
The Cross – Border Labour Migration
of Romanian Meat Workers in the
Dutch – German Border Region;
A Frontline in the Question of
European Social Integration

BACHELOR THESIS
in Public Governance Across Borders/
Management, Society and Technology
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Date: 12.08.2024

word count: 12000

Ethical Approval number: 240896

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Abstract

The research at hand has been designed to answer the research question “How do various actors involved in inter – European labour migration in the meat sector around the border region of Gronau (Westfahlen) perceive and respond to the associated opportunities and challenges?”.

In a qualitative case study approach orienting on grounded theory different viewpoints, challenges, opportunities but also possible solutions have been collected and analysed. In the form of qualitative interviews, data from two Romanian meat workers, a manager of a meat company, the leader of an associated interregional Euregio project, voices from the German- but also Dutch municipality affected by the phenomenon as well as various actors dealing with the social implications of the phenomenon have been gathered. The results documented show up the economic and social dimensions connected with the manifestation of the Schengen area in a cross border “Euregion” where the free movement is being used by working agencies to profit from the yet less integrated public authorities and regulations of both countries.

Starting from the understanding of the workers’ as well as employers’ motivations and perspectives the challenges and first success stories in the attempt of fighting criminal exploitation from both countries’ public actors have been shown up and connected to an overall perspective for the region. It is found that a common chance for all actors and the entire region can be found in the cooperative creation and safeguarding of long – term qualifying jobs, providing good working – and living standards, binding needed workers for the long term. In this way a resilience against criminally operating working agencies but also an increasing labour shortage can be possibly built up.

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Introduction

The phenomenon of Romanian migrant workers in the meat industry is not a new – but for long time a scientifically underrepresented one. While the German consumption of meat and support of it in recent years is continuously sinking, the meat production due to Germany's exporting role has hardly followed this trend (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung, 2024).

Paired with the general shortage of labour force especially in the secondary sector, countries like Germany and the Netherlands profit from the EU enlargement in 2004 joining the former UDSSR countries of Romania and Bulgaria to the European union and free labour market. While those countries' economies due to their historical background tend to offer often poor working conditions and comparably low living standards, the same have ever since the joining of the EU been push factors for workers especially from Romania to temporarily migrate to western EU countries suffering from labour shortages. The higher wages in countries like Germany and the Netherlands have ever since the border opening led to a strong trend of labour migration especially amongst young citizens.

But this seemingly win-win situation for both the Romanians and the host – countries' side has turned out to be more complex and vulnerable to different kinds of negative side effects for all actors than eventually expected. Regulations to handle and mitigate those are necessary and possible as the prohibition of 3rd party contractors in Germany as a reaction to scandals of exploitation through these has shown. But such regulations on a single national scale are often not enough, as the case of Romanians living in Germany but working in meat factories in the Netherlands – where 3rd party contractors are still allowed - demonstrates.

In the case chosen it is being worked with different regional actors from both sides of the border, trying to understand how the phenomenon of labour migration affects both countries to different extends and what problems and chances are related to it. While there has been especially much research about labour migration potential and the predictable extend of it prior to the EU enlargement in 2004, and a medium amount of research being dedicated towards the migrant groups themselves including their motives, comparably little research focus has yet been laid on the complex interactions and influences emerging for different actors in the host region in the practice of labour migration, and the question of the extent to which those can be shaped on a very regional level. The case region chosen shows to be a suitable example for the identification of parties influenced positively and/or negatively from labour migration on the very local level both in Germany and the Netherlands. Furthermore, with a pioneering Euregio

project it was possible to witness very concretely the impact of cross border governance responses.

While an actual analysis about strategies and different success – defining scenarios for a fruitful actor cooperation for minimizing the negative effects of labour migration for a majority of stakeholders is of extreme relevance to the entire Schengen area in the European Union the analysis outlined in this paper works on the step previously necessary for such: Characterizing the role, standpoint and potential power for influencing the situation of actors related to the practice of labour migration in the region. This follows the aim of understanding the multidimensionality of interests shaping the phenomenon as well as the potential and necessity for changes. The overall research goal of interpretive nature is summarized in the main research question, which is as follows:

“How do various actors involved in inter – European labour migration in the meat sector around the border region of Gronau (Westfahlen) perceive and respond to the associated opportunities and challenges?”. Specifying sub questions emerging from this and structuring the research process are:

- I. What are the specific perceptions of Romanian meatworkers regarding the opportunities and challenges they encounter during their stay in the Dutch-German border region around Gronau (Westfahlen)?
- II. How do employers in the Dutch-German border region perceive the opportunities and challenges of employing Romanian meatworkers through inter-European labour migration?
- III. To which extent do the Challenges and Opportunities associated with inter-European labour migration of Romanian meatworkers differ between the Dutch and the German public system?
- IV. How do governmental agencies on the German and on the Dutch side of the border around Gronau (Westfahlen) perceive and respond to the differing opportunities and challenges associated with inter-European labour migration of Romanian meatworkers?
- V. Are there attempts of integrating the various actor interests emerging in the region and if so in what form?

Although there are a possibly seemingly overarching number of perspectives aimed to be leading the research, the wide – while in depth overview of the specific actors in the region and their motives and interplay is intended to be met due to the choices made in the research design.

Theory

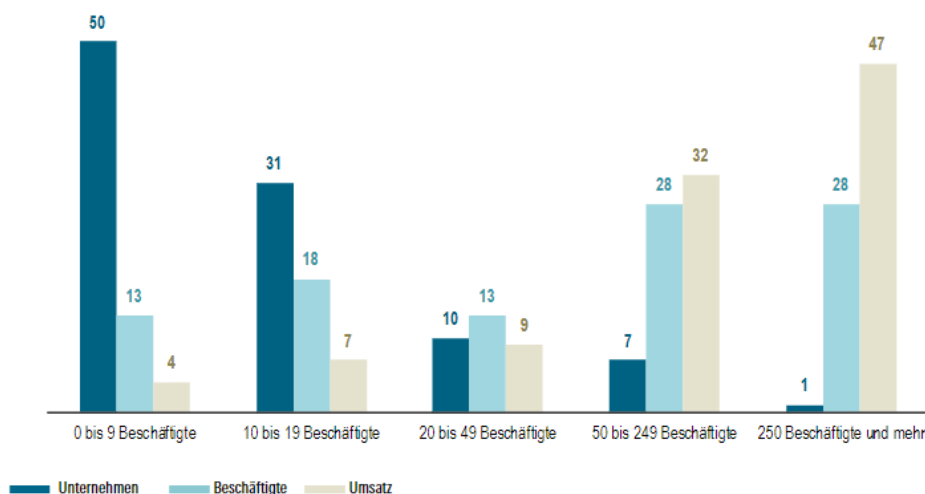
While there is very little research yet on the concrete phenomenon of the cross-border labour migration of meat workers in the region surrounding Gronau and the knowledge about the employment of the border as a further factor to take advantage of for employers is only emerging, the phenomenon of the cross border labour migration of eastern European workers in a very comparable region has just began to be analysed by Jungwirth, a scientist leading the research project “transnational labour migration” in the Rhein – Waal region which lies about 100km South of Gronau. In the first and only yet published report „*Arbeitsmigration zwischen den Grenzen – Arbeits- und Lebenssituation von Arbeitsmigrantinnen und Arbeitsmigranten in relevanten Sektoren in der Euregio Region*“ (Jungwirth, Glassner, 2024) the researchers depict the living- and working situation of workers during- and after the pandemic. While the main focus lies on the effect of different covid measures on the situation of the workers, it is one of the very first scientific sources describing classifying the group of – often eastern European migrants living in Germany but working in jobs in the Dutch meat industry or agricultural sector. The precarity of that group of people especially during the pandemic is mentioned to have been severe enough to have led to considerations of listing the cross-border phenomenon under some conditions as a form of human trafficking in the Dutch penal code.

As the mentioned report though is only the first summary of a larger research project which is still being continued, the literature resources following by now depict a more generalized macro - picture of research around the topic of labour migration and the meat industry with a focus on the Netherlands and Germany. While the chosen research question does not explicitly include the question of precarity, that concept of it as well as the working conditions together with the contribution of labour migrants in the western European societies turned out to be the main focus of existing research in the thematical field. As however the perspective of all different kind of actors in the region during the conducted research, indirectly seems to have shaped by the degree of admitted precarity, the following literature review is still considered to be relevant for the research conducted. Valuable background information concerning the meat industry and the implications of different working conditions on the people employed in the system are intended to be pointed out in that way, providing a larger embedding context of the followingly presented regional results.

The report: “*Neuordnung der Arbeitsbeziehungen in der Fleischindustrie: Das Ende der organisierten Verandwortungslosigkeit*“ points out phenomena and shifts that have shaped working conditions and business models in the German meat industry giving context to the development towards the prohibition of temporary employment in the meat industry in Germany while also comparing it with its European neighbours (Erol et al. 2020). The authors bring a paradigm shift in the branch towards export, internationalization and quantitative expansion, in connection with the liberalization of the European working markets as well as the erosion of workers’ organizations. Those phenomena among others have initiated a rise of the industrialized models of meat processing from a small business cantered -, to a monopolized, export oriented, meat price dumping meat market being based on the exploitation of cheap labour from mainly eastern – European working immigrants constituting 50- up to 100% of the companies’ workers (Erol et al.,2020).

This is amongst others being demonstrated with the help of the graphic below showing the ongoing trend of the monopolization of the German meat market in 2017 towards very few companies employing more than the other companies which are making most of the profit. In fact, there shows only a single company employing more than 250 employees, which at the same time generates almost as much win as all the smaller businesses together (Eurostat 2020, quoted by Erol et al., 2020). The graphic following, also underlines the trends shown up by the scientists, focusing on the profit development in the German meat sector from the 20002 until 2022 in total, which – despite a shrinking meat consumption in Germany – has turned out to increase by about 28% (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022).

**Unternehmen, Beschäftigte und Umsatz im Bereich
„Schlachten und Fleischverarbeitung“ in Deutschland nach Betriebsgrößen, 2017**
Angaben in Prozent



Quelle: EUROSTAT 2020, Jährliche Unternehmensstatistik, eigene Darstellung.

Figure 1.: (Eurostat 2020) “Companies, employees and profit in the sector of “Butchering and Meat processing in Germany after the business size, 2017

Nettoumsatz in der Fleischverarbeitung in Deutschland in den Jahren 2002 bis 2022

(in Millionen Euro)

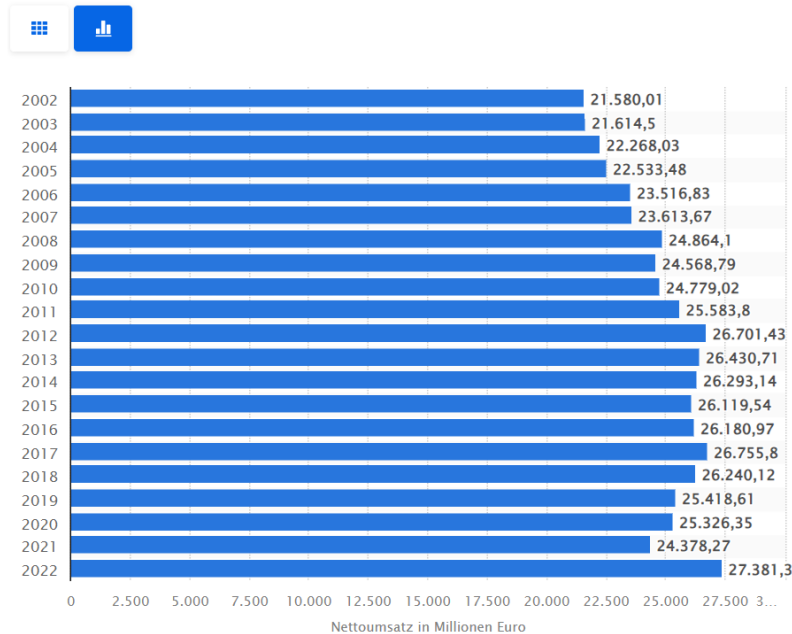


Figure 2:(Statistisches Bundesamt,2022) “net profit in the meat processing in Germany in the years 2002 – 2022”

While those data are primarily focused on Germany there is substantial reason to assume similar developments in the Netherlands based on own interview data (Interview 7, Interview 5). The research points out, that the “cheap” workers being part of the win strategy could improve their situation comparably substantially with the 2015 initiated minimum wage in Germany. However, despite voluntary commitments to improve working and living conditions of migrant workers the German labour protection authority in the year 2019 reported severe violations of workers’ rights such as illegal

- > "Wage withholding for personal protective equipment,
- > Wage withholding for rent,
- > Wage withholding for driving service,
- > Wage withholding for induction if the employee wishes to terminate their employment prematurely and
- > Reduction of wages due to misconduct"

(Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Soziales 2019: p. 9, cited in p. 9 Erol et al. 2020).



Figure 3.: (Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Soziales 2019: p. 7) „Deficiency quota in the controlled companies“

Translation: “deficiency rate in the tested companies: 15% slight deficiency, 85% severe deficiency. Total amount of violations: 8752,5863 violations in the area of working time law, 2481 violations in the area of occupational health precautions, 296 technical occupational protection deficits, 112 deficits in the organization of the occupational health” (Ministerium für Arbeit Gesundheit und Soziales ,2019)

While the working protection report in 2019 has not received a lot of attention, only one year later with the outbreak of the coronavirus especially in meat plants the public attention was drawn to the working and living conditions of the labour migrants. The bad conditions having led to severe covid outbreaks and entire regional lockdowns turned out to be a turning point in public opinion ultimately enabling the passing of a historical law: The “Arbeitsschutz – Kontroll Gesetz” (Occupational protection – control Act) which prohibits the employment of temporary workers in the German meat sector, re-delegating the responsibility of firmly employing and granting employers rights to the firms. The law signified an important step in changing the status and position of the workers to the positive and hindering the practices of often criminal contracting agencies. Beforehand, working time exploitation, unlawful wage retention and lacking safety equipment was mostly caused by working agencies trying to save money in those areas passing on the price dumping pressure to the workers in order to remain attractive to the company as the report of the work authority clarified (Ministerium für

Arbeit Gesundheit und Soziales ,2019,p.8). The new law therefore put the full responsibility for workers back to the primary employers easing controls and the question of accountability. While therefore, a substantial step towards a restructuring of working relations in the meat industry away from workers’ exploitation is taken, Erol et al. argue, that only with the establishment of a nationwide collective bargaining coverage good working conditions could be granted for the long-term and a “race to the bottom” effectively stopped (Erol et al.,2020).

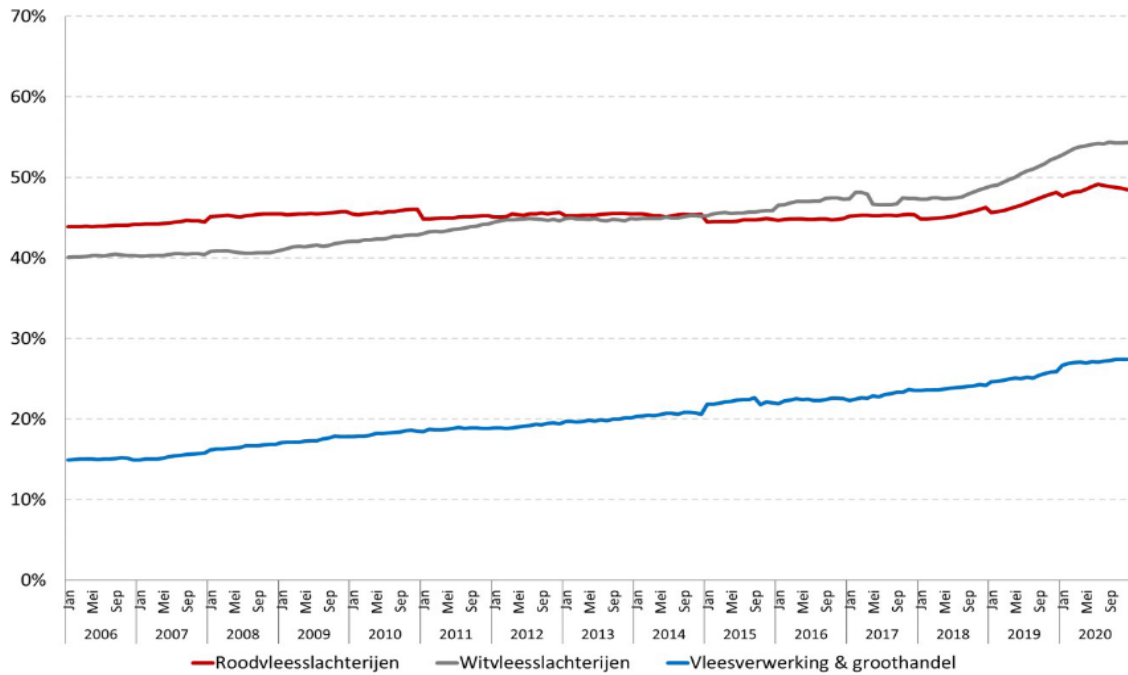
What besides a general understanding of the picture stands out in the report, is the comparisons with neighbouring countries including the Netherlands. Although the Netherlands are presented as a country having established a covering, nationwide bargaining agreement, at the same time it is a country still allowing the employment of so called “flex(ible) workers” and therefore only the shrinking number of directly employed staff does at all profit from this regulation.

Furthermore, the trends of export orientation, quantitative and cheap production focus as well as work step compartmentalisation in the German leading meat companies seem to play also a major role in the Dutch branch, considering the fact, that the practices and trends described for the German sector explicitly mentioned the company “Vion”, the Dutch leading- and in Germany already second largest company in the meat sector. While the company refused an exchange in the process of the research paper, its perspective and practices can only be guessed due to its reputation in the region (Interview 1,6,7).

Verbal estimations of half of the Dutch economy standing still or even falling apart without migrant workers (interview1,7) are in its core significance (a strong dependence of the Dutch economy from labour migrants) scientifically substantiated by the paper of Fasani et al.(2020) statistically evaluating the reliance of European countries in the “key professions” also known as the “system relevant” professions on labour migrants. It shows, that on average every EU country relies to 13% on the work of labour migrants filling up labour shortages. What furthermore stands out in that context is the overrepresentation of the group of labour migrants in the low skill secondary sector such as food processing (Fasani et al.,2020).

Focusing on the Dutch meat sector the report ”Eindrapport Aantal werkenden in de slachterijen en overige vleessector” (own translation: “Number of workers in slaughterhouses and other meat industry”) the authors Heyma and Luiten(2020) state the previous assumptions on the relevance of migrant workers and the Dutch working landscape in that domain with concrete numbers: In their research the authors found an total amount of 13,800 migrant workers being employed in the meat sector of which three quarters would stem from eastern European countries like Poland and Romania (p. 3, Heyma and Luiten ,2020).The highest share of migrant workers can be found being employed in slaughterhouses where they make up an average percentage of 51% of all workers (p. 3, Heyma and Luiten ,2020).

Share of migrant workers among total meat sector workers increases and varies between 15 and 55 percent across subsectors



Source: CBS Microdata, COV & NEPLUVI, edited SEO Economic Research

Figure 4. (Heyma and Luiten 2020, p.3, quoted from CBS Microdata) “Share of migrant workers among total meat sector workers (...)”

There has been observed a slight increase of workers being employed over a temporary employment agency since 2006, so that in the year 2020 37% of all workers in the sector would have been working in such an arrangement, of which again 80% are constituted by people of non-Dutch nationality while nationals in comparison only to one fifth would be employed with a working agency (p.36, Heyma and Luiten ,2020). The report in its initial statement integrates the standpoint of Dutch employers speaking out against the demand of Dutch workers’ unions to – according to the German example – only allow permanent and direct working contracts with the employers. The Dutch working agencies in comparison to the ones having existed in Germany it is argued, would be more professional often due to their certification and specialization (Heyma and Luiten ,2020).

While the support for the prohibition or limitation of working agencies among societal actors seems to be growing also in the border region of Gronau (interview 1,4,6,7, mind protocols 1,2,3,4), another report commissioned by the Dutch Cabinet does not either deny abuses of workers’ rights by certain work agencies nor the possibly important role of them for the Dutch economy and therefore proposes a middle way. The report “No second- class citizens”

(translation from Dutch) by the so-called “Relief team for the protection of migrant workers” (translation) under chairman Emile Roemer (2020), argues similar to the German research, for structural change. In a stakeholder-based problem analysis especially the lacking independence of often lowly educated and informed, non-Dutch – or English-speaking workers is pointed out and set in contrast to the self – reliant and defensive citizens that the Dutch laws and regulations are usually designed for. The high structural dependency on the employer in the Netherlands is pointed out as a problem that has to be addressed with additional controls and regulations for employers (whether it is an agency or not) as well as the need for more independent contact, advise and helping points provided by the public system. It is argued, that although many employers offer fair conditions to migrant workers, there would be an urgency to close existing gaps in the legal and executive system and restrict exploitatively operating working agencies and employers (Roemer, 2020).

Focusing on the labour landscape in Germany again but with certainty also pointing out tendencies for the Netherlands Khalil et al.(2020) describe the system relevant jobs in Germany being occupied to one fourth by people of migration backgrounds. Although this kind of work is considered as crucial for the functioning of western societies, the authors point out, how those often again are laying within the low wage sector. A correlation of migrant workers starting into the working market from less advantaged conditions and therefore more likely agreeing to precarious conditions is pointed out. To end exploitative structures and strengthen vital jobs within western European societies, it is proposed, to increase efforts towards better working conditions in precarious jobs as well as the development of strategies to improve the starting conditions for people from different contexts (Khalil et al.,2020).

Research conducted by Dragano et al. (2015) might possibly also point towards the need of such multilevel structural improvements for workers. In their article “Arbeit und gesundheitliche Ungleichheit“ (“Work and health inequality”) the scientists present their German- but also Europe- wide applying finding, stating that lower qualifying-, often manual labour as well as precarious working conditions according to their statistical research depict a severe health risk increasing the risk for an earlier death compared to higher working positions/fields. The research points out a complex influence of education and income (correlating with the job position) on living conditions and health - impacting behaviour, finally significantly influencing the longevity as well as mental and physical health of workers. While the research did not include data on precarious working conditions it was mentioned though,

that those would even exacerbate this effect if physical complaints would out of pressure, fear or a lacking health care access not be treated in time (Dragano et.al. 2015).

The theory around the described macro level tendencies and phenomena is considered relevant in a more indirect manner: It is about to show up in different form and intensity in the practical findings of the research, co-influencing the single actors' perspective concerning the research question. Even if not always mentioned explicitly the presented selection of literature provides important surrounding and background information and supports the contextualization of findings.

Although as shown up since the corona Pandemic there has been an increase on research and debate around the topic and situation of working migrants in the meat sector, the local responses and relations of different regional actors and their perspective on the phenomenon has not been extensively scientifically thematized yet and depicts therefore this works' research gap intended to be address. The aim followed is to identify central tendencies on the way towards more informed governance around the issue.

On the one hand this might allow in a later stage of research highly relevant and relatively generalizable findings for the multitude of existing EU borders and labour migration relations. On the other hand, in this stage of research it was considered to be of high importance to depict and understand in an in-depth manner the specific and contextually narrow setting. However, the intention to allow for findings that at later stages could be eventually tested and transferred to other- relatively comparable contexts remains.

Methods

The focus region of the case study is the Euregio-region around Gronau and Enschede including the district of Borken on the German- and the region of Twente on the Dutch side of the border. .The chosen region offers the comfort of being located in the living area of the researcher as well as the location of the university which offered an advantage for the conducted field research and furthermore allows to shine a light on a less known side phenomenon of labour-migration in the sector: The cross – border labour migration within the German – Dutch Euregio border region adding another international – and EU relevant dimension. Since 2021 there has been noticed an increase of Romanian workers and working agencies operating in the area often housing eastern European working migrants in Gronau

(and surrounding) and employing them in the Dutch meat sector (Interview 5). While there are several meat processing companies in the city of Enschede, the leading and most influential meat processing company of the Netherlands “Vion” has located one of its in total six national production sites in Enschede and therefore along the other companies shapes the reputation of the region as an important area for the national meat production (Interview 7).

Following this idea, the research presented has been conducted based on an explicitly inductive – grounded theory approach allowing for the necessary understanding of “*the workings of particular processes (...) illuminated by single cases*” (Scott, 1997, p.153).

While in this design no specific hypothesis is being formulated prior to the research, the formulation of the research question already to some extent implies assumptions about relevant actors being the Romanian workers, the employers as well as the regional governmental actors on both sides of the border. The identification of the relevant actors began with the review of local news having led to the first contact with the mayor of the municipality of Gronau as well as the NGO “Verein für Würde und Gerechtigkeit” (Radio WMW, Fuhrhop,2023). From this starting point, a grounded theory research typical, empirical data- and recommendation-based way of identifying relevant actors has been applied. This strategy turned out to result in “shorter ways” a high cooperation willingness and more specific – context relevant - questions allowed to be asked if a connected - previously contacted and then forth recommending actor has been mentioned. The qualitative interviews have been conducted in a semi – structured way, allowing for a certain openness to yet unknown facets, stories and viewpoints while still also being able to integrate previously collected knowledge to in this way come closer to the initial research question. As the interviews with the two workers in order to guarantee their safety had to be designed anonymously it was decided to not include any personal names in the research. While all officially planned interviews have after receiving consent been audio recorded, three out of seven interviews had to take place over a video call while all other four interviews could be conducted in person. The two interviews with Romanian meatworkers took place with the help of a live translator. The Romanian parts of the conversation have automatically been translated by the EU – GDPR conform version of the transcription tool “Good tape”. As however the translation not always has led to reliable results, the passages employed as a quote in this work have additionally undergone a check of the translating person. Interviews which have been conducted originally in German have been also coded in their original language. Furthermore, there have been taken field notes/ mind protocols on more spontaneously

emerging informal interviews. All resulting textual material of qualitative collected data have been uploaded and coded with the help of the software Atlas.ti following the steps of random – axial- and selective category forming according to grounded theory (Payne, 1997).

The formed categories eventually have allowed for the structuring and in relation setting of the qualitative data having led to the creation of the results- charts underlining which represent base for the analysis and can be found in the data appendix.

The grounded theory approach enabled the seizing of the opportunity to join a field lab in a comparable project between the Radboud- and the Rhein – Ruhr university discussing the topic of housing solutions as well as the participation in the conference “Working across borders – towards a fair 360-degree labour mobility” (2024) organized in cooperation of the Netherlands, Germany and the European Labour Agency. While not depicted directly in the research, the overall understanding and extend of the phenomenon of labour migration has been enhanced through those events and important conversations been held.

For the field research in the case region there has been identified a multitude of possibly relevant actors which due to time and space limitations of this work however could not all be successfully integrated. Nevertheless, the following actors have been identified, interviewed and in their perspective included into the analysis:

- > The leader of the regional taskforce and Euregio – representative (Interview 1)¹: The Euregio is an administration union between municipalities and districts along the Dutch – German border and in this form one of the oldest cross border cooperation associations of the European Union. The Euregio is commissioned with the consulting of politics and citizens as well as the execution of projects all standing under the goal of regional integration despite the border, enhanced understanding of the neighbouring country as well as decreasing possible burdens of the border between the two countries (Euregio, 2024, Interview 1). Following hints and complaints from the civil citizenship in the year 2023 the Euregio - led project „Euregional network work migrants“ (in the following “Euregio – project”) began to initiate cooperations of relevant actors from both sides of the border leading to six commonly executed housing controls in the district of Borken. Represented in the regular round table meetings are the Dutch- labour inspection,

¹ To be found under this number in the appendix

regional information and expertise centre, the district police centre of Borken as well as representatives of the district of Borken and Overijssel. Understanding the different regulations and responsibility divisions but also enabling channels of communication and further cooperation are aims of the project which seems to resemble the most important governance response concerning the local phenomenon in both countries yet (Euregio, 2024). The interview with the leader of the Euregional project can followingly be seen as central concerning a local voice knowing the situation and regulatory on both sides of the border as well as the perspective of one of the most central drivers for cross border cooperation.

- > A Romanian worker of a smaller meat factory in Enschede (Interview 2):

This interview partner has been contacted during the attempt to make an interview appointment with the companies' leaders outside of the factory area through a pre – formulated translated message on a phone leading to the exchange of contacts and the arrangement of a video-call based interview.

- > A Romanian worker employed in the biggest meat factory in Enschede (Interview 3):

Again, this opportunity for contact was taken during an unsuccessful attempt to get in contact with a representative of the company outside of the area with the help of a by standing – English speaking and connecting other worker leading to the exchange of contact data and the arrangement of a video call-based interview. Both Romanian workers therefore have been selected completely randomly, in their interviews though offer a very central – and often underrepresented direct perspective of the phenomenon of labour migration in the meat sector in the region of research.

- > A school teacher from Gronau (Interview 4):

The establishment of this contact was based on the recommendation of an NGO. The teachers' shared experiences have contributed to significant insights into the local social dimension of the phenomenon as well as the less obvious regional effects of the labour migration.

- > The purchase manager of a smaller meat factory in Enschede (Interview 5):

In contrast to the response of the cities' largest meat manufacturer the company has allowed insight into their important perspective concerning the phenomenon of meat workers'

migration. Only by also knowing the employers' side of the phenomenon and being in exchange real solutions can be found on the long term for the region. Therefore, depicting one of many possible opinion spectrums from the side of the meat industry is important part of answering the research question.

- > The leader of the regulatory office in Gronau (Interview 6):

The regulatory office together with the interlinked construction office are two of the most central German municipal organizational structures dealing with the daily reality and societal pressure-points of the work migration in the region: Complaints and hints from neighbours and citizens concerning problematic social or housing situations are often dealt with in those offices. Furthermore, controls are being organized and executed here. The interview can be seen as the voice of the German municipality of Gronau which is the by far mostly affected city in the district of Borken in terms of housing of labour migrants.

- > A commissioned public official of the municipality of Enschede (Interview 7):

An initial request to the mayor of the city of Enschede turned out to be delegated to the municipality's leader of the cross-border cooperation department and projects who followingly has been interviewed. A wide spectrum of opinions concerning the phenomenon and handling of labour migration in the meat sector within the local governance system of the municipality as well as a shift of paradigm and possible future developments could be taken up into the analysis through this interview representing the perspective of the municipality hosting the meat industry of focus being confronted with different questions than for example the German municipality.

Concepts

Most of the relevant concepts about to be shown up have been deducted and assessed as relevant after the conduction and evaluation of the field research. While the interviews do speak in big parts for themselves and mostly already answer the research question from different perspectives, the following concepts about to be presented will be helpful to unite and interpret the main themes and outcomes of the single voices and create possible continuous outlooks.

The first very obvious conceptualization needed in order to answer the research question is the one of Challenges and Opportunities. Although initially planned to only focus on the individual actors' perspective on the phenomenon – for example only including Challenges and Opportunities of the phenomenon mentioned by the teacher which actually pointed towards the school-context, too much valuable collective perspective brought up by each individual actor would have been lost if this approach would have been followed. This can be explained with the high degree of societal awareness and responsibility inherent to many of the actors' daily professional functions but could also speak just in general for a never entirely self- but also community - centred mindset of most stakeholders within regional contexts. Coming back to the operationalization of Challenges and Opportunities, primary the actor affecting but also secondarily – the community, region and/or phenomenon- affecting relevant factors have been coded, interpreted and involved into the analysis. Generally speaking, factors, conditions or outlooks perceived as negative and negative for the personal-/ common good by the actor fall under the category of Challenge. All factors enhancing the personal-/ common good related to the phenomenon are being summarized as Opportunities. Below follow some coding examples taken from the Interview with the meat manager (Interview 5).

Transcript passage	Code, context
<p>“When people are learning the language, which is, of course, good for the reintegration... Yeah. ...but also for the cooperation in the company.” (p.13)</p>	<p>Opportunity → incentive to encourage workers to learn language / offer them a language course, increase chances of them staying</p>
<p>”Of course, it's maybe the agencies, they get a check and then maybe they find something, but that's not something that, it's not information that we get.”(p.10)</p>	<p>Challenge → Info about workers' rights violations of working agency is not shared with company</p>

Figure 5.: own graphic: Coding examples for the Atlas.ti coding of Challenges and Opportunities

Additionally, to the head coding category presented here, several coding sub – categories have been formed all contributing to the more detailed understanding as well as the description of the nature and background of the opportunities and challenges asked for in the research question which have led the coding process and are basis of the analysis.

As demonstrated in the graphic below, most categories are not necessarily only associated with a challenge or an opportunity but can contain both depending on the single actors’- perspective, forming therefore the “mixed explanatory categories” (depicted in the result charts with the colour of yellow). While there are many aspects which are eventually chance for one and challenge for the other actor and therefore belong to the mixed categories, there are some challenges that no actor can officially embrace and that therefore only appear in the “challenge” category. Nevertheless, especially future oriented solutions, recommendations as well as the category of identified cooperation potential point towards the integration and cooperation between challenge- and opportunity affected actors and in an overall picture depict the main “opportunity” for the entire region and all actors. All explanatory categories depicted below have been identified in the coding process and will – if represented in the interview – be found in the results chart of each actor in the appendix. The colours employed in the charts refer to challenges (red), opportunities (green) and the mixed category (yellow).

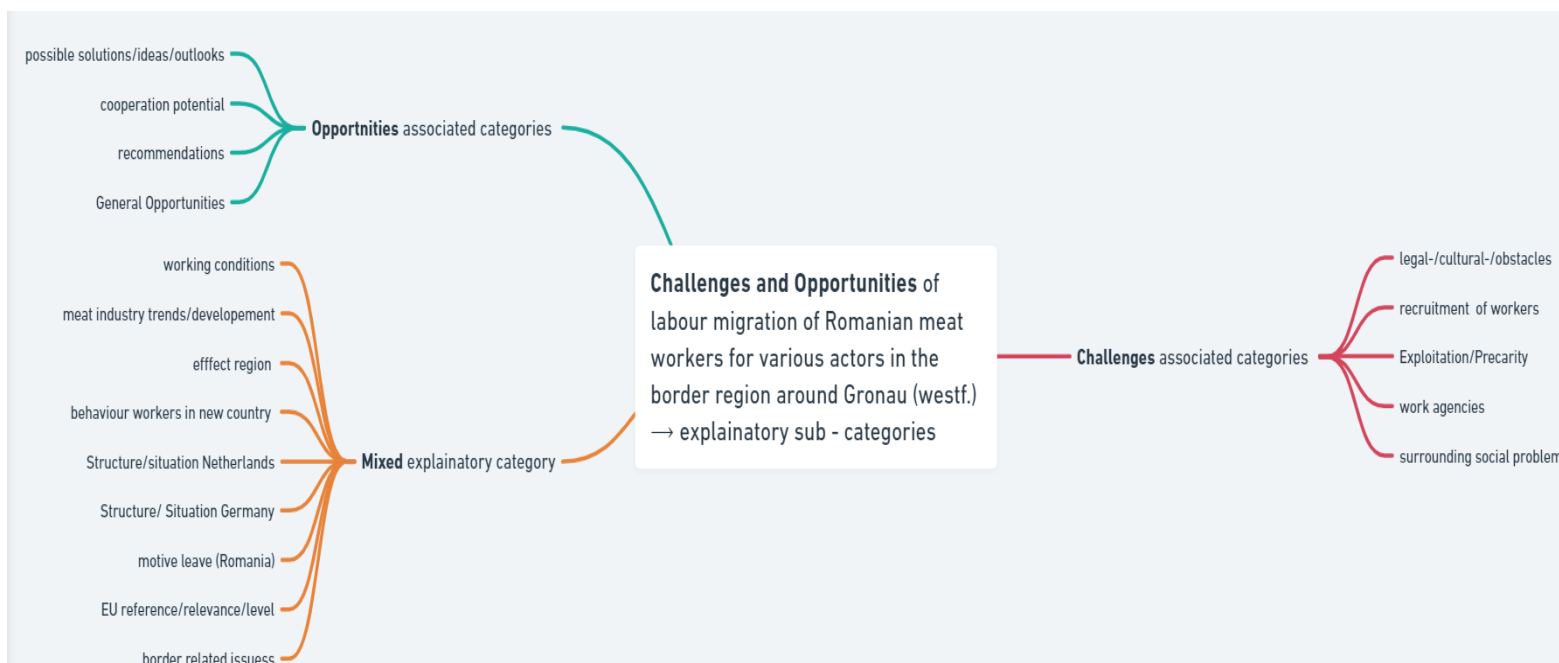


Figure 6.: Own graphic: inductively extracted categories from data material forming together the nature and background of Challenges and Opportunities coming with the phenomenon in the region

As a last concept Precarity is about to be briefly laid out. Although hardly ever explicitly mentioned, the theme indirectly in its different dimension has proven to turn out as a decisive and connecting element in all interviews. The concept of Precarity in this work is defined as “(...)a precarious existence, lacking in predictability, job security, material or psychological welfare”(Standing, 2011, p. 10) Often also including the absence of available secure social networks (Castel, 2000). Possibly as the public opinion associating Romanian meatworkers with precarity would be too hard to argument against, none of the actors interviewed denied the possibility of that reality fully.

Analysis

During the field research at a field lab in the Radboud University one sentence has been once mentioned, taken up and later on been stated in many interviews that seems to describe one major core problem of the phenomenon: “*The Economy gets all the benefits while society carries all burdens*”.

Indeed, there shows much truth to be found in this rather plain formulation. In the field research executed it turned out that in the past working agencies and meat factories in the Netherlands have profited from the Dutch - German border and the phenomenon of labour migration of Romanian meat workers while the societal actors – mainly so far on the German side of the border have turned out to be faced with lots of the associated challenges. While the workers themselves are often the ones being exploited the most and carry the highest and most personal likelihood of facing challenges of all actors, the phenomenon would not exist anymore if not the opportunities would often outweigh the challenges that workers in the region are facing when coming to work here. To explore those tendencies more is goal of the following analysis, beginning with the workers’ perspective (sub-question I).

Meat workers

In the process of asking the workers after their specific perception of the opportunities and challenges in the region connected to their job in the meat industry, it turned out, that as part of the overall challenges can be already seen the kind of answers that have been given. What stood out a lot, was instead of an awareness of precarity and bad living conditions in witnessed exploitation, the interviewees tended to stress their personal responsibility and opportunity taking to navigate out of such situations instead of trying to seek advice and justice. Connected

to this can be seen, their verbalised surprise in the displayed interest in their story, daily life and work experiences through the interviews.

Both workers represented in this research have come not directly to the meat sector but over informal invitations (friends/ Facebook) to the German construction sector first, where both faced heavy exploitation. After months of delayed or even not delivered payment of work without contract or insurance both randomly selected workers turned out to search for an alternative job which then for both turned out to be the meat sector.

Worker 1 worked in a German meat plant first where a 4-person flat shared with 8 people for a rent of 350 euro has been faced and a promised increase of the salary not been realized, so that through a recommendation of a friend he ended up changing to work in a smaller – qualitative product-oriented meat factory in the Netherlands.

Both workers perceived the work in a meat factory as a relatively secure opportunity for granted and regular income in their attempt to turn their back on the construction sector. However, it stands out, that neither with past jobs nor with the present ones in the meat factories in the Netherlands the workers seem to be aware whether or not they are working at a working agency or the factory directly. It is solely spoken about “Romanian boss(/-es)” or “Turkish /Dutch” bosses. Indeed, it turned out even, for one worker that a direct employment at the factory as well as housing and transport free of charge was assumed, while additional research showed, that the same factory did not recruit nor employ migrant workers directly but only over work agencies which keep in fees for housing and transport from the workers’ salary.

This single example already shows the high degree of informality in the sector where workers are not aware of their actual employers or the amount of money being kept in by them but merely have to rely on the information being shared to them by the “Romanian (speaking) Boss(/-es)”.

This is also reflected in the form of recruitment and job finding, where often not a formal application but an invitation over a friend or a social media advertisement leads to a new workplace. Due to the high flexibility and fluctuation in the sector also coming from the side of the workers, the offer of pre – organized housing is often important for the workers to be able to begin the work at all – as finding a flat without knowledge of the local language and area is very difficult. At the one hand therefore, the workers described the provided housing not per se as something bad and were both in relative agreeance with their current living

situation although one worker has to share his room and commute for one and a half hours from Germany to his job in the Netherlands (3 hours per day).

Also, here it shows, that the satisfaction with the living situation does not come from knowing and seeing the rights for accommodation and housing standards fulfilled, but rather by having experienced way worse situations in previous job offers (with several people sharing rooms and flats with entire families and other strangers for example). One important characteristic and therefore possible advantage of both workers has to be recognized in this context, which is their independence and confidence as young, male individuals to walk away from too exploitative situations of housing or non – payment as both have described to have done several times. Important to mention here is that this might not represent the situation of the majority of workers. After having been asked for the reason of other workers possibly staying longer in heavily exploitative working conditions, worker 2 stated that many had families which were highly dependent on the little money which could have been sent, so that their fear of leaving and possibly not being able to send anything anymore was bigger. It clearly shows here unfortunately, how much the degree to which a Romanian worker being exploited or not at the workplace in Western European countries seems to be still dependent on their experience and personal confidence abroad but also their degree of education, connectedness and even luck.

While for the worker having already spend more time working in the Netherlands in a smaller factory the working conditions were perceived as way more attractive, granting necessary working breaks and the possibility to work in a higher position than before, it also got clear that other than that due to a relative disconnect with the surrounding society but also the open borders, not much difference between Germany and the Netherlands is being perceived. Despite both having been labour migrants for several years now, none of the two yet learned Dutch or German which is also a factor leading to a feeling of disconnection with the two societies (Germany and Netherlands) alike although sympathies for both cultures have been mentioned as well as dissatisfaction with the disconnected state.

On the outlook however, both workers imagine to stay at least six more years and one even to bring his family here. While the one in a more qualified position plans to stay in this job, the worker having begun his work in a big meat factory mentioned intentions to bring his family to Germany and change the job again. Both workers showed sympathy to the local culture and intentions to learn the languages.

To summarize, what is also elaborated in the results' chart in the appendix, the biggest challenges for the workers can be seen in the physical demandingness of the job, the relative sociocultural isolation, the constant risk of being taken advantage of the in-transparency and informality from sides of the working agencies as well as unfamiliarity with their rights and ways to make them count. In relation to this stand the opportunities of more attractive economic conditions in comparison to those in Romania enabling family support or saving for future goals, the perspective of integrating into the countries' societies and building up a higher living standard. From an external perspective also the possibility of connecting with other actors to enhance a dialogue about improving workers' rights security and integration beyond the single persons' stories seems to be a major opportunity for all stakeholders.

Dutch Meat Sector

Coming from the workers' perspective, the actor bringing and eventually keeping the workers in the region – the employers - shall be continued with.

While there are about five meat processing plants in the region of Enschede, establishing contact to the leaders of those turned out as very complicated and, in the end, usually unsuccessful with especially the biggest and most controversial one. However, at a family-owned business it turned out to be as simple as walking into the locations' office and directly getting an appointment for an interview. This openness for a talk granting the representation of a part of the spectrum of possible employers' perspectives in the region therefore cannot be taken for granted and can be seen as a first positive sign for possible ongoing dialogue-willingness of all different actors in the region.

This willingness for cooperation with the municipality turned out also in several points in the interview to be stated. Especially the launching of language courses in the hope for better internal communication as well as external integration of workers into the society as well as a possible cooperation in terms of additional housing building were viewed as possible future projects. Despite this however, the main responsibility for integrating into society is seen with the individual workers themselves' and less perceived as a responsibility for the company.

While the companies' ethos seems to differ to some degree from the bigger ones stressing quality over quantity of the product and therefore also declares an ambition to offer good working conditions and bind workers, if possible, for the long term, - the company still also seems to be driven by a high motivation for growth, and the vast majority of workers are

employed over working agencies due to organizational and economic reasons. The general trends of compartmentalization, export orientation and Europeanization of workers as well as customers clearly also affect this business which stated of itself to have always adapted with the time and changing markets.

Currently the strategy of spreading out the exports to many different countries in order to reduce vulnerability to sudden changes seems to be possibly also employed in the selection and composition of the worker-base: Currently the company employs people stemming all from eight different work agencies and six different nationalities. There is a share of long-term workers which is seasonally dependent then joined by short term flexible workers. While the head of the company would not want to accept exploitation of workers by their working agency and therefore tries to only work together with certified ones, there are no other means yet to ensure the agencies' practices. Even in controls which are perceived to happen regularly and sufficiently, the outcomes of the agencies' results are not being shared with the company depicting a challenge of in-transparency in terms of the workers' living standards. However, while it is stated that if exploitation would come to the surface the cooperation with such an agency would be ended, the main responsibility for ensuring the workers' living standards is still seen with the governmental controls, and less laying in the employers' own hands.

Furthermore, the interest to bring those questions more into the companies' responsibility seems to be limited as all recruitment, translation and surrounding organizational effort would not be economical to execute in the own house. While these arguments are plausible for the short term and seasonal workers, the long-term employment of workers over a working agency of up to 25 years still seems to be caused by an additional financial advantage resulting from the different employment – status of those workers.

To summarize, the Europeanization of the economic and social sphere allowing for a broad worker- as well as market base seems to impact the company enormously, depicting challenge due to higher market pressures and opportunity due to diversification possibilities at the same time. While there is a high awareness and willingness for constant change and improvement in order to remain successful in terms of business strategies in a Europe wide competition, the competition for workers connected with the desire to provide best – possible long-term working - and living conditions seems to be still moderate.

Therefore, one of the biggest challenges seems to be the prospect of a possible prohibition of working agencies as challenges like finding and housing workers have been outsourced to

them, while the status of a rented worker as well as the work of the agencies depict a huge opportunity for the current working model of the business. From an outside – perspective expanding the motto of quality instead of quantity to the employees and therefore re – gaining more responsibility or at least insight into the living conditions of the workers and enhancing their integration into society depicts a huge long- term opportunity for attracting and ensuring a stable workers’ base Europe wide.

Coming to the sub-question III on the challenges and opportunities for the German- and Dutch- public societal actors and their strategies to deal with them, brings one back to the initial sentence of the society having to carry all the burdens while the economy wins.

Dutch Public Sector

Although there are not just disadvantages for the regions’ society, the main recent opportunities connected to the phenomenon are connected to chances to improve the current situation and cooperations, but less about direct wins to the region.

While the Dutch municipality until the begin of the Euregio project has not been aware about the struggles that the German municipalities already went through, the entire phenomenon of cross – border labour migration was also not known to be impactful beyond the Dutch/ German commuters.

Despite the duty for registrations even for short term stays, the municipality struggles to have an overview over the own labour migrant population, as the registration duty is often not being followed. Also, the national legislation, controls as well as criminal persecution is described as being lacking on all ends, providing plenty of opportunity for unlawfully operating working agencies. Other than in Germany, there are hardly trade taxes being paid to the municipalities by the local businesses, so that one also can hardly speak of the Dutch municipality profiting from the system.

In an interview, the public administration of the town was described as being divided between voices that want to protect the influential meat businesses as employers for the region (despite the fact that little locals are employed anymore) which see the problems caused by Dutch working agencies’ practices in Germany as a German problem, and voices which see the local meat industry still in responsibility for improvements and want to cooperate with the Germans to combat the difficulties being caused in the Netherlands. Despite the inner discussion there, especially through the Euregio project but also the councillor publicly questioning the future

importance and potential of the meat business for the municipality there seems to be a tendency within the administrative system of the municipality of Enschede to increase efforts to ensure good living and working conditions for the labour migrants in the meat industry.

This is also represented in the municipalities' official support for the recommendations formulated in the so-called Roemer report, "No second-class citizens" (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2020) on the topic dealing with the question of improving the living standards of migrant workers and hindering criminal practices exploiting them.

While the local current effort of doing so is still limited to the participation in the Euregio project, first ideas of going into dialogue with the meat companies themselves as well as possibly initiating a system of naming and shaming with exploitatively operating working agencies are being contemplated. The project and enabled exchange practices with Germany is perceived as an opportunity to also generally get to know each other as well as the division of responsibilities on the other side of the border.

Furthermore, there has been formulated the hope to develop ways of treating the manually working labour migrants as good as the so called "Expats" often working in the very best conditions in IT companies. This would follow the vision to sustainably bind people from both branches for the long term which would benefit the region independently from the meat sector.

Nevertheless, big problems to face in that context depict the Dutch national plans of budget cuts for the municipalities' while increasing their responsibilities as well as the ever – increasing housing crisis, making the provision of good workers' accommodations even harder. It can be summarized, that against possible expectations of the Dutch public system profiting from migrant workers while leaving the downsides of the phenomenon with Germany, also the Dutch public sector struggles to get an overview over the workers living still in the Netherlands as well as the ones commuting every day from Germany. Also, financially the situation is more a burden than a win, as trade taxes from the businesses are paid to the central government which however even plans to cut funds for the municipalities which already struggle to organize housing controls.

As an opportunity to follow the public responsibility of guaranteeing good living conditions for workers and possibly even binding them for longer and also in other sectors to the region can be seen the cooperation and exchange with the German municipality and neighbouring district so that the border would no longer bring the advantage of escaping housing regulations for working agencies. This could lead to more positive migration experiences turning short

term labour migrants in potential new citizens and future qualified workers. First steps as the establishment of informal contacts, a handbook for an overview of the responsibilities and public systems of both countries, data exchange agreements as well as first commonly organized housing controls in Gronau have already successfully been realized following the mission of fighting criminal workers' exploitation.

Binational Cooperation Initiative

In the interview with the Euregio representative and leader of the project voiced hopes to change the exploitation system locally have been small, and rather a collection of evidence to carry to responsible authorities on the higher levels of decision making through lobbying in the European Union as well as the federal and national governments of Germany but especially the Netherlands are seen as an opportunity for change.

The mediating role of the Euregio also got clear through the diplomatic character of the interview, knowing all actors and perspectives well and arguing also the meat industry would never want to take advantage of the people and that it would be indeed the working agencies which usually would try to unrightfully earn money with their workers. The main exploitation would therefore happen usually in terms of overpriced and bad housing in some cases tuning out to be more lucrative than the actual "renting out" of the workers.

The cooperation and mediation between all actors and the actions started so far are nevertheless described as a big opportunity also by the Euregio, and challenges of cross border data sharing have already been possible to overcome. Although the actor agrees, that the untransparent system of working agencies which have been build up in recent years would by ideally best to prohibit like in Germany, this option is not considered realistic due to the degree of economic importance it currently still holds in the Netherlands. Getting in contact with labour migrants is also described as a challenge, as consulting and support facilities in both countries would be not used by the workers, while the public offices would not yet make use of social media, where getting in contact – especially on Facebook – would be possibly very resultful.

In general, the impression is being shared, that the group of the migrant workers is not at all present and visible in society and if it was not due to neighbours' complaints, no one would even notice the whole phenomenon as a possible problem being indication of their precarious situation. Throughout the field research the interviewee was met several times on all different kinds of connecting events surrounding the topic, representing it, connecting with relevant

actors on national and comparable regional level about the phenomenon and bringing the topic and possible solutions forward.

Developments taking place in the time of research within the projects where the exchange with a private certification agency which turned out to certificate accommodations of registered agencies even across the border without however informing local authorities or paying attention to the existing violations of German fire protection and/or housing law. Integrating the organization's standards with the ones of German construction law as well as informing the local administration about the location of accommodations through a possible cooperation depicts a current opportunity in that process covering however still only registered working agencies.

Furthermore, after much effort it turned out to be successful to invite a representative of a local meat factory to the round table, again bringing opportunity for more regional cross – actor, cross – border dialogue bearing potential for regional change. It can be summarized, that the direct participation cross - actor, cross – border dialogue depicts one of the most important local responses and opportunities towards the cross-border labour migration in the meat industry holding the potential to gain European wide attention and blueprint character for cross – border, participative local solution development in terms of the ongoing European economic and social integration.

German Public Sector

The question of social integration is one of the main challenges that the German public system has to struggle with. At first glance, it appeared that mainly the housing and registration question would be of administrative relevance for the public German system, but connected with it turned out to display several wider social problems.

Beginning with the rather obvious part, the struggles connected with unlawful housing conditions or un – registered workers' accommodations, the interview with the regulatory office, the actor officially dealing the most with the phenomenon is of relevance to report from. Using the sensed immunity from state controls for a Dutch company placing their housing behind the national border combined with the lower housing prices in Germany and the willingness of locals to rent out facilities which with “normal” clients would have needed cost intense renovations first, Dutch working agencies in the last three years have increasingly

chosen to take advantage of those factors and house their workers in Germany while sending them to work typically in the Dutch meat industry.

Mostly ignoring the need for registering commercial accommodations according to German law, the practice mainly came to public attention through neighbours reporting noise disturbance, rubbish problems etcetera to the local regulatory office. Through the Euregio project and cooperation with Dutch authorities several razzias of suspicious buildings could have been executed delivering important data about the inhabitants and their status in the country. Also, the newly released “Wohnraumstärkungsgesetz” (law for living room enhancement) which clearly defined the lawful ways of private living but also the conditions that commercial living has to fulfill, the local municipality has been entitled and strengthened to enforce those conditions, depicting a first facilitating, national legislative response to the phenomenon.

During house controls cases of poor living quality due to mould, rubbish, old technique or infrastructure to overpriced conditions have been detected and persecuted. Another challenge displaying at the homeless shelter of Gronau from time to time is workers having lost their working contracts connected to their housing contracts having to find themselves on the street then before being able to return to Romania or search for a different job.

In total six maliciously operating working agencies could be identified with joint forces so far. However, if the signal hoped to be sent by the razzias to convey that such practices would not be tolerated in the region, has worked out seems to be still questionable. The regulatory office rather seems to face the challenge of a shift of the strategies of working agencies from finding large scale – to small scale, less obvious housing facilities often hidden within normal residential areas. This makes the identification but also proving that it would be commercially driven and not privately organized housing even harder.

The regulatory office itself states, that not enough capacities would be available right now, to face this problem with full attention, but that still continuously the round table meetings would be visited and neighbours’ complaints being followed. The root of the problem in the end is also stated by this actor would have to be solved though by the Dutch politicians, and an action such as the prohibition of working agencies such as in Germany would be very much welcomed.

The Social Dimension displayed in Germany

That the phenomenon in Gronau reaches though still dimensions beyond the housing and construction regulations got very much clear through an interview with a school teacher from town.

He states that all of his Romanian students (stemming from about twelve families in total) would be connected through one distinguishable feature: Absence in school. While the parents of those children seem to have registered in town and at this event receive instruction to sign in their children in a local school, many children turn out to come only a view days in the beginning to school and eventually during another class once a week where all Romanians would sit together, but not other than that. As the willingness also to participate in class, the frequent absences paired with the level of language learning compared to other immigrants' children was so bad, the teacher decided to try to get in contact with the parents.

As the classical letters to them failed to work, the teacher organized an informational evening together with a contacted NGO providing Romanian speaking personnel as well as possible additional information on workers' rights and legal support. In order to make sure the invitation would reach the parents the invitations in Romanian language were brought to each of the families' homes being reported also to be in very bad condition in person. On the day of the actual event which was framed as a talking round with coffee and cake, no one of all the families appeared.

The NGO already said, that this was a strange sign as usually a view people show up and this would then show simply a general un – interest in the topic. However, if no one appears this would be a very strange signal.

When meeting one of the students later in school and asking for a possible explanation why no one would have shown up, the student said that the mother had planned to show up but “In the company they said she was not allowed to go”. For the teacher this event stated the already guessed heavily precarious situation of his students' families but not knowing how much threat has been applied to the workers, he decided to resign his efforts other than handing out a brochure with contact details to the NGO to any Romanian student he met in school.

This story in a shocking manner demonstrates, how some working agencies really rather deserve the name of a criminal organization, strategically trying to avoid the workers' integration into society fearing even the children getting too well integrated into the school

system. While the teacher stated to have reached his personal limits of ideas how to change this situation, he stresses that the parents precarity could not be seen separately from the school attendance problem and if there were other attempts to face the problem in the region, he would be happy to join in those.

As on the large scale he demands the meat factories to be called into greater social responsibility for their workers and effects on the whole of society, for his school he would wish for an acknowledgement of the problem and the funding of an additional Romanian speaking assistant being able to educate the children about the chance that their school visit depicts.

It stands out, that the social problem here has only been recognized and seen in its bigger context due to engagement of a single teacher, while it would have been easy to not care for absent students. The shocking extent of control of criminal working agencies over their workers including even children in their right for an education being affected demands severe public attention and adds an entire, yet underrepresented dimension to the phenomenon of cross-labour migration of Romanian meat workers.

In further research for possible established responses for cases like those a talk with the local youth welfare office has been realized, revealing another case in the past in which a 12-year-old boy was being made babysit small children of all ages from different worker families in a single room alone having been reported by neighbours. The youth welfare office stated though to only be able to work on indication/ suspicion base and could not per se control all kinds of migrant meat worker families.

The possibility for seemingly many public offices to only act on a reported incidence case but not to see and treat the phenomenon with its problems on a wholistic and in a preventative manner depicts a problem which the not yet neighbourly reported individuals still in the dark have to face the consequences from. However, through a talk with the Euregio project leader reporting of the case and the teachers 'willingness to develop possible solutions, the contact to the cities' leading social planning officer could be established hopefully representing an opportunity for a wholistic local response to the social side of the problem.

Reflecting on the publics' systems actors in Gronau the main challenges detected can be seen in a scarcity of resources to give the phenomenon the attention, yet it might possibly deserve

whether in terms of unmantling the new housing strategy of the working agencies in residential areas or establishing the urgently needed contact to school children's' parents. Although the euregio- project can be seen as a very central strategic and cross – border governance point for all, and therefore also the biggest opportunity for the public German system, also this project is not equipped with the capacities for a large-scale change at the legislative roots of the problems – the meat industry and its working agencies.

Before coming to the analysis' results, it has to be acknowledged, that the work presented depicts only rather an overview of all complex in detail opportunities and especially challenges as the format at hand cannot entirely do justice to the extend and press of the phenomenon explored. Therefore, a closer study of the result charts in the data appendix allowing for more in – detail insights is highly recommended.

Conclusion

Returning to the initial research question after the challenges and opportunities perceived and responded to by various actors of the inter – European labour migration in the meat sector around the border region of Gronau, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The field research enabled to show the high subjectiveness of the migration-, labour- and living situation of the Romanian meat workers often suffering also physically and mentally from the consequences of the demanding nature of their work, but often feeling – individually responsible for their own situation, not questioning possible further rights they would be entitled for. The vast difference in the working conditions and payment in comparison to Romanian standards is often reason enough for going on, paired with the frequent pressure of having to earn money for the family back home or save for dreams of independency. While signs of precarity such as physical exhaustion, social isolation from the host societies as well as experienced betrayal of non-paid salary are perceived and indicated as challenges, the ones of in-transparent working conditions and relations with the working agencies or the non-awareness about the own rights are not perceived and voiced as such. Next to saving or investing money in personal future projects or the own family, the job in the meat industry is perceived also as an opportunity to start out and settle entirely in for the long term in the Netherlands or Germany connected with the hope of cultural exchange, socioeconomical rise as well as higher living standards.

This opportunity for a long-term settling of migrant workers is also perceived as such by the local economy, being in a scarcity of workers. However especially smaller businesses emphasizing a level of knowledge and quality of the product over quantity acknowledge this chance also on a long – term perspective.

In contrast bigger, quantitatively oriented and from European market pressures driven companies still benefit hugely from the system of flexible work on the basis of working agencies being financially more beneficial than the direct and firm employment of staff. Working agencies cooperating with those big players tend to pass on the price pressure to the workers leading to often in-transparent and precarious living conditions. Although no meat company would officially embrace these practices, it is their economically driven way of operating and externalizing responsibilities leading to the described challenge also contributing to the general bad image of the meat industry.

Stepping therefore over the short-term profits and establishing a system of more social responsibility and binding of workers in long-term working positions actually depicts a more resilient and future proof opportunity.

Apart from the private sector the public sector in Germany and the Netherlands both have to deal with challenges such as a too little means and know how provided by both National governments in order to organize denser controls of the operating of working agencies. As registered agencies are controlled often also privately by their associations and a cooperation and integrating standards with such for housing depicts a chance for the German public authorities, the control of the more often criminal – unregistered working agencies still depicts a huge challenge for both countries as well as on a secondary level the workers themselves.

Both municipalities share the perspective that one of the biggest chances at the moment can be seen in the continuous cooperation via the Euregio project, while the Euregio itself still sees the most decisive opportunity for the improvement of the situation laying with the Dutch National Government as well as the European Union.

The Euregio project participation can be seen as the momentary Dutch effort to compensate for the externalization of problems to the German neighbours that happens due to the housing crisis in the Netherlands but also the lacking exchange so far of the counties having depicted incentive for the criminal use making of the national border.

A further integration of the regions therefore indeed seems to be one of the best strategies to turn this current regional challenge into the opportunity of safeguarding fair working and living conditions for migrant workers and attracting those also for the long-term, possibly filling the increasing worker shortages in all kind of branches. However, to come closer to this vision, especially the social challenges occurring mainly on the German side of the border such as school absence of workers' children and certain features of a parallel society showing have to be addressed by fighting the often-precarious situations of workers from multiple fronts.

This vision could be possibly enabled through an even wider actors' participation in the Euregio – or a comparable project, beginning a clearly yet missing exchange and dialogue with especially the workers themselves. Also, the contact and dialogue with all local meat factories should be furtherly pursued. Additionally, the continuation of the seeking of public and especially political attention on the topic through lobbying and media campaigns on national – and European levels in order to effect tighter controls for working agencies, additional social

responsibility incentives for the factories as well as additional means for integration especially in form of schools' support and integration facilities in both countries can be recommended.

The results documented show up the economic and social dimensions connected with the manifestation of the Schengen area in a cross border "Euregion" where the free movement is being used by working agencies to profit from the yet less integrated public authorities and regulations of both countries. Starting from the understanding of the workers' as well as employers' motivations and perspectives the challenges and first success stories in the attempt of fighting criminal exploitation from both countries' public actors have been shown up and connected to an overall perspective for the region.

The research depicts a unique qualitative insight of the connection, surprising political relevance and interconnectedness of single Romanian workers' story, a way of meat factory management, small town administration in Germany and the Netherlands, the eye for social struggles of a teacher as well as the local – transformative potential of a cross – country cooperation initiative in both a very local and entirely European direction.

While having been led and informed by the current research on the topic, the work at hand has also allowed the region to speak for itself in a first step, preparing the way and pointing towards the development of further target based regional development goals and projects on the local – and further comparative and generalizing research on the scientific – level. The work points through the case region towards the EU wide importance of the regional actors' dialogue and cooperation beyond borders that can turn stories of work exploitation into stories of socioeconomical rise, European social integration and multicultural prosperity. While therefore the potential and importance of facilitating such actor – participative projects become clear, also their limitations and need for responsive, quick and locally informed legislation have been shown up to close the gaps in the system which to close surpass the local authorities' power. Further research, overcoming this works limitations integrating the still missing regional perspectives –(such as the one from the working agencies), accompanying the actors' dialogue as well as orienting on a possible European generalizations and responses of the phenomenon is to be highly recommended.

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Appendix

Interview 1: Euregional Project leader

Explanatory category	Euregio leaders' perspective
Possible solutions/ideas /outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - egal way found to exchange information across borders, making also exchange with certification organization attractive as it might lead as first step to more exact knowledge about amount of migrant workers and location of accommodations in district - while unlikely that final solutions are about to be found in project aim to improve cooperation and information about situation in order to bring relevant information to the right instance as for example the European Labor Authority → Europe wide phenomenon of labor migration and exploitation in cross border context - social media as possible chance to get in contact with workers and also as medium which in past has been used to organize successful strikes - <i>“Ultimately, I believe the solution to the problem we have here lies in the Hague. It has to be solved in the Netherlands. You have to deal better with temporary migrant workers, yes. You don't really want to have temporary employment agencies. Yes, so they need to be better regulated.”</i> (P20) - controls organized by ministry and not private organization - beginning dialogue and active integration of workers
Cooperation potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improving cross-border cooperation, information exchange, networking between politicians and relevant actors from both sides via the project → aiming to improve situation of labour migrants - certified companies need to have accommodation control be done that lately also operates over the border (more than municipalities) → cooperation potential - chance to begin planned dialogue also with meat industry as they need personnel but have usually no interest in exploitation - possibly joining efforts with trade unions being engaged in information campaigns for workers - aim to fight exploitation in the system but still acknowledged that phenomenon itself can be very beneficial for workers and local economy → possible cooperation basis for all different actors: commonly ending exploitation
General opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one of the only Euregios that is itself launching projects such as the one about labour migration - municipal controls as chance to also control/detect un - registered working agencies - idea to place created anonymous survey also at other social advisory offices where migrants might go for advise to then be able to give hints about situation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - district of Borken playing relieving role for municipalities in initiating Euregio - project and strengthening municipalities in their work - although controls often more symbolic character important for information collection to show up need for action and criminal structures to public authorities on EU-/Government level
Working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - most working agencies registered in industry association(ABU) which initiated a duty to register coming with the incentive/right to keep parts of the workers' salary in to cover housing/transport/material costs - however no duty to register at industry association at all and also often unlawful / intransparent in - keeping of money - in general too little knowledge about system of working agencies → how does recruitment function, how is transport organized, how is payment and contract handled etc.
Meat industry trends/developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - shortage of labor force on Dutch work market having led to flexibilization and formation of wide, ramified network of working agencies → more and more work done without firm working contract→ high risk for precarity
Effect region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - phenomenon way bigger than initially expected (one doctor reports of 2000 Romanian patients in Gronau alone)
Structure/situation Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“So of course it would be better to work without temporary employment agencies, but you also have to be realistic. The shortage on the labor market and on the housing market is so bad at the moment that without this temporary work we would immediately push the economy into the abyss. So politically, you cannot afford to ban it right now.”</i>(p11) - Throughout last decades building of untransparent sub – sub – sub structures' system of working agencies - little dialogue potential with working agencies seen as having an interest in upholding current system
Structure/ Situation Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - while Dutch municipalities have insight and means of doing housing controls of accomodations German municipalities often lack the experience or even overview how many workers are living in the region → combined with lower housing prices in Germany working agencies would often take advantage of the border and accomodate workers on the German side - often no experience/ know how from municipalities how to organize raids/controls and whom to include →project helping with that - perceived decrease of severely unacceptable living space → possibly already slight success but also chance that just other strategies applied
EU reference/relevance/level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - while cooperations with home countries like Romania rather EU task also difficult as in meat branch tendency to recruit lowly educated or ethnic minority people which do not have a strong lobby in Romania - problem perceived as too big to be solved by municipalities and project → real change depends on national / EU wide change

<p>Border related issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not common yet and also restricted in terms of data protection regulations to exchange relevant information between countries → e.g. the German workers protection control seeing bad living conditions would have no contact to the Dutch companies - municipalities in Germany often understaffed and yet less experienced in organization of complex controls: <i>“It’s unbelievable how many responsibilities there are and sometimes the problem is that a municipality can’t organize such a control because of the effort, but also because of how many organizations have to be involved. Yes. And the district even has to support that. And then you also have to exchange information with twice as many organizations across borders. Yes. That’s such an effort.”</i> (p17)
<p>Legal-/cultural-/obstacles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in Corona times a lot of misconducts revealed through covid outbreaks but also as the public authorities temporarily had more rights to controls due to the Health laws - housing raids more a symbol than solution: people will be relocated to better place - old place would be sold, but company can continue after like before → no change in the system - while in both countries municipalities have responsibility of controlling accommodations are often understaffed/ do not have as much permanent capacity as the private certification organization - while positive development that occupational safety authority is strengthened by state, they only control the workplace but not the housing (-/payments) - in general too little knowledge about system of working agencies → how does recruitment function, how is transport organized, how is payment and contract handled etc. - problem that many Romanians afraid of public institutions, often also unaware/uneducated about rights and sometimes also threatened by agency if complain/ask for improvements
<p>Exploitation/ precarity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in last decade enormous temp - agency system has build up earning its money not with selling of products but with their personnel → high motivation to get most out of it - <i>“I have heard several times that temporary employment agencies in the meat industry, for example, no longer earn their money by hiring out work, but by housing rents. That’s from the migrant workers. They earn so much money, so fines of 100,000 euros are simply paid in cash.”</i>(p9) - reports of cases of people who have been losing their job when gotten ill instead of getting the “health insurance” they paid the agency for - Structurally weakest, defenseless are being exploited the most in labor market
<p>Work agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - often not intention of meat factories to exploit people but de facto happening a lot via work agencies that are engaged for recruitment, organization of all other needs of workers and also allow for cheaper, flexible work-contracts - also some migrants living in Germany seem to have to travel hours up until the west of the NL every day to work as the companies want to avoid Dutch public supervision

Surrounding social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - while cooperations with home countries like Romania rather EU task also difficult as in meat branch tendency to recruit lowly educated or ethnic minority people which do not have a strong lobby in Romania - <i>“So they don't speak the language, they don't speak the official language, they don't know how the authorities are organized, where they even have to go, they don't know which people they can trust, they often can't read or write when you go to the apartments and you ask them to fill out the questionnaire, and then you ask, for example, what their working hours are, then you want to know how long the work lasts, how long you work per day, and then they say Monday to Friday. So they just don't understand very well what you're actually there for, and that's actually quite difficult. “(p21)</i> - in daily life workers but also entire problem hardly visible/ present → parallel world (intentionally so...?)
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Interview 2 and 3: Romanian meat workers

Explanatory category	Romanian workers' perspective
Possible solutions/ideas/outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Desire of workers to integrate into society for longer - Willingness to learn the language <i>“I really want to learn this language and get closer to them.(...)There are people who are organized, respectful.”</i> (interview, worker1, p27) - Interest in acquiring additional qualifying skills - Desire to build up family in region - Knowledge about rights and warning signs slowly spreading over social media - More Romanian speaking public advisory personnel would enhance trust, dialogue and reporting of exploitation
Cooperation potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language courses as contact point and bridge into society - Account of already successful cooperation between German and Romanian police supporting workers who have been deprived of their passports - More and more NGOs employing Facebook presence to warn/ council workers - Improved cooperation between all involved countries' authorities to enforce rights and fight criminal exploitation at its roots and region of display – eventually coordinated by European Labour Authority as long term perspective.
General opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With knowledge about shortage of workers flexibility of branch can be used to leave bad conditions and find a new work fast - <i>“No, no, no. I don't want to stay in the factory. I want to learn how to drive a car. I want to have a family around me, so I can learn how to drive a car.”</i>(Interview worker 2, p17) - (company depended-) upward mobility with more experience

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With experience and higher positions possible to earn more than double the comparable salary in Romania → saving for future goals - An own room within the accommodation perceived as big advantage - Companies often well prepared for Romanians providing instructions in home tongue - Flexible meat worker jobs in the Netherlands/ Germany with pre-organized housing and paper administration also bridging chance to start out in country until other workig / living chances identified
Working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived to be better in Netherlands than Germany, better in smaller-than bigger, quantitative oriented working places - Even with working conditions within legal framework very hard job not everyone can “resist”, accounts of chronic fatigue, coldness, injury, exhaustion - Reports of six days of work per week despite nightshifts - <i>“it's cold, you know, because there are some very big fans (...), it produces a cold, I can't stay there anymore, it's hard, just to work very fast and to work fast, because you said you warm us up, and it's hard because every back, every leg, that cow leg, we have to raise. And we have to walk three meters with one hand. Because even if it has 50 kg, you have to raise it, you understand, because it comes to you the full frame and you cut it yourself from the ribs and from the throat, you know?”</i> (Interview worker 1,p18) → processing about 1000kg per day in the cold = very demanding physical conditions - However: With experience and higher positions possible to earn more than double the comparable salary in Romania □ saving for future goals
Behavior workers in new country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook as medium to exchange and organize amongst workers - both workers surprised in research interest in topic → do not identify with having been exploited in past/ see it more as personal issue to deal with/ overcome not something needing public attention - <i>“I didn't miss a day to miss work or something. Nothing like that. So, I was present day and night. I worked in three shifts. In three shifts. And at night, exactly at 2 o'clock, I had to go to work. So, I worked non-stop. I didn't realize that it was good or bad. Just to be able to... To have a job in which I can work, to earn money. To not appeal to anyone or something.”</i>(Interview worker 1, p 3,4) → high level of personal commitment to make independence / dreams happening → if possibility to earn better than in Romania not much focus on own rights
Motive leave Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possibility of earning double of the local salary - Independence from parents and making own experience - Comparably good chances to save something abroad even without qualification
Border related issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unfamiliarity with local public system/ actors - Account of one of the workers living 1,5h of driving away from the Dutch meat plant as it is cheaper and less regulated for the working agency to house in Germany
Legal-/cultural obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “making it” (succeeding) seen still in very individualistic narrative, assessing success as depending merely on personal effort not good

	<p>working conditions → decreases likelihood of standing in for rights/ organizing</p> <p><i>“(…)about my courage, that I had to tell them that I didn't stay, my experience, I'm a little more learned in this life. From 17 years old, I went to the West.”</i>(interview worker 2, p10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In comparison to Romania a lot of working and living conditions seem to be still bearable although already violating local norms - Working – and housing contract often all in one → if one is lost both are lost, risk of homelessness - Huge hesitation of finding legal support in case of betrayal due to stories of people failing and indebting themselves with it
Recruitment of workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bonus for private people recruiting new workers leading to wrong promises being made - Very informal recruitment over personal contacts/ Facebook → no security to know if promises will be kept <p><i>“He said, look, my friend, this guy called. He called the company, and everything is fine, he's a good guy. That's how I got here.”</i>(Interview worker 2, p12)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often uneducated/ unqualified workers targeted
Exploitation/ precarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To avoid heavy exploitation in construction sector switch to meat sector relatively common - Especially German meat sector seems to violate living & working standards - Often external factors like a dependent family back home increase pressure to accept bad conditions in order to provide a minimum - Accounts of a flat for 4 shared by 8 people each paying 350euro and not knowing each other, also children present - Especially in illegal positions without working contract fear of searching for help due to “illegal” work and unfamiliarity with German police <p><i>“And they (people known by interviewee having been exploited) don't need to call the police. If they don't know how to talk, they won't do anything. And if you don't have the right, if you don't have a contract, if you go to the police and tell them, I worked with a whip, and they don't want to give me money, you don't have any evidence to prove that you worked with that person.”</i>(Interview worker2, p10)</p>
Work agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-transparency towards workers about rights, as well as practice of keeping in money - Accounts of false promises of salary increase, exploitative living conditions - Seem to target less educated, unqualified workers → less defensive - Interest in maximum earnings from workers - Often pass on price pressures from companies and have to make cheap offers to them
Surrounding social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling of separation from rest of society <p><i>“Sometimes I come to go to the city alone, and I go to the terrace, I don't know. It's like that, stupid. I don't even know how to say a word. How do you say it? It's like, give me a souk, or something. Or something else.”</i>(Interview worker 1, p27)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often family/ children back home → possibly reinforcement of traditional gender roles with mothers staying home - No/little knowledge about rights and ways/ help to enforce them - Sometimes social conflicts amongst co-workers - Social working climate/tone described as “rough” → both workers advised not to talk also to co – workers - Problems of alcohol/ drug addiction of some workers <p>Drawing attention during the interview was also frequent smoking, energy drink consumption, restlessness of both workers during interview</p>
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Interview 4: Gronau School teacher

Explanatory category	School teachers' perspective
Possible solutions/ideas/outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - language courses as door-opener in all areas of life (also avoiding negative school experiences children) - establishing contact & receiving special support from federal ministry/municipality
Cooperation potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aiming towards socially responsible factory owner seeing and considering the whole family of their workers - cooperation and exchange with other local actors (contact established after interview) possibly leading to new solutions and suitable means to attempt getting in contact & form socially oriented local task force - possibly expanding cooperations on district levels to all schools affected beginning eventually with handing out brochures also to other schools
General opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - every Romanian child receives info brochure of legal support NGO at this school - access to higher living standard in Germany/Netherlands compared to Romania → potential possibility leave of precarious situation - “if there's a new idea, i'll be right back on board”(p8) → high readiness for change and engagement - better safeguarding of de-/registrations of families actually happening (by far not all labour migrants registered)
Meat industry trends/development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unclear for everyone how long families actually stay → perception of long holiday for children
Structure/Situation Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high migration percentage in schools in Gronau has led to acceptant and multiculturally experienced surrounding - insufficient exchange with municipality so far as view phenomenon from different angles but also because of differing responsibilities - not clear yet how many families stay actually on long - how many on short term - needed romanian speakig personal not granted by public system yet - problem not yet widely acknowledged
Legal-/cultural/obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - institution of school perceived as threat and far from own (often lowly educated-) life reality

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - means of “school consequences” such as bad marks, parent talks or letters to the parents all lead to nothing → momentarily capitulation towards absence by teacher
Exploitation/ precarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - children see no future in country for them due to witnessing of parents working conditions resulting in rejecting attitude - living conditions witnessed during attempts of parent contact “worse than for every newcoming refugee in town” → crowded, run down housing - parallel society structures hindering social integration/ upward mobility - attempts of reaching out to the parents seem to have been disrupted by threats of intermediaries (most probably working agency) → indicator to assume system behind families’ none integration - parents seem to have no capacity to make sure children go to school - “we can't see it separately the school law violations and the unbelievably precarious working conditions belong together” (p2)
Surrounding social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - low to no attendance of Romanian workers’ children in school → big problem on long term for children if should stay in Germany as here no prospect without graduation - compared to other migrant children little will for integration / learning of language - children see no future in country for them due to witnessing of parents working conditions resulting in rejecting attitude - usually the main social contacts of the children are other Romania children they live with - children have been ripped out of previous living context and find no connection to country - usually the main social contacts of the children are other Romania children they live with - possible municipal social support offers would all be based on language → vicious cycle → need for Romanian speaking personnel - realizing all possible opportunities next to other daily challenges within the school context - also most opportunities rely on voluntary extra work of the teacher-/s - big chance for children in school not clear to them - room for action momentarily limited to giving a brochure for support NGO to every new Romanian child

Interview 5: Meat Factory Manager

Explanatory Category	Employer in Meat-industry s’ Perspective
Possible solutions /ideas/outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality instead of quantity - Quality instead of growth compulsion? - Company – sponsored language courses benefiting work in company and integration in society - No worldwide decline in meat consumption expected (by company) → long term solutions needed - Experience of more stable customer base due to good quality possibly applying/increasing if social- & animal welfare stated

Cooperation potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“I don't have to hide anything. And I also think study, research, and learning, it's very important.”</i>(p20) → good conditions for possible upcoming cooperations/ improvements (wholistic perspective) - As family-owned business easier to adjust course/ make decisions & changes quickly - <i>“I don't have contact with Vion. Some guys from the sales department sometimes have contact, but it's just mainly business. It's about buying and selling of meat.”</i> (p12) → possible chance of joining forces and resources to improve situation/ agree on social codex (avoidance of higher pressure on the one taking initiative) - Openness for cooperating with municipality on question of housing/ starting a common project <i>“I would not say that we won't be interested in something like that. Yeah. Because I think living areas are one of the biggest problems in a lot of industries”</i>(p15)
General opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU wide export <i>“I think we have about 20% of raw products going to the Dutch market and the rest is going to other countries”</i> (Interview # p.2) - ensuring good quality of product by trying to attract workers on the long term and pay more for skilled qualitative labor than for simple one → quality instead of quantity - <i>“ We need workers. We need migrants.(...)I think when this would stop... I think 50% of the companies in Holland, they will stop their productions because there are no workers. Because we don't have enough Dutch people to do the work.”</i>(p16) <i>“ We're always trying to grow, to improve. Yeah. And to do new aspects of the business.”</i>(p19) → high incentives to assure sustainable way of attracting and keeping workers
Working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 60 - 65% employed on long term basis, while 35 - 40 % flex worker however also long term workers mainly employed over working agencies <i>“we have agencies, the people are working for them for already for 25 years in the company”</i>(p6) → possible indication that additional reason for long term – flex workers is still lower costs than employment - in emergencies company transports to hospital usually through working agency responsible injuries etc.
Meat industry trends/ development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European free trade and work market as wider origin of competition for resources/ consumer → higher price pressures, more uncertainty → high need for flexibility in every aspect - seasonality of work (highs before holidays and Christmas) leading to necessity for share of flexible workers due to economic reasons - division of im-/exporting relations to many different countries as risk reduction strategy → evl. parallel with nationalities of workers? (working with 8 different agencies, six nationalities)
Effect (destination) region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Romanians make up about 20% of workers in production floor right now, some work there since 9 years and have made their families come here too.
Behaviour workers in new country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - personal (family-/-) situation heavily destines time spend in company → trend to leave after some years when enough money saved - sometimes problems with alcoholised/drugged workers

Structure /situation Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - state controls perceived as effective against exploitation from agencies
EU reference /relevance/level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU wide competition, Eu wide markets, EU wide worker recruitment - EU wide migration trends heavily influence workers' nationalities
Work agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stated to be needed for recruitment, translation, housing- formality organization à non-economic bureaucratic and cultural effort - Would be guaranteeing for workers' skills à retain right to send away if unsuitable – otherwise risk for company - Stated as crime prevention only working with registered companies - Opportunity for small workers themselves to open small agency when cannot handle physical work anymore - company has to rely on law compliance of agency → do not control for example if in case of injury agency really pays for medical care “of course, we cannot check everybody, but I think normally it should be arranged.”(p18) - prohibition claimed to be less needed in NL than GER as controls/regulations more developed in NL
Legal-/cultural- / obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - perspective that workers themselves are responsible for their integration → hard ground to initiate cooperation/ responsibility - possible short term market disadvantage if higher costs through more engagement in living conditions of workers - finding cooperations in region despite very different mindsets requires lots of good will
Recruitment of workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European trends leading to changing base of flexible workers: from Turkish over Syrian, Polish, Hungarian, Romanian and lately also Bulgarian and Portuguese people - in total about 6 different nationalities employed
Surrounding social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No information about living location of workers → no knowledge about cross border – phenomenon - Certain Problem awareness about non integration of workers-/' families - Drunken/drugged workers showing up

Interview 6: Regulatory Office Gronau

Explanatory category	Regulatory offices' perspective
Possible solutions /ideas/outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concrete solution outlooks for housing problem: execution of the new law as well as additional personnel - razzia - controls in order to set sign and enforce laws, grant workers better living, get better understanding of workers as well as possibility for tax investigation to reveal wrongly declared earnings by companies - <i>“Why do such companies even exist? There is still money involved in between. If the companies that take advantage of this would hire themselves, it would certainly be better for everyone involved.”</i> (p.9) - possible trend that also workers would only go for certified agencies anymore → education opportunity - prohibition of intermediate working agencies/ stricter national regulations and tighter public controls

Cooperation potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the biggest certification company (SNF) recently joined in the euregional cooperational meetings → perspective for possible integration of standards - cases of establishment of contact with landlord of houses allowing for good cooperation/ quick reactions to problems
General opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Wohnraumstaerkungsgesetz”(housing reinforcement act) by federal state as “sharper sword” for municipal action - increased action strength through cooperations with federal ministries and Dutch authorities (euregional project) - positive cooperation experience in control actions - protection of workers as incentive for optimizing processes of control - with increased knowledge of phenomenon also increasingly better responses and coordination of responsibilities, cross border-/cooperations etc. - already successful smaller controls on municipal level executed, having led to closing of some collective accommodations - surveys done with workers during controls combine all information necessary for different local actors → attempt to find if unrighteous money-flows towards working agency exist for example
Effect region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gronau as the most affected city in district Borken due to direct border closeness - social unrest in neighbourhoods due to lack of consideration & problems with noise/rubbish/wrong parking often by people only staying for a short term → persecution hard due to high fluctuation of people - landlords & work agencies profit from renting out & earning from low quality living space without having to renovate and invest in it
Structure situation Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regulatory office responsible to control lawful housing conditions however also dependent on citizens’ hints/organizing & cooperation capacities for resource intense control actions - unclear situation about how many Romanian workers live in Gronau also as officially legislation allows 3 month of un -registered stay - even afterwards though hardly way to enforce it→ lacking overview - slow process to fully ‘solve problem” as only limited personnel resources not allowing it for prioritized treatment - little lobby for strengthening of migrant workers’ rights
Border related issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unclarity about responsibilities and action potential to guarantee compliance to German law and rights of workers in different public offices, border as additionally confusing/hindering factor
Legal-/cultural-/obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - landlords & work agencies profit from renting out & earning from low quality living space without having to renovate and invest in it - executing new law requires lots of personnel and capacity as it concerns the control of standards for workers’ accommodation - often companies - to avoid higher requirements - pretend a private living in the facilities although it needed to be declared as workers’ accommodation → conflict with German housing law! - “At the moment, it's trendy for these companies to nestle in in residential areas. “(p5) → hard to identify houses and prove unlawful usage - “hidden” commercial housing often identified through neighbours’

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - complaints → high dark number has to be assumed - data protection laws as hindering for cooperations between actors - The Dutch certification standards do not align with German construction-/ housing law yet → despite certification some houses might still be illegally used
Exploitation/ precarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - already rats, mould, wrong waste disposal, old technique risks detected at controls - often amounts of salary kept for rent by working agencies not in the least standing in relation to offered quality of living
Work agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - often companies - to avoid higher requirements - pretend a private living in the facilities although it needed to be declared as workers' accommodation → conflict with German housing law!
Surrounding social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social unrest in neighbourhoods due to lack of consideration & problems with noise/rubbish/wrong parking often by people only staying for a short term → persecution hard due to high fluctuation of people - increasingly creative/more hidden ways of exploitation in future

Interview 7: Municipality of Enschede

Explanatory Category	Perspective Municipality Enschede
Possible solutions/ideas/outlooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councillor lately on conference concerning topic openly questioned if meat sector even in its form should be part of the cities' (future) economy - <i>“If you bring the problem back to the base, the solution is actually quite simple. Companies (...) in this sector must be prohibited from using temporary employment agencies.”</i>(p6) - trying to make sure that all migrant workers especially also the ones in lower branches get granted their rights as it is happening already now with “Expats” working in high tec companies - separating working and living contract → transparency and continuous housing if working contract ended - companies with enough work should be able to employ workers firmly - vision of interviewee to establish “naming and shaming” of criminal working agencies which has not found broad agreeance yet though - nationally initiated execution of the recommendations of the “no second class citizens “ report such as for example the duty for employers to register their migrant workers as well as the creation of registration points that also serve as info - and integration point for every new person in the country - need to find solutions for resilient economy → rethinking sectors, work, robotization etc.
Cooperation potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chance to go into dialogue with companies as politicians and point out moralic duty and responsibility in the matter - biggest temp agencies usually work correctly → as have reputation to loose (but of cause are more expensive)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - getting to know each other through euregional project also informally and establishing “shorter connections” → e.g. solve an issue with a quick call
General opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cooperation with other partners allows for better informed initiative taking in terms of own municipal measures - municipality less dependent on keeping companies as business taxes are paid not to them but government → especially if not employing many locals little pressure to bind / keep them to area - practical and concrete recommendations towards Dutch parliament in report “No second class citizens” (translation) by the “Migrant worker protection booster team” → municipality stands for execution of those and sees huge improvement potential in them - less meat export, production and consumption as chance to ease the problem - eu-regionally exchanging and getting to know each other’s political /administrative systems & responsibility division via the project→ manifesting new knowledge in handbook, common survey questionnaires in commonly organized controls - <i>“We have to create the conditions for people to feel comfortable here. So they send their children to Dutch or German schools and integrate here.”</i>(p15)
Meat industry trends/development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - also internally in administration voices which try to protect big meat firms / aim to act in their favor claiming they would be an important employer - meat industry hardly benefits municipality as hardly local people employed, business taxes are paid to government instead though challenges around labour migrants emerge - Reputation of Vion (big meat company) the same as Toennies in Germany → might not have high cooperation willingness / sense for social responsibility→ However have much power in Netherlands <i>“Vion stands at the begin and the end of the solution”</i> (p8) - most meat produced for export → however the nation has to face all downsides of meat production
Structure/situation Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - utilization of border in exploitative ways by working agencies is new phenomenon to municipality - only 2023 through euregio - project problem awareness <i>“Reason one is economic, so it's more expensive. And (reason) two is that it's easier for the temp agencies to circumvent regulations and laws this way.”</i>(p5) - within municipality still also voices that see it as problem Germany had to solve alone (do not see Dutch responsibility in causing the problem) → next to euregio cooperation project no other measures taken yet - at moment governmental shortcomings in terms of organizing controls and persecuting crime

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - most controls right now executed by private label being payed by the companies → public, frequent , truly independent controls necessary - <i>‘We have migrant workers in all sectors and so on. (...) They actually do the work that no Dutch person can or wants to do. (...) so we can't do without ‘(p9) → labour migrants to keep the economy running</i> - despite having to pay the work agency and the working hours of it seems to be still cheaper for companies to not employ themselves directly - new right wing government might try to act against working migrants → also negative for economy - massive shortenings of funds for municipalities by 2026 while increased responsibilities → high pressure to cut expenses → combined with right wing government uncertainty about progress in labour migration topic
Structure/situation Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - perception that German public prosecutor's office does assess crime around topic as not very important
EU reference /relevance/level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lots of labour migration still based on difference of living standard → this however expected to shrink with further integration of European union - Example of Poland shows how rising living standards make less people migrate and even companies move there as economical costs/taxes are still relatively low → need to create attractive conditions for economy AND workers to preserve economic stability
Legal-/cultural obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - despite duty for individuals de-/registrations cannot be trusted → no overview over situation - euregional project should talk more with/ confront if necessary work - / meat companies → so far certain hesitation perceived - some hindrances for cooperation concerning data protection regulations
Exploitation/precarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>‘The problems are mainly in neighbouring Germany and here in the region, especially Gronau. Migrant workers, not just Romanians, live there in miserable conditions, paying absurdly high rents for, literally, a mattress. The rent is deducted directly from the salary, sometimes the passport is taken. They live with far too many people in one house. And all this causes problems in the neighbourhood: noise, garbage in the yards, streets overcrowded with cars, small-scale crime.’(p24)</i> - about six detected temp agencies operating in illegal / “mafiosi” ways in area of Enschede - sometimes earn more in extra costs they keep in from salary than from actual renting out of labour force
Surrounding social problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finding the right balance between attracting people and not stealing all workers/ intellectuals from home countries

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- one of biggest struggles of municipality is already living space - building proper housing for the workers will be a challenge
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