

Essays on attracting and retaining highly educated migrants

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SUMMARY

Highly educated migration has been increasing during the past years and is likely to continue doing so in the future because of improved educational levels worldwide, the move to the knowledge-based economy and growing skills shortages. Despite the importance of highly educated migration and increased interest in the topic by policy makers, employers and scholars alike, the understanding of the field remains insufficient. The aim of this dissertation is to add to a better understanding of the phenomenon of highly educated migration, using an interdisciplinary and mixed methods approach that brings in the views of employers and migrants themselves. The dissertation is paper-based and includes four key analytical chapters that can be read independently. The dissertation structure mirrors the different stages in the migration process from (employers) attracting migrants (Chapter 2) to migrants' experiences with settling-in (Chapter 3) and the formation of spatial intentions (Chapter 3), to realising these intentions (Chapter 4). All chapters have important implications for the retention of highly educated migrants.

More specifically, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of the employer view by exploring Dutch SMEs' demands for highly educated migrant workers as well as their approaches and abilities to attract and retain migrants using qualitative interviews (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 turns to the perspectives of highly educated migrants themselves. Based on an online survey and serial interviews with highly educated migrants living in a cross-border region spanning parts of the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium, this chapter studies migrants' perceptions of the welcoming environment in the host country and the institutional, societal and personal factors contributing to their feelings of being welcome. Building on this, Chapter 4 tests policy-makers' assumptions that the creation of a welcoming environment can facilitate the retention of highly educated migrants by examining the association between migrants' feelings of being welcome in the host country and their spatial intentions (i.e., intending to stay permanently, intending to stay temporarily/ being uncertain, and intending to re-migrate). Finally, Chapter 5 studies the link between stated and revealed spatial preferences, by zooming in on the spatial intentions and subsequent spatial behaviour of recent higher education graduates in the same cross-border region combining panel survey data and interviews. Taken together, these studies contribute to insights on three under-studied aspects of attracting and retaining highly educated migrants, namely 1) the employers' role; 2) the role of early experiences in the host country and spatial intentions; and 3) highly educated migration in a less central region.