

## (Un)intended Consequences in High-Skilled Migrants' Integration and Inequalities: A comparison of Policy in Germany and the Netherlands

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## (Un)intended Consequences in High-Skilled Migrants' Integration and Inequalities: A comparison of Policy in Germany and the Netherlands

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the interaction between national policies on the admission of highly-skilled migrants and on the integration of migrants. There is a long-standing debate in the literature as to whether or not migration and integration policies are effective; however there is little consideration of the unintended consequences that these policies may have. We argue that, through their interaction, migration and integration policies have unintended consequences, which create or contribute to social inequalities among migrants. We illustrate our argument through case studies of Germany and the Netherlands, based on expert interviews and interviews with highly-skilled migrants from Asia. Migrants reported facing linguistic, bureaucratic and social challenges, and difficulties in finding employment. These disadvantages accumulate and interact with, for example, gender inequalities, adding up to a high price for migration. The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates the importance for policy-makers to consider how policies interact with each other and what effects this can have.

### Keywords:

Highly-skilled migration; integration; unintended consequences; social inequalities.

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## 1. Introduction

Immigration and integration policies are highly salient in the public and political debate in Europe at the moment, as a result of the significant transformations in migration processes currently taking place (Boswell 2016). However, national political responses within the European Union (EU) to migration are often not consistent. In practice, this became evident in the responses to the enormous influx of humanitarian migrants in 2015-2016, which placed governments of EU member states under huge pressure to respond in an adequate and timely manner to these flows. In some national cases this sparked controversy due to native populations searching for housing or employment feeling threatened or side-lined by the inflow of refugees. The 'Brexit' decision in the UK was at least partially predicated on the idea that immigration was out of control, and control could be reasserted by leaving the EU. Whether or not this turns out to be the case – because the UK was never bound by EU immigration law due to its opt-out, and may end up accepting continued free movement of EU citizens– it shows the belief held by the public that governments are in principle able to control phenomena such as immigration flows. Control may however also be aimed at increasing immigration: many OECD countries are experiencing or will experience shortages in highly skilled labour in the near future, and in response these countries have adopted policies aimed at facilitating the recruitment of highly skilled migrants (e.g. Herczog and Wiesbrock 2016). In the realm of integration, the EU lacks centralised coordination measures, and as a result there are major differences observed between the integration strategies of the various EU member states (Wiesbrock 2011). Further differences may arise between national and local integration policies (Scholten 2016).

Given the scale of immigration to European countries, and the corresponding social and political challenges for these societies, it is particularly pertinent to question how much control politicians really have over processes and outcomes related to migration and integration: Are state institutions in a position to design instruments precise enough to target specific challenges related to immigration, and adequately implement these? What are the consequences of these migration regimes, especially the social outcomes, for highly skilled migrants and their family members?

We argue that migration and integration policies do not always have the expected outcomes and their intersection may create or contribute to social inequalities among migrants. In this paper we build on the existing work by scholars who compare Germany and the Netherlands due to their broad similarities in terms of institutions and migration history, and yet key differences in terms of immigration and integration policies (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2010; Euwals

et al. 2010). However, these studies have not addressed the *unintended* consequences of these policies and the resulting drawbacks for highly skilled migrants and their families. We identify how and why the interaction between migration and integration policies results in unintended consequences, and we analyse how these unintended consequences create or foster inequalities among highly skilled migrants in Germany and the Netherlands. The empirical analysis is based on 118 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Asian migrants and experts conducted in Germany and the Netherlands in the period 2014-2016. The following section sets out the analytical framework which is used to structure our findings. The empirical section presents the findings from the fieldwork in Germany and the Netherlands, and the conclusion suggests avenues for future research.

## 2. Unintended consequences, policy interactions, and social inequalities

### 2.1 Unintended consequences of interacting migration and integration policies

There is a long-standing debate in the academic literature about whether or not migration policies are effective; in other words whether migration policies have an impact on the volume, origin, direction and composition of migration flows (see Czaika and de Haas 2013). Bhagwati (2003: 99) observes that “the ability to control migration has shrunk as the desire to do so has increased”. With regards particularly to the US, scholars have critically argued that migration policies are seldom based in any evidence-based knowledge of the forces that shape international migration (Massey and Pren 2012). Instead, the degree of openness of policies might be significantly shaped by existing economic conditions and political ideologies (Meyers 2004). Three ‘policy gaps’ account for the lack of effectiveness of migration policies: a discursive gap, resulting from the discrepancy between discourses about migration and actual migration policies on paper; an implementation gap, resulting from the incomplete or incorrect implementation of policies; and an efficacy gap, when migration policies do not have the intended effects on migration flows (Czaika and de Haas 2013).

Especially the efficacy gap indicates that migration and integration policies may have unintended effects, or even have the opposite effects from that which policymakers intended. There is little attention to this issue in the policy analysis literature; Hogwood and Gunn’s impressive volume, for example, devotes only a short paragraph to the issue of “side effects” (1984: 225). There is also currently no systematic analysis of such effects in the European migration literature, beyond the recognition that multicultural policies may have unintended (negative) consequences for immigrants’ integration in the host society (e.g. Ersanilli and

Koopmans 2011: 211). For the case of the US, authors give occasional empirical examples, such as increased border controls which did not decrease irregular migration but did increase migrant deaths (Castles 2004), and measures aimed at reducing circular undocumented migration which instead converted these flows into permanent migration (Massey et al. 2014).

These unintended effects are not limited to policies controlling admission to a country's territory (i.e. migration policies); measures targeting migrants in the country of destination (i.e. integration policies) may also have unintended effects, either on their own or in interaction with admission policies. One example is the indirect tension between policies against irregular immigration, and citizenship acquisition policies: as members of ethnic minorities acquire citizenship in their country of destination, and therefore electoral rights, their political clout may contribute to pressure a government into softening its stance on irregular immigration of that ethnic group (Bhagwati 2003: 103).

We draw here on the typology of unintended consequences developed by Burlyuk (2017), which seeks to classify and explain unintended consequences. Unintended consequences can be classified according to their mode, nature, origin, and target(s). So an analysis of unintended consequences of policies should question whether the consequence was anticipated and desired, which actor was responsible for and which affected by the consequence, and the effect of the consequence on the achievement of the original intention of the policy. A number of causes may account for unintended consequences of migration and integration policies, including interest conflicts between different groups that wield influence over migration policy-making (Freeman 2006); hidden agendas in migration policies which obscure the actual objectives of policy-makers (Castles 2004: 214); the framing of issues during the policy-making process and compromises between different actors involved (Czaika and de Haas 2013: 491); incorrect or incomplete implementation of policies (e.g. Sabatier and Mazmanian 1980); erroneous assumptions about the situation and about what others – in this case migrants – will do (Burlyuk 2017: 1015-1016); or 'blindness' of policy-makers to potential unintended consequences because the desired and intended consequences are so important that no other option is considered (Burlyuk 2017).<sup>1</sup>

In this paper we pick up on one particular cause of unintended consequences, namely the relationship between different policy instruments. Several scholars have studied the causes

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<sup>1</sup> Arguably the international competition for highly skilled migrants has taken on such proportions, with states competing to design the most attractive immigration options for the highly skilled (e.g. Cerna 2014).

and outcomes of policy ‘interactions’ or policy ‘intersections’ in the context of the relationship between monetary and fiscal policies (e.g. Dixit and Lambertini 2001) or between environment and energy policies (e.g. Nilsson et al. 2012). Policy interactions can result in unintended consequences due to conflicts between policy objectives, policy instruments, or implementation practices (ibid.). In terms of levels of analysis, policy interactions may be internal or external (taking place within one policy domain or between different policy domains) and horizontal or vertical (at the same level of governance or between different levels of governance) (Oikonomou and Jepma 2008: 135). The central argument of this paper is that the interaction of migration and integration policies and their implementation at the national and local level results in unintended consequences, and in particular social inequalities for migrants.

## 2.2 Social inequalities as unintended consequences of migration and integration policies

The previous sections have established that migration and integration policies can have diverse and often unforeseen impacts. One particular unintended consequence can be the creation or perpetuation of social inequalities for (highly skilled) migrants and their families.

In recent literature, migration policies in general have been discussed in relation to inequalities. For instance, policies toward immigrants create certain dichotomous migrant categories (e.g. ‘Europeans’ vs. ‘non-Europeans’) which in combination with other heterogeneities (e.g. gender, class, and ethnicity) can lead to unequal treatments of migrants with different legal status (Mügge and van der Haar 2016). Migration policies and inequalities are also discussed in relation to the access to citizenship that ensures the rights and participation of full members of society, while curtailing the rights and participation of others (Smith 2001). However, there may be a “trade-off” in numbers and rights (Ruhs and Martin 2008), meaning that with increasing inflows of migrants, the rights offered to them can tend to decrease. This might signify that, in comparison to low-skilled migrants, destination governments grant highly skilled migrants more rights, since they are usually lower in numbers (Ruhs 2013). This does not however mean that highly skilled migrants and their families have through this granting of more rights also more benefits. For instance, Koopmans (2010) finds that especially generous welfare state regimes are likely to create unintended consequences linked to drawbacks among migrants, such as low labour market participation, high degrees of segregation, and high involvement of immigrants in crime.



In addition to policies on migration, citizenship and rights, integration policies are both an important remedy for or source of inequalities. Language is an important trigger of disparities, and in fact opportunities in education, employment, building of relationships, and participation are much more limited through differences in language than for instance through religious pluralism (Brubaker 2014). This indicates that sound integration policies which actively incorporate migrants into society, such as through tailor-made language training, are key in order to reduce the degree of inequalities among migrants and non-migrants in destination societies.

While interest in the political sociology of migration is growing, there is currently no systematic comparative analysis in the European migration literature of the unintended consequences of migration and integration policies for highly skilled migrants and their family members. From this vantage point, this paper not only analyses the effectiveness of policies by showing how the interaction between migration and integration policies can result in unintended consequences, but it goes one step further and addresses how these processes are related to concrete outcomes, namely to the (re)production of inequalities among migrants. Social inequalities are social dynamics of hierarchisation leading to advantageous or disadvantageous conditions among people in society (Grabb 2006). Scholars have employed different analytical lenses for focusing on the often overlapping material, symbolic, spatial and cultural dimensions of inequality, and have identified both ascribed (e.g. gender or age) and achieved (e.g. occupational position or education) determinants of inequalities. Regarding the mechanisms through which social inequalities arise, scholars have identified for instance exploitation, distantiation or exclusion (Therborn 2006) for material inequalities, distinction based on habitus (Bourdieu 1979) for symbolic inequalities, segregation (Musterd 2005) for spatial inequalities, and racialization, stigmatization, evaluation and standardization (Lamont et al. 2014) for cultural process leading to inequalities. Social inequalities, and particularly the link to migration, have been overwhelmingly discussed from an economic point of view, for instance related to income or wealth differences (Black et al. 2005), but relatively less attention has been paid to cultural processes provoking inequalities.

Therefore, the empirical discussion below focuses on the working of these cultural aspects among highly skilled migrants as the unintended consequence of the interaction of migration and integration policies. Particularly, we focus on evaluation processes as a mechanism through which values are defined, institutionalised and assigned to individuals and groups in society. Evaluation “is a process that results in winners and losers, for example through rankings, or the differential allocation of desirable resources” (Lamont et al. 2014, p.594). Evaluation as a mechanism for inequality-related cultural processes may also take place through

migration and integration policies and the formal implementation procedures embodied in bureaucracy, which migrants are obliged to comply with. In addition, cultural disparities can be expressed through stigmatisation, understood as a social dynamic that “consists in designating symbolically, and qualifying negatively, identities and differences” (Lamont et al. 2014: 589). Public and political discourses but also increasingly policies on paper and their bureaucratic implementation in many (if not all) European countries today can stigmatise immigrants to varying degrees or produce perceptions of stigmatisation.

In the next section we show how evaluation and stigmatisation processes can result in the (re)production of social inequalities for highly skilled migrants (and their family members) in Germany and the Netherlands. Additionally, it is highlighted that these inequalities can even unleash other dynamics, sometimes linked to the change of migrants’ intentions and behaviours.

### 3. Discussion of Empirical Findings

The empirical discussion below on the cases of Germany and the Netherlands shows that migration policies interact with national integration policies and thereby create several unintended consequences. One important expression of these consequences discussed below are the (re)producing inequalities among migrants.

#### 3.1 Germany

In German political discourse, motivations to create incentives for attracting highly skilled migrants are mainly associated with concerns related to occupational shortages in some sectors of the economy (Zimmermann 2013), the competitiveness in the global economy (Boucher 2016) and future demographic challenges (Fuchs and Kubis 2017).

Just as several other EU member states, also the German government has sought to tackle these challenges by adjusting national migration policies (Cerna and Czaika 2016) and became gradually involved in that what has been defined as the “global competition to attract highly skilled foreign labourers” (Boeri et al. 2012). Political endeavours were continuously made especially after the 2005 New Foreigner Law (NFL), by providing a privileged entrance for highly skilled migrants from non-EU countries (Martin 2012). Over the subsequent years, migration policies were frequently reformed in order to reduce formal barriers and attract

more non-EU professionals (Beine et al. 2016). This trend became apparent in different reforms, such as the lowering of income and investment ceilings for incoming migrants, the partial removal of labour market tests, the facilitation of the recognition of qualifications through the gradual systematisation of procedures (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik et al. 2017), and the implementation of the EU Blue Card (Hanganu and Heß 2016).

Integration policies were also progressively enhanced and particularly migrants' acculturation and labour market integration were emphasised (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2016). Integration courses consisting of language and orientation classes, already introduced in 2005 within the NFL (Schneider 2007), became compulsory for those non-EU migrants who aim to obtain a long-term residence in Germany in the 2007 National Integration Plan (Kreienbrink and Rühl 2007). Additional measures for supporting individual migrants and fomenting their educational and labour market participation in society were included in the 2012 National Action Plan on Integration (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik et al. 2017). The 2016 Integration Law has both institutionalised integration policies into a separate law and extended it to humanitarian migrants (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2016).

The political intention to attract and integrate highly skilled migrants is, for instance, reflected in the intersection of migration and integration policies: highly skilled migrants entering the country (either through the national residence scheme or the Blue Card) receive an initial residence permit for the duration of 33 or 36 months, without being obligated to comply with integration requirements, nor explicitly supported to integrate through any kind of free measures. At first glance, this 'freedom' might be considered as favourable for migrants, but it might equally pursue different (hidden) political goals: first, to quickly satisfy employers' needs for young, qualified and cheap labour forces (Zimmermann 2013); second, to increase the attractiveness of Germany for highly skilled migrants by signalling that labour market access is liberated from major formal barriers; third, to minimise public concerns related to immigration, since the implementation of integration measures from the beginning of the stay can indicate a promise of permanent residence (Ruhs 2013); and fourth, to implement a probationary time to test migrants' long-term suitability in the labour market through self-selection mechanisms (Goldring and Landolt 2013).

This 'freedom' in integration also has unintended and undesired effects, which might be linked to changing intentions and the premature outmigration of the highly skilled migrants (and their family members) so needed in Germany. In this vein, there is evidence that integration barriers in Germany are frequently perceived by immigrants as very high. The reasons for this evaluation are diverse, ranging from difficulties to socialise in everyday life, to find adequate housing, to communicate with colleagues and superiors at the workplace, or to

deal with formal institutions (Aksakal and Schmidt 2017). For migrants, especially the initial period of stay represents a rush hour in their life abroad because during this period they need to deal with a range of often challenging tasks in the relocation and integration process, including language acquisition, which has been identified as a major initial barrier for immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Our evidence indicates that linguistic skills in general and specific technical and cultural knowledge in some spheres, as well as exchange with and guidance from others, are of particular relevance. A sphere where these skills are especially needed is in the bureaucracy which represents the implementation level of policies, including the formal evaluation of migrants. Bureaucratic tasks demand from migrants not only at the beginning but also during their stay a certain type of 'knowledge skill' (Machin and Stehr 2016) and frequent interaction with institutions. It has been observed that migrants are, especially at the local government level, frequently discriminated institutionally due to lower quality responses by clerks, which potentially discourages them from applying for social benefits (Hemker and Rink 2017). Our findings indicate that challenges for migrants resulting from bureaucracy can be expressed in very different ways. Consider the feedback of an interviewed expert:

There are many challenges migrants confront at the beginning of their residence; however the bureaucracy is often a central issue...On the one hand, they are confronted with still too complex procedures and on the other, they can be treated inappropriately by clerks, because they do not listen to them carefully and are not interested in particular issues they have (Lars, labour market expert).

Experts from civil society critically noted that increasing rationalisation of bureaucratic procedures, often linked to public budget cuts, represent a concrete expression of the neoliberal agenda in Germany. These shifts in bureaucracy are detrimental for effective institutional procedures, especially in the light of growing and increasingly diverse inflows of migrants. Diverse conditions have been identified as contributing to these circumstances, such as personnel shortages and insufficient linguistic preparedness of clerks, which is frequently expressed in difficulties to formally deal with migrants in other languages than German. Moreover, several experts identified deficiencies in institutional coordination on supranational, member state and local as a significant issue. Similar to other European member states, such as the Netherlands (Scholten, 2016), Germany has indeed established a centralised national coordination framework, which is however not effectively interacting with European and local-level institutions.

Migration experts have noted that these existing structural conditions, in combination with the high humanitarian inflows during 2015 and 2016, have significantly aggravated bureaucratic procedures. With the relatively abrupt increase in humanitarian flows, not only have populist discourses been strengthened (Vehrkamp and Wratil 2017) but as a consequence also some

existing policies and institutional practices have been altered. This has important effects for the bureaucratic evaluation and treatment of migrants, including that of highly skilled migrants and their family members, because in general terms institutional routines, such as the regulation of migrants' residence permits, recognition of qualifications, and conditions relating to employment, housing or health, have changed. This contributes to long-lasting formal procedures as a result of increasing pressure, confusion and overload among the staff of institutions evaluating migrants.

As a result of the previously noted 'freedom' in integration, in combination with the institutional issues in bureaucratic evaluation, a range of interviewed migrants complained about both bureaucracy and institutional treatments and perceived these as a barrier for their overall integration. It was frequently argued that time slots in appointments are too shortly calculated, much information and documents are not available in different languages, or – as reflected in the statement of one highly skilled female interviewee – clerks are not willing to deal with migrants in other languages:

(...) whenever I come into a contact with the German bureaucracy, like at the foreigners' office or like address registration place(...) I don't know if this is real or my own perception, but like I've been told "I can't help you, you need to bring a German person with you here" ...I mean she said that to me in English, so she obviously understands English and I didn't really quite understand you know, why she felt the need to tell me that I need to bring someone else to translate things. (...) I wonder if it's an instance of racial discrimination (Akari, 1983, female, professional, Japan).

A deficient understanding of the language, culture and bureaucratic procedures can be linked in different ways to inequalities (Machin and Stehr 2016), not only objectively (i.e. in comparison to others) but as the quotation indicates also subjectively (i.e. perceptions of personal non-acceptance and exclusion). Especially among first-time movers, certain institutional practices within bureaucratic evaluation are perceived as acts of stigmatisation, regardless of whether this was intended or not. Next to these personal perceptions, our findings also indicate that in the evaluation of migrants on the political and bureaucratic level, the general assumption exists that highly skilled migrants have largely homogeneous attributes, including the same knowledge and skill levels, migration background and needs. These observations show the two different ways evaluation and stigmatisation can be linked to each other and serve as mechanisms for cultural inequalities.

The previous discussion indicates that the 'freedom' in integration in Germany, in fact represents for many highly skilled migrants residing in Germany an 'integration vacuum' which can be linked to disadvantages for some migrants, such as first-time movers: due to limited experience they may need more knowledge, exchange and guidance than others, but do not have adequate access to supportive measures. It is therefore not surprising that these migrants

often perceive bureaucratic procedures and treatments in institutions as a clear expression of stigmatisation and discrimination. For highly skilled migrants and their family members, the ‘integration vacuum’ amounts to an absence of free formal learning opportunities, guidance and exchange. Integration courses could serve to overcome several of the previously noted issues because these courses aim to equip migrants with a better orientation in Germany, including a better understanding of cultural, political, economic and bureaucratic dynamics; provide migrants in a relatively short time with sufficient ‘language capital’ (Dustmann 1999); and enable migrants to engage in exchange with peers and teachers, and thereby learn strategies to find and use relevant information and to deal with the bureaucratic apparatus in Germany (Lochner et al. 2013).

Our findings also indicate that disadvantages can be accumulative among some migrants in Germany. In addition to drawbacks related to bureaucratic barriers in the light of an ‘integration vacuum’, some migrants can experience other detriments due to a lack of personal and professional social capital (Lin 2000). Professional social capital can be provided by colleagues employed to support foreign employees, for instance through internal language courses or specialised human resource departments frequently institutionalised in large and internationally oriented firms. In this case, migrant workers can rely on the support of language instructors or lawyers in order to understand formal procedures or to deal with bureaucratic tasks. Migrants who lack such capital may also experience disadvantages in other spheres of life (such as the personal social sphere), and the accumulation of disadvantages can have an even stronger influence on their future mobility plans. This may explain the discrepancy between initial long-term residence intentions and de facto short duration of stays in Germany, such as for Indian highly skilled migrants in Germany (Faist et al. 2017).

### 3.2 The Netherlands

Dutch migration policy is also predicated on the need to attract highly skilled migrants to the Netherlands; this was the main rationale behind the Modern Migration Policy, which entered into force in 2013 (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations 2011). There is a clear distinction in the evaluation of highly skilled migrants as opposed to other labour migrants: “Dutch labour migration policy is geared towards enhancing the knowledge-based economy and attracting highly educated people. For the top segment of the labour market the labour migration policy is inviting. For other third-country nationals who want to come to the Netherlands for economic reasons the admissions policy is restrictive” (European Migration Network 2016: 17). The positive value assigned to highly skilled migrants is expressed through migra-

tion and integration policies: highly skilled migrants and their partners do not need to comply with civic integration requirements, and their partners also have access to the labour market without needing a work permit (European Migration Network 2013: 4). Thus, the same ‘freedom’ in integration exists in the Netherlands as in Germany.

The positive evaluation of highly skilled immigrants stands in stark contrast to the extreme politicisation and stigmatisation surrounding the issue of integration. Over time, and particularly with the rise of populist right-wing parties in the early 2000s, Dutch integration policy has become more assimilationist. Today, integration policy is focussed on acquisition of the Dutch language and knowledge of Dutch society and the labour market. Personal responsibility is emphasised: migrants are responsible for completing the integration trajectory within three years after arrival in the Netherlands, or face a fine. In order to cover the costs of integration courses and exams, migrants are eligible for a loan of up to €10,000. Family migrants furthermore must complete a basic integration course in their country of origin before they travel to the Netherlands (Algemene Rekenkamer 2017). In sum, these measures can be seen as serving a dual purpose: both integration, and migration control (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011: 21). Exempting highly skilled migrants from these onerous integration requirements highlights the positive value which the Dutch government assigns to this group, and aligns with the government’s objective to facilitate highly skilled immigration to the Netherlands. However, this very assumption – that exempting highly skilled migrants from integration requirements makes the Netherlands a more attractive destination for long-term or permanent settlement – does not seem to be playing out in practice. In fact, it is having the unintended (and completely contradictory) consequence of making migrants more likely to choose to leave the Netherlands. In our interviews, highly skilled migrants reported feeling lonely in the Netherlands. Although Dutch people speak good English, and this makes the initial process of settling into the Netherlands relatively easy, migrants reported that in social settings Dutch people prefer to speak Dutch, and it therefore becomes difficult to establish friendships. In addition, partners of highly skilled migrants – often highly skilled themselves – reported difficulties with finding a job due to language barriers, despite in theory and on paper having free access to the labour market. One family migrant from India summed up the frustration regarding the contradictions in Dutch policy: highly skilled migrants can freely bring their partners with them to the Netherlands, there are no integration requirements and the partners may work, but in practice they face a number of barriers:

Getting a visa is so easy, they treat you as a highly skilled migrant, but once you start looking for a job, you have to speak Dutch... All the websites are in English, but they still want you to speak Dutch. If Dutch was so mandatory they should keep the prices for the [language] classes reasonable... At least they should have told I had to speak Dutch (Sabita, 1985, female, family member, India).

This quote also shows that the emphasis on Dutch language was not something that migrants were aware of before they came to the Netherlands.

This unintended consequence is undesirable, because it hinders the achievement of the original policy objective, namely encouraging highly skilled migrants to establish themselves in the Netherlands. If highly skilled migrants feel socially isolated in the Netherlands and if their partners struggle to find work, they will naturally contemplate moving to another country or returning to the country of origin (e.g. WODC 2014: 73). Indeed, experiences of current migrants may affect future migration flows too: “rare are the migrants without contacts among compatriots already living and working in Europe who relay their own experiences at work, in shops, and at government offices” (Doomernik et al. 2009: 19). If highly skilled migrants consider staying permanently or naturalising in the Netherlands, the ‘freedom’ in integration disappears and they will have to take the civic integration exam, at which point not having learned Dutch previously will become an obstacle (European Migration Network 2013: 36). This shows, therefore, that just as in Germany this ‘freedom’ should not be considered an advantage but rather an ‘integration vacuum’.

These adverse consequences of exempting highly skilled migrants from integration requirements could arguably have been anticipated, even though evaluations of the highly skilled migrant scheme have focussed on the effect for the Dutch knowledge economy and the existence of abuses of the system (European Migration Network 2013: 29-30), not on the experiences of migrants and their family members concerned. A 2013 report by the European Migration Network recognises that Dutch policy on highly skilled immigration concerns mainly immigration measures (European Migration Network 2013), and that highly skilled migrants often do not feel at home in the Netherlands and live in a form of segregation (id., 17). A 2015 report by SEO Economic Research acknowledged the importance of employment for partners of highly skilled migrants, and estimated this effect: “The probability of staying in the Netherlands after five years is 18 percentage points higher for highly skilled migrants with employed partners” (SEO Economic Research 2015: 31). The policymakers who were interviewed for this research also understood the need to make the Netherlands more attractive for partners of highly skilled migrants.

Responsibility for this unintended consequence can be allocated to the different actors with a stake in Dutch migration and integration policy. The Ministry of Economic Affairs believes that highly skilled migrants can have positive effect on the Dutch economy and wants to encourage more such immigration, but is not actually responsible for making policy on migration. Instead, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment plays a central role in labour migration as it has responsibility for the protection of the Dutch labour market and also for inte-



gration policy. Integration policy in the Netherlands has become mainstreamed, meaning that immigrants are targeted with the same instruments as the native Dutch population (e.g. Scholten et al. 2017). The only elements of ‘integration policy’ that really remain are the language and civic integration exams, and this policy places responsibility on the individual migrant for his/her progress towards passing those exams. Dutch policy therefore stigmatises migrants by assigning to them responsibility for their failure to integrate.

How has the situation arisen in which the combination of Dutch policy on highly skilled migration and on integration combine to produce unintended consequences? This case is an instance of policymakers being ‘blind’ to potential unintended consequences because the desired and intended consequences are so important (Burlyuk 2017: 1016). The policymakers interviewed for the research often talked in very general terms about the positive impact of highly skilled migrants for the Dutch economy, but much seemed to be assumed rather than documented. Some interviewees even admitted that there might be a difference between the theory and practice of highly skilled migration; for example, because the scale of highly skilled migration to the Netherlands is relatively small, the macro-economic effect is likely to be minimal. There is thus a certain ignorance or disregard for the actual impact of the policy, but highly skilled immigration is a blind spot for policymakers because it is such an important objective. This is coupled with an erroneous assumption about migrants’ behaviour. It is assumed that waiving integration requirements for both the migrant and the partner will make the Netherlands a more attractive destination for highly skilled migrants. However, this ‘integration vacuum’ can have the unintended consequence that migrants who are socially isolated in the Netherlands and whose partners struggle to find work as a result of not speaking Dutch are not likely to settle for an extended period of time. In addition, immigration policy does not alone account for highly skilled migrants’ choice of destination; economic factors, the openness of professional markets, the tertiary education system, and the level of tolerance in a society all play a role (Doomernik et al. 2009).

In this case study, it is particularly women who are affected by the unintended consequences of the interaction of migration and integration policies. The report by SEO Economic Research analysed 8,445 highly skilled migrants with a partner from 2005-2012. Of those couples, in 14% the woman was the migrant; in 86% the woman was the partner. In other words, there is a gender bias in highly skilled migrant couples, because mostly the man is the migrant (and therefore by definition in employment). By the end of the observation period, only

18% of partners of highly skilled migrants had a job in the Netherlands (SEO Economic Research 2015, p.40).<sup>2</sup> This means that migrant women, who may already face gender inequalities in the labour market and career setbacks when starting a family, potentially lose extra time on the labour market due to being unemployed while living abroad. These women therefore face the accumulated inequalities linked to gender inequalities (present for all women in a society) plus the inequalities resulting from evaluation processes related to their status as migrants. Despite the positive value assigned to highly skilled immigrants by Dutch policy, these migrants still face practical difficulties to access the labour market, resulting in economic inequalities.

## 4. Conclusions

This paper addressed, from a political sociology viewpoint, the interaction of migration and integration policies for highly skilled migrants in two European countries, the resulting unintended consequences, and the links to cultural processes linked to inequalities. The analysis shows that migration and integration policies are in many aspects similar regarding the objective to attract highly skilled migrants by providing, in comparison to other migrants, more simplified admission procedures in Germany and the Netherlands. In both countries, there are also intensive political discourses on migrants' integration, but an 'integration vacuum' exists for highly skilled migrants: there is no obligation for them or their spouses to participate in language training or orientation courses during the first years of residence. The major objectives of such policies seem to be, on the one hand, to respond to employer demands in the short-term by providing qualified foreign workers without long admission procedures, and on the other hand to further increase the attractiveness of the two destination countries by avoiding high entrance barriers and onerous integration requirements at the beginning of stays.

However, intersecting migration and integration regimes in both countries produce several unintended consequences, including inequalities among migrants and spouses. There is evidence that the absence of any integration requirements, as well as the absence of explicit

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<sup>2</sup> The preponderance of male highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands may be due to the jobs they come to fulfil, which are mainly in IT – a sector which is still characterised by gender stereotypes in addition to an unfavourable work-life balance (Kofman 2014: 122).

support for integration during the first years, can entail several consequences, including for example the difficulties with bureaucracy in Germany and building of social relationships and integrating in the labour market in the Netherlands. This shows that policies in both countries do not represent a 'freedom' in the incorporation into society, but rather an 'integration vacuum'. These circumstances are aggravated by relatively unprepared and inflexible institutions which are especially under pressure in light of emerging challenges in relation to humanitarian migration.

In Germany, formal bureaucratic evaluation in conjunction with the 'integration vacuum' can have the unintended consequence of uneven conditions for highly skilled migrants in comparison to migrants in other legal categories (e.g. international students) as well as producing perceptions of stigmatisation among these migrants. Highly skilled migrants do not represent a homogenous group of people. Not all of them are able to quickly and independently adapt to Germany which shows that the evaluation on the political and bureaucratic level is rather misleading, producing drawbacks for some migrants. In the case of absence of other sources of support and orientation, it might entail the accumulation of additional detriments. The German economy seems to be affected by onward or return migration of highly skilled migrants which, in the light of acute labour shortage and future demographic pressures, represents an unintended and undesired outcome for the country.

In the Netherlands, the unintended consequences of migration and integration policies for highly skilled migrants were isolation and experiences of loneliness in the everyday life, and difficulties for spouses to find work as a result of lacking language skills. Highly skilled women who accompany their spouses face symbolic and material inequalities as a result of migration, in the form of experiences of loneliness in the everyday life, and difficulties to find work. These combine with gender inequalities in the economic and cultural sphere, adding up to a high price for migrating.

Hitherto, only few studies focused on the accumulation of inequalities related to cultural dynamics emerging from migration or integration policies, to which this paper contributed an additional comparative analysis. Future research should pay particular attention to the way in which policy interactions can produce unintended consequences which may contribute to cumulative social inequalities. In doing so, not only can a better understanding of contemporary interlinkages between different policy areas and long-lasting disadvantages be produced, but also theory building in migration and inequality studies might advance.

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