

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in
Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

*Dual Degree Program, Maastricht University, MSc International Business, Organization:
Change, Management, and Consultancy, & NOVA University, MSc Management*

**How do human resources practices support the onboarding and integration of high-
skilled migrants?**

How are the socio-economic, organizational and individual factors interacting to influence the
decision to migrate?

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24/01/2025

Abstract

This study examines how socio-economic, organizational, and individual factors influence high-skilled migration decisions, with a focus on the role of HR practices in onboarding and integration. Semi-structured interviews with high-skilled migrants and HR professionals indicate the interplay between career aspirations, systemic conditions, and personal motivations driving migration. Findings emphasize the critical role of tailored HR strategies, including comprehensive relocation support, career development pathways, and inclusive integration programs. Additionally, the study highlights the challenges posed by career patterns and dynamic global talent flows, contributing to discussions on brain circulation and offering actionable insights for organizations to enhance talent retention.

Keywords: High-skilled migration, onboarding, integration, HR practices, brain circulation, career mobility, talent retention

This work used infrastructure and resources funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (UID/ECO/00124/2013, UID/ECO/00124/2019 and Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209), POR Lisboa (LISBOA-01-0145-FEDER-007722 and Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209) and POR Norte (Social Sciences DataLab, Project 22209).

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1 Introduction

Across member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the inflow of international migrants increased by around 25% from 2010 to 2019 (OECD 2022). However, the migration of highly skilled migrants occurs at an even higher rate among young workers, particularly at the beginning of their careers (OECD 2024). In the Netherlands, the stay rate of international students from the European Economic Area (EEA) was only 19% five years after graduation in 2015-2016 (Elfferich 2022). In 2023, the Dutch Education Minister proposed measures to centralize control over the inflow of international students, responding for example to pressures on housing and lecturer availability, despite the Netherlands' reputation as a renowned and well-connected country for higher education (Letter of 21 April 2023 from the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to the House of Representatives on Managing the Influx of International Students in Higher Education, 2023). This growing workforce of high-skilled migrants who completed their tertiary education in the Netherlands has needs and preferences that companies must acknowledge in their practices and policies to better attract, integrate, and understand them.

Globally, companies have been using diversity and inclusion statements, including on cultural diversity, in their own branding to stand-out and attract talents (Jonsen et al. 2021). However, how well do these organizations understand the decision-making processes of highly skilled professionals considering migration? Skilled migration plays an important role in shaping global economies by fostering innovation and contributing to economic growth in host countries, while also presenting significant challenges for origin nations (Bhardwaj and Sharma 2023). Organizations around the world are increasingly competing to attract top talent to address specific sectoral shortages and mitigate issues like population ageing, with policies such as the European Blue Card designed to attract and retain highly skilled professionals (Bailey and Mulder 2017; Beaverstock 2011). This dynamic leads to a complex interplay of brain drain and brain gain. Brain drain refers to the emigration of educated individuals from developing

countries, which diminishes their human capital and hinders their economic growth (Agrawal et al. 2011; Docquier, Lohest, and Marfouk 2007). In contrast, brain gain occurs when destination countries benefit from the influx of skilled migrants, boosting their innovation progress and economic performance (Fassio, Montobbio, and Venturini 2019; Hajro, Gibson, and Pudelko 2017). Additionally, brain circulation offers a more balanced view, highlighting the potential for skilled migrants to contribute to both their home and host countries. This concept involves a continuous exchange of talent and knowledge, where migrants may return home or engage in cross-border collaborations that enhance global economic integration and counteract some of the negative effects of brain drain (Harvey 2008; Saxenian 2006). Understanding these concepts is essential for organizations and policymakers aiming to maximize the benefits of skilled migration while addressing its broader implications.

The decision to migrate is shaped by various factors and their complex interactions. On a personal level, high-skilled workers may choose to leave their origin-country if they face insufficient career resources, limited opportunities for professional development, and weak social ties or national identity (De Cieri et al. 2009; Goštautaitė et al. 2019). On the other hand, they may be attracted to destination countries by better job prospects, higher living standards, and opportunities for self-realization and personal fulfilment (Stahl et al. 2024; Urbański 2022). External circumstances, such as political or economic instability, can also push professionals to seek more stable environments with fewer disruptions (Bhardwaj and Sharma 2023; Zweig, Tsai, and Singh 2021). Additionally, the desire for self-realization, personal fulfilment, higher living standards, and new networks can also drive migration (Bartolini, Gropas, and Triandafyllidou 2017; Farashah et al. 2023). For instance, researchers might move to countries with advanced infrastructure and cutting-edge technology (Gibson and McKenzie 2011). The decision to migrate is dynamic and influenced by changing circumstances and life events. Understanding how personal motivators interact with conditions in both the origin and

destination countries is key (Weinar and Klekowski Von Koppenfels 2020). However, to what extent do Human Resources (HR) departments grasp the priorities and needs of migrants? Current literature indicates a need to explore the interaction between various factors—socio-economic, organizational, and individual—in the decision-making process of highly skilled migrants, especially in uncertain economic times (Niraula and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Additionally, self-selection factors need to be addressed: how migrants differentiate themselves from their non-migrating counterparts, and how do "push" and "pull" motives influence their decision to migrate (Stahl et al. 2024)? To address organizational needs, it is essential to gain in-depth knowledge of the interactions between factors driving migration decisions and to implement tailored changes in organizational policies and practices.

The classification of highly skilled migrants often depends on varying definitions. It often represents a category of migrants having completed tertiary education that can come from any global region (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022; Weinar and Klekowski Von Koppenfels 2020). According to research on the impact of globalisation on career patterns, national differences in the careers of top managers have decreased. Additionally, these patterns are starting to converge. For example, the relevance of degrees like MBA has been increasing. These high-skilled workers are represented by an increasing proportion of non-nationals (Davoine and Schmid 2022). Thus, highly skilled workers are migrating and reinforce the globalisation of career patterns.

Building on these insights, this study aims to explore the following two interconnected research questions:

1. *How do human resources practices support the onboarding and integration of high-skilled migrants?*
2. *How are the socio-economic, organizational and individual factors interacting to influence the decision to migrate?*

To explore these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two key groups: high-skilled migrants and HR managers. This study involves high-skilled migrants with a Dutch tertiary education in the early career stages, and HR managers. The interviews with high-skilled migrants were conducted first, allowing their insights to shape the research focus and more effectively address the identified gaps in the literature. Subsequently, interviews with HR managers offer a perspective on current organizational practices and policies related to attracting and integrating high-skilled migrants. This sequential approach ensures that the study is grounded in the real-world experiences of migrants while also capturing the organizational viewpoint. The research focuses on participants engaged in global professions, who are not professionally bound to a specific geographic region (Fourcade 2006). Participants must have completed their tertiary education in the Netherlands as international students and subsequently migrated outside of both the Netherlands and their home country. Additionally, they should be employed in large companies with over 250 employees. This focus allows for a more in-depth analysis of a specific category of workers (Crowley-Henry, O'Connor, and Suarez-Bilbao 2021). The participants will have migrated within the last five years, a timeframe that is crucial as it influences their recollection of the migration process and the socialization context at the time (Colakoglu, Yunlu, and Arman 2018). This period also allows for the study of a time marked by significant uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022). By focusing on this specific population, the study aims to capture the interaction between factors during a period of significant global change, and their influence on contemporary migration decisions, providing deeper insights for both academic research and HR practices. While understanding why mobile workers decide to migrate, career paths could be modelled and sketched on the basis of the models drawn by Evans et al. (1989), for better clarity and new insights. The impact of globalisation on career paths of mobile workers can be studied further and results can be considered in HR policies and practices.

This study is relevant for HR departments of business organizations and for academic researchers in organization studies, e.g. HR and organizational behaviour, as well as in work psychology. Indeed, the field of careers accounts for global changes and their impact is equally on individuals as on organizations and society as a whole. Understanding better the high-skilled migrants' workforce can allow HR departments to better strategize talent attraction and integration, as well as providing supporting policies (Baruch and Sullivan 2022; Hajro et al. 2021; Stahl et al. 2024). The evolution of career patterns in Europe under the scope of globalisation shows new emerging trends that have not been extensively researched yet (Davoine and Schmid 2022). Gaining in-depth insights on the decision-making process from a specific sample of high-skilled migrants can offer valuable knowledge for further studies on career patterns and high-skilled migrating workers. In-depth data analysis can unveil elements that were not present in broader data collection processes before.

The thesis begins with a literature review that explores existing theories and research on the concept of high-skilled migrants and the factors influencing their migration. This review will provide a comprehensive framework for approaching the complex interactions that drive migration decisions and will also integrate HR strategies for attracting, retaining, and integrating highly skilled migrants. Following the literature review, the methodology section will be introduced. This section will detail the research execution guidelines, sample selection, and coding procedures, justifying the chosen methods. In Chapter 4, the outcomes of the semi-structured interviews will be outlined and further discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, contributions, practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research will be presented.

2 Literature Review

The current chapter will summarize definitions and analytical classifications of highly skilled migrants, demonstrating the absence of a universally accepted concept (Weinar and Klekowski Von Koppenfels 2020). It will outline reasons why organizations are attracted to

these migrants and the challenges faced by highly skilled professionals during the migration process. Finally, the review will categorize the factors influencing the decision to migrate into a 2x2 matrix (see Table 1), categorizing them by personal motivators, circumstances and opportunities, and push-pull factors. This framework provides insights for business organization, in particular top management and HR departments, on how to approach the complex interactions driving migration decisions, helping them to attract and integrate high-skilled migrant employees into their workforce.

2.1 Highly Skilled Migrants in Contemporary Settings

2.1.1 Definitions and Classifications of Highly Skilled Migrants

The definition of highly skilled migrants has been debated in the literature, revealing significant variability in how this group is conceptualized. Highly skilled migrants are commonly defined by three criteria: education, occupation, and wages (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022). Often, there is an assumed direct link between tertiary education and high skill levels, which can overlook broader definitions of skill (Borjas 2005; Kone and Özden 2017). Additionally, some definitions incorporate wage levels as a proxy for skill, suggesting that higher salaries correlate with higher skill levels (Borjas 2005). Weinar and Koppenfels (2020) emphasize the roles of temporariness and mobility, introducing categories like expatriates and international students into the discussion. For this study, highly skilled migrants will be defined as “migrants with at least a bachelor’s degree or equivalent who have moved legally to work and live abroad for an indefinite period of time” (Farashah and Blomquist 2021; Hajro, Gibson, and Pudelko 2017).

Different countries and organizations adopt varying standards to define high-skilled migrants (Parsons et al. 2014; Weinar and Klekowski Von Koppenfels 2020). This discordance manifests in several ways: definitional differences, where various countries have their own criteria for what constitutes high skill; occupational discordance, where the classification of the

same individual can vary depending on local occupational frameworks; and policy discordance, where immigration policies affect whether an individual is considered highly skilled. Moreover, Weinar and Koppenfels (2020) argue that definitions of highly skilled migrants can be influenced by the normative values of those setting the criteria, questioning who defines high skill and for what purpose. For instance, in the Netherlands, educational attainment is not always required for the "knowledge migrant" scheme (Hercog and Sandoz 2018), while in the USA, only 8% of migrants meet all three common criteria—tertiary education, high-level occupation, and a salary of at least \$100,000—illustrating discrepancies based on salary and occupation (Goulart, Ramos, and Ferrittu 2022; Parsons et al. 2020). The lack of a uniform definition reflects broader issues in understanding the diverse and multifaceted nature of highly skilled migration.

2.1.2 Consequences of Migration: Brain Drain, Brain Gain, and Brain Circulation

Skilled migration significantly contributes to economic growth and innovation in host countries, enhancing productivity and technological advancement (Bhardwaj and Sharma 2023). As observed by Beaverstock (2011), the global competition for highly skilled migrants has intensified, driven by the need of organisations to address talent shortages in various sectors. For instance, in the EU, skilled migrants help counteract the effects of population ageing and regional decline, crucial for sustaining innovation and economic stability. The European Blue Card and similar programs in the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK aim to attract and retain such talent by providing favourable conditions for highly skilled workers (Bailey and Mulder 2017). While skilled migrants contribute positively to innovation, their impact is more pronounced in sectors with high foreign direct investment (FDI) and openness to trade, demonstrating the importance of targeted migration policies that align with industry needs (Fassio, Montobbio, and Venturini 2019). Additionally, the organizational context plays a critical role in shaping skilled migrants' workplace experiences and integration, which in turn

influences their contributions to economic growth and innovation (Hajro, Gibson, and Pudelko 2017). Therefore, understanding the factors that motivate highly skilled workers to migrate is essential for organizations seeking to maximize their potential.

Brain drain remains a pressing issue for developing countries, as the migration of skilled professionals to more developed economies drains human capital and hampers long-term growth. The departure of educated individuals weakens local innovation capacity and limits the ability to address key economic challenges (Agrawal et al. 2011; Docquier, Lohest, and Marfouk 2007). While remittances and potential knowledge transfers can mitigate some losses, these benefits do not necessarily compensate for the broader economic harm. The reliance on foreign expertise creates a cycle of dependency, reinforcing global inequalities (Lim and Basnet 2017). Critics argue that, without strategic interventions, brain drain exacerbates the development gap, as destination countries benefit from talent at the expense of source nations (Borjas 2015). This dynamic calls into question the fairness and sustainability of the global talent flow.

In contrast to the detrimental effects of brain drain, the concept of brain circulation offers a more optimistic view of skilled migration, emphasizing the potential for a dynamic exchange of talent and knowledge between countries. This concept, explored by Saxenian (2006) and others, describes how skilled migrants contribute to their home countries through technology transfer, investment, and professional networks. While brain drain involves a permanent loss of talent from the source country, brain circulation encompasses a more fluid exchange where migrants may return home or engage in ongoing collaboration with their countries of origin. This process helps maintain and even boost the global economic machinery by facilitating knowledge spillover and fostering international partnerships (Harvey 2008). For example, skilled professionals who migrate for education or career opportunities may later return to their home countries, bringing back advanced skills and insights that enhance local

industries and innovation systems (Bhardwaj and Sharma 2023). Brain circulation thus represents a valuable mechanism for global economic integration and development, mitigating some of the negative impacts associated with brain drain while amplifying the benefits of skilled migration.

2.1.3 Highly Skilled Migrants and Their Role in Contemporary Business Organizations

The integration of highly skilled migrants is crucial for enhancing the innovation and competitive edge of multinational firms in the global market. Highly skilled migrants play a crucial role in fostering innovation within multinational firms, particularly when their diverse backgrounds and problem-solving approaches complement those of native workers. Research demonstrates that firms with high integration capacity benefit significantly from employing migrants, as they contribute unique perspectives and access to non-overlapping knowledge networks, driving firm-level innovation (Laursen et al. 2020). The career trajectories of top managers across European countries have increasingly been shaped by globalization, with greater representation of non-nationals and individuals with international experience, indicating the growing importance of global talent in leadership roles (Davoine and Schmid 2022). Multinational firms also strategically balance the employment of migrants domestically and abroad to optimize knowledge-sharing and innovation. However, immigration restrictions may limit firms' ability to coordinate this talent distribution, potentially undermining their global competitiveness (Belderbos et al. 2023). Highly skilled migrants not only drive innovation but also reshape the dynamics of organizational leadership and global talent management.

Effective integration of highly skilled migrants into organizations involves understanding their interaction within diverse social worlds. Grosskopf (2024) mentions that organizational integration goes beyond macro-economic factors, emphasizing the role of cultural exchange and colleague interactions in fostering both workplace and societal integration. Hajro et al. (2019) note that individual, organizational, and societal variables impact

migrant acculturation and coping strategies, emphasizing the complex, multi-level processes that shape integration and the resultant outcomes in personal and professional domains. While state support for migrant integration is often limited, private actors—such as employers and coworkers—play a vital role in facilitating this process. Additionally, migrants themselves can drive their integration by affecting organizational decision-making (Van Riemsdijk and Basford 2022). Effective integration of highly skilled migrants involves navigating complex interactions at multiple levels, highlighting the need for HR practices to consider these multi-faceted dynamics from the beginning of the migration process on.

Despite their high qualifications, many skilled migrants face barriers to employment that match their expertise. This underemployment often results from organizational resistance, where migrants are viewed as potential disruptors to established norms and practices, which challenges the assumption that organizations universally support migrant hiring (Risberg and Romani 2022). Meanwhile, migrants within the EU/EFTA countries frequently face qualification mismatches and deskilling, leading to periods of professional instability. Despite these challenges, they often view their international work experience as a valuable asset that can enhance their career opportunities (Landolt and Thieme 2018). Understanding these barriers is crucial for examining how migrants weigh the risks associated with migration, including the likelihood of being undervalued in their chosen destination.

2.2 Factors Influencing Migration Decisions

In analysing the drivers of skilled migration, it is helpful to categorize them within a 2x2 matrix, organizing the factors into two key dimensions: personal motivators and circumstances/ opportunities. These dimensions are further divided into push and pull factors, providing a structured framework for understanding the forces influencing migration decisions (Pszczółkowska 2024). Push factors are conditions that urge individuals to leave their origin countries, often driven by constraints such as economic instability, social injustice, or political

unrest. Conversely, pull factors will represent, in this study, the opportunities that attract individuals to a new destination, including better career prospects, higher living standards, and personal fulfilment. However, it's important to note that depending on personal views, circumstances, and priorities, the same factors may be perceived differently, and their categorization as push or pull could vary based on individual circumstances. This matrix approach allows us to systematically explore how both personal motivations and external circumstances interact to shape skilled migration patterns.

Table 1: 2x2 Matrix presenting factors influencing the decision to migrate

Factors	Push	Pull
Personal Motivators	Career Embeddedness Community Embeddedness National Identification	Career Advancement Social and Cultural Alignment Self-Realization
Circumstances/ Opportunities	Political & Economic Instability Labour Market Conditions	Employment Opportunities High Quality of Life Research & Infrastructure

2.2.1 Personal Motivators vs. Push Factors

The push factors influencing skilled migration can be rooted in issues related to **community and career embeddedness**. Career embeddedness refers to the various factors that keep individuals tied to their current employment situation, such as job satisfaction, career prospects, and professional development opportunities. When career embeddedness is weak, individuals may perceive fewer barriers to leaving their home country for better opportunities abroad. For example, insufficient career resources or developmental feedback in the home country can diminish career satisfaction, making migration a more appealing option for skilled workers seeking professional growth (Goštautaitė et al. 2019). Similarly, community embeddedness, which includes social connections and the quality of life in one's current community, influences migration decisions. High levels of community embeddedness often result from strong social ties and a positive community environment, which can make the prospect of leaving more daunting. However, if community embeddedness is low, individuals

may find it easier to relocate, as they are less tied to their current social networks and local community (Goštautaitė et al. 2019; Stahl et al. 2024). Thus, weak career and community embeddedness in the home country can act as push factors, driving skilled workers to explore opportunities abroad.

National identification, which reflects the extent to which individuals view themselves as representative of their home country, plays a crucial role in moderating the impact of push factors on migration decisions. A strong national identity can reinforce community embeddedness, making individuals more likely to value their ties to their home country and less inclined to leave despite adverse conditions (De Cieri et al. 2009; Ellemers 2004). Weaker national identification can decrease community embeddedness by reducing the importance of maintaining community links, diminishing community fit, and lessening the perceived sacrifices of leaving (Goštautaitė et al. 2019). National identity refers to the extent to which individuals view themselves as embodying the traits they believe characterize their nation (De Cieri et al. 2009). It also involves the degree to which a person sees themselves as a representative of a specific group (Ellemers 2004). Country identification will also play a significant role in the willingness to return to the origin-country after having migrated. Additionally, the differential between the institutional contexts of the origin and destination countries can influence the levels of career and community embeddedness (Stahl et al. 2024). Lower national identification can diminish the embeddedness in one's home country, making migration and potential repatriation less likely to be influenced by strong ties to the origin country.

2.2.2 Personal Motivators vs. Pull Factors

The pursuit of **career advancement** and personal development significantly influences skilled migrants' decisions to relocate to destination countries. Human development opportunities include better job prospects, higher living standards, and advanced education. The

perceived benefits of relocating to a country with superior human development indicators act as a strong pull factor, aligning with the general trend of migration towards more developed economies (UNDP 2019). Additionally, the appeal of **experienced upgrading**—such as improved status, work conditions, or job roles—makes migration an attractive option (Stahl et al. 2024). Aspirations often include the desire for **self-realization** and the fulfilment of personal potential, which is facilitated by self-determination. This drive to achieve one's goals can be a powerful pull factor, attracting individuals to destinations where they believe they can best fulfil their ambitions and grow professionally (Scheibelhofer 2018). This drive towards personal and professional fulfilment makes migration to the destination country an appealing option for skilled individuals.

Social and cultural factors also strongly influence migration decisions. **Family-related factors** often drive individuals to relocate, whether to join family members, enhance their family's quality of life, or provide better opportunities for their children (Pope et al. 2014; Urbański 2022). Alongside this, **value-congruent societal practices** draw migrants to destinations where cultural values and practices align with their own aspirations, enhancing their sense of belonging and integration. **Experienced multiculturalism** acts as a significant pull factor by fostering an inclusive environment, thereby facilitating migrants' integration and enhancing their sense of belonging in the destination country. The latter further entices migrants who value global interaction and diversity (Stahl et al. 2024). These social and cultural motives align with the broader goal of seeking environments that offer a richer, more fulfilling life experience.

2.2.3 Circumstances and Opportunities vs. Push Factors

Political and economic instability drive migration, pushing people to find safer and better opportunities elsewhere. **Political** instability is a major push factor for migration, as it disrupts the security and stability needed for both professional and personal life. This situation

is particularly strong in sub-Saharan African countries (Docquier, Lohest, and Marfouk 2007; Poppe et al. 2014). Poor **social welfare** performance, including inadequate public services and unreliable policy commitments, further worsens these conditions, driving individuals to seek more stable and dependable environments (Bhardwaj and Sharma 2023; Zweig, Tsai, and Singh 2021). **Economic** instability drives migration as individuals from struggling economies seek better opportunities elsewhere. Research shows that a drop in GDP per capita significantly increases migration rates among professionals (Okeke 2013), while economic crises in regions like Southern Europe push educated individuals to relocate for improved career prospects and living conditions (Bartolini, Gropas, and Triandafyllidou 2017). As a result, those facing unstable conditions are often motivated to relocate in search of greater stability and better opportunities.

Labour market demand, regulations, and company support are key push factors in skilled migration. When local labour markets fail to offer sufficient job opportunities, skilled workers often seek better prospects abroad. Farashah et al. (2023) highlight how underemployment and limited openings can drive even highly qualified professionals to leave. Restrictive regulations and complex bureaucracy can also hinder their ability to work effectively, adding to their frustration. Additionally, a lack of company support, such as limited career growth, further pushes individuals to seek more supportive environments elsewhere, leading many to migrate for better opportunities.

2.2.4 Circumstances and Opportunities vs. Pull Factors

Employment and professional opportunities are significant pull factors for skilled migrants, as they seek destinations offering **better earnings, career development, and job security**. Countries with strong labour markets and higher remuneration attract talent by providing not only competitive salaries but also opportunities for career growth and advancement (Bartolini, Gropas, and Triandafyllidou 2017). The promise of **research**

opportunities and robust **infrastructure** further enhances a destination's appeal, particularly for those in specialized fields (Gibson and McKenzie 2011). Skilled migrants are often drawn to environments where **advanced technology** and innovation drive their industries, enabling them to stay at the forefront of their profession (Astor et al. 2005). As Farashah et al. (2023) note, such environments allow professionals to fully utilize their skills, offering long-term career benefits that are not always available in their home countries. This combination of professional stability, career progression, and a favorable research environment makes certain countries highly attractive for skilled migration.

In addition to professional opportunities, a high quality of life and improved living standards are key pull factors that attract skilled migrants. Countries offering higher living standards, **better education**, and **networking opportunities** create an environment where both professional success and personal fulfilment are achievable (Farashah et al. 2023; Kline 2003). Skilled migrants often seek destinations that provide not only a strong job market but also opportunities for **self-improvement** through **education** and **qualifications** (Dulam and Franses 2015; Nifo and Vecchione 2014). In such environments, skilled migrants can build valuable networks that boost their job prospects and career growth, making these destinations attractive for both career opportunities and better living conditions.

2.2.5 Complex Interactions: Macro, Meso, and Micro-Level Factors

The decision-making process for highly skilled migrants is influenced by a complex interplay of macro, meso, and micro-level factors, often interacting with turning points or critical junctures. The factors highlighted earlier can undergo significant disruptions; for instance, macro-level factors such as economic instability, environmental crises, and global pandemics can create critical junctures that prompt migration. Similarly, meso-level factors, such as crises and urban security deterioration, can shape the immediate environment and impact migration decisions. At the micro level, personal life-changing events and household

dynamics can further influence the decision to migrate (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022). These disruptions and interactions across various levels underscore the multifaceted nature of migration decisions, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of how these factors converge to shape the migration patterns of highly skilled individuals.

The interaction between these levels is evident in the life-course events that impact migration decisions, such as family formation or career advancement. Networks and social connections also play a crucial role, either facilitating migration through support or shaping opportunities (Weinar and Klekowski Von Koppenfels 2020). The interactive multi-level approach, as illustrated in the Canadian context, emphasizes that migration is not a linear process but a dynamic, evolving decision influenced by a combination of personal, familial, and contextual factors (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022; Sapeha 2015). This comprehensive view underscores the importance of understanding how macro, meso, and micro factors intersect and how critical junctures can alter migration trajectories, shaping the experiences and outcomes of highly skilled migrants as they navigate their decisions to move or stay.

2.3 HR Strategies in Business Organizations for Attracting, Integrating, and Retaining Highly Skilled Migrant Workers

Consultancy literature provides insights into HR current strategies for attracting, integrating, and retaining highly skilled migrant workers in business organizations. Below is a refined outline with key updates to reflect this focus.

2.3.1. Global Talent Trends and Recruitments of high-skilled migrants

Global talent trends are significantly shaping the migration decisions of high-skilled professionals, urging companies to adapt quickly to the changing workforce landscape. The Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) serves as an essential benchmark for countries to evaluate their talent competitiveness, directly influencing how organizations approach talent acquisition and retention strategies. For instance, Switzerland, identified as a “*Talent*

Champion,” holds the highest score and ranks alongside other high-income nations in Europe and North America (Lanvin and Monteiro 2023).

Consultancy reports emphasize that potential migrants consider not only job-related factors but also quality-of-life aspects, such as safety and cultural inclusiveness. High-skilled migrants are increasingly attracted to employers who provide robust support during relocation, including assistance with visas, housing, and onboarding, as these aspects can significantly impact their choice to move abroad. In recent years, Canada emerged as the top destination in 2020, while Australia took the lead in 2023 following a post-pandemic employment surge. London remains a favoured city due to its extensive global network and the prevalence of English, with Amsterdam closely trailing behind. Further, consultancy sources highlight a growing interest in virtual mobility and increasing demographic pressures, which are driving talent trends toward greater global mobility (Baier et al. 2024; Bravery, Silva, and Peterson 2024). Thus, consultancy findings underscore the need for companies to adapt to these shifting dynamics to attract and retain high-skilled talent effectively.

2.3.2. Integrating Highly Skilled Migrants into Business Workforces

Effective integration of highly skilled migrants is emphasized in consultancy literature as critical for enhancing organizational performance and fully leveraging their potential. Acculturation processes, which help migrants adapt to new cultural and professional environments, are essential to both their personal and work satisfaction (Hajro et al. 2019). While state actors face challenges in supporting long-term integration, private and voluntary organizations are instrumental in providing information about work regulations and norms. According to consultancy insights, the workplace environment, including employers and colleagues, plays a central role in helping high-skilled migrants navigate their new settings. High-skilled migrants themselves can also serve as agents of integration, impacting decision-making at higher levels (Van Riemsdijk and Basford 2022). These interactions foster an

inclusive workplace culture, supporting both individual adaptation and broader organizational growth.

Furthermore, consultancy reports suggest that the integration of skilled migrants contributes significantly to organizational innovation. Migrants bring diverse perspectives and access to unique knowledge networks, enhancing problem-solving capabilities within teams. Organizations that embrace cultural diversity tend to experience greater innovation performance (Fassio, Montobbio, and Venturini 2019; Guznajeva et al. 2020; Laursen et al. 2020). However, the effectiveness of these integration efforts often depends on a firm's prior experience with high-skilled migrants, as those with established practices for embracing diversity can better leverage the unique contributions of their migrant hires (Laursen et al. 2020). Consultancy perspectives advocate for companies to adopt holistic integration practices that drive innovation while supporting successful adaptation for skilled migrants.

2.3.3. Retention Strategies for Business Organizations: Keeping Highly Skilled Migrants

In today's competitive job landscape, consultancy literature highlights the challenges businesses face in retaining highly skilled migrants. With an aging workforce and skill shortages, HR departments are encouraged to consider employees as valued customers, tailoring their approaches to meet diverse needs and foster a supportive environment (Usanova, Zikic, and Vaiman 2023). Consultancy reports underline the importance of this approach for both assigned expatriates and self-initiated migrants, ensuring they feel appreciated and are motivated to stay with the organization.

The "*global war for talent*" exacerbated by changing demographics and staffing shortages, drives organizations to refine retention strategies (Baldassari, Hajro, and Žilinskaitė 2022). To attract and retain top talent, companies should focus on their core values, clearly communicate their benefits, and build diverse teams. According to consultancy findings, offering flexibility, accelerating hiring processes, and providing clear career paths can improve

job satisfaction (Feldmann 2021; Guznajeva et al. 2020). Emphasizing a positive work experience and demonstrating genuine appreciation are also effective retention strategies. Failing to prioritize these elements, consultancy sources caution, may result in losing valuable talent to competitors, ultimately impacting the organization's growth and stability.

In conclusion, the updated model, inspired by the Stacey Matrix (Stacey 1996) (see Figure 1), provides a nuanced framework for understanding the factors that shape migration decisions among highly skilled migrants. The model's horizontal axis represents the complexity of interactions between factors influencing migration decisions, with complexity increasing from left (low) to right (high). The vertical axis denotes the degree of access to information and/or influence organizations have on these decision-making factors, with access and influence increasing from top (low) to bottom (high). The **Macro-Level**, positioned in the lower left of the quadrant, encompasses broad systemic influences such as political stability, economic conditions, and global talent trends. While organizations can observe these influences, they have limited ability to shape or control them directly. These factors form a foundational backdrop for migration, creating conditions that set the stage for broader migratory trends among highly skilled workers. Progressing toward the **Meso-Level**, the focus shifts to organizational strategies and HR practices. Here, organizations have a higher degree of influence, enabling them to adjust specific elements—such as onboarding processes, job flexibility, and cultural integration efforts. Positioned along the spectrum of increased complexity, this level reflects the medium degree of interdependence among factors, where organizations actively shape the migration experience and outcomes through practices aimed at attracting and retaining talent. Furthermore, the **Micro-Level** in the middle of the model represents the complex interplay of individual motivations, including personal career aspirations, relationships, and community ties. This level is marked by high complexity due to the interdependent and deeply personal nature of the factors influencing migration decisions,

making them difficult to observe or control. For organizations, this layer presents a sphere where visibility and influence are limited, as the personal and individualized nature of these factors falls outside the organizational sphere of impact. Finally, in the top-right corner, the **Turning Points** represent pivotal moments or disruptions in the migrant’s decision-making process. These may include life events, economic shocks, or policy changes that introduce high complexity and unpredictability. While organizations can observe macro-level trends, they often lack insight into these Turning Points, which arise from complex and less accessible interactions among various factors, beyond their direct influence. The model highlights how these levels interact dynamically, with macro-forces shaping organizational and individual decisions, and turning points introducing sudden shifts that may realign an individual’s priorities (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022). Together, this structure offers a holistic view of the multi-dimensional factors influencing highly skilled migration, emphasizing the areas where organizations can engage and where complexity limits their influence.

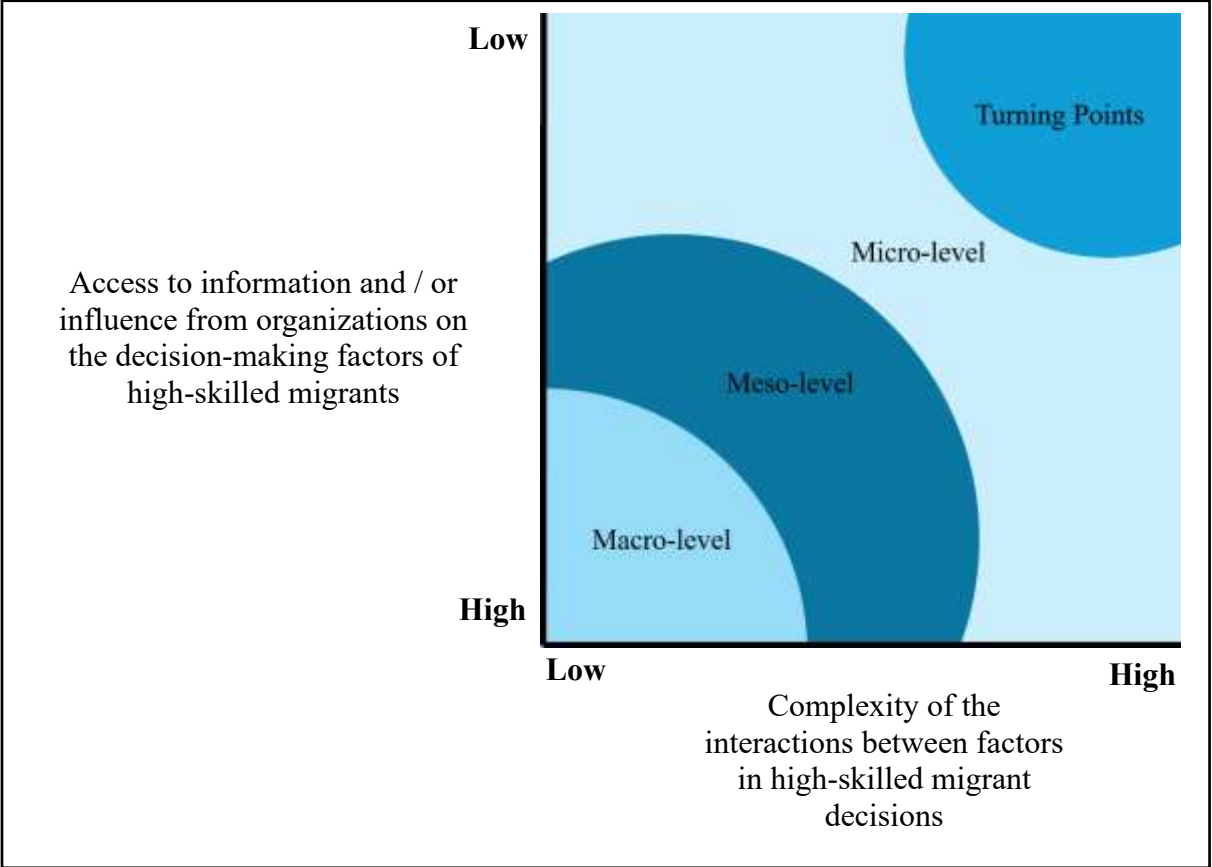


Figure 1: A Multi-Level Model of Factors Influencing Highly Skilled Migration Decisions – Complexity of Interactions and the Organization’s Role

3 Research Design

3.1 Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist epistemological stance, which prioritizes understanding the social world by examining how individuals interpret and make sense of their own experiences. Unlike the natural scientific model commonly used in quantitative research, this approach emphasizes the subjective insights of participants (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2022; Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke 2004). Given the gaps in the existing literature, particularly in relation to the specific interactions between individual motivations and organizational factors influencing high-skilled migration, this interpretivist approach is particularly suited for generating new insights where existing theories or data are limited (Farashah et al. 2023; Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022; Stahl et al. 2024). By focusing on the personal and organizational perspectives of high-skilled migrants and HR managers, the study seeks to uncover the complex interactions shaping migration decisions, rooted in participants' lived experiences (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2022). An inductive approach is used in this study to allow insights and themes to emerge naturally from the data, enabling a deeper understanding of the migration decisions based on participants' experiences rather than testing pre-existing theories (Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke 2004). Further unfolding the approach to theory development, semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility and ability to explore participants' lived experiences. This approach is ideal for capturing the nuanced interactions between personal motivations and external factors influencing migration. The format allows participants to shape the conversation, uncovering new themes and insights, making it well-suited for understanding the dynamic nature of migration decisions (Gill et al. 2008; King Dejardin 2014; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2019).

3.2 Research Structure and Data Collection

The research design follows a sequential approach, beginning with interviews of high-

skilled migrants and then HR managers, allowing the insights from migrants to shape the focus of subsequent discussions with HR managers, who provide a broader organizational perspective, incorporating examples from various employees. Semi-structured interviews are used as the primary data collection method, conducted online via ZOOM meetings, depending on participants' availability. This approach offered flexibility in exploring personal migration experiences and organizational practices, while open-ended questions encourage participants to provide in-depth responses (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2022; Gill et al. 2008). Audio recordings of each interview were made with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. A consent form from Maastricht university was sent to interviewees prior the interview. Ethical considerations are important, with steps taken to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and the respectful handling of sensitive data, particularly concerning personal migration experiences and company policies. Adhering to ethical guidelines is crucial for ensuring the integrity and credibility of the study, as it protects participants' rights and fosters trust by guaranteeing informed consent, confidentiality, and respectful handling of sensitive information. This careful approach not only respects participants' personal experiences and company policies but also enhances the study's validity by ensuring that data is reported accurately and transparently, avoiding as much as possible misrepresentation or distortion (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2022; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2019).

Two structured interview protocols allowed to maintain consistency across interviews while allowing space for participants' narratives to uncover new themes. A protocol ensures that confidentiality, and consent about the use of results are clearly communicated, all of which are essential for obtaining honest and accurate data (Rabionet 2014). One protocol was addressed to the highly skilled migrants and the other one to the HR managers. The structures of the interviews are the following:

Table 2: Interview Sections of the Protocol for High-skilled Migrants

Interview sections	Example of topics covered – High-skilled migrants
Introductory questions on educational background	e.g. degree, motivations, experience in the Netherlands
Migration decision-process	e.g. What were the main factors that influenced your decision to leave the Netherlands after graduating? e.g. Can you describe the process you went through when deciding to migrate?
Career development and further opportunities	e.g. What was your experience entering the job market in your current country? e.g. How does your career path differ from what you expected when studying in the Netherlands?
Adaptation and integration	e.g. What personal and professional challenges did you face when you first moved to your current country, and how did you overcome them?
Multi-level influences	e.g. Did political factors or governmental policies in either country play a role in your decision to migrate? e.g. How did your university or professional networks assist you in finding employment abroad? e.g. What personal factors, such as family, career goals, or lifestyle, influenced your decision to migrate?
Reflections on future	e.g. Reflecting on your migration journey, what advice would you give to other international graduates considering a similar path? e.g. If you had access to everything you mentioned in your home country, would you have stayed there instead of migrating?

Table 3: Interview Sections of the Protocol for HR Professionals

Interview sections	Examples of topics covered – HR professionals
Introductory questions on current role	e.g. role, years of experience
Migration decision-process	e.g. What trends or patterns have you observed in the migration decisions of high-skilled professionals over recent years?
Career development and further opportunities	e.g. What are the typical career trajectories for high-skilled migrants within your organization? e.g. How does your organization support the professional development and career progression of high skilled migrants?
Adaptation and integration	e.g. What strategies does your organization use to help high-skilled migrants adapt to the work culture and social environment in your country?
Multi-level influences	e.g. How do economic conditions in your country impact the recruitment and retention of high-skilled migrants? e.g. Have any recent political or governmental policies affected your organization's approach to hiring and managing high-skilled international employees? e.g. How do professional networks and industry associations support

	the recruitment and integration of high-skilled migrants?
Reflections on future	e.g. What do you see as the future trends in the migration of high-skilled professionals, and how is your organization preparing for these changes? e.g. Reflecting on your experiences, what advice would you offer to other HR professionals managing high-skilled migrants?

Given the international study background of participants, interviews were conducted in English, though challenges could have arisen with HR managers less familiar with English (Welch and Piekkari 2006). One interview was conducted in French, the HR manager interviewee's native language, to ensure no key data was lost. This design ensures a robust exploration of the factors influencing migration decisions, grounded in real-world experiences while addressing organizational practices.

3.3 Sample Description

The research focused on participants engaged in global professions, who are not professionally bound to a specific geographic region (Fourcade, 2006). This study focused on two distinct participant groups: high-skilled migrants and HR managers. The high-skilled migrants selected for this research will have completed their tertiary education in the Netherlands as international students and subsequently migrated outside of both the Netherlands and their home country. Therefore, all high-skilled migrants have before their migration lived at least one experience abroad and migration during their studies. Additionally, they should be employed in large companies with over 250 employees. This focus allows for a more in-depth analysis of a specific category of workers (Crowley-Henry et al. 2021). The participants have migrated within the last five years, a timeframe that is crucial as it influences their recollection of the migration process and the socialization context at the time (Colakoglu et al. 2018). This period also allows for the study of a time marked by significant uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath (Niraula and Triandafyllidou, 2022). By focusing on this specific population, the study aims to capture the interaction between factors

during a period of significant global change, and their influence on contemporary migration decisions, providing deeper insights for both academic research and HR practices.

The sampling strategy involves purposive sampling to ensure the selection of participants who meet these specific criteria (Bell, Bryman, and Harley 2022). The sample comprises 17 participants, selected to achieve theoretical saturation (Hennink and Kaiser 2022). They were recruited through alumni networks from universities, LinkedIn searches, referrals, and snowball sampling. Interviewing both high-skilled international professionals and HR managers from the same sector and cities, facilitates a comprehensive exploration of both individual and organizational perspectives on migration decisions. HR managers were selected to provide insights into organizational practices and policies related to the integration and support of high-skilled migrants, offering a perspective on how companies navigate and influence migration decisions. It was first intended that the HR managers would be found in the companies of the high-skilled migrants, but due to a lack of participation willingness, this constraint was changed. HR managers were therefore found in similar industry sectors and in similar cities as the highly skilled migrants, meaning in western European countries. The following table lists all participants as well as the relevant demographics that were taken into account when building the sample.

The tables in Appendices A and B list all participants, the first identifying the highly skilled migrants and the second the HR professionals interviewed. Demographic data is mentioned, to give an overview of all profiles. The participant ID will be reused to mark quotes used in chapter 4 and 5.

3.4 Data Analysis and Coding Procedure

The data analysis began with the transcription and preparation of interview data, using an Excel document for the qualitative analysis to manage and organize the data. The data structure procedure starts with identifying first order concepts from the interviews with high-

skilled migrants. This involves assigning descriptive labels to significant portions of the verbatim based on major themes in the insights emerging from the interviews, that are recurrent (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Saldaña 2016).

Following the initial procedure, a second round of first order concepts will incorporate insights from interviews with HR managers. This iterative process refines and expands the themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of both migrant experiences and organizational practices (Saldaña 2016). Using the Gioia method, second order themes will be drawn, and finally aggregate dimensions are identified. Both these steps are abductive and rely also on the theory (Magnani and Gioia 2023). Thematic analysis is employed to identify insights and connections between personal motivations, organizational practices, and socio-economic factors (Braun and Clarke 2006). To find the most relevant insights in the context of this study, verbatim that might deviate from the common answers will also be collected. While these responses may be considered outliers, they can provide a window to new understandings and challenge established frameworks. As Hymer and Smith (2024) suggest, exceptions or outliers often reveal the limitations of existing theories and inspire researchers to explore innovative avenues of inquiry. By embracing these outliers, this study aims to develop recommendations that account for diverse perspectives, potentially advancing the field and fostering nuanced new research orientations and conclusions (Hymer and Smith 2024). The aggregated dimensions drawn from the Gioia structure of this study are presented in Chapter 4 while the first-order codes and second-order concepts are displayed as the Gioia data structure in the Appendix (see Appendix C).

4 Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with high-skilled migrants and HR managers, aimed at exploring the factors influencing migration decisions, integration experiences, and organizational practices. The data analysis was carried out systematically,

starting with the transcription and coding of interview data. First-order concepts were identified based on recurring themes in the participants' responses, followed by the development of second-order themes and aggregate dimensions using the Gioia method. This approach provides a structured and detailed representation of the data. Additionally, sub-chapter 4.5 gathers deviating quotes that give direction to new hypotheses.

The chapter is organized into several sections. It begins by exploring the interviewee's perceptions of the contexts that shaped the migration decisions of high-skilled migrants, followed by an examination of the distinctive attributes of destination countries and cities that influenced these decisions and migrants' integration experiences. Subsequent sections delve into the perceived role of personal aspirations, such as the pursuit of growth and exploration, and provide insights into organizational practices supporting migrant employees. Finally, considerations regarding overlooked or unique perspectives are highlighted. Together, these sections present a comprehensive and detailed account of the study's findings. Each quote utilized in this chapter is followed by the participant ID who said it. In sub-chapters 4.1 to 4.4, quotes illustrate the main themes drawn from this study, and in sub-chapter 4.5, they highlight the deviating perspectives of participants. Appendix D compiles a sample quotes per theme addressed in sub-chapters one to four.

4.1 Context that Shaped the Migration Decision

Migration decisions are seen to be influenced by a combination of personal, cultural, and structural factors that shape an individual's perception of potential destinations. For high-skilled migrants, the Netherlands seems to emerge as a gateway to broader opportunities, offering quality education and an international environment conducive to exploration and growth. However, language requirements often posed a barrier to fully accessing the job market in the Netherlands.

- *“I think studying in the Netherlands gives you so many nice options for entry to different places and even places like Australia, like US, somewhere in Asia. [...] You have so many*

great opportunities from your university. And I think use them, I was one of the, you know, one of the few people that really use these opportunities. And I was always looking at them like, why are you not going somewhere? I can go for you if you don't want to. I want to use your opportunity.” – 8

Dissatisfaction with home countries also plays a critical role in migration decisions. Participants frequently cited restrictive environments, stagnant industries, and conservative cultural norms as key drivers for leaving. These factors contributed to a sense of professional and personal stagnation. While participants voiced frustration with systemic inefficiencies, societal attitudes, or lack of economic prospects, the possibility of returning later in life often remained a long-term aspiration tied to family values and cultural familiarity.

- *“So it's a bit the whole mentality of, you know, we think we (Greeks) know better, we think we can do it better. And, yeah, we think we're smarter. And that's for me, like, I somehow couldn't relate. It was not who I am. And I think there's also not a lot of exposure. And we think we have, that's the reason why we're a bit narrow minded. We're not very open minded, because we don't have a lot of exposure.” – 2*
- *“It sounds silly, but you look at Italy and you look at Spain, there's just no jobs. You cannot feed yourself, you cannot afford a place to live, you cannot have a family there.” – 700*
- *“I think if I had an upbringing that was just nice and not as toxic as it was, then of course I would want to go back to something that's nice. I created an environment that's nice for me outside of Germany in London. So then that became my new home, right? Because that's where I felt safe.” – 5*
- *Like, if I would want a family, I would prefer to have it in Italy. [...] Here is all of the kids are, you know, their father is probably some kind of director, some kind of banker or fund investment CEO or whatever. [...] Maybe they are the owner of a couple of little shops in the city center and they're just making the money out of it. So, no, I would not raise my kids here just because it's a bit far from reality.” – 1*

Migration is further influenced by interconnected micro, meso, and macro-level factors. At the micro level, individual aspirations for career advancement are decisive. Social components, including family and partner considerations, are equally influential. For example, some participants cited relationships as pivotal in shaping their migration trajectories while emphasizing that professional alignment with personal goals was necessary for relocation decisions.

- *“I'm really career driven, like how can I advance my career and how can I make a lot of money?” – 5*

- *“My partner, my boyfriend, had got a job in Belgium. And so I was like, let's keep this area. So I'm like closer to him. I'm still following my goal because I didn't want to go to Belgium, but still following my path and my goal, but it's quite close.” – 9*
- *“That's why I think the number one is probably the social component, right? The family, the partner, this sort of thing, because that's what most people, I argue, relocate for generally, right?” – 200*

At the meso-level, university networks, recruitment events, and institutional connections create pathways for migration. These intermediaries often serve as important touchpoints for migrants lacking local networks, fostering initial integration and professional exposure.

- *“There were many events as well hosted by several student clubs, student associations that connect employers, companies to the students themselves. And this is, of course, playing a crucial role also for international students to have that first touchpoint who may not have a local network of friends or family to also introduce them to different businesses.” – 200*
- *“Because we have a little bit the ability in Luxembourg to pick and choose. Applications on jobs are absolutely crazy here. We have hundreds and hundreds of people from predominantly Italy, Spain, France. And because of that, we're able to, as an employer, pick those from the best universities.” – 700*

Finally, macro-level factors, such as economic conditions and government policies, play a nuanced role in shaping migration decisions. While these factors may not always be at the forefront for migrants, higher compensation in destination countries frequently stands out as a significant pull factor. Conversely, restrictive immigration frameworks and labour shortages regulations can pose challenges, whereas flexible policies facilitate smoother transitions. This highlights the critical need for structural alignment between migrant aspirations and the regulatory environments of host countries.

- *“I think probably unconsciously, it played a role, but not necessarily like actively in my mind” – 9*
- *“I can tell you that the key factor is for sure monetary.” – 600*

In sum, migration decisions among high-skilled migrants seem to be deeply rooted in a blend of personal aspirations, structural opportunities, and cultural influences. These decisions are shaped by the interplay of dissatisfaction with home contexts, the appeal of new opportunities, and complex emotional ties to both origins and destinations. The following

section examines participants' perceptions of various destination countries and cities, highlighting how these views influence both migration decisions and integration experiences.

4.2 The Distinctive Context and Attributes of the Destination Country/City that Influence Migrants' Decisions and Integration

The destination country's attributes significantly influence migrants' experiences and their ability to integrate. Many HR professionals express general common appreciation for the destination country, particularly for its work-life balance, cultural inclusivity, and vibrant international environment. However, several high-skilled migrants relocated to the specific destination country only for the position. These factors are often contrasted with the challenges of adapting to certain aspects of the foreign society, such as its climate, perceived indifference from locals, and the cultural differences in workplace dynamics. Such tensions underscore the duality of migrants' experiences, blending opportunities with hurdles to full integration.

- *“So, Luxembourg kind of brings the ability to really do this more high-skilled work. Make a change in parentheses that you might not be able to do in more remote areas of all these (southern European) countries” – 700*
- *“I moved here mainly because of the job. I didn't move to the UK because of the UK. I don't know if you have that already in Europe. I mean, because, I'll be honest, it's fine here, but there are more attractive places weather-wise, food-wise, even tax-wise.” – 6*
- *“I know of people that have come, and then that ended up becoming too depressed because of the weather that they were not used to.” – 600*
- *“Sometimes there are like kind of frictions. For example, in Spain, we are very touchy. I don't know if you know that, Alicia, but if you were here, I would have to give you two kisses. And this is what I did when I arrived in here to a colleague of mine that was going to work with me for a lot of projects and so on. So I introduced myself and say, OK, I am [name], nice to meet you. How are you doing? Blah, blah, blah. And I tried to kiss her like, blah, blah. And she was like, eh, eh, eh, eh, eh, eh. Respect my personal space because why are you touching me? You don't know me.” - 400*

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping career progression and social inclusion. For some participants, acquiring local language skills opened doors to both professional and personal opportunities, enabling deeper integration. However, for others, the inability to meet linguistic demands created barriers, restricting career prospects and fostering isolation. The

existence of international and industry-specific "bubbles" in larger cities was seen as an opportunity, offering a sense of belonging among other expatriates.

- *“It might be a little bit beneficial to be local-local, to be Luxembourgish. We have clients from Luxembourg that want to speak Luxembourgish. And I have seen for myself that dramatically I get pursued more to be put on certain clients, on certain projects. Because of my, not necessarily my nationality, but my language there.” – 700*
- *“It's almost just like a playing field for international people. And they all find each other because they all come there (London). They're all alone. They all kind of team up.” – 5*
- *“It's sort of a bubble with the UK, one could say. Of course, there's much higher labor mobility. If you have a job here and you don't like it, you can apply for so many other things and can literally schedule an interview the next day.” – 6*

4.3 Migration Driven by Exploration and Growth Beyond the Comfort Zone

For many high-skilled migrants in my interview population, the decision to migrate is deeply tied to a desire for personal and professional growth, often coupled with a fear of stagnation. Achieving financial independence emerges as a strong motivator, with migration offering the possibility of self-reliance and stability that may not be achievable in the home country. For some, returning home is not perceived as a viable option, reinforcing the commitment to succeed abroad despite the challenges migration entails. Notably, HR professionals did not emphasize these personal aspirations and motivations during their interviews.

- *“Would I go back now to Italy just to enjoy my pasta with my mom every Sunday? Man, I mean, I would enjoy, yes, but nothing new. I know that if I can go somewhere and I can start doing something new or I can accomplish something that I never accomplished before, then that's the real inspirational engine for me” – 1*
- *“I think I like to challenge myself and for me, going back, it feels like a step back. And I like to go forward. So, going backwards, it scares me, I would say. I think it blocks my development as a person and not only professionally.” – 2*
- *“But I think the hardest part is still, like, also to, like, I would say, like, say goodbye to friends and families and to not know when you see them next time.” – 9*

This drive for exploration is further fuelled by a relentless pursuit of adventure and new experiences. Many participants expressed a strong eagerness to embrace challenges that push them beyond their comfort zones, fostering confidence and resilience. Migration is often seen

as an opportunity to broaden perspectives, explore novel opportunities, and advance professional ambitions.

- *“I mean, frustration creates ambition, right? Like, we want to change something because we're not happy with how it is.” – 6*
- *“Why wouldn't you (migrate)? That's always something that will probably be open for you. You have the passport, you have the people there. So for me, it was like, why not do something a bit more random in your 20s, go away and then we'll see. I think that was really the most exciting factors.” – 7*
- *“So if you want to do something, do it, go find a place where to do that. And if there is not a place where to do that, you find a way to do that in any way. Like you create something for yourself, but you need to do that, if you want to keep enjoying the outside life. Otherwise, you can still go back to your mom and ask her for the pasta and ask her for, or I don't know, carrying you around in your favourite park and your favourite restaurant. But if you really like that food, then cook it by yourself. Just go buy the best ingredients and you enjoy a proper bottle of wine and you see your day would be much better.” – 1*
- *“I experienced what it means to be in a place of opportunity. And that always kind of pulled me back to it.” – 5*

4.4 Recommendations for Organizations to Enhance Support for Their Migrant Workforce

This section focuses directly the first research question: how organizations respond to high-skilled migration decisions and support the onboarding process. Organizations play a crucial role in supporting high-skilled migrants during their relocation and integration journeys. Effective support mechanisms, such as relocation packages, housing assistance, and financial support for settling costs, can significantly ease the challenges of transitioning to a new country. Providing tailored resources, including language training and cultural upskilling, enhances migrants' capacity to navigate both professional and personal environments, enabling smoother integration into the local context.

- *“I think number one being sort of offering language courses and the possibility for further development and further education, because this also ensures that you build up the expertise that is required locally.” – 200*
- *“They [company name] basically enrolled me with an immigration lawyer, and these guys took care of everything visa-related.” – 6*
- *“They [company name] basically offered an interest-rate-free loan of, I think, 3,000 pounds, which you could use to, like, upfront, you know, like, move here, find an apartment, pay a*

deposit, whatever, which then gets just deducted piece by piece from your salary, which, in this case, was also very doable because it's interest-rate-free.” – 6

In addition to practical support, organizations can foster a sense of belonging by offering mental health programs, networking opportunities, and community-building initiatives. These efforts can address the emotional and social challenges migrants face, creating a supportive environment that encourages engagement and retention. Furthermore, collaborations with government-driven initiatives and corporate social responsibility programs can extend the scope of support, demonstrating a commitment to the well-being of the migrant workforce. By adopting a holistic approach, organizations can better address the multifaceted needs of high-skilled migrants.

- *“If you are in a new place and if you are by yourself, you would like to know kind of like similar people. So like like-minded people that also travelled, also came and are in the same position. So just having some kind of like a buddy and having a group of people that started working as kind of like similar company as well.” – 8*
- *“Then secondly, I would definitely implement some kind of mental health programs, like some free, even health, I don't know, some kind of free doctors, free psychologists in the office, because some people really get stuck. Some people really don't, they're just trapped mentally in whatever is happening there and their personality is just destroyed from whatever is happening in the office.” – 1*
- *“First on my list is the fact that we cannot work from our own countries. For us, it's not a sacrifice to be here. This is our choice. But you have to understand that we are far away from our families. It's not that I want to go to Rome because I want to party or whatever. I just want to see family and friends out there growing up. I still want to feel connected to them, friends and family.” – 4*
- *“I would like to see a little bit more integration of religious and political points of views. And like, for example, if you are hiring someone from India if they celebrate Diwali, give them the week Diwali as paid time off, right? Because that's what they celebrate according to their religion.” – 500*

4.5 What is Still to Be Considered?

While this research has provided comprehensive insights into the factors influencing high-skilled migration and the organizational practices supporting migrants post-hire, certain aspects warrant further exploration. Trends such as early-career migration, generational shifts in work attitudes, and the interplay of personal and professional dynamics introduce new

dimensions to understanding the migration journey. The perspectives shared by participants in this section serve as "outliers" that push the boundaries of existing discussions and open avenues for future research.

- *“I can tell you that I see a lot of people that come, that they stay for a couple of years, and they end up leaving and going back to their home countries. So this is a pattern that I can see quite a lot here. And if I think about my company specific, I mean, it's [company name], and this happens not just in Luxembourg, but everywhere, I think. A lot of people join, they work here for three, four, five years, and they end up leaving for other companies, even within Luxembourg. But I feel like a lot of migrants are coming to work for some years, make a bit of money, and then go back.” – 600*
- *“One consideration that I've heard of. And that is salary levels. I think that oftentimes the ones that come from further out are expecting less. And therefore are also paid less. Which turns into, it's not really the topic today, but turns into resentment. And maybe people wanting to leave earlier than someone that is getting paid more fairly. Let's put it like that. Or higher.” – 700*
- *“From what I observed and from conversations that I have, I think Berlin also had a little bit of a boom. I mean, Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, all of these cities had a little bit of a boom after Brexit because before people were a lot going to London because of the language, right? It was English, it was easier. So there was a lot of movement over there. And then that, you know, Brexit happened, people started to move away and go to other sort of tech hubs.” – 500*

Moreover, personal choices and social dynamics add layers of complexity to migration decisions. Preferences for urban living, generational attitudes toward work, and the balancing of professional ambitions with personal relationships all contribute to the diversity of migrant experiences. These observations reveal the need for a deeper understanding of how cultural, social, and economic factors intersect in shaping migration pathways. Exploring these dimensions can offer new perspectives on the evolving nature of high-skilled migration and its implications for individuals and organizations alike.

- *“There is the factor where some people use an employer or a professional opportunity to integrate into the country, and then, once they are well-integrated and settled, they find a better opportunity. Alternatively, they accept an offer purely as a stepping stone. This is something I've really noticed lately. It's not necessarily unique to Luxembourg, but I think it's becoming more common. There's a kind of newer generation than ours that accepts an offer while waiting for another one. They accept it, sign the contracts, show up, work their minimum 15 days to a month, and then tell us, “I've been waiting for another offer; I have*

to leave.” They use this as a lifeline to land in Luxembourg and get settled. I’m noticing this more and more—it’s happening.” – 100

- *“So, you’re seeing new opportunities and channels that are opening up. Equally, you’re seeing a closing of perhaps doors where you’re on the periphery of what could be determined as skilled, as defined by the government as to what skilled is.” – 400*
- *“So, there might be some men who, if they’re moving, they won’t necessarily, they will wait for an opportunity or they’ll go out and search for an opportunity, depending on ethnicity and gender. Whereas some women may actually be actively approached for specific roles within highly skilled, I’m talking within the highly skilled areas. So therefore, they may see that as an added incentive in addition to moving with a partner. Is that there is potential for them to find work.” – 400*
- *“We’re the thing is also we were focussing a lot on people that were coming from outside of the European Union. OK. And now we’re looking more and more at younger people that are coming from southern European countries such as Spain and Italy. And people with a lot of ambition and a lot of drive that don’t see their countries evolving at the rate that other European countries are evolving. So, yeah, I’ve been hiring a lot of Italians, a lot of Spanish people. That just want to go out, want this international career that they don’t feel that they’re being offered in their own countries as well. And, yeah, the migration of younger, younger people with a lot of talent is, yeah, it’s also new.” - 800*

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of the factors shaping high-skilled migrants' decisions to relocate, their experiences integrating into new environments, and the organizational practices supporting their transitions. Through the Gioia method, first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions were developed, offering a structured understanding of the diverse perspectives shared by participants. In sub-chapter 4.5, outliers offer a springboard for future research and practice, enriching the understanding of high-skilled migration in an evolving global context.

This analysis sets the foundation for the next chapter, where the findings will be discussed in greater depth. The discussion will contextualize these insights within existing literature, assess their theoretical and practical implications, and explore how they inform strategies for supporting high-skilled migration and integration.

5 Discussion

This study set out to explore the interaction of socio-economic, organizational, and individual factors influencing high-skilled migration decisions, alongside the strategies

employed by HR professionals to address these dynamics. The findings indicate a complex interplay of personal aspirations, structural opportunities, and organizational interventions, offering insights into contemporary migration decisions. Appendix E presents a summary of key recommendations for organizations proposed by high-skilled migrants and HR professionals, that are presented in sub-chapter 5.3. This chapter unpacks the results, identifies the limitations of this study, and highlights its implications.

5.1 General Discussion of the Results

5.1.1 Contexts Shaping Migration Decisions

The data suggests that the decision to migrate is shaped by a combination of dissatisfaction with home-country contexts and the attraction of opportunities in destination countries. Many participants cited limited career opportunities, cultural conservatism, and systemic inefficiencies as important push factors that aligned with existing studies on brain drain and migration motivators (Bartolini, Gropas, and Triandafyllidou 2017; Kone and Özden 2017). At the same time, pull factors such as career advancement prospects, higher salaries, and improved living standards underscored the importance of individual aspirations in migration decisions. These findings suggest an extension of the 2x2 matrix framework (see Table 1), illustrating how personal motivations and external conditions converge to drive migration. However, participants also highlighted significant emotional and social ties to their home countries, reflecting the enduring influence of community embeddedness and cultural identity, even in the context of global career mobility.

Macro-level conditions, including political and economic stability, seem to play a nuanced role in shaping migration trajectories. While systemic instability in home countries was a prominent push factor, migrants reported varying degrees of awareness about macroeconomic conditions in destination countries prior to migrating. Furthermore, HR professionals regarded these factors as more significant compared to high-skilled migrants. This

reflects Niraula and Triandafyllidou (2022) observation that migration flows are shaped by multiple levels of factors, with macro-level often mediated by personal and meso-level considerations, such as university networks and recruitment events. For instance, many participants emphasized the role of institutional connections, such as career services and alumni networks, in facilitating access to global opportunities. These intermediaries served as bridges for individuals lacking established networks in their desired destinations, highlighting the meso-level as a key enabler of migration.

5.1.2 Attributes of Destination Countries

Migrants' experiences in destination countries reveal a duality of opportunities and challenges. Participants praised professional opportunities, cultural inclusivity, and international networks as key advantages. However, language barriers, cultural differences, and social integration difficulties often hindered deeper assimilation. Notably, language emerged as a critical factor influencing career trajectories and social inclusion. Migrants with local language proficiency reported better access to professional opportunities, while those without faced limitations.

The existence of "expat bubbles" in cities like London or Luxembourg provided migrants with a sense of belonging but sometimes impeded cultural integration. Climate, inclusivity, and social attitudes also played nuanced roles in shaping migrants' experiences. Some participants struggled with weather conditions or perceived indifference from locals, which affected their satisfaction and well-being. These findings suggest that HR practices and local policies are still to be enhanced to take into account the broader lifestyle factors that influence migrants' decisions to stay or leave, particularly in regions aiming to attract and retain global talent.

5.1.3 Motivations Driving Exploration and Growth

A defining feature of the participants in this study was their intrinsic motivation to

explore and push beyond their comfort zones. Unlike individuals who migrate primarily for financial gain, many participants framed migration as a pathway to personal and professional growth. This finding reinforces this dimension in existing migration theories, emphasizing the role of self-actualization and adventure in high-skilled mobility for this early-career migrants.

Participants described migration as an opportunity to embrace challenges, broaden perspectives, and achieve independence. This aligns with Scheibelhofer's (2018) work on self-determination as a pull factor in migration. For some, the desire to escape stagnation in their home countries further amplified their drive to seek novel experiences abroad. Notably, this workforce often prioritizes dynamic and exploratory career paths over long-term stability. HR professionals, however, did not consistently recognize this distinction, often designing retention strategies that failed to align with the aspirations of exploration-driven migrants.

This finding underscores the need for tailored organizational approaches. For instance, offering rotational assignments, cross-border projects, or extended professional development opportunities could appeal to migrants with a desire for growth and mobility. Organizations must also account for the importance of flexibility, such as remote work options, which would allow these individuals to balance exploration with maintaining ties to their home countries.

5.1.4 Organizational Practices Supporting High-Skilled Migrants

Organizational strategies significantly shaped the experiences of high-skilled migrants, with relocation support and onboarding processes emerging as key factors. Participants emphasized the value of practical assistance, such as housing support, visa facilitation, and cultural orientation programs. These provisions not only eased transitions but also fostered a sense of belonging in their new environments. However, gaps in HR practices seemed evident, particularly in addressing emotional and social dimensions of integration.

Many participants noted a lack of mental health resources and limited cultural adaptation support within their organizations. While logistical needs were well-addressed, the absence of

programs that promote emotional well-being and community integration limited the effectiveness of these strategies. Moreover, organizations rarely offered options for remote work from abroad, a policy that could significantly enhance flexibility and allow migrants to maintain familial and cultural connections. Given the increasing prevalence of remote work, adopting such policies could strengthen retention and appeal to a broader range of talent (Bravery, Silva, and Peterson 2024).

The study also highlighted the importance of professional development opportunities. Participants consistently cited the value of upskilling programs, mentorship, and clear career paths in enhancing job satisfaction and loyalty. For retention strategies to succeed, organizations must recognize the diverse needs of their workforce, particularly those driven by exploration and growth. Developing inclusive policies that address both professional aspirations, and personal well-being can create a more supportive environment for high-skilled migrants (Baier et al. 2024).

Policymakers are also indicated to have an important role to play in shaping migration experiences. Flexible immigration policies, clear recognition of foreign qualifications, and support for family reunification are important in attracting and retaining global talent. Moreover, initiatives that promote collaboration between academic institutions, businesses, and governments can create stronger pathways for migration, ensuring that the benefits of high-skilled mobility are equitably distributed. For instance, policies that incentivize brain circulation, such as tax benefits for returnees or funding for cross-border collaborations, could mitigate some of the negative effects of brain drain (Niraula and Triandafyllidou 2022).

5.1.5 Contributions to Brain Circulation

This study contributes to the discourse on brain circulation, emphasizing how high-skilled migrants act as conduits of knowledge and innovation. Several migrants expressed reluctance to return to home contexts perceived as limiting but valued maintaining ties through

professional and personal networks. This aligns with Saxenian's (2006) concept of brain circulation, where migration facilitates the exchange of skills and ideas across borders.

The temporary nature of migration decisions emerged as a key theme, with many participants viewing their initial roles abroad as stepping stones for global career advancement. This reflects Davoine and Schmid's (2022) observations on the globalization of career patterns, where mobility is increasingly seen as an asset. Cities like Berlin, London, and Luxembourg serve as international bubbles—dynamic hubs for high-skilled migrants seeking opportunities in competitive labor markets. However, they contribute to high turnover rates as young, ambitious professionals continually seem to seek better opportunities.

Participants highlighted the challenges organizations face in retaining this highly mobile workforce. Migrants often accept roles as temporary footholds, leaving when better opportunities arise. This dynamic is further complicated by salary disparities, where migrants paid less than local counterparts experience resentment, potentially accelerating turnover. Additionally, organizations need to navigate generational attitudes toward career mobility, with younger talent frequently prioritizing rapid advancement and self-fulfillment over long-term commitments.

Gender and family considerations add complexity to migration pathways. Women were reported to be actively recruited for high-skilled roles, often moving alongside partners, while men were more likely to prioritize their own opportunities before relocating. These dynamics highlight the need to understand how family roles and gendered expectations influence migration decisions and integration experiences.

The study also highlights the uneven distribution of opportunities. While large organizations and resource-rich regions attract and retain top talent, smaller firms and less competitive countries struggle to offer the support necessary for sustainable brain circulation. Addressing this disparity requires coordinated efforts from governments, businesses, and

educational institutions to create more inclusive and accessible pathways for high-skilled migration.

The findings reinforce that brain circulation is not only about the movement of talent but also about its redistribution and potential for innovation. However, high mobility, wage dissatisfaction, and short-term career patterns challenge the sustainability of this dynamic. Policymakers and organizations must adapt strategies to retain talent, address inequities in treatment, and leverage the potential of high-skilled migrants to drive innovation and cross-border collaboration.

5.2 Theoretical Contribution

This study makes significant contributions to the academic literature on high-skilled migration by highlighting the complex interplay of socio-economic, organizational, and individual factors in migration decisions. The findings challenge the traditional view of migration as a purely economic decision, emphasizing the role of deeply personal aspirations such as professional growth, self-realization, and the desire for exploration. Migrants are not solely driven by better economic opportunities, but also by a need to break free from restrictive cultural norms, dissatisfaction with systemic inefficiencies, and a desire for new experiences. These motivations extend and refine existing theories of brain drain and migration (Bartolini et al. 2017; Kone and Özden, 2017), highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of high-skilled migration.

The study's findings also underscore the importance of incorporating meso-level factors—such as institutional support systems—into migration theories. Participants cited university career services, alumni networks, and recruitment events as key enablers in accessing global opportunities. Furthermore, the research contributes to the emerging discourse on brain circulation by illustrating how high-skilled migrants can act as conduits of knowledge and innovation across borders, not just for personal gain but also for broader socio-economic

development (Saxenian 2006). The findings thus offer a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between personal motivations and systemic factors, encouraging further research into the long-term impacts of migration on both individuals and the industries in which they work.

5.3 Managerial Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study emphasize the diverse motivations, experiences, and challenges of high-skilled migrants, offering a foundation for organizations seeking to improve their HR practices. By aligning strategies with the nuanced insights shared by exploration-driven and career motivated migrants, organizations can better attract, integrate, and retain global talent (Usanova, Zikic, and Vaiman 2023; Baier et al. 2024). The following recommendations are informed by the study's findings and bring what has been found in academic and consultancy literature one step further.

5.3.1 Onboarding and Integration

The findings highlight the diverse aspirations and challenges of high-skilled migrants, shaped by a blend of personal motivations and systemic factors. While some are driven by the desire for exploration and growth, others prioritize career advancement and opportunities for skill enhancement. Organizations that address these varied needs through comprehensive strategies can better attract, integrate, and retain this young talented workforce (Guznajeva et al. 2020).

Beyond onboarding, cultural and social adaptation plays an important role in fostering a sense of belonging. Organizations can provide language training, cultural workshops, and networking events that connect new hires with colleagues and local communities. Acknowledging and accommodating cultural practices, such as religious holidays or dietary choices, further demonstrates organizational inclusivity.

Actionable steps:

- Tailor onboarding frameworks to cultural backgrounds and specific host city contexts, including "Welcome Packages" with cultural guides, language resources, and access to community-building opportunities. Facilitate shared cultural activities, such as celebrating global festivals or cooking local dishes, to promote mutual understanding and reduce barriers.
- Create apps or online platforms, providing resources like local survival tips, community event calendars, mentor connections, and discussion forums to address workplace and city-specific needs.

5.3.2 Career Development and Retention

High-skilled migrants are often motivated by career advancement and personal growth, making career development a cornerstone of successful retention strategies. Organizations should implement differentiated career development plans that reflect the varied aspirations of their workforce. For example, exploration-driven migrants may value opportunities for international assignments, leadership training, and cross-functional exposure. Conversely, career motivated migrants may prioritize structured roles with clear growth trajectories and stability.

Retention efforts should also address the emotional and social challenges migrants face. Initiatives that foster a sense of community, such as networking events and team-building activities, can help reduce feelings of isolation. Mental health resources and family support programs further contribute to a supportive organizational culture, encouraging long-term loyalty (Feldmann 2021).

Actionable steps:

- Offer career tracks for exploration-driven and career motivated migrants. For example, the Exploration Track would provide international rotation opportunities in international hubs, sabbatical options for personal growth projects, and leadership development tailored to

global outlook. On the other hand, Stability Track would focus on building long-term professional security with structured promotions, guaranteed financial incentives, and tailored upskilling. Both options not being mutually exclusive.

- Support emotional well-being and cultural integration through mentorship programs with senior leaders who share similar experiences, along with initiatives like subsidized counseling, social support events, and community-building activities.

5.3.3 Organizational Flexibility and Collaboration

Flexibility is a key factor in accommodating the diverse needs of high-skilled migrants. Remote work options, flexible scheduling, and opportunities for temporary assignments in home countries can enhance job satisfaction and demonstrate the organization's commitment to understanding employee priorities (Bravery, Silva, and Peterson 2024).

Collaboration with external stakeholders, such as local governments, universities, and community organizations, can further strengthen support systems for migrants. These partnerships can provide additional resources, such as visa assistance, housing subsidies, and cultural exchange programs, which enrich the migrant experience and foster loyalty.

Actionable steps:

- Implement remote and flexible work options, allowing migrants to work from home countries temporarily or adjust schedules for cultural or family needs, such as observing holidays or managing time zones.
- Collaborate with local governments and community organizations to provide housing support, legal assistance, and resources for cultural acclimatization.

By focusing on tailored onboarding and integration, robust career development, and organizational flexibility, businesses can address the challenges and aspirations of high-skilled migrants effectively. Collaborative partnerships further enhance these efforts, creating a comprehensive framework for attracting and retaining global talent. These recommendations

align organizational practices with the dynamic needs of a diverse workforce, ensuring long-term success for both migrants and their employers. A summary of suggested recommendations can be found in Appendix E.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of high-skilled migration, several limitations must be acknowledged. Purposive sampling ensured that participants aligned with the study's objectives, however, the sample's narrow focus on highly skilled migrants having studied in the Netherlands limits its scope. Future research could expand the sample to include diverse study countries. Additionally, a broader scope of industries, geographical regions, and socio-economic backgrounds would provide a more comprehensive understanding of migration decisions. Furthermore, the focus on migration patterns to Western European countries may not fully capture the diverse motivations and experiences of migrants in other regions with distinct socio-cultural or economic contexts. Expanding the geographical scope could offer valuable perspectives on migration trends globally. A second limitation concerns the concept of "highly skilled". In this study, it has been defined as having obtained tertiary education. However, highly skilled could also be defined as possessing a rare expertise, less available. This consideration would also give an enriching perspective. Another limitation arises from the retrospective nature of participants' accounts, which may be influenced by recall bias. While the participants were selected for their recent migration experiences, their reflections may still be shaped by their current circumstances, potentially altering their recollection of motivations and challenges. A longitudinal design tracking migrants' experiences over time could address this issue and offer deeper insights. However, selected participants have mostly migrated for 1 or 2 years, as a maximum of 5 years migration was also a criterion. Only one participant has migrated for 6 years. Additionally, interviews were primarily conducted in English, a second language for most participants. While

this facilitated a shared medium of communication, it may have constrained some participants in expressing complex thoughts or emotions. Conducting interviews in participants' native languages or utilizing interpreters could improve the richness of the data collected.

Finally, this study primarily reflects the perspectives of high-skilled migrants and HR managers. Other stakeholders, such as policymakers, academic institutions, and local communities, play critical roles in shaping migration experiences and outcomes. Future research could integrate these perspectives to provide a more holistic view of the systemic factors influencing high-skilled migration.

6 Conclusion

This study investigated the interplay of socio-economic, organizational, and individual factors influencing high-skilled migration, as well as the role of HR practices in addressing these dynamics. By integrating insights from high-skilled migrants and HR professionals, the findings suggest a nuanced understanding of the drivers, experiences, and organizational interventions associated with global talent mobility. The study emphasized the importance of both personal aspirations and systemic conditions in shaping migration decisions, while highlighting organizational strategies that facilitate integration and retention.

The findings indicate that high-skilled migration is driven not only by economic incentives, which is more defended by HR professionals, but also by personal motivations such as the pursuit of professional growth, self-realization, and the desire for new experiences. Push factors like systemic inefficiencies, limited career prospects, and cultural conservatism in home countries interact with pull factors, including enhanced career opportunities, competitive salaries, and supportive policies in destination countries. Migration decisions are shaped by a combination of these factors and are influenced by ongoing negotiations between personal aspirations, institutional frameworks, and external conditions.

The research contributes to the academic discourse on high-skilled migration by

expanding frameworks like the 2x2 matrix to illustrate macro-, meso-, and micro-level interactions. It also advances discussions on brain circulation, showing how high-skilled migrants drive innovation and cross-border knowledge-sharing, offering a balanced perspective on global talent mobility.

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the importance of tailored HR strategies for attracting, integrating, and retaining high-skilled migrants. Comprehensive relocation support, cultural orientation programs, and flexible work policies, such as remote work from abroad, were identified as essential elements for meeting the needs of this workforce. Organizations should also recognize the diverse motivations of migrants, distinguishing between those who seek exploration and growth, those who prioritize financial advancement, and those who seek both. Similarly, policymakers play an important role in creating immigration frameworks that support the smooth transition and integration of high-skilled migrants, ensuring equitable and sustainable mobility pathways.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its geographic focus, retrospective accounts, and reliance on English-driven interviews. Future research should include diverse regions, longitudinal methods, and other stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of high-skilled migration.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex factors shaping high-skilled migration and the significant role of organizations and policymakers in supporting global talent mobility. As globalization and technological advancements continue to shape the workforce, adapting to the unique needs and challenges of high-skilled migrants will become increasingly important. By addressing these dynamics, stakeholders can better harness the potential of this workforce, fostering innovation, cultural exchange, and economic development across borders.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Demographic Data from the Sample of High-skilled Migrants

Participant ID	Gender	Age (years)	Origin Country	Destination City	Dutch University	Time since current migration	Industry
1	Male	26	Italy	Luxembourg	Maastricht	2 years	Software development for consulting firms
2	Female	25	Greece	Luxembourg	Maastricht	2 years	Financial services
3	Male	22	Belgium	Luxembourg	Maastricht & Rotterdam	1 year	Management consulting for banks
4	Male	24	Italy	Luxembourg	Maastricht	2 years	Consulting
5	Female	30	Germany	London	Breda & Maastricht	6 years	Advertising
6	Male	21	Germany	London	Maastricht	6 months	Technology
7	Female	25	Germany	Paris	Maastricht & Rotterdam	1 year	Technology consulting
8	Female	26	Poland	Brisbane (Australia)	Eindhoven (Fontys) & Maastricht	1 year	Digital agency
9	Female	27	Austria	Hamburg	Maastricht	2 months	IT consultancy

Appendix B – Demographic Data from the Sample of HR Professionals

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Working City	Role	Industry
100	Male	23	Luxembourg	HR & Recruitment Assistant	Consulting in financial services
200	Male	27	Zürich	Recruitment Manager	Recruitment
300	Male	46	London	Leader of the Executive Hiring across all the UK	Professional services
400	Female	25	Luxembourg	HR Specialist	Consulting Services
500	Female	33	Berlin	Senior Manager Talent Acquisition	Software Services
600	Female	24	Luxembourg	Human Capital Consultant	Consulting Services
700	Male	26	Luxembourg	Senior Consultant in HR Transformation	Financial Services
800	Female	39	Brussels	Talent Acquisition Advisor	Financial Services

Appendix C – Gioia Data Analysis Method: Data Structure

Regarding the number of quotes, the first number indicates quotes from high-skilled migrants, and the second number represents quotes from HR professionals, with both numbers separated by a slash symbol.

1st Order Code	Number of Quotes	2 nd Order Concepts	Number of Quotes	Aggregate Themes
Netherlands gives good education	2/0	The Netherlands as an entry door	9/0	Context that shaped the migration decision
Netherlands gives opportunities to explore further	4/0			
International environment in the Netherlands opens to new experiences	3/0			Number of Quotes: 73/42
Requirement of Dutch as a barrier	3/0	Barriers to enter the job market in the Netherlands	7/0	
Attractiveness of the job market	4/0			
Home country is experienced as closed-minded	4/0	Negative judgements on home country	13/2	
Home is not home anymore	2/0			
Working culture is not attractive in the home country	2/2			
Cultural and social behaviours are perceived as	5/0			

negative			
Values of the home country are important when thinking about creating a family	2/0	Going back to the origin country is in consideration - at a later stage	6/0
Openness to go back	4/0		
The home country and industries there are too static	3/0	Lack of professional opportunities in home country	7/0
The majority have low ambitions in home country	4/0		
Social component – family, friends, romantic partners influenced the migration decision	7/7	Micro-level factors shaped decision to migrate	17/14
Environment and lifestyle influenced the migration decision	4/4		
Career progress ambition influenced the migration decision	6/3		
University networks and career activities played a role in the migration	5/9	Meso-level factors shaped decision to migrate	6/9
Networks did not play a role	1/0		
Higher compensation worked as a pull factor	4/8	Macro-level factors shaped decision to migrate	8/19
Destination country's government' regulations as a barrier for migration	0/8		

Safety and security as a push factor	0/3			
Macro-level factors were not considered at all before migrating	4/0			
Destination country as an ideal	1/6	Destination country is appreciated for its culture and work-life balance	5/10	The distinctive context and attributes of the destination country / city that influence migrant's decisions and integration Number of Quotes: 42/51
Destination country is appreciated	4/4			
Destination country is not much appreciated	1/2	Destination country is not much appreciated	2/9	
Climate is hard to get used to	0/5			
Professional position is more important than the location	1/3			
Language opens doors	5/2	Language requirements can enable new opportunities or limit the career progression	7/12	
Language is seen as a limitation in the career abroad	2/10			
Perceived indifference from locals	5/3	Cultural disconnect in local attitudes and work practices	9/10	

Working culture in destination country differs from the home country one	4/7			
An international bubble of open-minded individuals	12/8	Perceived bubble-like environment	17/9	
Industry-specific bubble of opportunities	5/1			
Achieving financial independence as a pull factor	8/3	Financial independence with no option to return home	13/3	Migration driven by exploration and growth beyond the comfort zone
Returning to home country is not an option	5/0			Number of Quotes: 86/4
Seeking the next challenge and going the extra mile	9/0	Relentless drive for growth, adventure, and confidence	34/0	
Eagerness for life in its early stages	6/0			
Strong urge for the extra adventure that sparks excitement	10/0			
Feeling of being unstoppable, confidence from experience	9/0			
Obstacles and hurdles of migration	8/1	Migration driven by the fear of stagnation outweighing the challenges	13/1	
Fear of monotony	5/0			
Desire to explore novelty	10/0	Desire to explore, broaden the mind, and advance professionally through	26/0	

migration				
Exploration fosters exposure and broadens the mind	5/0			
Exploring driven by professional ambition	4/0			
Further migration driven primarily by career development	7/0			
Relocation paperwork assistance	5/8	Relocation and Integration Support	13/25	Recommendations for organizations to enhance support for their migrant workforce
Housing support	2/5			
Relocation financial assistance	2/5			Number of Quotes: 20/49
Relocation and integration packages shaped by company size and position type	0/5			
Remote work opportunities from home country	4/2			
Language training and local-specific upskilling opportunities	1/6	Professional Development & Upskilling	3/6	
Mental health support programs	2/0			
Networking and connection events	4/7	Networking & Community Building	4/10	
Optional participation programs	0/3			

Government-driven initiatives	0/4	External Influences & Corporate Responsibility	0/8	
Corporate social responsibility	0/4			
Trend in early career migration – goal is to develop competences and then leave	0/8	Career and Migration	1/20	What is still to be considered?
Career progress and ambition are homogenous between locals and migrants	0/6			Number of Quotes: 18/27
Is there a time to go back?	0/1			
High-skilled or very high-skilled	0/4			
Discovering work environment and work environment in a different culture, both for the first time	1/0			
Relocation is a risk for the migrant and for the employer	0/1			
Willingness to settle down in a specific city	3/0	City Life and Living Decisions	6/0	
Desire to live in big cities	3/0			
Uncertainty is accepted	2/0	Life Choices and Expectations	11/0	
Questioning the urge to always have more	1/0			
Trigger event – Erasmus	1/0			
Staying under same conditions is not understandable	2/0			

Understanding that failure is acceptable	3/0		
Focus on own self	2/0		
Which partner follows the other? (Gender)	0/2	Social and cultural observations	0/8
Southern European come, spare money, and leave	0/1		
Brexit – new cities like Amsterdam and Berlin experience a boom	0/1		
Cross-over – Germans go out and migrants come	0/1		
Retaining vs. attracting talent challenges are different in different cities	0/1		
New Generation of employees – take benefit of companies and don't respect contracts	0/1		
New young and talented European workforce	0/1		

Appendix D – Sample of Key Quotes per Theme

4.1 Context that Shaped the migration decision

Studying in the Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•“I think studying in the Netherlands gives you so many nice options for entry to different places and even places like Australia, like US, somewhere in Asia. [...] You have so many great opportunities from your university. And I think use them, I was one of the, you know, one of the few people that really use these opportunities. And I was always looking at them like, why are you not going somewhere? I can go for you if you don't want to. I want to use your opportunity.” – 8•“In the Netherlands, you need to speak Dutch, which I don't mind learning, because I'm German, it's not that hard to get Dutch. [...] And then on the job market, I don't think any employer is willing to actually pay you to learn Dutch unless you promise them to stay with them for five years or so. So that was the problem of finding a job.” – 6
Dissatisfaction with home country	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•“So it's a bit the whole mentality of, you know, we think we (Greeks) know better, we think we can do it better. And, yeah, we think we're smarter. And that's for me, like, I somehow couldn't relate. It was not who I am. And I think there's also not a lot of exposure. And we think we have, that's the reason why we're a bit narrow minded. We're not very open minded, because we don't have a lot of exposure” – 2•“I don't like the Italian way of things where everything is just, you know, done not properly. This, I don't share. So, the whole Italian society, I don't particularly like, no. Actually, it makes me angry. It's very bad. That's the main reason why we are all forced to leave, you know. People just think about their own benefits and not doing things properly, not paying the right taxes, not thinking on the most logical way, just thinking about their own benefits and that's it. Not thinking about the efficiency of how you should do things.” – 1•“It sounds silly, but you look at Italy and you look at Spain, there's just no jobs. You cannot feed yourself, you cannot afford a place to live, you cannot have a family there.” – 700•“I think if I had an upbringing that was just nice and not as toxic as it was, then of course I would want to go back to something that's nice. I created an environment that's nice for me outside of Germany in London. So then that became my new home, right? Because that's where I felt safe.” – 5•“I will go back to Italy, because it's the place where I see myself growing up my kids in a few years. But it's a point of arrival for me, going back to Italy with a stable job and a stable family.” – 4•“Like, if I would want a family, I would prefer to have it in Italy. [...] Here is all of the kids are, you know, their father is probably some kind of director; some kind of banker or fund investment CEO or whatever. [...] Maybe they are the owner of a couple of little shops in the city center

	<i>and they're just making the money out of it. So, no, I would not raise my kids here just because it's a bit far from reality.” – 1</i>
Micro-level factors shape the decision to migrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I'm really career driven, like how can I advance my career and how can I make a lot of money?” – 5</i> • <i>“In the industry I wanted to work in, so the financial sector, it's quite tough in Liège to find jobs in big companies. So that's, yeah, mostly why I did not go back to Liège. Yeah, I kind of knew it since the beginning when I arrived in Maastricht that working in Liège would not be the most interesting thing for my career.” – 3</i> • <i>“My partner, my boyfriend, had got a job in Belgium. And so I was like, let's keep this area. So I'm like closer to him. I'm still following my goal because I didn't want to go to Belgium, but still following my path and my goal, but it's quite close.” – 9</i> • <i>“I had my boyfriend. So I met my boyfriend when I was still in Maastricht. So it's been a while. And so I did already have him when I decided to move here. I do want to say that it was for sure a factor, but it was not the only factor It's not like I would have thrown over all my life if I wouldn't have liked Paris and I wouldn't have thought it would be nice to live here. I wouldn't have done it.” – 7</i> • <i>“That's why I think the number one is probably the social component, right? The family, the partner, this sort of thing, because that's what most people, I argue, relocate for generally, right?” – 200</i>
Meso-level factors shape the decision to migrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“There were many events as well hosted by several student clubs, student associations that connect employers, companies to the students themselves. And this is, of course, playing a crucial role also for international students to have that first touchpoint who may not have a local network of friends or family to also introduce them to different businesses.” – 200</i> • <i>“Because we have a little bit the ability in Luxembourg to pick and choose. Applications on jobs are absolutely crazy here. We have hundreds and hundreds of people from predominantly Italy, Spain, France. And because of that, we're able to, as an employer, pick those from the best universities.” – 700</i>
Macro-level factors shape the decision to migrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Not even considered. I think it also has to do with when you're a student looking for your first job, you have nothing to lose, nothing. So it really doesn't matter.” – 5</i> • <i>“I think probably unconsciously, it played a role, but not necessarily like actively in my mind” – 9</i> • <i>“Of course, the compensation is a lot higher than in the neighbouring states. So I think this is also a factor that's then driving people to jump on the opportunity that's in front of them.” – 200</i> • <i>“I can tell you that the key factor is for sure monetary.” – 600</i> • <i>“So then, so we have applications from people outside the UK and want</i>

to move. Those are people who are foreign nationals with certain visas in the UK who want to move to us as well. So is it? Yeah, it's a minefield..” – 300

•“The point in recruitment is that we have a list published by the Luxembourg government of occupations in shortage, which allows us to recruit people from outside Europe, meaning outside the Schengen Area, to issue work permits more quickly, and actually without necessarily having to justify that we were unable to find a profile within Europe.” – 100

4.2 The Distinctive Context and Attributes of the Destination Country/City that Influence Migrants’ Decisions and Integration

Destination country perceptions

•“So, Luxembourg kind of brings the ability to really do this more high-skilled work. Make a change in parentheses that you might not be able to do in more remote areas of all these (southern European) countries” – 700

•“We were talking about South Europe versus Northern Europe, right? And we always had this image, especially if you're from smaller countries in South Europe who never necessarily went forward with their economy and became really strong versus the image that the Northern European countries that we perceived as always, right? And I think I've always had this image since a little kid that Germany was this like powerhouse, right? Where everything was happening, strongest economy of Europe.” – 500

•“I moved here mainly because of the job. I didn't move to the UK because of the UK. I don't know if you have that already in Europe. I mean, because, I'll be honest, it's fine here, but there are more attractive places weather-wise, food-wise, even tax-wise.” – 6

•“I think a lot of people try to look for international experiences because they also understand that is valued and that if they want to one day go back to their home country, it's something that is going to be highly valued and that might have even an impact on their salary or their position. So, this is for sure something that I think as well is pushing younger people and high skilled workers to go out and have other experiences.” – 600

•“I know of people that have come, and then that ended up becoming too depressed because of the weather that they were not used to.” – 600

•“The weather thing is something that people underestimate terribly. The fact that we don't see the sun from November to, I don't know, early April, let's say. It's something that it really hits people very hard.” – 800

•“They're (Australian colleagues) also not very curious about you.” – 8

•“So, this is a bit the work culture that I feel people are very, very focused on what they're doing. And they sometimes forget about the other things in life.” – 600

•“Sometimes there are like kind of frictions. For example, in Spain, we are very touchy. I don't know if you know that, Alicia, but if you were here, I would have to give you two kisses. And this is what I did when I arrived in here to a colleague of mine that was going to work with me for a lot of projects and so on. So I introduced myself and say, OK, I am [name], nice to meet you. How are you doing? Blah, blah, blah. And I tried to kiss her like, blah, blah. And she was like, eh, eh, eh, eh, eh, eh. Respect my personal space because why are you touching me? You don't know me.” - 400

The role of language

•I started learning French a bit, which I had never had in high school. So that was nice. And now I started working in French because I decided to stay here.” – 7

•“To see what it means to live in a different language and the doors that English opens to you, then gave me the confidence to pursue my studies in another country.” – 5

•“For certain roles, we are still quite limited to Germany and Austria because of the language skills [...]” – 600

•“It might be a little bit beneficial to be local-local, to be Luxembourgish. We have clients from Luxembourg that want to speak Luxembourgish. And I have seen for myself that dramatically I get pursued more to be put on certain clients, on certain projects. Because of my, not necessarily my nationality, but my language there.” – 700

•“It's almost just like a playing field for international people. And they all find each other because they all come there (London). They're all alone. They all kind of team up.” – 5

•“Brussels in itself is also that, so it's an international hub. Mainly, yeah, mainly for people that work for the European Union. So that's a bubble, actually, the EU bubble.” – 800

•“It's sort of a bubble with the UK, one could say. Of course, there's much higher labor mobility. If you have a job here and you don't like it, you can apply for so many other things and can literally schedule an interview the next day.” – 6

•“And also the fact that there are many options out there. So you can, if you're good, and if you like what you do, you can definitely develop quite fast here (Luxembourg).” – 2

4.3 Migration Driven by Exploration and Growth Beyond the Comfort Zone

Stepping out of the comfort zone

•“Would I go back now to Italy just to enjoy my pasta with my mom every Sunday? Man, I mean, I would enjoy, yes, but nothing new. I know that if I can go somewhere and I can start doing something new or I can accomplish something that I never accomplished before, then that's the real inspirational engine for me” – 1

•“I just need to constantly be moving a bit. Otherwise, I will get a bit too bored. And that's what I want to say. Like I needed to get out.” – 7

-
- *“I don't like being that comfortable. I mean, now living here, of course, it's comfortable because I've been living here for a long time and I speak English really well. And, but I don't know, staying where I came from would have just been too boring almost for me.” – 5*
 - *“The fact that now I'm completely financially independent and going from one day to the other, asking money to your parents to be completely independent, is for sure the reason for which I'm here now.” – 4*
 - *“And then you're going to be looking at countries that offer this sort of high income wages, you know, Luxembourg, Lichtenstein, Switzerland, and then it really depends from where you're from as to which would offer the higher income in comparison to your current status quo.” – 200*
 - *“[...] I can be independent makes me gives me the liberty to create my own lifestyle here.” – 2*
 - *“So, I don't like to just put myself in the comfort because the comfort is coming from someone else, which is my parents or something that someone else achieved. So, that is where the independence came into picture when I mentioned it before. So, I want to find my own comfort. I want to achieve my own comfort. I don't want to live on the comfort that someone else gave me, even if I appreciate it so much, of course. But I don't want to, you know, just let myself down on that comfort. I want to achieve it and if this expects me to go through some uncomfortable situation or some shitty shared apartments and moving all the time, man, I will do that. I have the energy for that. So, I will do that as long as I enjoy it.” – 1*
 - *“That (going back to home country) would feel like taking a step back and kind of, I've been out in the world and then coming back would be, yeah, step back, almost.” – 5*
 - *“I think I like to challenge myself and for me, going back, it feels like a step back. And I like to go forward. So, going backwards, it scares me, I would say. I think it blocks my development as a person and not only professionally.” – 2*
 - *“But I think the hardest part is still, like, also to, like, I would say, like, say goodbye to friends and families and to not know when you see them next time.” – 9*
 - *“It can be tiring at times to always be with new people. Always leave the communities where you made friends and then move somewhere else.” – 6*

**Drive to
explore more**

- *“I've grown as a person. So, like I've just changed as well. So obviously, like back in the day, I just wanted to travel. I just wanted to go to places.” – 8*
 - *“I mean, if you like the experience, if you like what you lived, then you have so many things on your head that pulls you out of your country that I think friends and family, they already knew that I was not going to be*
-

long in, so I never felt a resistance. Of course, my mom always says, I miss you here, why don't you come back with me?" – 4

•“I mean, frustration creates ambition, right? Like, we want to change something because we're not happy with how it is.” – 6

•“Why wouldn't you? That's always something that will probably be open for you. You have the passport, you have the people there. So for me, it was like, why not do something a bit more random in your 20s, go away and then we'll see. I think that was really the most exciting factors.” – 7

•“So if you want to do something, do it, go find a place where to do that. And if there is not a place where to do that, you find a way to do that in any way. Like you create something for yourself, but you need to do that, if you want to keep enjoying the outside life. Otherwise, you can still go back to your mom and ask her for the pasta and ask her for, or I don't know, carrying you around in your favorite park and your favorite restaurant. But if you really like that food, then cook it by yourself. Just go buy the best ingredients and you enjoy a proper bottle of wine and you see your day would be much better.” – 1

•“[...] I'm still on the exploring mode and want to see new things.” – 9

•“I've always been a curious person. I like to travel and I knew that my time in Rome was done. Not because I don't like Rome, not because I don't like my friends and family, just because I think there's so much more. You can get so much enriched by experiences, people and everything.” – 4

•“I experienced what it means to be in a place of opportunity. And that always kind of pulled me back to it.” – 5

•“I definitely maybe explore maybe the same job, but in a different country just to discover something else.” – 2

4.4 Recommendations for Organizations to Enhance Support for Their Migrant Workforce

Supporting policies and practices

•“I think number one being sort of offering language courses and the possibility for further development and further education, because this also ensures that you build up the expertise that is required locally.” – 200

•“[...] much more upskilling, so much more focus on learning and development.” – 700

•“They [company name] basically enrolled me with an immigration lawyer, and these guys took care of everything visa-related.” – 6

•“It would be nice to have a kind of a checklist to do like summary what you all need if you come, if you're new to this country. Because I mean, yes, you have Google, but it's overwhelming at first. You don't know where to look for what and what to do.” – 9

•“They [company name] basically offered an interest-rate-free loan of,

I think, 3,000 pounds, which you could use to, like, upfront, you know, like, move here, find an apartment, pay a deposit, whatever, which then gets just deducted piece by piece from your salary, which, in this case, was also very doable because it's interest-rate-free.” – 6

•*“So the first one is the rent. So the, how can I say? The rent, yeah, the house, apartments, housing, the housing part. The housing part is definitely one of the biggest ones.” – 1*

•*“I know that some companies even have certain apartments. So they invested in real estate, for example, to accommodate these relocations of hires of high skilled or key hires and to help them adjust and support them on the first month of relocation.” – 500*

**Enhancing
sense of
belonging**

•*“If you are in a new place and if you are by yourself, you would like to know kind of like similar people. So like like-minded people that also travelled, also came and are in the same position. So just having some kind of like a buddy and having a group of people that started working as kind of like similar company as well.” – 8*

•*“When people come into our organisation, you know, just on their first day, they're set up with a counsellor who works with them from a professional perspective.” – 300*

•*“Then secondly, I would definitely implement some kind of mental health programs, like some free, even health, I don't know, some kind of free doctors, free psychologists in the office, because some people really get stuck. Some people really don't, they're just trapped mentally in whatever is happening there and their personality is just destroyed from whatever is happening in the office.” – 1*

•*“I don't know if everyone else does the same thing, but we are in a position where we should be doing a lot and we do.” – 300*

•*“There are a lot of government incentives regarding integrating foreigners, integrating people who come here into the local landscape.” – 200*

•*“First on my list is the fact that we cannot work from our own countries. For us, it's not a sacrifice to be here. This is our choice. But you have to understand that we are far away from our families. It's not that I want to go to Rome because I want to party or whatever. I just want to see family and friends out there growing up. I still want to feel connected to them, friends and family.” – 4*

•*“It was for a huge important aspect for me to do home office. If needed from another country to see family and friends.” – 9*

•*“in a country that has so many international workers, you could imagine that there is a lot of flexibility for people to, you know, travel and maybe go back to their home countries and working from there, because you can work from home, supposedly, in some companies. So, you could imagine that there is a bit of flexibility. I mean, if you can work*

from your house, you can also work from your country for; I don't know, even if it's a couple of days, you go for a weekend and you stay a bit longer and you work from there. But actually, this is not the case. So, because of policies and also government, like, things related to the governments, they cannot do it” – 600

•“I would like to see a little bit more integration of religious and political points of views. And like, for example, if you are hiring someone from India if they celebrate Diwali, give them the week Diwali as paid time off, right? Because that's what they celebrate according to their religion.” – 500

4.5 What is Still to Be Considered?

Early-career migration

•“I can tell you that I see a lot of people that come, that they stay for a couple of years, and they end up leaving and going back to their home countries. So this is a pattern that I can see quite a lot here. And if I think about my company specific, I mean, it's [COMPANY NAME], and this happens not just in Luxembourg, but everywhere, I think. A lot of people join, they work here for three, four, five years, and they end up leaving for other companies, even within Luxembourg. But I feel like a lot of migrants are coming to work for some years, make a bit of money, and then go back.” – 600

•“One consideration that I've heard of. And that is salary levels. I think that oftentimes the ones that come from further out are expecting less. And therefore are also paid less. Which turns into, it's not really the topic today, but turns into resentment. And maybe people wanting to leave earlier than someone that is getting paid more fairly. Let's put it like that. Or higher.” – 700

•“From what I observed and from conversations that I have, I think Berlin also had a little bit of a boom. I mean, Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, all of these cities had a little bit of a boom after Brexit because before people were a lot going to London because of the language, right? It was English, it was easier. So there was a lot of movement over there. And then that, you know, Brexit happened, people started to move away and go to other sort of tech hubs.” – 500

Social dynamics

•“There is the factor where some people use an employer or a professional opportunity to integrate into the country, and then, once they are well-integrated and settled, they find a better opportunity. Alternatively, they accept an offer purely as a stepping stone. This is something I've really noticed lately. It's not necessarily unique to Luxembourg, but I think it's becoming more common. There's a kind of newer generation than ours that accepts an offer while waiting for another one. They accept it, sign the contracts, show up, work their minimum 15 days to a month, and then tell us, “I've been waiting for another offer; I have to leave.” They use this as a lifeline to land in

Luxembourg and get settled. I'm noticing this more and more—it's happening.” – 100

•*“So, you're seeing new opportunities and channels that are opening up. Equally, you're seeing a closing of perhaps doors where you're on the periphery of what could be determined as skilled, as defined by the government as to what skilled is.” – 400*

•*“So, there might be some men who, if they're moving, they won't necessarily, they will wait for an opportunity or they'll go out and search for an opportunity, depending on ethnicity and gender. Whereas some women may actually be actively approached for specific roles within highly skilled, I'm talking within the highly skilled areas. So therefore, they may see that as an added incentive in addition to moving with a partner. Is that there is potential for them to find work.” – 400*

•*“We're the thing is also we were focussing a lot on people that were coming from outside of the European Union. OK. And now we're looking more and more at younger people that are coming from southern European countries such as Spain and Italy. And people with a lot of ambition and a lot of drive that don't see their countries evolving at the rate that other European countries are evolving. So, yeah, I've been hiring a lot of Italians, a lot of Spanish people. That just want to go out, want this international career that they don't feel that they're being offered in their own countries as well. And, yeah, the migration of younger, younger people with a lot of talent is, yeah, it's also new.” - 800*

Appendix E – Practical Recommendations for Organizations

Category	Recommendation	Objective
Relocation Support	<p>Offer comprehensive relocation packages, including assistance with visas, housing, and settling costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative checklist • Interest-rate-free loan upfront 	Facilitate a smooth transition for high-skilled migrants to the host country.
Workplace Integration	<p>Provide cultural orientation programs and language training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddy programmes • Free local language programmes 	Enable migrants to adapt to the professional and social environment more effectively.
Mental Health & Inclusion	<p>Introduce mental health support services and initiatives to foster workplace belonging.</p>	Address emotional and social challenges to enhance well-being and retention.
Career Development	<p>Offer ongoing professional development opportunities, including mentoring and upskilling programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes on local expertise 	Support migrants' career growth and job satisfaction.
Flexibility in Work	<p>Allow remote work arrangements, including the option to work from abroad where permitted by law.</p>	Attract and retain globally mobile talent by accommodating their need for flexibility and exploration.
Retention Strategies	<p>Tailor strategies to the diverse needs of migrants (e.g., those driven by exploration vs. career).</p>	Ensure long-term engagement by addressing unique motivations and preferences.
Work-Life Balance	<p>Promote a balanced work culture with flexible schedules and paid time off for culturally significant events (according to religion and origin country).</p>	Enhance job satisfaction by respecting cultural and personal priorities.