



Report
Business, Migration and Mobility
Roundtable discussion with Dutch Business Leaders
(The Hague, 28 April 2009)

Chair: Mr. R.F.M. Lubbers
Participants: Representatives of various business sectors, local and national governments
Location: VNO-NCW, The Hague

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- Since the first business and migration meeting in the Netherlands in 2007, companies seem to have accepted that migration is a fact of life and an issue they will have to deal actively with.
- Most companies have diversified and internationalized their recruitment and staff policies over the past years. Companies indicate that they have profited from diversifying their staff, in particular in cases where the clientele also has a diverse background (Business Case for Migration).
- In light of the current global economic circumstances some companies feel forced to temporarily reorient towards the national market.
- The regulations and procedures for attracting skilled migrants to the Netherlands have significantly improved in recent years.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS IDENTIFIED

- To better mobilize the capabilities and talents of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants residing in the Netherlands;
- To invest more in the education and training of migrants, particularly with regards to professional training, while taking into account the specific needs of first, second and third generation immigrants;
- To fuel public-private partnerships, in particular between local governments and businesses, in order to integrate, educate and retrain migrants towards the labor market;
- To invest more in credential recognition of diplomas obtained abroad in order to prevent brain waste;
- To encourage and facilitate entrepreneurship of migrants;
- To improve living conditions, in particular housing circumstances of migrants;
- To advance coordination among the corporate sector to advocate their position to the government to provide insight into the positive opportunities of labor migration;
- To ensure more flexible regulations and procedures for migrants other than high skilled or knowledge migrants, as well as for nanny's, family members and temporary employment and education of personnel from partner companies in third countries (without having to put them on the payroll in the host country).
- To provide more clarity on existing policies and possibilities with regards to labor migration and refugee admission.

1. Introduction

Much has changed globally, since the last Business and Migration Dialogue in The Netherlands on 7 November 2007, not the least of which is the economic crisis, which is severely impacting the lives of migrants. Although it is too early to fully understand the long term implications of this crisis for the global refugee and migration agenda, migration and the mobility of labor will undoubtedly be one of the most important challenges of the 21st century.

The corporate sector plays a vital role as employer and societal actor with regards to migration issues, but has hitherto been involved too little in the migration debate. Therefore *The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration* (THP) in the framework of its *Business Initiative*, organized for the second time a roundtable discussion on 'Business, Migration and Mobility' in the Netherlands, in cooperation with the European Commission (EC) and the Dutch Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW). In addition to representatives from the corporate sector, a number of governmental representatives, in particular from cities, took part in the roundtable discussion in order to facilitate a dialogue between these two important stakeholders in the migration policy field. In the following sections, the main conclusions, ideas and recommendations brought forward by the participants have been summarized.

2. Framing the Debate

In line with the introduction the underlying question for the roundtable was how the nexus between migration and business can get a clearer profile. The European Commission (EC) and The City of The Hague had prepared some specific points for discussion:

- The EC tends to start from the assumption that, given demographic and labor market developments and the related ageing of the population in Europe, the need for labor in the member states of the European Union will drastically increase. Seeing that there is a limit on stretching the retirement age, the EC presupposes that part of the future need for labor will have to be fulfilled by migration. The Commission would like to engage in a dialogue with the corporate sector in order to find out to what extent the sector envisions problems fulfilling labor needs in the future and whether there is a need for assistance in recruiting personnel through cooperation between the European Union and third countries, for example with regards to pre-departure training, credential recognition and education.
- The City of The Hague posed the question to the corporate sector whether companies and (local) governments could and should not work closer together in integrating (in particular young) migrants already residing in the Netherlands into the labor market.

3. Roundtable discussion

3.1. Findings

The focus of the discussion was particular on the national level; the business representatives hardly referred to the European context. In general all companies seemed to have a positive

attitude towards migration and employing migrants. In comparison with the meeting that was organized in 2007, it seems that companies have embraced migration and mobility much more as a 'fact of life.'

All representatives indicated that their recruitment policies have become more diverse and international; some companies explicitly indicated that greater diversity benefits their business, in particular in cases where the clientele also has a diverse background (so a "Business Case for Migration" can be made). A few companies pointed out that the current economic circumstances are leading to a reorientation to the national market with regards to recruitment policies as well as with regards to other business activities. In addition, companies also indicated that the diversity of the staff greatly varies across regions: in larger cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam there is a great availability of talented migrants.

With regards to policy developments, the majority of the companies indicated that the laws regulating recruitment of high skilled migrants have been significantly simplified and improved since the meeting of 2007. It has become easier to recruit high skilled migrants. This can for example be illustrated by the recently established expatcenters, which are similar to the one-stop-shops that had been proposed by some companies in earlier discussions. The representatives felt that these centers should also be established in other parts of the country. Despite this positive development, there seems to remain a tension between the mandate of the Ministry of Justice to keep order on the one hand and to regulate migration policies that can create creativity and entrepreneurship on the other hand.

During the discussion a distinction was made between a higher segment of migrants (high skilled migrants/expats), who often reside temporarily in the Netherlands, and a lower segment of migrants who often wish to settle more permanently. Representatives from the municipality, as well as most corporate representatives said there is room and need for more public-private partnerships in particular with regards to integrating and educating the 'lower segment' in the labor market. Within such partnerships, (local) governments could in particular play a facilitating role in identifying and training potential employees.

From the municipal level it was emphasized that it should not be forgotten that the integration of new migrants needs time. Particular groups of migrants that have been in The Netherlands for some time seem to have started 'settling' only recently and as such now find their way up on the social ladder of the city. In addition a recent research by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) indicated that support for the multicultural society has significantly increased in The Netherlands.

Some participants argued that the Dutch government should take the responsibility to make sure that (poor) countries of origin also benefit from migration. The concept of circular migration is often referred to in this regard, although there seems to be some skepticism within society towards stimulating circular migration. The Dutch government is therefore currently developing a pilot 'circular migration'. In addition more efforts could be made in creating and maintaining links between countries of origin of migrants and The Netherlands. Lastly the participants also felt that The Dutch government should invest more in

maintaining links with migrants who leave, as they can serve as ‘ambassadors’ of The Netherlands abroad.

3.2. Points of attention and action

Issues that were brought forward as challenges, points of attention and action relate mainly to education, entrepreneurship, housing, public perception of migration and migration policies.

Education

The corporate and the governmental sectors should cooperate more in order to capitalize on the talents of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants already residing in the country. In particular more should be invested in the education and training of (children of) migrants, particularly with regards to technical and professional training while taking into account the specific needs of first, second and third generations. Credential and diploma recognition also remains an issue of concern; the Dutch government ought to invest more in (mutual) recognition of diplomas obtained abroad in order to prevent brain waste. In order to integrate, educate and retrain migrants towards the labor market more public-private partnerships should be established. Companies could for example ‘adopt’ migrants that are included in governmental retraining programs by offering them a job as soon as the program finishes.

One particular challenge that was referred to with regards to capitalizing on available talent is the young age (11-12 years) at which children have to choose their level of education in The Netherlands. Particular for boys this is problematic as they on that age are often behind in their development as compared to girls. This seems to be all the more true for boys from a migrant-background, often resulting in their receiving education below their level. Another difficulty with regards to age was brought forward by the (public) transport sector. The minimum age to become a driver of trucks, trams and trains is 21, while potential employees for this sector often finish their education much earlier; there is need to bridge this gap.

Entrepreneurship

Not so much from the side of the corporate representatives, but more from the side of the other participants the advice was given to pay more attention to entrepreneurship among migrants. Among many migrant groups, entrepreneurship seems to be valued highly, but migrants often lack the opportunities, know-how of local procedures or financial capital to start a business. The Dutch government could invest more creating support structures.

Housing

The availability and quality of housing is a major problem for both temporary migrants as well as migrants that have settled more permanently in the Netherlands, chiefly because of the long waiting lists for social housing. This has negative implications for the wellbeing of migrants and the flexibility of companies to attract migrant labor.

Public perception of migration

More efforts should be made to create a more positive public perception of migration, for example by highlighting successful migrants as role models.

Migration policies

Some companies indicated that there is a need for better coordination among the corporate sector to advocate their position to the government. Although there are currently a multitude of umbrella organizations, there is not one such organization where a coalition of corporate labor market experts come together, for example to provide insight into the positive opportunities of labor migration. It is up to the corporate sector to take the initiative for such an organization or coalition of companies. It would be desirable that small and medium enterprises work together with bigger companies in such a coalition. The representatives from the local government also expressed the wish to cooperate more with the corporate sector (in the city) in order to be able to influence national policy making.

In spite of the improvements made in recent years with regards to regulations and procedures for attracting skilled migrants to the Netherlands, it seems that the business sector would still like to see more flexible regulations and procedures for migrants not falling under the category of high skilled or knowledge migrants, as well as for nanny's, family members, and temporary employment and education of personnel from partner companies in third countries (without having to put them on the payroll in the host country).

To conclude the Dutch government was urged to provide more clarity on existing policies and possibilities with regards to labor migration and refugee admission. As it stand now it is difficult to access information on admission procedures for potential labor migrants or for those who qualify as refugees.

3.3. Good practices identified

Some good practices from companies and/or local governments in order to ensure greater participation and to better capitalize on the capacities and talent of migrants are:

- ✓ Whereas 5 years ago the participants of the Young Talent Program of IBM were for 80 % from a Dutch background and for 20 % from a foreign background, the numbers now have been reversed.
- ✓ In order to attract a work force with a diverse background IBM organizes information sessions for certain categories of people, that are underrepresented in the company, such as women and migrants.
- ✓ IBM organizes special "summer schools" for female high school and university students in the area of the IBM-office in Amsterdam.
- ✓ In the framework of the national "from Problem District to Exemplary District" policy, the City of The Hague has concluded a pact with a few companies in order to improve the participation in the labor market, by offering young people with little experience or perspective in-house training and work experience. Among other companies Ballast Nedam is a partner in this pact.
- ✓ In order to guarantee safety and flexibility at the workplace, Ballast Nedam is currently investing in a translation computer to be used at construction sites.
- ✓ Just like other companies, IKEA cooperates with the University Assistance Fund (UAF) in order to offer talented refugee in the Netherlands the opportunity to build a career.
- ✓ Winst&Waarden, bureau for social entrepreneurship, annually offers two internships to young people with a migrant background. The assignments to these interns are as much as possible designed to make use of their bi-culturality and multilingualism.

- ✓ ING has introduced a Global Diversity Council. The Global Diversity Council consists of senior leaders from each Business Line. Diversity Council members play an important role in the execution of ING's diversity strategy. They work directly within the business units and they and their teams are the primary catalyst for embracing diversity and driving the diversity agenda through each Business Line.
- ✓ In Rotterdam excursions are organized for students and school kids and their parents to shortage sectors, such as the port docks. In particular among first generation immigrants, who often came to The Netherlands under guest worker schemes, in some cases as dock workers, the port in an unpopular place to work.
- ✓ The City of The Hague is creating "entrepreneur houses" in various neighborhoods that should serve as a one-stop-shops for entrepreneurs wishing to start a business.
- ✓ In order to stimulate the positive effects of migration on the development of countries or origin, IOM The Netherlands facilitates several projects for the temporary return of qualified migrants to their country of origin to allow them to contribute to capacity building in their country of origin.

Participants list

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