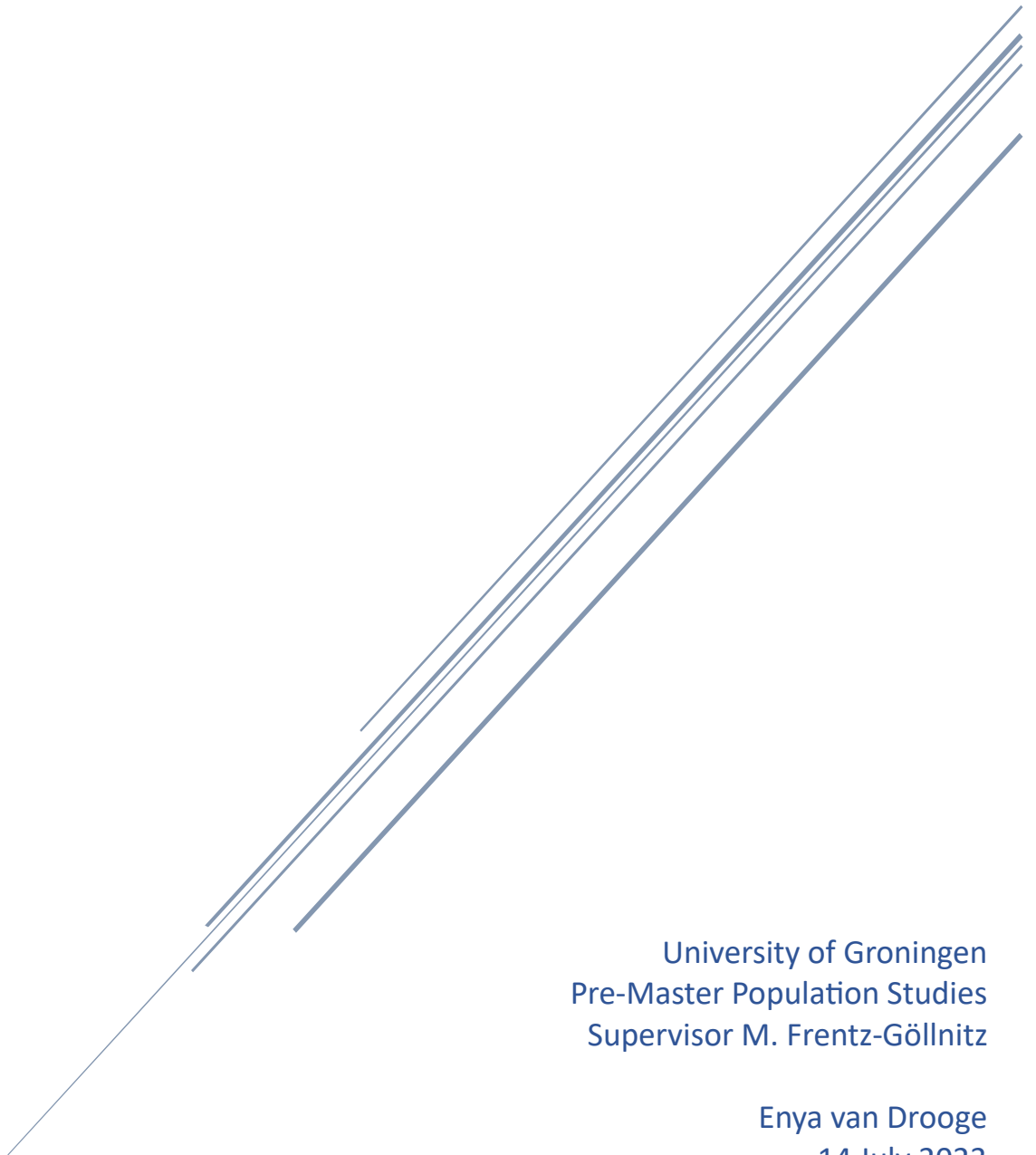




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# *Immigrants' challenges of integration into the Dutch labour market*



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## Summary

The Netherlands is facing shrinking working populations, putting more pressure on the country's social safety net. This demographic shift impacts the labour market and potential labour force, where the country will rely more on immigrants' participation. This makes the relationship between migration and the labour market a subject to ongoing discussion. The central research questions are:

1. *What are challenges for immigrants to integrate in the labour market in the Netherlands?*
2. *Do western immigrants experience less challenges than non-western immigrants when integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands?*

Quantitative research methods are applied on an individual-micro level, in the form of an online survey. Descriptive analysis is performed to analyse the collected primary data.

The results show that language barriers are the most experienced and important challenge for immigrants in integrating in the Dutch labour market. Western and non-western immigrants both experience three challenges per person, clarifying that immigrants from both background regions experience an equal amount of challenges. Additionally, immigrants offer potential to minimize negative consequences on the labour market shortages, as they work full time more often than natives and they can fill employee shortages in the tertiary sector.

It is necessary to implement policies to improve labour market integration for immigrants, in order for both western and non-western migrants being able to contribute in the Dutch labour force and fill employee shortages. By promoting equal opportunities and providing support tailored to the needs of migrants, the integration process can be enhanced for all individuals, regardless of their background, and this possibly relieves pressure on the labour market.

This report provides possibilities for further research regarding discrimination among immigrants and the open survey questions contain new insights and perspectives to the subject.

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# Introduction

## Background

The salience of migration as a political and social concern has intensified in the Netherlands, as its population mainly grows due to external migration. Since 2017, the natural population growth has been negative, meaning that there were more deaths than births. This trend has continued ever since. However, the Dutch population is still growing. It grew by 27.400 in the first quarter of 2023, and this increase was entirely due to immigration. During the same period, the negative natural population growth was even higher than in previous years (CBS, 2023c). This demographic shift impacts the labour market and the potential labour force.

The Dutch labour market currently faces employee shortages in every sector (NOS, 2022). There are 143 vacancies for every 100 unemployed people (CBS, 2022a). Additionally, the Netherlands has the highest rate of part time workers within the EU in relative terms (Eurostat, 2018). The number of Dutch people who start working part time is still growing (UWV, 2022). Moreover, the Netherlands expects to face further shrinking working populations, putting more pressure on the country's social safety net (World Economic Forum, 2022). These developments further increase the tension on the labour market. Indicators suggest that this problem will become more acute in the coming years and the country will inevitably have to open its borders strategically. Companies will be forced to change their business structure, by relying more on immigrants' participation in the labour force. This would ease pressure on public finances, making the relationship between migration and the labour market a subject to ongoing public discussion, and this topic highly societally relevant.

Existing literature makes us aware that this demographic shift will continue, based on population demographics projections (European Commission, 2022). The share of the potential labour force will keep decreasing, and shrinking working populations have a negative impact on the labour market (NIDI, 2020). This comes with economic problems, though we do not yet know how this can be tackled adequately. In order to successfully ease the negative results of shrinking working populations, political, social, economic, and financial solutions are necessary (Długosz, 2011). Completed research provides insights and possibilities to the problem. A formerly published OECD report recommends that the Netherlands should improve its policies in attracting and retaining highly skilled migrants, in order to address employee shortages and strengthen its position as a knowledge-based economy (2016). Although, data about specific opportunities for immigrants providing solutions to the shortage problem, where and how immigrants can contribute to the Dutch labour market is limited. It is known that labour participation of people with a migration background is on average lower than that of people without a migration background in the Netherlands. This can be derived from various obstacles that migrants encounter in engaging in the Dutch labour market (SCP, 2020b). People with a non-western migration background are even more disadvantaged than people with a western migration background (CBS, 2020). This makes the research gap, and motivation to fill this gap, adding this view to existing literature to provide academic impact which the society will benefit from.

## Research Problem

The motivation of this study is derived from the problems within the labour force, that are expected to worsen in the coming decades. In light of these concerns in the Dutch society, this study is focussed on current individual challenges of western and non-western immigrants. The research aim is to find out what immigrants face as challenges when integrating in the Dutch labour market, and if the number of experienced challenges differs per background region, by collecting individual data about immigrants' challenges for integrating in the Dutch labour market. The two central research questions are:

- *What are challenges for immigrants to integrate in the labour market in the Netherlands?*
- *Do western immigrants experience less challenges than non-western immigrants when integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands?*

## Structure

This report consists of five chapters, including this Introduction. After this first chapter, we go into the Theoretical Framework. This second chapter presents relevant concepts, with a corresponding conceptual model and hypotheses. This is followed by chapter three, Methodology, where the data collection, sampling strategy, data analysis and data management are discussed. Chapter four elaborates on the Results, continued with a discussion. Finally, chapter five contains the Conclusion, providing the main findings, a reflection, and recommendations for further research.

## Theoretical Framework

Where the background section has a macro-national view, the literature focuses on a micro-individual level in order to tackle the research problem. This study contains three core concepts which are described below.

- **Immigration:** It is believed that migrants can be a solution to shrinking working populations, they can secure a certain level of social safety net benefits (Dlugosz, 2011). This is seen as an opportunity because in 2022, already 15% of the Dutch population are born in a foreign country. Of the 17.6 million people residing in the Netherlands, 2.6 million were born abroad (CBS, 2023a). The immigration peak for both genders is between the ages 25 and 30 (PBL, 2021).

Migration has become more diverse in terms of migrants' origins (Migration Data Portal, 2021). It has become global, where a distinction can be made between western and non-western immigrants. Western migrants have a background from the regions Europe, North America and Oceania. Non-western migrants have a background from Asia, Africa and South America (CBS, 2023d). Work has become an increasingly important motive to come to the Netherlands for both western and non-western individuals (CBS, 2020). This relates to one of Ravenstein's laws of migration, where he claimed that the main causes of migration are economic, including the attraction of more jobs and higher wages (Grigg, 1977).

- **Labour Market Integration:** Integration is a broad phenomenon, capturing both educational and economic outcomes (Åslund et al., 2009). Most immigrants are young, as also described in the immigration peak ages, and willing to work (Reynaud, 2019). Therefore, immigration increases the number of people in the potential labour force and it is thanks to migration that the Dutch labour force will not shrink even more in the coming years (NIDI, 2020). This relates to literature from de Graauw and Bloemraad, they state that more fully integrated immigrants boost the economy and strengthen community cohesion (2017). In order to realize this, information exchange needs to be made more effective (Garibay & De Cuype, 2018).

Currently, 69% of working age people without a migration background are employed (SCP, 2020a). This is slightly lower for people with a western migration background with 67.3%. The difference is larger compared to people with a non-western background where 60.9% work (Het Parool, 2020). This difference in labour participation threatens to increase further and can be explained by the fact that individuals with a migration background do not have the same opportunities as natives. Immigrants only receive support towards the labour market when they have a residence permit, and it is expected that they find work by themselves. This impacts issues like social cohesion and institutional trust (SCP, 2020b). However, the number of migrants in paid work increased in 2022 compared to 2021 (CBS, 2023b). This increase shows promising opportunities for the shrinking labour force.

Europe works on initiatives to attract more highly skilled migrants (Migration Data Portal, 2021). The OECD recommends that the Netherlands should likewise reinforce efforts to retain highly skilled labour migrants, and to better promote itself as a destination for skilled labour migrants. Considering this, retention rates of such knowledge migrants can be improved if their partners would have better opportunities in the labour market (OECD, 2016). Regarding this, Massey states that immigrants who express higher levels of satisfaction of the concerning country are more likely to naturalize and more likely to stay on the long term (2006).

- **Challenges:** Udah (2019) and Andemariam (2008) both state that potential obstacles and challenges consist of racism and discrimination, language proficiency, lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of qualifications, and a lack of connections and networks. Almost 64% of participants recognized the important role of language proficiency for employment outcomes and 93% attributed their low employment participation to discrimination based on skin colour (Udah, 2019). Additionally, Kloubert acknowledges the complexities in bureaucratic structures, different legal regulations, lack of knowledge of cultural norms, and language barriers (2020). Lastly, the 'human capital theory' suggests that skill plays a key role in employment prospects for international migrants. Hereby, difficulties can be experienced in learning about and adapting to a new culture. The most encountered challenge by migrants, with 43%, are language skills. Regarding social connections and networks, 12% perceived networking as a challenge. Finally, difficulties in adjusting to the new culture in relation to e.g. working methods and hours are experienced by 23% (Viningienė et al., 2018).

All of the mentioned theories concern current challenges faced by individual immigrants during integration into labour markets, and language barriers are mentioned in all of them. SCP states that learning the Dutch language is the most important factor of integration, followed by knowledge of the Dutch society (2019). Additionally, long term committed immigrants show high levels of language proficiency. Language acquisition is influenced by exposure to the language and made commitments to the country (Mesch, 2003).

On average, individuals with a non-western migration background are more disadvantaged than individuals with a western migration background. Western migrants, often coming from countries with developed economies, generally face fewer challenges when integrating into the Dutch labour market compared to non-western migrants. This can be attributed to factors such as shared cultural norms and similar educational systems, making it easier to navigate towards jobs. Non-western migrants often face multiple challenges, hindering their access to employment opportunities and career progression (CBS, 2020).

## Conceptual Model

The conceptual model is shown in figure 1, visualizing the three core concepts and their relationships. Where 'Immigration' is the starting point with different background regions, 'Labour Market Integration' is the goal, and 'Challenges' influences this relationship and outcome. 'Challenges' concern individual challenges both western and non-western immigrants face while integrating into the Dutch labour market.

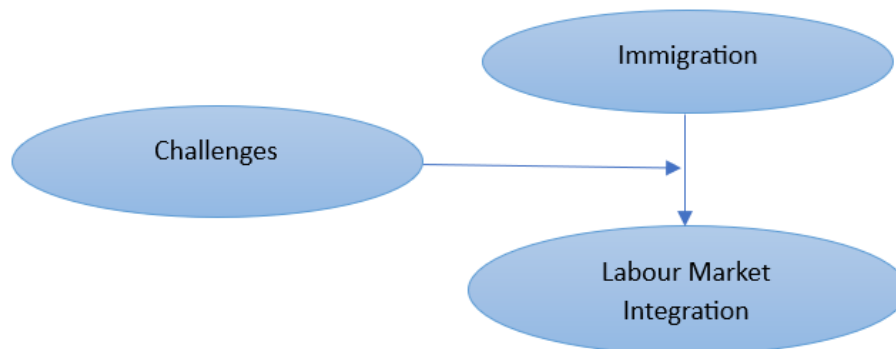


Figure 1 – Conceptual Model (Author's own design)

## Hypotheses

The hypotheses are derived from the core concept 'Challenges' and the aforementioned theories. The literature suggests that 'Language Barriers', 'Discrimination' and 'Adjusting to new culture' are the most often experienced challenges by immigrants when integrating in labour markets. Moreover, it is proposed that the amount of experienced challenges differs per background region. Based on this, it can be expected that these will be the most important outcomes of this study as well. The hypotheses are as follows:

- *Language barriers, discrimination, and adjusting to new culture are the most important challenges for immigrants in integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands.*
- *Western immigrants experience fewer challenges than non-western immigrants when integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands.*

# Methodology

## Data Collection

Quantitative data methods are applied on an individual-micro level, enabling the researcher to conduct the study within the designated timeframe. Initially, secondary data was looked for. However, no appropriate data contributing to the research questions was available, which confirms the research gap. Therefore, an instrument for primary data collection is developed in the form of an online survey and is conducted in the Netherlands. Primary data is also chosen because it creates new knowledge, specifically relating to this study and making the entire dataset relevant in covering the research questions. The researcher is the direct source and has full control over the quality and accuracy of the data, increasing the reliability. Primary data makes the measures between the units of analysis directly comparable, which is an advantage as the results can therefore be easily standardized and shared among researchers (Clifford et al., 2016). Advantages of online surveys include that they offer a variety of features, its timesaving, and reduces costs. Moreover, it gives the ability of the internet providing access to individuals who would otherwise be difficult to reach through other channels (Wright, 2005).

The survey, including an ethics disclaimer, can be found in appendix 1. It is built on the basis of the core concepts from the theoretical framework. But first, demographic questions are asked, allowing to gain background information on participants. This provides context for the collected data, which allows to describe the participants and to better analyze the data (Allen, 2017). This concerns survey questions 3 to 10. Survey question 11 is essential, linking directly to both research questions. Additionally, long term commitment is asked, in the interest of gaining data about the differences in attracting and retaining immigrant employees. Furthermore, it is relevant to find out in which sectors immigrants mostly work and if this is mostly part time or full time, to see if this differs from natives and if this overlaps with the employee shortages.

## Sampling Strategy

Representativeness to the population is secured by participation recruitment through a non-probability sample, using a judgmental sampling technique. This sample type uses personal judgment to decide which individuals of the population can best serve the purpose of the sample based on their suitability (Burt et al., 2009). As it concerns an online survey, the respondents are recruited through the internet using social media, as suggested by Clifford et al. (2016). This sampling technique is followed by the snowball technique. Thus, initially the researcher's network is used in distributing the survey. Afterwards, participants are allowed to share the survey to their own networks, recruiting other contacts. Further recruitment through the snowballing effect creates randomness and reduces bias, as respondents are recruited by chance, making the results more valid and representative to the population (Clifford et al., 2016). A relevant sample is obtained by recruiting respondents with the following characteristics:

- Aged 18-75; these are the years in which people actively engage in the labour market in the Netherlands. It is after primary education generally is finished and until a few years after the official age of pension has started (Rijksoverheid, 2023a).
- People who are not born in the Netherlands but currently live in the Netherlands, making them immigrants of the first generation. It concerns migrants who have crossed international borders to get to the Netherlands and initially did not possess a Dutch passport. Thus, the Dutch Antilles do not count as such. Even though international borders are crossed, these migrants already own a Dutch passport as these countries belong to The Kingdom of the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2023b).
- People in the workforce of the Netherlands, making that they have already experienced challenges instead of still having to face them. It concerns paid employees in diverse sectors and could be part time or full time.

To ensure respondents' suitability remains, two questions are created at the beginning of the survey confirming their necessary characteristics. To collect responses, the survey was online from 28 April 2023 until 28 May 2023. It is aimed for to maximize differences in demographic characteristics, including e.g. gender and age.

Through these sampling strategies, 80 valid cases are gathered. A threshold of 30 per group is common across statistics and is an appropriate sample size for most quantitative studies. However, the higher the sample size, the more likely the sample is representative of the population (Sauro & Lewis, 2016). As a sufficient amount of cases is gathered, the sample seems valid to infer findings back to the population.

## Data Analysis

The survey was conducted through Qualtrics, and the gained data needed to be exported. The program offers multiple export files and download possibilities. A SPSS sav data file with raw data, variables and value labels was downloaded and opened into the software SPSS. Here, the variables were checked on their measurement levels and, if applicable, corrected. Multiple answers were possible in questions 11 and 13. Question 5 is transformed into a binary variable. The given answers in the category “Other;” and the fully open optional questions are excluded from the analysis. However, these options provide insightful answers which can contribute to follow-up research. In appendix 2, the answers of questions 14 and 15 are presented.

Descriptive statistical analysis is performed to analyse the collected data. Descriptive statistics is an important part of research which is used to describe the study’s data features. It provides summaries about the sample and the measures, in order to communicate large amounts of information in a simple way. Measures of frequency, central tendency, and dispersion of the variables are used to describe the data (Mishra, et al., 2019). Descriptive statistics are calculated with the use of SPSS.

A next step of data analysis is conducted with a two-tailed two-sample t-test, in order to find out if the number of experienced challenges differs between western migrants and non-western migrants. The concerning two variables are ‘region’ and ‘amount of experienced challenges’, where the independent variable is the background region and the amount of experienced challenges the dependent variable. Firstly, all continents are merged into two regions. Europe, North America and Oceania are combined into ‘western’ (region 0), and Asia, Africa and South America into ‘non-western’ (region 1). Secondly, the amount of experienced challenges are combined per person. These variables are chosen to be able to compare the two groups, to determine a statistically significant relationship, and to see whether or not there are differences between them. This parametric test is appropriate to use, as it concerns one ratio and one binary variable and independent cases, and it determines whether the mean for two groups is equal. A sufficient amount of cases is obtained for each group to be able to perform this statistical test. A 95% confidence interval is used, which is usually the case for statistical analysis in this manner (Burt et al., 2009). The statistical hypothesis is: ‘In the population, the mean of the amount of experienced challenges for the western and non-western region is equal’. The corresponding formula is depicted in figure 2. To study the relationship between the two variables and their distributions further, a crosstabulation is made. The distribution of the region variable is almost equal, 38 to 32, meaning that both groups are almost equally represented.

$$t = \frac{(\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) - D_0}{\hat{\sigma}_{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}}$$

Figure 2 – Formula two-sample t-test (Author’s own design)

## Data Management

The survey is administered through the online program Qualtrics provided by the University of Groningen, making it a safe and reliable environment to use for research data. It is preferable that such a program is used over an unconsidered alternative, due to data protection. Only the researcher can access the program, which is secured with passwords and a Multi-Factor Authentication verifier. Additionally, this program offers the possibility to anonymize responses, does not record IP addresses, and makes it impossible to skip questions.

SPSS is used through <https://uwp.rug.nl/>. This is an IT work- and data storage place from the University of Groningen. This drive is only accessible with active UG credentials, making it a safe environment for the use and storage of the research data. All data is securely stored at this network.

To address ethics, considerations are taken into account during the data collection process by presenting a disclaimer at the beginning of the survey, informing respondents about the research purposes. Besides that, it explicitly states where the data is used for and for which timespan the data is stored. It also asks for participation agreement, while maintaining anonymous, as it may contain personal and sensitive answers.



## Results

A descriptive statistics summary of respondents' demographics is depicted in table 1. Separate outputs concerning respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in appendix 3. It shows that the majority of respondents identify as female, 40% as male, and 1.25% as other. The age has a range of 53, the minimum value of the variable is 19 and the maximum value 72. The mean is 34.12 and it has a standard deviation of 12.50, measuring a high variability in the distribution of the variable. Most respondents are born in Europe, followed by Africa and Asia. The highest obtained educational level is mostly University, continued with Secondary School. The amount of years lived in the Netherlands shows a range of 68, the values lay between 1 and 69, having a mean of 12.80. The standard deviation here is 13.70, measuring an even higher variance in the distribution. The majority describes their employment status in the Netherlands as full time for an employer, and the minority is self-employed. Respondents have mainly worked in the tertiary sector in the Netherlands and the least in the primary sector. Most generally find a job in the Netherlands between 1 to 6 months.

<i>Variable (N = 80)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	32	40%			
Female	47	58.75%			
Other	1	1.25%			
<b>Age</b>					
			19	72	34.12
<b>Continent</b>					
Europe	39	48.75%			
North America	4	5%			
South America	7	8.75%			
Asia	14	17.50%			
Africa	15	18.75%			
Oceania	1	1.25%			
<b>Educational Level</b>					
Primary School	0	0%			
Secondary School	27	33.75%			
University of Applied Sciences	13	16.25%			
University	30	37.50%			
Doctorate/ PhD	7	8.75%			
Other	3	3.75%			
<b>Years lived in the Netherlands</b>					
			1	69	12.80
<b>Employment Status</b>					
Full time for employer	35	43.75%			
Part time for employer	28	35%			
Self-employed	6	7.50%			
Unemployed or in training	11	13.75%			
<b>Working Sector</b>					
Primary Sector	1	1.25%			
Secondary Sector	7	8.75%			
Tertiary Sector	41	51.25%			
Quaternary Sector	31	38.75%			
<b>Time to find a job</b>					
Less than a month	28	35%			
1 to 6 months	37	46.25%			
7 to 12 months	5	6.25%			
More than a year	8	10%			
Not found a job yet	2	2.50%			

Table 1 – Respondents' demographics (Author's own design)

Figure 3 shows the most experienced challenges by immigrants in engaging in the Dutch labour market. In total, 223 challenges are counted, 10 participants stated that they did not experience any challenges. 50 out of the 80 respondents implied having dealt with 'language barriers'. This indicates that this challenge is by far the most experienced challenge. The top 5 most experienced challenges is:

1. Language barriers (62.5%)
2. No response to applications (35%)
3. Competition with natives (32.5%)
4. Lack of social connections and networks (31.3%)
5. Discrimination (21.3%)

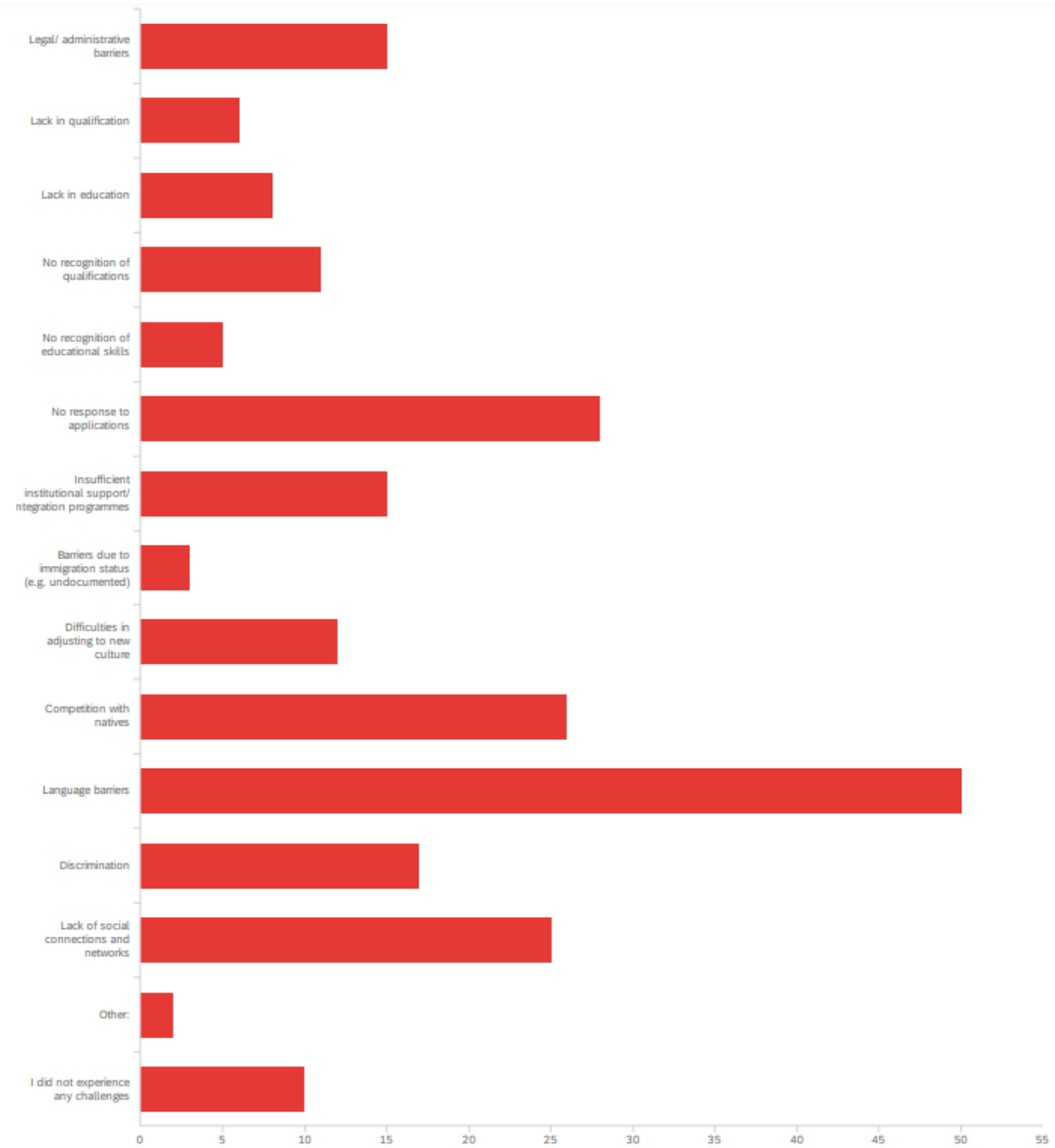


Figure 3 – Challenges in engaging in the Dutch labour market (Author’s own design)

Appendix 4 addresses all other outcomes of the conducted survey questions with adequate figures. The most disagreed upon statement in question 12 is: ‘I did not feel welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, but now I feel a long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands’. The most agreed upon statement is: ‘I felt welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, and currently feel a long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands’. Lastly, 220 answers are counted for opportunities for immigrants to better integrate and engage in the Dutch labour market. The top 3 here is:

1. Better access to information (65%)
2. Better access to social activities and support (62.5%)
3. Better access to gain skills (60%)

All results of the two-sample t-test can be found in appendix 5, table 2 shows the group statistics. It can be interpreted that the mean of both groups is almost equal. For the western region, it is 3.2368 and for non-western 3.125, with a mean difference of .11184. This outcome reveals that both regions experience around three challenges per person on average, and that this number does not differ between both groups. The test is not significant with a p-value of .114. Consequently, the statistical hypothesis 'In the population, the mean of the amount of experienced challenges for the western and non-western region is equal' cannot be rejected. Therefore, there is a risk of a type 2 error. This results in the mean indeed being equal between the two groups. This means that immigrants' background region does not significantly influence the amount of individually experienced challenges, and that both western and non-western immigrants experience the same amount of challenges.

<b>Group Statistics</b>			
	Region	N	Mean
Amount of experienced challenges	0	38	3.2368
	1	32	3.1250

Table 2 – Group Statistics (Author's own design)

The crosstabulation is shown in table 3. In total, 70 respondents experienced between one and eight challenges in engaging in the Dutch labour market. Thereof, 38 are of a western background and 32 of a non-western background. As mentioned, 223 challenges are experienced. Deriving from the table, 123 of those challenges are experienced by western region migrants, against 100 by migrants from non-western regions. It also shows that the majority experienced one, two or three challenges, and the minority six, seven or eight.

<b>Amount of experienced challenges * Region Crosstabulation</b>				
		Region		
		Western	Non-Western	<i>Total</i>
Amount of experienced challenges	1	5	11	16
	2	9	4	13
	3	12	5	17
	4	6	3	9
	5	1	5	6
	6	1	1	2
	7	3	1	4
	8	1	2	3
<i>Total</i>		38	32	70

Table 3 – Crosstabulation (Author's own design)

## Discussion

Concerning respondents' demographics, it is no surprise that most are female and young, as this is generally the case in surveys. Women are more likely to participate than men, and younger people are more likely to participate than older people (Smith, 2008). Furthermore, the immigration peak for both males and females is between the ages 25 and 30 (PBL, 2021). This is similar to participants' ages. It also makes sense that respondents from all continents are retrieved, because migration has become more diverse in terms of migrants' origins (Migration Data Portal, 2021). Moreover, it is recommended to retain highly skilled labour migrants (OECD, 2016). This corresponds to the highest obtained educational level being mostly University, making it seem that indeed highly skilled migrants are attracted. As stated by CBS, 48% of the Dutch work part time (2022c). This percentage is higher than the 35% of participants. Most participants work in the tertiary sector, which overlaps with natives. In 2021, more than half of the Dutch working population also worked in this so-called service sector (CBS, 2022b). Most respondents are from Europe and therefore western immigrants, where 46% generally takes 1 to 6 months to find a job and 35% less than a month. This shows resemblance to other literature, where is stated that natives and western immigrants on average take between 0 to 3 months to find a job. For non-western immigrants it frequently takes up to 12 months or more (CBS, 2010). Additionally, the proportion of immigrants in employment increases the longer they have been in the Netherlands (CBS, 2023b).

The most experienced challenge 'Language Barriers' is also indicated in previous research. SCP states that learning the Dutch language is the most important factor of integration. Not speaking the country's dominant language is an important barrier, but mastering the language increases self-reliance (2019). Language acquisition is not influenced by migration motivations, but by exposure to the language and made commitments to the country (Mesch, 2003). When immigrants have more opportunities to learn the official language, it can improve their schooling, professional training, and access to citizenship. The society as a whole benefits from this, as more fully integrated immigrants boosts the economy and strengthens community cohesion (de Graauw & Bloemraad, 2017).

SCP also mentions that knowledge of the Dutch society is important for integration (2019). The results show that the challenge 'Difficulties in adjusting to new culture' is not experienced often. Only 15% mentions having dealt with this challenge, making it a positive outcome relating to the importance of knowledge of the society for integration. The following most experienced challenges 'no response to applications' and 'competition with natives' can also be experienced by natives, as these are general challenges that occur in engaging in the Dutch labour market (CPB, 2018).

The most agreed upon statement about long term commitment is: 'I felt welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, and currently feel a long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands'. Findings from other studies state that immigrants who express higher satisfaction levels of the concerning country are more likely to naturalize and, because of that, more likely to want to stay in the country on a long term (Massey, 2006). Relating this to the results, it may be assumed that immigrants in the Netherlands have high satisfaction levels about the country. Additionally, immigrants who made a long term commitment to the country, for example by buying a dwelling, show higher levels of language proficiency than those who did not (Mesch, 2003). This links back to the most experienced challenge in this study; language barriers. On the contrary, another study finds that migrants regularly do not feel at home in the Netherlands. Migrants often feel excluded about the social climate regarding opportunities open to migrants and the existing openness for society to become culturally diverse (Dagevos et al., 2022). Lastly, retention rates of knowledge migrants can be improved if their partners would have better opportunities in the Dutch labour market (OECD, 2016).

Better access to information is the most answered opportunity for immigrants to better integrate and engage in the Dutch labour market. Even though the common basic principles for immigrant integration policy of the EU mentions 'exchange of information' (SCP, 2012), the results show that improvements are needed in accessing this information. Correspondingly, Garibay and de Cuype suggest that the exchange of information needs to be made more effective (2018).

Individuals with a non-western migration background are on average more disadvantaged than individuals with a western migration background. Western migrants generally face fewer challenges than non-western migrants (CBS, 2020). This contradicts to the results, where immigrants from both background regions experience the same amount of challenges. Here, western immigrants experience more challenges than expected.

Governments and employers can counteract labour inequalities with targeted measures (SCP, 2020a). Policies that support labour market integration can help to overcome challenges for both western and non-western migrants. Integration policies should include language training programs, recognition of foreign qualifications, cultural awareness training, and combating discrimination in the workplace. It should equip migrants by improving their education level and knowledge of the Dutch language, ensure accessibility to the labour market, and promote institutional trust (Dagevos et al., 2022). More benefits can be gained by speeding up the path to work, shortening the duration of permit procedures and providing earlier access and guidance towards the labour market. It also helps to determine the knowledge, skills and work experience of newcomers earlier, and focussing more on certifying foreign diplomas (SCP, 2020b). By providing equal opportunities and support tailored to migrants' needs, the labour market integration process can be enhanced for all individuals regardless of their background.

## Conclusion

### Main Findings

The results reveal that immigrants mostly work full time, only 35% work part time. On the contrary, natives work part time more often with 48% (CBS, 2022c). This suggests that immigrants offer potential to minimize negative consequences on the Dutch labour market shortages, due to the fact that they work more hours per week than the Dutch. Regarding working sectors, most immigrants work in the tertiary sector providing services. This does not differ from where most natives work, as more than half of the Dutch working population also work in this so-called service sector (CBS, 2022b). This does not directly overlap with the employee shortages, but there are currently employee shortages in every sector in the Netherlands (NOS, 2022). For this reason, immigrants could help to minimize the shortages in the tertiary sector. This is doubtful in the primary sector as they scarcely work there.

Geographical differences divide immigrants into western or non-western migrants, based on their background region (CBS, 2023d). The two-sample t-test shows that there is no significant relationship between the background region and the amount of experienced challenges. Both western and non-western immigrants experience around three challenges per person on average, revealing that the mean of both groups is equal. This means that the background region of the immigrants does not significantly influence the amount of individually experienced challenges, and that both western and non-western immigrants experience the same amount of challenges. The crosstabulation indicates that individuals experienced between one and eight challenges in engaging in the Dutch labour market. The majority experienced only one, two or three challenges.

These outcomes relate to the first hypothesis; *'Language barriers, discrimination, and adjusting to new culture are the most important challenges for immigrants in integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands'*. It shows that language barriers are the most experienced challenge in engaging in the Dutch labour market with 62.5%, and therefore the most important. Contrarily, the other two challenges are not experienced that often. Discrimination is experienced by 21.3%, and adjusting to new culture by 15%. The challenges 'no response to applications', 'competition with natives', and 'lack of social connections and networks' are experienced more frequently, contradicting to the aforementioned theories and estimates. Thus, there are various challenges, linking back to the first research question; *'What are challenges for immigrants to integrate in the labour market in the Netherlands?'*. Language barriers impact immigrants as they do not master the Dutch language, but natives do not experience this barrier as Dutch is their mother tongue. The following most experienced challenges 'no response to applications' and 'competition with natives' can also be experienced by natives as these are general challenges that occur in engaging in the Dutch labour market (CPB, 2018).

The results reveal that the second hypothesis *'Western immigrants experience fewer challenges than non-western immigrants when integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands'* is not the case, subsequently dismissing the second research question *'Do western immigrants experience less challenges than non-western immigrants when integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands?'*. The mean of the amount of experienced challenges for the two regions is equal. The number of experienced challenges, three, is equivalent between immigrants from western and non-western background regions. This result clarifies that western immigrants experience more challenges than initially expected.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the data and from previous beneficiaries is that it is necessary to adopt a strategy that promotes and strengthens immigration. As immigration is the main source of population growth, it could be a solution to the shrinking working population and can secure social safety net benefits (CBS, 2023c; Długosz, 2011). Most immigrants are young, work is an important migration motive, and more fully integrated immigrants boost the economy (CBS, 2020; de Graauw & Bloemraad, 2017; Reynaud, 2019). Therefore, it is needed to implement structural policy changes to improve labour market integration for both western and non-western migrants in the Netherlands, in order for immigrants being able to better contribute in the labour force in addressing the problem and filling employee shortages. By promoting equal opportunities and providing support tailored to the needs of migrants, the labour market integration process can be enhanced for all individuals, regardless of their background. Governments and employers can counteract labour inequalities with targeted measures (SCP, 2020a). The most important challenge and factor of integration, language, can be overcome by training programs (SCP, 2019). Additionally, it is recommended that access to information is made more effective and easier accessible (Garibay & De Cuype, 2018). In turn, this is possibly able to relieve pressure on shortages in the Dutch labour market, and therefore on the country's social safety net.

## Reflection

More representative sampling methods than the snowball technique exist, but they are not easily accessible. In this case, there was no other feasible option. This could lead to biased results, making the technique a potential weakness. A justification to the use, validity and representativity of this method lays in the wide variety of the research results. A diverse sample is generated concerning age, educational level, employment status, duration of living in the Netherlands, and there are respondents from all continents. Additionally, the immigration peak for both men and women is between the ages 25 and 30 (PBL, 2021). This is similar to participants' ages.

The survey questions were made as a 'requirement' to fill out. Automatically, the program made it mandatory to give a response to all questions, otherwise it was not possible to complete the survey. The last two open questions are exempted from this, they were optional. This requirement may create bias, as it forced respondents to answer even if they did not know the answer or did not want to answer. Although, this is done intentionally to prevent uncompleted surveys and the outcome is that there are no missing values in the dataset. All responses remain representative as respondents' suitability is ensured by the first two survey questions.

Difficulties were experienced in finding participants who met the necessary characteristics. For example, the researcher ran upon a possible respondent from the Dutch Antilles. The concerning country is part of The Kingdom of the Netherlands but not of the main land. Even though the country has a different language and currency than the main land of the Netherlands, the potential respondent was not included in the research as he/she has the same passport and educational system as the Netherlands. This leads to more similar experienced challenges with other Dutch citizens, than experienced challenges by other immigrants. Moreover, international students were approached, but it turned out they do not have a job in the Netherlands and therefore do not meet the necessary characteristics. Finally, a few potential respondents did not speak English. The researcher found out that they did learn Dutch after migrating, but did not learn English after coming to the Netherlands.

This descriptive research is designed to determine the populations' characteristics, and describe the distribution of variables, without regard to causalities. This methodology focuses on describing the subject without covering why it happens. This descriptive nature has consequences on what could not be measured within the study. Even though some causal relations have been tested, descriptive studies are not helpful in identifying causes behind the phenomenon. Results may reflect bias due to the absence of statistical testing. Finally, one disadvantage with the mean is that it is affected by outliers (Mishra, et al., 2019).

To conclude, overall the research results might be applied to a broader context as the sample accurately resembles the broader population. Randomness, representativity and the sample size are taken into account in assessing the data quality. The population and sample share the same characteristics and therefore the findings can be considered as generalizable. Even though the dataset has a high level of completeness and is of quality, the data source still remains a smaller-scale survey.

## Recommendations

This report provides possibilities for further research. Firstly, all survey data can be used for follow-up research. This data offers interesting possibilities for follow-up research regarding e.g. discrimination among immigrants, where further efforts are needed to develop appropriate assessments of future scenarios. Secondly, the open answer survey questions offer interesting possibilities for further research. Take for example these three separate anonymous quotes: *'I've found my attitude and thoughts to be my biggest blockade'*, *'Lack of housing disproportionately affecting immigrants leads to difficulties in adjusting to a stable labour market'* and *'I moved to the Netherlands having secured a job beforehand'*. These answers contain new insights and perspectives to the subject, which are not investigated within this research and are therefore interesting to further examine. Thirdly, the most agreed upon statement about long term commitment is: *'I felt welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, and currently feel a long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands.'* This shows that immigrants are willing to stay in the Netherlands on the long term. This provides opportunities to give more attention to the integration system in the Netherlands, as there does not seem to be a difference in attracting and retaining immigrant employees. Lastly, another group for further research could concern immigrants who speak a different language than English, as this research was conducted in English.

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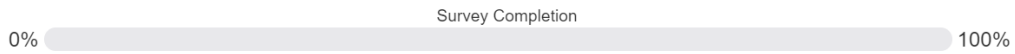
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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Survey



### Survey: Immigrants' challenges in the labour market of the Netherlands

This is a questionnaire about the challenges of immigrants in engaging in the labour market in the Netherlands. As a student from the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen, I am doing research for my pre-master thesis in Population Studies. This is under the supervision of prof. dr. ir. H. Haisma & M. Frentz-Göllnitz. I am interested in understanding what barriers and opportunities international migrants face when engaging in jobs, and eventually this will help me to reflect on how immigrants could contribute to the ageing labour market in the Netherlands.

Your opinion is valuable. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. Your data will be kept confidential and will be stored on the University's secure network that only I can access. Your data will be removed two months after the thesis has been passed successfully.

For questions, please contact me at: [e.y.van.drooge@student.rug.nl](mailto:e.y.van.drooge@student.rug.nl)  
More information about your privacy rights and policy can be found at:  
<https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/policy-and-strategy/privacy-and-security-at-the-ug/>

---

By submitting this form, I give consent that my data can be used for the research purposes as stated in the disclaimer.

Ok

---

I hereby declare that I am not born in the Netherlands but currently work here or have worked here.

Ok

---

What is your gender?

- Male  
 Female  
 Other
-

What is your age in years?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



In which continent were you born?

- Europe
- North America
- South America
- Asia
- Africa
- Oceania

What is your highest obtained educational level (or equivalent to)?

- Primary School
- Secondary School (VMBO/ MAVO/ HAVO/ VWO)
- University of Applied Sciences (HBO; Bachelor or Master)
- University (WO; Bachelor or Master)
- Doctorate/ PhD
- Other:

How many years have you lived in the Netherlands?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



How would you mainly describe your employment status in the Netherlands?

- Full time for employer
- Part time for employer
- Self-employed
- Unemployed or in training

Which of the following sectors best describes where you have mainly worked in the Netherlands?

- Primary Sector (extraction and harvesting of raw materials, such as agriculture and mining)
  - Secondary Sector (construction, manufacturing and processing to the production of finished goods)
  - Tertiary Sector (providing services, such as retail, sales, transportation, entertainment, recreation and communication)
  - Quaternary Sector (knowledge and intellectual pursuits including education, research & development and IT)
- 

How long does it generally take you to find a job in the Netherlands?

- Less than a month
  - 1 to 6 months
  - 7 to 12 months
  - More than a year
  - Not found a job yet
- 

Which challenges have you dealt with in engaging in the Dutch labour market? (multiple answers possible)

- Legal/ administrative barriers
  - Lack in qualification
  - Lack in education
  - No recognition of qualifications
  - No recognition of educational skills
  - No response to applications
  - Insufficient institutional support/ integration programmes
  - Barriers due to immigration status (e.g. undocumented)
  - Difficulties in adjusting to new culture
  - Competition with natives
  - Language barriers
  - Discrimination
  - Lack of social connections and networks
  - Other:
  - I did not experience any challenges
-

How strongly do you agree with the following statements:

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree	I don't know/ no opinion
I felt welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, but I feel no long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, but now I feel a long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, and currently feel a long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel welcome when I first started working in the Netherlands, and currently feel no long term commitment towards working in the Netherlands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What do you think are opportunities for immigrants to better integrate and engage in the Dutch labour market? (multiple answers possible)

- Better access to government formalities (permits and registrations)
- Better access to information (practical information and referrals to reliable service providers)
- Better access to social activities and support (chance to start building a social and/ or business network)
- Better access to gain skills (work experience and education)
- Improve discrimination laws and enforcement
- Other:

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences or barriers? (Optional)

Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding to this survey? (Optional)

Figure 4 – Survey in Qualtrics (Author's own design)

## Appendix 2 – Open Questions

*Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences or barriers?*

Dutch people sticking together and never accepting immigrants within their friend group

Starting from basic helps sometimes to build up connections

No.

No

No comment

Next to barrier because of my background, it was hard to find a job experiencing the same barriers as Dutch people

Bias from recruiters is one of the biggest barriers and should be addressed by policy makers. In companies that might come from HR staff, but in Universities it is even more challenging, as employers are more likely to select Dutch, European and North American staff. The reason I see is that bias will favour people with similar cultural background - in this case the global north (including AUS/NZ).

It depends very much which work you do. The branch you are in I think

You have to work harder than the native Dutch, you have to be the same as native Dutch.

I'm working in a (mental) health institution; don't know if that falls under tertiary sector

More employment opportunities and skills development for immigrants to enter the labour market. All immigrants want is to gain employment, work support their families, economy and earn their keep in the Netherlands

Ik ben niet in NL geboren maar ben en voel mij al 40 jaar wel een NL. Dit soort onderzoeken maken te weinig onderscheid in de doelgroep. Daardoor zal het antwoord zo generalistisch zijn dat het maar de vraag is wat de praktijk hier aan heeft.

In my opinion, barriers are there, it is harder for international to get a job or a traineeship in the Netherlands (especially for non-europeans). However, I do understand the reasonings. For example, I work in factories and most operators don't really speak English - so it is justifiable if they want to hire people who speak Dutch. The administration is also very intricate and difficult, but I understand because there are immigration laws - the Dutch government has to make sure that their own people are employed before taking in more immigrants.

Maybe the Netherlands could stop with the structural racism in having non-EU people require a permit, which they can't even apply for themselves. It makes a non-EU person pretty much impossible for smaller businesses which don't have the time or resources to invest in hiring them (e.g. HR department). Even companies that do would prefer to save on the "hassle" of non-EU people

The administrative and bureaucratic hurdles to gaining work was the most confusing part to navigate. Confusing and contradictory information

I think the language barrier is a big part of not feeling comfortable or welcome, as well as not being able to relate to the culture.

The pay is not great for minimum wage workers

Sexism, either advantaging women or men;

Speaking Dutch (at a good level) is a game changer. Ever since I started speaking fluent Dutch, I have gotten at least an interview to every job I have applied

Find a good friend in hard times. Learn from his educational experiences without racism and discrimination

Sometimes race did play a role in the work environment. Since they were less professional, but it was never straight up racist.

Studying in the Netherlands before working in NL offers more advantages.

Nothing to mention

Anyone who is different will receive different treatment than the standard. I've found my attitude and thoughts to be my biggest blockade

Housing very closely connected to labour - lack of housing disproportionately affecting immigrants leads to difficulties in adjusting to a stable labour market

Figure 5 – Answers Open Survey Question 14 (Author's own design)

*Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding to this survey?*

Every country has his rules. I respect everyone and then you get respect back.

No

No coment

Nederlanders zijn bod en zeggen altijd alles wat ze denken. Dat komt kwetsend over.

No

Sometimes it is frustrating when your way of communication is different. Brings sometimes misunderstandings. You will be fully accepted when you are 'the same'.

I have only worked for the university thus since it's a very international environment I did not feel unwelcomed or discriminated in any way. The position was also the first job I applied for so I do not have a lot of experience with applying for employment offers in this country.

Define what do you mean by 'feel welcomed when I first started working in NL', welcomed by the colleagues, employeer (attitude), welcomed as in that it was easy to get integrated / get formalities done --> it can mean different things (or just define when defining your variables/elements of the conceptual model it in ur thesis and say you also gave an explanation for the respondents; yey scientific integrity)

For the question "How long does it generally take you to find a job in the Netherlands?", I moved to the Netherlands having secured a job beforehand. So you might want to include a further option. Also, the matrix questions were a little difficult to answer since you are asking two things at the same time in each questions.

May be you want to change the first question to "which region were you born"? As Europe and Asia are both on Eurasia continent wise.

No

Figure 6 – Answers Open Survey Question 15 (Author's own design)

Appendix 3 – Demographic Characteristics

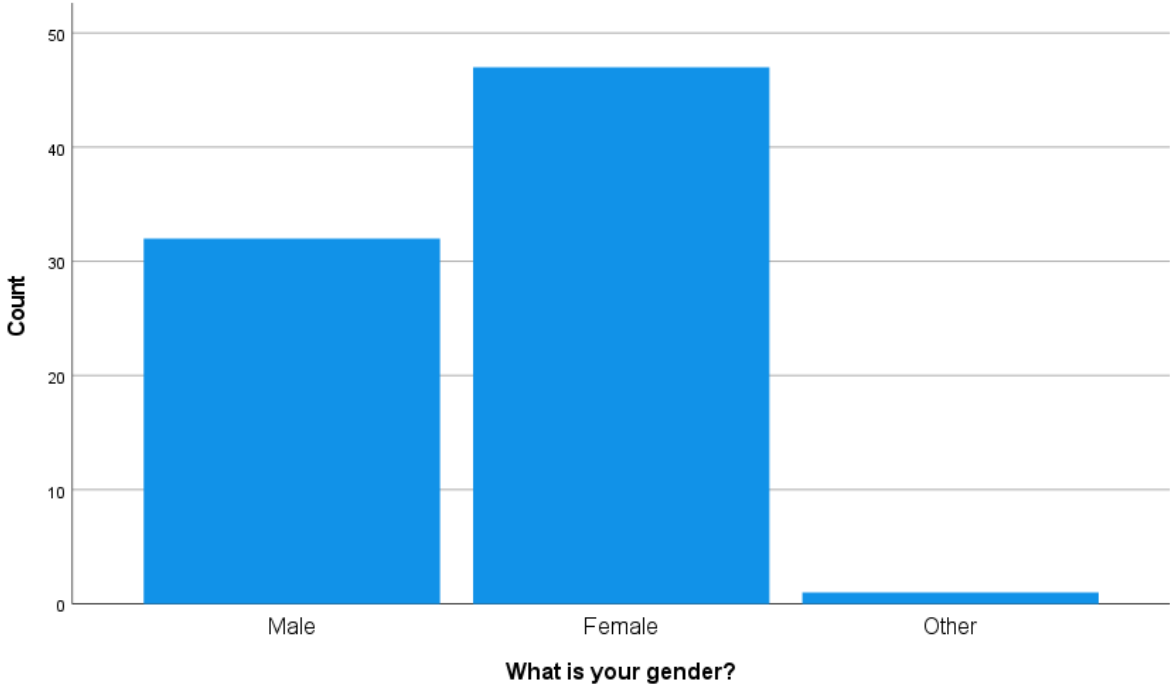


Figure 7 – Gender (Author’s own design)

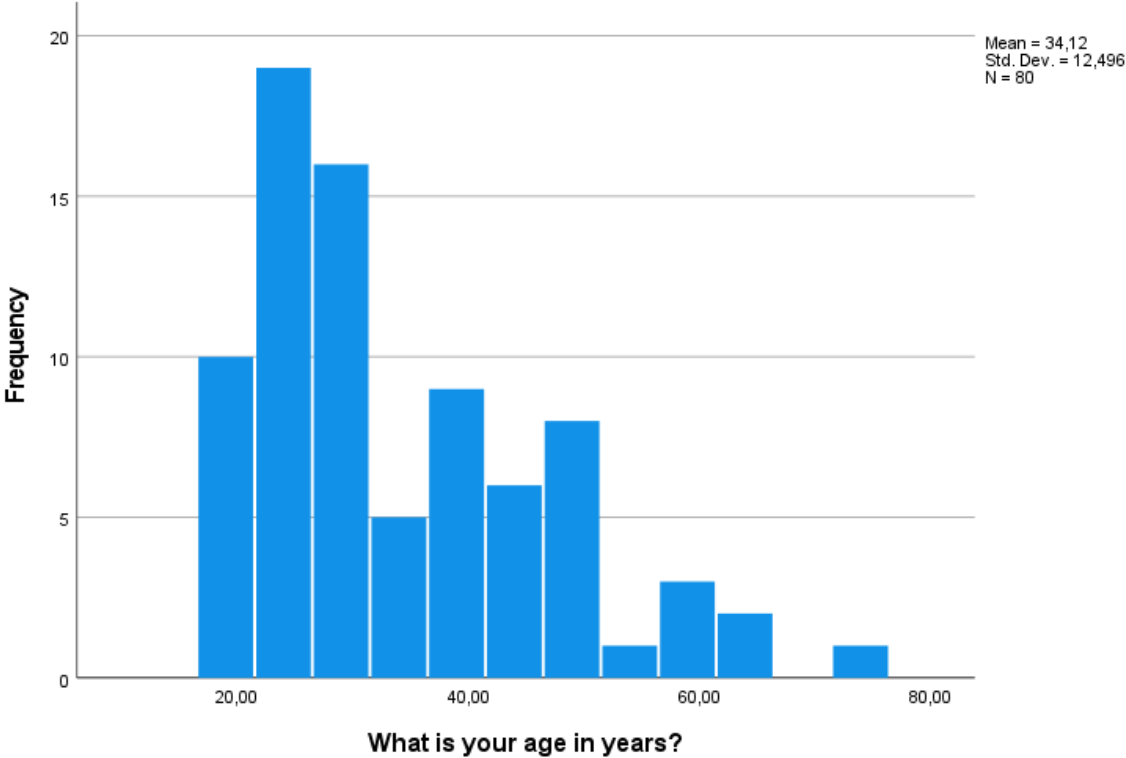


Figure 8 – Age (Author’s own design)



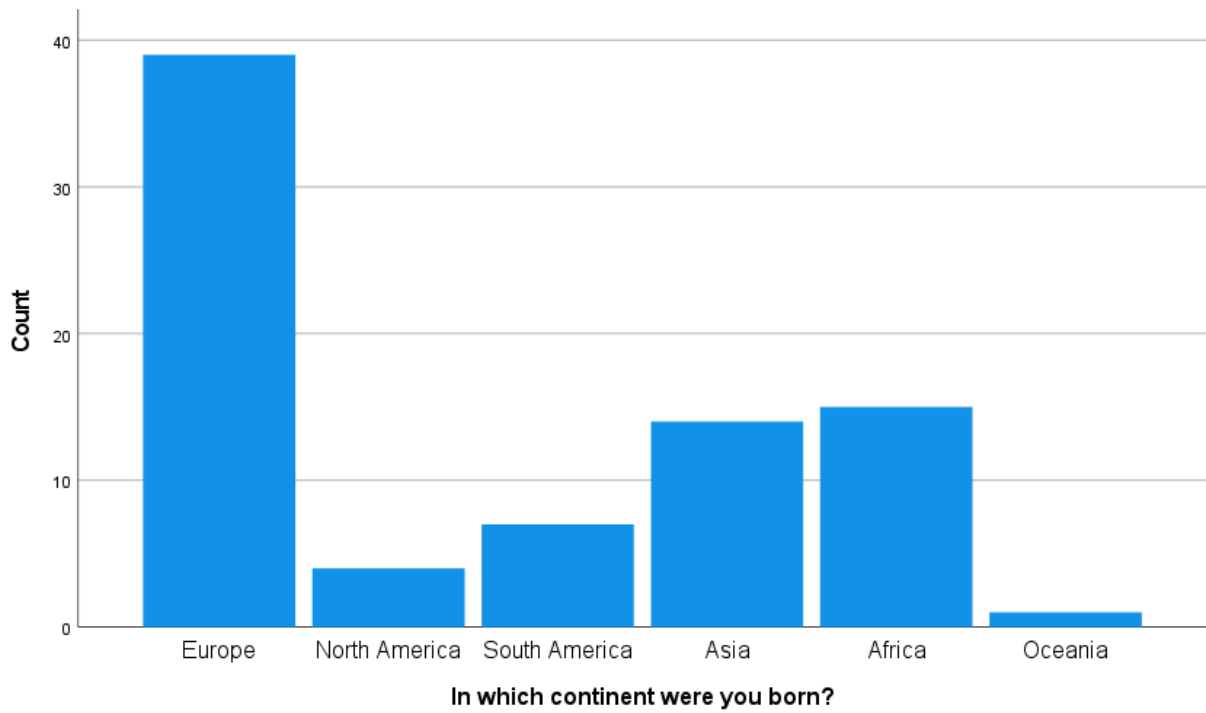


Figure 9 – Continent (Author's own design)

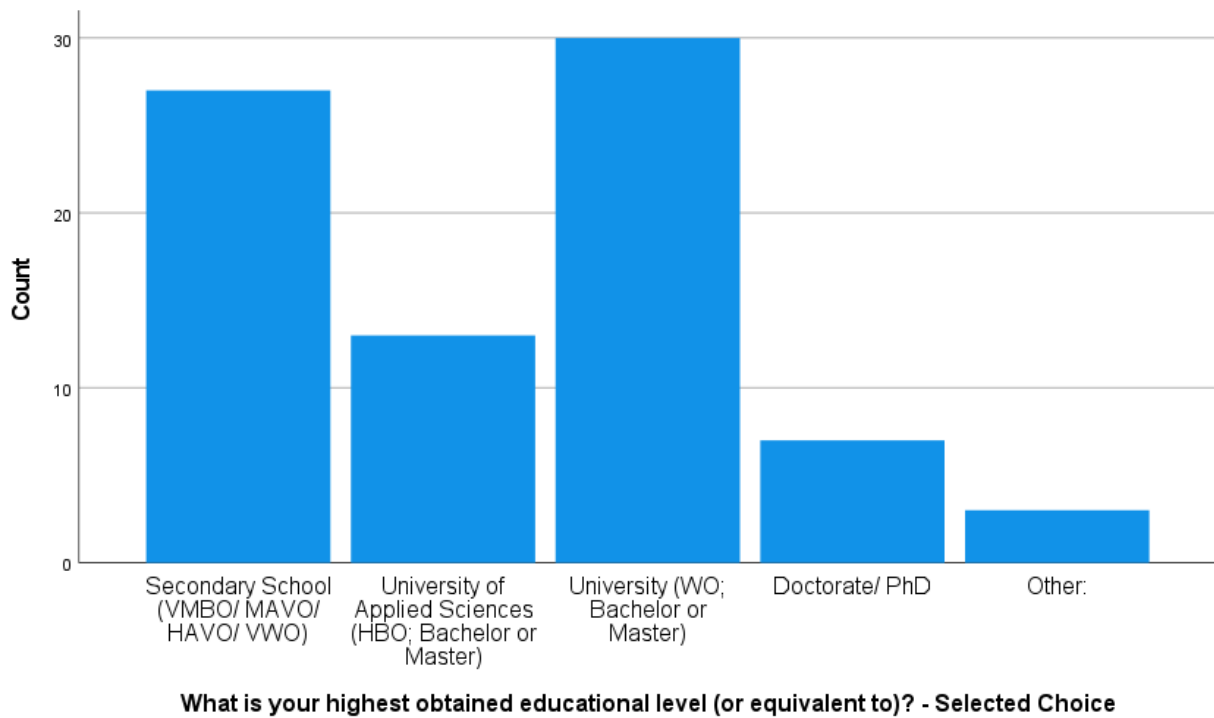


Figure 10 – Educational Level (Author's own design)

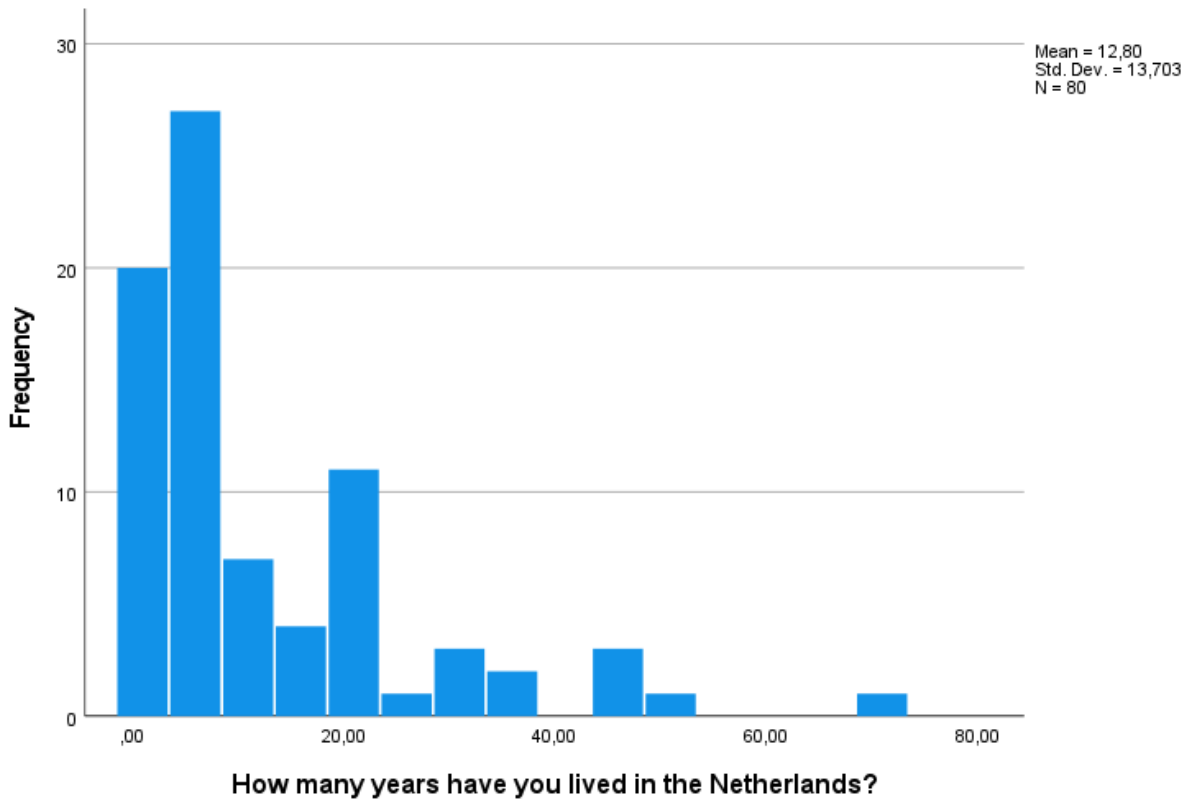


Figure 11 – Years Lived in the Netherlands (Author’s own design)

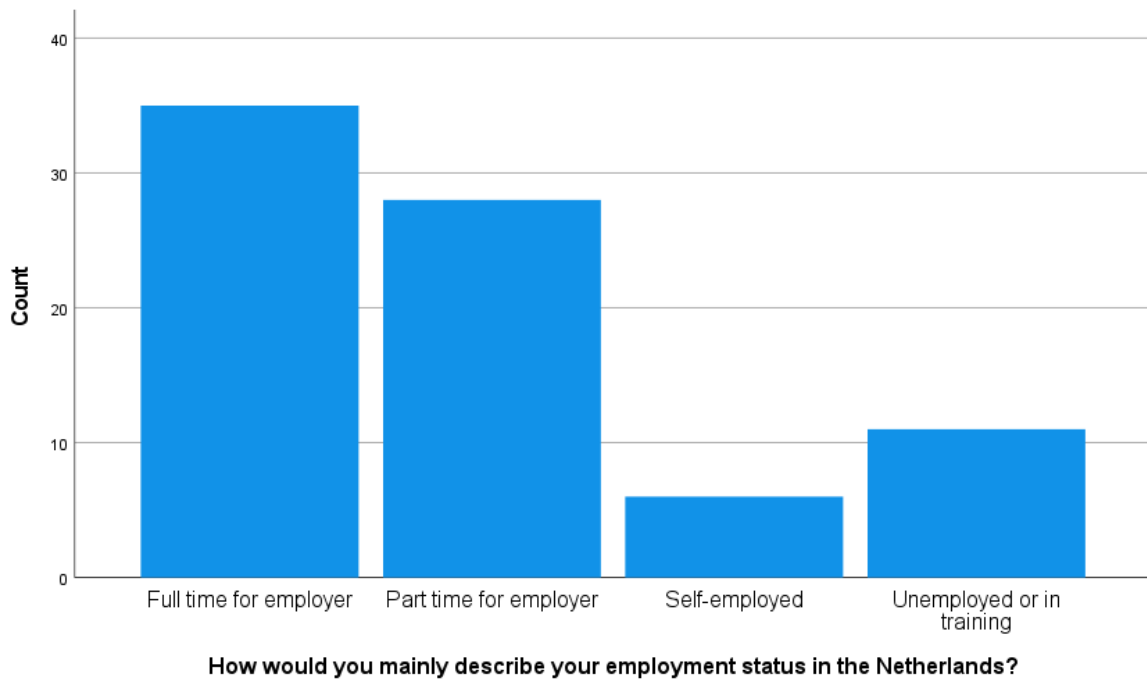
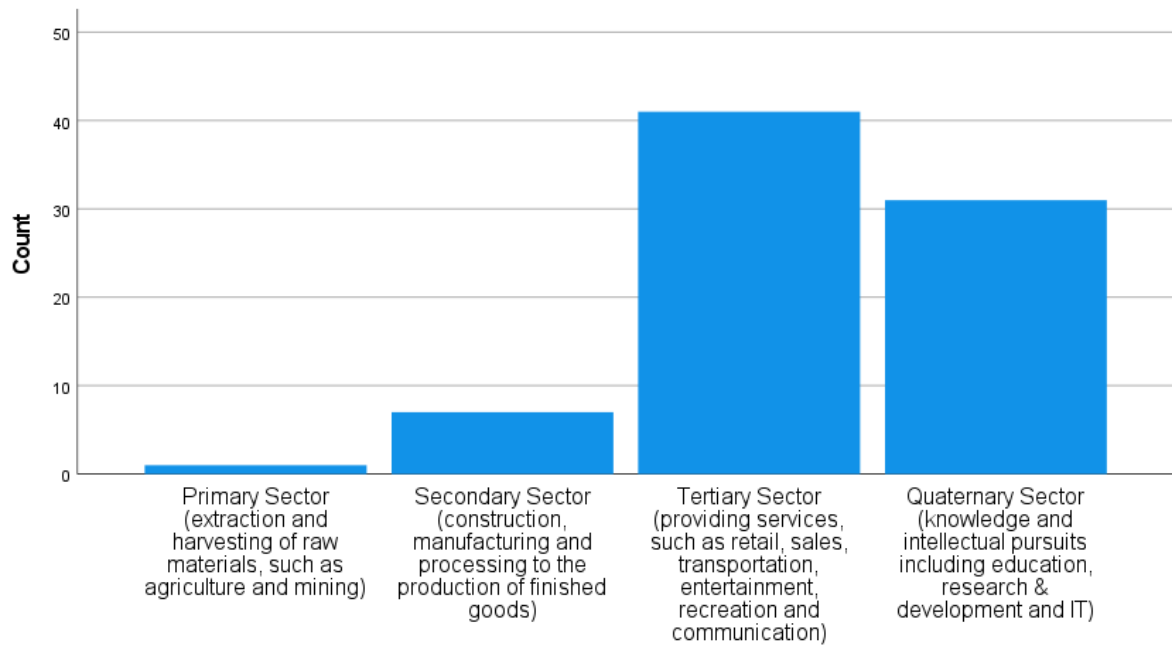
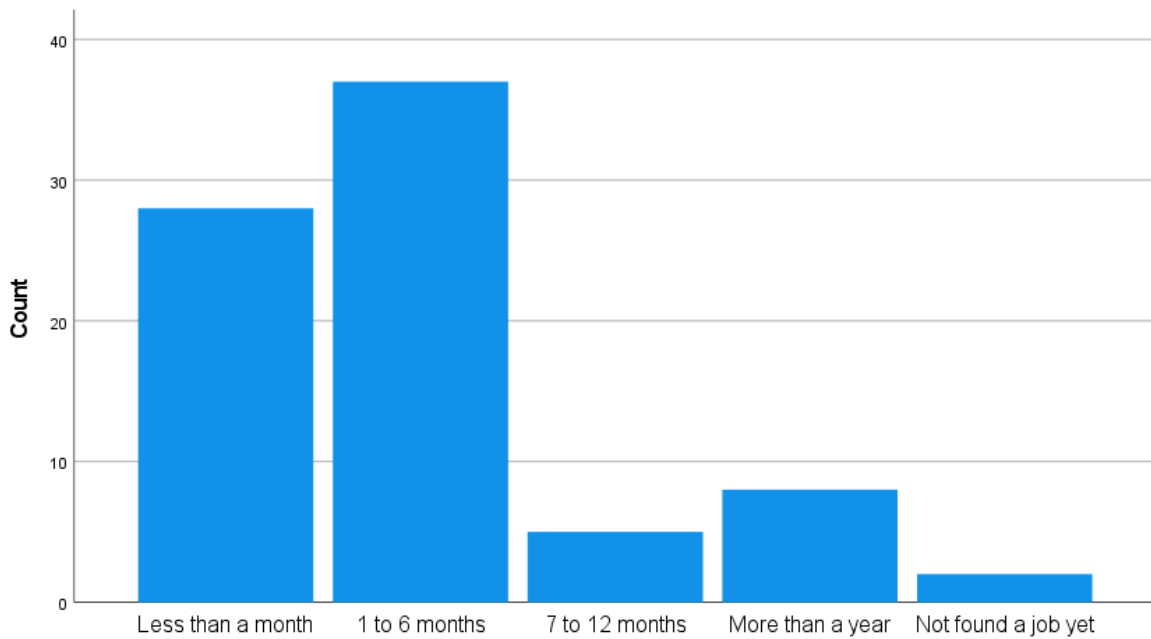


Figure 12 – Employment Status (Author’s own design)



**Which of the following sectors best describes where you have mainly worked in the Netherlands?**

Figure 13 – Work Sector (Author’s own design)



**How long does it generally take you to find a job in the Netherlands?**

Figure 14 – Time Finding a Job (Author’s own design)

## Appendix 4 – Outcomes

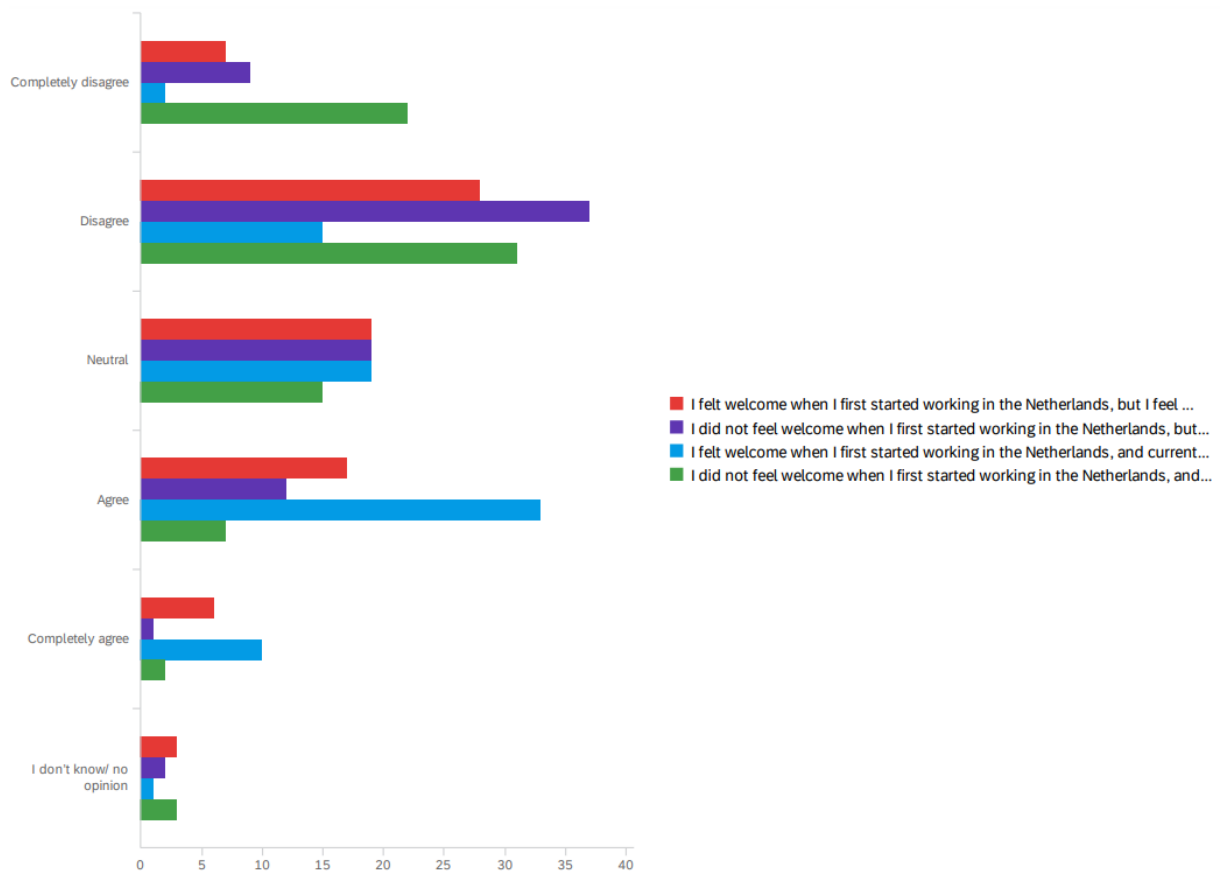


Figure 15 – Agreement on Statements (Author's own design)

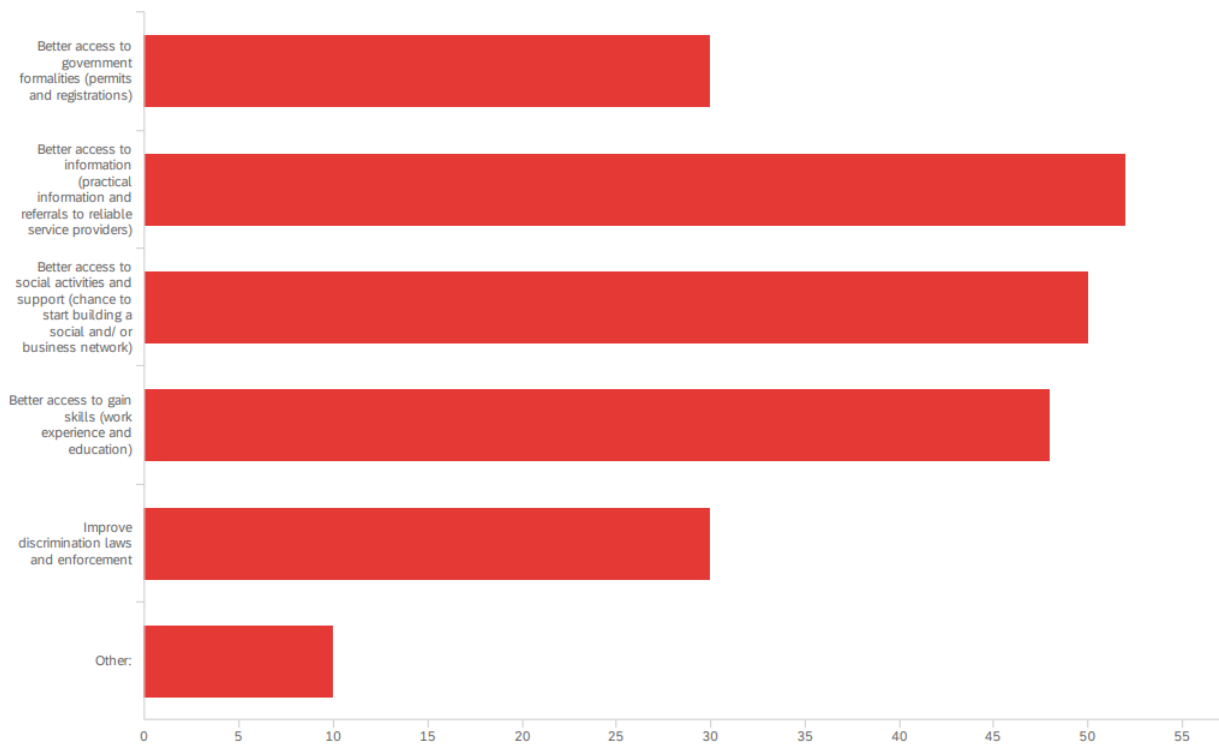


Figure 16 – Opportunities for better engaging in the Dutch labour market (Author's own design)

## Appendix 5 – Two-sample t-test

### Group Statistics

	Region	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Amount of experienced challenges	0	38	3,2368	1,79239	,29076
	1	32	3,1250	2,16646	,38298

Table 4 – Group Statistics (Author's own design)

### Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Amount of experienced challenges	Equal variances assumed	2,566	,114	,236	68	,407	,814	,11184	,47308	-,83217	1,05585
	Equal variances not assumed			,233	60,262	,408	,817	,11184	,48085	-,84992	1,07360

Table 5 – Independent Samples Test (Author's own design)