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The Appeal of the Netherlands to Knowledge Migrants

Management Summary

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- MANAGEMENT SUMMARY -

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Management Summary

The Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Security and Justice commissioned Regioplan to conduct a study into the appeal of the Netherlands to highly skilled migrants (so called knowledge migrants). The aim of the study was to obtain insight into how the immigration policy can make the Netherlands (more) attractive to highly skilled migrants and more particularly how the IND and other parties involved can improve services to these migrants. The study provides insight into the reasons why highly skilled migrants choose the Netherlands and their experiences with Dutch entry policy and services. By highly skilled migrants, we mean all highly qualified workers from outside the EU/EEA who are working in the Netherlands as knowledge migrants. This group includes highly qualified managers or ICT specialists, for example, but also academic staff such as PhD candidates, researchers or teaching staff. Besides providing insight into the choices and experiences of highly skilled migrants, this study formulates concrete starting points for improving services to this group of migrants. This could ultimately boost the appeal of the Netherlands as a host and career country.

The study consisted of three parts: (1) an exploration of the field; (2) survey among highly skilled migrants and (3) a brief comparison of the policy and implementation in two other European countries. We used various methods for this: document study, interviews with eleven stakeholders involved in providing services to highly skilled migrants, a web survey among 1,116 highly skilled migrants who were admitted in the period 2016-2018, customer journey interviews with ten respondents from the web survey who were less satisfied with the application and entry process and finally, a brief document study and two interviews with policymakers about the policy practice in Switzerland and Germany.

Choosing the Netherlands

Various pull factors were involved in choosing the Netherlands. Ideas about the quality of life (security, culture, way of life), career options, knowledge infrastructure (employer's reputation) and financial considerations are important factors in choosing the Netherlands. Familiarity with the Netherlands also plays a role: half of all highly skilled migrants have been to the Netherlands before as part of their studies, work or holiday.

Most highly skilled migrants consciously choose the Netherlands. However, some highly skilled migrants ended up in the Netherlands more or less by chance. They didn't know which country to choose or had a preference for another country. One in three highly skilled migrants had no specific preference for the Netherlands and 14 percent of the highly skilled migrants really wanted to go to another country. Frequently mentioned countries are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Australia, Sweden and Denmark. Attractive financial schemes (salary, 30% scheme) and possibilities to stay permanently seem to be an incentive for this group of highly skilled migrants to eventually choose the Netherlands.

Experiences with the entry policy and procedures

Highly skilled migrants are generally positive to very positive about the entry policy and implementation of immigration procedures. They feel that the policy and procedures when they first arrive are clear and transparent. The target period within which applications are handled is nearly always achieved. The employer, who generally acts as a recognised sponsor, plays an important role in this.

A quarter of the highly skilled migrants had already worked as a skilled migrant in another country. Compared with their previous experience, this group is more positive about the procedures in the Netherlands than in other countries. The Dutch entry policy for highly skilled migrants (and their family members) comes off well in a comparison with Germany and Switzerland too. The procedure is simple and often has short processing times, mainly thanks to the use of the recognised sponsor. This is supported by stakeholders who say that the Netherlands has one of the fastest and smoothest procedures for highly skilled migrants.

Support and services during the application and entry process

In the study, the appeal of the Netherlands was not only linked to the entry policy and procedures, but it also explored how the highly skilled migrants experienced the support by the recognised sponsor and the services of different parties such as the IND, embassies, expat centres and municipalities. Highly skilled migrants are (very) positive about the support of recognised sponsors prior to their arrival in the

Netherlands. They were generally also positive about the services of parties involved in the application and entry process. The services of expat centres were particularly well rated. They were slightly more critical with respect to the IND, embassies and municipalities, but still generally (very) positive.

Experiences with extension procedure

Highly skilled migrants are much less positive about the transparency and processing time of extension procedures. Highly skilled migrants don't understand why this process takes so long or what exactly they need to do. Nor do they understand why they are informed in Dutch by the IND, despite not being obliged to learn the Dutch language, or receive any help to do so.

The Netherlands as host and career country

Highly skilled migrants experience the Netherlands as an attractive destination. The quality of life, the way of life and the career opportunities are particularly well rated. Highly skilled migrants also indicate that the quality of life, culture and way of life in the Netherlands are better than they initially thought. The positive appreciation for the Netherlands translates into the high percentage of highly skilled migrants who say that they wish to stay in the Netherlands for a longer period (around 70%) and that they would recommend the Netherlands to other highly skilled migrants (around 80%).

At the same time, highly skilled migrants also have critical comments about the Netherlands as a host and career country. For example, highly skilled migrants are less satisfied with the social integration in the Netherlands (including the possibilities to learn Dutch) and about the cost of living and housing. The limited career opportunities for partners and the attitude to foreigners are also aspects which are less satisfactory. These negative aspects can even be a reason for some highly skilled migrants to leave the Netherlands quite soon (around 10%).

Problems and areas for improvement

The results of this study clearly show that the policy and implementation of the procedure relating to entry and residence of highly skilled migrants are generally rated positively and run smoothly. Nevertheless, there are also areas of criticism. For example, highly skilled migrants under the age of 30 often feel that the salary requirements to be eligible for a permit are too high. They also feel that the recognised sponsor structure can make it harder to find a job in a specific sector or at a smaller company. A small percentage of the highly skilled migrants have found that the entry and residence process can be a difficult procedure. This mainly applies to situations in which there is confusion regarding the transition between residence schemes, there are problems with legalising documents of the highly skilled migrant or his/her family members (e.g. lack of clarity about the conditions), the English language skills of a highly skilled migrant are poor or if a recognised sponsor is not proactive enough, does not provide sufficient guidance and/or overview.

Based on the problems identified in this study, several improvements are suggested related to:

- *improvements in the organisation and implementation and services*, particularly with respect to co-ordination between the embassy and the IND when issuing a provisional residence permit (mvv), the support to recognised sponsors, communication by the IND to highly skilled migrants, the regional coverage of the expat centres, a uniform implementation of the registration requirements by the municipalities and cooperation and knowledge exchange between parts of the IND;
- *improvements to policy and procedures relating to migration*, particularly regarding transitions between migration schemes (including transition from the orientation year of highly educated persons to the highly skilled migrant scheme), difficult legalisation procedures for family members travelling at the same time or later, possibilities for permanent residence and extension procedures;
- *improvements to policy and procedures relating to integration*, relating to the social integration (including further information and support regarding the daily life in the Netherlands), Dutch language classes and support for the study and career opportunities for partners of highly skilled migrants;
- *better branding of the Netherlands abroad*, publicise the favourable highly skilled migrant scheme, the career opportunities and the quality of life in the Netherlands in countries outside the European Union through social media or make better use of networks of expats or foreign students.

In conclusion

Overall, we can conclude that the highly skilled migrant scheme and the services are rated positively by highly skilled migrants. There are problems in the entry process that certainly require attention. However, the general picture is that the highly skilled migrant scheme is a clear and smooth procedure. What also emerges from this study is that highly skilled migrants find the Netherlands attractive as a host and career country and that many consider staying in the Netherlands for a longer period. However, highly skilled migrants miss support in their social integration. In this respect, very little policy has been developed for this group. If the government wishes to retain highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands for a longer period, it could devote more attention to this.



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