

 **WRR-Policy Brief 1**
*Making Romanian and
Bulgarian Migration Work in
The Netherlands*

The opening up of the Dutch labour market to Romanian and Bulgarian workers has thrown a spotlight on both the justified concerns and the untapped opportunities in relation to European labour migration.

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Summary

On 1 January 2014 the Dutch labour market was thrown open to Romanian and Bulgarian workers. This has once again put intra-European labour migration in the spotlight. To date, the economic benefits of European labour migration have outweighed the costs. To ensure that the free movement of workers remains socially and economically viable into the longer term, it makes sense to rethink the current policy.

- There are justifiable concerns about the lower end of the labour market. Attention is needed for the socioeconomic integration of European settlement migrants, the unintended side-effects of the flexible labour market and the unfair competition with the existing labour force.
- At the upper end of the labour market, there are untapped opportunities. It is advisable to attract and retain European study migrants and highly skilled labour migrants. There are several ways of doing this: by investing in the knowledge infrastructure; by creating a welcoming climate; and by offering careers at a sufficiently high level.
- It is important to develop a broader, forward-looking policy vision in which the justified concerns and untapped opportunities in relation to labour migration are given a central place. Attention is also needed for the broad cooperative relationships between host countries and countries of origin.



The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) explores future developments with a view to supporting government policy.

WRR-Policy Brief

WRR-Policy Briefs are short publications which reflect on a current policy theme from the basis of the WRR's scientific knowledge.

January 2014, no. 1

Publisher: WRR

Editing: WRR

Translation: Julian Ross

Design and layout: cimon communicatie

ISSN: 2352-1899

Please cite this publication as:

Kremer, M. and E. Schrijvers (2014) 'Making Romanian and Bulgarian Migration Work in The Netherlands', WRR-Policy Brief, no 1, January 2014, The Hague: WRR.

1

Background: Romanian and Bulgarian labour migration

focusing among other things on the likely number of immigrants from both countries. While it is not known how many immigrants will come to the Netherlands in the future, intra-European migration is already a fact.

Together with the free movement of goods, services and capital, the free movement of workers is one of the four fundamental freedoms of the European Union. This freedom became particularly evident following the accession of eight Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union; starting in 2004, labour migrants began moving from Eastern to Western Europe, including the Netherlands. It is now estimated that there are 340,000 migrants from that region living in the Netherlands. Despite the transitional measures, this number is thought to include between 34,000 and 44,000 Bulgarians and between 62,000 and 72,000 Romanians.¹ They entered the Netherlands as self-employed or as students, or found employment with a work permit or as illegal workers. Romanians and Bulgarians will become a more visible category in the migration statistics now that (since January 2014) they are able to register as legal workers.²

The opening up of the labour market to Romanians and Bulgarians places the existing intra-European migration in the spotlight once again, as well as the costs and benefits of labour migration. This Policy Brief applies insights gained from the earlier publication of the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) publication *Making Migration Work. The future of labour migration in the European Union*³ to the question of Romanian and Bulgarian labour migration. There are justifiable concerns about that migration, but also untapped opportunities. The central question addressed is: how can existing and future intra-European labour migration be made to work, including migration from Romania and Bulgaria?

With effect from 1 January 2014 the Dutch labour market, like that in other member states, has been opened up to Romanian and Bulgarian workers. This has given rise to many discussions,

1. Van der Heijden et al. 2013. According to official figures, there are 21,000 Bulgarians and 17,500 Romanians living in the Netherlands.
2. The other side of the story is that the number of illegal Romanians and Bulgarians will probably fall sharply, as happened when Polish migrants were permitted to seek work legally on the Dutch labour market. See Van der Heijden et al. 2011.
3. *Making Migration Work. The future of labour migration in the European Union* (J.W. Holtslag, M. Kremer and E. Schrijvers, eds.), The Hague, 2013.

2

Costs and benefits of labour migration

Migration raises concerns that the economic costs will outweigh the benefits. In the Netherlands, those concerns are fuelled partly by past experiences with ‘guest workers’ in the 1960s and 70s, when Dutch employers recruited unskilled men from the Moroccan Rif and Turkish high

plains to work in sectors which, as it transpired, were soon relocated abroad. The costs of their unemployment – including in the form of benefits – was borne by the community, or the government; the benefits went to employers, as WRR calculations confirm.⁴

According to a recent OECD study, in most countries today the fiscal benefits of labour migration are greater than the fiscal costs.⁵ One reason for this is that, unlike in the era of guest worker migration, access to social security is now more restricted. Moreover, labour migration has taken on a new guise migrants are (slightly) better educated and are more often able to return to their country of origin. The recent labour migration from Central and Eastern Europe, in particular, appears to have a positive impact on the public finances. Calculations for the United Kingdom – which has received the most European labour migrants – and for Spain and Sweden show that they make a positive contribution to the national coffers.⁶ Research on temporary labour migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in the Netherlands reaches the same conclusion: a temporary labour migrant makes a net positive contribution of 1,800 euros to the Treasury each year.⁷

This effect is amplified by the fact that European migrants pay taxes but make little use of publicly funded provisions, including social assistance benefits: although the share of social assistance benefit recipients among Central and Eastern European labour migrants in the Netherlands has risen by 1 percent, it is still low.⁸ There is also no convincing empirical evidence for the existence of European benefit tourism. European migrants do not go to a country to take advantage of the welfare state; they go mainly in order to work.^{9 10}

4. WRR 2001; Roodenburg et al. 2003; Nyfer 2010; Hartog 2011.

5. OECD 2013.

6. Dustmann et al. 2010; Boeri 2009; Boeri and Monti 2007; MAC 2012; Wadensjö 2012.

7. Berkhout and Hof 2012. Unlike other countries, in the Netherlands research has only been carried out on the economic costs and benefits of temporary labour migration. We are not aware of any calculations for recent settlement migration in the Netherlands.

8. CBS 2013.

9. Benefit tourism is the phenomenon where migrants move to countries in order to receive social security benefits (Borjas 1999). A limited number of studies do indeed find a link between immigrant numbers and the generosity of the social security system, but that relationship is often weak (De Giorgi and Pellizzari 2009; Razin et al. 2011). There are many other studies where no relationship whatsoever is found between migration and social security (Roodenburg et al. 2003; Nowotny 2011; Barrett and Maître 2011; Lessenski and Angelov 2013; ICF GHK 2013). It is however possible that people prefer to stay in the Netherlands if they receive social security benefits.

10. It is very important to note that the Dutch supplementary benefits system – like the British and Danish variants – is susceptible to fraud. The greater opportunities for free movement within Europe lend fraud and crime an international character.

However, some caution is called for when painting this positive picture. The costs and benefits for the public purse depend on the labour market position of immigrants in the long term. It is therefore important from an economic and social perspective that if labour migrants settle in the Netherlands, they hold on to the work they have. That is the lesson

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from our guest worker past. The costs of labour migration increase when people – and their children – are not in work.¹¹ It is also sensible to apply a broader, more dynamic perspective on the economic costs and benefits of labour migration.¹² Instead of simply adding up the numbers – the ‘accountant’s approach’ to immigration – we look at the degree to which labour migration contributes to a country’s economic growth and development.

The economic and social benefits of labour migration are moreover increased where labour migrants are more highly skilled.¹³ The benefits for the Treasury are greater: highly skilled migrants pay more tax and are less likely to become unemployed and have to rely on benefits. They are also very useful for the Dutch labour market and economy: migrants with high-grade technical skills can for example fill (temporary) shortages and offer companies specific knowledge about foreign markets or innovations happening elsewhere.¹⁴ The importance of such labour migration for the economy was also recently confirmed in a study by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) in the UK, which found that the presence of labour migrants has increased the productivity of the United Kingdom.¹⁵

At present, the Netherlands attracts a relatively high proportion of low-skilled migrants but not many who are highly skilled: only a fifth of labour migrants to the Netherlands fall into the latter category, and highly skilled migrants make up just over 2 percent of the entire labour force (figure 1 and 2). Labour migrants in the Netherlands thus have lower skill levels compared with the existing labour force, a third of which is highly skilled.¹⁶ The Netherlands also has relatively few highly skilled migrants when compared with the United

11. Roodenburg et al. 2003; Nyfer 2010.

12. Nijkamp et al. 2010; SER 2007 and 2013.

13. OECD 2013. See also CPB 2012 and SER 2013.

14. Nijkamp et al. 2010; Saxenian 2006; Goldin et al. 2010; Malchow-Møller et al. 2011.

15. Rolfe et al. 2013.

16. CBS/statline: 33 percent of the population aged between 25 and 65 years have a higher professional or university education.

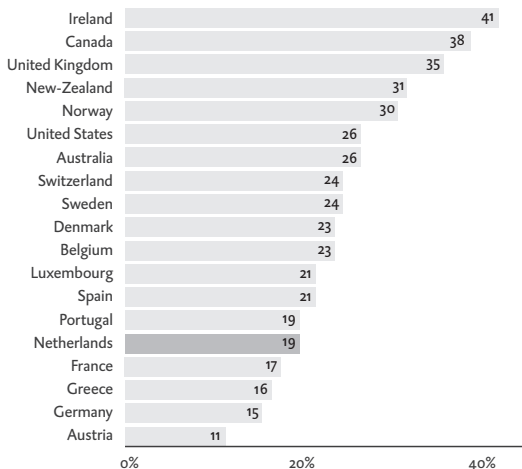
Kingdom and Ireland, but also with Sweden and Belgium. It is therefore important not only to improve labour migration at the lower end of the labour market, but also to seek to attract and retain more highly skilled labour migrants.

Figure 1 Highly skilled migrants as a percentage of the total labour force



Source: Boston Consulting Group 2012, based on OECD figures

Figure 2 Highly skilled migrants as a percentage of the total number of migrants



Source: Boston Consulting Group 2012, based on OECD figures

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Making labour migration work at the lower end of the labour market

Although today's European labour migrants are more highly skilled than the guest workers in the past, a substantial proportion of them still end up at the bottom of the labour market, in flexible jobs with few prospects.¹⁷ This seems to apply particularly for the Bulgarians already present in the Netherlands, who appear on average to have an even lower education

level than the Bulgarians in Bulgaria itself. Research suggests that almost a third of them have received only elementary education.¹⁸ The Romanians present in the Netherlands generally appear to have a higher education level.¹⁹ However, the Roma people among the Romanians and Bulgarians in the Netherlands have received very little or no schooling.²⁰

What policy is needed to address these vulnerabilities at the lower end of the labour market? How can we ensure that the tragedy of the guest worker history is not repeated, including from the perspective of the labour migrants themselves? And in addition: how can we protect workers against unfair competition from outside?

Less flexibility constrains demand

Labour migrants – including Romanians and Bulgarians – come to the Netherlands if there is demand for workers. Put differently: they come because employers need them. As a Parliamentary inquiry has confirmed, some employers deliberately infringe legal provisions and collective bargaining agreements in recruiting these workers.²¹ The government has sufficient powers to enforce the law and thus to reduce the demand for cheap labour (and to prevent exclusion of labour migrants), and enforcement has in fact been a priority of the last two Dutch governments.

More complex is the fact that demand for foreign labour is also driven by legally permitted arrangements on the Dutch labour market, such as temporary contracts, payroll constructions, self-employment and temping agency work. The flexible labour market and labour migration have become each other's allies. Efforts to reduce labour migration at the bottom of the labour market will therefore have to focus on the sources of the flexible labour market. This may mean that temping agencies, temporary contracts and the rules

17. Engbersen et al. 2011; Gijsberts and Lubbers 2013.

18. Bulgarians are accordingly employed primarily at the lower end of the labour market, for example in cleaning jobs and the hospitality and construction industries – some of them in the black economy.

19. Gijsberts and Lubbers 2013; Engbersen et al. 2011.

20. There are about 10-12 million Roma living across the 28 member states of the European Union. Of this total, an estimated 750,000 live in Bulgaria (10% of the population) and 1,850,000 in Romania (8.5% of the population).

21. TK 2011-2012.

on self-employment need to be held up to scrutiny again, but from the perspective of their significance for immigration. Making the jobs filled by labour migrants less flexible might

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make them more attractive (once again) to employees and jobseekers already present in the Netherlands.

Fair competition

In the Netherlands, too, concerns are voiced about the labour market position of the existing labour force based on the idea that migrants 'steal' jobs. There is little scientific evidence of displacement effects at *macro-level*: economists in the Netherlands and elsewhere have repeatedly reached the conclusion that, on balance, labour migration ultimately produces virtually no displacement effect.²² Labour migrants normally enter the country only when the economy is growing, and often work in a specific area of the segmented labour market, where they do jobs that the existing workforce prefer not to do. Genuine displacement by Central and Eastern European labour migrants has rarely occurred in practice, either in the United Kingdom or in the Netherlands.²³

However, displacement can occur in specific, shrinking sectors – i.e. at *micro-level* – especially if those sectors fail to innovate adequately.²⁴ Where they occur, displacement effects often impact on earlier migrants.²⁵ In the Netherlands, these include Turkish and Moroccan migrants, their (now grown-up) children, and refugees. Like many of the new European migrants, these groups work in the flexible lower end of the segmented labour market. During the recent economic crisis, they have also been the groups who have become unemployed on a large scale. White native Dutch workers are generally better rooted in the Dutch economy.²⁶ The policy on the arrival of Romanians and Bulgarians should therefore also include attention for the 'old categories' of migrants, who are often in a weak position on the Dutch labour market.

22. Chorny et al. 2007; Clemens 2011; Berkhout et al. 2011; Wadensjö 2012; Ruhs 2013.

23. Berkhout et al. 2011; MAC 2012; Ruhs 2012.

24. Van der Waal 2009.

25. See also Cedefop 2011; Dhéret et al. 2013.

26. CBS 2013.

The existing labour force can also suffer from unfair competition from seconded foreign workers – people who work in the Netherlands but are employed by a European company (or manpower services agency). This (legal) construction is especially common on large – often publicly tendered – construction projects.²⁷ A law to protect workers has come into force in the Netherlands (the Terms of Employment (Cross-border Work) Act, or WAGA), which gives seconded workers virtually the same rights as ‘ordinary’ employees, in the sense that the essence of Dutch collective labour agreements also applies for them. In practice, however, there are many grey areas and enforcement of national legislation is made more difficult by the international nature of secondment constructions. As well as attention from the national government and employers’ and employees’ representatives, therefore, this is an issue which demands attention from the European Union.

There can also be legal competition in relation to the payment of social insurance contributions. The contributions for seconded employees are paid in the country of origin: that is where the labour migrant builds up his or her pension and/or unemployment benefit entitlements. Those contributions may be lower elsewhere than in the Netherlands; that is certainly the case in Romania and Bulgaria.²⁸ This makes domestic workers more expensive and enables employers to derive considerable cost advantages by using labour migrants. As the agreements on this issue are made at European level, the Netherlands can join with other countries in making proposals in Brussels to raise contributions to the same level as in the host country. The contribution differential that arises as a result could be paid into a national or European mobility fund, for example for labour migrants who lose out in terms of social security.²⁹

Investing in socioeconomic integration

Looking to the future, it is important to invest in the socioeconomic integration of European settlement migrants. Not every migrant is looking to settle in the host country, and a striking characteristic of European migration is that a proportion of it is (very) temporary. New technologies which make it easier to maintain ties with the country of origin (Internet, mobile telephony), cheap flights and the open borders within Europe are giving rise to ‘euro-commuters’.³⁰ Already, an estimated 350,000 Poles and between 280,000 and 360,000 Romanians have returned to their country of origin, partly because of the crisis elsewhere in Europe.³¹ It is also estimated that half the Poles who migrated to the Netherlands have since

27. A total of around 82,000 seconded European workers are employed in the Netherlands, of whom 14,671 originate from Poland (ISMERI 2012), so far only 959 from Romania and 392 from Bulgaria.

28. Regioplan 2012.

29. See also Kremer 2013.

30. Sandu 2013.

31. Dhéret et al. 2013.

returned home.³² Nonetheless, a proportion of the new migrants will wish to settle in the Netherlands.³³ It is very plausible that these will mainly be the lower skilled labour migrants, with the more highly skilled returning to their country of origin.

Schooling, language training and employment counselling can prevent settlement migrants – who are in a weak labour market position – from eventually becoming unemployed. Without social investments, the tragedy of the guest work history could be repeated. Labour migrants have a responsibility themselves in avoiding this fate, but so do employers and government, which also derive economic benefits from labour migrants. Employers and temporary employment agencies currently do little more than offer work and possibly help with housing. The Dutch government also takes relatively little financial responsibility for the socioeconomic integration of labour migrants. Civic integration in the Netherlands is for example mainly a financial responsibility of migrants themselves. In traditional migration

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countries such as Canada and Australia, and also in Scandinavia – including Denmark – the situation is different: here, the government contributes to language teaching for migrants and often also provides employment counselling.³⁴

The consequences of limited socioeconomic integration often land on the doorstep of local authorities. Some Dutch cities, such as Rotterdam and The Hague, as well as some villages, especially in the provinces of Noord-Brabant and Limburg, are confronted with a concentration of new, mainly low-skilled Europeans, many of whom have an inadequate command of Dutch. Among the new groups of European labour migrants, the Turkish-Bulgarian group are in a particularly worrying position in view of their very low incomes and the fact that they are employed in the informal circuit.³⁵ Local authorities need more support for socioeconomic integration from both national government and employers. There is already a surfeit of demand for such things as provision of information, housing and schooling.³⁶

32. Nicolaas 2011.

33. Engbersen 2012.

34. Collett 2011; Kremer 2013.

35. Engbersen et al. 2011; Gijssberts and Lubbers 2013.

36. Engbersen 2012.

In short, making European labour migration work better at the bottom of the labour market serves a dual purpose. It would improve the chances of success of migrants and generate social and economic benefits in the long term. At the same time, it would create a more equal labour market position for employees in a Europe without borders, so that domestic workers would have less reason to fear losing their jobs due to competition from Central and Eastern European labour migrants.

4 Making labour migration work at the top of the labour market

Only a fifth of all labour migrants in the Netherlands have a higher education background, and just over 2 percent of the Dutch labour force consists of highly skilled migrants (figure 1 and 2). The Netherlands could place greater value on highly skilled labour and study migrants, including from Romania and Bulgaria.

Although the majority of Bulgarians in the Netherlands have a very low education level, there are also some very highly educated Bulgarians. Also, no fewer than 38 percent of the Romanians living in the Netherlands are highly educated (compare that with 19% of

The Netherlands could place greater value on highly skilled labour and study migrants, including from Romania and Bulgaria.

Polish migrants).³⁸ In addition, a large number of Bulgarian and Romanian students are in higher professional and university education in the Netherlands, also in economic and technical disciplines, and their number is increasing year on year. After Germany, China and Belgium, Bulgaria is now the fourth most important country of origin for foreign students in the Netherlands, with over 1,600 students; in 2007-2008 there were 711. The number of Romanian students is also considerable, at 1,050.³⁹ Whether these students will remain in the Netherlands after graduating remains to be seen; most foreign students return home after completing their studies.⁴⁰ This applies especially for Bulgarian students, who do not feel at home in the Netherlands.⁴¹ How can the Netherlands do more to retain the qualities of these study migrants, and of highly skilled labour migrants in general?

37. Gijsberts and Lubbers 2013.

38. Engbersen et al. 2011.

39. Nuffic 2012.

40. SER 2013.

41. Gijsberts and Lubbers 2013.

Any bid to attract and retain highly skilled migrants stands or falls on three factors: offering a pleasant living environment in which these migrants feel welcome; a good knowledge infrastructure: talent attracts talent; and above all good career prospects.⁴² Highly skilled Romanians and Bulgarians, in particular, often work in jobs for which they are overqualified. Figures for Europe as a whole show that 21 percent of Bulgarians and 12 percent of Romanians have a high qualification level, whereas only 11 percent and 2 percent, respectively, are performing highly skilled work.⁴³ The phenomenon of ‘brain waste’ is alive and well both in Europe as a whole and in the Netherlands.

When seeking to attract and retain highly skilled labour migrants, it is important to take into account the interests of the origin countries, even though these are sometimes conflicting. On the one hand, the freedom of movement is welcomed in Bulgaria and Romania as a great good: under the Communist regime, freedom of movement was severely restricted in both countries. Bulgaria and Romania also receive a great deal of money through remittances – transfers of money by migrants abroad – though these amounts have reduced since the onset of the crisis.⁴⁴ In addition, the better educated migrants have transnational knowledge networks and trading relations which can help improve the economy in their country of origin.⁴⁵ In this sense, these countries are enjoying a ‘brain gain’.

At the same time, both countries are experiencing a ‘brain drain’. Concerns are expressed in both Romania and Bulgaria about the departure of highly skilled workers, especially in specific sectors such as health care.⁴⁶ As an example, 7 percent of Romanian doctors have emigrated.⁴⁷ However, emigration of highly skilled workers is driven mainly by strong push factors: internal problems in the country of origin, such as very low wages and a dysfunctional healthcare system. Doctors are for example often unwilling to move to outlying regions, even though work is available there.⁴⁸ Such a brain drain thus serves to highlight problems within the country of origin.

42. Papademetriou 2012.

43. Holland et al. 2011; Galgóczi et al. 2012.

44. At one time this amount even exceeded the European social transfers (Angelov 2011). In 2012, some 3.5 billion dollars was transferred to Romania, equivalent to around 2.1 percent of Romanian GNP (in 2008 the figure was 9.2 billion). Transfers to Bulgaria amounted to 1.4 billion dollars in 2012 (2.8 percent of GNP), compared with 1.9 billion dollars in 2008) (Wereldbank 2013).

45. WRR 2010.

46. Ulrich et al. 2011; Moutafova 2011.

47. Wereldbank 2013.

48. WRR 2010.

Making more constructive use of the labour migration of highly skilled Romanians and Bulgarians requires creativity: host countries could for example invest in the country of origin (for example in the healthcare system or in technical education) and could organise rotation schemes for highly skilled labour migrants and study migrants. The latter initiative would ensure that a proportion of highly skilled workers return to their country of origin whilst still maintaining their ties – albeit not physical – with the Netherlands. The knowledge and economic networks which this would generate could in turn boost the economic benefits of labour migration for the Netherlands.

5 Broader partnerships

The contacts between the Dutch government and the governments of Bulgaria and Romania should not be limited to the recent agreements on enforcing labour market legislation, however important they may be. This would be ignoring opportunities for all concerned. It is just as important to seek to develop broader (knowledge-based) economic relations between host and origin countries, for example in relation to training of middle-ranking technical staff, partnerships between universities and knowledge networks. Dutch business also has a great deal to gain from

*...the Netherlands is one of the biggest investors in both
Romania and Bulgaria.*

this, both in the Netherlands and in the origin countries: the Netherlands is one of the biggest investors in both Romania and Bulgaria. There is also scope for more cooperation on socioeconomic issues, such as the integration of (unskilled) Roma both in the Netherlands and in Romania and Bulgaria, and the repatriation of Romanians and Bulgarians if immigration has not delivered what they hoped. In short, it would be wise to discuss the concerns and opportunities of the free movement of workers as part of a broader package of cooperative relationships between origin and host countries.

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