewees requested to remain anonymous, their nationalities and occupations are therefore instead to differentiate between the respondents

Table 3.1 Overview of respondents and dates of interview

Respondent #	Gender/Nationality	Date of interview	Medium	Duration (minutes)
Respondent 1	Male, British	2-11-2021	In-person	26
Respondent 2	Female, British	2-11-2021	In-person	14
Respondent 3	Female, German	10-11-2021	Online, google meets	19
Respondent 4	Male, American	4-11-2021	Online, google meets	23
Respondent 5	Female, Russian	5-11-2021	In-person	31
Respondent 6	Female, Spanish	10-11-2021	In-person	29
Respondent 7	Male, Swiss	8-11-2021	In-person	44
Respondent 8	Female, Canadian	10-11-2021	In-person	37

Chapter 4. Results

4.1 Social factors influencing highly skilled migrant migration decisions.

4.1.1 Language

Interview data shows language plays a small role in the initial decision-making of HSM's. This is especially due to the high degree of English fluency present in the Netherlands. One interviewee stated the following, which the majority of the participants agree with.

“It’s relatively easy to live everyday life without having to learn an incredible amount of Dutch as almost everyone speaks fluent English, So that wasn’t really deterring factor” (Male-American, 4-11-2021).

Literature shows similar findings stating a pull factor for migrants is a “widely-spoken native language” (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015). While English isn’t the native language it’s widely spoken in the Netherlands. One participant stated being influenced by such a pull factor.

“One of the thing I was thinking of when applied for this job is that well, I can improve my English. Because the Dutch is impossible for me at this time of my life, I cannot learn that. And I know that here is a country where you can work and live with English” (Female-Spanish, 10-11-2021)

Most interviewees stated there was little motivation to learn Dutch due to this. Interestingly most interviewees said while they try to learn Dutch, they have trouble practicing it due to native speakers

transitioning to English almost immediately in conversations with foreigners. Thus, decreasing their motivation.

Areas where participants faced challenges regarding language were primarily social integration and bureaucratic challenges, the latter of which will be addressed in section 4.3.1. Participants stated social integration is challenging when unable to speak the native language. A method of integrating however seemed to be through partners.

“The only way you can sort of integrate into the Dutch community is if you have a Dutch partner, and then you get introduced to their friends and their family.” (Female-British, 2-11-2021).

Literature shows linguistic skills can affect disparities in terms of social outcome which is likely what participants are experiencing (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015). In the professional atmosphere most participants did not experience language barriers, however this is mostly due to participants working at the University where speaking English is preferred. One participant who works part-time at an architectural firm had a different experience which illustrates the importance of being able to speak Dutch in sectors other than academia.

“I work at a architecture firm as well. And it's very challenging for me to advance in my career. Because of the language barrier. I think I'm getting to a point to understand that I'll be a Canadian working on international projects. Never a Dutch Canadian working purely in Dutch because it takes it's too much energy.” (Female-Canadian, 10-11-2021).

4.1.2 Ethnicity

Ethnicity was not a deciding factor for most participants when looking at migration decision-making. The majority stated they didn't feel any form of inequality regarding their ethnicity. One participant felt however that;

“Spanish people are not well considered abroad, Not especially here but everywhere” (Female-Spanish, 10-11-2021).

This however was a broader statement not specific to the Netherlands. Besides this there were no difficulties regarding ethnicity. One participant noted they felt as a “invisible immigrant” due to them fitting in and not feeling different to the native populace (Female, Canadian, 10-11-2021). Ethnicity was not a motivational factor for participants when considering their migration options. Ethnicity has less of a push-pull influence on migration decisions to migrate or to stay as compared to literature (Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

4.1.3 Gender

Gender was like ethnicity regarding migration decision-making. Some female participants stated they sometimes still feel a sense of patriarchy but mention this is universal and not specific to the Netherlands. Some even were positive of gender equality in the Netherlands,

“Regardless of where I go, being a woman is tough. I'm just lucky that I now live in a country (referring to the Netherlands) where it's not as tough (Female-British, 2-11-2021).

One participant stated they preferred to move to a country which was not too different from their own but never looked at established gender or ethnic inequalities (Female, German, 10-11-2021). Literature by Bailey and Mulder (2017) also looks at the co-moving aspect of gender norms this was only identified once in the interviews, however it should be noted a primary reason for this was her feeling of lack of purpose in her job at the time;

"I guess my work was more important than hers in terms of location and in terms of family balance. Because, first of all, she didn't really love her job." (Male-Swiss, 8-11-2021).

4.2 Life-course events influence on migration motives:

4.2.1 Career progressions

An important aspect of life-course events for HSM's is career progression. Most participants stated this as being an important motivational factor for their migration decision. Having career progression with economic gain was not a requisite.

"If the money stays the same, so you're not seeing any economic increase or decrease, then I'd be happy because it still be a job, And it still probably be like another experience to get further ahead." (Male-British, 2-11-2021).

Another stated migrating to a job in the Netherlands was so they would feel more empowered and established when moving back to their home country (Female, Russian, 5-11-2021). Literature shows a similar finding in which the privileged middle class don't always depend on remittances but see international migration to move up in the social hierarchy (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). Participants were all working in Academia which may play a role regarding their disregard for economic gain, one participant sums it up well.

"I don't think people move for money. In academia, people are very rarely motivated by money, they need to make sure that they have a way of living, means to live. But they are more motivated by securing a stable job than then actually a job that pays well." (Male, Swiss, 8-11-2021).

Most participants mentioned the struggles of finding employment in Academia and expressed their value for job stability. Job stability and employment therefore also seem to be more important for HSM's than economic motivations. This no doubt also plays a role in their decision-making in migration options.

4.2.2 Migration distance

Research regarding migration distance and family shows "highly educated people are more likely to move more often over long distances" (Kōu et al., 2015). Participants however had mixed responses, two individuals stated moving further away from family doesn't bother them and they rank pursuing career advancements as being more influential (Male, American, 4-11-2021; Male, British, 2-11-2021). Other participants in contrast expressed the importance of family and are hesitant from moving further away from them. COVID-19 played a role in this as participants re-evaluated the importance of their family.

"The pandemic, made me realize that I can't go much further. It just takes too long to get home and see family and you just feel so disconnected." (Female-British, 2-11-2021).

"Sometimes I think I would like to leaving America in the United States, because I enjoy when I was there for three months. But I also feel how far you are. I mean, I think I cannot be that far with one ocean in between my family." (Female-Spanish 10-11-2021)

Participants with elderly parents were also especially reluctant to move further away from their home country in the case of emergencies. Additionally, many participants already self-reflected the distance they would want to live away from their home country and many came to the conclusion they are

reluctant to move further away. This reflection however seems to be biased by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is discussed further in section 4.4.

4.2.3 Linked lives

Another key aspect of life-course choices is linked lives as this often plays a major role when deciding to migrate (Bailey and Mulder, 2017). For participants in relationships this caused push and pull factors. Families of mixed nationalities moved to the home country of one of the partners to reunite and be closer to their family.

“His father lived in the Netherlands and we decided to do a give our relationship another try. And then also allow my son to have some exposure to his Dutch heritage...and I left my job in Canada.” (Female-Canadian, 10-11-2021).

“In this case, it was really moving closer to my wife's family. But it also means moving away from my own family and friends” (Male-Swiss, 8-11-2021).

As can be seen by the two quotes above however this comes at the cost of their own family or in some cases their job. This does re-emphasize the impact linked lives has on migration choices. Younger participants relationships also had a large impact on their migration motives. Akin to the literature co-moving sharing households are important dynamics which influence migration decisions (Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

“I started looking for a job in Groningen because of this boyfriend. And I think that's, that would be a big reason to stay. (Female-German, 10-11-2021)

“it was always planned that she joined me in Europe, and whether I'm still doing the PhD when she comes, or I have a different job. So the plan was that she would follow me wherever my job goes. (Male-British, 2-11-2021)

Linked lives prove to be in some cases not only a major motivational factor for HSM's to migrate but also a deciding factor and affect migration trajectory.

4.3 Political and institutional Factors

Important to note is that during the interviews different results were found from that of the theoretical framework. Political and institutional challenges were barely influential for migrants when deciding to move to the Netherlands but played a larger role upon arrival.

4.3.1 Bureaucratic

The area where participants stated they had the most challenges concerning political and intuitional factors was Bureaucratic. This includes aspects such as tax forms, corona policy measures, and general administration. The challenges faced were that the English versions were not easily accessible or not available at all. All participant stated they needed to either ask for help from Dutch colleagues or hire an individual to do their paperwork for them.

“We had to go to a tax lawyer last year, and I signed all the stuff we talked about, and it was Gezellig and whatever. But at the end of the day, I really don't know what I signed.” (Female-Canadian, 10-11-2021)

While it seems to be a minor inconvenience one participant felt the inability to fill in such basic forms is a form of inequality and a disadvantage compared to native residents

“And I think that’s really unfair, because then of course, you have a huge disadvantage compared to that people or people who speak the language who can just do it, so that’s not super inclusive.” (Female-German 10-11-2021)

Important to note is that participants had an easier time completing bureaucratic forms when they were able to fill them in online. This allowed them to easier translate hard-to-understand sections.

4.3.2 Knowledge of highly skilled migrants’ benefits and visa limitations

Knowledge of benefits or visa was surprisingly limited for most of the participants, especially those who came from an EU country. Obviously, those situated outside the EU had to inform themselves for their work visa’s but this was primarily done through the human resources department of the employer. An example of this can be seen from the interviewees experience below.

“I had already situated the idea that I could potentially move from the US to the Netherlands. And I think it was already in the very last stages of me, taking a position here that I spoke with someone from HR, who then informed me about the visa process” (Male-American, 4-11-2021)

This is a common trend found in the interviews, where the interviewee’s focus primarily on first landing the job and afterwards informing themselves about all he possible benefits. Once again, a focus on career progression can be seen above economic benefit when looking at migration motives, like section 4.2.1. Any benefits were more seen as a bonus rather than a core motivational factor, as can be seen by the quote below.

“I was not aware of the 30% rule before I came here. And it was just when I started discussing practical things before, I signed the contract. But when I started discussing practical aspects, I was already offered the job that my future boss was started telling me, you know, you are eligible. And it does make a big difference. So it was not really part of my choice. But it certainly makes things better.” (Male-Swiss, 8-11-2021)

4.3.3 30 percent ruling

Another key aspect for HSM’s is their eligibility to apply for the 30 percent ruling. This ruling was recently reduced from 8 to 5 years. This measure was put into place to help expats cover the additional costs they incur from working in the Netherlands, such as travel expenses, additional housing costs and day-to-day expenses (Vankan et al., 2017). All but one participant stated it not being the primary motivational factor for moving to the Netherlands but rather a welcome benefit. The one individual where the 30% ruling was most influential stated it as being a reason to stay in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“a big factor of what’s kept me here, during the pandemic was the 30% facility.” (Female-British,2-11-2021).

Other participants saw the tax exemption more as an added benefit as their focus was on career progression. Some went on stating the 30 percent ruling it not needed in their field of work (Academia) or relevant in their case the ruling is intended as for people who have specific expertise which is not found or hardly found in the Dutch labour market (Vankan et al., 2017)

“So I don't I'm not completely certain that this 30% rule is necessary, at least in academia, it might be more necessary in private firms that compete with other global cities.” (Male-Swiss, 8-11-2021).

“I have the 30% ruling. if you want my honest opinion, if I'm selfish, I think it's great. But at the same time it's an old fashion policy. Because I'm supposed to be hired because there is no other profile like me here. But that is not true.” (Female-Spanish, 10-11-2021).

The 30% ruling doesn't seem to be of value in every sector of work, the reduced time of the ruling also doesn't have any clear effect on the participants migration motives. Governments could lay more focus on looking at the benefit and or necessity of the 30% percent ruling different sectors. Identifying which sectors the Netherlands is lacking expertise in and placing more emphasis on benefits for those sectors would be a better solution albeit a more time-consuming solution.

4.4 COVID-19

Another influential impact for HSM's migration decisions is COVID-19. This had a definite impact for all participants. A portion of them stating their experience here in the Netherlands was biased and caused them reevaluate their migration decisions. A degree of homesickness was felt among the participants which made them realize they would at some point return to their home country if they did not initially move to the Netherlands for family reasons.

“If you're going to ask me about the pandemic and how it involves, and affects my plans but in a way, it forced me to feel a bit more homesick than I ever felt before. ... If it remains for a long time. It might be one of the arguments why I might decide to move closer to my parents and live in Moscow instead” (Female-Russian, 5-11-2021)

“It reinforced homesickness and it made my doubt reemerge. The doubts I had when I signed the contracts. It made the drawback of coming here, suddenly more obvious.” (Male-Swiss, 8-11-2021)

“That (COVID-19-lockdown/curfew) made me homesick. And I think at that point, it became clear to me that I was definitely on a path to moving back to the US at some point.” (Male-American, 4-11-2021)

The experiences quoted above give an indication what kind of impact the COVID-19 crisis can have on migrants living abroad. Overall, the crisis seems to have a major impact on future migrations and length of stay of migrants already present in the Netherlands. As the crisis is still relatively new research regarding the corona crisis and (highly skilled) migrants were limited or non-existent. However, it's a topic that should be considered for future research as respondents felt it had a major impact on their migration motives.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to identify what motivates HSM's migration decisions. First, it's important to note migration motives is a complex issue which often includes multiple push and pull factors as well as numerous costs and benefits. However, from the research a few patterns could be identified that help answer the research Question. To help answer this an adapted conceptual model is shown below.

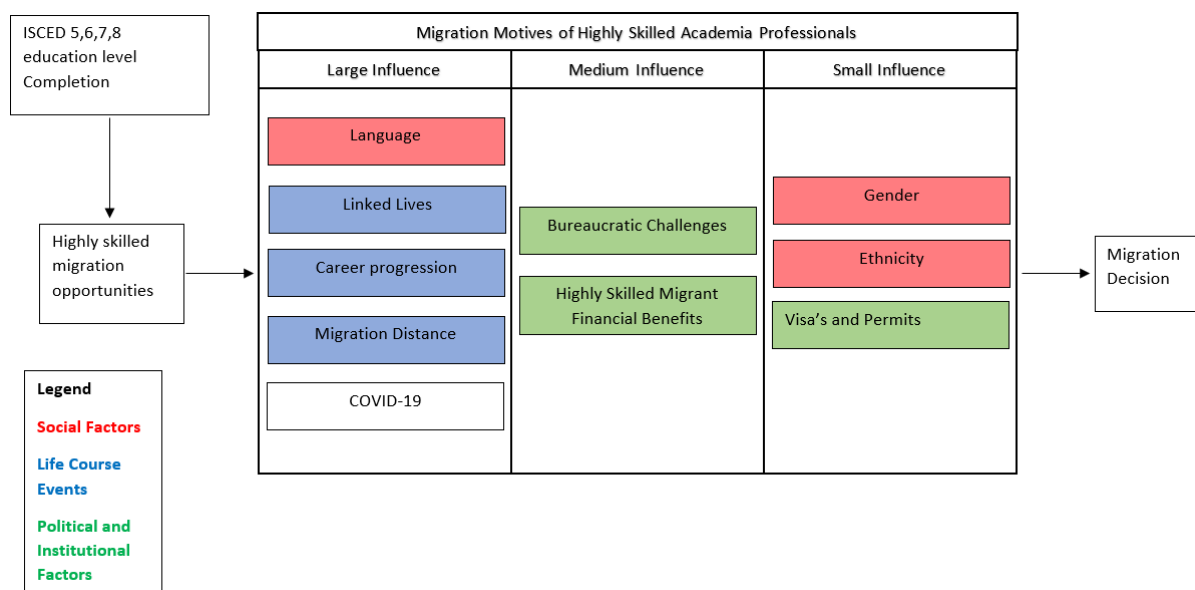


Figure 5.1 Updated Conceptual Model

This updated version of the conceptual model illustrates each migration motive researched on a scale from having a large influence on small influence on HSM's in the academia sector.

Language was identified as having a large influence. The fluency native residents have over English was for many participants an important motivational factor. It allowed for a smooth transition into a foreign country. This correlates with the Literature on widely spoken native languages (Adserà and Pytliková, 2015). While at first glance it seems to be a positive motivational factor Language poses challenges for HSM's who try to integrate into Dutch society, as they don't speak Dutch, it presents a contradiction where due to the fluency of native residents, HSM's aren't motivated or driven to learn Dutch. Causing HSM's social integration to suffer and possibly affect future migration decisions.

Linked lives proves to be in some cases not only a major motivational factor for HSM's to migrate but also a deciding factor for migration trajectory. This was expected as Literature emphasizes the importance of family dynamics and relationships for HSM's (Bailey and Mulder, 2017).

Literature regarding migration distance states "HSM's are more likely to move over longer distances" (Kõu et al., 2015). Contradictorily this study shows HSM's are hesitant to move further away from their family reemphasizing the importance of family dynamics and to a degree linked lives once again. This finding is however biased by COVID-19 as many research participants felt increased 'homesickness' due to the pandemic restrictions. Further research would need to be conducted to assume if this finding is an outlier due to this bias.

Career progression also proves to be an important motivational factor especially for HSM's in the Academia sector. Job stability and employment prove to be influential to HSM's than Economic motivations. Global competition in a job limited atmosphere is the likely culprit to this favourability for job stability and employment rather than economic gain. This also explains the little influence financial benefits such as the 30 %percent had on HSM's. Such benefits are seen as a welcome benefit and not essential. In some cases, however such a benefit can tip the scales in favour of migrating for HSM's considering costs and benefits.

Bureaucratic challenges had no influential role in the initial migration decision for HSM's. However once present in the Netherlands this was more influential, but still limited regarding future migration

decisions, such as staying in the Netherlands or return migration. Such bureaucratic challenges are however present in most countries with a foreign language to that of the participant. The lack of literature found on the topic reinforces the insignificance of this theme. The main issues surrounding the bureaucratic challenges relate more to language and social integration rather than bureaucracy itself.

Social factors such as ethnicity and gender had a minimal if any impact on migration motives of HSM's in contrast to the literature by Bailey and Mulder, (2017). Knowledge of benefits the participants were eligible for were also surprisingly limited and was mostly handled through the HR department of the employer. Overall, these factors seem to be overshadowed by more important motivational factors from the participants.

Another key find was the influence the COVID-19 pandemic had on future migration decisions. The most influential impact the crisis had on participants was the reevaluation of their migration decisions and resulted in many individuals deciding they would remigrate. This wasn't the focus of the research but deemed relevant as it influenced migration decisions.

5.2 Reflection

Overall, this research has areas for improvement. Firstly, it's clear migration motives are highly complex and focusing on one aspect rather than three broad themes would allow for a more precise and efficient study. Currently too many aspects are looked at all at once for the size of a bachelor's thesis.

The respondents were also limited to Groningen and the Academia sector in part due to the COVID-19 crisis and time constraints surrounding the bachelor's thesis. Consequently, it's not possible to make general statements about HSM's and their migration motives for different regions and employment sectors.

The methodology could also have benefitted from a mixed-methods approach where a survey was used to allow for a broader sample, although less in-depth, analysis of the different themes. As advised by one participant, creating a focus group with multiple HSM's to discuss their migration motives could also potentially be an effective way gathering multiple opinions and identifying the most important motives.

5.3 Recommendations

Due to the research taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic migration decisions were influenced heavily by the pandemic. Questions were added during the data collection regarding the pandemic which gave insights into the topic but future research on the topic would be interesting to see what further impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has on HSM's or regular migrants. Additionally further research in different sectors or regions could allow for interesting comparisons between them. This would allow for a wider understanding of the topic of HSM's migration motives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

The central research question is: “*Besides economic what motivations influence highly skilled migrants in choosing the Netherlands as a location to migrate to?*”. Three sub questions will help answer this central research question

- What social factors influence highly skilled migrants migration motives?
- To what extent do life course events influence highly skilled migrants motives?
- What are political or institutional challenges that highly skilled migrants have faced when choosing the Netherlands as a location to migrate to?

Introduction:

0. Introduce myself and the research topic, goals as well as the purpose of the research/ Ask about recording of interview/
1. Can you start off by telling me a little bit about yourself
 - a. Where do you come from?
 - i. Did you grow up there?
 - b. Where did you study?
 - i. What degree?
 - c. Where have you lived prior to the Netherlands?
2. What were your motivations for moving to the Netherlands?
 - a. Depending on answer go into depth on:
 - i. Language
 - ii. Life course events
 - iii. Political institutional

Social motivational factors

3. Moving to another country can present language barriers, how much of a role did language play when deciding to move?
 - a. Where you contemplating other countries?
 - b. Do you experience any language barriers?
4. How do you feel your day to day life is affected by possible language barriers?
 - a. Did you take these into account when deciding to move?
5. In what ways did your gender influence your decision to move here?
 - a. Do you feel any form of inequality regarding your gender?
 - b. Would you take this into consideration when deciding to move again?
6. In what ways did your ethnicity influence your decision to move here?
 - a. Do you feel any form of inequality regarding your ethnicity?
 - b. Would you take this into consideration when deciding to move again?

7. Research has shown that some countries have a culture of migration; Is it common in your culture to migrate for work opportunities?

Life course events:

8. Research has shown “highly educated people are more likely to move more often over longer distances; do you see yourself in this?
 - a. How do you look at moving further away?
 - i. *For career choices?*
 - ii. *Regarding family*
 - iii. *Regarding Relationships?*
 - b. What would convince you to stay? (either in the Netherlands or home country)
9. Were other job employment opportunities available? (in home county or abroad)
 - a. Was your primary reason economic or rather for the international (job/career) experience?
10. Are you married?
 - a. If yes; what influence does this have on your migration decisions
 - i. Length of stay?
 - b. If no; in what ways would a marriage influence your migration decisions?
11. Are there any other ways your career or certain family dynamics influences your migration choices?

Political and institutional challenges:

12. Were you well informed of the highly skilled migrant situation in the EU/Netherlands?
13. Do you currently fall under the Dutch highly skilled migration scheme? (residence permit or kennis-werker/highly skilled migrant visa?) 30 percent ruling
 - a. If yes; Do you feel the current visa is adequate?
 - b. If no; Do you receive any other benefits from the government?
 - c. Taxes and bureaucratic elements not translated.
14. Do you feel the Dutch governments approach to highly skilled migrants or migrants in general is lacking in any way?

Question about CORONA

Conclusion:

15. So if I understood correctly, ... (summarize key migration motives)
16. Do you have anything else to add with regard for this interview?
17. Do you have any further contacts I could speak to for my research?
18. Is there something else you would like to mention?

19. Thank the interviewee, question if they would like to receive the final product, exchange contact details

Appendix 2: Code map

