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POLICY BRIEF

Fostering labour market integration of Third Country Nationals in the Netherlands;

Enhancing the uptake of existing methods for recognition of qualifications and competences of migrants



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Introduction

The Netherlands has the ambition to gain a competitive edge in the global knowledge economy. At the same time, similar to most European societies, it faces demographic challenges. In 2040 it is expected that for every two of working age (aged 15-64), there will be one person in the retirement age (aged 65 or older) (Eurostat, 2014). It is therefore essential that the skills, knowledge and competences (SKC) of all workers in the Netherlands are fully used, including those of migrants.

This policy brief is part of DIVERSE, an international comparative research programme implemented in ten European countries. The main aim of the DIVERSE programme is to examine the ways in which systems of SKC recognition accommodate migrants from outside the EU

Key recommendations:

- *Develop a 'Recognition Finder' tool, which enables migrants to present themselves better to employers;*
- *Inform migrants about the list of organisations that have received the status of 'recognized referent' by the IND. These organisations have easier recruitment procedures and experience with migrants;*
- *Encourage organisations to follow trainings on the business-case for diversity management;*
- *Reinstall funds for unemployed migrants to enrol in recognition of prior learning programmes.*

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(Third Country Nationals, TCNs). The programme examines the different pathways available to TCNs to obtain recognition of their current skill sets and to help them find their way into the Dutch labour market. From January until September 2014, four working-group sessions and over 40 interviews were held with representatives of public bodies, organisations employing TCNs, unions, non-profit organisations, migrant organisations, career and employment consultants, intercultural mediators, and TCNs themselves. The part of the research on diversity management practises within organisations and participation by TCNs in voluntary organisations is presented in the policy brief 'Fostering equal treatment of Third Country Nationals; Improving practises of skill and diploma recognition and diversity management practises within organisations'.

The importance for the Netherlands to integrate TCNs in the labour market

Immigration to the Netherlands continued to increase in 2013. Although the large majority (80%) of labour migrants comes from EU countries (Van der Welle, 2013), currently 249 thousand TCNs (aged 15-65) or 2,5% of the Dutch population, legally reside in the Netherlands. Roughly two thirds of TCNs originate from Turkey (24%), Morocco (14%), China (9%), the United States (5%), Indonesia (4%), India (4%) and Suriname (2%) (Statistics Netherlands, 2014). Whereas the majority comes to the Netherlands for family reunification (40%), labour migration accounts for 15%. Other motives include study (20%) and asylum (15%) (Van der Welle 2013).

The economic crisis has seriously affected labour migration to the Netherlands. Fewer work permits are issued to TCNs and return migration is increasing (van der Welle, 2013). However, whereas the crisis is expected to be of a temporary nature, on the long term, as a result of an ageing society, labour shortages in the Netherlands are expected to grow, particularly in larger cities and in sectors such as health care, primary and secondary education, horticulture and in the manufacturing sector (RWI, 2010). Whereas migrants cannot prevent labour shortages to arise, they can alleviate the issue (Muysken et al., 2013).

Barriers to TCN employment

TCNs face two major legal obstacles when presenting themselves on the job market:

- In the Netherlands, as in other EU member states, vacancies should in principle be filled by job-seekers from EU countries. Only if no suitable candidate is found, a vacancy can be opened to TCNs. This rule does not apply for highly skilled workers who can make use of the so-called Knowledge Worker Scheme (Rijksoverheid.nl).
- Specified for the Knowledge Worker Scheme, TCNs can only obtain a work and residence permit if they meet the income requirement of €4.371,84 gross per month (for persons of 30 years of age and above) or €2.297,16 (for persons under 30 years of age).



A collection of methods and tools that aim to enhance SKC recognition and management of cultural diversity within organisations.

This significantly lowers the number of vacancies available to TCNs, given that 82 per cent of them have a lower or intermediate education (Statistics Netherlands, 2014). Apart from legal obstacles, TCNs face more social and linguistic challenges connected to being foreigner in the Netherlands, which have to do with organisation cultures and negative or stereotypical perceptions of HR and other staff (see for example Van den Broek, 2014). Lastly, as a result of the current tight labour market, approximately one third of young native Dutch in the beginning of their career currently settle for jobs for which they are overqualified (Berkhout et al., 2012).

“Immigration will help to alleviate the ageing problem, as long as the immigrant will be able to find work (Muysken et al., 2011, p. 2)”

Pathways to recognition of diploma's and prior learned skills, knowledge and competence (SKC)

Within this context it is important that TCNs receive the proper support to demonstrate their SKC to the key 'gate-keepers of the labour market' - employers and education institutions. The following will present the most important pathways to recognition in the Netherlands.

1. Recognition of foreign education diplomas

SBB (the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market) is in charge of



the evaluation of credentials at the level of senior secondary vocational education (MBO), including adult education, and preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO). Nuffic is in charge of credential evaluation at the level of higher education (universities of applied science and research universities) and general secondary level education. These authorities operate one central desk, the Information Centre of Expertise for International Credential Evaluation (IcDW), to which applications for credential evaluation can be submitted. A credential evaluation is a written statement that indicates in which way foreign diplomas and study programmes are valued in the Netherlands. If possible, a detailed and systematic comparison with Dutch educational programmes is done.

2. Recognition of professional qualifications and work experience obtained

In the Netherlands, several professions are regulated (e.g. doctors, nurses, lawyers), meaning that permission by the competent authority is required to be legally entitled to practise them (see full list in Nuffic, 2014). In case of regulated professions, TCNs are required to contact the competent authority to be informed about procedures, rules, required documents and costs to have their foreign credentials recognized and to be able to practise their profession in the Netherlands. Although each competent authority applies its own set of criteria, which may vary by country of origin and occupational group, they usually require the following documents: an application form, a personal identification document (identity card or passport), a certified copy and/or credential evaluation of the diploma, evidence of recent practical experience, declaration of good health and good behaviour. To assist TCNs in navigating their way to the relevant authority, Nuffic operates the National Contact Point for Professional Recognition (NCP).

3. Recognition of prior learning through non-formal and informal learning and learning connected to their migratory background

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL, in Dutch EVC) can provide an alternative assessment route for TCNs. RPL is a well-developed system in the Netherlands. A RPL-procedure usually starts with the development of a portfolio, in which a

candidate collects all of his or her experiences, including, whenever possible, proofs of these experiences. Then, these experiences are compared to a relevant national competence framework used in formal education (in Dutch: CREBO and CROHO) or in a specific sector. The next step is the assessment phase, where an assessor or expert in a specific job field describes the competence of a candidate based on aptitude tests, job shadowing or criteria-based interviews (where candidates are asked for their response or reaction in specific situations). This step results in an Experience Certificate (EC). As yet, no rights can be derived from an EC; ultimately it is up to exam committee or employer to acknowledge this recognition (validation). To find the right organisation or sector to do a RPL-procedure, [browsing the RPL-register](#) of recognized RPL-providers might be useful:

Personal awareness of competence and ambitions

For job seekers, having knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses as well as the ability to communicate these effectively to employers is as important as having the right qualifications. Knowledge about employment opportunities requires knowledge of specific aspects or sectors of the labour market and, to some extent, knowledge of your career. There are a number of methods available to TCNs that are relevant in this context.

CH-Q experience profile is a training method for career orientation that uses a holistic approach, meaning that informal learning experiences from work, family, hobbies, interests and potential migration backgrounds are taken into account in the process of discovering SKC, career ambitions and possibilities. In four to five group sessions, participants develop a portfolio and an action plan for taking the first steps in their career. CH-Q has experience with TCNs.

Europass is most known for their European CV template, which can be downloaded from their website. They have also developed a language skills passport, diploma and certificate supplements and a portfolio template to show voluntary work experience or internship experience obtained abroad (Europass Mobility). Since many readers – employers – are familiar with the template, these templates are very useful to show experiences in a comprehensive manner.

University Assistance Fund (UAF) for refugee students offers study and work support for highly educated refugees. Those who wish to follow a Dutch bachelor or master programme in regular education can get financial support for tuition fees, language courses, books, a computer, travel costs and more. The UAF also offers job interview trainings, network meetings and has various projects focused on work placements on a paid or on an internship basis. A recently delivered methodology called 'Sustainable and Diverse' targets both employers and employees to implement diversity management practises.

The Dutch Refugee Council (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland) gives practical support to refugees during their



Shortages are likely to remain in sectors such as health care, primary and secondary education, horticulture and in the manufacturing sector.



asylum procedure and their integration into the Dutch society. One of their current projects, in cooperation with UAF, is 'Project Startbaan' which aims to help 600 refugees to find work through individualized support, SKC awareness training, language courses and job application trainings.

Actiz 'Skills in Pictures' is an online portfolio tool that enables people to describe who they are, what they are good at, what they like doing and what their motives are in a variety of methods. One of these is the use of pictures to describe someone's prior learning experiences, that is well suited for TCNs.

C-Stick is a digital portfolio that enables people with a distance to the labour market, including TCNs, to develop a personal development plan, map their SKC and apply for jobs directly.

Policy implications – What needs to happen next?

As this policy brief shows, the Netherlands has a well-developed national infrastructure for foreign diploma recognition and recognition of prior learning. Also, the DIVERSE research programme has identified that in the course of a few years, many training programmes and online tools to map individual SKC and/or develop career plans have been developed, some of which are specially developed for TCNs while others can be used by TCNs with support from a coach. In the Netherlands, there have been a variety of work and learning programmes (in Dutch: 'leer-werktrajecten') where key actors such as education institutes, employers, local departments of social affairs and employment and the executive institute for employee's insurances (UWV) work together to enhance employment of various target groups, including persons with a different cultural background.

While many of these initiatives have been successful, new initiatives should further integrate the following factors:

- Sustainability: how to ensure that the project continues to be effective after it ends?
- Ownership: how to ensure that employers, as the main gate-keepers to the labour market, share project goals?
- Accessibility: how to ensure that information on pathways to recognition reaches TCNs? Both higher and lower educated TCNs and studies (Duvekot *et al* 2014; Van der Welle, 2013) show that information for TCNs on steps to take for SKC recognition can be improved.

Taking RPL as an example, a major current challenge is to encourage employers and education institutes to validate recognition (e.g. the Experience Certificate). For employers, the commitment to RPL implies an investment in time and resources on their part (ownership). They often do not know how to deal with workers from a different cultural background or do not know how to implement diversity management (DM) effectively in an integrated manner (they rather implement relatively isolated set of practises). For these organisations DM trainings focusing on the 'business-case for diversity' could be an outcome, as diverse teams are not only good for innovation; also many organisations are going to be more culturally diverse as their costumers become increasingly multicultural. However, RPL procedures are expensive, costing roughly between €700 and €1,500 per person depending on the complexity of the procedure and whether a

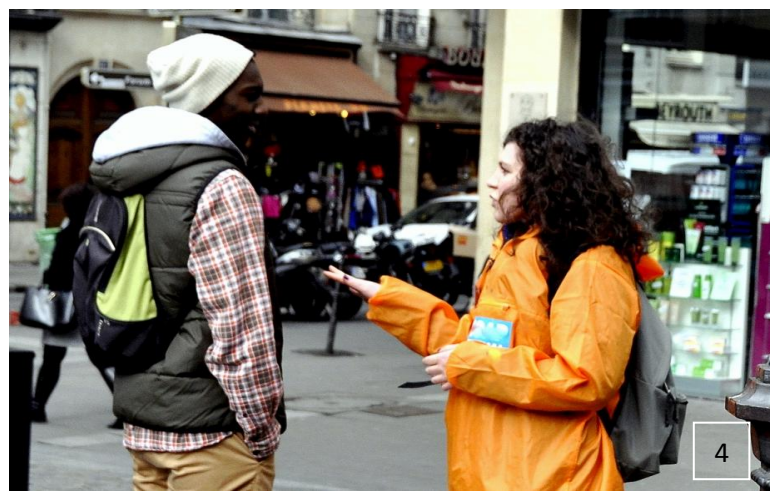
person is employed or not (accessibility). While some collective agreements have included statements on workers' right to an RPL procedure and employers' responsibility for (parts of) the costs, it is questionable whether RPL is affordable for all unemployed TCNs. In the past, there were special funds available for such persons but these have been cut as a result of austerity measures (sustainability). Reinstalling these funds for TCNs is recommended. Whereas it is foremost the responsibility of employers to 'accept' and start working with diversity, it is up to the employee – the TCN – to present him or herself professionally. For this, evidence shows, guided programmes are most effective but expensive. In the meantime, it is recommended to better inform TCNs about the list of organisations that already have experience with hiring TCNs and received the status of 'recognized referent' by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). Migrants could 'target' these organisations as they are allowed easier recruitment procedures and likely to be more open to diversity: <https://ind.nl/zakelijk/openbaar-register>

Participants of the working groups reached consensus that developing a new SKC audit scheme or a tool designed to improve recognition of SKC or RPL would run a high risk of duplication of already existing audit schemes. Instead, designing an instrument that increases the use of existing instruments (accessibility and sustainability) could be a way forward. During the working group sessions it became clear that many TCNs are not aware of the tools and opportunities for support in using these tools available to them in the Netherlands.

One of the options to explore is the development of an online 'Recognition Finder'. This recognition finding tool would be designed for migrants to find the right instrument or method that is relevant for their career goals and for employers who wish to benefit from a more culturally diverse staff and at the same time support labour market integration of migrants. Within the group of TCNs four separate groups could be distinguished on the basis of their ambitions:

- Recent arrivals who wish to gain awareness of their SKC;
- Migrants who want to develop specific competences to qualify for work;
- Migrants who believe they bring the relevant skills and wish to make the step to paid work;
- Migrants who have already found paid work in the Netherlands but wish to improve their career opportunities.

In the framework of the DIVERSE project, a prototype of such a Recognition Finder has been developed, including four





modules targeting the four different groups. This prototype is initially developed for migrants, but could also be beneficial for natives who lack qualifications. In 2015, the Dutch DIVERSE team will cooperate with five European partners on the development of a tool that can be applied across Europe. In addition, the team welcomes ideas and suggestions from interested parties in the Netherlands to further develop the Recognition Finder for the Dutch context.

Participating organisations

Actiz (association for health care providers), CINOP/Knowledge Center for RPL, COA Nijmegen (asylum seeker centre), Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers, Committee for Foreign Accredited Health Workers, Dichterbij (health institute), Dutch Council for Refugees (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland), Europass, Immigrant Advisory Council of the municipality of Nijmegen, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Kantharos (consultancy for diversity management), Olympia Employment, Radboud University Medical Centre International Office, Regional Teaching Centre Nijmegen for secondary vocational education (ROC), Sane Consultancy Services (consultancy in human performance), Scouting Gelderland, SEBA cultuurmanagement bv, University of Applied Sciences Arnhem-Nijmegen (HAN), UAF (University Assistance Fund), Wemos Foundation (advocacy for health access), Zahet (health care provider).

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Further reading

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Colophon

Authors

Niels Grootjans
Lars Paardekooper
Roos Pijpers (r.pijpers@fm.ru.nl)
Pascal Beckers
Ton van Naerssen
Lothar Smith

Implementing institute

Radboud University Nijmegen
Nijmegen School of Management
Department of Geography, Planning and Environment

www.ru.nl/gpe

Contact

Visiting address

Thomas van Aquinostraat 3
6525 GD Nijmegen
The Netherlands

T: +31 (0) 24 3616161
F: +31 (0) 24 3564606

Postal address

P.O. Box 9108
6500 HK Nijmegen
The Netherlands

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