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**KNOW YOUR WORTH: HOW TO REDUCE MIGRANTS'
OVERQUALIFICATION**

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Executive Summary

Overqualification is a large problem for both EU and non-EU migrants coming to the Netherlands. Lack of qualification recognition, social support, and inadequate employment policies push labour migrants to take jobs below their skill level, wasting human capital and reducing economic efficiency. Therefore, this policy paper aims to summarize insights from existing research to reduce overqualification. Literature reveals the possible positive role of the following group of actions: **(1)** a faster and more efficient recognition process of education and training credentials; **(2)** training and internship programmes that enable migrants to adapt their existing skills to the Dutch labour market, **(3)**; and improving matching between migrants and employers.

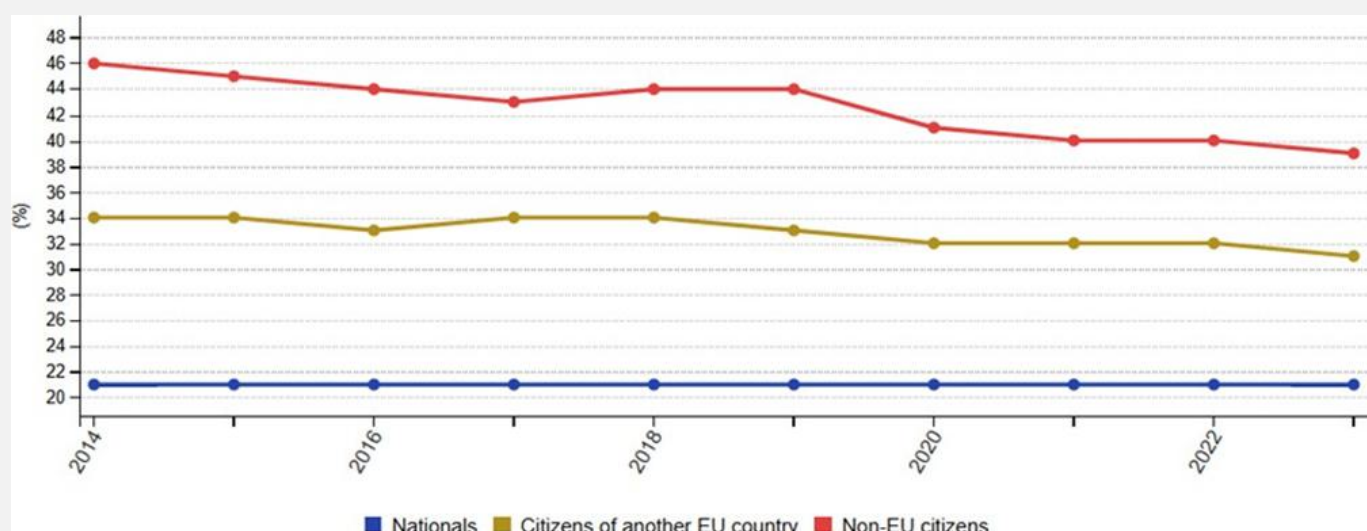
Introduction

In 2023, the overqualification rate in the Netherlands was close to 32% for EU migrants and 40% for non-EU migrants, compared with 20.8% for Dutch nationals, as shown by Figure 1 (Eurostat, 2024). Although the overqualification of migrants has slightly decreased in recent years, working on reducing it further is still important to tap the potential of migrants. While academic and policy definitions vary, overqualified employees are individuals with a tertiary level of education working in low- or medium-skilled occupations; in other words, these people are employed in positions that do not match their qualifications (Dalmont

et al., 2024). In practice, this may include, for instance, a trained medical doctor working as a taxi driver, an engineer with a master's degree employed in a call centre, a lawyer working in a warehouse, a teacher with a university degree employed in cleaning or catering, or an architect working as a delivery rider. Such cases often stem from lengthy recognition procedures for foreign qualifications, limited access to professional networks, language barriers, or discrimination in the labour market (De Lange et al., 2021).

Migrants are nonetheless essential in filling vital roles that keep European economies functioning (Fasani & Mazza, 2020; European Commission, 2023). Overqualified employees represent a waste of human capital (Goldring & Guidoum, 2013), and because labour migrants play such a vital role, implementing policies to improve their position in the labour market would benefit not only the migrants but also the Netherlands. Labour migration policies should be aligned with contemporary economic models and the political ideas of the receiving countries (Balch, 2011).

Figure 1: Overqualification rates for the period 2014-2023



Source: Eurostat, 2024

Currently, the structure of the Dutch labour market is segmented with migrant workers going to specific sectors (Van Bochove et al., 2010). This is also linked to migrants' networks, which, by providing information only on certain opportunities, push migrants towards jobs below the tertiary education level (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2010). Many potential labour

migrants who wish to come to the Netherlands rely on these networks for job opportunities. Furthermore, certificates and diplomas are not always recognized or translated to Dutch equivalents properly or timely leading to an increase in overqualified employees (Netherlands Worldwide, n.d.; Muller et al., 2017). These policy failures can force highly-educated migrants into lower-skilled jobs, wasting human capital and reducing economic efficiency. Improving recognition of foreign certificates and experience, thus allowing for improved labour integration, would harness migrants' skills, benefiting both individual migrants and the Dutch economy.

Possible measures

To contribute to mitigating overqualification, several measures have been identified by existing literature. Literature reveals the possible positive role of the following group of actions:

- (1)** a faster and more efficient recognition process of education and training credentials;
- (2)** training and internship programmes that enable migrants to adapt their existing skills to the Dutch labour market;
- (3)** and improving matching between migrants and employers.

(1) A Faster and More Efficient Recognition Process of Education and Training Credentials

For migrants to fully utilize their skills in the Dutch labour market, it is essential that the qualifications they obtained abroad are recognized in a timely and reliable manner. Lengthy recognition procedures can lead to prolonged periods of unemployment or force migrants into low-skilled jobs that do not reflect their actual expertise. The European Commission (2020) has outlined several steps to improve recognition across the EU, such as simplifying procedures, enhancing collaboration between agencies, and promoting transparency of qualification systems. Adopting similar measures in the Netherlands could significantly reduce barriers for highly educated migrants. For example, closer cooperation between

organizations responsible for integration and credential evaluation would streamline the process, ensuring that migrants are not caught between bureaucratic systems.

Transparency about different qualification frameworks is also vital, as it allows both employers and migrants to better understand the value of foreign degrees. A more efficient recognition process would not only prevent overqualification but also ensure that the Dutch economy can benefit from the knowledge and skills that migrants bring with them.

(2) Training and Internship Programmes to Adapt Skills to the Dutch Labour Market

Recognition alone is often insufficient to guarantee that migrants can apply their qualifications effectively. Training programmes and targeted internships can bridge the gap between existing expertise and the specific requirements of the Dutch labour market (Gonggrijp & Onwudiegwu, 2024). Such initiatives may help migrants adapt to different techniques, standards, and professional norms that may differ from those in their country of origin.

Tailored workshops could, for instance, focus on sector-specific regulations, professional communication, and the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Beyond technical skills, these programmes can also equip migrants with the ability to present and communicate their qualifications effectively, an area where many face difficulties (Goldring & Guidoum, 2013). Complementary traineeships provide valuable work experience and may culminate in certification, which offers formal evidence of competencies (European Commission, n.d.).

These traineeships not only enhance employability but also help fill labour shortages in specialized industries that are underrepresented in the Dutch education system (Stewart et al., 2021). In this way, both migrants and employers benefit: migrants gain practical pathways to appropriate employment, and companies gain access to talent to meet shortages.

(3) Improving Matching Between Migrants and Employers

Even when qualifications are recognized and skills adapted, overqualification persists if migrants are not effectively connected with employers who require their expertise. Current employment agencies often focus on placing migrants in low-skilled jobs, which reinforces patterns of underemployment (Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). Reorienting these agencies toward a broader matchmaking role could create stronger bridges between skilled migrants and employers facing labour shortages.

Organizing targeted networking events is another way to connect migrants with companies directly, helping them expand beyond small social networks that often consist only of fellow migrants (Kracke & Klug, 2021). In the long term, these professional contacts not only improve immediate job matching but also provide ongoing opportunities through broader social capital (Ryan & Mulholland, 2013).

Additionally, governments could support employers by introducing financial incentives, such as wage subsidies for hiring highly qualified migrants in skilled positions. Evidence from Sweden shows that such measures can create more entry opportunities for migrants and encourage firms to tap into this talent pool (Hooper et al., 2017). By improving job matching through agencies, networks, and incentives, the Dutch labour market can better align the skills of migrants with employers' needs, reducing overqualification and enhancing overall productivity.

Conclusions: towards a comprehensive approach to tackling overqualification

The persistence of migrant overqualification in the Netherlands is a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive and integrated policy response. Addressing this issue cannot rely on a single measure; instead, it calls for coordinated interventions that target recognition of qualifications, adaptation of skills, and improved labour market matching.

Taken together, the aforementioned measures form a comprehensive programme that addresses multiple dimensions of overqualification. The combination of these measures in a strategic programme is important as the different measures combined can tackle the different causes of overqualification. Recognition systems acknowledge and validate skills; training and internships adapt those skills to the Dutch context; and improved job matching ensures those skills are deployed effectively in the labour market. This integrated approach not only improves labour market outcomes for migrants but also strengthens the Dutch economy by unlocking underutilized talent.

In sum, tackling migrant overqualification is both a social and an economic imperative. Reducing overqualification improves the well-being and integration of migrants, enhances the competitiveness of the Dutch labour force, and contributes to addressing labour shortages in critical sectors. A coordinated strategy that combines recognition, training, and matching policies offers the most promising path forward.

Policy recommendations

POLICY	ACTION POINTS
Streamline recognition procedures for foreign qualifications (involving state level, national stakeholders and professional organisations)	• Accelerate and simplify credential evaluation processes. • Increase transparency of qualification frameworks to help both employers and migrants understand the value of foreign degrees.
Develop targeted training and bridging programmes (involving national and local stakeholders tasked with migrant and beneficiary labour market integration)	• Focus on adapting existing skills to Dutch standards rather than retraining from scratch. • Include sector-specific workshops, professional communication courses, and cultural orientation. • Provide structured internships linked to industries with labour shortages.
Reorient employment agencies towards high-skilled matching (involving state and local level interventions)	• Incentivize agencies to connect migrants with jobs that reflect their expertise. • Establish partnerships with employers to reduce dependence on informal migrant networks.
Introduce carefully designed employer incentives (involving state and local level interventions)	• Offer wage subsidies or tax benefits to companies hiring highly qualified migrants in sectors facing shortages. • Ensure that such incentives are tied to long-term integration and career development rather than short-term placements.

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