

# **High-Skilled, Low Impact?**

## **The Perceived Effects of Populist Narratives on Skilled Migrants in the Netherlands**

Thesis BSc

Lis de Bode

Supervisors:

G.B.M. Dielissen

Dr. A.D. Beldad

Technology and Liberal Arts & Sciences

University College Twente

University of Twente



## **Abstract**

This study examines whether there is an impact of populist narratives on high-skilled migrants, a group that is often overlooked, and if so, what the impact is and what its consequences are. This study aims to evaluate the integration experience of high-skilled migrants and to discuss whether and what impact populist narratives have on this experience. Through ten semi-structured interviews, participants living in the Netherlands for at least five years were asked about their integration experience and their awareness, and the perceived impact of political narratives. The findings show that most participants have a high sense of integration but do not feel affected by political narratives, as they do not feel targeted. Furthermore, the findings underscore the unique situation of a high-skilled migrant as they disassociate from other types of migrants. As they do not identify as the group that is targeted in narratives, they do not feel affected by right-wing political narratives. Moreover, participants solely focus on direct policy implications when talking about the possible impact of populist narratives, rather than focusing on public discourse or a change in public attitudes towards migrants. Only when the narratives lead to direct policy would high-skilled migrants feel affected. This displays the importance of crafting policies with care. Policymakers should account for the different experiences and circumstances that different types of migrants have, rather than making one policy for all types of migrants. Additionally, the participants displayed a mindset without borders, increasing the effects of migration narratives over the world on their feelings. Global developments, like the migration problem in the US, affect the feeling of safety and the level of impact of populist narratives.

*Key words:* high-skilled migrants, integration, populism, political narratives

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. <i>Integration</i> .....	8
2.1.1. Criticism on the Concept of Integration.....	8
2.1.2. The Integration Experience .....	9
2.2. <i>The Integration Paradox</i> .....	10
2.3. <i>Political Narratives</i> .....	11
2.3.1. Migration Narratives .....	11
2.3.1.1. The Humanitarian Narrative.....	12
2.3.1.2. The Populist Narrative.....	12
2.3.1.3. The Dutch Context .....	13
2.4. <i>The Migration Crisis</i> .....	14
2.5. <i>Summary</i> .....	15
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. <i>Design</i> .....	16
3.2. <i>Participants</i> .....	16
3.3. <i>Procedure</i> .....	17
3.4. <i>Timing of Data Collection</i> .....	18
3.5. <i>Data Collection</i> .....	18
3.6. <i>Analysis Method</i> .....	19
<b>4. Results.....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1. <i>Sense of Integration</i> .....	20
4.1.1. Feeling of Acceptance.....	20
4.1.2. Feeling of Being at Home .....	21
4.1.3. Language .....	22
4.2. <i>Identification of the Participant</i> .....	23
4.2.1. Self-perception .....	23
4.2.2. Residence Permit.....	24
4.3. <i>Awareness and Impact of Political Narratives</i> .....	25
4.3.1. Awareness and Perception of Political Narratives .....	25
4.3.2. Impact of Political Narratives .....	26

4.4.	<i>Summary</i> .....	28
<b>5.</b>	<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>29</b>
5.1.	<i>Interpretation of Results</i> .....	29
5.2.	<i>Implications</i> .....	32
5.2.1.	Academic Implications.....	32
5.2.2.	Societal Implications and Recommendations .....	33
5.3.	<i>Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research</i> .....	34
<b>6.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>38</b>
	<b>Appendix 1: Information Letter</b> .....	<b>44</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Consent Form</b> .....	<b>51</b>
	<b>Appendix 3: Interview Guide</b> .....	<b>52</b>
	<b>Appendix 4: Science Popularization</b> .....	<b>55</b>

## 1. Introduction

Recently, the Dutch political context has changed significantly as far-right populist parties, such as the PVV, have now become the biggest parties, and hence dominant political forces who shape national discourse on migration (Oostveen, 2024). The growth of populist parties like the PVV can be attributed to growing public concerns about issues such as immigration and cultural identity, an aversion to establishment parties, and the rise of alternative media outlets such as YouTube (Boswell et al., 2021; Crum, 2022; Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019). Especially on the topic of migration, the stance of the PVV is very pronounced:

“Our beautiful [country] has been severely damaged by the ongoing asylum tsunami and mass immigration. ... There is no part of our society that is not affected by the admission of so many fortune seekers. ... We will do everything to stop the disruptive asylum and immigration disaster.” (PVV, 2023)

Public discourse as well as policy approaches on migration have been reshaped by politicians and media outlets (D’Amato & Lucarelli, 2019). Research has shown that exposure to Dutch politics leads to a higher perceived discrimination and that the often-negative Dutch immigration and integration debate leads to a diminished sense of belonging (Van Doorn et al., 2013; Verkuyten, 2016). The PVV's rhetoric has influenced mainstream parties, such as the VVD and CDA, over the last decades to adopt more restrictive immigration policies, thereby altering the integration landscape for migrants (Akkerman, 2018).

Previous research, such as that by Sahin-Mentucek (2020) and Boswell et al. (2021), has elaborated on the risk of populist migration narratives, but it was always in the context where populist parties received around 10% of the votes. Risks include, for instance, the potential for increased polarization, and risks for migrants to be less willing to integrate (Boswell et al., 2021; Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). Currently, populist parties are on the rise, making it more relevant than ever to examine if there is an impact of their narratives on migrants, and if so, what the impact is and what its consequences are.

Studies that address migration narratives are often not focused on populist narratives.

Moreover, studies focus on public attitudes or policy changes rather than on how the targeted migrant groups themselves perceive and respond to these narratives. This constitutes an important oversight, as understanding migrants' viewpoints is essential for formulating more successful and humane integration policies.

The current political climate fosters an environment where high-skilled migrants may feel marginalized, despite their contributions to society. Despite their growing numbers and economic importance, high-skilled migrants remain underrepresented in integration research (Spadavecchia & Yu, 2021). This is especially problematic as high-skilled migrants are different than other groups, meaning their integration experiences may also differ substantially. High-skilled migrants face unique circumstances in their integration, such as different social expectations, policy treatments, and labor market positions (Geurts et al., 2020; Stiphout-Kramer et al., 2024). As the situation differs from those who are low-skilled, and there is a dearth of research into the topic, despite it being a large group, it is important to focus on high-skilled migrants in the context of integration. This focus is particularly valuable for understanding the limitations of current integration approaches that may not account for the social and psychological dimensions of belonging beyond economic participation.

The integration experience is utilized as an alternative to integration, focusing on the perspective of the migrant rather than the perspective of institutions and countries on how well one integrates. By using the integration experience and talking to high-skilled migrants, this research aims to bring new insights from the point of migrants rather than the point of majority.

Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. 'Do populist political narratives influence the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least five years?'
2. 'What is the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least five years?'
3. 'What consequences are mentioned of the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least five years?'

A timeframe of five years is utilized as a criterion for selecting participants, as it allows for examination of migrants who have had time to navigate through various integration processes, establish themselves in Dutch society, and develop awareness of Dutch politics.

Understanding how political narratives shape high-skilled migrants' integration experiences can provide valuable insights for policymakers who want to promote an inclusive society. It may also inform debates on the responsibilities of host societies in facilitating integration and remaining a country of interest for highly skilled labor migrants, and challenge dominant policy narratives that assume migrants' integration success depends solely on their efforts. Moreover, the Dutch context could serve as a case study that applies to more European countries, as it is a broad phenomenon that populist parties are gaining power and are using a specific migration narrative to scapegoat migrants as the cause of a wide range of issues (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019; Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). This study contributes to the current body of knowledge on migration and integration by researching the relationship between migrants' experience and political narratives, advancing the understanding of integration as a more dynamic and relational process rather than a one-sided responsibility for migrants (Klarenbeek, 2021).

To answer these questions, qualitative research will be conducted. Ten high-skilled labor migrants who have lived in the Netherlands for at least five years were interviewed. Prior to the data collection, a literature review will be conducted to define the concepts of 'integration', 'migration narratives', 'populist narratives', 'the migration crisis', and 'the integration paradox'. Finally, the results will be presented, and conclusions will be drawn.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, a literature review will be conducted to lay a foundation to examine the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled migrants in the Netherlands. First, the concept of integration is examined, where it is defined, its critiques are made visible, and the shift towards the integration experience is explained. Next, the integration paradox is explored as a theoretical lens that is relevant for high-skilled migrants to explain certain integration experiences. This is followed by a broad discussion on narratives, which is narrowed down to migration narratives. Two main types of migration narratives are discussed: humanitarian and populist narratives. Lastly, the concepts are put in the Dutch political context as well as in the broader context of the European ‘migration crisis’.

### **2.1. Integration**

According to Alba and Nee (1997), integration is a two-way process of acceptance and mutual change. Integration requires that ethnic minorities feel equally at ease with interaction with the majority as the majority does with close social relationships (Storm et al., 2017). This definition closely aligns with Berry’s definition of integration. Berry has come up with a bi-directional acculturation theory (Berry, 2011). Here, acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change resulting from a meeting between cultures. It is based on the intersection of the maintenance of heritage culture and identity to sustain cultural communities, and participation with other groups. Integration is one of the types of acculturation, meaning that the migrant seeks to gain a relationship with the host society, but also wants to maintain their heritage culture and identity (Berry, 2011).

Another prominent theory on integration is from Harmut Esser. Following Esser’s theory of integration, four domains are important: cultururation (the gaining and sharing of knowledge and competences), interaction (the formation of social relationships in daily life), identification (the emotional attachment to the host society), and placement (the socio-economic position) (Esser, 2001; Lindo, 2005). The idea is that the more a migrant invests in these domains, the better they will integrate.

#### **2.1.1. Criticism on the Concept of Integration**

There is criticism of the concept of integration and the way it has been handled in dominant theories like the ones that were mentioned. The main criticisms are that it remains unclear



into what a migrant must integrate, that the concept of ‘society’ remains very vague, and that integration is still often (implicitly) formulated as a one-way street seen from the point of view of the majority rather than a two-way street.

In the theories of Berry and Esser, ‘society’ is seen as a static and homogeneous domain without problems, and problems are thus problems of ‘integration’, and hence problems of migrants (Schinkel, 2018). While the societal mechanisms into which the migration phenomena and the immigrants themselves are to be incorporated are taken for granted, almost all studies focus solely on migration, immigrants, and their integration (Penninx, 2010).

The notion of a ‘pure society’, where members are seen as full citizens, positions migrants as outsiders. They are expected to become members, giving integration a one-way perspective and making it a one-way street (Klarenbeek, 2021). This conceptualization leaves the dominant group of members of society unexamined and unaccountable, while the migrant is expected to adjust and ‘integrate’ (Klarenbeek, 2021; Schinkel, 2018; Scuzzarello, 2012). Schinkel (2018) further argues that the dominant group remains constant and unchanged through time, even though it should adapt in response to the diversity brought by continuous migration and integration. As the ‘society’ is unchanged, this creates a permanent barrier for migrants as they can never become fully part of this connotation of ‘society’.

Moreover, the way integration is measured reinforces the ‘us vs them’ distinction between the majority and the migrant community (Lindo, 2005; Schinkel, 2018, 2019). Even well-intentioned notions of integration as a two-way street can still reinforce the boundary between those who must integrate and those for whom integration is not an issue, as one group is required to work on the integration, and the other is not (Klarenbeek, 2021; Schinkel, 2018).

### **2.1.2. The Integration Experience**

Due to this criticism, there is an increasing call for the reconceptualization of integration as a dynamic, relational, and deeply situated process (Klarenbeek, 2021; Lindo, 2005). This indicates a transition from classifying and quantifying integration to comprehending the evolution of interdependence and the dynamics of power in daily life (Schinkel, 2018). Therefore, this study focuses on the integration experience as a conceptual framework that allows for centering the challenges, perceptions, and agency of migrants within the integration process. This approach is valuable as it acknowledges the complexity of integration beyond simplistic metrics, recognizes migrants as active participants rather than

passive subjects of integration policies, and provides insights into how political narratives are experienced at the individual level. Understanding migrants lived experiences is crucial for developing more effective, humane integration policies that address real barriers to belonging and participation.

Utilizing the ‘integration experience’ prioritizes the perspectives of highly skilled labor migrants, providing a bottom-up viewpoint that captures the complexity, contingency, and agency involved in integration processes. In this context, the focus lies on participation. Participation is not a quantifiable result but a mechanism by which migrants establish membership, challenge boundaries, and collaboratively shape society (Scuzzarello, 2012).

## **2.2. The Integration Paradox**

An interesting concept regarding the integration of high-skilled migrants is the integration paradox. It is the phenomenon of immigrants who are more structurally integrated and highly educated turning away from the host society, rather than becoming more oriented towards it (Verkuyten, 2016). This is because they experience more discrimination and less acceptance (De Vroome et al., 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2013). There are three main explanations for this phenomenon. First, highly educated immigrants are increasingly evaluating their circumstances and potential with the majority population (Verkuyten, 2016). The relevant comparison comes out negatively since immigrants often have lower-level employment than members of the majority who have equal levels of education. This causes relative deprivation: immigrants feel unfairly disadvantaged compared to the majority (Schaeffer & Kas, 2024; Verkuyten, 2016). Second, due to the better structural integration of higher educated migrants, they are more in contact with majority members, which leads them to be more exposed to discrimination and negative contacts with majority members (De Vroome et al., 2014). Especially exposure to Dutch politics tends to fuel discrimination due to the negative public climate towards ethnic minorities in politics (Gijsberts & Vervoort, 2009; Van Doorn et al., 2013). The recent changes in Dutch politics and the rise of the populist narrative make it important to research this topic. Third, rising expectations play a role. Immigrants who are highly educated and take an effort to integrate develop higher expectations, especially after being in the country for a while, and are disappointed when they are not met with equal rewards in the shape of, for instance, opportunities and recognition (Gijsberts & Lubbers, 2015; Van Doorn et al., 2013). Due to their educational background and awareness of systemic discrimination, higher educated migrants can more confidently

attribute this inequality compared to natives to discrimination rather than a lack of skills and effort (Verkuyten, 2016).

The integration paradox hampers the sense of belonging of migrants (Geurts et al., 2020).

The structural position of migrants is more likely to serve as an impediment to identification with the destination country, while simultaneously acting as a potential catalyst for a larger, worldwide perspective that surpasses attachment to a single country (Geurts et al., 2020).

Altogether, the integration paradox is thus an important phenomenon to consider when discussing the integration experience of highly skilled migrants.

### **2.3. Political Narratives**

This section zooms in on one potential aspect that affects the integration experience of migrants: narratives, and particularly political migration narratives. Narratives are defined as selective stories that include one or more causal claims (Dennison, 2021). Political narratives often contain an additional element that describes what should be done related to that narrative once the narrative is seen as true (Dennison, 2021). Political narratives are frequently used as they tell and simplify a story from an angle that is helpful for the party. Once a narrative is widely accepted by society, a party has the chance to instigate action. Hence, narratives are powerful tools that are used to make the complex reality more understandable and to affect one's emotions, identities, attitudes, and behavior (Dennison, 2021; Sahin-Mencutek, 2020).

#### **2.3.1. Migration Narratives**

Migration narratives are defined as 'stories developed through communicative practices in order to offer a specific view on migration and/or migrants' (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020, p. i). In this paper, the focus will lie on political migration narratives, the stories developed by politicians to offer a view on migration (often seeing migration as a problem), as well as interventions in line with this view (Boswell et al., 2011). More specifically, within the political narratives, strategic narratives will be examined. These seek to shape public opinion and mobilize resources, such as the media to garner popularity (Boswell et al., 2021; Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). Different narratives compete to be the dominant narrative, the most successful and widely accepted narrative (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020).

The literature presents various narratives concerning migration, which can be distilled into two primary categories: the humanitarian narrative and the populist narrative.

### **2.3.1.1. The Humanitarian Narrative**

In the humanitarian narrative, migrants are displayed as victims of an unjust crisis and of unjust racism and xenophobia (Boswell et al., 2021; D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019). Oftentimes, the narrative is paired with a sense of western heroism; the victimized migrant is to be rescued by the 'native' hero (Hansen, 2020). The narrative is meant to promote compassion as well as to spark support for universal values for migrants, such as human rights (Hansen, 2020). The humanitarian narrative can be found in the media and politics, usually in left-winged parties such as GroenLinks-PVDA in the Netherlands (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019; GroenLinks-PvdA, 2024). In fact, in national media, the humanitarian narrative is the only narrative that is covered to oppose the populist narrative (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019).

### **2.3.1.2. The Populist Narrative**

Whereas in the humanitarian narrative, migrants are seen as victims, in the populist narrative, migrants are seen as a threat. According to Akbaba (2018), populism divides society into two groups: 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. Populists claim the right of existence to speak for 'the pure people' instead of for specific groups. Moreover, populists tend to simplify issues through narratives to build consensus (Akbaba, 2018). Narratives are found to have a significant effect in both unifying and dividing individuals, as well as in legitimizing societal limits of inclusion and exclusion (Boswell et al., 2021). By creating a dichotomy, populist narratives are hence narratives of 'us versus them'. This narrative affects inclusion and acceptance policies and depicts migrants as threats to the security and economy of a nation (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). Populists utilize their nativism to construct a narrative where migrants are 'othered', and a distinction is made between migrants and natives using cultural values and history (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). This results in narratives that foster camaraderie and group affiliation among natives, while also maintaining exclusion (Boswell et al., 2021). In this context, populism is utilized by radical right-wing politics, where national identity and exclusion are among the most important values (Akbaba, 2018). Populists utilize language to construct a discourse based on cultural history in which migrants are painted as a threat to 'our' security, culture, and identity (Hansen, 2020). Radical right parties politicize immigration and generate hostility through these values (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). Populists employ migration narratives to convey and control public perception, associating them with unrelated societal challenges. Their anti-immigration angle is used to mask other

social issues by arguing that migration is linked to all these other issues, and that solving the migration question will also help solve other issues (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020).

This narrative that is harmful to migrants has been spread through media outlets (Boswell et al., 2021). In their study on migration narratives in national newspapers throughout different European countries, D'Amato and Lucarelli (2019) have found that the populist narrative has been normalized in recent years in the media but also in politics. At first, this narrative was distinctive for populist parties, but now mainstream parties have adopted this narrative as well. For instance, Mark Rutte, the previous Dutch prime minister, took over the language previously only used by the populist PVV (Akbaba, 2018). This normalization validates restrictive migration policy and diminishes migrants' rights (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019).

### **2.3.1.3. The Dutch Context**

In the Netherlands, like in most of Europe, the populist migration narrative is most prominent. Populism gained its first popular attraction in 2002 through Pim Fortuyn and his party LPF. He was able to vocalize the dissatisfaction felt by many Dutch citizens with the centrist cabinets that were in place for eight years, and convert it into a broad political movement that was built on concerns about the state of housing, safety, healthcare, and most importantly, migration and integration of minorities (Crum, 2022). However, Fortuyn was assassinated, and in the absence of its founder, the LPF imploded. Still, this was a starting point for other politicians to position themselves as right-winged populists. The PVV, led by Geert Wilders, has been the biggest and most established populist radical right party in the Netherlands since 2006 (Crum, 2022). In recent years, other populist parties have also emerged, such as the Forum voor Democratie (FvD) and the BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB). The current cabinet is the first to include populist parties, displaying that mainstream parties engage with these parties rather than isolating them, thereby legitimizing their presence (Crum, 2022). It should be noted that in the most recent voting outcome, it would have been difficult to maneuver around the populist parties, as for the first time ever, the PVV became the biggest party. Wilders and his party use the traditional 'us vs them' narrative, where the 'others' are migrants, and usually those with an Islamic background. Moreover, the PVV is highly nationalistic, and hence anti-immigration and anti-EU.

Additionally, they are skeptical of pluralist institutions, mainly since they intend to remove the dominant actors and to remove any of them that are tolerant and supportive of Muslim migrants (Crum, 2022). The reason for the PVV's recent success could be that migration was a hot topic at the time of the elections. In the current geopolitical crisis, a reduction in seats

for the PVV is already visible in the most recent poll (Schelde et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the party remains the biggest, showing that there is still wide support for its populist ideas.

#### **2.4. The Migration Crisis**

All these dynamics - the dominance of 'us vs them' narratives, the rise of the extreme right and populism, and the normalization of anti-immigrant discourse - created a foundation to call the migration movement in 2015-2016 the 'migration crisis' (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). In these years, many refugees from war-torn areas entered the European Union. This constituted the most significant displacement of refugees since World War II (Brooks, 2016). The EU was already fragile on the topic of migration, and this large influx brought the agreement to a breaking point (Brooks, 2016). The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 caused a more recent influx of refugees pressuring the EU's borders, and is also at times named a migration crisis (Mooney, 2023).

Especially national politicians have a voice in the media when discussing migration topics (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). According to Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017), news journalism carries an important role not only in informing, but also in its political value as an instrument to spread narratives of politicians. Here, radical right parties serve as important catalysts by directly influencing the politicization of the issue and pushing other parties to address it as well (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). This politicization exacerbated the idea of a "migration crisis" in Europe (Scholten & Van Nispen, 2015).

The influx of migrants, similar to the events of 2015-16, significantly bolsters the popularity of populist parties (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). Since the introduction of the migration crisis, migration has evolved into an essential concern for revisiting European integration, its political value, and its practical use (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019). For populists, this was a chance to advance their anti-immigration and anti-Europe stances, and with success. In a situation where the issue of migration is high on the agenda everywhere, it is not an option for mainstream parties to ignore it. Instead, they reacted to the crisis and also to the populist right parties' emphasis on immigration in a short period of time (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). Ever since the migration crisis, the immigration issue has been highly politicized and has been one of the key issues in national electoral campaigns throughout Europe (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). Thus, since the influx of migration in 2015-16, the topic has remained a pivotal point on the political agenda, creating an opportunity for the populist narrative to rise.

## 2.5. Summary

The literature shows that political narratives potentially have an influence on the integration experience of high-skilled migrants in the Netherlands. As integration is a contested concept, the ‘integration experience’ will be utilized, focusing on the experiences from the perspective of the migrant.

As high-skilled migrants are discussed, the integration paradox is an important phenomenon to consider. This means that high-skilled migrants who may be structurally better integrated usually feel more discriminated against and less connected to Dutch society.

The concept of narratives has also been defined. In the context of migration, there are two main public narratives: the humanitarian, which focuses on migrants as a victim, and the populist, which focuses on migrants as a threat. The latter has become increasingly dominant in the Dutch context due to the rise of populist parties and might affect the integration experience of migrants.

The ‘migration crisis’ is a concept often used by radical right parties to describe a situation where there is a large influx of migrants at once, for instance due to war. Radical right parties have used this concept to politicize the issue of migration.

Altogether, these concepts lay a foundation to answer the research questions that are central in this study:

1. ‘Do populist political narratives influence the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least 5 years?’
2. ‘What is the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least 5 years?’
3. ‘What consequences are mentioned of the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least 5 years?’

These questions are sequential, meaning that each one must be addressed in order.

### 3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology of this study. The design, participants, procedure, data collection, and analysis method are described.

#### 3.1. Design

The data for this research were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted from May 15 to May 27, 2025. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online and were on average 38 minutes in length. The focus of the interviews was to explore the integration experience of the migrant and to see if populist narratives impact this experience. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they enable in-depth conversations and provide an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of what the participant means. Moreover, it allows discussing other possible factors that might affect the integration experience, creating a wider scope of the research.

#### 3.2. Participants

Participants were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling. There were three criteria the participant had to comply with:

1. the participant must be a high-skilled migrant, referring to someone who works in a position that requires a tertiary level of education or specialization. There was no income requirement set;
2. the participant must have come to the Netherlands for employment purposes; and
3. the participant must have lived in the Netherlands for at least five years.

These selection criteria were applied to ensure that only high-skilled migrants who came from abroad to take up high-skilled jobs were selected. This was to ensure that interviewees who came to the Netherlands for other purposes, such as for their partner, would not be part of the sample, as it is assumed that different situations and obstacles could characterize such a group (Schäfer & Maxwell, 2025). It should be noted that people who entered to study and afterwards decided to stay are part of the participants. This was decided as they complied with the other criteria and as they turned out to be in very similar situations to participants who came for employment purposes. The minimum of five years was chosen as it is assumed that this would give a migrant ample opportunity to integrate in the Netherlands, and to get a grasp of what Dutch society, including Dutch politics, is like.



If participants met these criteria and were willing to participate, they would be interviewed. The participants were recruited through the personal network of the researcher. In total, 11 people were interviewed. Out of this, 10 responses were used for the results. This is because one participant (P-04) did work in the Netherlands but resided in Belgium. This introduced a unique cross-border element that is not seen as representative of the population of high-skilled migrants. The participants have different backgrounds.

**Table 1: Characteristics of participants**

<b>Participant no.</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Length of stay</b>	<b>Came alone?</b>	<b>Place of living</b>	<b>Type of permit</b>
P-01	Philippines	5 years	No	Amsterdam Area	Permanent residency
P-02	Slovakia	8 years	No	Amsterdam Area	EU nationality
P-03	China	9 years	Yes	Amsterdam Area	Permanent residency
P-05	Mexico	8 years	No	Enschede	Work visa
P-06	Russia	8 years	Yes	Amsterdam Area	EU nationality
P-07	India	10 years	Yes	Utrecht	Permanent residency
P-08	Botswana	10 years	Yes	Amsterdam Area	Permanent residency
P-09	India	15 years	No	Amsterdam Area	Permanent residency
P-10	India	12 years	Yes	Utrecht	Work visa
P-11	Taiwan	10 years	Yes	Amsterdam Area	Dutch nationality

### **3.3. Procedure**

After the participant agreed to participate in the research, a meeting time was planned. The meetings were conducted either face-to-face, usually at the participant's place of work, or online when this was not possible. The interviews were conducted over two weeks in May 2025. In advance of each interview, an information letter was shared in which the participant could read more about the research and how their data would be handled. The information letter can be found in appendix 1. At the start of the interview, the participant had the chance to ask any questions they still had about the interview and received the informed consent,

which they read and signed. The consent form can be found in appendix 2. With this, they agreed on the interview being recorded and the data being used for this research.

Furthermore, the researcher emphasized that the interview could be stopped at any time and that participation could be withdrawn.

Then, the interview began. The participant was asked to introduce themselves, with a focus on their migration and academic background. Next, the first experiences of the participant in the Netherlands were discussed. Thereafter, the current sense of integration in the Netherlands was discussed, and factors that affected this. This was followed by questions regarding the participants' awareness of political and public migration discourse. Then, the impact of such narratives was discussed. Lastly, the future of the participant in the Netherlands and the future of migration in the Netherlands in general were discussed. The last question of the interview was always whether the participant had any last remarks. After this, the recording was stopped. The researcher took some time to chat with the participant after the recording and emphasized that the participant could always reach out in case of any questions or remarks. The interviews took 38 minutes on average.

For a more detailed description of the interview procedure, see the interview guide in appendix 3.

### **3.4. Timing of Data Collection**

It is important to note that the data for this research were collected before the fall of the Dutch cabinet on June 3, 2025. The cabinet has fallen as the PVV, the biggest political party in the coalition government, decided to step out because they were dissatisfied with the collaboration with the other parties on the topic of migration. The fall of the cabinet could have changed the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The perceptions and experiences discussed in this research reflect the context before the fall of the cabinet. This timing should be considered when reading the paper, as the political developments that occurred after data collection may have since influenced the experience of high-skilled migrants in the Netherlands as well as public and political discourse.

### **3.5. Data Collection**

The audio of the interview was recorded using a basic recording application on a phone. The recordings were transcribed with Amberscript, an automated transcription program offered by

the university. This transcription was then checked and anonymized by the researcher. The participants were referred to as P (from 'participant') with a number, based on the order in which the interviews took place (e.g., the participant who was interviewed first is called P-01).

### **3.6. Analysis Method**

The transcriptions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This was done in a few steps. First, the researcher got familiarized with the data. This was done in large part by reviewing the transcripts, where the interview was listened back to and the transcript was read through. Next, the transcripts were coded, where sections of the transcript were highlighted and labeled. This was done using Word. After this, themes were created by looking at transcripts and combining similar codes. Here, Excel was used. The coding was thus done using an inductive approach, meaning that the data was used to determine themes. Then, the themes were reviewed to check that they are useful and accurate. This list of themes was then defined and named. These themes created new insights, which are communicated in the results section and discussed in the discussion section.

## 4. Results

This section aims to provide an overview of the data to answer the research questions. The data stems from the interviews that have been conducted. The section is divided according to three main themes that have been found: sense of integration, identification of the migrant, and the perception and impact of political narratives.

### 4.1. Sense of Integration

This theme describes the extent to which participants feel integrated into Dutch society. These results can later be used to explain factors for the interest, awareness, and impact of narratives. The section is divided into three subthemes that all influence the sense of integration.

#### 4.1.1. Feeling of Acceptance

The first subtheme is ‘feeling of acceptance’. When asked, respondents varied from feeling somewhat to fully accepted for who they are in Dutch society. Most participants were very positive about their feelings of acceptance, indicating a higher sense of integration. One factor influencing the feeling of acceptance slightly was discrimination. P-01, for instance, answered when asked if he felt accepted:

“I think so, yes. I would be lying if I said there are not certain incidents where I felt [someone was being racist toward me]. But for the majority part, I think there's a warm acceptance towards people like me.” – P-01 (Philippines)

In general, the participants did not experience a lot of discrimination, and the instances in which they did experience discrimination did not make a huge impact on how accepted they felt, as they did not want to generalize this behavior to the entire Dutch society. Participant 10 captured this well:

“I've had some instances where people have not been very nice to me, but I just feel like the world has enough stupid people. It's nothing to do with Dutch and non-Dutch. There are stupid people everywhere. The fact that one or two people don't treat you well, because whatever reason doesn't generalize the population.” – P-10 (India)

Another factor influencing the feeling of acceptance was the Dutch culture. It was mentioned by many of the participants that the open-mindedness and tolerance of the Dutch particularly helped in feeling accepted:

“I think for me to have this feeling, it has to do with the overall society that people don't really judge you or whatever you say, because that's the perception of people, that they just accept who you are.” – P-03 (China)

The environment in which the participant resided was also a factor influencing the feeling of acceptance. Participants often mentioned that they lived and worked in an international environment, and that this helped them not to feel like an outsider and to feel more accepted. P-11 (Taiwan), for instance, mentioned that “I always feel accepted by the people around me”.

Aside from these factors, some participants also mentioned the role of government policy in feeling accepted. Especially the 30% ruling was often mentioned as an example. The 30% ruling is a Dutch tax exemption meant for high-skilled migrants, where they can receive a maximum of 30% of their salary tax-free. The ruling is meant to compensate migrants for additional expenses they incur. Since 1 January 2024, the tax benefit has been scaled back gradually (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2018). Regarding this, participant 8 mentions:

“I sometimes have doubts if we're really accepted expats. Especially when it comes to some of the policies and regulations that are being put in place, like the decreasing of the 30% ruling. That really impacted me because when I first arrived, I think I had the 30% ruling for eight years, and then it was decreased to five years. So those types of things kind of make me feel not accepted.” – P-08 (Botswana)

#### **4.1.2. Feeling of Being at Home**

All respondents mentioned feeling at home in the Netherlands, sometimes even more so than in their home country. Participant 3 mentioned:

“Do I consider Netherlands as my home? Yeah. ... I, we [P-03 and a friend] have the same feeling that every time when we landed at Schiphol, we feel like, oh, we're home. I told her, I have no clue why, because I don't really feel the same feeling when I'm landed in my real city.” – P-03 (China)

Other participants mentioned that they noticed they became more Dutch and felt less connected to their country of origin when going there due to this.

“When I go to my homeland, I find it difficult there now. Because over the last ten, fifteen years, I have learned more about this culture than the culture which I'm coming from. Right. So, I find it difficult going there.” – P-07 (India)

The main reason why participants feel at home is that they have all been here for a longer time, and they have had time to establish social networks. Participant 9 responded when asked about his feeling of being at home:

“Initial two years, it was a challenge. Because we did not have a setup. ... So, if we have not found our social system around us, those families who we have now, the network which we built, if it is not there, we might have gone back long before.” – P-09 (India)

All participants had well-established social networks in the Netherlands at the time of the interview. Together with having a job here, and some also having a partner and family here, this led to feeling more at home in the Netherlands as they have built their lives in the Netherlands rather than their countries of origin.

Moreover, some participants mentioned that the feeling of security and safety also contributed to the feeling of being at home. Participant 6 (Russia) mentioned regarding safety: “In the Netherlands I feel protected. I feel like I have rights, I'm respected. And also, as a woman with a child, I have possibilities, and I have options.”.

Other participants mentioned that feeling at home made them feel more secure. Participant 10 mentioned:

“I feel this is home now as well. You know, that's also why I feel I can say what I think. Yeah, because I also contribute equally to society. I pay my taxes, I do everything, so then I can also have an opinion. When I first came, I didn't think I would. Now it's home. In home you can criticize as well, you know. I feel very secure.” – P-10 (India)

#### **4.1.3. Language**

Nearly all participants mentioned the importance of learning Dutch to integrate better. Most stated that learning the language helped in befriending and getting to know more Dutch people, which eventually helped in their integration:

“I think especially if I can be a conversationalist in the Dutch language, then I think I will have the best experience. So yeah that's the last step before becoming fully integrated with the community.” – P-01 (Philippines)

Some participants also mentioned that Dutch people react very positively and get friendlier once you speak Dutch to them:

“The moment when I start to speak Dutch, then people respond to me really friendly and very positively, even if at a certain moment I cannot continue the conversation in

Dutch, people are still very willing to help. So, this is a difference, I noticed after my Dutch becomes better.” – P-11 (Taiwan)

Moreover, many participants mentioned that they regret not learning the language sooner, as it would have helped them integrate better at an earlier stage:

“If I were looking back, I would probably try to learn Dutch earlier. ... Now, looking back at it, I think it would have been probably smarter to do that earlier so that you are then done, because then you know the language and a lot of other things open for you as well.” – P-02 (Slovakia)

Nevertheless, there were also some participants who mentioned they did not feel the need to learn Dutch, as the environments they were in were all so international that there was no added value. One participant answered when asked if she learned Dutch:

“No, I didn't. And even up to now, I'm embarrassed to say that I haven't, because I think all environments that I'm in are not really Dutch speaking. ... So, I don't feel a lot of pressure, especially in Amsterdam, to learn Dutch.” – P-08 (Botswana)

## **4.2. Identification of the Participant**

This theme describes how the participants see themselves. These results can later explain factors for interest, awareness, impact, but also perception of narratives.

### **4.2.1. Self-perception**

The participants in this study used a wide range of words to define themselves in terms of the migration that they have been through. The words ‘expat’, ‘foreigner’, ‘international’, ‘worker’, and ‘high-skilled migrant’ all came across when a participant referred to themselves. Notably, none of the participants called themselves a migrant.

Another aspect that came through is that most participants had a mindset without borders. This means that participants usually had lived and worked at multiple countries, and that they had multiple opportunities when choosing to go to the Netherlands. It also means that most, if not all, participants looked for opportunities across the world and thus were not bound to one specific country or place. When asked about the reason for coming to the Netherlands, participant 5 answered:

“I decided that I wanted something international. And I looked in England, I looked in Germany, I looked in some other places. I also looked in the US. Through [person], who is now my boss. ... I asked him whether it would be possible for us to come here

for a year. And luckily, he said yes. ... And that's why I decided to come to the Netherlands.” – P-05 (Mexico)

Furthermore, some participants reflect on (the extent to which) their own identity is maintained whilst staying in the Netherlands. Most participants mention that they want to preserve their own identity to an extent and have become neither Dutch nor from the country of origin over time.

“And when I've lived abroad for a very long time. You neither belong in India nor do you belong in the Netherlands. You're somewhere in between. And that's where I am at now.”  
– P-10 (India)

Moreover, many of the participants note that they are different from the Dutch majority, for instance, participant 8 (Botswana) states “I would say the social wise was a bit of a difficult one for me because I think people [in the Netherlands] are very different.”.

There are also some participants that explicitly mention their difference from other migrants in the Netherlands:

“I think I'm in a very privileged position. ... I think financially I'm stable and in a very good stage in comparison to people who moved here due to political reasons or searching for asylum. I'm in a very different environment.” – P-11 (Taiwan)

#### **4.2.2. Residence Permit**

A more practical way of looking at the identity of a participant is through the residence permit they hold, and the considerations that led to having this type of permit. Most participants do not have and do not want a Dutch nationality. A reason for this is that it is not necessary for them, for instance, as they already have EU nationality. Another reason is that they do not want to let go of the ties they still have with their country of origin. In the Netherlands, it is usually mandatory to give up the other nationality when obtaining Dutch nationality. Participant 10 (India) mentioned: “I have to give up my Indian nationality, and I don't think I'm ready to give up that piece of paper which says I'm Indian.”.

Some participants also mentioned that they would like to be more integrated before obtaining Dutch nationality. Participant 8 (Botswana) said: “I have to learn Dutch and feel like I'm really Dutch for me to take the nationality.”.

Other participants do want to obtain Dutch nationality, as it would give more stability and security. Participant 11, the only one of the participants who obtained the Dutch passport, mentioned this was the main reason for him:



“The biggest concern is that without a nationality, as a basically as a foreigner, I can only stay in the Netherlands with the sponsorship of a company. So having a job from a big company, it is crucial to provide the stability I need to stay here legally. ... So, it's quite always stressful to be aware of my visa condition. And now with the Dutch nationality, it means that if I want to switch jobs, I can just resign. ...I don't necessarily need to rely on a big corporate to sponsor my stay in the Netherlands. That part, it gives me a lot of relief mentally.” – P-11 (Taiwan)

### **4.3. Awareness and Impact of Political Narratives**

This theme describes the awareness and impact of political narratives on the participants. These results can later be used to answer the three research questions directly.

#### **4.3.1. Awareness and Perception of Political Narratives**

All participants had knowledge of the Dutch political landscape and changes within it. The amount of knowledge on the political climate differed across participants. The reasons for the difference in interest often had to do with the experiences and background of the participant. One participant, for instance, mentioned that she has little interest in politics due to the politics in her home country:

“I'm not really a person who is really into politics, because, like I tell other people, I really don't think that there's politics in China whatsoever, because it is what it is.

There's nothing that I can control. And then even if I want to say something, it doesn't really matter. And it's okay to stay away from politics.” – P-03 (China)

Nevertheless, nearly all participants saw a change in politics, mostly due to new policies that were introduced. The most mentioned policy is that of the 30% ruling, which is decreasing. Other changes that were mentioned are the general limiting of foreigners and the lowering of the budget for education. Participant 9 put the change in attitude towards migrants in words:

“The right wing are mostly getting into a center stage nowadays because earlier usually this discussion is [about] the tolerance, accommodation, acceptance, inclusiveness. These were the talks years before. But now [it is about] ‘how do I preserve?’” – P-09 (India)

Some, like participant 2 (Slovakia), highlighted that this change was at least partially due to the recent elections in which populist parties got more power: “So it has changed, I think

obviously with the latest elections. ... And of course, the new government is very populist as well.”.

Moreover, some of the participants noted that the change of narratives is a worldwide phenomenon:

“But then it's [the 30% ruling] being changed by policies which I feel are really stemming from this idea that foreigners should not be benefiting from the Netherlands, or we need to protect our borders. I feel that's the narrative, but it's not just the narrative here, it's the narrative all over the world I feel lately.” – P-08 (Botswana)

This notion often arose as multiple participants compared the situation in the Netherlands to that in other countries, most often in countries they had lived in.

Many participants displayed their understanding of the concerns around the topic of migration and acknowledged that migration is a problem:

“From the news that I've heard from the incidents that I've seen, the majority, and I don't know if this is a blindsided or if this is an assumption or a fact, crimes are like perpetrated by non-native Dutch. And how come? Right. I mean, how come that non-Dutch people are slowly destroying this country? For me, that's not pleasant.” – P-01 (Philippines)

Furthermore, participant 10 (India) noted: “I also can understand the concerns, because if you only have a country filled with migrants, it also doesn't work.”.

#### **4.3.2. Impact of Political Narratives**

Most participants noted that these political narratives did not have an impact on them. Different factors were mentioned as reasons why there was no impact. Some participants mentioned they felt the narrative had little to no impact on them, as they felt protected because of their permit. Participant 3 notes:

“I think it's also probably because I got my long residence, that residency a couple of years ago. And I felt a bit more protected afterwards.... Because if it's a couple of years ago, I still need to rely on my working visa to be in the Netherlands. And yeah, I for sure keep an eye on this on the immigration policy and everything. And now that I'm kind of in, so I'm like, okay, that's good.” – P-03 (China)

A few participants mention that they feel little impact from the narrative as they have been in the country for a longer period, and thus most of the intended policies, like the decrease of the 30% ruling, do not affect them. Participant 7 mentions:

“The only thing which I hear is a couple of things, which in my situation will not impact anymore because maybe I have already crossed that phase, one is like I always hear about, you know, other expats talking about 30% tax ruling.” – P-07 (India)

Many participants that did not feel affected by political narratives noted this was as they are a high-skilled migrant:

“Being a highly skilled worker, it probably doesn't matter that much because if you're already here, if you're already integrated and you really bring value to the society by what you do, then you're not looked at the same way as maybe some other migrant groups, right?” – P-02 (Slovakia)

Noting this, many of the participants felt that other migrant groups than themselves were targeted in the narratives. People from the Middle East, North Africa, refugees, and new expats were mentioned as ones that could experience an impact due to the political narrative.

Participant 3 mentions:

“The culture is more a bit opposite against the immigrants, but my feeling is that Asians are not really on top of their list. It's more to the people from the Middle East and African countries, and Afghanistan, those countries that they're targeting. So, the impact on me is not that much” – P-03 (China)

Regarding new expats, participant 9 mentions:

“But now the colleagues who are recently coming in, they are struggling because ... the policies are changing. So, it is having an impact on colleagues settling in here.” – P-09 (India)

There are also some participants who do feel impacted by the migration narrative. This is mostly due to worries about financial stability due to the changes in the 30% ruling. Two participants work in academia and mentioned that the cuts in educational funding and the aim to lower the number of international students by offering more education in Dutch impacted them.

Even though most participants did not feel impacted right now, some did worry the narrative could impact them later if it got more extreme, as in a more extreme case, it does not matter what type of migrant you are and what type of permit you have. Participant 9 states:

“I’m not saying we are facing this extinction, but if it just goes to an extreme level then it affects us. Even though, like, you know, it doesn’t matter that I have a Dutch passport or not. Because this is beyond that legal proof that I can live in this country or not.” – P-09 (India)

This fear exists as there are other countries in which the situation has become more extreme and unstable, such as the US. Regarding this, participant 3 notes:

“I don’t think that the political environment will impact me directly right away. But I don’t know what will happen in the future. Nobody knows because I have many friends in the US. And I have to say that they are under a lot of insecurity, so to say, because they’re Chinese, even if they change their citizen to US or they get the green card, the long-term residency, they’re still afraid that because of a very small thing, then they will get deported.” – P-03 (China)

#### **4.4. Summary**

The data suggests that participants feel integrated. They feel accepted due to the Dutch culture, especially the open-mindedness and tolerance of the Dutch, the international environment, and the welcoming expat policies. Moreover, they feel at home, safe and secure, and acknowledge that learning the language supports integration.

Most participants do not perceive themselves as regular migrants. Participants often have a mindset without borders and feel neither Dutch nor from their country of origin. Moreover, they feel different from the Dutch majority, but also different from other migrants. Only one holds Dutch nationality, and few wish to obtain it, often due to the restrictions on dual citizenship and a limited added value.

Participants are aware of political narratives, especially regarding changes in the 30% ruling. Some find the tone increasingly populist, and most noted that there is a global trend in changing political narratives. While most do not feel affected by these narratives, often because of their length of stay, permanent residency, or high-skilled status, they acknowledge others, like recent expats or migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, could be affected. A few do feel affected, and some worry that they can become impacted if the situation worsens.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Interpretation of Results

This research focused on the integration experiences of high-skilled migrants and the possible impact of populist political narratives on their experiences. Using semi-structured interviews, ten high-skilled migrants shared their integration experience and their perspective on populist political narratives. From these interviews, it became apparent that most participants do not feel impacted by populist political narratives as they are high-skilled migrants, have been in the Netherlands for a longer period, and thus most policies do not affect them, and as they hold a permanent residency.

Participants did not feel impacted by populist political narratives, as they are high-skilled migrants. Several participants expressed that they feel fortunate to be in a privileged position, having a choice between multiple migration opportunities, holding well-paid jobs immediately upon arrival, and receiving support from their companies throughout the integration process. The finding that these circumstances specific to high-skilled migrants shape how they perceive the impact of migration narratives underlines the importance of research focused on this group. Further, it aligns with the notion that high-skilled migrants are evaluative of their circumstances and potential and compare it to others, especially the majority, but, in this case, also with other migrant groups (Verkuyten, 2016).

The participants being highly skilled migrants could also lead to a lower impact, as their position could lead them to be more integrated sooner. Being in an international environment and working at a company in which you feel accepted and helped throughout your integration process might help. However, this contrasts with the integration paradox, in which it is argued that high-skilled migrants who are structurally better integrated feel more discriminated against and less connected to Dutch society (De Vroome et al., 2014; Verkuyten, 2016), and thus could make you more aware of these harmful narratives and make you feel more impacted. This contrast could be explained as the integration paradox usually refers to well-integrated second-generation citizens with a migration background. Moreover, participants note that they contribute to society through their knowledge and by paying taxes. This could further improve the ties with the Netherlands. In this research, the integration paradox thus seems to play no role. Participants indicate that they feel integrated and connected to an extent. All of them have experienced little discrimination. A reason for this could be that many of the participants reside in international environments and urban areas.

What is most intriguing is that by noting they are high-skilled migrants, and through their self-perception in general, participants seem to disassociate themselves from other types of migrants. This is visible in that many understood the migration concerns, and some were even concerned themselves. When discussing these concerns, participants used other terms, such as ‘migrants’, instead of the terms they used to define themselves considering their migration, such as ‘expat’, ‘international’, and ‘high-skilled worker’. This could indicate that they are talking about other types of migrants than themselves. Many participants additionally noted that these other types, specifically migrants from the Middle East, North Africa, and newer expats, could feel impacted by the migration narratives as they are the ones who are targeted. This notion could be true, but nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there appears to be little sense of identification, especially with migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. There was some sense of sympathy with the newer expats, likely as this group is within the same social circles as the participants.

The dissociation is intriguing, especially as the populist narrative does not make an explicit distinction between different migrant groups. Rather, an “us vs. them” discourse is used, where ‘us’ are native Dutch, and ‘them’ are all other residents (Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). This dissociation from ‘the migrant’ who is targeted in populist narratives reflects a tension between the narratives created by populist leaders and how study participants view themselves.

Further, it could differ between the perspective of the participants and the perspective of the Dutch majority. It could be that the Dutch majority does not see high-skilled migrants differently from other types of migrants, mainly because the difference between high-skilled migrants and other types cannot be seen at first sight. A reason why the participants do see a difference and feel that especially migrants from the Middle East and North Africa are targeted may be largely attributed to the prominence of the PVV as the most influential populist party in the Netherlands. The PVV has been a very Islamophobic party historically, thus targeting Muslims more than others in their narratives (Crum, 2022), and most Islamic countries lie in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the results, participants mentioned they did not feel impacted by the narratives as they had been in the country for a longer period, and thus, they experienced little impact from changes in policies. Most often, the changes in the 30% ruling were mentioned. Interestingly, participants focus only on concrete policies, and specifically the 30% ruling, rather than on public discourse, like discussions in politics or the media, and the attitude of Dutch citizens

towards migration. It was expected that discussions in the media would play a bigger role, as harmful narratives used specifically to shape public opinions have been able to spread through media outlets (Boswell et al., 2021; Sahin-Mencutek, 2020). It indicates that there is little interest and or knowledge in public discourse, even though the theoretical framework shows that this is used to politicize and discuss the issue of migration (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). This disinterest is nevertheless understandable as the discourse often does not have a direct impact on the participants. Not focusing on the attitude of Dutch citizens could be as this is a non-factor for the participants of this research. All participants work and live in an international environment where their social circle mostly consists of fellow expats. Moreover, they all lived in or around a city, so there is a high chance that the Dutch people they do get in contact with are people residing in the same area. It is known that people residing in urban areas are usually less populist and nationalist rather more cosmopolitan than those residing in rural areas (Huijsmans et al., 2020). This could mean that the Dutch that the participants encounter have a more positive attitude towards migrants, as it is plausible that positive interactions with migrants could lead to a lower impact of narratives on one's attitudes (Dennison, 2021). One participant even mentioned that it could be that in more rural parts, this feeling of acceptance by society could be very different. Moreover, migrants detach populist narratives from the general public's attitude. This is interesting as the public voted for these populist parties and their narratives to become dominant. Some participants experienced negative encounters with Dutch citizens, but they did not link these encounters to populist narratives. The reason for this detachment could again be the urban and international environment in which they reside, and the fact that they do not feel targeted being a skilled migrant.

Another reason why participants did not feel impacted by populist political narratives is that they hold permanent residency. In this case, an EU or Dutch nationality also falls under permanent residency. The permanent residency increases the sense of safety and security, leading to a higher sense of integration. Even though no research has been found about permanent residency holders and their feelings of security, it aligns with findings in the literature that citizenship helps in feeling more secure and integrated (Erdal et al., 2018). Holding a permanent residency gives more security about their stay in the Netherlands, and makes the participants feel more protected against possible negative policies against migrants. However, in the context of international examples, specifically in the US, where

residence permits seem to offer little protection, this sense of security due to a permit is decreasing (Wong et al., 2025).

Aside from the group that did not feel impacted by narratives, there was still a small group of participants who did feel impacted by populist narratives. This had to do with changes in their work field, and changes in the 30% ruling. Again, the impact is thus solely decided by direct policy, rather than public discourse. A reason for this could be that the participants see a shift to populist leaders globally, and they have seen up until now that populists make many promises but do not always make these promises come true. This notion has been voiced explicitly by one of the participants and could be true for others as well. Moreover, it could have to do with a disinterest in political and public discourse, leading them to see and experience change only when it directly affects them.

## **5.2. Implications**

### **5.2.1. Academic Implications**

The findings of this research contribute to the academic fields of migration, integration, and identity in several ways. First, the finding that participants dissociate from other types of migrants, and from the Dutch majority, underscores the need for nuanced typologies in migration studies. It is known that different labels, including ‘migrant’, carry different frames that can alter perceptions of people hearing the narrative in which it is used (Lee & Nerghes, 2018). Nevertheless, to the author’s knowledge, there is no research into how different migrant groups perceive themselves, and if and what the influence of such labels is on this. It further highlights the importance of researching high-skilled migrants as a separate group. Moreover, together with the notion of a mindset without borders that is often noted by participants, this offers fertile ground to further study transnational identity formation and the shift away from static national identities. Another insight from this international mindset that the participants hold is that it appears to increase their connection to global changes. Global developments, like the migration problem in the US, affect the feeling of safety and the level of impact of populist narratives. This larger perspective could be caused by the structural position of migrants, as Geurts et al. (2020) suggests.

Furthermore, most participants thus did not feel impacted by national populist narratives but did display awareness of such discourses. This suggests that the impact is influenced by the unique ‘privileged position’ of high-skilled migrants, which adds an important layer to



understanding how and why political climates affect different migrant groups. This opens space for comparative research of narrative impact across varying migration groups.

The finding that the integration paradox played no role in this research due to the international environment in which the participants reside, and possibly the shorter stay of the participants, offers an extra dimension to the existing research on the integration paradox.

### **5.2.2. Societal Implications and Recommendations**

Participants did not identify with other migrant groups, nor completely with the Dutch majority. This reflects their unique status but also displays a potential for social fragmentation. To address this, community organizations as well as policymakers could work on mentorship programs or on a form of group discussions with different groups of people in which high-skilled migrants get connected with locals and other migrant groups. This could build solidarity, cross-group understanding, and help reduce the social distance between different communities.

Moreover, many participants noted they did not aspire to become a Dutch citizen as there was a low added value, and due to the restrictions on dual nationality. This suggests a need to re-evaluate citizenship policies for high-skilled migrants. By making the process more flexible and valuable, for instance by offering benefits with partial integration, without requiring full naturalization, high-skilled migrants could be encouraged to commit to the Netherlands for a longer period.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the international environment in which the participants live play a crucial role in the sense of integration. This signifies that the concept of integration could be looked at from a wider angle, also including more concretely the environment in which one integrates. Both employers and the government should broaden their understanding of integration, which includes not only the cultural aspects, but also other aspects like the environment in which one lives. They could further support high-skilled migrants' integration process by providing access to international networks and workspaces, and by giving support for transnational lifestyles.

The finding that solely policy affects the perceived impact of populist narratives highlights the importance of crafting policies, especially related to migration, with an understanding of the differences between groups of labour migrants. Policymakers should account for the different experiences and circumstances that different types of migrants have, rather than making one policy for all types of migrants. Distinctions must be made to a high level, as

even high-skilled and low-skilled should not be put under the same policy due to their differences, even though they both are labor migrants.

### **5.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

The group of participants has a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, ensuring the research covers a wide range of perspectives. Nevertheless, due to the use of convenience sampling, participants often worked at the same company, and there was little variation in educational background. Moreover, this caused a small variation in the place of living. Even though high-skilled migrants usually reside in urban and international areas, as these are the places where international companies have their offices, this could have resulted in an overrepresentation of individuals with similar professional and socio-economic backgrounds. This has potentially limited the range of perspectives that are captured. Moreover, this limits the generalizability of the findings to other parts of the Netherlands, especially in more rural areas, where integration conditions may differ due to less international environments or different social dynamics. Another limitation is that almost all participants held EU citizenship or permanent residency. The study showed that the type of permit had an influence on the impact of populist narratives. This participant group thus limits insights into high-skilled migrants with a work visa or Dutch nationality.

The generalizability of findings is further limited by the small sample size ( $n=10$ ) of this research. Therefore, it would be beneficial and increase the rigor of future research by including a larger group of participants who have a more diverse background in terms of education, career, type of permit, and geographical scope. This could bring different insights. Moreover, during the interviews, it became apparent that some of the participants had studied in the Netherlands and thus did not comply with one of the criteria. The criteria that participants should have come here for work were set as it was assumed that several different situations and obstacles could characterize a group that arrived for purposes other than work. However, after conducting the interviews, the responses of participants who came here to study initially were highly compatible with the responses of participants who came here for work. This has to do with the fact that almost all participants in this group initially came to work in the Netherlands for a shorter period, for instance, to finish one specific project, and then decided to stay longer. This turned out to be a typical pathway for high-skilled migrants, and therefore the whole group of participants, including the ones who came initially to study, was considered representative. In future research, the criteria of the participants could be

adjusted so that there is a greater inclusion of edge cases, such as migrants who came to study and then stayed to work.

Furthermore, the research process has some limitations. The coding and analysis of the data were done by a single researcher, which may introduce subjectivity and reduce reliability. Moreover, there was no dedicated qualitative analysis software tool used, which could have caused a lack of auditability and transparency of the data. However, for a small sample size like this, it could be justified not to use analysis software as the added value is lower. Additionally, there is a potential for researcher bias, especially in interpreting nuanced expressions of identity. The researcher belongs to the Dutch majority, and hence the views and own interpretation of narratives of the researcher might have influenced the analysis. There were efforts made to remain data-driven and reflexive, but still, there are limits to the conformability of the research. Participant validation may have helped in increasing conformability. Thus, to enhance dependability and conformability, fellow researchers and participants should be included more throughout the research process in future research.

As for concrete research directions, it would be interesting to further research the dissociation of high-skilled migrants from other types of migrants. It could be examined whether this dissociation is indeed a phenomenon among skilled-migrants, and among other types of migrants. If it is, it could further be examined what the causes and consequences of this dissociation are. Moreover, the integration experience could be further researched considering the mindset without borders that high-skilled migrants generally have. Concretely, it could be studied whether and what kind of impact the international mindset of high-skilled migrants has on their integration experience. Examining the role of living in an urban and international area for the integration experience could also be an interesting topic. Comparative research on the impact of populist narratives between different migrant groups could further explore the differences and determining factors that influence the perceived impact.

A new insight from this research was that the integration paradox played no role in this set of participants, most likely due to the international environment in which they reside, or possibly due to the length of stay of the participants. This raises questions concerning the conditions under which the paradox occurs. Future research could focus on whether an international environment plays a role in whether the integration paradox appears. On a broader scale, further research should be done about the applicability of the integration to the group of high-skilled migrants.

## 6. Conclusion

This research aimed to study the integration experience of high-skilled migrants in the Netherlands and the possible effects of populist political narratives on this experience. It was examined if there was an impact of political narratives on the integration experience, and if so, what this impact was and what the consequences of this impact were. These questions were addressed through data collected from skilled migrants residing in the Netherlands for at least five years.

The research shows that most participants did not feel affected by populist political narratives about migration. Only if the policy directly affected them did they feel impacted by such narratives. This displays the importance of crafting policies regarding migration with care, as this is a critical channel through which narratives can have an impact on one's integration experience.

Moreover, high-skilled migrants seem to disassociate themselves from other migrant groups, making them feel less affected by migration narratives as they do not feel targeted.

Participants mentioned that there are possible consequences for other migrant groups but did not mention any concrete examples.

Additionally, their positive integration experiences are linked to the international environments and urban settings, and their permit type. Nevertheless, the sense of belonging and security that especially a permanent residency fosters is decreasing due to global changes, and could further decrease with changes in the political climate. Some participants worried about a potentially worsening situation, in which they got more cautious about their future planning and worried about possible policies that could impact them.

Generally, participants report a high sense of integration, feeling accepted, at home, and secure. This is due to factors like the welcoming Dutch culture, the 30% ruling that supports them, and the international environment in which they live and work. Moreover, it is due to the length of stay, resulting in policies having limited effect on this group, the fact that most feel protected due to their permanent residency, and as the participants do not feel targeted by policies being a high-skilled labor migrant.

Nevertheless, some participants did feel impacted by populist political narratives, as they were directly affected by policies, for instance, in their work field. The influence of these populist political narratives on the migrants who felt impacted was that they felt a decrease in their perceived safety and security due to direct policies. Interestingly, only policies seemed to affect the integration experience.

Thus, while the current impact of political narratives on high-skilled migrants appears to be minimal, the potential for change remains. If populist narratives become more dominant and manage to translate more into concrete and restrictive policies, the impact of these narratives on the integration experience of this group could change significantly.

To summarize, this research highlights that policy is a decisive factor shaping the perceived impact of narratives on high-skilled migrants. Moreover, the importance of focusing on high-skilled labor migrants as a separate group is underscored. The specific circumstances that shape their integration experience and the perceived impact of populist political narratives are unique from other migrant groups. The study can be used as a starting point to further conduct research in this area. Moreover, policies regarding migration should be crafted with care, as this is the only factor influencing the perceived impact of populist political narratives.

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## **Appendix 1: Information Letter**

### *Request for participation in*

## **High-Skilled, Low Impact? The Perceived Effects of Populist Narratives on Skilled Migrants in the Netherlands**

Utrecht, 16 April 2025

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a scientific research study about the impact of populist narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled migrants. This study is part of a thesis and supervised by supervisors from the university of Utrecht and the university of Twente. Participants have been recruited through the personal network of the researcher.

### **What is the study about?**

This study is about the possible impact of populist narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled migrants. Its research questions are:

1. ‘Do populist political narratives influence the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least five years?’
2. ‘What is the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least five years?’
3. ‘What consequences are mentioned of the influence of populist political narratives on the integration experience of high-skilled labor migrants in the Netherlands who have resided in the country for at least five years?’

The political landscape has changed significantly over the past couple of years in the Netherlands. Populist parties have become the biggest in the countries, and their narratives have become dominant. Therefore, it is interesting to research if and how these changes and narratives affect the integration experience of a high-skilled migrant.

Understanding if and how political narratives shape high-skilled migrants' integration experiences can provide valuable insights for policymakers aiming to foster inclusive societies. It may also inform debates on the responsibilities of host societies in facilitating integration and challenge dominant policy narratives that assume migrants' integration success depends solely on their own efforts.

Moreover, The Dutch context could serve as a case study that is applicable for more European countries, as it is a broad phenomenon that populist parties are gaining power and are using a specific migration narrative to scapegoat migrants as the cause of a wide range of issues.

### **How will the study be conducted?**

The study will utilize semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gain insights in the integration experiences of high-skilled migrants. The interview will take a maximum of 45 minutes and will be conducted at a private place that the participant is comfortable in (eg. a room at the university of Utrecht or at a company office). The interview will be transcribed using the program AmberScript, anonymized, and then analyzed using the program Nvivo. Your information will be kept in a safe place. To read more about this, see the Appendix ("Personal Data").

As a participant, you are only expected to participate in the interview. There will be no compensation for the participation. By participating, you will help contribute to research that is potentially valuable to enhance the integration experiences for skilled migrants.

### **Who are the researchers?**

The researcher is Lis de Bode. She is a third-year bachelor student studying Technology and Liberal Arts and Sciences at the university of Twente. During her studies, she majored in social sciences, including political science. This research is part of her thesis, a research paper that is the final step towards a bachelor's degree. The research is supervised by drs. Gerrit Dielissen (first supervisor), sociologist and assistant professor at the university of Utrecht, and by dr. Ardion Beldad (second supervisor), researcher and associate professor at the university of Twente.

Contact information:

Lis de Bode: [l.i.debode@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.i.debode@students.uu.nl)

Drs. Gerrit Dielissen: [G.B.M.Dielissen@uu.nl](mailto:G.B.M.Dielissen@uu.nl)

Dr. Ardion Beldad: [a.d.beldad@utwente.nl](mailto:a.d.beldad@utwente.nl)

### **Will you participate?**

Participation is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you do not have to do anything further. You can also stop at any time during the study. You never have to say why you do not want to participate, or why you want to stop. In the latter case, we will delete your data.

**What will happen to your data?**

We need your contact information for this study, and during the study we will collect further data, for example about your background and education. You can read about how we will handle all this data in the appendix ("Personal Data").

Kind regards,

Lis de Bode

[l.i.debode@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.i.debode@students.uu.nl)

+31630366136

This research has been approved by the Faculty Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Utrecht University. If you have a complaint about the way in which this study is conducted, please contact the complaints officer via [klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl). Please include the reference number: 25-1648

Below a summary of the processing of personal data done as part of our research project. The following pages contain more detailed information on data processing and your rights.



#### **What personal data is being processed**

Age, gender, education level, job, area of work, background



#### **Why is this data being processed**

The data are used in a study on the integration experience of high-skilled migrants. The data will be anonymized as much as possible.



#### **Who will have access to the data**

Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to the personal data. The data are anonymized as soon as possible, and others will only have access to anonymous data. Personal data are stored encrypted on a password-protected storage at the university of Utrecht.



#### **How long is the personal data being stored**

After completion of the data collection, the data will be anonymized as soon as possible – at the latest after 3 months. At that time, all contact details will also be deleted



#### **On what legal basis are we processing the data**

The data will be processed according to your explicit consent.



#### **What are your rights**

You have the right to object to the processing of your personal data. To do so, please contact the researcher ([email address]), or fill in this form: [https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier\\_privacy\\_aanvraag](https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier_privacy_aanvraag).



#### **How can you contact us**

If you have any questions, you can contact the researcher at [l.i.debode@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.i.debode@students.uu.nl), the supervisor at [g.b.m.dielissen@uu.nl](mailto:g.b.m.dielissen@uu.nl), or if you have complaints, you can contact our complaints officer ([klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl)) or our data protection officer ([fg@uu.nl](mailto:fg@uu.nl)).

## **Your Personal Data**

Within the **Do I Still Belong Here?: The Lived Impact of Populist Narratives on Skilled Migrants in the Netherlands** study, we work with personal data, i.e., information that says something about you. This might include your name or profession, as well as your answers to our questions.

Because we work with personal data, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies. The GDPR is a European law that gives you as a participant certain rights. For example, you are entitled to important information about the study, which we aim to provide in this letter.

### **What personal data do we collect?**

We collect the following personal data from participants:

- Names and contact information - to be able to contact (potential) participants in the study and make an appointment for the interview;
- Audio recordings of interviews - to accurately capture the answers to our questions;
- Transcripts of interviews - to be able to convert the audio recordings of the answers into readable text that can be analyzed. Transcripts are written texts of the participants' answers to the questions, as well as everything else said during the interview.

We also collect personal data that is extra sensitive. For these personal data, we ask for your consent:

- Data on participants' profession - to find out if people with a particular profession think differently about the research topic, and to indicate whether you are a high-skilled migrant.
- Data on participant's length of stay in the Netherlands – to find out if the length of stay influences the integration experience.
- Data on the participant's background (educational, social, ethnical) – to find out whether one's background influences the integration experience.

### **What happens to participants' personal data?**

We delete participants' names and contact information once we have made an appointment. Immediately after making the transcripts of the audio recordings, those recordings are deleted. There is nothing in the transcripts that would allow anyone to immediately recognize participants, but it is possible that participants say something about themselves in their answers that makes them recognizable to some people. We make sure that such recognizable things never appear in publication(s) about our research.

The transcripts from which identifying information is removed are stored on Yoda, a well-secured computer system at Utrecht University. Dutch universities have agreed to keep these data for at least 10 years. Other researchers can then check whether we conducted our research properly.

### **Who has access to your data?**

Only the members of the research team (the principal investigator and the two supervisors) have access to your personal data. These members are obliged to keep your data confidential. We will make your personal data anonymous as much as possible.

### **We ensure proper security of your personal data**

Utrecht University treats your personal data very confidentially. We secure your data well. For example, all computers that hold personal data are password protected, and many computers are even more secure, with a second “factor” (2-factor authentication, or 2FA).



## Are we allowed to use your personal data?

We ask you to consent to the use of your personal data (you will find a consent form attached). Without your consent, we may not use your personal data. You are not obliged to give consent: the choice is entirely up to you. If you do not give consent, this will not have any negative consequences for you. If you do give consent, you can withdraw it at any time, either during the study or afterwards. You will never have to say why you do not give consent or why you are withdrawing your consent.

If you withdraw your consent to the use of your personal data, we will delete your data. However, everything that we have done with your personal data until then may be left as it is. Therefore, we do not have to retroactively undo the use of your personal data.

Would you like to withdraw your consent? Please contact the researcher ([l.i.decode@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.i.decode@students.uu.nl)) or fill out the [Privacy Request Form](https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier_privacy_verzoek) ([https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier\\_privacy\\_verzoek](https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier_privacy_verzoek)) (Dutch only).

Please include the name of the study, the name of the researcher and the reference number: 25-1648.

**Please note!** You can only withdraw your consent if we can find out which personal data belong to you. Once your personal data have been anonymized, you can no longer withdraw your consent.

## What rights do you have under the GDPR?

People whose personal data are used have a variety of rights. For example, they may access their personal data. In case you notice that certain information is not correct, you sometimes have the right to have those data corrected. In addition, you can ask us to delete your personal data, although this is subject to strict conditions. If you would like to exercise your rights, please contact the researcher ([l.i.decode@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.i.decode@students.uu.nl)) or fill out the [Privacy Request Form](https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier_privacy_verzoek) ([https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier\\_privacy\\_verzoek](https://forms.uu.nl/universiteitutrecht/formulier_privacy_verzoek)) (Dutch only). Please include the name of the study, the name of the researcher and the reference number: 25-1648.

You also have the right to file a complaint. To do so, please contact our complaints department ([klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl)) or our data protection officer ([fg@uu.nl](mailto:fg@uu.nl)). If you are unable to reach an agreement with us, you can file a complaint with the Dutch Personal Data Authority (the *Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens*).

## Contact information

### Researcher:

[l.i.decode@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.i.decode@students.uu.nl)

+31 6 30366136

### Supervisors:

[g.b.m.dielissen@uu.nl](mailto:g.b.m.dielissen@uu.nl) (first supervisor)

[a.d.beldad@utwente.nl](mailto:a.d.beldad@utwente.nl) (second supervisor)

### Data controller:

### Utrecht University:

Heidelberglaan 8

3584 CS Utrecht

## More information

For participants in scientific research, Utrecht University has written a general privacy statement, in which you will find much more information about how we handle participants' personal data. Scan the QR code or go to <https://tinyurl.com/uu-privacy-statement-en>.



## Appendix 2: Consent Form

### **DECLARATION OF CONSENT for participation in: High-Skilled, Low Impact? The Perceived Effects of Populist Narratives on Skilled Migrants in the Netherlands**

#### **Participation:**

- I have read the information letter about the study and understand what it says.
- I have been able to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I have had sufficient time to consider whether I wish to participate.
- I am participating voluntarily.

#### **My information:**

- I know that data about me will be collected.
- I agree to the use of these data for scientific research, as explained in the information letter.
- I agree to recordings being made. The researcher will only use these recordings for this research.

#### **Consent:**

I am aware that I have the right to withdraw my consent to the use of my data, as described in the information letter.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

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#### **To be completed by researcher carrying out the study:**

I declare that I have explained to the participant named above what their participation in the study entails.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Interview Guide

<p>Introduction researcher and research – explain research and length of interview, consent form and information letter.</p> <p>Research will be anonymized, and data will be handled with care. You can stop the interview at any time for any reason. You can choose to not answer a question at any time for any reason.</p> <p><b>Are there any questions about the consent and the interview?</b></p> <p><b>Sign or give oral/recorded consent</b></p>	
<p><b>Introduction person</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Background</li> <li>- Migration / ethnical background</li> <li>- Academic background</li> <li>- Profession</li> <li>- family</li> </ul>	<p>Tell me a bit about yourself?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How old are you?</li> <li>- Where are you from?</li> <li>- What is your ethnicity?</li> <li>- What is your gender?</li> <li>- How long have you been in the Netherlands?</li> <li>- What is your educational background?</li> <li>- What is your current profession?</li> <li>- Before going to the Netherlands, what kind of work did you do?</li> <li>- Have you worked in other countries before coming here?</li> <li>- Did you go the Netherlands on your own? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o If not, who did you bring?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Why did you decide to migrate to the Netherlands?</li> </ul>
<p><b>First experiences in the Netherlands</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First impressions</li> <li>- Challenges/good things</li> <li>- Experiences at home/work</li> <li>- settling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What were your first impressions of the Netherlands? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Was the Netherlands like you expected it would be?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- how would you describe your first year in the Netherlands? How was the settling down?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How were you received at work? and in your neighborhood? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Examples?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>integration factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how would you describe the process of integrating in the Netherlands?</li> <li>- What factors played a role in your integration? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o What helped you, what felt as an obstacle?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- What are things that impacted your sense of belonging and welcomeness in Dutch society? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Or how welcome you felt? (e.g. personal investments in language acquisition, joining clubs, contacts with Dutch people)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Current sense of integration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sense of belonging</li> <li>- Social circle</li> <li>- Social activities</li> <li>- Sense of acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To what extent do you feel accepted for who you are in the Dutch society? Why?</li> <li>- how would you describe your sense of connection with Dutch society?</li> <li>- How would you describe your social circle? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Do you have Dutch friends or contacts outside of work?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- have you obtained a dutch nationality? Do you intend to apply for Dutch citizenship? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o what were your considerations?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- in general, how would you describe your feeling of being at home in the Netherlands? why?</li> </ul>
<b>Awareness of political and public discourse</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change in political climate</li> <li>- Migration in media</li> <li>- Migration in politics</li> <li>- Touched by discourse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe the political climate in the Netherlands from the time you entered until now?</li> <li>- How do you perceive the way the topic of migration is discussed in politics or media? Explain</li> <li>- to what extent do discussions in the media and politics affect you?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ what kind of effects can you describe? (eg. effects emotionally, socially, professionally)</li> </ul>
<b>Impact of political narratives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public opinion</li> <li>- Motivation to integrate</li> <li>- Sense of welcomeness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to what extent do you feel the current political climate affects you?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have you noticed changes in how people treat you because of public discourse?</li> <li>○ Has the political climate affected your motivation to integrate or learn the language?</li> <li>○ Have you ever felt less welcome or less safe due to things said by politicians or media?</li> </ul> </li> <li>- to what extent did your feelings as a migrant change from the time you entered the country to now?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ why do you think there was a change?</li> <li>○ what are the effects of these changes on you?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Other integration challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In general, how do you feel about your integration experience in the Netherlands?</li> <li>- What could make integration easier for you?</li> </ul>
<b>Future</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If you had to decide again, would you still move to the Netherlands? Why?</li> <li>- <i>What changes would you like to see in how the Netherlands approaches high-skilled migrants?</i></li> <li>- What are your hopes for your future here?</li> </ul>
<b>End</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thanks for your time and participation</li> <li>- Last remarks?</li> <li>- Questions about what happens now?</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4: Science Popularization

<https://sites.google.com/view/theeffectofmigrationnarratives/homepage>

### Full text that is on the website:

“Our beautiful [country] has been severely damaged by the ongoing asylum tsunami and mass immigration. ... There is no part of our society that is not affected by the admission of so many fortune seekers. ... We will do everything to stop the disruptive asylum and immigration disaster.” – PVV

This quote is one of the first points on the party agenda of the PVV, the biggest party in the Netherlands. The PVV is a populist party, favoring native Dutch citizens over other inhabitants. The story that the populist PVV and parties like it spread about migration has become the main story people hear in the news. These stories can be harmful to migrants in the country, as people might perceive them differently, and they may be less welcome.

De Bode has researched migrant experiences in the Netherlands. In her research, she interviewed high-skilled migrants – migrants who have a good job and are well educated – who have been in the Netherlands for at least 5 years. They were asked about their experiences in the Netherlands so far and whether they felt that these narratives affected them. It turns out that most participants did not feel affected by these narratives. This was because they did not feel the stories were about them, but rather about other types of migrants. Thus, they did not feel like they belonged with this group of migrants that was targeted.

The participants only focused on the influence of policies that were formed by parties sharing these negative stories about migration, as policies could directly affect them. They did not really look at other possible effects, like a change in the attitude of Dutch natives towards them. A reason for this could be that the participants usually lived in a very international setting.

Moreover, the participants showed that they had an international mindset. They had friends and family all over the world, which caused them to be involved in the news and in political developments on a more global level. They used instances from other countries to predict what the situation in the Netherlands could become like. The situation in the USA, where Donald Trump is deporting many migrants despite their documents, scared some of the participants about what the future in the Netherlands could be like.

These findings open several avenues for future research. It would be interesting to further research the dissociation of high-skilled migrants from other types of migrants. Furthermore,

the international mindset could be studied. It would be interesting to see what the impact of this mindset is on the integration of skilled migrants. Additionally, exploring the role of residing in an international environment for the integration experience could also be interesting.