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**Article**

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## Article

# Highly-Skilled Migrants, Gender, and Well-Being in the Eindhoven Region. An Intersectional Analysis

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**Abstract:** The shortage of skilled labor and the global competition for highly qualified employees has challenged Dutch companies to develop strategies to attract Highly Skilled Migrants (HSMs). This paper presents a study exploring how well-being is experienced by HSMs living in the Eindhoven region, a critical Dutch Tech Hub. Our population includes highly skilled women and men who moved to Eindhoven for work or to follow their partner trajectory. By analyzing data according to these four groups, we detect significant differences among HSMs. Given the exploratory nature of this work, we use a qualitative method based on semi-structured interviews. Our findings show that gender plays a crucial role in experienced well-being for almost every dimension analyzed. Using an intersectional approach, we challenge previous models of well-being, and we detect different factors that influence the respondents' well-being when intersecting with gender. Those factors are migratory status, the reason to migrate, parenthood, and origin (EU/non-EU). When all the factors intersect, participants' well-being decreases in several areas: career, financial satisfaction, subjective well-being, and social relationships. Significant gender differences are also found in migration strategies. Finally, we contribute to debates about skilled migration and well-being by including an intersectional perspective.



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**Keywords:** Highly Skilled Migrants; well-being; intersectionality; gender; The Netherlands; Eindhoven

## 1. Introduction

The population decline and the shortage of skilled labor have challenged European countries and companies to engage in the global battle for “the best and the brightest”. In this framework, over the last twenty years, numerous EU countries, including The Netherlands, have started to develop policies and strategies to attract and retain HSMs (Tarique and Schuler 2010; Suutari et al. 2014; SEO 2015; Cerna and Czaika 2016; Shirmohammadi et al. 2019). The Eindhoven region, also known as Brainport Eindhoven<sup>1</sup>, consists of Eindhoven and 20 surrounding municipalities in The Netherlands' Southeast. In the last 15 years, the area has turned into the high-tech industrial hub of The Netherlands and started to attract highly qualified employees from every corner of the world (OECD 2013). With its 13,100 Knowledge Migrants (KMs)<sup>2</sup> in 2015, the Brainport Eindhoven represents the preferred working area for economically active international employees in the South of the Country, 75% of which are males (Decisio Report 2017).

Several studies challenge the idea that Highly Skilled Migration (HSM) leads only to empowerment or emancipation for migrants, especially women (Riaño 2011; Bastia 2011; Ramos and Martín-Palomino 2015). Research shows that women represent the most highly qualified people who move for non-work-related reasons and, therefore, do not enter the country through a highly skilled migration scheme (Kofman and Raghuram 2006; Riaño 2011; Aure 2013). This means that migrant women are more vulnerable in the labor market.

Since migrants often leave their homes searching for a better life, measuring their subjective well-being can indicate whether they achieve this goal (IOM 2013; Spadavecchia

2017). However, research on links between HSM and well-being is still scant (Spadavecchia 2017). Currently, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no studies are looking at this relation from an intersectional perspective. We argue that using an intersectional approach is crucial for understanding the differences in experienced well-being among different groups of HSMs and for detecting possible inequalities. In this framework, our study investigates how HSMs experience well-being in the Region and how those experiences differ due to one's gender, parenthood, origin and Migration reason, and status.

The main research questions guiding the study are:

- (1) How do HSMs experience their well-being in the Eindhoven region?
- (2) What (if any) are the differences in experienced well-being among HSMs who moved for a job and those who moved due to their partner's trajectory?
- (3) How do migration status, gender, origin, and parenthood play a role in the experienced well-being of HSM living in the Eindhoven region?

The study builds on models of well-being proposed by IOM (2013), by Seligman (2011, 2018), and by OECD (Durand 2015; OECD 2017), on intersectionality and literature focusing on highly skilled migrant women and global talent management (see par 3; 4 and 5).

Together with Nash (2008), Kynsilehto (2011), Riaño (2011), Rodriguez and Scurry (2019), this study challenges the existing idea of discrimination and privilege in migration studies by placing intersectionality across different scales. By showing how the same subject with intersected identities could embody both discrimination and privilege, we argue that privilege is a relational and situational concept.

The article is divided into eight sections. The following section (two) briefly introduces the Dutch perspective and definitions of HSMs. Section three introduces the critical concepts of the study and discusses the connection between highly-skilled migration, the idea of privilege, and highly skilled migrant women. Part four focuses on intersectionality. The following section presents some literature on well-being and outlines how we apply this concept to our study. We then present the methodology (six) and findings (seven), followed by the conclusions (eight).

## 2. Criteria for the Definition of Highly Skilled Migrants

The Dutch institutional setting for entering as Knowledge Migrants (KM)<sup>3</sup> requires that the migrants enter the Country based on a job offer from a registered company and a minimum salary<sup>4</sup>. Using the salary threshold and sponsorship criteria to define HSMs, the government excludes all highly qualified people who entered the Country for non-job-related purposes.

In this study, we use the education criterion to define HSMs. Thus, we consider highly skilled people who hold at least a bachelor's or college degree when entering the Country (Aure 2013; Spadavecchia 2017). Using this criterion, we challenge the definition of HSMs proposed by the government, and we detect differences among people who migrated to enhance their career to those who moved due to their partner's trajectory. This criterion allows us to identify possible inequalities and discrimination.

## 3. Highly Skilled Migration, the Concept of Privilege, and Highly Skilled Migrant Women

Over the last two decades, studies on highly skilled migrants have increased. However, studies focusing on highly skilled migrant women are more recent. Kofman (2000) critique studies on highly skilled migration for having overlooked the employment situation of women entering the Country as accompanying partner. Along the same lines, Kofman and Raghuram (2006) and Docquier et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of looking at highly qualified migrant women to change the dominant narrative that sees migrant women only as dependent migrants of a male first migrant. On the idea of changing the prevailing narrative depicting highly skilled migrants as young males, Docquier et al. (2009) have created the first database on highly skilled migrant women. Ever since, several scholars

have been pursuing the visibility of highly skilled migrant women and their migratory patterns and strategies. In 2013, [Spadavecchia \(2013\)](#) provided a macro-level analysis of women's migration patterns from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to Europe. Her finding shows that the number of SSA highly qualified migrant women in Europe is rising and that migratory routes and patterns vary. [Elo et al. \(2020\)](#) suggest that despite the increasing feminization of migration, highly skilled female migrants' contributions to economies through careers or entrepreneurship remain overlooked.

Over the last decade, several studies have reviewed the common idea that highly skilled migration leads only to empowerment or emancipation for migrants, especially women ([Riaño 2011](#); [Bastia 2011](#)). [Ramos and Martín-Palomino \(2015\)](#) found that while international mobility may cause emancipation for women, new environments may relegate them to traditional roles. According to [Riaño \(2011\)](#), migration can represent a loss of social position for migrants who do not migrate for labor-related reasons. Those groups are more vulnerable to progressive deskilling, loss of confidence, and autonomy due to their economic dependence on their partners or welfare support ([Iredale 2005](#)). According to [Slade et al. \(2013\)](#), every year, thousands of migrants face barriers to getting a job that matches their education, skills, and work experience. Such restrictions include the non-recognition of foreign credentials, linguistic difficulties, limited social and professional networks, and local work experience. Thus, many migrants engage in volunteer work to connect to the labor market.

For many HSMs, migration does not inevitably reduce inequality but may generate new forms of social inequality.

Moreover, [Riaño \(2011\)](#) finds that traditional ideas about gender roles, discourses about ethnic differences, and discriminatory migration policies intersect to create boundaries for skilled migrant women accessing the labor market's upper segments.

Finally, [Aure \(2013, p. 277\)](#) distinguishes between skilled migrants and skilled migration. She points out that while HSM is related to migrants' legal entry (legal status) as highly qualified workers in specific highly-skilled company schemes, highly skilled migrants may also enter a country through different non-work channels.

Therefore, a focus on HSMs can critique and broaden concepts of skilled migration and add knowledge on how entry routes influence these migrations ([Aure 2013](#); [Spadavecchia 2017](#)). Research shows that women represent the majority of highly qualified people moving for non-work-related reasons, and, consequently, not entering the country through a highly-skilled migration scheme ([Kofman and Raghuram 2006](#); [Kley and Mulder 2010](#); [Riaño 2011](#); [Aure 2013](#); [Vergés Bosch and González Ramos 2013](#)). This means that migrant women are more vulnerable in the labor market. Structural constraints, such as labor conditions and family structure, limit migrant women's agency ([Charrad 2010](#); [Ramos and Martín-Palomino 2015](#)). [Shirmohammadi et al. \(2019\)](#) detected gender as a crucial moderator for qualification-matched employment. This pattern is most frequent among women migrants entering the host country as dependents ([Cooke et al. 2013](#); [Fossland 2013](#)). [Iredale \(2005, p. 163\)](#) argues that family obligations, gender bias, and the inability to take assessment procedures and training limit the ability of highly skilled migrant women to enter their training occupation. According to the author, women often delay applying to recognize their qualification for the accreditation process until their partner has completed it. This leads to a delay in learning the destination country's language and remaining at home to attend to the family's needs. The result is a longer working gap in women's curriculum and limits knowledge of the destination country's language, which decreases the chances of women entering the occupation of their training. A small proportion of skilled migrant females entered highly-paid jobs that matched their qualifications ([Gandini and Lozano-Ascencio 2016](#); [Kler 2006](#)).

Moreover, women migrants' under-representation in high-demand occupations such as business administration, engineering, and IT and their presence in education, health, and culture-related professions partially accounted for their disadvantaged position in the labor market ([Gandini and Lozano-Ascencio 2016](#)).

#### 4. Intersectionality in Migration Studies

In migration studies, intersectionality is a lens providing multi-dimensional understandings of how gender is co-constructed in migration processes specific to its context. For example, Bastia (2011) included gender, race, and ethnicity as crucial analytical concepts to understand Bolivian migrants' everyday lives. Other studies included the dimensions of disability, sexuality, nationality, and migration conditions to the original framework of gender, race, ethnicity, and class (Valentine 2007; Chow 2011). Scholars also use intersectionality to understand the experience of highly-skilled migrant women (Riaño 2011; Kaushik and Walsh 2018; Rodriguez and Scurry 2019). This body of literature widened the scope of research by questioning who should be considered an intersectional subject and the complex relations between contested identities and structures. Kaushik and Walsh (2018) stressed the importance of using an intersectional lens in highly skilled migration studies. Kynsilehto (2011) challenges the current discourses concerning HSMs as male elite, autonomous, or the privileged by using the life stories of Maghrebi women in France. The analysis shows a variety of ties and characteristics matter, besides the label "highly-skilled." Studies further question the terminologies used to categorize migrants in current literature that often ignores the subject's intersected nature (Riaño 2011; Webb 2015). Riaño (2011) discusses how gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position influence highly skilled migrant women's access to labor. Webb (2015) explores the migratory trajectories of highly qualified female migrants who came to Australia as partners, often resulting in career disruption, re-domestication, and a re-feminization of health and human service work. These processes are negotiated by gender, ethnicity, race, and life stage. An intersectional approach reveals the nature of the Anglo-Eurocentric flow of power in migration policy and practice, which treats migration experience as linear and rational (Webb 2015). Current studies show that the lack of an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach in studying women's migration has led to an inadequate understanding of migrant women's contribution to global business and entrepreneurship (Elo et al. 2020; Aman et al. 2020). Empirically, current studies combine intersectionality, and HSMs are still scarce. Rodriguez and Scurry (2019) argue gender and foreignness intersect to shape negatively skilled migrant women's experiences in Qatar. More specifically, fewer studies (e.g., Riaño 2011; Webb 2015) have teased out the differentiated experience of the HSMs who moved to follow another highly-skilled migrant versus those who moved to reunite with a native-born national. In this framework, our study intends to combine the theoretical approach of intersectionality and studies on well-being to find out the dimensions and intersected identities that matter in interpreting the nuanced experience of HSMs (men and women) who moved for a job or due to their partner's trajectory.

#### 5. Well-Being and Migration

Over the last two decades, studies on migration have shown an increasing interest in migrants' well-being. Research has looked at how well-being constitutes a push or pull factor for migrants. Liem et al. (2006) looked at the impact of migration in Asia on the well-being of women, children, and the elderly who had been 'left behind'. Wiesmn and Brasher (2008) argued that well-being differs from concepts such as happiness and life satisfaction because well-being is situated in a broader construct called 'quality of life'. Safi (2010) looked at the differences experienced in well-being among migrants and non-migrants, finding that migrants experience a lower sense of well-being than non-migrants. Graham and Markowitz (2011) state that unhappiness drives migration, and migration creates unhappiness, and those factors reinforce one another.

Vathi and King (2017) argue that return migration policies strongly influence the well-being of return migrants, especially when migrants' well-being is not part of the policy. On the contrary, policies enhancing premigration and postmigration well-being will contribute to a safer and better-controlled migration (Veronese et al. 2020). Fry and Wilson (2018) explored the impact of migration policies on New Zealanders' well-being and stressed the importance of a well-being approach in migration policies.

Dahlin et al. (2020) bring religion and religiosity to the core of the well-being of migrants and argue that religiosity, the religious identity, and the existential well-being of migrants impact their integration process in the host societies. Finally, in their study on women's migration and well-being, Williams and Hall (2014) propose some reflections on the relationship between migration and well-being from an ecological perspective. They argue that "psycho-spiritual well-being is reciprocally influenced by the larger ecology in which humans are embedded" (p. 218).

Even if studies on well-being are flourishing, researchers have no consensus on how well-being should be defined (Dodge et al. 2012; Petermans and Cain 2020).

#### *Well-Being Models and How They Informed Our Study*

There are three well-being models that informed our study: the OECD regional well-being model, the IOM model (IOM 2013), and the PERMA model by Seligman (2011, 2018). For the OECD model, Durand (2015) measures well-being in terms of outcomes achieved in material living conditions (i.e., income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing conditions) and quality of life (i.e., health-status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, personal security, and life-satisfaction). The IOM report (IOM 2013) made use of a well-being model elaborated by Gallup scholars, which includes five dimensions: career, social, community, health, and financial well-being. Through this model, the IOM report offered the first-ever assessment of well-being among migrants worldwide. Their findings shed light on how migrants rate their lives and how they feel regarding income, employment, health, security, and other dimensions relevant to their well-being (IOM 2013, p. 21). We believe that it is pertinent to explore those dimensions of well-being also for HSMs. Nevertheless, we wanted to dig deeper into personal emotions as relevant aspects of well-being. Therefore, we used the PERMA model, which has not been studied for understanding HSM well-being before. The PERMA model of well-being elaborated by Seligman (2011, 2018) focuses on measuring and assessing individuals' emotional well-being. The five domains of PERMA theory are positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A).

To sum up, this study explores the career, financial, social, community, and health proposed by IOM (2013) and OECD models and the emotional side of well-being as elaborated by the PERMA model. Besides building on literature on HSM, global talent management, dual-career couples, and women's migration, we have explored other dimensions not theorized in the models mentioned above. In this regard, we have looked at aspects such as the destination country's culture and the importance of keeping one origin culture, and we explored the importance of family well-being and the possible relevance of perceived discrimination.

According to ICP (2016), the Country's people and culture are essential attraction factors for highly qualified migrants. Therefore, we included a dimension related to cultural well-being. As for indicators, we used the importance of keeping their cultural traditions and feeling comfortable about the host country's and Region's cultures.

As perceived discrimination plays an essential role in migrants' psychological well-being (Sener 2019; Hashemi et al. 2019), we included it as a dimension in our study.

Building on the concept of linked lives proposed in the life course studies (Giele and Elder 1998; Kōu et al. 2009; Kōu and Van Wissen 2009, 2014; Spadavecchia 2017), we included a dimension on the migrants' perception of families and partner's well-being.

As regards the health dimension, we explored the migrants' perception of the health-care system.

Finally, building on the PERMA model, we have developed different sets of indicators for each analyzed dimension. For instance, for career well-being, we looked at career advancement, (mis)match between qualification and the job (Charsley et al. 2020), work-life balance and flexible arrangements, company culture, and the possibility of growing. We also explored the sense of achievement and positive emotions, as proposed by Seligman (2011, 2018). The same holds for social well-being, for which we looked at relationships,

positive emotions, and sense of belonging (engagement) as used in the PERMA model. Still, considering the importance of volunteering for migrants (Slade et al. 2013), we also examined the volunteering aspect and the sense of achievement, and the positive emotions that can be derived from it.

We analyzed elements related to financial satisfaction and the country's contingent elements, such as the perspective on the 30 percent facility policy<sup>5</sup> for economic well-being.

We explored the sense of safety and political participation proposed by the IOM (2013) model regarding community well-being.

## 6. Method

Considering the study's explorative nature, we opted for a qualitative methodology, including semi-structured in-depth interviews. Thus, a qualitative research design is required to explore the differences in the experienced well-being of the HSMs in the Region (Ramos and Martín-Palomino 2015). Furthermore, from an intersectional perspective, the use of the semi-structured interviews around the critical elements of well-being and the control variables individuated lead to a critical examination of how the main migration reason, gender, parenthood, and origin of HSMs intersect to shape their overall well-being experiences (Riaño 2011).

Our study involved in-depth interviews with two groups of HSMs of a total of 20 people. The first group comprises HSMs who moved for job-related reasons, and the second group includes ten HSMs who moved due to their partner's jobs. We recruited those who have lived or worked in the Eindhoven region for at least six months upon accepting the interview invite, who obtained at least a bachelor/college degree before moving to The Netherlands. Most of them are not from the same households. The interviews were conducted in Spring 2019 in the city of Eindhoven, Netherlands.

Statistics of international KM in Eindhoven were referred for representative sampling (see Decisio Report 2017). This study made use of four control variables such as gender (males and females), main migration reason (reunification to the partner or job), parenthood (yes or not), and origin (Europeans and non-Europeans). The above-mentioned control variables lead to a minimum of 16 interviews. Nevertheless, to reach the saturation of information, we have conducted 20 interviews.

Participants were contacted through the Eindhoven expat physical and online communities. Snowballing was also used for participants to introduce others who are qualified for the study.

In our sample, HSMs who moved due to their partner's trajectory ranged from 30 to 54 years old (average age 38.4 years old); eight out of ten are women, five out of ten are mothers. Respondents are from Serbia (one), Portugal (one), China (two), Indonesia (one), India (one), Colombia (two), Turkey (one), and Nepal (one). None of them is married to a Dutch national. Within this group, four out of ten have a permanent job in technology companies. In addition, one participant has a long-distance freelance job outside of The Netherlands; one works as a hotel cleaner; two, at the time of the interview, do volunteering work for different organizations; two are currently looking for a job (see Table 1).

HSMs who moved for job-related reasons ranged from 28 to 40 years old (see Table 2). Three out of ten are females, and five out of ten moved to The Netherlands with a partner. Two are Italians, one is Austrian, and another is Portuguese; the other six are from China, Australia, India, Turkey, Colombia, and El Salvador. Two participants from the first group are entrepreneurs, while others work for technology companies or universities in the Region.

**Table 1.** Profiles of the interviewees: HSMs who moved due to their partner's trajectory.

Name	Origin	Age	Gender	Children	Partner/Nationality of the Partner
Alexandra	Serbia	35–40	Female	Yes	Serbia
Mariana	Brazil	40–45	Female	Yes	Portugal
Binsa	Nepal	30–35	Female	No	Nepal
Catalina	Colombia	30–35	Female	No	Italy
Andres	Colombia	30–35	Male	No	Colombia
Navya	India	35–40	Female	Yes	India
Arina	Indonesia	30–35	Female	No	Italy
Ling	China	30–35	Female	Yes	China
Mei	China	50–55	Female	Yes	China
Burak	Turkey	40–45	Male	No	Turkey

Source: Elaboration by authors. Note: To preserve the participants' anonymity, the names listed are not their real names.

**Table 2.** Profiles of the interviewees: HSMs who moved for job-related reasons.

Name	Origin	Age	Gender	Children	Partner/Nationality of the Partner
Mario	Italy	25–30	Male	No	Single
Carlos	El Salvador	30–35	Male	No	Spain
Walter	Austria	35–40	Male	Yes	Spain
Mia	Australia	25–30	Female	No	Single
Phil	China	25–30	Male	No	Single
Bao	China	50–55	Male	Yes	China
Tiago	Portugal	30–35	Male	Yes	Brazil
Raj	India	35–40	Male	Yes	India
Francesca	Italy	30–35	Female	No	Single
Ada	Turkey	40–45	Female	No	Turkey

Source: Elaboration by authors. Note: To preserve the participants' anonymity, the names listed are not their real names.

Semi-structured interviews were prepared for the two groups of participants around crucial dimensions of well-being and global talent management, referring to findings from existing literature on HSMs, dual-career migrant couples, migrant women, and well-being (see par. 5).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research (Nowell et al. 2017), specific measures have been taken. First, all the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and carefully analyzed. The analysis was organized in three stages: selective (according to the well-being dimensions), open, and axial coding.

Data collection triangulation and researcher triangulation have been used to address credibility. The research design had been presented and discussed with other colleagues to get an external check. The interview script has been discussed among the two researchers and tested with two persons having all the characteristics required before starting the interview process. During the interviews, the researchers took notes and shared them with each other to check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data.

To ensure confirmability, the study is based on substantial literature and models of well-being found in research (Nowell et al. 2017). Moreover, researchers opted for the semi-structured interviews based on the intersection of well-being models and other dimensions derived from the literature (see par. 5) instead of unstructured interviews. This way, the validity of the results is better secured because more structured interviews can reduce possible biases. In addition, the questions within the semi-structured interviews had an open character to avoid performativity and desirable answers by interviewees. Moreover, to further mitigate desirable answers, the anonymity of the interviews was guaranteed.

## 7. Findings

Well-being is experienced differently by distinct groups of highly qualified migrants living in the Eindhoven region. We found that gender is a crucial factor of experienced well-being for numerous dimensions analyzed, except for trust in the health system, culturally



related needs, and family well-being. We also detected other factors or identities that, when intersecting with gender, influence the respondents' well-being. Those factors are migratory status, the reason to migrate, and parenthood and origin. Moreover, we also see that migration strategies are highly gendered.

### 7.1. When Gender Does Not Function as an Influencing Factor of Experienced Well-Being

#### (a) Health

Eighteen respondents do not trust the health system, and some mentioned having negative experiences with it. However, among our respondents, most EU nationals indicated that they kept their own country's health insurance. In this way, in case of an emergency, they can get assistance there.

A respondent said the healthcare system represents a reason to leave the Country.

"I have a bad experience. It is one of the reasons I do not want to stay. I had to fight, I was ill, and I had to push to get the help I knew I needed because even my doctors back in my own Country told me that I needed to do it, which made me question Dutch society. ( . . . ) I feel like because I am foreign, they would want to help me less than they would help a Dutch person". (Mia, 25–30 y.o., a female researcher from Australia)

Raj, mentioned other issues, such as misdiagnoses and discrimination:

"I see my friends, the doctors don't diagnose properly, and they have to go back to India for surgery. ( . . . ) We are vegetarians, and the doctor once asked, "How are you guys living on this Earth by just eating uh, stop eating meat"? ( . . . ) Also, the market is open only to Dutch doctors. You cannot have an Indian, a Chinese, or an American doctor working here". (Raj, India, male 35–40 y.o., entrepreneur)

#### (b) Cultural well-being

The Dutch culture is seen differently among EU and non-EU nationals.

Walter, an Austrian engineer, living in the Region for about seven years, does not find many differences among Austrian and Dutch culture:

"I don't know, I always felt at home here, yeah it's, it's also not so different from Austria. It's a bit less hierarchical. The only problem I have is the food culture; I'm a foodie, I like cooking myself, so food is for me really important, and everywhere I go I look for local food, and in The Netherlands, it is impossible to find a local restaurant, you can find the snack bar, and that's it, actually. Eventually, you realize, yeah, that's the local food. But besides that, I don't see much difference". (Walter, 35–40 y.o., a male engineer)

Two non-EU nationals mentioned a lack of spontaneity as a specific Dutch society trait:

"I just think that Dutch culture is . . . I was talking to this friend from Spain, and she was saying there is less spontaneity, like talks between people, it's very different from where we came from. It is something I did not think would affect me as much as it does. It is something I was aware of, but it affects me more than I thought". (Mia, 25–30 y.o., a female researcher from Australia)

"I am ok with the culture here, but, yeah, let's say I am not connected to Dutch people; I don't know why they are not spontaneous; everything should be planned weeks ahead, even just a beer. There is no spontaneity. When I was living in Spain, that was easier". (Carlos, 30–35 y.o., a male researcher from El Salvador)

Most of the respondents talked about directness as a distinctive trait of Dutch culture and mentioned that either it took time to adapt to it or that they cannot adapt:

"I think people are more relaxed here. I do not know how to describe it because it is different from China. In China, everything is fast-paced ( . . . ) Dutch are very frank; in China, we are more polite. I would say, no, not polite, you know,

we don't really talk directly, and it was difficult for me. Now, I live here, but somehow I am disconnected from Dutch people". (Phil, 25–30 China, male engineer)

The possibility of maintaining cultural traditions (namely, food and festivities) is important for interviewees; however, it becomes less relevant to people who migrated more than once or had been outside of their origin country for a long time.

"I do not think there are so many traditions that are different. I sometimes miss the Australian way of interacting and the food. (Mia, 25–30 y.o., a female researcher from Australia, who migrated more than once)

"Well, I think I changed a lot. The culture here influenced me, so maybe it will be difficult to keep your culture here. But I don't feel like I need to keep my culture". (Yu, 25–30 China, male engineer, left his Country 6 years ago)

"I keep the traditions that are useful for me. Having lived in different countries, Colombia, Italy, and the USA, I know what I like from all those places, including traditions. I keep what I like". (Catalina, 30–35 y.o. a female architect from Colombia, a freelancer)

"Not that important. It is ok; I already left China for so long. As an international, we just adapt, maybe (I miss) the food, the Chinese food. Even in the Chinese center, I do not go there so often". (Mei, 50–55 y.o. a female engineer from China, female, 20 years living in The Netherlands)

Also, respondents from India have a strong community in the Eindhoven region, and they celebrate their festivities together; this is also the case for Raj:

"We have no problem keeping our traditions. ( . . . ) we are all Indians at home, and we have our food. We also celebrate festivals with the Indian community here. We have a big community here". (Raj, India, male 35–40 y.o., first-time international migrant)

#### (c) *Family Well-Being*

HSMs who moved with a family or a partner consider their family (or partner's) well-being as crucial for their intention to stay. We did not detect significant gender differences for this dimension.

"I think she's happy, and this is very important for me. She is now looking for a job, so that is the only thing she is missing now. I would say she would be happier with a job, of course. If she can't find it, after I finish my project, we will move to another place where she can find a job. I had my opportunity, and she deserves to have hers". (Carlos, 30–35 y.o a male researcher from El Salvador)

"They (my family) are happy with their life since we moved here, and this is very important for me, otherwise we would leave". (Tiago, 30–35 y.o., a male engineer from Portugal)

"It is difficult to say, Yes, they, they are happy, we are happy, I mean we have everything we need here. My husband is the happiest because of his job. He works for a great company. But my kids, I don't know; they are happy, but whenever we go on holiday to my Country( . . . ), the way they smile is different. The way they talk( . . . ) they are louder, they are constantly smiling. I mean they::: they are very well integrated here, and luckily school is really nice here. So uh, but still, sometimes I think they would be happier back home. We discussed it with my husband, and in a couple of years, if we are not happy, we will go back to our Country". (Alexandra, 35–40 y.o. a female engineer from Serbia)

#### 7.2. *Gender as an Influencing Factor of Experienced Well-Being*

Our findings show that gender directly influences our respondents' experienced well-being in the following areas: career, financial, community, and social well-being, and

perceived discrimination. The vast majority of women interviewed experienced lower well-being than men for career and community dimensions and higher discrimination due to their migration background and gender.

(a) *Career well-being*

HSMs who were struggling in the job market found certain skills were deemed only for the Dutch, which excluded migrants with similar or even higher qualifications in terms of experience and skillsets.

One participant, an engineer who followed his partner from Colombia, talked about his frustration that only pure technical skills were deemed desirable for migrants:

“They are not interested in the part of my skills on management and administration in engineering”. (Andrés, 30–35 y.o., a male engineer from Colombia)

Among HSMs employed, the working women interviewed feel less comfortable with the company culture than men.

Moreover, numerous women have experienced a mismatch between their qualifications with the job they are doing. That is especially true when gender intersects with migratory status, namely when women entered the country through a family migration scheme.

“The first year I was here, I had a part-time job in a travel agency. It is not relevant to my background, but I just want to have something, even to fill the gap”. (Ling, 30–35 y.o., a female chemical engineer from China)

“I never thought I am going to move in here because I had a very flourishing (dentistry) career in India. My skills were not recognized here, and then I was pregnant. I was home for four years and had no social life. When my son went to school, I started to reach out to volunteering. Then I worked for XXX company for almost two years. It is unpaid. There are about 30 volunteers. The knowledge and degree level, of course, do not match my experience. But it gives me an identity. Otherwise, I was somebody’s wife”. (Navya, 35–40 y.o., a female volunteer from India currently unemployed)

The lack of a support network and social connections, not knowing the unspoken rules of the labor market in The Netherlands, and the mismatch between the sector of education and the labor market requests constitute the principal barriers encountered by the “spouses” when looking for a job. In most of the cases, they had a career back home. When moving to The Netherlands, they found themselves not having a job for a longer time than expected (12 months on average), and they had to renegotiate their identities.

“I am a professional woman; when I arrived, I had more than ten years of experience in my field. I thought I would find a job in three months. But no. Then, for more than a year, I was at home with my kid. It took me more or less one year like looking for opportunities and getting tons of rejections; and then it only got better when I started participating more in networking events and meeting people, to kind of find my way in Eindhoven”. (Mariana 40–45 y.o., an employed female business specialist from Brazil)

When HSMs who moved due to their partner’s trajectory are women and mothers, their situation becomes even more difficult because they find themselves not having time to look for a job and without a support network.

“I miss family, I miss their support in terms of being here; when we arrived, my kids were very young, and I was here alone, with them. I couldn’t properly look for a job because they were asking my full attention, of course. Sending them to the daycare was not possible; it was crazy expensive. So, I was 100% with them. I was just looking for jobs at night when they were sleeping. It was like that for more than a year”. (Alexandra, 35–40 y.o., a female engineer from Serbia)

Respondents whose job is in line with their education do experience a high sense of achievement and are satisfied with their work-life balance and the possibility to grow, regardless of their gender. Nevertheless, we see that respondents with those characteristics are mainly men.

(b) *Perceived discrimination*

Our findings show that perceived discrimination in the work environment is a crucial factor influencing the interviewees' well-being.

We encountered three primary forms of perceived discrimination: the migratory background, the Country of origin, and gender. When those three factors intersect, we see a higher level of perceived discrimination.

Almost half of the respondents experienced language barriers at work in informal settings (e.g., lunches) and sometimes during formal settings (e.g., meetings).

Arina, a communication professional from Indonesia, migrated to The Netherlands to join her husband and is currently working as a hotel cleaner. She affirmed that international workers in her company do not access the same information as Dutch colleagues.

“There seem to be things that are understood or known automatically by the Dutch colleagues that we don't know. You have to find them yourself. In the beginning, for example, I was sick, and I told at work that I am sick, and I cannot come, and my boss told me that I could stay home for one or two days. I understood that I was being paid to stay at home, but those two days were not paid.”. (Arina, 30–35 y.o. a female, communication expert from Indonesia)

Among our respondents, the vast majority of women who have a job perceive discrimination due to their gender, particularly those who work in a tech-related field. The forms of discrimination perceived vary from structural discrimination to individual discrimination.

Regarding structural discrimination, we detected salary gaps among women and men, unequal opportunities in career advancement in the company, unequal length of maternity and paternity leave.

Ada tells her experience on how she found out that her company offers better positions with higher salaries to men:

“With my boyfriend, he's also offered a job position here after I came and started here. We both have exactly the same background ( . . . ), we both graduated from the same schools ( . . . ), and I had even one year more of work experience than him, and he was hired for a higher position with a higher salary”. (Ada, 40–45 y.o. a female engineer from Turkey)

Women working in tech sectors are also worried about the low number of tech professional women in companies.

As for individual discrimination, we detected forms of paternalism, sexual harassment, and the assignment of more manageable tasks than males' peers.

“I do not know if it has to do with me being young or a woman or a young woman. ( . . . ) I have to earn their trust that I can do my job, and that frustrated me. While with young guys, it doesn't happen. Also, the tasks that are assigned to me are easier than the ones assigned to guys ( . . . ) I see that my more experienced colleagues treat me like a daughter, with respect to the younger colleagues who are guys. They do not treat you equally because they treat you like their daughters”. (Francesca, 30–35 y.o., a female engineer from Italy)

Some of the women talk about sexist comments.

“In the group full of males, there were lots of comments made about women not being as smart or capable as males”. (Mariana 40–45 y.o., a female business specialist from Brazil)

Others discuss sexual harassment in the work environment.

“I know another story from a different group that happened. The boss knew a [supervisee] was bothering a [colleague in a junior position], making sexual advances to her, and then he still gave him an amazing recommendation for his next career step. I was horrified and could not believe this big boss would let something like that happen and pretend that it did not happen. They were both Dutch males, and it made me think, what the problem with the sexism culture here is”. (Mia, 25–30 y.o., a female researcher from Australia)

When origin intersects with gender and migratory status, it situates HSMs in an even more invisible position. Employees of high-tech companies share variegated experiences and relate such experiences to their origins. More than half of the participants, and all the women with non-Europeans origins, felt that they couldn’t get access to the management-level positions, mostly reserved for Dutch or Anglo-American men. Moreover, they complain about not being invited to relevant meetings to which their Dutch male peers are invited.

“The management-level [positions]. I don’t think it would be possible for me [to get those positions]. Because I’ve seen at xxx company, to climb up the career ladders, I don’t see anybody else in a higher position or become manager other than the British, American, or Dutch”. (Ada, 40–45 y.o. a female engineer from Turkey)

“I definitely think there is some difference between Dutch people and international people. I have a Dutch male colleague, who is in the same position as I am, and I think it is because he is male, or he is Dutch, or both, but he is always in meetings with the general manager and vice president, which I’m not invited”. (Alexandra, 35–40 y.o., a female engineer from Serbia)

(c) *Community well-being*

Our results show that while local political activities’ involvement does not play a significant role in the respondents’ well-being, safety does. That is especially true for respondents coming from violent or conflicting areas.

“The violence growing makes a weird feeling; of course, we cannot compare with the levels that we have in South America”. (Mariana, business manager from Brazil, 40–45 years old)

Moreover, all-male respondents experience a high level of safety in the region, and so do most women. Nevertheless, a third of women do not feel safe.

“I think it is not very safe, especially in my street, because there are strange guys. Also, somebody broke into my friend’s house while she was there. And also in our building, there is one apartment someone broke in”. (Ling, 30–35 y.o., a female chemical engineer from China)

“When I arrived, I thought that coming from a third-world country, I would be protected. So I was very free, walking around the city. Until a few episodes happened. The first one was when I was walking home, and this guy showed me his parts. Then, some months later, I was again walking home, and there was a guy following me. I was forced to run and hide in the market. And then I talked to a waitress in a bar, and she told me that this kind of sexual harassment by guys is pretty normal in the city”. (Catalina, Colombia, 30–35 years old, female)

(d) *Social well-being*

For the social connections and sense of belonging dimensions, gender becomes a relevant influencing factor only when intersecting with other factors, such as migration status, migration reasons, and parenthood.

“The social life, before giving birth, was fine. I could join some activities and connect with other international people. After that, I can’t anymore”. (Ling, 30–35 y.o., a female chemical engineer from China, unemployed)

Our respondents connect with other HSMs in the Region, especially with people with similar migration histories or paths. Moreover, all the respondents from China and India express a sense of belonging to their co-nationals in the Region. In general, the vast majority of participants feel disconnected from Dutch society.

Kaan expressed his concern about being a Turkish in The Netherlands:

“But still, I feel there is a distance between internationals and people here. Especially being Turkish isn’t helpful. There is a big Turkish community here. And then they have a certain idea and stereotypes of Turkish”. (Kaan, Turkey, 40–45 y.o., male)

Our respondents see volunteering as either a way to connect to the host society or find a job.

Hence, this dimension can be analyzed for both social and career well-being.

Among the “spouses,” eight out of ten have participated in volunteering activities. All of them are women, and six out of eight volunteered to connect to the labor market. Among those who moved for a job, men did not volunteer. One out of three women was volunteering, and another was looking for volunteering opportunities but couldn’t find any due to language barriers.

In general, volunteering increased engagement, the respondents’ sense of meaning and achievement, and strengthened their relationships with the community. Nevertheless, when volunteering is sought after as the only possible strategy to re-enter the job market, the result is that respondents get stuck in volunteering positions and find the experience useless for their purposes. In most cases, they ended up feeling exploited by the organization.

Ling mentioned that a foundation offered her a job in a startup, which turned out to be a volunteering experience. She left the position because she felt frustrated by offering her skills for free and not being treated well.

“The reason I left is that our group leader sent an email about the notification of the next meeting at 7:30 in the morning. The office is very far from my place. When I go there, there is nobody there. So, everybody knows the time has changed to 9 o’clock, except for me. It didn’t feel well to pay for transportation. And I’m working for free. I brought my knowledge to them, but they didn’t even bother to say something like I am very sorry for that. They also promised training for us but in the end no training at all”. (Ling, 30–35 y.o., a female chemical engineer from China)

Binsa mentioned to have had too many responsibilities for being just a volunteer:

“I can understand that is volunteering, but . . . you have to do everything because you are the only one who would be there during the exhibition. So you look after the visitors, and you look after the place and everything in a big house . . . and I got a message when the lady asked me, (..) ‘Did you lock the place?’ So many responsibilities. I don’t want to be a volunteer and have all those responsibilities, including the safety of the whole place”. (Binsa, 30–35 y.o., English literature expert, unemployed, and volunteer from Nepal)

Alexandra expresses her concern about being exploited by the organization she volunteered for:

“It took a lot of energy and effort, and in the end, I haven’t got anything. Like the letter of recommendation, even all the promised things, a reference on LinkedIn, were never given to us. That was the form of payback that they promised. That guy from XXX thought that we are his property, but in the end, nothing to give you, like at least a reimbursement, that wasn’t good”. (Alexandra, 35–40 y.o., a female engineer from Serbia)

(e) *Financial well-being*

Women and men who moved to the region for job-related reasons are somewhat satisfied with their economic situation and feel that this helps with their overall experienced

well-being. This feeling is not shared by many HSMs who moved to reunite with their partner/spouse. Among them, those who do not have a job are not satisfied because they do not generate income. The vast majority are not happy with its financial situation.

“Unfortunately not, I am not satisfied (with my financial situation). But, I don’t have to worry about finances because of my husband. But personally, no”. (Navya, 35–40 y.o., a female volunteer from India currently unemployed)

“Well, I don’t get paid. So personally, it is not good, and I think it is so far satisfactory. It is not too much, but for a couple, it has been. We can balance, you know, enough”. (Binsa, 30–35 y.o., English literature expert, unemployed, from Nepal)

Two are satisfied, but it took them a few years before having the right job with a good salary.

“Financially? Yes, we are satisfied, now we both have good jobs, but it took me a while before getting to do the job I am prepared for, which pays me well. Before I couldn’t find a job, I worked as a volunteer for startups that simply used my skills and did not pay me a penny, and then I found a job below my skills level, and after a few years finally, I am doing my dream job, and I am paid well”. (Mariana, business manager from Brazil, 40–45 years old)

“Yeah, I am, we are. When I arrived here 20 years ago, I couldn’t find a job for myself. It took me some time before finding a job, for some years I did not work, so I was.. not very happy economically then, but now I am working for my company for 15 years, and the salary is good”. (Mei, 50–55 y.o. a female engineer from China, female, 20 years living in The Netherlands)

One is working with a flex-time contract and is very unsatisfied:

“My situation, not so much. Even if it is part-time, it is not fixed hours, and I never can be sure how much I get every month. It’s 10% different every month. Every month it can be more or less”. (Arina, 30–35 y.o. a female, communication expert from Indonesia, currently working as hotel cleaner)

Alexandra, a female engineer from Serbia, is not completely satisfied with her salary, as she thinks that the pay is lower than it should be, but she accepted the job so to enter the labor market:

“Uh (..) financial . . . uhh is ok, it could be better because I am not paid much for my job. They pay me a very low salary for this kind of job, but what can I do? This job was my option to start working here. My husband has a good salary, but mine is much lower, and we both are engineers”. (Alexandra, 35–40 y.o.)

The man who moved because of his partner and had a job is satisfied with his career and financial situation. The same holds for one female participant who came to join her husband and continued working as a self-employed for the previous company in the USA.

Respondents who moved because of their job get access to a 30% facility policy, which increases their economic well-being, while migrants who moved to join their partner, when employed, cannot get access to this benefit.

To conclude, our findings show that HSMs do not represent a homogeneous group (Kofman 2000), and their well-being is influenced by several factors, such as gender, parenthood, migration reason, and migration status.

This study confirms that migration strategies are highly gendered. Among our respondents, women represent the vast majority of people who put their careers on hold and follow their partners, as confirmed in the Report on KM in the Region (Decisio Report 2017) and by the Report on HSMs in The Netherlands (SEO 2015). This has a severe impact on several well-being dimensions. This group is most likely to experience a lower sense of career and financial well-being and experience several impediments in their career advancement. First, it is difficult for them to find a job that fits their skills and experience (Aure

2013; Riaño 2011). Second, when trying to access the labor market through volunteering work, they feel exploited; third, when entering the labor market, they face more barriers to their career advancement than HSMs who moved for work-related reasons. The majority of respondents believe that top managerial positions are primarily reserved for Dutchmen. This is known as the glass ceiling.

Women who moved due to their partner's trajectory also experience a lower sense of social well-being. To be negatively influenced are their level of engagement, positive emotions, and the quantity and quality of relationships with people in the Region. They also experience a lower sense of meaning and accomplishment than HSMs who moved for work. This seems to be especially true for women who lived in the Region for less than five years. On the other hand, women living in the Region for more than five years mentioned that they could get a job after a few years and become more connected with the social environment. Thus, the length of stay seems to be a factor influencing the well-being of HSMs. The correlation between length of stay and the well-being of HSMs is to be explored further in future research.

As mentioned above, when volunteering is used as a strategy to connect to the labor market, the risk of being exploited is relatively high—nevertheless, some respondents who volunteered experienced positive emotions and felt engaged with the community.

Furthermore, besides their migratory status or reason, several women perceive different forms of discrimination due to their gender and, to a lesser extent, their migratory background. Women respondents experienced structural and informal discrimination in the work environment, especially women working in the tech field.

## 8. Conclusions

This study critically reveals the dimensions of well-being relevant to HSMs' everyday lives and how intersected identities are crucial in explaining the respondents' experienced well-being.

We found that gender, motherhood, origin, migratory reason, and status speak to the varied experience within HSMs in Eindhoven.

First, participants experience diverse forms of discrimination due to their migration background, origin, and gender. Regarding the migration background and origin, we detected the inaccessibility to certain information reserved to Dutch employees and the glass ceiling (Siebers and van Gastel 2015). In addition, language barriers in both formal and informal settings strengthen the discrimination perception. We also see that gender is a highly relevant factor for perceived discrimination; in fact, most working women felt discriminated against in the work environment because of their gender, especially those working in the technological field. Forms of perceived discrimination vary from sexual harassment to getting less important tasks than their male colleagues (Iredale 2005) to the gender pay gap, forms of paternalism, and sexist comments. Also, numerous respondents felt that top positions are reserved only for Dutch or white males (Siebers and van Gastel 2015). Moreover, non-European women experience more substantial impediments to access top positions; this is also found in the literature under the adobe ceiling concept (Gutiérrez et al. 2012).

Second, career well-being is compromised when the migratory status is "spouse," and the lowest career well-being is experienced when all five identities intersect in one subject. The majority of migrants who came under the "spouse" category experienced several barriers in finding employment, especially when their skill sets were not deemed desirable. Similar results are also presented by Aure (2013), Shan (2013), Guo (2015), Siebers and van Gastel (2015), and Chimukuche (2019). When motherhood intersects with gender, migratory reason, and status, women experience higher barriers to finding a job. That also leads to the formation or strengthening of traditional gender roles.

Third, HSMs with a job are generally satisfied with their financial situation, especially with the 30 percent facility policy. However, as also found by Riaño (2011), Chimukuche (2019), and Charsley et al. (2020), when gender intersects with migratory status and reason



to migrate, most love-related migrants receive a salary below their qualifications, and they are excluded from the 30 percent facility policy.

Fourth, gender plays a significant role in HSMs' social well-being, especially in volunteering experiences. A prevailing majority of women who moved for both job or love-related reasons volunteered, while none of the men did so. Women seek to experience a sense of achievement, meaning, and community in volunteering. When gender intersects with migratory reason and status, HSMs who moved for love-related reasons see volunteering as a way to connect to the labor market. [Slade et al. \(2013\)](#) showed similar results in their study in Canada. As a result, most of them ended up feeling exploited and perceived many of such experiences as "useless."

The majority of the respondents do not feel connected to the Dutch community; instead, they feel a sense of belonging to fellow migrants, colleagues, or co-nationals living in the Region. Further, some migrants feel being stereotyped by their place of origin in Dutch society.

Origin (EU vs. non-EU) plays a role in the perception of Dutch culture and feeling comfortable with it.

The health system represents an issue for numerous respondents. Nevertheless, while Europeans feel that in case of serious illnesses, they can fly to their own Country, for some non-Europeans, the health system represents a reason to leave the Country. Moreover, some discrimination due to their origin has been detected for non-European migrants.

Lastly, for the community's well-being, the most significant difference is the experienced sense of safety. While male respondents experienced a high level of safety, one-third of female respondents feel unsafe.

This study gives a renewed understanding of HSMs by teasing out the differences within the group. HSMs do not represent a homogeneous group of people ([Kofman 2000](#)). When gender, migratory status, origin, motherhood, and migration reasons intersect, the level of experienced well-being decrease in the following areas: career, financial, subjective, and social well-being, and perceived discrimination increases. Migratory status and migratory reasons are strictly related and represent critical factors for experienced well-being. Significant gender differences are found in migration strategies ([Kofman and Raghuram 2006](#); [Cooke 2008](#); [Kley and Mulder 2010](#); [Riaño 2011](#); [Aure 2013](#); [Vergés Bosch and González Ramos 2013](#); [SEO 2015](#); [Decisio Report 2017](#)).

This research strengthens previous findings on women representing most HSMs entering the Country as dependent migrants ([Kofman and Raghuram 2006](#); [Riaño 2011](#); [Aure 2013](#); [Ramos and Martín-Palomino 2015](#); [Shirmohammadi et al. 2019](#)). Furthermore, this results in vulnerabilities in the labor market, such as deskilling, loss of social capital, and financial autonomy ([Iredale 2005](#); [Charsley et al. 2020](#)). Finally, this paper responds to the call for a broadened definition of Highly Skilled Migrants ([Aure 2013](#); [Spadavecchia 2017](#)) by including multiple dimensions and identities.

To this end, this study shows the importance of using the education criterion in the definition of highly skilled migrants. When the criteria used to define HSMs, are solely based on salary threshold and sponsorship, various groups of highly qualified people who moved to the country for other than career-related purposes cannot be individuated by policymakers and companies. Therefore, companies and countries might lose the opportunity to incorporate them in their economies.

By revealing the complexity within HSMs, we argue that privilege is a relational and situational concept. As current migration studies are criticized for distinguishing migrants by the binary notions of discrimination and privilege ([Kynsilehto 2011](#); [Riaño 2011](#); [Webb 2015](#); [Rodríguez and Scurry 2019](#)), this study shows that discrimination is experienced in the everyday lives of a traditionally deemed privileged group of HSMs ([Kaushik and Walsh 2018](#)). Thus, we argue that discrimination and privilege could be embodied simultaneously by an intersectional subject of contested identities, which challenges the idea that intersectionality is a concept just for the "oppressed". Our participants perceived the different levels of discrimination, depending on their intersected identities.

When the five identities intersect in one subject, meaning when the migrant is a woman, non-Europeans, mother, who migrated to join the partner, and whose migration status is “spouse,” this person experiences the lowest level of subjective well-being and the most significant barriers in finding a job. Thus, HSM does not lead only to empowerment or emancipation, especially for non-EU women (Riaño 2011; Bastia 2011; Rodriguez and Scurry 2019) who are mothers and migrated due to their partner’s trajectory. Those women experience a bottleneck in accessing career opportunities. It can be theorized that HSMs women who moved due to their partner’s trajectory experience a second layer of the glass ceiling. Mason and Ekman (2007) use the term “second glass ceiling” to refer to faculty women working after starting their families yet, instead of continuing with the pursuit of their initial career plans, were working in second-tier positions for fewer hours, less pay, less prestige, and limited upward mobility. HSMs women who moved to their partner’s trajectories undergo a similar situation. Further empirical studies should look at the second glass ceiling for highly skilled migrant women.

Finally, by looking at HSMs and well-being from an intersectional perspective, this study provides a new understanding of how well-being can be experienced differently due to diverse intersected identities. Moreover, it challenges previous well-being models by including new dimensions that play a critical role in HSMs well-being, such as perceived discrimination, cultural well-being, and perception of partner and family well-being.

This study presents some limitations; first, it did not include an ecological approach to well-being and migration (Williams and Hall 2014). The relationship between the natural environment and highly skilled migration deserves to be further explored. This can be done in future studies. Second, the proportion between EU and non-EU respondents is not entirely balanced. This is due to few reasons; first, there is a high percentage of non-EU HSMs in the region, and even though the researchers have sent a few messages to different online and offline communities asking for EU participants, not many EU migrants decided to participate in the study, while non-EU migrants showed a high interest in participating in the study.

Following the research results, future studies might focus on volunteering as a means for HSMs women to get connected to the labor market. In this frame, it is highly relevant to explore further the possible risks of exploitation that can surge in this situation. In addition, research on women’s migration and well-being would benefit from more empirical studies approaching the topic with an intersectional lens. Further studies can explore the relationship between well-being and migration with an intersectional lens, looking at gender as a spectrum and, thus, including the experiences of, for example, transgender and queer individuals.

Also, this study shows that HSMs (and especially HSMs women) perceive different forms of discrimination in the workplace. HSMs perceived discrimination in the workplace is currently undertheorized; thus, more research is needed in this area.

When looking at the well-being of HSMs in the Eindhoven region, several things can be addressed at the regional and company level. First, as most of the HSMs who moved due to their partner’s trajectory are willing to start or continuing their career in Eindhoven, companies should consider their potential as international talent locally available. Second, as several respondents felt exploited while volunteering for companies, this sector should be regulated and observed to reduce exploitation risks. Third, both companies and regions should look at HSMs’ overall well-being when designing policies and strategies to retain them. Fourth, as perceived discrimination due to one’s gender represents an issue for several women working in the Region, companies should address this by creating or improving policies and strategies. At the same time, the Region should support companies in this process. Finally, as HSMs do not represent a homogeneous group, policies should address the needs of the different sub-groups. Finally, as HSMs with intersected identities (as is the case of non-Europeans mothers who migrated to join their partners and which migration status is “spouse”) experience a lower sense of well-

being, companies and policymakers should design diversity policies and strategies with an intersectional approach.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from subjects involved in the study.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The name Brainport represents a set of collaborative initiatives to strengthen the region's economic and innovation systems (OECD 2013).
- <sup>2</sup> Knowledge migrants (KM) (Kennis migrant in Dutch) is the term used by the [Decisio Report \(2017\)](#) to define highly skilled migrants living in The Netherlands. The term is based on the Dutch government's definition of highly skilled migrants and includes a salary threshold and sponsorship criteria. It then differs from our definition of HSM, which is based on the education criteria (see par. 2).
- <sup>3</sup> <https://ind.nl/werk/werken-in-nederland/paginas/kennismigrant.aspx>, (accessed on 5 June 2020).
- <sup>4</sup> The salary threshold differs according to the age of the knowledge migrants (for people below 30 years old, the salary required is lower than for people older than 30 years old), and the profession (e.g., for people working in academia are considered highly skilled migrants even when they have a lower salary than people of the same age working in industry). Moreover, people applying for a European Blue card have a different salary threshold than those entering the Dutch migration scheme. Normbedragen inkomenseis | Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (IND).
- <sup>5</sup> The 30% facility is a measure available to employees recruited from outside The Netherlands to work in the Country temporarily. If they satisfy the related conditions, they are exempt from paying tax on up to 30% of their salary. <https://www.government.nl/topics/income-tax/shortening-30-percent-ruling> (accessed on 5 June 2020).

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