BEYOND PRECARIOUS MIGRANT WORK

An interdisciplinary approach to understanding and improving Central and Eastern European migrant workers' quality of working conditions in Dutch warehousing and greenhouse horticulture

Kornélia Anna Kerti

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Migrant workers' precarious quality of working conditions is a persistent policy challenge in the increasingly flexible Dutch labour market (Cremers, 2023; Siegmann et al., 2022). Precarious work makes migrants' working lives insecure, unstable and uncertain, pushes the responsibility of the risks of the work to migrants, limits their capacity to voice their concerns, provides them with minimal social protection, and subjects them to inequal and unfair treatment at the workplace (Allan et al., 2021; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). Since the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, 2011 and 2013, Central and Eastern European (CEE) workers have grown to make up one of the largest migrant groups in the Netherlands (CBS, 2024, see Table 1). Enticing, migrant-targeted advertisement of work opportunities and cross-border hiring in historically precarious, low-wage industries has contributed to the growth of the CEE migrant worker group, specifically in the Dutch greenhouse horticulture and warehousing sectors (Acocella et al., 2024; Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Pijpers, 2010; Siegmann et al., 2022).

Table 1.1 *Number of Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the Netherlands in 2014 and 2024 (CBS, 2024)*

	Polish	Bulgarian	Romanian	Hungarian	Lithuanian	Slovakian	Latvian	Croatian
2014	85.800	17.800	10.000	10.300	4.600	3.900	3.300	1.800
2024	194.400	60.500	52.300	22.500	11.500	9.600	8.900	6.900

CEE migrant workers are at a risk of precarious work in the Dutch greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing sectors for several reasons. First, these sectors are leading in the employment of temporary agency mediated migrant labour, accounting for 19% and 44% of the total temporary employment of migrant workers respectively (ABU & NBBU, 2021). Much of CEE migrants' employment in these sectors is facilitated through one of the close to 16 thousand registered temporary work agencies in the Netherlands (Inspectie SZW, 2023), who in addition to offering employment, often also arrange migrant workers' housing, transportation to work and access to healthcare for additional costs, resulting in complex dependencies for migrant workers (Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). Second, CEE migrants often have temporary, flexible employment contracts, the volatility of which are amplified in greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing, where labour demand is also affected by seasonal demands (Doomernik et al., 2023; Strockmeijer et al., 2019). This leads to an increased risk of unstable and uncertain employment. Last, CEE migrant workers generally have low foreign language proficiency and do not have access to state-mandated language courses to improve their Dutch skills, which puts them at a risk of becoming socially isolated and at a risk of being exploited due to not being able to channel their voice about their working conditions (Djundeva & Ellwardt, 2020). This is intensified in greenhouse horticulture and warehousing, where the work is physically demanding, repetitive and can be learned through on-the-job training, attracting workers with little to no Dutch language skills (Berntsen & Marino, 2023; Siegmann et al., 2022).

While the focus of this dissertation is greenhouse horticulture and warehousing, our findings can offer insights for other sectors characterized by precarious work, such as construction and meat processing, and to a lesser extent the hospitality, domestic work and cleaning service industries.

While precarious migrant work long-existed in greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing in the Netherlands, the COVID-19 pandemic brought CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions to the centre of media attention and policy debate (De Lange et al., 2022; Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021). As in greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing CEE migrant workers were required to continue working throughout the pandemic, reports started to emerge about their overcrowded and inhumane housing and the violation of health and safety rules at their workplace and in their transportation to and from work, increasing the possibility of infection, ultimately posing a public health risk (Berntsen & Marino, 2023). While stakeholders did not agree on the 'how', they all agreed that improving working (and housing) conditions was necessary. In response to the reports of precarious working conditions, the government established a taskforce to give recommendations on tackling the exploitation of migrant workers (Aanjaagteam Bescherming Arbeidsmigranten, 2020). Non-governmental organizations and trade unions offered support and information about public health measures to migrant workers, the latter pressing the Dutch government to tighten regulations on temporary work agencies and enhance social rights protections for migrant workers (De Lange et al., 2022). User organizations and temporary work agencies were suddenly tasked with ensuring respect for public health measures at the workplace and at migrants' housing locations, while being required to conduct regular testing and to quarantine those infected to prevent a further spread of the virus (Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021). Despite their efforts, the media and trade unions blamed user organizations and temporary work agencies for the questionable practices that led to widespread precarious work for CEE migrants (Skowronek et al., 2022). Employers' organizations (e.g. Glastuinbouw Nederland and ABU) in turn pointed to malafide, non-affiliated user organizations in their sectors, and emphasized the urgency of pushing these user organizations out of the market through improved regulatory frameworks (Been & de Beer, 2022).

The on-going blame-shifting as to who is responsible for CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions and the uncertainty regarding the actions that could improve these conditions point to our limited understanding of CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the Dutch greenhouse-horticulture and warehouse distribution sectors. In particular, it indicates that research is necessary to understand the antecedents of CEE migrant workers' precarious quality of working conditions, CEE migrant workers' subjective experiences with the quality of their working conditions and, most importantly, to identify measures that can improve CEE migrants' quality of working conditions. Based on these areas, this dissertation focuses on the following overarching research question:

How can we explain and improve the quality of working conditions of Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing sectors in the Netherlands?

To answer this research question, I address three key issues in this dissertation. These key issues are (1) to identify the underlying factors that explain quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers; (2) to explore how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions; (3) and to identify measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions. I elaborate on these three key issues below.

1.2 KEY ISSUES

Key issue 1: Which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers?

The first key issue of this dissertation focuses on the underlying factors that explain CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions. The extant literature includes several conceptual frameworks that explain how marginalized workers under economic constraints are at a risk of experiencing precarious work, including labour market segmentation theories (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Piore, 1979) and, more recently, the psychology of working theory (Duffy et al., 2016) and the work precarity model (Allan et al., 2021). While these frameworks comprehensively explain the antecedents and outcomes of precarious quality of working conditions, they offer limited insights into the persistence of precarious work over time. Furthermore, these frameworks generally focus on well-established factors that have an influence of the quality of working conditions (e.g., regulation, organizational policies, migrant workers' individual characteristics), and do not consider the impact of increasingly important stakeholders (e.g. media representatives, non-governmental organizations). Additionally, contextual sensitivity is often lacking in these frameworks as they do not account for specific groups of marginalized workers (e.g., workers with disabilities, migrant workers, refugees), context-specific regulatory frameworks (e.g., free movement of workers on the EU level, national regulation), migration patterns (e.g., intra-EU East-West migration), and cultural factors (e.g, language barriers, social network ties) that influence the quality of working conditions. I argue that for these reasons existing frameworks cannot fully explain CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions.

Building on the limitations of the aforementioned frameworks, in Chapter 2, I construct a causal loop diagram, that explains the non-linear feedback underneath CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions in Western European food production. I argue that this causal loop diagram explains how worker-, organizational- and institutional-level factors are interconnected and balance or reinforce each other through feedback loops, which in turn contribute to the persistence of precarious quality of working conditions over time. In Chapter 3, I extend my analysis to understand how non-traditional stakeholders, including researchers, media representatives and non-governmental organi-

zations explain the tenacity of the low quality of working conditions. In both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, significant attention is paid to the context that CEE migrant workers are embedded in, be that regional (Western Europe, Chapter 1) or country-specific contexts (Dutch greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing, Chapter 2). By doing so, I present a contextualized understanding of precarious work, complementing previous conceptual frameworks that focus on factors that influence (precarious) quality of working conditions (Allan et al., 2021; Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Duffy et al., 2016; Piore, 1979).

Key issue 2: How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?

The second key issue of this dissertation relates to CEE migrant workers' subjective experiences with their quality of working conditions. Previous research has extensively explored CEE migrants' experiences with their working conditions across different contexts (e.g., Arnholz & Hansen, 2013; Janta et al., 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). Many of these studies focus on traditionally migrant labour-dependent industries, such as agriculture (e.g., Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Siegmann et al., 2022), whereas the warehousing sector, emerging as one of the prime sectors of employment for CEE migrants, is seldom the focus of inquiry. Moreover, research tends to concentrate on Polish workers, who represent the largest group of CEE migrants in Western Europe (White, 2016). As a result of a mass migration of Polish workers following the EU enlargement in 2004, the Polish diaspora developed well-established communities in host countries (Schwabe & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2022). While it is important to understand Polish workers' experiences with working conditions, it cannot be assumed that these necessarily reflect those of minority CEE migrant worker groups, such as those of Hungarian migrant workers. Furthermore, most studies on CEE migrant workers' experiences with quality of working conditions are based on cross-sectional qualitative interviews, which do not allow for understanding how their trajectories develop, and experiences change over time. I argue that for these reasons, more longitudinal qualitative research is necessary, with a focus on minority CEE worker groups in the warehousing sector.

To contribute to the literature in the aforementioned aspects, in both Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I focus on Hungarian migrant workers' experiences in Dutch warehousing. In Chapter 4, I analyze 18 life history interviews with Hungarian workers to grasp how their experiences prior to migration shape their perceptions of employment in Dutch warehousing. In Chapter 5, I draw on 22 longitudinal interviews with Hungarian migrant workers conducted before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, interpreting changes in their perceived employability. In Chapter 6, I reflect on my embodied experiences as a migrant woman researcher based on six weeks of ethnographic fieldwork as a warehouse employee. By concentrating on a specific segment of the CEE migrant worker group and a relatively unexplored employment sector, and by incorporating life-history interviews, longitudinal interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, I contribute to the existing literature on CEE migrant workers' experiences of their quality of working conditions (Arnholz & Hansen, 2013; Janta et al., 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022).

Key issue 3: What measures can institutions, organizations and migrant workers take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions?

The third key issue in this dissertation focuses on the measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving quality of working conditions. The extant literature on CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions is largely descriptive, and even when it discusses measures to improve quality of working conditions, it emphasizes actions that individual stakeholders can take rather than actions at the level of institutions or as part of collaboration between stakeholders (Alberti et al., 2013; Been & de Beer, 2022; Berntsen, 2016; Peró, 2020). Participatory action research has been recognized as an effective method for improving the quality of working conditions for various migrant groups, however to our knowledge has not been utilized in the context of CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the Netherlands (Bhuyan et al., 2018; Francisco-Menchavez & Tungohan, 2020).

To explore the potential of action research methodologies for fostering stakeholder collaboration to improve the quality of working conditions, I present the findings of a participatory action research project focusing on HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work in Dutch warehousing and greenhouse-horticulture in Chapter 7. In this study, I explore stakeholders' responses to these HRM tensions, and how participatory approaches facilitate consensus building between stakeholders. I contribute to existing literature on measures to improve CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions by incorporating participatory action research methods and involving a wide range of stakeholders.

1.3 KEY APPROACHES

I address these key issues through four key approaches. These include (1) adopting an interdisciplinary approach by integrating knowledge on quality of working conditions from the industrial relations, human resource management, sociology of work and critical management studies disciplines; (2) integrating insights from the worker, organizational and institutional levels of analysis; (3) critically assessing the role of the researcher across the different chapters as critical outsider, as sympathetic outsider, as participant in-betweener and as outsider knowledge broker; (4) and showcasing the value of qualitative methods in researching migrants' precarious work. These key issues are addressed in more detail in the next paragraphs.

Key approach 1: Adopting an Interdisciplinary Approach

The first key approach concerns adopting an interdisciplinary approach. In migration research, "disciplines often develop their research and perspectives in relative isolation, and comprehensive interdisciplinary research is rare" (Pennix et al., 2008). To overcome this limitation in the extant literature and to acknowledge that CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions is multifaceted, this dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary ap-

proach. This involves integrating perspectives from industrial relations, human resource management, sociology of work and critical management studies. Taking an industrial relations lens allows for understanding the role of trade unions and collective bargaining in CEE migrants' quality of working conditions (Alberti & Peró, 2018; MacKenzie & Lucio, 2019). A human resource management (HRM) approach grants insight into the role of temporary work agencies' and user organizations' policies and practices, and how these influence CEE migrants' quality of working conditions (Connell & Burgess, 2009; Forde & MacKenzie, 2009; Turchick Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013). Through a sociology of work perspective, I can understand power imbalances between employers and CEE migrant workers and how these relations affect quality of working conditions (Scott & Rye, 2023). A critical management approach allows for exploring how CEE migrant workers' inequalities tied to structural hierarchies reproduce through organizational policies and practices, and how these trickle down to affect the quality of working conditions (Zanoni & Miszczyński, 2023; Duda-Mikulin, 2020).

In this dissertation, I attempt to bridge the gap between these disciplines. In Chapter 2, I construct a causal loop diagram explaining CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions based on the systematic review of 119 articles across the HRM, sociology of work and industrial relations disciplines. In Chapter 3, I focus on stakeholders' configurational boundary work and how this influences CEE migrant workers' mobility agency, thereby incorporating a sociology of work perspective (Langley et al., 2019). In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, using cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), I explore CEE migrants' perceptions of quality of working conditions, including HR practices, thereby aligning with the HRM discipline. In Chapter 6, I reflect on embodied experiences was a migrant woman researcher, bringing in a critical management perspective (Butler, 1990). Last, in Chapter 7, I draw on paradox theory to explore stakeholders' responses to HRM tensions, thereby once again incorporating an HRM discipline (Keegan et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016). Therefore, this dissertation represents interdisciplinary work to understand a complex phenomenon that has been largely studied from singular perspectives beforehand, and to contribute to better understanding a persistent policy challenge in order to improve the quality working conditions for CEE migrants in the increasingly flexible Dutch labour market.

Key approach 2: Integrating Cross-Level Analysis

The second key approach is centered around integrating cross-level analysis. Despite its benefits for understanding complex problems in migration studies, qualitative cross-level analysis encompassing the institutional, organizational and worker levels is still rare (Grosskopf et al., 2022; Knappert et al., 2020). In research on CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions, most research focuses on a maximum of two of these levels (e.g., HR policies and their perceptions by CEE migrations, Cremers, 2023).

In this dissertation, I engage in cross-level analysis combining partial knowledge from the institutional, organizational and worker levels. In Chapter 2, I link factors across

multiple levels based on support from the literature in a causal loop diagram. As an example, I find support for a causal loop explaining that if the power distance between migrant workers and employers decreases (organizational level), migrant workers' agency increases, raising their collective action (worker level), which in turn increases the quality of labour regulation and social protection (institutional level). In Chapter 3, I focus on how stakeholders' boundary work (the creation, reinforcement, and negotiation of boundaries between social spaces) both on the institutional and organizational level influences CEE migrant workers' mobility agency (the self-negotiation of spatiotemporalities in their lives) on the worker-level. In Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I explore worker-level perceptions of quality of working conditions at the organizational level. In Chapter 7, I look at how stakeholders on the institutional and organizational levels can collaborate with each other and with migrant workers on the worker-level to improve quality of working conditions. Thereby, I adopt cross-level analysis across the chapters of this dissertation.

Key approach 3: Critically Assessing the Role of the Researcher

The third key approach relates to critically assessing the role of the researcher. This dissertation emphasizes the importance of self-reflexivity in exploring CEE migrants' quality of working conditions. I am a CEE national who moved to the Netherlands as a student. While not sharing the experiential base of CEE migrants at the focus of research, I have work experience in part-time, low-wage employment in the Netherlands, which brought both a valuable perspective (e.g., having access to study population, being able to communicate with migrant workers in their native language) and unique challenges during the research (e.g., overcoming confirmation bias, risk of losing critical distance). As a result, I took on a different role as a researcher across the different chapters, including a researcher as critical outsider, a researcher as sympathetic outsider, a researcher as participant in-betweener and a researcher as outsider knowledge broker (Chhabra, 2020). In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I took on the role of critical outsider. Throughout the research process, I established a distance between my own experiences, the literature and stakeholders, maintained a neutral standpoint, while actively challenging assumptions through alternative research methods and being critical of power relations. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I took on the role of sympathetic outsider. Here, while I continued to maintain my neutral standpoint, I showed understanding and compassion for Hungarian migrant workers' emotions and experiences throughout the data collection process, and by my focus on the interaction between their lives and careers. During the analysis and writing phases, I reclaimed the distance between my own experiences and those of the participants, and strived to channel migrants' experiences impartially and authentically. In Chapter 6, I assumed the role of participant in-betweener. During the ethnographic fieldwork, I embraced my shared identity with the focus group as a migrant worker, but also maintained distance to the field through holding onto my identity as a researcher. As taking on the role of in-betweener is especially challenging (Ademolu, 2024), I reflect on this extensively in the chapter through the themes of prejudice, escape and guilt. Last,

in Chapter 7, I adopted the role of outsider knowledge broker. In this position, I again assumed neutrality and established a distance between my own experiences and those participating in the research, however I also actively engaged in facilitating knowledge exchange between participants. Taking on these different roles allowed for enhanced awareness of my role as a researcher and of its influence on participants and research findings.

Key approach 4: Showcasing the Value of Qualitative Methods

The fourth key approach relates to the value of qualitative methods for researching migrants' precarious work. Qualitative research is particularly suitable to explore complex issues in migration studies due to offering a nuanced analysis and amplifying marginalized migrant voices who otherwise lack mainstream representation (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018).

In this dissertation, I showcase a variety of qualitative research methods, that allow for an in-depth understanding of CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions. In Chapter 2, I use qualitative system dynamics with input from a systematic literature review. In Chapter 3, I use content analysis for interpreting stakeholder interviews. In Chapter 4, I use narrative analysis to give meaning to Hungarian migrant workers' life history interviews. In Chapter 5, I adopt a longitudinal interview design and use thematic analysis and visual life diagram mapping to interpret these. In Chapter 6, I construct an autoethnographic story based on ethnographic fieldwork and do writing differently. Last, in Chapter 7, I use content analysis to identify stakeholder responses across the 22 stakeholder interviews and the three participatory action research groups. As shown above, I incorporate a variety of qualitative research methods into this dissertation making both the data collection and analysis process valid and relevant.

1.4 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

This dissertation is comprised of one systematic literature review, five empirical qualitative studies and one concluding chapter. The outline of the dissertation is presented below.

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I address the first key issue, thereby identifying which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers. In *Chapter 2*, I present a causal loop diagram of quality of working conditions based on the systematic literature review of 119 studies. The extant literature on migrant workers' quality of working conditions assumes a linear understanding of cause and effect (e.g., Alberti, 2014; Wagner & Hassel, 2016; Rogalewski, 2022). This does not account for the non-linear behavior of the feedback loops underneath quality of working conditions. The goal of this chapter is to integrate partial, linear, idiosyncratic knowledge on CEE migrant workers' working conditions into a comprehensive causal loop diagram. I use the theory of dynamic complexity to identify feedback loops underneath CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions (Sterman, 2001).

In *Chapter 3*, I focus on exploring multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work in Dutch greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing. Stakeholders engage in boundary work - the creation, reinforcement, and negotiation of boundaries between social spaces (Langley et al., 2019). This influences migrant workers' mobility agency, referring to migrants' self-negotiation of spatiotemporalities in their lives. I use content analysis to interpret 34 stakeholder interviews conducted with policymakers, trade unions, user organizations, temporary work agencies, journalists, non-governmental organizations, housing experts and researchers. The first aim of this chapter is to understand how the prevailing stakeholder narratives make, arrange, buffer and coalesce the boundaries within which CEE migrant workers' exercise their mobility agency. The second goal is to understand stakeholders' behavioral strategies of boundary work following the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Chapter 4, 5 and 6, I examine the second key issue, and explore how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions. In *Chapter 4*, I explore the frames of reference that CEE migrant workers use to interpret their quality of working conditions in Dutch warehousing. Frames of reference can be understood as self-constructed norms originating from employees' experiences, which they use as benchmarks for the subjective evaluation of working conditions (Clibborn, 2021; Könönen, 2019; Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). I use narrative analysis and cognitive dissonance theory to interpret 18 in-depth interviews with Hungarian migrant workers. The first aim of the article is to explore how migrant workers' frame of reference form. The second aim of the article is to identify how migrants' frames of reference influence their perceptions of the quality of working conditions.

In *Chapter 5*, I investigate how migrants' access to resources during global crises, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic, influence their perceived employability. Perceived employability refers to migrants' views on their ability to secure and retain employment (De Vos et al., 2011; Vanhercke et al., 2014). I use conservation of resources theory and thematic analysis to interpret 22 longitudinal in-depth interviews conducted with Hungarian migrant workers in Dutch warehousing before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first aim of the chapter is to explore whether the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a career shock for migrant workers – an event that prompted them to reconsider their careers (Akkermans et al., 2020). The second aim of the chapter is to explore the influence of resource loss and resource gain spirals on migrants' subjective evaluations of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their perceived employability and careers.

In *Chapter 6*, I explore embodied experiences in Dutch warehousing. I draw on six weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in two warehouse distribution centers. The first aim of the chapter is to explore the role of the body in doing low-wage work (Butler, 1990). The second aim of the chapter is to showcase the value of writing differently through autoethnographic stories (Clavijo & Mandalaki, 2024; van Amsterdam, 2014; van Amsterdam et al., 2023).

I reflect on the third key issue by identifying what measures institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions. In *Chapter 7*, I explore stakeholders' responses to HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work. HRM tensions are conflicts arising from inherent contradictions between the parties in the employment relationship (Thompson, 2011). I build on paradox theory and use content analysis to interpret 22 stakeholder interviews and three participatory action research focus groups with 8-11 participants (Keegan et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016). The first aim of the article is map HRM tensions between temporary work agencies, user organizations and migrant workers. The second aim of the article is to analyze stakeholders' (defensive or proactive) responses to these tensions across the interviews and the participatory action research focus groups.

In *Chapter 8*, I interpret the implications of the dissertation for the three key issues. I outline the theoretical contributions for each key issue. I outline practical contributions on the institutional, organizational and worker levels. I conclude this chapter by listing the limitations of the dissertation, and identifying future research directions for exploring quality of working conditions in different contexts, for bringing more attention to within-group differences in migration research and for focusing on the role of migrant workers' personal ecosystem in their quality of working conditions.

The detailed outline of each of the chapters including an overview of the key issues tackled and the key approaches represented is included in Table 1.2. The conceptualization of the dissertation is included in Figure 1.

Table 1.2 *Overview of chapters in this dissertation*

Chapter	Key issue	Role of the researcher	Discipline	Research question	Theory	Methods
Chapter 2	Key issue 1: Which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers?	Researcher as critical outsider	HRM, sociology of work, industrial relations	Which feedback loops explain the quality of working conditions of Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the food production chain of Western Europe?	Dynamic complexity in systems thinking (Sterman, 2001)	Systematic literature review of 119 articles, interpreted through group model building
Chapter 3	Key issue 1: Which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers?	Researcher as critical outsider	Sociology of work	How does multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work influence CEE migrant workers' mobility agency in low-wage employment in the Netherlands?	Configurational boundary work (Langley et al., 2019)	34 in-depth interviews with stakeholders
Chapter 4	Key issue 2: How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?	Researcher as sympathetic outsider	HRM	How do frames of reference influence Hungarian migrant workers' perception of working conditions in Dutch warehousing?	Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957)	18 in-depth interviews with migrant workers
Chapter 5	Key issue 2: How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?	Researcher as sympathetic outsider	HRM	How do resources in times of crises affect the thought processes and actions of migrant workers considering their careers and perceived employability?	Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989)	22 in-depth longitudinal interviews with migrant workers

Table 1.2 *Overview of chapters in this dissertation (continued)*

Chapter	Key issue	Role of the researcher	Discipline	Research question	Theory	Methods
Chapter 6	Key issue 2: How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?	Researcher as participant in-betweener	Critical management	How did I experience the management, peer-imposed and internalized ideal worker norms and how do I interpret my feelings and reactions to these experiences?	Embodiment (Butler, 1990).	6 weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in warehouses
Chapter 7	Key issue 3: What measures can institutions, organizations and migrant workers take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions?	Researcher as outsider knowledge broker	HRM	How do stakeholders in temporary agency migrant work in the Netherlands respond to HRM tensions in the triangular employment relationship?	Paradox theory (Keegan et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016)	22 in-depth interviews with stakeholders, 3 participatory action research focus groups with 8-11 participants

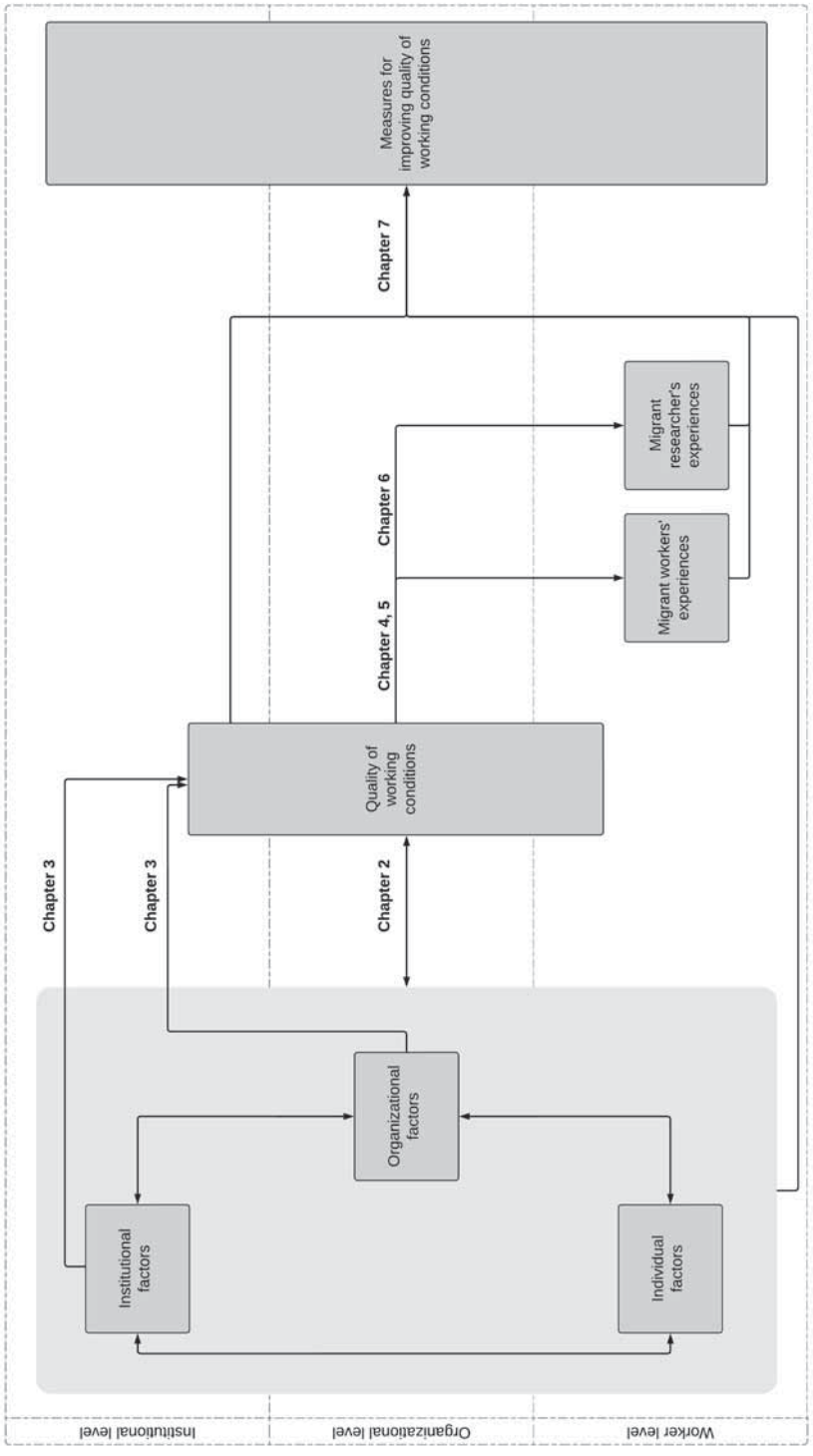


Figure 1.1 *Conceptualization of the dissertation*

1.5 ETHICS REVIEW

All studies included in this dissertation received ethical clearance from the Ethics Review Board of Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

1.6 FUNDING

This research was financially supported by Insituut Gak. Instituut Gak aims to contribute to the quality of social security and the labour market in the Netherlands by funding social projects, research, chairs and professorships.

CHAPTER 2

European migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the food production sector: A causal loop diagram

Kornélia Anna Kerti, Inge Bleijenbergh, Brigitte Kroon, Charissa Freese, Marloes van Engen

This chapter is in the second round of revision as: Kerti, K.A., Bleijenbergh, I., Kroon, B., Freese, C., & Van Engen, M. European migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the food production sector: A causal loop diagram.

This chapter was presented and discussed at the ILERA Conference (2021), EGOS Colloquium (2022) and the International System Dynamics Conference (2022).

ABSTRACT

Many Central and Eastern European migrant workers have precarious working conditions in food production, which suggests that low quality of working conditions has a systemic character. To better understand the dynamic system that explains the persistence of precarious work in the food production sector, we conducted a systematic literature review of 119 studies. Integrating studies on elements of the system into a causal loop diagram, we identified feedback loops that explain the persistence of low quality of working conditions. The feedback loops encompass three overarching themes: (1) the quality of labour regulation and social protection; (2) the use of temporary work agencies, and (3) the availability of migrant workers for precarious work. The causal loop diagram shows how labour regulation can reduce the use of temporary work agencies, increase the agency of workers, and decrease migrants' availability for precarious work.

Keywords: quality of working conditions, dynamic theory, migrant workers, food production, temporary work agency

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Governments and organizations continue to fail providing good quality of working conditions for migrant workers in Europe (Naccache & Al Ariss, 2018; Omanović et al., 2022; Wright & Clibborn, 2019). When employment is "uncertain, unstable, and insecure and in which employees bear the risks of work (as opposed to businesses or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory protections", low quality working conditions amount to precarious work (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018, p. 1). Several factors contribute to the persistence of precarious work for migrant workers. Non-standard work became increasingly deregulated, gradually diminishing labour standards for workers on the periphery of the labour market (Bal & Izak, 2021; Prosser, 2016). Labour market flexibilization led to the emergence of labour market intermediaries facilitating migrant workers' mobility to match the demand for low-wage temporary labour (Sporton, 2013). In such institutional contexts, trade unions struggle and often fail to organize migrant workers (Carver & Doellgast, 2021). Coupled with the lack of representation in collective bargaining, migrant workers' weak position in the employment relationship makes them available for and vulnerable to precarious working conditions (Anderson, 2010). While some migrant workers are able to contest their labour market position, many are trapped in continuous cycles of precariousness, eventually causing depression, anxiety, burnout (Allan et al., 2021).

Precarious work affects labour relations, undermining social cohesion, solidarity, and integration (Doellgast et al., 2018; Rubery et al., 2018). Precarious work relates to weakening labour standards, the ineffectiveness of collective bargaining and an increase in the power distance between employers and workers (Andrijasevic & Sacchetto, 2016; Kushnirovich et al., 2019). Improving migrants' quality of working conditions is a pressing challenge for organizations and governments as it is essential for the sustainable organization of work (Pfeffer, 2010).

One of the sectors of the labour market where precarious work prevails is the food production chain: agriculture, food processing, warehouse distribution and hospitality (e.g., Alberti, 2014; Hopkins et al., 2016; Janta et al., 2011; Lever & Milbourne, 2017; Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Scott, 2017). This sector received significant attention for migrants' low-quality of working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic (Palumbo et al., 2022). Fuelled by the principle of free movement of persons, many Central and Eastern European (hereinafter: CEE) migrant workers find employment in the food production chain of Western Europe (Currie, 2007; Engbersen et al., 2017; Hopkins, 2011). Migrant workers in the food production chain often face a demanding workload and extensive working time and are subject to strong managerial control and the insecurities of flexible working arrangements (e.g., Alberti, 2014; Baxter-Reid, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2016; Pijpers, 2010; Voivozeanu, 2019).

This article aims to explain the persistence of precarious working conditions for labour migrants in Western European food production by visualising the feedback underneath. To map the feedback underlying the quality of working condition, we integrate studies

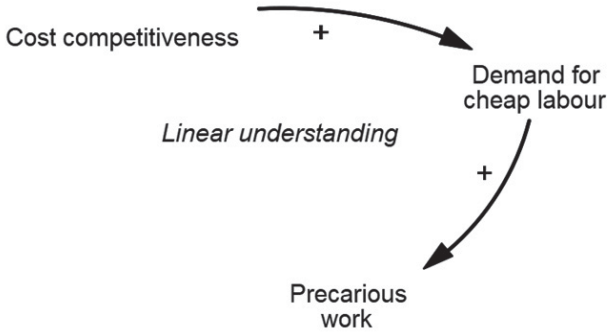
that detail elements of the system in a coherent causal loop diagram. The state of the art on labour migrants consists of studies that explain linear feedback (e.g., Alberti, 2014; Wagner & Hassel, 2016; Rogalewski, 2022). A linear understanding of cause and effect - albeit providing an in-depth exploration of precarious work on a particular level - fails to grasp the nonlinear behaviour of the system of working conditions at large. Considering the persistence of precarious work for CEE migrant workers, we assume an underlying system that is characterized by dynamic complexity, which means feedback at different levels interact and sometimes reinforce each other (Lewis et al., 2015; Poblete, 2018). Our research question is: *Which feedback loops explain the quality of working conditions of Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the food production chain of Western Europe?*

Building on a systematic review of the literature, we construct a causal loop diagram of migrant workers' quality of working conditions. The causal loop diagram shows how the feedback loops underpinning precarious work self-reinforce or balance each other (Sterman, 2001). This article makes a contribution to management literature on the quality of working conditions by combining partial, idiosyncratic, and linear knowledge on migrants' working conditions into a comprehensive causal loop diagram that bridges different levels of analysis. As it identifies the feedback loops that reinforce and balance precarious work in the food production chain, the causal loop diagram represents a dynamic theory that can serve as an evidence-based framework for the agenda setting of policy makers, trade unions and employer's organizations.

2.2 THE DYNAMIC COMPLEXITY OF QUALITY OF WORKING CONDITIONS

In this section we explain how systems thinking adds to understanding and managing the quality of working conditions of migrant workers. We illustrate this by referring to an example of linear understanding of the relationship between cost competitiveness and precarious work: When cost competitiveness increases, organizations try to keep their competitive advantage by lowering their labour costs. Therefore, the demand for cheap labour grows, and when supply meets demand, precarious work rises (Grimshaw et al., 2018) (See Figure 1). However, it remains unclear how precarious work drives further trends, like cost competitiveness. This linear understanding cannot explain the persistence of low-quality working conditions over time.

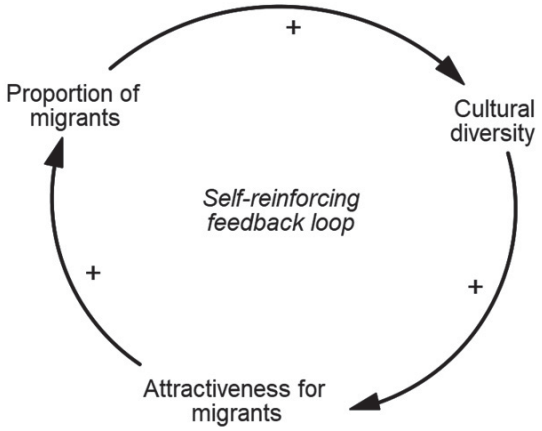
Figure 2.1 *Linear understanding of the link between cost competitiveness and precarious work*



Systems thinking increases our understanding of the persistence of low quality of working conditions by acknowledging the dynamic complexity of the underlying system. Dynamic complexity is inherent to systems that are tightly coupled, governed by feedback, nonlinear, counterintuitive and policy resistant (Sterman, 2001). In this case, the economic and social contexts for labour migration are tightly coupled. Shifts in the quality of working conditions in one sector or for one specific group feeds back into another. As in systems shaped by dynamic complexity the consequences of policy makers choices determine future scenarios (Sterman, 2001), feedback can be understood through self-reinforcing or balancing feedback loops, which together form a non-linear feedback system (Forrester, 1994).

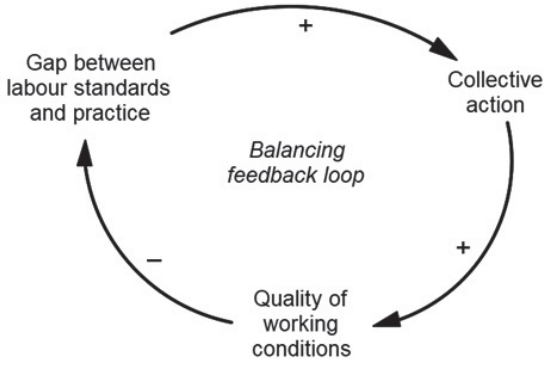
A self-reinforcing feedback loop "creates action which increases a system state, which in turn leads to more action further increasing the system state" (Vennix, 1996, p. 45). An example of a self-reinforcing feedback loop concerns the proportion of migrant workers in the host country (See Figure 2). When the proportion of migrant workers increases in a country, the workforce also becomes more culturally diverse (Samaluk, 2016). The rise in cultural diversity makes the country more attractive to new migrants and as additional migrant flows emerge, the proportion of migrant workers increases (Samaluk, 2016). The self-reinforcing feedback loop of the growing proportion of migrant workers continues until the system is interrupted (such as when labour shortages move towards labour surplus, forming a balancing feedback loop).

Figure 2.2 *Self-reinforcing feedback loop of proportion of migrant workers*



In a balancing feedback loop "an increase or decrease in the original variable is counteracted throughout the loop" (Vennix, 1996, p. 35). We explain the functioning of a balancing feedback loop through the gap between labour standards and practice (See Figure 3). If the gap between labour standards and practice deepens, workers are more likely to turn to collective action, such as engaging in a strike. When the collective action is successful, and better terms of employment are negotiated, the quality of working conditions improve (López-Andreu, 2020). When the quality of working conditions rise, the gap between labour standards and practice decreases and collective action goes down again. This illustrates that an initial increase in the gap between labour standards and practice balances through feedback.

Figure 2.3 *Balancing feedback loop of the gap between labour standards and practice*



In this article, we adopt systems thinking to map the feedback underneath precarious work in the food production chain and to aggregate the findings of previous studies into a causal loop diagram.

2.3 MATERIALS & METHODS

Positioning

In this paper, we chose to follow an action research paradigm (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). This means we combine an objectivist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). With objectivist ontology, we mean that we look for knowledge that is evidence-based. With a subjectivist epistemology, we depart from the position that we want to produce knowledge that supports changing reality, in this case empower labour migrants in changing their working conditions.

Conceptualization

Following the PICo guideline for qualitative inquiries (Stern et al., 2014), the population for the review concerned CEE migrant workers, the phenomenon of interest was the feedback explaining the quality of working conditions, and the context concerned the food production chain of Western Europe. Central and Eastern European migrant workers were conceptualized as workers with a country of origin of Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia. These countries (with the exception of Croatia) are often collectively referred to as A2 and A8 countries due to their accession to the European Union in 2004 and 2007 respectively. In previous research, workers from these countries have been consistently considered to represent CEE migrant workers (e.g., Scott & Brindley, 2012).

Working conditions were operationalized in line with the conceptualization of decent work by Anker et al. (2003). (Good) quality working conditions require ample employment opportunities, intolerance of child labour and forced labour, adequate earnings and productive work, decent working hours, stability and security of work, good balance between work and family life, fair treatment in employment, safe work, adequate social protection, workplace democracy and effective social dialogue, and a conducive socio-economic context for decent work (Anker et al., 2003).

The food production chain was conceptualized as consisting of four sectors: agriculture, food processing, warehouse distribution, and hospitality, which are characterized by migrant labour in Western European countries (Alberti, 2014; Hopkins et al., 2016; Janta et al., 2011; Lever & Milbourne, 2017; Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Scott, 2017). Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, Ireland, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway were selected as Western European countries for this study. We opted for these countries as they each have more than 100.000 inhabitants with a CEE citizenship and are above a threshold of welfare (above 30.000 euros GDP per capita).

SAMPLE OF STUDIES

A systematic search of the literature was conducted in Web of Science, EBSCOhost, Scopus, and ProQuest in December 2020. Combined, these databases offer multidisciplinary coverage (Campbell et al., 2018). Preliminary search terms included 'CEE mi-

grant workers' (population), 'working conditions' (phenomenon of interest) and 'Western Europe' (context), and their synonyms or operationalized elements. We combined the search terms with Boolean operators to form search queries. We included articles in the sample that were (1) empirical (quantitative and/or qualitative), (2) English-language (3) peer-reviewed journal articles (4) published between 1995 and 2020. While the CEE countries covered in this article only joined the European Economic Area in 2004, 2007 and 2013, a broader window of publication years potentially reflects the institutional factors influencing migrant workers' working conditions before and after the principle of free movement. The search resulted in 595 hits, after removing duplicates.

Abstracts of the 595 articles were screened, of which 140 full articles were considered relevant. Further screening yielded 24 studies that met the inclusion criteria. Next, backward citation screening until saturation led to an additional 50 studies. A forward citation screening process led to 20 additional studies. The initial sample of the review consisted of 94 studies. To incorporate the most recent publications in our review, the systematic literature search was repeated in May 2022, leading to 19 additional articles, while 6 further studies were manually selected to be included in the sample upon recommendations from social sciences scholars. The final sample consisted of 119 articles, published between 2007 and 2022. The sample included articles from different research paradigms, which had the commonality of explaining (elements of) the quality of working conditions.

The most represented journals in our selection were Work, Employment and Society (n=10), Population, Space and Place (n=7), European Urban and Regional Studies (n=6), Economic and Industrial Democracy (n=5), British Journal of Industrial Relations (n=5), Human Resource Management Journal (n=5) and Journal of Rural Studies (n=5).

DATA EXTRACTION AND SYNTHESIS

All articles were coded by the first author and one of the other authors. When coding the articles, we looked for causal links based on textual cues (Newberry & Carhart, 2024). An example of a causal link based on the text is included in Table 1.

Table 2.1 *Example of causal link from the literature*

Quote	Link	Explanation
"Workers find themselves in a rather isolated position in the Netherlands, as they are highly dependent on their employers, they know little about the existing employment regulations and they do not have the means and opportunities to claim their rights and entitlements." (Berntsen, 2015, p. 80).	Multiple dependencies – Power distance employers and employees (+)	If migrants' multiple dependencies increase, the power distance between employers and migrants increase

Following this double inductive coding process, the authors built a causal loop diagram that integrated variables and relationships identified in the literature. The authors used the method of group model building to construct a causal loop diagram based on the articles in the sample. They engaged in six group model building sessions (Vennix, 1996) facilitated by the second author, to integrate the knowledge from separate studies. We validated the initial diagram based on a second, deductive coding process of the literature, eliminating relationships that were inconsistent between studies. This led to a more parsimonious diagram where we focused on feedback loops and only kept those unanimously supported by the literature.

During further rounds of analysis we brought back the feedback related to three main themes: (a) quality of labour regulation and social protection (themes 1, 2 and 3); (b) use of temporary work agencies (themes 4 and 5); and (c) migrants' availability for precarious work (themes 6, 7 and 8). These themes unify feedback loops with similar paths, which simultaneously addresses different levels of analysis. A complete table with references supporting each feedback loop can be found in the supplementary material.

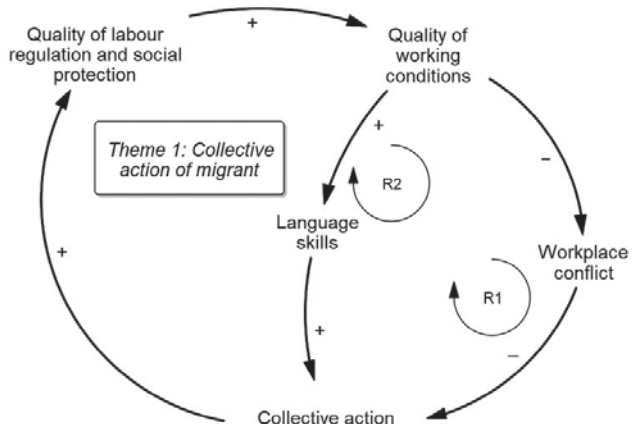
2.4 RESULTS

Theme 1: Quality of labour regulation and social protection

The first theme concerns the role of *quality of labour regulation and social protection* in migrant workers' quality of working conditions. The quality of labour regulation and social protection refers to the extent to which the legal framework safeguards migrant workers' rights and interests. This theme embeds three sub-themes: collective action of migrants; level of job-to-job transitions and agency of migrants.

Collective action of migrants. Collective action of migrants increases the quality of labour regulation and social protection. Examples of collective action are migrant workers' collective practice of resignation (Birke & Bluhm, 2020), united effort to unionize (McDowell et al., 2007), collective solidarity towards each other (Wilkinson, 2014), or strikes (Sporton, 2013).

Figure 2.4 *Collective action of migrants*

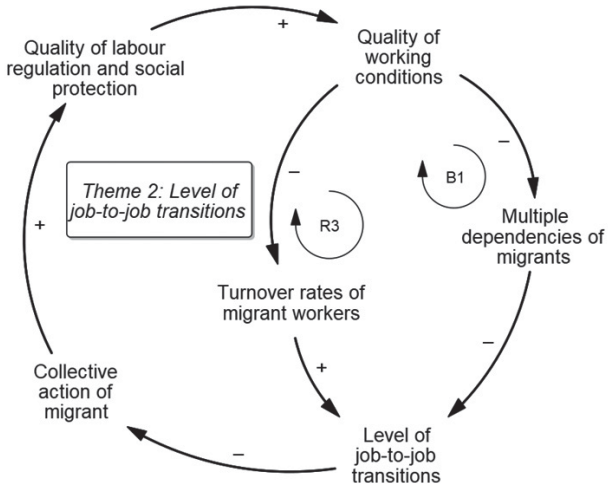


Quality of working conditions relates to the collective action of migrant workers through two self-reinforcing feedback loops. The first concerns workplace relations (R1). If the quality of working conditions increases, the extent to which there is an informal segregation in the workplace between (ethnic) groups of workers, whereby members of some groups are more privileged and have more access to resources than others – decreases. Consequently, workplace conflict decreases (e.g., Agar & Manolchev, 2020; Sporton, 2013). A decline in workplace conflict increases the collective action of migrants (e.g., McDowell et al., 2007; Refslund & Sippola, 2020), which increases the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016). An increase in quality of labour regulation and social protection is self-reinforcing via further improving the quality of working conditions (R1; e.g., Refslund, 2016; Rogaly, 2008).

The second feedback loop highlights the importance of migrants' language skills for their level of organization(R2). If migrant workers' quality of working conditions increases, their language skills also improve, as decent working time or the availability of language courses at the workplace allows them to dedicate more attention to skill development (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). By learning the host-country language, language barriers for trade union membership decrease and migrant workers engage more in collective action (e.g., Fitzgerald & Hardy, 2010; Rogalewski, 2022). This increases the quality of working conditions through improved quality of labour regulation and social protection, forming the second self-reinforcing process (R2).

Level of job-to-job transitions. Level of job-to-job transitions is a central concept in explaining quality of labour regulation and social protection, which ultimately links to quality of working conditions. Level of job-to-job transitions refers to the frequency with which migrant workers move to a different job without periods of unemployment, which is often high in temporary, non-standard forms of employment (e.g., Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Voivozeanu, 2019).

Figure 2.5 *Level of job-to-job transitions*



Level of job-to-job transitions links to quality of working conditions through a self-reinforcing and a balancing feedback loop. The first, balancing feedback loop concerns the organization of labour in the food production chain (B1). If migrants' quality of working conditions increases, their multiple dependencies – the extent to which migrants are reliant on their employer beyond their income (e.g., transportation to work, accommodation) – decrease (e.g., Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022). If migrants become less dependent on the employer, their job-to-job transitions increase due to improved mobility (e.g., Findlay et al., 2013; Voivozeanu, 2019) which diminishes average employment periods, decreasing migrants' ability and willingness to engage in collective action (e.g., Rye

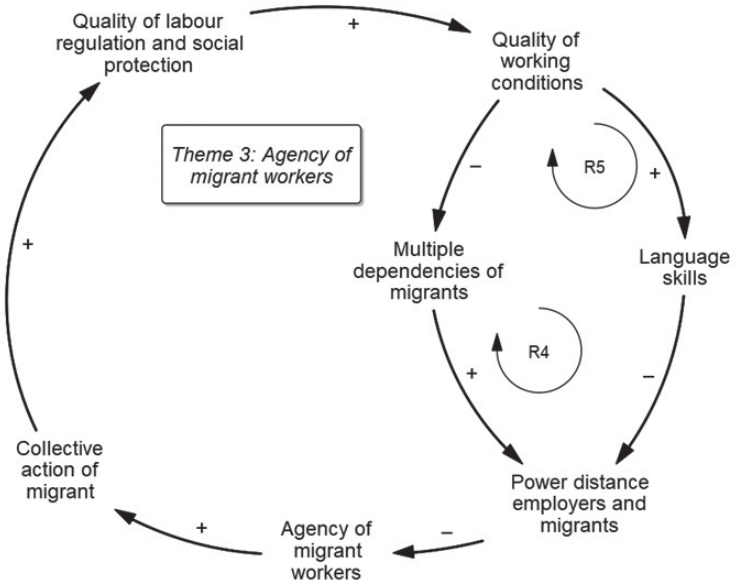
& Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner & Refslund, 2016). If migrant workers' collective action decreases, the quality of labour regulation and social protection decreases (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016). This results in lower quality of working conditions, forming a balancing feedback loop (B1; e.g., Refslund, 2016; Rogaly, 2008).

The second, self-reinforcing feedback loop concerns migrant workers on the micro level (R3). If migrants' quality of working conditions improve, they are more satisfied with their employment, which decreases turnover rates (e.g., Janta, 2011; Tannock, 2015). This reduces migrants' job-to-job transitions (e.g., Hassel et al., 2016; Moroşanu et al., 2021) and increases their collective action (e.g., Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner & Refslund, 2016), increasing the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), ultimately reinforcing the quality of working conditions(R3; e.g., Refslund, 2016; Rogaly, 2008).

Agency of migrant workers. The third sub-theme shows how agency of migrant workers is paramount for improving quality of labour regulation and social protection. Agency of migrant workers is the ability to undertake actions to improve working conditions. These actions include migrants' resistance to managerial control (Alberti, 2014), initiatives to alert the labour authorities about working conditions (Voivozeanu, 2019), individual solidarity towards their colleagues (Wilkinson, 2014) or resource mobilization towards career progress (Aziz, 2015).

Agency of migrant workers links to quality of working conditions through two self-reinforcing feedback loops. The first concerns the nature of the employment relation (R4). If quality of working conditions improves, the multiple dependencies of employees on their employers decrease (Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022). If migrant workers have access to housing and means of transportation, independent of their employer, the power distance between employers and employees - the relative control that employers exert over employees - decreases (e.g., Cosma et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2014). This increases the agency of migrant workers (e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007), which fosters collective action to improve working conditions (e.g., Birke & Bluhm, 2020; Potter & Hamilton, 2014). If collective action increases, the quality of labour regulation and social protection rises (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), ultimately improving the quality of working conditions through self-reinforcing feedback (R4; e.g., Refslund, 2016; Rogaly, 2008).

Figure 2.6 *Agency of migrant workers*



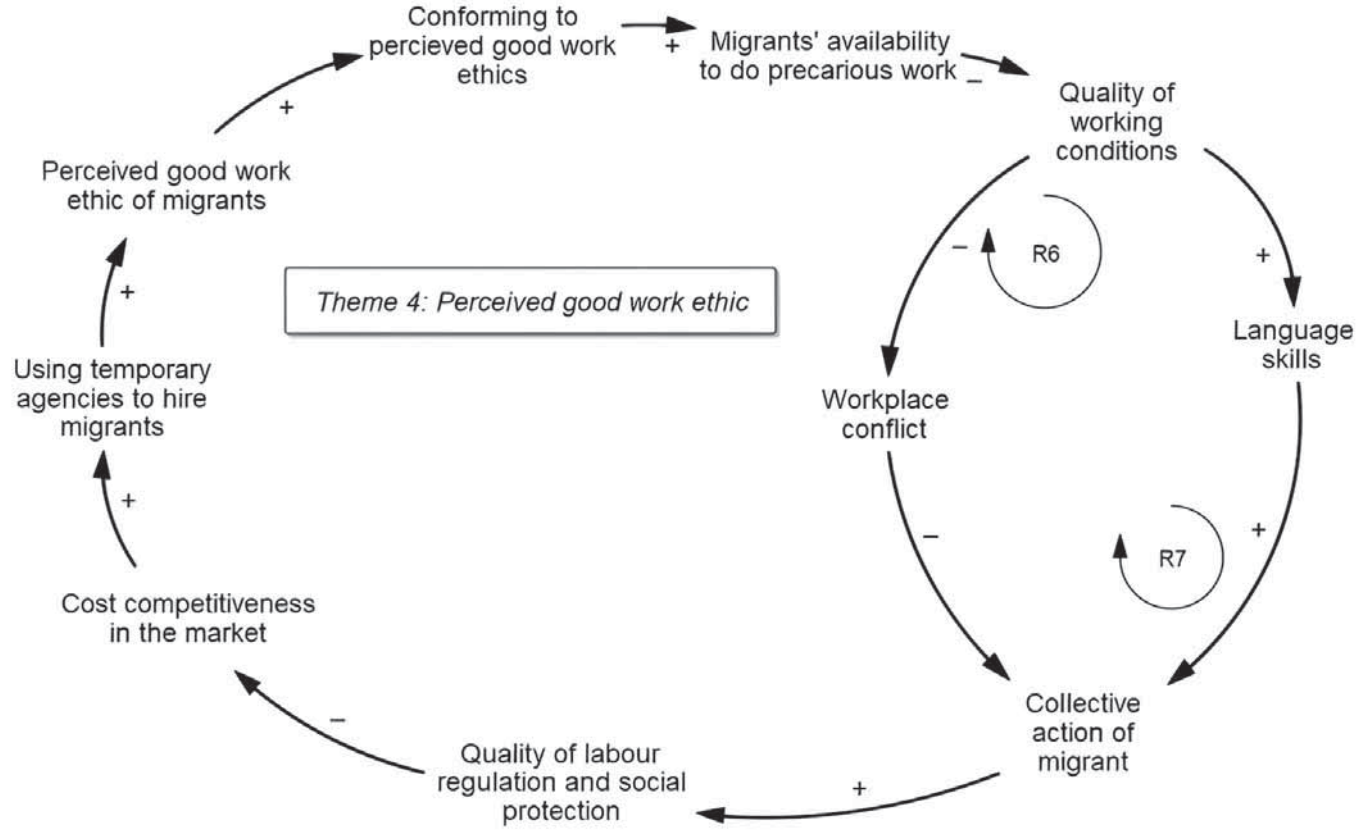
The second self-reinforcing feedback loop puts individual migrant workers central (R5). If the quality of working conditions increases, the language skills of migrant workers also improves (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). By speaking the host country-specific language, migrant workers better understand their labour rights, lowering power distances towards the employer (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; McDowell et al., 2008). This increases the agency of migrant workers (Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007), promotes collective action (e.g., Birke & Bluhm, 2020; Potter and Hamilton, 2014), improves the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016) and ultimately reinforces quality of working conditions (R5; e.g., Refslund, 2016; Rogaly, 2008).

Theme 2: Use of temporary work agencies

The second theme relates to the *use of temporary work agencies.* Employers often use the services of temporary work agencies to meet the fluctuating, seasonal demands in food production (e.g., Hopkins, 2014; Lloyd & James, 2008). Two sub-themes related to the use of temporary work agencies: perceived good work ethic and length of stay.

Perceived good work ethic. The first sub-theme reflects on how the use of temporary work agencies fosters perceptions of good work ethic, which in turn relate to the quality of working conditions. We defined perceived good work ethic as the extent to which employers perceive CEE migrant workers as suitable for low-wage, food production employment (Aasland & Tyldum, 2016). Temporary work agencies have been argued to contribute to the framing of CEE migrants as a docile, hard-working, easy to manage workforce (e.g., Hopkins, 2014; Lloyd & James, 2008).

Figure 2.7 *Perceived good work ethic*



Perceived good work ethic is linked to quality of working conditions through two self-reinforcing feedback loops. The first is embedded in workplace relations (R6). If the quality of working conditions decreases, workplace conflict increases (e.g., Agar & Manolchev, 2020; Sporton, 2013). Workplace conflict decreases collective action (McDowell et al., 2007; Refslund & Sippola, 2020), decreasing the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016). A lower quality of labour regulation and social protection enhances cost competitiveness between employers (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021), increasing the need for numerical flexibility within organizations. Consequently, organizations more often use the services of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). As temporary work agencies often perceive CEE migrant workers as "appropriate workers for particular jobs" (Aasland & Tyldum, 2016, p. 2) their work ethic is increasingly perceived as suitable for food production employment (e.g., Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, 2021; Lever & Milbourne, 2014). This increases the standards of work expected from migrant workers, increasing the need to conform more to excessive standards to sustain migrants' employment (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; Jones, 2014). This increases migrants' availability to do precarious work (e.g., Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kaprans, 2022), decreasing the quality of working conditions (e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021). This is a self-reinforcing process (R6).

The second feedback loop is tied to the individual level (R7). If the quality of working conditions of migrant workers increases, their language skills improve (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). This leads to more collective action (e.g., Fitzgerald & Hardy, 2010; Rogalewski, 2022), which further enhances the quality of working conditions through the feedback loop of perceived good work ethic (R7).

Length of stay. The second sub-theme shows how the use of temporary work agencies links to the quality of working conditions through the length of stay. Length of stay is the amount of time that migrant workers stay in the host country. The often-used constructions of zero hour, on-call and temporary agency employment contracts make migrant workers' employment temporary, ultimately reducing their length of stay (e.g., Aasland & Tyldum, 2016; Pijpers, 2010).

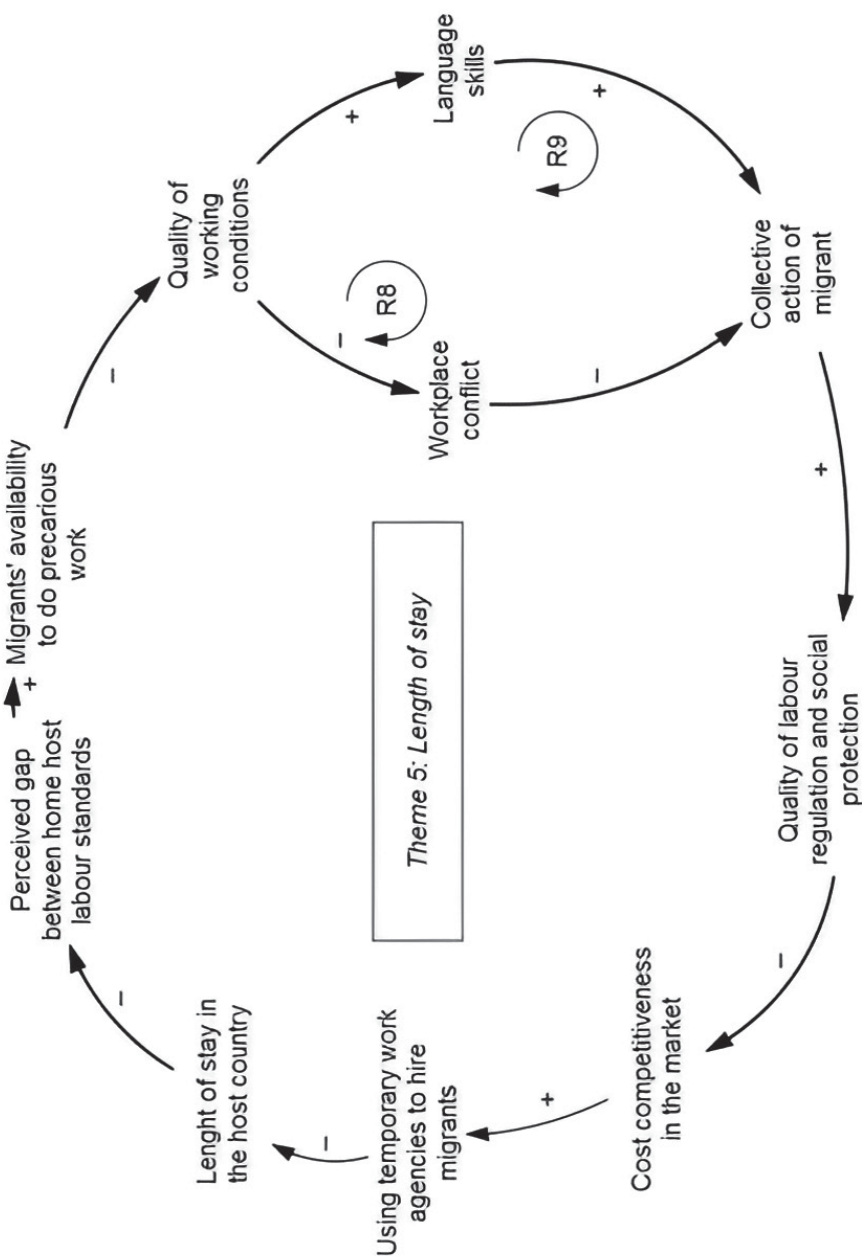


Figure 2.8 *Length of stay*

Migrant workers' length of stay connects to quality of working conditions through two self-reinforcing feedback loops. The first feedback loop centres around workplace relations (R8). If the quality of working conditions improves, less workplace conflict appears (e.g., Agar & Manolchev, 2020; Sporton, 2013). Due to a more collaborative work environment, migrant workers become more inclined to engage in collective action (e.g., McDowell et al., 2007; Refslund & Sippola, 2020), which enhances their representation in collective bargaining , raising the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016). The strengthened legal framework limits cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021). This leads to a decline in the use of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). If employers more often hire migrant workers directly, they have more stable employment, which increases their length of stay in the host country (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Scott, 2017). The longer migrant workers are embedded in the host country context, the less they perceive a gap between the labour standards of the home and host country, often coined as the (dual) frame of reference in the literature (e.g., Manolchev & Ivan, 2022; Rye, 2018). Consequently, migrants are less available for precarious employment (e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019), which improves the quality of their working conditions (e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021). This is a self-reinforcing process (R8).

The second feedback loop concerns language skills (R9). If the quality of working conditions increases, migrants improve their language skills (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). Better language skills promote migrants' collective action (e.g., Fitzgerald & Hardy, 2010; Rogalewski, 2022). So, length of stay reinforces quality of working conditions (R9).

Theme 3: Migrants' availability for precarious work

The third theme relates to *migrants' availability for precarious work*. This theme addresses the feedback underneath migrants' preparedness to accept low quality working conditions. We distilled two sub-themes that are embedded under this theme: mobility barriers and power distance.

Mobility barriers. The first sub-theme focuses on the *mobility barriers*, outlining the feedback between migrant workers' labour market mobility and quality of working conditions. This theme encompasses four feedback loops, two of which are self-reinforcing while two are balancing.

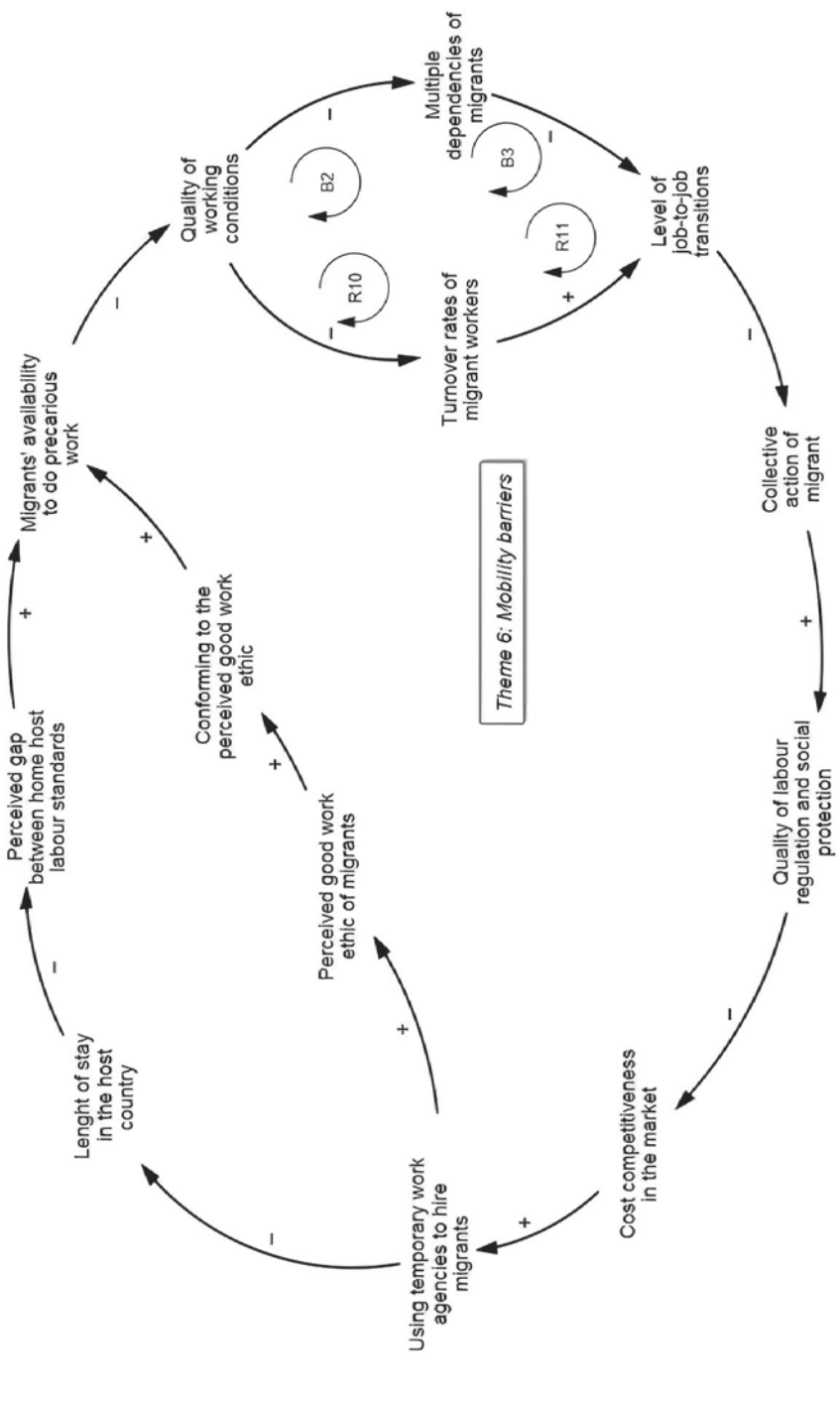


Figure 2.9 *Mobility barriers*

The balancing feedback loops (B2 and B3) focus on multiple dependencies. When the quality of working conditions increases, migrant workers' dependencies on their employers decrease (e.g., Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022). This increases migrant workers' job-to-job transitions (e.g., Findlay et al., 2013; Voivozeanu, 2019). When migrants stay at a workplace for a shorter period, they are less likely to engage in collective action (e.g., Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner & Refslund, 2016). This decreases the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016). The macro-level process of declining labour standards impacts the market by increasing cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021), where organizations have more need for numerical flexibility and consequently use the services of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers more often (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). As a result, migrant workers' employment is less permanent, decreasing their length of stay in the host country (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Scott, 2017). The shorter migrant workers stay at a workplace, the higher their perceived gap between home and host country are (e.g., Manolchev & Ivan, 2022; Rye, 2018). A less thorough understanding of host-country context labour standards increases migrant workers' availability to do precarious work (Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019), which ultimately harms the quality of working conditions (e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021). This forms a balancing process (B2).

Second, when the quality of working conditions increase, fewer multiple dependencies exist (e.g., Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022), increasing the level of job-to-job transitions (e.g., Findlay et al., 2013; Voivozeanu, 2019). This reduces collective action (e.g., Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner & Refslund, 2016), lowers the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), and increases cost competitiveness in the market (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021), which increases using temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). This promotes employers' perceptions of migrants' good work ethic (e.g., Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, 2021; Lever & Milbourne, 2014), through which migrants confirm low quality working conditions through increased standards of work (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; Jones, 2014). This ultimately – through increasing migrants' availability to do precarious work (e.g., Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kaprans, 2022) - diminishes the quality of working conditions, forming a balancing process (B3; e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021).

The next feedback loops are self-reinforcing and centred around migrant workers' turnover rates (R10 and R11). If the quality of working conditions improves, this reduces their retention (e.g., Janta, 2011; Tannock, 2015) subsequently lowering their level of job-to-job transitions (e.g., Hassel et al., 2016; Moroşanu et al., 2021). This increases migrant workers' collective action (e.g., Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner & Refslund, 2016). Collective action improves the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), lowering levels of cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021), reducing the need for numerical flexibility and for the use of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al.,

2013). The increase in standard employment relations with migrant workers lowers their perceived predisposition for certain positions (e.g., Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, 2021; Lever & Milbourne, 2014), due to which the standards of work expected from them reduce. Consequently, migrant workers conform less to excessive standards (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; Jones, 2014), which limits their availability to do precarious work (e.g., Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kaprans, 2022). This improves their quality of work, through self-reinforcing feedback (R10; e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021).

Second, if the quality of working conditions increases, migrants' turnover rates are lower (e.g., Janta, 2011; Tannock, 2015), reducing their level of job-to-job (e.g., Hassel et al., 2016; Moroşanu et al., 2021). This improves collective action (e.g., Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner & Refslund, 2016), increasing the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), reducing cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021) and the use of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). More standard employment relationships for migrants increase their length of stay in the host country (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Scott, 2017), reducing their perceived gap between the home and host country labour standards (e.g., Manolchev & Ivan, 2022; Rye, 2018). This reduces migrants' availability to engage in precarious employment (e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019), which will ultimately improve the quality of working conditions (R11; e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021).

Power distance. This sub-theme highlights the importance of the power distance within the employment relationship. We defined power distance as the relative control that employers can exert over employees. This theme reflects on four self-reinforcing feedback loops.

Two self-reinforcing feedback loops focus the role of multiple dependencies in shaping the power distance in the employment relationship (R12 and R13). First, if migrant workers' quality of working conditions increases, their multiple dependencies decrease (e.g., Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022), which reduces the power distance in the employment relationship (e.g., Cosma et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2014). This promotes opportunities for migrants to express their ethnic identity, enhancing their agency (e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007) and collective action for better working conditions (e.g., Birke & Bluhm, 2020; Potter & Hamilton, 2014). This improves the quality of labour regulation and social (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), which leads to lower levels of cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021), decreasing the use of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). This enhances migrants' length of stay in the host country (e.g., Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, 2021; Lever & Milbourne, 2014), reducing their perceived gap between home and host country labour standards (e.g., Manolchev & Ivan, 2022; Rye, 2018). Ultimately, the shifting frames of migrants' reference results in lower willingness from migrants to engage in precarious work (e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019), improving the quality of working conditions (e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021). This is a self-reinforcing feedback loop (R12).

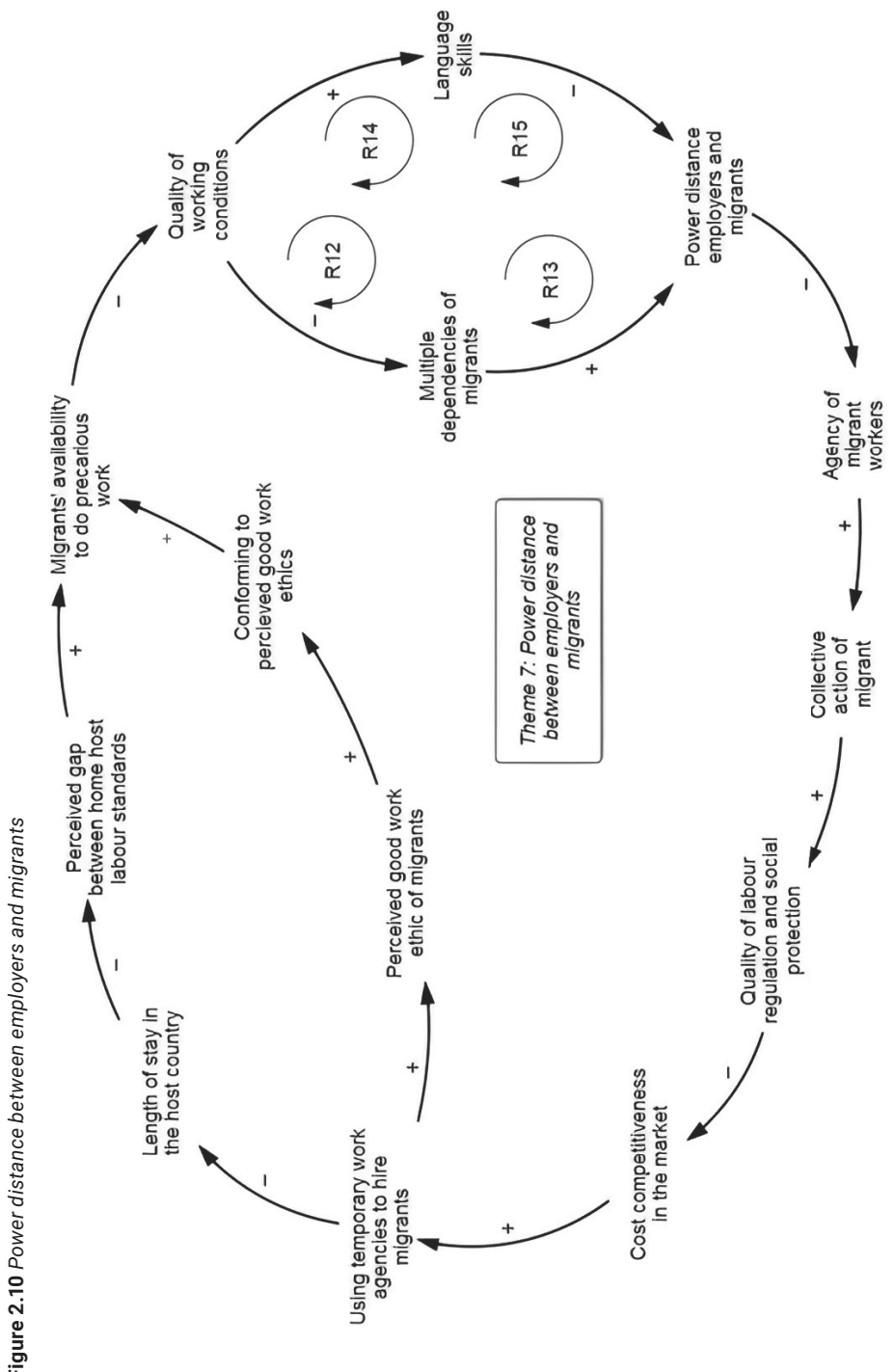


Figure 2.10 *Power distance between employers and migrants*

Second, if the quality of working conditions improves, migrants' multiple dependencies on the employer decrease (e.g., Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022). This reduces the power distance between migrants and their employers (e.g., Cosma et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2014), which improves the agency (e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007), and in turn the collective action of migrants (e.g., Birke & Bluhm, 2020; Potter & Hamilton, 2014). More collective action leads to improved quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), reducing cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021), and the use of temporary work agencies to hire migrant workers (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). This reduces perceptions of migrants' good work ethic (e.g., Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, 2021; Lever & Milbourne, 2014), which means that migrants have to conform less to differential standards at the workplace to be considered good performers (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; Jones, 2014), and are less available to engage in precarious work (e.g., Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kaprans, 2022). This improves the quality of working conditions, through self-reinforcing feedback (R13; e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021).

Two more self-reinforcing feedback loops highlight the importance of language skills (R14 and R15). If the quality of working conditions improves, migrants' language skills enhance (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). This in turn promotes migrant workers' awareness of labour rights, which leads to lower power distance between employers and migrants (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; McDowell et al., 2008). This creates opportunities for migrant workers to express their ethnic identity at the workplace, which promotes individual (e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007) and collective behavioural tactics to improve conditions (e.g., Birke & Bluhm, 2020; Potter & Hamilton, 2014). This is conducive to the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016), which reduces cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021) and the use of temporary work agencies to employ migrants (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). Less temporary employment increases migrants' length of stay in the host country (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Scott, 2017), reduces migrants' perceived gap between labour standards of the home and host country (e.g., Manolchev & Ivan, 2022; Rye, 2018). This makes migrants less available for precarious work (e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019), which ultimately improves their quality of working conditions (e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021). This is self-reinforcing feedback (R14).

Last, when migrants' quality of working conditions increases, they gain opportunities to improve their language skills (e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). Being able to communicate in the host country language more fluently reduces the power distance between employers and migrants (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; McDowell et al., 2008), which boosts the agency of migrants (e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007), collective action (e.g., Birke & Bluhm, 2020; Potter & Hamilton, 2014), and the quality of labour regulation and social protection (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner & Hassel, 2016). Through reducing cost competitiveness (e.g., Caroli et al., 2010;

Schweyher, 2021), this also leads to more standard forms of employment for migrants, reducing the use of temporary work agencies (e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013). Through influencing perceptions of work ethic (e.g., Felbo-Kolding and Leschke, 2021; Lever & Milbourne, 2014), migrants conform less to higher standards at the workplace (e.g., Friberg & Midtboen, 2019; Jones, 2014), making them less available to engage in precarious work (e.g., Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021; Kaprans, 2022). This ultimately raises the quality of working conditions through self-reinforcing feedback (R15; e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin & McCollum, 2021).

2.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article aimed to map the feedback that explains the persistence of precarious working conditions of Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the food production chain of Western Europe. Based on a systematic literature review, we constructed a causal loop diagram to integrate idiosyncratic, linear and scattered knowledge about the quality of working conditions. The causal loop diagram identifies feedback loops related to three themes: the quality of labour regulation and social protection, the use of temporary work agencies and migrants' availability for precarious work.

A systems perspective facilitates integrating knowledge from different streams of literature in explaining the persistence of low quality of working conditions. We contribute to these streams by showing how low quality of labour regulation and social protection interacts with the use of temporary work agencies and the availability of migrant workers, sustaining precarious work in food production. Specifically, we show how the organization of low-wage work promotes workplace conflict amongst migrant workers (Agar and Manolchev, 2020; Sporton, 2013), undermines their collective action simultaneously (McDowell et al., 2007; Refslund and Sippola, 2020), thereby connecting sociology of work and industrial relations literature. Furthermore, by showing how the use of temporary work agencies keeps low-wage work short-term (Pijpers, 2010; Scott, 2017), ultimately making migrant workers prepared to accept precarious working conditions (Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019), we connect these literatures once more. Additionally, we connect investments in workers' language skills (Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski and van der Haar, 2022) with decreasing the power distance between employers and workers (e.g., Friberg and Midtboen, 2019; McDowell et al., 2008), herewith linking human resource management (HRM) and sociology of work literature. Furthermore, by showing that investing in the language training of migrant workers will increase their agency and mobilization (e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007) in the long-term leading to improving labour regulation (e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner and Hassel, 2016), we connect the debates in HRM and industrial relations literature. Insight into this feedback emerged when we reviewed and integrated macro, meso and micro level processes from a systems perspective. To summarize; we contribute to industrial relations literature by showing that investments in language skills will enhance bottom-up organizing. We contribute to HRM literature that multiple dependencies of employees will

diminish their agency regarding the quality of their work. We contribute to sociology of work by describing how temporary work agencies are involved in processes of othering migrant workers and ultimately deteriorate the quality of their working conditions. The causal loop diagram shows how labour regulation can reduce the use of temporary work agencies, increase the agency of workers, and decrease their availability for precarious work (See Figure 11).

The analysis has practical consequences for policy makers, employers, and unions. The causal loop diagram provides a comprehensive dynamic theory that can serve as an evidence-based framework for the agenda setting of policy makers, trade unions and employer's organizations. First, the diagram indicates a legal gap pertaining to migrant workers' multiple dependencies on temporary work agencies. We advise governments to address this in legislation. It suggests that the separation of employment contracts and tenancy agreements would both promote migrant workers' agency and labour market mobility. Second, the diagram also shows that employers and trade unions need to improve HRM practices for migrant workers. With migrant workers becoming essential workers in the low-wage sectors of Western Europe (Anderson et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2021), improved HRM-practices are integral for their retention. Our diagram shows that HRM-practices that focus on the development of migrant workers through supporting their language skills and knowledge of labour rights (cf. Ortlieb & Ressi, 2022), can reduce workplace conflict and ultimately increase migrants' job attachment, reducing the turnover rate of migrant workers. The feedback system also suggests that improved employee listening (by means of employee engagement surveys) and protection of health and safety at the workplace can be important for reducing migrants' (voluntary) turnover. Third, our diagram indicates that local governance and municipalities need to take responsibility for both migrant workers' quality of working conditions and housing. Granting permissions for the establishment of industrial sites that rely on migrant labour need to always be coupled with effective social and housing policies.

While our article provides a comprehensive overview of the feedback loops influencing migrant workers' quality of working conditions, it also holds limitations. The first limitation is the limited amount of literature available on a specific part of the food sector, namely warehousing, compared to agriculture, hospitality and food processing. Warehouse distribution is one of the fastest growing sectors that increasingly relies on migrant labour (Szytniewski & van der Haar, 2022). We call for future research on migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the warehouse distribution sector of food production.

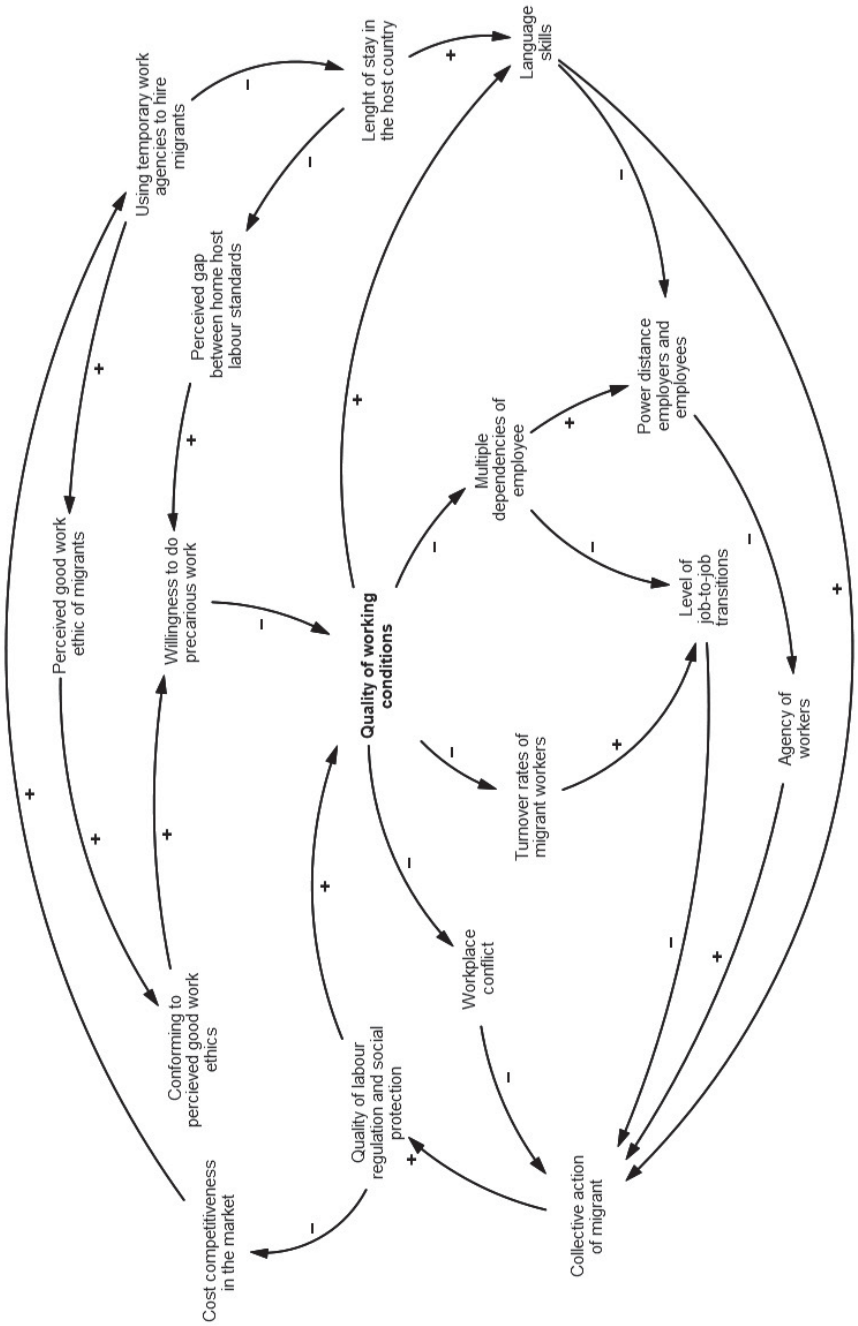


Figure 2.11 *Causal loop diagram of migrant workers' quality of working conditions in food production*

The second limitation regards the generalizability towards migrants' labour conditions in general. Our review only builds on literature focusing on migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the food production chain. Although similar feedback loops might appear in other low-wage labour sectors in Western Europe, other sectors may have unique feedback loops which should be identified separately. In particular, the systemic use of the posting of workers in the construction industry (Berntsen, 2016; Berntsen & Lillie, 2016; Caro et al., 2015; Marques et al., 2021), the invisibility of domestic migrant work due to its embeddedness in households (Farris, 2015; Hellgren, 2015), and the mobility of migrant road transport workers across national borders (Riesco-Sanz et al., 2020; Rizzo & Atzeni, 2020) may create other feedback loops underneath quality of working conditions that are similar in some ways but unique in others.c

To conclude, precarious work – despite the adaptive approach of stakeholders (e.g., Keune & Pedaci, 2020) – is still often a reality for Central and Eastern European migrant workers in Western Europe. Our causal loop diagram shows that quality of working conditions is not only contingent on the nature of the employment relationship, but also stretches to labour regulation, the way temporary agency work is organized and development opportunities of migrant workers. We suggest that exploring the feedback underneath precarious work across other migrant worker groups in different sectoral and regional embeddings can enhance our theoretical understanding of this process and help to identify levers for changing them.

CHAPTER 3

Multi-stakeholder boundary work contesting the space of hyperflexibility, multiple dependencies and voice: Migrant workers' mobility agency in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder narratives influence migrants' mobility agency by affecting the space within which migrants navigate their employment. This paper explores how multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work affects Central and Eastern European migrants' mobility agency in low-wage warehouse distribution and greenhouse-horticulture employment in the Netherlands. Through content analysis of 34 stakeholder interviews, we identify three boundaries which define the space of migrants' mobility agency: (1) hyperflexibility, (2) multiple dependencies and (3) voice. Our findings show that stakeholders' boundary making to reinforce these boundaries has a negative impact, their boundary arranging and buffering has a positive influence, while boundary coalescing has mixed effects on migrants' mobility agency. We contribute to literature by showing that the boundary work of stakeholders beyond the employment relationship contributes to migrants' mobility agency and by suggesting that stakeholders' boundary work can and does amplify migrants' mobility agency, pointing to improving quality of working conditions in low-wage employment.

Keywords: configurational boundary work; content analysis; migrant workers; mobility agency; precarious work

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the expansion of the European Union (EU) with new member states between 2004-2013, low-wage employment in the Netherlands is increasingly performed by Central and Eastern European workers (Siegmann et al., 2022, 2024). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic amplified precarious conditions for these workers, as many lost their accommodation during lockdowns, were stuck without transportation, or had limited opportunities to adhere to health regulations at their workplaces (Isaac and Elrick, 2021; Ulceluse and Bender, 2022). This should not have come as a surprise, as research had already mapped before the pandemic that low-wage employment restricts CEE migrants' agency (Berntsen, 2016; Samaluk, 2016). The agency of CEE migrant workers is of interest, as in addition to enjoying free movement as citizens of the European Union, they represent a highly educated workforce willing to work in low-wage sectors of employment (Baxter-Reid, 2022; Samaluk, 2016; Siegmann et al., 2022). Mobility agency is especially relevant here, referring to migrants' negotiation of their past, present and future spaces of employment, as it can explain how migrant workers are willing to put up with precarious presents in the hope of securing more stable employment in the future (Zampoukos et al., 2018). We contribute to this stream of literature by furthering the understanding of the boundaries of spaces within which CEE migrants' mobility agency manifests.

In social spaces, experiencing boundaries refers to the phenomenon where certain norms, rules, or societal expectations imposed on individuals or groups create invisible lines that limit or define behaviour, interactions, and identity within the larger social context. These boundaries influence access to resources, opportunities, and social recognition (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Boundary work refers to the creation, reinforcement, and negotiation of boundaries between social spaces and sets how individuals and groups interact, communicate, and understand their roles within these spaces (Langley et al., 2019). Boundary work, shaped by social, cultural, and institutional factors, establishes the areas of influence and control, determining roles and responsibilities within employment relations (Helfen, 2015). While previous research focused on how migrants themselves negotiate (employment) boundaries (Debonneville, 2019; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Joseph, 2014; Manolova, 2020), this study explores how multi-stakeholder boundary work shapes labour migrants' mobility agency in the space of low-wage employment.

Stakeholders outside a social sphere play a key role in defining, managing, and realigning the legal, social, economic, and cultural boundaries "from above" (Scuzzarrello and Moroşanu, 2023). In labour migration, policy makers on the national, regional, and local levels set the legal boundaries of migration, but also influence migrants' access to the social safety net in the host country (Neef, 2020; Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023). Media outlets shape the boundaries of public opinion and demarcate the baseline of interactions between the majority population and migrant workers (De Coninck, 2020). Employers do not only determine working conditions of migrants', such as wages, working time or work tasks, but can create exploitative dependencies by taking charge of migrants' housing or transportation to work (Birke and Bluhm, 2020; Potter and Ham-

ilton, 2014). When migrants attempt to mobilize to change their working conditions, trade unions set the boundaries of their collective voice (Marino, 2015). Through collective bargaining, these boundaries are renegotiated, resulting in collective agreements (Helfen, 2015). When migrants' leeway to effectively negotiate their conditions becomes slim, non-governmental organizations take up the role of pushing the boundaries by advocating for their rights (Zogata-Kusz, 2022). Through these actions, stakeholders engage in boundary work, "the process of creating hegemonic narratives that differentiate a collective from others by drawing on an imagined sense of shared belonging within their subgroup, while at the same time silencing intra-group differences" (Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023, p. 2995). Considering the wide range of stakeholders engaging in boundary work around migrants' mobility agency, taking a multi-stakeholder perspective is instrumental for understanding the space within which this agency is embedded.

The lens of configurational boundary work is the most suitable for exploring multi-stakeholder boundary work. Configurational boundary work refers to the actions of individuals external to boundaries which are aimed at creating differentiation and integration amongst groups (Langley et al., 2019). As the subject of boundary work concerns individuals different than the self, configurational boundary work means working through boundaries, contrary to other forms of boundary work that focus at working for or at boundaries (Langley et al., 2019). Previous research showed that stakeholders engage in configurational boundary work in the low-wage cleaning sector to establish new categories of precarious temporary workers, which implies that configurational boundary work could be relevant in flexible low-wage employment in the Netherlands (van Eck et al., 2023).

In this paper, we explore how multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work affects the mobility agency of CEE migrant workers in low-wage employment in The Netherlands. Low-wage employment is an important space to study boundary work and migrants' mobility agency. With the rise of low-wage, flexible employment in the Netherlands, CEE migrant workers are at a risk of becoming trapped in precarious employment (Loomans et al., 2024). Although this pattern is not unique to the Netherlands, most research has concentrated on migrant workers in the UK and research in other European countries is nascent (Davies, 2019; Hopkins et al., 2016). To account for national contingencies, Langley et al. (2019) point at the need for comparative research on configurational boundary work, to which we add with a content analysis of 34 interviews to identify the configurational boundary work through which stakeholders define the space of CEE migrant workers' low-wage employment in the Netherlands. The research question is as follows: *How does multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work influence CEE migrant workers' mobility agency in low-wage employment in the Netherlands?*

This paper is structured as follows. First, we explain the space of low-wage employment in the Netherlands and elaborate on stakeholders' boundary work. Next, we outline how we used content analysis to distil stakeholders' boundary work from the interviews. After, we elaborate on how stakeholders arrange, buffer and coalesce boundaries for migrant workers, and the impact of these actions on migrants' mobility agency. We conclude by discussing our findings in light of the literature on configurational boundary work.

3.2 THE SPACE OF LOW-WAGE EMPLOYMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

In social systems, boundaries of social spaces demark who or what is in, and who or what is out. Two forms of boundaries exist, namely symbolic and social (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Symbolic boundaries categorize goods, practices, people, places, and time. They also indicate hierarchies between groups, and provide a common identity within groups. Social boundaries manifest between groups with unequal access to resources and social opportunities, guided by constraining, generally agreed upon symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Low-wage employment in Western Europe occupies a space of work that is largely precarious, due to unstable income and insecurities about the continuity and quantity of work (Allan et al., 2021; Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017). Typically, employment does not provide enough protection from abuses or unsafe working conditions, and the opportunities of workers to advocate for change is limited (Allan et al., 2021).

Exploring the space of migrants in low-wage employment is particularly interesting in the Netherlands. After the second World War, there was a high labour demand for workers to contribute to rebuilding the Dutch economy. As labour became scarce, from the 1960's, the Netherlands started to welcome guestworkers from Southern Europe, former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Morocco to perform low-wage work in sectors with high labour demand (e.g., textile, shipbuilding). These immigration flows co-occurred with the arrival of workers from former Dutch colonial territories (e.g., Suriname), who as Dutch citizens, received integration support from the government. Despite the government's intention to host guestworkers only temporarily and the initial lack of policies to integrate these workers, by the 1970's it became clear that many guestworkers were determined to stay. Following family unification of these workers, and the development of increasingly restrictive immigration policies from the 1980's, the government struggled to socio-culturally integrate former guestworkers into Dutch society (Penninx, 2020). Such struggle continued till the expansion of the European Union (2004-2013) with former Eastern bloc countries, following which many CEE individuals used their freedom of movement to find employment in the Netherlands (e.g., Siegmann et al., 2022).

The intensity of intra-EU migration patterns have measurably amplified in the past ten years: The number of CEE nationals in The Netherlands more than doubled since 2012, reaching 410.000 people by 2022 (Pharos, 2023). Many CEE workers find employment in migrant-dominated low-wage employment sectors, such as warehouse distribution and greenhouse-horticulture, where the work is easy-to-learn, physically exhausting and generally unattractive for local workers (Siegmann et al., 2022; Dörflinger et al., 2021). CEE migrant workers do not only experience long hours and demanding work (Alberti et al., 2013) but also often become marginalized and geographically and socially isolated from the majority population, including local communities or established groups with a migration background (Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012). Lacking social network ties in the host country, CEE migrants' access to resources – be that better employment opportunities

or living conditions – becomes limited (Ryan, 2011). Trade unions struggle to organize migrant workers, which limits their opportunity to exercise a collective voice (Siegmann et al., 2022). CEE migrant workers have limited access to social security, which can lead to adverse outcomes such as homelessness (Misje, 2022; Mostowska, 2013).

Flexibility practices in the Netherlands represent a unique space, as CEE migrants' employment in low-wage work is largely facilitated by one of the estimated 16.000 temporary work agencies registered in the country (Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie, 2023). Between 2006 and 2021, the share of CEE migrants in temporary agency work increased from 22% to 67% of the total number of temporary agency migrant workers (Heyma and Verliet, 2022). Due to reports about migrants' precarious working and housing conditions at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the risk these posed to public health, the position of CEE migrant workers emerged as an important policy issue (Berntsen and Skowronek, 2021). The government appointed a taskforce to investigate migrants' position and to provide advice for policy development (Rijksoverheid, 2020). The report(s) provided a framework for improving migrants' working and housing conditions, emphasizing that CEE migrants' mobility agency is constrained by stakeholder practices (Aanjaagteam Bescherming Arbeidsmigranten, 2020).

Mobility agency refers to the self-negotiation of "the spatiotemporalities typically involved in the existence of the migrant worker: the lives and places that they have (temporarily) left behind, the present situation as temps/agency workers in the host country, and the future that lies ahead." (Zampoukos et al., 2018, p. 41). Mobility agency draws on the concept of mobility power and mobility strategy (Zampoukos et al., 2018). Both mobility power and mobility strategy originate from labour process theory and broadly refer to migrants' ability to make choices about offering their labour to organizations, their capacity to move between jobs and to autonomously navigate the labour market (Alberti, 2014; Smith, 2006; Scott and Rye, 2023; Vickers et al., 2019). While research on mobility power and mobility strategy emphasizes migrants' intentional, purposive agency, the notion of mobility agency acknowledges that "workers objectives and motives may alter over the course of time and (…) and that not all workers have a clear and definite understanding of what to do with their (work) lives" (Zampoukos et al., 2018, p. 46). Mobility agency is particularly relevant in the space of low-wage employment, as it can help explain how CEE migrant workers negotiate their precarious working conditions in the present in hopes of gaining access to stable employment in the future. In the following section, we reflect on stakeholders' configurational boundary work in the context of low-wage employment.

3.3 STAKEHOLDERS' CONFIGURATIONAL BOUNDARY WORK

Previous research shows that CEE migrant workers' opportunities to resist precarious work and living conditions are structurally weak in low-wage employment (Lever and Milbourne, 2014; 2017; Szytniewski and van der Haar, 2022). We argue that this manifests and reproduces through multiple stakeholder narratives. Broadly defined, stakeholders are all parties who have an influence on CEE migrants' mobility agency in low-wage employment. Here, we argue that it is important to consider stakeholders beyond the traditional focus of employment relations, such a non-governmental organizations or media, who can play an important role in managing the boundaries of migrants' agency to access legal remedies or to influence the public perception. Through their narratives, stakeholders perform configurational boundary work which defines the space of low-wage food production employment.

Boundary work is the creation, reinforcement, and negotiation of boundaries between social spaces and sets how individuals and groups interact, communicate, and understand their roles within these spaces (Langley et al., 2019). Stakeholders can engage in boundary work for different reasons. Based on the objective of boundary work, Langley et al. (2019) distinguish between competitive, collaborative, and configurational forms of boundary work. Boundary work is considered competitive when the goal of stakeholders' actions is to differentiate themselves from others to gain privilege and build leverage over them. Collaborative boundary work refers to goal-oriented actions of stakeholders carried out across boundaries with others to achieve common goals. Configurational boundary work refers to the actions of stakeholders to influence the boundaries of the spaces within which others are embedded through practices instilling competition and collaboration.

Configurational boundary work has three main characteristics. First, stakeholders engaging in configurational boundary work are external to the boundaries that they engage with. Second, the aim of configurational boundary work is to change the interaction between those embedded within the space, such as migrant workers. Third, in configurational boundary work, the spaces defined by the boundaries are more important than the boundaries themselves, the mobilization of space to drive interaction being a central objective (Langley et al., 2019). Configurational boundary work differs from collaborative and competitive forms in that it draws on the concept of framing, where stakeholders create narrative frameworks designed to strategically shape how others define and address social issues and potential solutions (Benford and Snow, 2000; Creed et al., 2002, Langley et al., 2019). Furthermore, configurational boundary work also leverages the concept of free spaces, understood as "small-scale bounded social settings separated from dominant groups where interactions can take place in a different way from those in mainstream society, and where people can mobilize for action" (Langley et al., 2019, p. 721). As stakeholders actively frame boundaries, and that the space within these

boundaries is essential to understand migrants' agency in low-wage employment, the framework of configurational boundary work is especially relevant here.

Based on Langley et al., (2019), and Scuzzarello and Moroşanu (2023), we distinguish four subcategories of configurational boundary work enacted specifically by stakeholders, labelled boundary making, boundary arranging, buffering boundaries and coalescing boundaries. First, in boundary making, stakeholders outside and "above" the social space in question engage in rhetoric and policy making to construct, maintain and control social and political order (Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023). For example Helfen (2015) shows how the stakeholder narrative on temporary work agencies providing triangular employment relations in German aviation industry gradually shifted from unacceptable to unavoidable, resulting in the making of supportive employment policy. Second, in arranging boundaries, configurational boundary work aims to refocus or transform practices and interactions, by changing physical, social, temporal and symbolic boundaries that hinder change (Langley et al., 2019). In the context of low-wage employment, the introduction of new technologies, such as exoskeletons which can support migrants in physical tasks is an example of arranging boundaries (Di Natali et al., 2021). Third, in buffering boundaries, stakeholders promote collaboration between organizations from different social spheres or between individuals with conflicting interests. An example of buffering boundaries includes the introduction of economic production alternatives to long supply chains, such as farmer's cooperatives balancing economic value and workers' well-being, which can challenge current boundaries (Giare et al., 2020). Last, coalescing boundaries aims at blurring the boundaries between groups to construct a new domain. For example, van Eck et al. (2023) showed that stakeholders of a cleaning company used configurational boundary work to diversify the workforce within the organization, however, the lack of further inclusion of these groups into organizational processes led to some groups' self-withdrawal from collaborative work environments, showing the need for more equal employment conditions for all workers.

In the following section, we explain the methods through which we explored multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work around CEE migrants' mobility agency.

3.4 METHODS

Sample and procedure

To select our sample, we identified stakeholders on the institutional and organizational levels through purposive and snowball sampling. On the institutional level, we identified trade unions, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, researchers, housing specialists and media representatives as a relevant participant group. On the organization level, we focused on user organizations and temporary work agencies. We selected two migrant work-dominated sectors that were reported as especially precarious during the COVID-19 pandemic, greenhouse-horticulture and warehouse distribution (Aanjaagteam Bescherming Arbeidsmigranten, 2020). While greenhouse-horticulture has been historically characterized by seasonal CEE migrant labour in the Netherlands, warehousing has

recently taken lead in the employment of CEE migrant workers (Skowronek et al., 2022). According to a report by the employers' organizations for temporary work agencies, the warehouse distribution sector accounts for 44% of temporary agency migrant labour, while greenhouse-horticulture for 19%, representing the two largest industries in offering temporary, flexible employment to migrants (ABU and NBBU, 2021).

We conducted 34 interviews with these stakeholders between January and March 2021. Via semi-structured interviews, we asked participants to map their expertise in the field of migrant labour, reflect on boundaries that they perceive as influential in CEE migrants' working conditions and evaluate the outlook of migrant labour in the two sectors. Due to restrictions for face-to-face data collection, all interviews were conducted online. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The sample demographics are included in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 *Sample demographics*

Stakeholder	Participants
Temporary work agency	1. **General director**, temporary work agency, production, construction, logistics 2. **Supervisor recruitment**, temporary work agency, food, logistics healthcare 3. **General director**, temporary work agency, warehouse distribution 4. **Operations manager**, temporary work agency, production, logistics, hospitality 5. **General director**, temporary work agency, greenhouse horticulture 6. **General director**, temporary work agencies' employers' organization 7. **Program facilitator,** European employment services
User firm	8. **HR manager**, user firm, warehouse distribution 9. **HR director**, user firm, warehouse distribution 10. **Entrepreneur**, user firm, greenhouse horticulture 11. **Entrepreneur**, user firm, greenhouse horticulture 12. **Entrepreneur**, user firm, greenhouse horticulture 13. **Policy specialist labour**, greenhouse horticulture employers' organization
Trade union	14. **Project leader**, trade union migrant workers project 15. **Trade union officer** temporary agency work 16. **Trade union officer** international transport and logistics
Policy maker	17. **Chair Governmental Advisory Board**, labour migration 18. **Governmental policy advisor,** labour migration and Covid-19 19. **Policy advisor,** labour inspectorate
NGO	20. **Team coordinator**, NGO migrant exploitation 21. **Advisor**, NGO human trafficking 22. **Project officer**, NGO migrant exploitation 23. **Coordinator**, NGO migrant homelessness
Researcher	24. **Researcher**, temporary agency work arrangements 25. **Researcher**, European migration law 26. **Researcher**, migrants' labour exploitation 27. **Researcher**, migrants' labour exploitation 28. **Researcher**, trade union 29. **Researcher**, trade union 30. **Researcher**, social security for migrant workers

Table 3.1 *Sample demographics (continued)*

Stakeholder	Participants
Housing	31. **Housing specialist,** bank providing loans for building migrant housing 32. **Housing specialist,** certification organization for migrant housing
Media	33. **Journalist,** editor of website on Polish migrant workers 34. **Journalist,** undercover reporter on working conditions in warehouses

Considering that the focus of our research is a worker group which experiences precarious working conditions, and often even exploitation in the labour market, it is essential to assess our positionality as researchers. The research was led by the first author of this study, who shares a migration background with CEE migrant workers including some experience in low-wage employment in the Netherlands. This position influenced the relation between the researcher and the participants during data collection, both implicitly (i.e., first author's internalized identification with the subject group) and explicitly (i.e., the recognition by participants that the interviewee has a name with CEE-origin). Reflection was supported by the fact that the other members of the author team do not share characteristics with the subject group relevant to the analysis. The other authors brought in expertise on non-standard work and HRM, equality, diversity and inclusion and social security and HRM, enabling an interdisciplinary dialogue about the data.

Analysis

Following the initial familiarization with the interviews, we used content analysis to interpret the data. First, we identified excerpts in the interviews in which stakeholders reflected on their influence on the space migrants workers have in low-wage greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing employment. We refer to the collective of these excerpts as the stakeholder narrative in the following section. Concurrently, we coded for excerpts that explicitly discussed migrant workers' mobility agency. Second, we focused on identifying whether these behaviours aligned with boundary making, boundary arranging, boundary buffering or boundary coalescing (Langley et al., 2019; Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023). We include our operational definitions for these forms of configurational boundary work in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 *Operationalization of the forms of configurational boundary work (adapted from Langley et al., 2019 and Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023)*

Form	Objective	Example
Boundary making	To create, maintain and control the social and political order.	The labour inspectorate conducting regular labour inspection to ensure compliance with labour regulation.
Boundary arranging	To shift the focus of interactions to explore new approaches or to accomplish the same tasks in a different way.	Temporary work agencies involving artificial intelligence in the screening of migrant workers during the hiring process.
Boundary buffering	To enable collaboration between organizations from different social spheres or between individuals with conflicting interests	Trade unions collaborating with employers organizations to increase migrants' trade union membership.
Boundary coalescing	To combine current activities into newly defined areas or spaces.	User organizations instituting a buddy program between migrant and local workers to create new, inclusive spaces.

Third, we thematized stakeholders' boundary work behaviours, leading to the emergence of three overarching boundaries that define the space within which migrant workers' mobility agency is embedded: (1) boundary of hyperflexibility, (2) boundary of multiple dependencies and (3) boundary of voice. Having allocated stakeholders' four types of configurational boundary work into these three themes, we identified how stakeholders work through these boundaries to change the space of migrants' mobility agency.

It is important to note, that part of our data collection took place during the COVID-19 crisis. Part of the boundary work we identified, was crisis-related and temporary, such as setting up testing locations for migrant workers (user organizations and temporary work agencies), introducing new workplace policies to adhere to social distancing regulations (user organizations), or providing temporary access for migrants who lost their housing to homeless shelters (policy makers). The analysis indicates that these forms of boundary work only influenced migrant workers' daily experiences, but did not impact their mobility agency. Therefore, in this study, we do not explicitly discuss stakeholders' boundary work that had the objective of mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis for migrant workers. We elaborate on our findings below.

3.5 FINDINGS

The findings indicate that three overarching boundaries define the space within which CEE migrant workers' mobility agency is embedded in greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing, namely a boundary of hyperflexibility, a boundary of multiple dependencies and a boundary of voice. Stakeholders engage in boundary making, arranging, buffering and coalescing activities when working through these boundaries, with both positive and negative influence on migrant workers' mobility agency. In the following section, we elaborate on the three boundaries, and the forms of boundary work stakeholders engaged in.

Boundary of hyperflexibility

The first boundary concerns hyperflexibility. In the stakeholder narrative, flexibility is positioned as central to greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing, shaping both CEE migrants' working and living conditions. We refer to this phenomenon as hyperflexibility, pertaining to perceived flexibility characterizing all spaces of migrants' agency to negotiate and challenge their precarious working and living conditions, such as their position in the labour market (presumed temporary stay), their employment relationship (flexible, temporary work agency employment) and individual life trajectories in the host country (temporary social network ties). Stakeholders engaged in boundary making, arranging, buffering and coalescing when working through the boundary of hyperflexibility, some of which have positive, while some have negative influences for migrant workers' mobility agency. An overview of stakeholders' boundary work through the boundary of hyperflexibility is included in Table 3.

Regarding *boundary making*, media, NGO's and policy makers pointed out that neoliberal policies that allow for hyperflexible working arrangements reinforce migrant workers' low mobility agency. They especially mention the growth of the temporary work agency sector as sustaining the political order of precarious work in low-wage employment. A journalist with undercover experience in the warehousing sector explains this as follows:

"The Netherlands tolerates everything. The Netherlands liberalised the temporary work agency sector at the end of the 1990's. So when Poland came with the joining [of the European Union], it was the perfect breeding ground for flexible workers. Suddenly those staffing companies started growing like mushrooms in the rain. Wild growth, unregulated, anyone can start a business and it goes on and on." (Participant 34)

Three stakeholder narratives emerge that are related to *arranging* the boundary of hyperflexibility. First, some user organizations indicated that they have managed to ensure a flat production pattern throughout the year, to reduce the fluctuation in their labour demand. In greenhouse-horticulture, this was facilitated through growing crops in artificially controlled environments (regulating temperature, humidity, light), while in warehouse distribution, this involved keeping warehousing tasks in-house rather than outsourcing these to external organizations. Reducing fluctuation in demand for mi-

grants' labour contributes to more stable patterns of employment, and consequently improved mobility agency for migrant workers. Second, some user organizations indicated that they only work with temporary work agencies that have been independently certified. While certification does not eliminate flexible working arrangements for migrant workers, it prevents temporary work agencies from rapidly scaling up and down migrants' employment. Third, user organizations discussed that robotization and technological improvements can contribute to stabilizing labour demand. However, user organizations also expressed their hesitance to invest in technology just yet, due to the high cost and uncertainty involved. While robotization and technological developments could improve migrant workers' mobility agency through making their employment less flexible, it could also result in automation and structural job loss, which would reduce migrants' mobility agency.

Concerning *boundary buffering*, we identified two narratives with regards to the boundary of hyperflexibility. First, the employers' organization of temporary work agencies advocate for the need to discuss best practices regarding migrant workers' flexible employment. They initiated a specialized collaborative unit to allow this, bringing together organizations, ultimately having the potential to improve migrants' mobility agency. Second, some user firms indicated, that due to not being able to find a temporary work agency that they could cooperate with, they collaboratively started their own temporary work agencies. This externalization of recruitment away from user organizations makes migrant workers' employment more flexible, reducing their mobility agency.

Last, regarding *boundary coalescing*, temporary work agencies indicated that due to the decreasing labour supply from CEE countries, they are exploring opportunities to hire non-EU citizens through flexible working arrangements. NGO's expressed their concerns regarding these practices, as it would add to the circulation of flexible labour in low-wage employment. This is explained by a team coordinator for an NGO focusing on migrant exploitation:

"Other groups of migrants are replacing them in the most, most precarious working conditions (…) by people from Asia let us say. So, there is always a next group of people with less rights and less knowledge about their rights that can replace [them]. So as long as there is not a legal framework that does not allow, and more a strong control of the rights, and if the agencies or their employers obey with this, I see the problem just changing maybe nationalities, but still ongoing." (Respondent 20)

By moving to new groups of migrants, stakeholders coalescence the boundary for CEE migrants, in an understanding that the status quo regarding low mobility agency can only be maintained if the current group of CEE migrants is replaced by workers with even less mobility agency.

Table 3.3 *Configurational boundary work of stakeholders addressing the boundary of hyperflexibility*

Boundary	Form of boundary work	Narrative	Stakeholder	Influence on migrants' mobility agency
Hyperflexibility	Boundary making	Neoliberal policies allowing for hyperflexible working arrangements	Policy makers	-
Hyperflexibility	Boundary arranging	Ensuring a flat production pattern to reduce fluctuation in labour demand	User organizations	+
Hyperflexibility	Boundary arranging	Working with independently certified temporary work agencies	User organizations	+
Hyperflexibility	Boundary arranging	Investing in robotization and technological improvements at the workplace	User organizations	+/-
Hyperflexibility	Boundary buffering	Institution of a specialized collaborative unit to discuss issues related to migrant workers in the temporary work agency employers' organization	Temporary work agencies	+
Hyperflexibility	Boundary buffering	User organizations founding their own temporary work agency	User organizations	-
Hyperflexibility	Boundary coalescing	Extension of cross-border flexible hiring beyond the European Union	Temporary work agencies	-

Boundary of multiple dependencies

The second boundary relates to multiple dependencies. In greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing, migrant workers often experience excessive dependence on their employer, the temporary work agency. Multiple dependencies refer to migrant workers' reliance on the temporary work agency for services beyond employment, such as transportation from the country of origin to the host country, housing, daily transportation to work and facilitating access to healthcare. We found that stakeholders engage in boundary making, arranging, buffering and coalescing when working through the boundary of multiple dependencies, with both negative and positive implications for migrant workers' mobility agency. We summarize these narratives in Table 4.

Regarding *boundary making*, we identified three narratives. First, temporary work agencies indicated that they have affiliate organizations in migrant workers' countries of origin, who engage in the cyclical hiring of migrant workers. They refer to cross-border recruitment, where temporary work agencies and their affiliates arrange migrants' transportation from their home country. This extenuates migrant workers' dependence on

the temporary work agency from the first step of recruitment, diminishing their mobility agency. Second, there is the narrative of temporary work agencies arranging migrants' housing, transportation to work and mediating access to healthcare once workers have arrived to the Netherlands. They state that some organizations do this to ensure that migrant workers have a gradual transition to the host country labour market, but that it allows malafide organizations to instil excessive control, such as having a strict behavioural code of conduct or setting up camera's at migrant workers' accommodation, or having them travel long distances between their workplace and housing location. As the head of the employers' organization for temporary work agencies explains:

"There are good intentions, but good intentions might work out wrongly. (…) The agencies, some of them use the regular houses. Some use the big hotels, some use the big holiday parks, some use specially organized big, mega housing facilities near the city. And [at all of these houses] there are housekeepers working. And these housekeepers take care of that it is clean, that it is safe that there are no fights whatever. All with good intention. But as soon as a good intentions become bad is when there is a camera which follows all the workers." (Participant 6)

Third, temporary work agencies indicate that they often have to house migrant workers at a long distance from their workplace (e.g., 60 km) due to not receiving building permits from municipalities to build migrant housing. Due to these long distances, migrant workers are taken in minibuses to their workplaces, increasing their dependencies on the temporary work agency, ultimately reducing their mobility agency.

In terms of *boundary arranging*, we identified four narratives that stakeholders use. First, NGOs focus on taking responsibility for migrant workers' housing when they lose their employment, and consequently their housing as well. These NGOs are funded by municipalities, and support migrant workers to relocate to their countries of origin or find new employment and housing in the Netherlands. This presents a safety net for migrant workers who would otherwise be at a risk of homelessness, ultimately improving their mobility agency. Second, temporary work agencies indicate that providing good quality housing has become the primary selling point for attracting migrant workers for employment. While this prompts temporary work agencies to improve their quality of housing for migrants, thereby improving their mobility agency, it could also mean that migrants agree to more precarious working conditions if they perceive their housing to be suitable. Therefore, this practice has both positive and negative implications for migrant workers' mobility agency. Third, with housing becoming an increasing concern, user organizations point out that they conduct periodic checks to make sure that their workforce lives in decent conditions. These checks can ensure that overcrowded, unsuitable forms of accommodations are identified, and through setting conditions for further cooperation or discontinuing business relations with the temporary work agency, user organizations can regulate housing for migrant workers, which would improve their mobility agency. Last, temporary work agencies indicate that they try to accommodate the special requests

of migrant workers regarding housing, allowing for instance couples to have a shared, private room together. This can contribute to migrant workers' preservation of social networks in the host country, having positive implications for their mobility agency.

Regarding *boundary buffering*, we identified two examples of boundary work targeting the boundary of multiple dependencies. First, the question of housing is a contested point between temporary work agencies and trade unions, which led to the establishment of an independent certification body. Temporary work agencies which are members of the TAW employers' organization are subjected to regular controls to ensure that their housing is of acceptable quality. This ensures that the housing of migrant workers (if arranged by collectively organized temporary work agencies), needs to reach a certain standard, which in turn positively affect their mobility agency. Second, stakeholders pointed out some successful collaborations between temporary work agencies and municipalities in determining how to arrange housing for workers in newly established warehouse distribution centers. Such collaborations are important, as they ensure that migrant workers do not need to commute long-distances to their workplace, thereby supporting their mobility agency.

In terms of boundary coalescing, trade unionists lobbying for the separation of employment and housing contracts emerged as the most prominent form of boundary work across the boundary of multiple dependencies. While this ensures that when migrant workers lose their employment, they can keep their housing, it posits significant challenges for temporary work agencies in terms of changing their infrastructure for arranging services for migrant workers. Ultimately, the separation of employment and housing contracts is beneficial for migrant workers' mobility agency.

Table 3.4 *Configurational boundary work of stakeholders addressing the boundary of multiple dependencies*

Boundary	Form of boundary work	Narrative	Stakeholder	Influence on migrants' mobility agency
Multiple dependencies	Boundary making	Cyclical hiring of migrant workers from their countries of origin	Temporary work agencies	–
Multiple dependencies	Boundary making	Malafide temporary work agencies exercising control over migrants through housing and transportation provision, and by mediating access to healthcare	Temporary work agencies	–
Multiple dependencies	Boundary making	Lack of permits for building migrant housing	Municipalities	–

Table 3.4 *Configurational boundary work of stakeholders addressing the boundary of multiple dependencies (continued)*

Boundary	Form of boundary work	Narrative	Stakeholder	Influence on migrants' mobility agency
Multiple dependencies	Boundary arranging	NGO's taking responsibility for migrant housing upon homelessness	NGO	+
Multiple dependencies	Boundary arranging	Migrant housing becoming a selling point in attracting migrant workers	Temporary work agencies	+/-
Multiple dependencies	Boundary arranging	Periodic quality controls of migrant workers' housing	Temporary work agencies and user organizations	+
Multiple dependencies	Boundary arranging	Possibility for migrant couples to have shared accommodation	Temporary work agencies	+
Multiple dependencies	Boundary buffering	Employers organization collaborating with an independent body to ensure good quality of housing across its temporary work agency members	Temporary work agencies	+
Multiple dependencies	Boundary buffering	Collaboration between temporary work agencies and municipalities to align housing demand and supply	Temporary work agencies and municipalities	+
Multiple dependencies	Boundary coalescing	Separation of housing and employment contracts	Temporary work agencies	+

Boundary of voice

The third boundary concerns voice. The boundary of voice is defined as migrant workers' limited opportunities to articulate their concerns regarding working and living conditions. We interpret boundary work addressing the boundary of voice broadly, extending to migrant workers' opportunities to participate in training, access legal remedies and bring attention to their precarious working conditions. Overall, stakeholders engage in boundary making, boundary arranging, boundary buffering and boundary coalescing when working through the boundary of voice. The latter three forms of boundary work have a positive impact on migrant workers' mobility agency, whereas the influence of boundary making is more mixed. We summarize these findings in Table 5.

Regarding *boundary making*, we identified four stakeholder narratives. First, trade unions indicated that migrant workers have low degrees of unionization, which limits

the representation of their interests in collective action (e.g., strike) and collective bargaining. This negatively influences their mobility agency. Second, NGO's, researchers and policy makers indicate that there are limited resources available for conducting labour inspections, where only a small number of user organizations are inspected for quality of working conditions every year. For malafide user organizations who offer precarious working conditions to migrant workers, the financial gains from violating regulation outweigh the risks of being fined by the inspectorate. This negatively influences migrant workers' mobility agency. As an advisor at an NGO combatting human trafficking explains:

"You can even calculate that the money that you actually distract from the migrant workers, you can just use that money to pay any fine that might come of an inspection. (…) For example with COVID-19, what did they [the inspectorate] do? They called companies to ask how they were doing and then they said yeah, they were doing fine. Oh yeah, I mean, if the police is calling me to see whether I am conducting any criminal behavior, I am saying all is fine." (Participant 21)

Third, NGO's point out that the legal route through which migrant workers can report precarious quality of working conditions offers limited restitution for the migrant workers themselves. The legal process offers limited opportunities for migrant workers to receive compensation for their grievances and focuses more on holding the employer accountable. This reduces migrant workers' incentives to report bad quality of working conditions, ultimately limiting their mobility agency. Last, journalists, policy makers and researchers state that migrant workers often have a lack of awareness of their rights, due to a lack of information about these as part of migrant workers' onboarding at the temporary work agency and user organizations. They indicate that malafide temporary work agencies recruit migrant workers with the promise of gross wages in their home countries, rather than informing them about the net amount that they will receive after deductions. When migrants face excessive wage deductions for housing or transportation to work, they often have no indication as to where they can report these practices. This ultimately reduces their mobility agency.

Concerning *boundary arranging*, we identified six stakeholder narratives. First, policy makers and researchers indicate positive expectations regarding the recent institution of the European Labour Authority (ELA). As a researcher explains, while the ELA has no regulatory function, it can provide support to national law enforcement bodies and can share best practices on how to disseminate information amongst migrant workers, which could improve their mobility agency. Second, temporary work agencies and user organizations pointed out that they offer development opportunities for migrant workers within their respective organizations. Migrant workers also have the chance, under certain conditions, to secure permanent employment either with the user organization or the temporary work agency. While mostly conditional on language skills, migrant workers also have the opportunity for promotion, increasingly taking on team leader or

line managerial roles. In leadership positions, migrant workers have the opportunity to support fellow migrant workers and take their opinions and interest into account during decision-making processes. This indicates an increase in their mobility agency. Third, journalists indicated that media channels, including Facebook groups and more traditional news sites, are becoming an important source of information for migrant workers. During the COVID-19 crisis, many migrant workers used these channels to get information about changes in public health guidelines. This indicates that both journalist and online community sites, and the journalists and fellow nationals who contribute to this, improve migrants' access to information, which positively affects their mobility agency.

Next, NGOs state that they took on the role to signal policy areas for improvement to policy makers based on migrant workers' complaints. This provides a channel for migrant workers' voice to policy makers, albeit indirectly, improving their mobility agency. Furthermore, trade unions point out that they turned to alternative models of organizing migrant workers, such as going to their housing locations. Trade unions indicate, that migrant workers feel more at ease to share their complaints at their housing location, as they perceive less control there from their employer compared to the workplace. Approaching migrant workers through representatives who share their native language is noted as particularly effective here. Last, temporary work agencies and user organizations provide training courses to migrant workers, which focus on sector-specific skills (e.g., quality control in greenhouse-horticulture or forklift license in warehousing) or language skills. Skill development allows migrant workers to have continuous employment in the Dutch labour market.

Regarding *boundary buffering*, NGO's indicate that they collaborate with trade unions and governmental bodies in offering legal advice to migrant workers. NGO's point out that due to the legal complexity of migrant workers' precarious working and housing conditions, these collaborations are necessary to identify the best support that they can offer to migrant workers. This collaboration improves migrant workers' mobility agency.

Last, we identified one stakeholder narrative that represents *coalescing boundary work* through the boundary of voice. This relates to user organizations' efforts to ensure that migrant workers feel comfortable to share the break rooms and common spaces with local workers at their workplace. While migrant workers often prefer to spend their breaks with their fellow nationals, organizations try to diminish the invisible separation lines between workers by providing them with uniform gifts for special occasions, and organizing team building events. This can help migrant workers establish social network ties with local workers, which ultimately improves their mobility agency. The consolidated configurational boundary work of stakeholders across the three boundaries is included in Figure 1.

Table 3.5 *Configurational boundary work of stakeholders addressing the boundary of voice*

Boundary	Form of boundary work	Narrative	Stakeholder	Influence on migrants' mobility agency
Voice	Boundary making	Low-degree of unionization of migrant workers	Trade unions	-
Voice	Boundary making	Lack of resources for conducting labour inspections	Policy makers	-
Voice	Boundary making	Lack of benefit for migrants reporting bad quality of working conditions	Policy makers	-
Voice	Boundary making	Providing limited or no information to migrants about their rights	Temporary work agencies and user organizations	-
Voice	Boundary arranging	Institution of the European Labour Authority	Policy makers	+
Voice	Boundary arranging	Development opportunities for migrant workers (including possibilities for permanent employment/promotion)	Temporary work agencies and user organizations	+
Voice	Boundary arranging	Media as channel of information for migrant workers about the host country	Media	+
Voice	Boundary arranging	NGO's signaling areas for policy development based on migrant workers' complaints	NGO's	+
Voice	Boundary arranging	Alternative modes of unionizing workers (e.g., at housing locations)	Trade unions	+
Voice	Boundary arranging	Providing training courses for migrant workers (including language courses)	Temporary work agencies and user organizations	+
Voice	Boundary buffering	Collaboration between NGO's, trade unions and governmental bodies to provide legal aid to migrant workers	NGO's and trade unions	+
Voice	Boundary coalescing	Ensuring that migrant and local workers feel comfortable to use shared spaces at workplace (e.g., break room in lunchtime)	User organizations	+

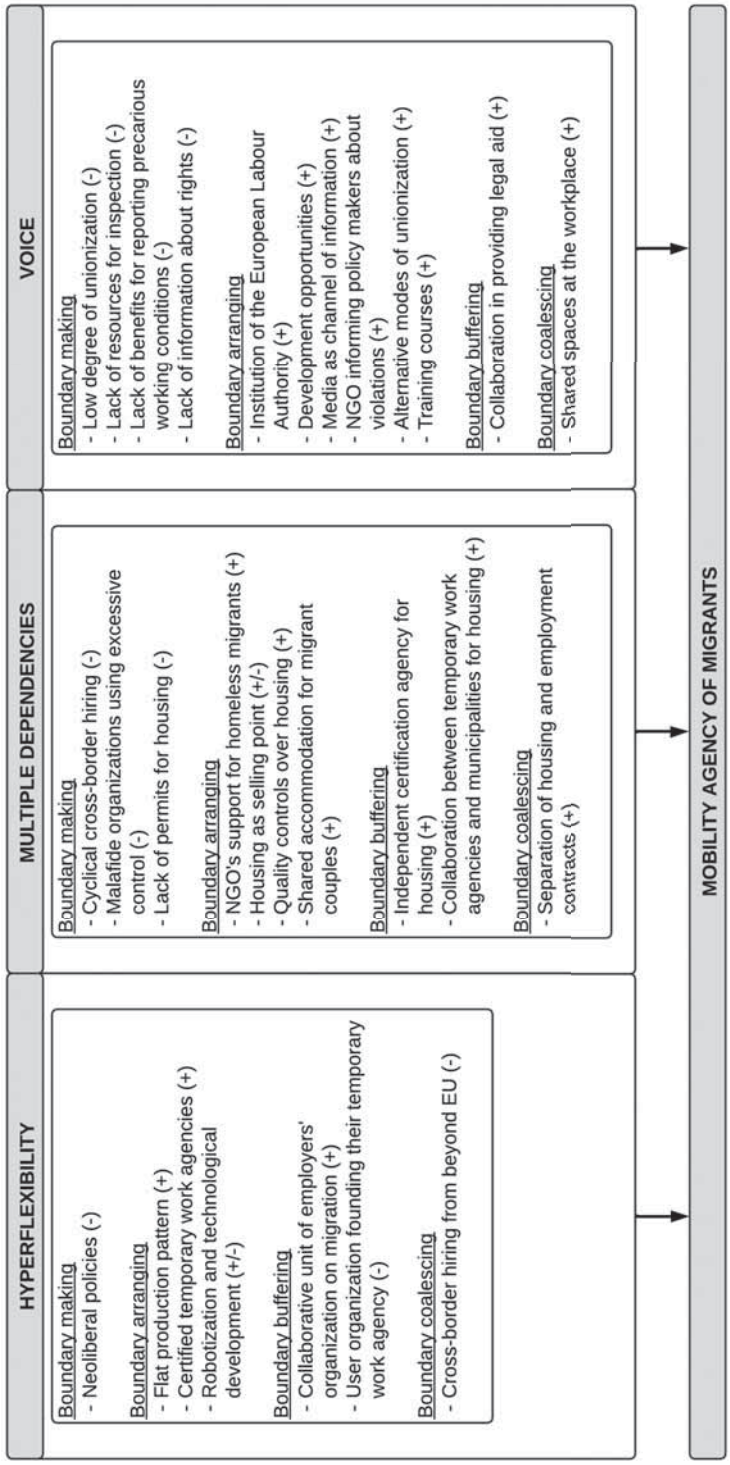

Figure 3.1 *Framework of configurational boundary work in migrants' low-wage employment in the Netherlands*

3.6 DISCUSSION

Interpreting Boundaries and Mobility Agency

This study aimed at exploring how multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work affects the mobility agency of CEE migrant workers in low-wage employment in The Netherlands. Through analyzing 34 stakeholder interviews, we identified three boundaries defining the space within which migrant workers' mobility agency is embedded; boundaries of hyper flexibility, multiple dependences and voice. The findings show that stakeholders engage in boundary making, arranging, buffering and coalescing to work through these boundaries, which have both positive and negative impact on migrant workers' mobility agency.

We find that the stakeholder's configuration of boundaries of hyperflexibility, multiple dependencies and voice create a space within which migrant workers have low mobility agency. The shared narrative points out that migrant workers are often employed by temporary work agencies, being recruited in their countries of origin (hyperflexibility). Their employment holds significance not only in terms of income but also serves as a critical means for securing housing in the host country (multiple dependencies). This housing is often of low-quality, socio-geographically isolating, and a site where temporary work agencies exercise control over their time outside of work (multiple dependencies). When migrants' rights are transgressed, and they would exercise their limited mobility agency to formally or informally voice their concerns about their working and living conditions, they are deterred by largely unfunctional complaint mechanisms (voice). Migrant workers have low rates of unionization, and are hesitant to engage in collective action in the fear of losing their employment, and consequently their housing (voice and multiple dependencies). The combination of neoliberal economic policies supporting the flexibilization of the labour market and the limited funding for labour inspections allow for malafide organizations to take advantage of migrant workers' low mobility agency, and to make profit from their precarious working conditions (hyperflexibility and voice).

The findings show that stakeholders' boundary making – aimed at maintaining and controlling the social and political order – strengthens the boundaries of hyperflexibility, multiple dependencies and voice and further diminish migrant workers' mobility agency. In contrast, we find that stakeholders' boundary arranging behaviour, which aims at introducing new approaches or to accomplish the same tasks in a different ways, has predominantly positive influence on migrants' mobility agency. We find similar patterns for migrants' boundary buffering behaviour, which aims at creating collaboration between stakeholders with different interests. Interestingly, stakeholders' boundary coalescing actions, which relate to combining current activities into newly defined areas or spaces, can also bring negative influences for migrant workers' mobility agency through bringing new workers into the space of precarious working conditions. These findings affirm that boundary work focused on transforming the status quo can explain changes in migrants' mobility agency (Langley et al., 2019), but also that not all configurational boundary work is change-oriented, and that boundary making in particular can be and is used by stake-

holders to reproduce spaces where migrants' mobility agency remains low (Scuzzarello and Moroşanu, 2023). This study offers a comprehensive understanding of the influence of stakeholders' boundary work on migrants' mobility agency by accounting for both the reproduction of the structural, historical roots of and the contemporary narratives around migrants' mobility agency.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study makes three important contributions to how we understand stakeholders' boundary work and migrants' mobility agency. First, we show that it is critical to go beyond the traditional organizational boundaries of the employment relationship to understand boundary work in the context of employment. Stakeholders external to the employment relationship – such as employers' organizations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, the media and governmental actors play an important role in defining the space of low-wage food production. In flexible working arrangements, where the unequal positions of employers and workers are especially prominent, and labour struggles become individualized, the renegotiation of and resistance to boundaries by external stakeholders could supplement the protection that new forms of employment no longer offer.

Second, we find support that stakeholders engage in boundary work addressing the legitimation of boundaries in migrants' low-wage employment, where boundaries of hyperflexibility, multiple dependencies and voice are no longer "natural, right, proper, in accord with the way things are or the way things ought to be" (Zelditch, 2006, p. 324). Our findings especially support this for boundary arranging and boundary buffering. Considering that stakeholders narratives do not only confine migrant workers' mobility agency, but can also transform into self-legitimizing practices, and eventually policies (Zanoni and Janssens, 2015), our findings point to the potential of structural improvements in the quality of working conditions in the greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing sectors in the Netherlands.

Third, we find that migrant workers' mobility agency is fluid, and can increase through stakeholders' configurational boundary work. Previous research has argued that mobility agency is conducive to migrants' ability and opportunity to improve their precarious working and living conditions (Alberti, 2014; Scott and Rye, 2023; Szytniewski and van der Haar, 2022), however it assumed that the space within migrant workers' mobility agency is embedded is stagnant. While Zampoukos and colleagues (2018) propose the plasticity of mobility agency due to changing aspirations of migrant workers over time, our findings indicate that this plasticity can also arise from stakeholders' boundary work. In this paper, we show that stakeholders – even temporary work agencies and user organizations, who are often conceptualized as the primary stakeholders upholding precarious work – can engage in boundary work that has the potential, albeit slowly, to improve migrants' mobility agency in the labour market. Our findings show that this is especially the case when stakeholders find new ways to carry out their current tasks or collaborate with stakeholders who hold different interests.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite drawing on rich, in-depth interview data, this study has limitations which outline avenues for future research. First, our study solely focused on stakeholders' boundary work in the employment of CEE migrant workers in food production. We would expect that third-country nationals from outside the EU are particularly affected by boundaries of multiple dependencies, as their right to remain in the host country is even closer tied to their employment (Könönen, 2019). As the stakeholder narrative indicates that the Asian workforce is becoming increasingly attractive for employers in food production, we call for future research on boundary work in the employment of third-country nationals in low-wage, precarious sectors.

Second, our study only covers stakeholders' boundary work in low-wage employment in the Netherlands, but does not extend to how migrants themselves could engage in configurational boundary work. As previous research points to stakeholders' boundary work evolving into policy through legitimation (Zanoni and Janssens, 2015), we believe that future research could explore how migrants' configurational boundary work can change quality of working conditions in low-wage employment. This research could draw on Scuzzarello and Moroşanu's work examining the generation of new boundaries "from below" (2023).

CHAPTER 4

Hungarian migrant workers' frames of reference around the quality of working conditions in Dutch warehousing: A narrative approach

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ABSTRACT

Central and Eastern European migrant workers often experience precarious working conditions in the low-wage sectors of The Netherlands. Taking a narrative approach, this study explores the frames of reference that Hungarian migrant workers use for interpreting their working conditions in the Dutch warehousing sector. Based on 18 in-depth interviews, we distill four trajectories of frame of reference formation: (1) from high-skill to low-wage employment trajectories; (2) from low-skill to low-wage employment trajectories; (3) temporary work trajectories; and (4) embedded trajectories. Next to a home-host country frame of reference, migrant workers also use peer and transitional frames of reference in their evaluation of working conditions. The findings indicate that migrant workers utilize their frames of reference to reduce the cognitive dissonance experienced upon being subjected to precarious work, especially following high-skill to low-wage, low-skill to low-wage and temporary work trajectories. Following sequences of non-standard working arrangements, migrant workers are prepared to accept employment with precarious working conditions if they perceive it to offer stability and security over time.

Keywords: migrant workers, precarious work, narrative research, frame of reference, cognitive dissonance

4.1 INTRODUCTION

With the rise of non-standard working arrangements, Central and Eastern European (hereinafter: CEE) migrant workers are increasingly hired on flexible employment contracts in the low-wage sectors of The Netherlands (Berntsen, 2015a; Berntsen, 2015b; Kerti & Kroon, 2020; Pijpers, 2010). In low-wage sectors, migrant workers often face precarious working conditions characterized by "instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social and economic vulnerability" (Rodgers, 1989, p. 3). In particular, CEE migrant workers often experience the uncertainties of temporary work agency employment, involving long working hours in exchange for substandard wages (Brinkmeijer, 2011; Kerti & Kroon, 2020; Pijpers, 2010; Van Ostaijen et al., 2017). Despite such working conditions, CEE migrant workers often decide to endure, even if only for the short-term. Previous research explains migrant workers' willingness to tolerate precarious employment by their frames of reference, which serve as a point of comparison for assessing the subjective quality of their working conditions in the host country (Aasland & Guri, 2016; Dundon, 2007; Fialkowska, 2021; Green, 2016; Irimias, 2016; Knight, 2014; Refslund, 2020; Rogaly, 2008; Rye, 2010; Rye, 2014; Rye, 2018; Scott, 2012; Voivozeanu, 2019).

Migrant workers' dual frame of reference wherein they compare conditions in the host society with conditions in the home country or with peers in similar circumstances, influences their perceptions of the quality of working conditions (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). For instance, wages migrant workers receive in the host country can be relatively high compared to similar work in their home countries (Refslund & Sippola, 2020; Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Rye, 2014; Rye, 2018; Scott & Brindley, 2012; Voivozeanu, 2019). Peer frame of reference also plays an important role in migrant workers' perceptions of working conditions (Clibborn, 2021). When migrant workers are aware of other immigrants experiencing precarious working conditions, they are likely to rationalize their position in reference to the peer group (Clibborn, 2021). Migrant workers justify the precarious working conditions that they experience in the host country through this home-host country and peer frame of reference.

Understanding the influence of migrant workers' frame of reference is especially important in the Dutch warehousing sector. While there has been ample research conducted on the working conditions of CEE migrant workers in the Dutch agriculture (Kroon & Paauwe 2014; Pijpers, 2010), construction (Berntsen, 2015; Caro et al., 2015) and meat-processing industries (Berntsen 2015; Lillie & Wagner, 2015), the warehousing sector remains largely unexplored. This is despite the large proportion of CEE migrant workers in the sector. By 2020, the warehousing sector - focused on sorting, processing and distributing goods - had become the primary sector for hiring migrant workers in the Netherlands (ABU & NBBU, 2020). Research focusing on this sector is therefore timely.

Within the Dutch warehousing sector, the growing need for flexible labor has materialized in ever-increasing numerical flexibility (De Vries, 2021; Van Looveren, 2018). This is realized through the hiring of migrant workers through temporary work agencies (De Vries, 2021; Van Looveren, 2018). While this allows organizations to adapt to fluctuations

in supply chains, it results in increasingly precarious working conditions for migrant workers. Undercover reporting by journalists shows that productivity standards and efficiency dominate warehouse work in the Netherlands (Olejarczyk, 2019; Van Bergeijk, 2018). Productivity standards within shift systems are especially problematic for migrants, as they risk being sent home without pay for the rest of their scheduled work time in case they do not meet the working hours standard (Olejarczyk, 2019). The pressure to demonstrate a high work ethic produces stress and anxiety in workers, which can lead to harmful coping mechanisms, such as the use of illicit amphetamines to improve performance (Muntz & Peek, 2021).

In this research we explore how Hungarian migrant workers' frames of reference influence their perception of working conditions in Dutch warehouse work. Central to the study is the question of how Hungarian migrant workers use their frames of reference to evaluate their experiences of working conditions in Dutch warehouse work. Hungarian migrant workers constitute the fourth largest ethnic group of Central and Eastern European migrants working in temporary employment in the Netherlands, after Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian migrant workers (ABU & NBBU, 2020).

To make sense of the frames of reference that migrant workers use to rationalize their working conditions, we use the principles of cognitive dissonance theory (cf. Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance theory describes how people deal with discrepancies between what they expect and what they actually experience (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance theory can contribute to theorizing about individual sense-making in interaction with one's context, as an explanation for migrant workers' experiences with working conditions. Based on a narrative analysis of 18 in-depth interviews with Hungarian migrant workers, we show four trajectories of frame of reference formation. A narrative methodological approach is uniquely suited for understanding individual trajectories of vulnerable workers as part of their broader life histories (Aure et al., 2018; Hailemariam et al., 2019). This article contributes to understanding careers of migrant workers and their readiness for engaging in precarious employment.

4.2 FRAMES OF REFERENCE: DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES FOR COGNITIVE DISSONANCE REDUCTION

Precarious employment is defined as work that is "uncertain, unstable and precarious, where workers bear the economic risks of employment (as opposed to businesses or the government) and receive limited social benefits and legal protections" (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017, p. 1). This is an absolute definition (Allan et al., 2021; Hewinson & Tularak, 2013; Jaehrling et al., 2018; Nugent, 2018), which allows for an objective understanding of precarious employment (where work with certain characteristics – e.g., temporary employment – is considered precarious). This definition does not take into account workers' perceptions in evaluating the quality of their working conditions (Allan et al., 2021). Recent literature on precarious work in the field of psychology has been advocating for the conceptual differentiation between precarious work and perceived job

precariousness, where the latter refers to "the individual, psychological experience of insecurity, instability, and powerlessness related to one's work" (Allan et al., 2021). Assuming that perceived job precariousness is an inherently individual experience implies that the relationship between precarious work and perceived job precariousness is not necessarily linear (Allan et al., 2021).

An important factor in migrant workers' experience of precarious working conditions is the person's frame of reference (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). Frames of reference can be understood as self-constructed standards rooted in workers' experiental base which are used as points of comparison for subjectively assessing one's quality of working conditions (Clibborn, 2021; Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). Previous research has shown that home-host country, peer comparisons and immigration regulation can have important implications for migrant workers' perceptions of working conditions (Clibborn, 2021).

Previous research showed that migrant workers view precarious working conditions in the host country more favorably because of the high wages they receive compared to those in the home country (Refslund & Sippola, 2020; Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Rye, 2014; Rye, 2018; Scott & Brindley, 2012; Voivozeanu, 2019). While such a dual frame of reference is often observed among short-term, temporary migrants (Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010), it offers less explanation for migrants' willingness to remain in precarious work on the long-term after becoming familiar with the host country context. Recent research suggests that the peer frame of reference offers an alternative explanation (Clibborn, 2021). A study conducted amongst international students in Australia found, that "students maintained their peer reference group as justification for continuing to tolerate low pay" (Clibborn, 2021, p. 349). Furthermore, Könönen (2019) showed that a frame of reference in which immigration regulations are taken as the norm affects both migrant workers' perceptions of working conditions and their broader labor market position. Despite the fact that an immigration regulation frame of reference is unlikely to apply to migrant workers within the EU, due to their right to free movement between European Union member states, it sheds light on the interdependence between macro (e.g., immigration regulation) and micro (e.g., willingness of migrant workers to do precarious work) mechanisms (Könönen, 2019). The similarity between these three previously identified frames of reference (home and host country, peers, and immigration regulations) is the importance of the lived experienced: Migrant workers' frames of reference appear to be rooted in their self-constructed standards of working conditions as formed throughout their employment history. This could indicate that different career paths act as distinct trajectories of frames of reference formation for migrant workers.

The implicit use of frames of reference by migrant workers in rationalizing and tolerating precarious working conditions possibly indicates cognitive dissonance reduction (cf. Festinger, 1957). Migrant workers within the EU often underpin their decision to migrate in the hope of a better quality of life, higher wages and career opportunities (Guth & Gill, 2008; Jozsa & Vinogradov, 2017; Kennedy, 2010). In the host country, these aspirations often do not materialize. The stress resulting from dissonance between cognitions - de-

fined as "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior" - compels migrant workers to actively seek consonance (Festinger, 1957, p. 3). They do so by introducing new cognitions in the forms of frames of reference and by redefining dissonant cognitions, such as precarious working conditions, with them. For example, a Polish migrant worker working as an order picker in the Netherlands may rationalize his precarious employment by arguing that wages are still much higher than in the context of his home country (a home-country-host-country frame of reference) or by claiming that *all* migrant workers working as order pickers experience precarious conditions (a peer frame of reference).

Building on cognitive dissonance theory, this article argues that migrant workers turn to their frames of reference to reduce the dissonance between expected and experienced working conditions. The research question is as follows: *How do frames of reference influence Hungarian migrant workers' perception of working conditions in Dutch warehousing?*

4.3 METHOD

Research design and data collection

This study builds on an interpretive qualitative research design, in the form of an in-depth, life history interview study. The reasons for opting for this approach are threefold. First, interpretive research designs position the viewpoints and feelings of research participants in the center of inquiry, therefore giving meaning to the voice of vulnerable study populations, such as that of migrant workers (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Second, interviews in interpretive designs represent a "key way of accessing the interpretations of informants in the field", hence providing an especially suitable method for understanding the frames of reference of migrant workers (Walsham, 2006, p. 323). Third, considering that the decision to migrate constitutes a major life event, life history interviews can prove to be meaningful for contextualizing migrant workers' lived experiences with working conditions both before and in the migratory context (Psoinos, 2019).

The research population concerned Hungarian migrant workers working in the Dutch warehouse sector. Gaining access to this study population is difficult, as migrants are often considered a hard-to-reach population in research (Shaghaghi, et al., 2011). This is especially the case in research focusing on the working conditions of migrant workers, who could be less willing to share their experiences with precarious work due to fear of losing their employment as a consequence. Considering that the language skills of CEE migrant workers are often limited (Andrzejewska, 2012; Friberg 2019 & Midtbøen, McDowell et al., 2008; Rye & Andrzejewska 2010) and that individuals can generally express their thoughts more openly in their native language, we opted to conduct the interviews in Hungarian. The first author of this article is a migrant worker, who had various low-wage part-time jobs in the Netherlands, such as dishwasher, waitress and supermarket employee. While the first author shares a national identity with the study participants, she did not have to rely on precarious work as a main source of income, therefore taking

a sympathetic outsider position in this study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The first author's shared national identity with the study population proved valuable for gaining access to the study population and allowed for building rapport and trust with participants.

We conducted interviews with 18 migrant workers who we recruited through snowball sampling until data saturation was reached. This is consistent with the sample size of previous in-depth interview studies with migrant workers (Fitzgerald & Hardy, 2010; Holgate, 2005; Krings et al., 2013; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; Weishaar, 2008). We selected participants because they (1) had Hungarian nationality, (2) were working in a Dutch warehouse at the time of the interview or shortly before, and (3) were employed in a non-managerial position.

To access the research population, the first author posted a short call on Facebook, in a community titled "Hungarians in the Netherlands," which at the time of data collection had nearly forty thousand members. The first author conducted the in-depth interviews in February and March 2019, which ranged between 30 minutes and 3 hours in length.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from migrant workers prior to the interview through a consent form. Participants had the option not to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with, or to withdraw from the study both during and after the interview. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, in public locations, to reduce any risks to participants. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim, anonymized and translated into English. Since the data collected were accessible only to members of the research team, confidentiality was ensured. As the collected data could only be accessed by the members of the research team, confidentiality was maintained. We obtained permission from the ethics committee of Tilburg School of Social and Behavioural Sciences to conduct this study.

The demographic characteristics of the sample varied in terms of age, gender, education level and previous work experience. Ten participants identified themselves as men and eight as women; the majority were in their 20s (six) or 30s (seven), with four participants in their 40s and one in their 50s. Three had completed primary education, three secondary education, seven secondary vocational education, two higher vocational education, and three higher education. The participants' work experience varied: before working in a Dutch warehouse, they worked as social workers, civil servants, electricians, architects, construction workers or factory workers. This suggests that the population of Hungarian migrant workers in the Dutch warehousing sector is quite heterogeneous, making it an interesting study population for interpretive qualitative life course research.

Instruments

The interviews with Hungarian migrant workers consisted of three parts, including (1) a part focusing on their working lives and live course, (2) a part on their experiences with working conditions in their current jobs, and (3) a part on contextualizing and reflecting on their experiences in the Dutch labor market.

In the first part, we focused on the educational background, migration motivation and career trajectories of migrant workers before and after their entry into the Dutch

labor market. In the second part of the interview, migrants work asked about their interpretations about the quality of their working conditions We posed questions about the quality of current working conditions using the seven dimensions of decent work, namely: (1) fundamental principles and values at work (e.g. fair treatment); (2) adequate working time and workload (e.g. work-life balance); (3) fulfilling and productive work (e.g. perceived value creation); (4) meaningful remuneration (e.g. living wages); (5) social protection (e.g. access to social security); (6) opportunities at the workplace (e.g. professional development) and (7) health and safety (e.g. work-related accidents) (Ferraro et al, 2016). When asked about their working conditions, migrant workers had the tendency to first provide objective answers (e.g. "I work in three shifts), therefore probing questions were necessary to learn about migrant workers' lived experienced with such conditions (e.g. "I do not like working in three shifts").

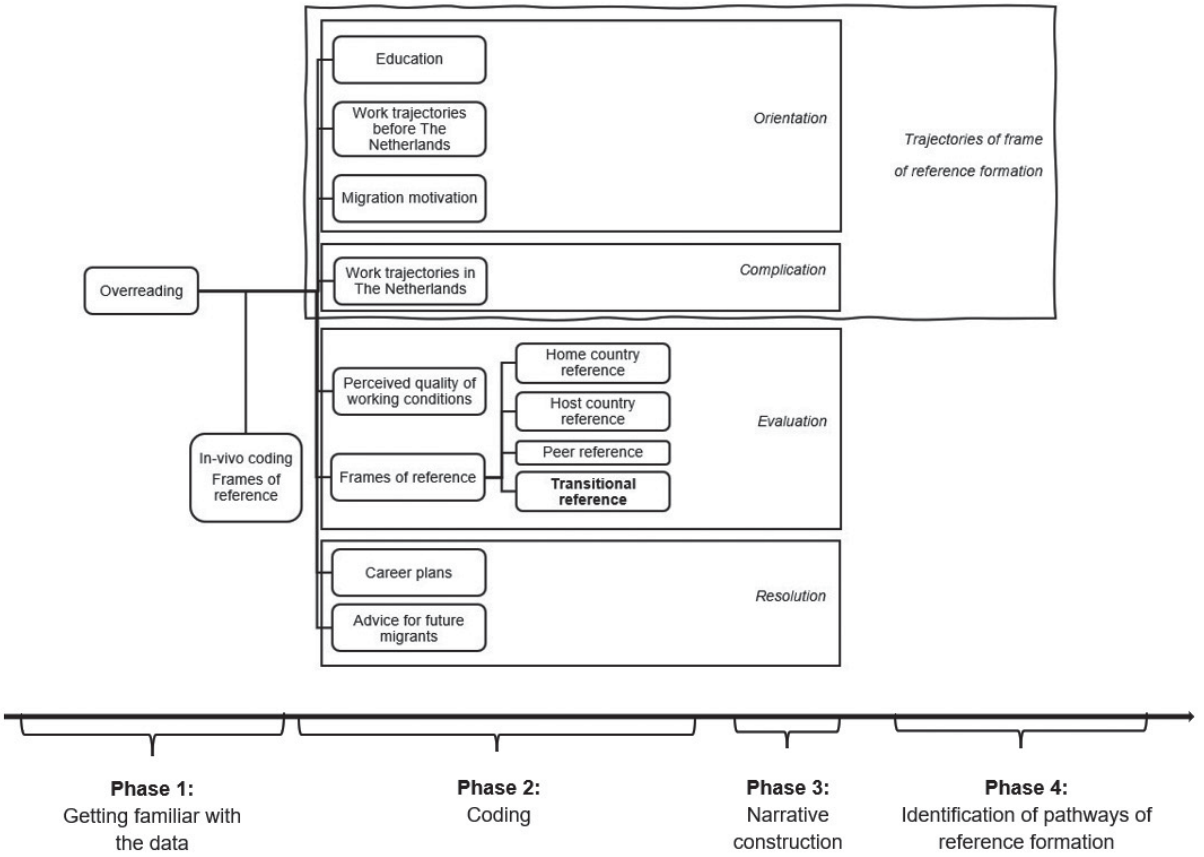
Frames of reference were operationalized as the standards to which migrant workers compare their working conditions at the time of the interview. Considering that frames of reference are ingrained in migrant workers' interpretation, no explicit questions were asked about this construct during the interview. Based on previous literature, we expected home country reference, host country reference and potentially peer reference to come forth in the interviews. In the last part of the interview, we focused on migrants' career plans and advice for fellow Hungarian migrant workers considering to enter the Dutch labor market.

Analysis

Narrative analysis is the most established research method for understanding lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative analysis, transcripts are treated as "self-contained wholes" (Ayres et al., 2003), focusing on analysis within the case rather than analysis between cases. Figure 3.1 illustrates the analysis process. As the first step in the analysis process, the first author read through the transcripts ("overreading") and selected excerpts in which participants interpreted their working conditions using "in-vivo" coding. The in-vivo codes matched the language used by the participants themselves. Next, coding was done with initial deductive codes generated from literature (e.g., home country reference measure; host country reference measure, peer reference measure).

The role of cognitive dissonance theory during the research process was of an abductive nature. This approach simultaneously enabled the interpretation of migrant workers' frames of reference in accordance with previous literature, while supporting the emergence of new patterns during the analysis process (Earl Rinehart, 2021; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). We developed abductive codes based on frames of reference that were present in the data but not previously distinguished in the literature. To represent migrant workers' interpretations as authentically as possible, we decided to focus on structuring their life course narratives in the analysis process. Using a Labovian framework (orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution) helped to provide a systematic structure to the stories (Patternson, 2008). In the final phase, we identified four general pathways of frame of reference formation. To ensure participants' anonymity, we use pseudonyms in the following section.

Figure 4.1 *Analysis process*



4.4 FINDINGS

Through constant comparison between theory and data, we identified four trajectories of frame of reference formation, namely (1) from high-skill to low-wage employment trajectories; (2) from low-skill to low-wage employment trajectories; (3) temporary work trajectories; and (4) embedded trajectories. These career paths represent trajectories of frame of reference formation, as individual frames of reference are anchored in lived experiences. While migrant workers' trajectories are uniquely individual, trajectories of frame of reference formation allow for some degree of generalization regarding the intra-EU East-West migratory experience.

First, migrant workers had a *high-skill to low-skill employment trajectory* of frame of reference formation if their occupational positions held in the home country required a higher level of education and skillset than the position held in the Dutch warehouse distribution sector. Migrant workers following this trajectory attended tertiary education or higher vocational education, and held positions such as social worker, ministry employee, or all-round office employee supporting the HR and Finance functions in the home country. Most of these participants indicated severe dissatisfaction with the working conditions experienced in the Dutch warehouse distribution sector.

Second, migrant workers followed a *low-skill to low-wage employment trajectory* of frame of reference formation if their occupational positions held in the home country required approximately the same level of education and skillset as the position held in the Dutch warehousing sector. Migrant workers in this category typically completed basic or vocational education, and had working experience as package delivery drivers, electricians, production workers or factory operators in the country of origin. Migrants' perceptions of working conditions in this category were often influenced by the higher wages they received compared to those for similar work in their home countries.

Third, we considered migrant workers to have a *temporary work trajectory* of frame of reference formation if their career was characterized by frequent engagement in employment facilitated by temporary work agencies. The interviews show that most migrant workers first encountered agency work in the context of their migration. In the Dutch labor market, temporary agency work appeared to be especially common in the food production chain, where migrant workers worked as production workers in meat processing, as order pickers in sorting centers of supermarkets. As the trajectories of these workers often showed excessive flexibility and insecurity, migrant workers seemed to seek and cherish stability and security in their employment.

Last, migrant workers were allocated to have an *embedded trajectory* of frame of reference formation, if their labour market transitions were mostly, or solely embedded in the Dutch labour market prior to the position held in the Dutch warehouse distribution sector. Migrant workers showing an embedded trajectory were often relatively young, who entered the labour market during or shortly after their studies. Many participants on this trajectory followed their significant other to The Netherlands, who generally were already embedded in the host country context for extended periods of time. Migrant

workers in this category often showed self-perceived upward occupational mobility over time, finding pride in being able to successfully navigate the Dutch labour market.

While some migrant workers showed combinations of multiple trajectories of frame of reference formation, for most one was predominant. In the next section, we present four narratives, each centered around one of the identified trajectories of frame of reference formation. We decided to focus on individual narratives rather than constructing archetypical narratives as these show how individual experiences of migrants contribute to their frame of reference formation. The narratives show that migrant workers' life experiences are increasingly embedded in non-standard employment in transnational labor markets.

Narrative 1: Ferenc - A life in "barracks," working as a "slave"

In the case of Ferenc (male, in his fifties) decades of experience as a knowledge worker in Hungary serves as a frame of reference. He distances himself from his colleagues and the precarious housing conditions provided by the employment agency. After completing a university degree in information technology, Ferenc held several positions in this field in Hungary. He also devoted some of his free time to literary projects, earning some additional income. Ferenc says: *"That was a quite good period of my life (…) now it is a quite strange and a bit [of an] asymmetrical thing that (…) I am an order picker"*. The financial crisis of 2007-2008 proved detrimental to Ferenc's career in Hungary, so he decided to move to Western Europe. After coming across a seemingly lucrative job advertisement on social media, Ferenc found work in a meat processing plant in Germany. Despite the high expectations he had of his new job, Ferenc felt deceived by his employer: *"Nothing was how they promised or how we discussed it"*. After deciding to look for better work in the Netherlands, Ferenc found a job as an order picker in the warehouse of a supermarket.

Reflecting on his working conditions as an order picker, Ferenc criticizes some of the practices of temporary work agencies, such as withholding wages when workers arrive late to work and when they do not submit two days of vacation in exchange for night shift leave. Ferenc expresses his dissatisfaction with the housing provided by the temporary work agency: *"That was really in the middle of nowhere, the closest store is eight kilometers away; a barracks camp (…) So they figured it out how to keep you in this slave existence. To give you an example, two of us lived in a room of seven square feet, and for that I paid 440 euros a month"*.

While describing these experiences, Ferenc said that the evaluation of his position as an order picker stems from his experiences in his home country: *"This is a warehouse job after all. To be honest, I think as an IT specialist (…) I did not feel that I could create value at a warehouse"*. He highlights how his situation differs from that of his peers: *"I am in a fortunate position that I speak two languages other than Hungarian so I can get a job, but (…) usually people who live in extreme poverty, who do not speak foreign languages are the ones who move here and who really take these utility jobs and semi-skilled jobs; so really few [people] from so to say my circles"*.

When Ferenc faced precarious working and housing conditions, Ferenc focused on saving parts of his relatively low salary to invest in finding accommodation in the private market in order to reduce the multiple dependencies that tied him to his employer, a prominent temporary work agency in The Netherlands. At the time of the interview, Ferenc experienced the consequences of this decision: *"I moved [here] three weeks ago, when I decided to break out from these (…) slave colonies, where the despoilment of the people is happening. I took that little money that I was able to save up and I rented a room here and I started looking for a job. I found a job within a week (…) but I have not worked for a minute yet. And they keep postponing. (…) Given word has no value".When asked to give advice to fellow Hungarians who are thinking about the possibility of migrating, Ferenc stated: "[This is] a nigthmare. Terrible (…) If I really had to, I would say that they should have some financial background (…) and they should learn to speak some language at least on a basic level"*.

Narrative 2: Katalin – Finding pride in good work ethic

Katalin's narrative illustrates, how experiences with precarious working conditions in low-skilled employment in the home country and finding value in one's work ethic compared to peers can act as frames of reference, through which precarious working conditions in the Dutch warehouse distribution sector are interpreted more favorably. After completing vocational education in the manufacturing of chemical products, Katalin worked in various positions in Hungary, including kitchen assistant in a restaurant, production assistant in a printing company and sales clerk in a supermarket. Then Katalin worked for ten years as a production worker in a bread factory. Katalin's experiences there, especially with regard to wages, were decisive in her decision to migrate: *"I loved it, but after three or four years it got truly ruined (…) When I left, my salary was less than when I started working there 10 years ago (…) With more money, I was hoping that life will be easier, too."*

Katalin gained access to the Dutch labor market through a transnational recruitment agency, which arranged for her to work in a greenhouse. She soon decided to look for a new job, because of the inadequate pay: *"There were some problems with the salary (…) This colleague of mine who was there for two weeks, she brought it up with the office, and she was sent away a few days later"*.

Driven by her determination to find work with better conditions in the Netherlands, Katalin contacted another employment agency and got a job as an order picker in the warehouse of a large supermarket chain. In the first month of her new job as an order picker, Katalin worked seven days a week, without any rest days: *"We did not ask for days off since we were hoping they will give us some, but they did not"*. Katalin had to work in two shifts, with the length of the night shift depending on the number of orders to be handled: *The (…) shift is from 2 AM, (…) so, there were some days of the week when we went home at 8 AM, or went home at 9 AM, but there were also times when I finished work at 1:35 PM"*. The ability of workers to complete their full shift depended in part on a quota, which was not made public to workers. As Katalin explained it, *"The daily quota depends on the orders and the person*." The unpredictability of the length of Katalin's

working hours had a negative impact on her private life: *"There is not really a private life here. There is work and sleep."*

Despite these precarious working conditions in terms of working hours, fair treatment and work-life balance, Katalin evaluated her job favorably because of the higher pay she earned compared to that in her home country*: "Financially, I am quite satisfied (…) because I am still comparing it to the one, I would get back home. I know that we are the bottom of the labour force, so I know that the people here, or that at proper workplaces this is not what people are getting, but compared to salaries at home, this is at the highest end of the spectrum"* Katalin found pride in her high work ethic as an order picker, compared to other, less committed workers in the warehouse: *"I'm the only [Hungarian] who is still here from our shift (…) There is no idling around here, but you need to go, tap-tap, stack it, put it and do it."*

Katalin is unhappy with the temperature in the warehouse, which is usually below zero degrees and contributes to her health problems. Despite, at the time of the interview she had no intention of looking for better work: *"To be honest I have no intention to change at the moment (…) I came to work and I am not afraid of work, I would do anything that I would have to do"*. This stance also reflected in her advice given to fellow Hungarians contemplating the idea of migrating West: *"Don't think too much, leave as soon as possible"*.

Narrative 3: Margit - Seeking stability in temporality

The story of Margit (female, in her thirties) shows that frequent transitions in the labor market, the right to free movement within the European Union, and the emergence of non-standard employment contracts, act as a frame of reference, leading migrants to evaluate working conditions more favorably. This is especially true if they perceive work as more stable and secure because of having a direct employment contract with the employer. After graduating from high school in Hungary, Margit worked as an assistant manager in a supermarket before deciding to move abroad in hopes of a better wages. The following year, Margit worked as a cleaner in a hotel in Ireland and as a kitchen assistant in a restaurant in Greece. Due to negative experiences with working conditions in the latter position, Margit decided to return to Hungary: *"It was a kind of slave labour, so one time we just got up and left in the middle of the night"*.

After a few years working in waitressing in a restaurant in Hungary, Margit entered the Dutch job market. Here - in the six years that followed - she frequently switched from one job to another, and from one sector to another. She worked in a greenhouse, was unemployed for a while, and worked as a production worker in four to five different factories. These frequent changes were due to the fact that Margit worked through several temporary work agencies.

The uncertainties caused by the temporary agency work resound in Margit's reflections*: "Nothing was certain (…) [The temporary work agency] recruited me to a company where you had to paint flower pots, and there we worked in five shifts, that was insanely tough, having to go two days in the morning, two in the afternoon, two at night, well that completely wore me out (…) And that was when I decided that okay, I had enough now."*

After these negative experiences with temporary employment contracts and non-standard working hours, Margit decided to focus on finding work with a direct employment contract. Margit got a job as an employee in a warehouse in the medical equipment supply chain of Dutch hospitals, and she eventually got a standard employment contract with this employer.

When evaluating her working conditions as a warehouse employee, Margit especially appreciated that her working hours resembled those of office hours so that she could achieve a better work-life balance: *"In this department, we work from eight to five. (...) [My partner] also works from eight to five, so we can also spend the evenings together, so it's fine."* When we asked Margit to reflect on the meaning of her job, she indicated that although the work does not create value for her, it does help her follow her passions: *"I have this [job] in addition to being able to realize my dreams. (...) I finally have financial stability, and in addition I will be able to do my hobby that I eventually want to be able to live from."* Margit found the acquired stability and security meaningful: *"[It] was really enticing (...) that there was a possibility to get a standard contract after nine months, and that's how it went, so now I have a contract with them. (...) Now I have my first contract since living in the Netherlands. Until now I didn't think that was possible, based on what (...) I've experienced. Because honestly, I've been to a lot of temporary work agencies, and four-five or even more workplaces, and I never felt that they would want to keep me long-term, or that there would be a possibility to stay. Because they just use you as a machine everywhere"*.

At the time of the interview, Margit had plans to start her own business as a nail technician in the future, but she noticed that more resources are needed to do so. She explained that her current job could play an important role in obtaining these resources and that she was therefore not considering to look for another job. The role of language skills prevailed as a priority in her advice to others thinking about migrating to The Netherlands: *"You can survive with English, but if someone wants to come here, and they even learn [Dutch] in the first year, then I think they can achieve a lot."*

Narrative 4: Janka - Building resilience for career development

The trajectory of Janka (female, in her twenties) shows that young migrant workers who enter the Dutch labor market with little or no work experience can still experience upward mobility and improvement in their working conditions when they have a social network already embedded in the host country, giving them access to knowledge and information. After getting her high school diploma in Hungary, Janka decided to join her partner, who by then had been working in the Netherlands for a year. In the years that followed, Janka held many different jobs, including cleaning lady, production worker in a factory and order picker in two different warehouses. As she reflects on the conditions under which she worked, Janka's positive attitude comes to the fore: *"Whatever I do, I gradually get to enjoy it. And that makes it easier for me to do this kind of work. Always seeing the bright side of a particular job."* In order to be able to secure a job which offered traditional working hours and the possibility to work part time, Janka completed a lo-

gistics administration certificate and became fluent in the Dutch language. As a result, she managed to transition to a part-time position in logistics administration, which she held at the time of the interview.

When assessing her working conditions, Janka finds it especially important that her job offers a good work-life balance: *"Well actually it is good, now that I am not working on Mondays, it is a lot better, because I can do my chores, cooking and cleaning and everything, so that I can spend time with my partner on weekends instead".* Although Janka finds the working hours of her current job favorable, she finds it difficult to communicate in a language other than her mother tongue: "*The language barrier is difficult (...) I cannot express myself very well in English or Dutch, no matter how good my English is*." Such communication problems sometimes make Janka feel left out at work: "*My last year I would describe as a roller coaster. There are better moments, and worse ones, and you have to live for the better ones (...) The fact that they talk about others behind their backs has a negative impact on my work attitude."* When she compares her current working conditions with previous experiences in the Netherlands, the difference in wages in particular appears to play an important role in the favorable assessment: *"When I was younger, they entrusted me with the work of several people, and for that low salary, well, then I was a bit outraged (...) It is much better, because of course I work in an office."*

The wish to secure a job where she would be able to work in her mother tongue dominated Janka's future career plans: *"I have this job in my head which, if I could get it, that would be the dream, that is being able to speak Hungarian (...) I miss my native language".* Janka also highlighted the importance of language skills to fellow Hungarians contemplating the idea of migration: *"They should learn a language, either English or even Dutch. Because then everything will be a lot easier. You can get a much better and more humane job then."*

4.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this research, using four different narratives based on interviews with Hungarian migrant workers, we studied how the frame of reference through which they view the quality of working conditions in Dutch warehouse work affects their perception of working conditions. We argued that frames of reference of migrant workers are formed through trajectories of frame of reference formation, which are embedded in migrants' life histories. Based on previous research, we expected that migrant workers would use their frames of reference to reduce cognitive dissonance (cf. Festinger, 1957). Such cognitive dissonance can arise when migrant workers face precarious working conditions in the host country that contradict their previous expectations that they would have access to better employment opportunities (Guth & Gill, 2008; Jozsa & Vinogradov, 2017; Kennedy, 2010). Using narrative analysis, we identified four trajectories of frame of reference formation that Hungarian migrants followed: namely (1) from high-skill to low-wage employment trajectories; (2) from low-skill to low-wage employment trajectories; (3) temporary work trajectories; and (4) embedded trajectories.

Ferenc's story illustrates the process from high-skill to low-wage work. It shows that migrant workers with this trajectory distance themselves from both the work they have to do and from other workers. In particular, Ferenc uses the home-host frame of reference to show that there is a gap between his perceived status as a knowledge worker and his tasks as an order picker. He uses a peer frame of reference to indicate that he is not like other order pickers in Dutch warehouse work. By using this frame of reference, Ferenc interprets his working conditions negatively, often comparing his position to the position of a slave. Through emphasizing distinctiveness from peers, Ferenc sought not only to reduce the cognitive dissonance rooted in the disparity between expected and perceived working conditions in the Dutch warehousing sector, but also between his position and that of those working there. Such use of frames of reference can serve as a discursive strategy of distancing oneself from the group, where "members of low-status groups try to improve their personal situation by distancing themselves from their stigmatized ingroup" (Van Veelen et al., 2020, p. 1089).

Katalin's narrative is consistent with a trajectory of reference formation from low-skill to low-wage work. Consistent with previous research, Katalin used a home-host country frame of reference that emphasizes the importance of wages when evaluating working conditions (Refslund & Sippola, 2020; Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010; Rye, 2014; Rye, 2018; Scott & Brindley, 2012; Voivozeanu, 2019, Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). However, she noted that her perceptions of wages were most likely different from people from the host country, implicitly acknowledging that trajectories of frame of reference influence perceptions. Katalin also used a peer frame of reference to differentiate herself from other workers in warehouse work: by conforming to the assumed high work ethic of Central and Eastern Europeans, she assumed the role of the ideal warehouse worker (e.g., hard-working, willing to work in unconventional hours, not taking leave). Because she justifies precarious working conditions by higher wages and she embraces the work ethic expected of migrant workers, Katalin sees her working conditions as relatively favorable. Thus, Katalin ignores the precarious elements of her working conditions through the use of frames of reference, ultimately resulting in reduced cognitive dissonance.

Margit's account of experiences with temporary agency work points to a frame of reference that has not yet been addressed in the literature: the transitional frame of reference. The transitional frame of reference can be defined as a standard of comparison that emerges from extensive experience with non-standard employment contracts and temporary work, in which workers are willing to accept precarious working conditions once they secure employment that, in their perception, offers stability and long-term security. For individuals having a temporary work trajectory, the possibility of receiving standard employment means a reinforcement of feeling valued work. In Margit's case, the use of a transitional frame of reference offers the possibility of finding satisfaction in a stable and secure job, even though other aspects of working conditions may be considered precarious. By ignoring the precarious aspects of her working conditions and using a transitional frame of reference, Margit seeks to reduce the cognitive dissonance experienced. Since temporary work agency contracts are also emerging outside

the context of labor migration, the concept of a transitional frame of reference also provides insight into workers' willingness to perform precarious work more generally.

Janka's narrative follows the embedded trajectory of frame of reference formation. Due to the lack of personal experience of migrant workers with working conditions outside the context of the host country, the frame of reference of the host country is dominant here. Successful transitions from one job to another in the host country context is an inherent feature of an embedded trajectory, with migrant workers gaining access to better working conditions over time. Janka's story shows that familiarity with the host country improves migrants' bargaining power vis-à-vis employers and enables a realistic assessment of working conditions. For individuals with an embedded trajectory, frames of reference are not used as means for reducing cognitive dissonance, but rather as a framework for reflection.

The analyses revealed that Hungarian migrant workers often rely on frames of reference to justify their continued exposure to precarious working conditions. These frames of reference are predominantly formed in pathways from high-skill to low-wage work, from low-skill to low-wage work, and in temporary work trajectories.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings have both theoretical and practical implications. First, we contribute to literature by identifying four pathways of frame of reference formation tied to migrant workers' career trajectories. Previous typologies were based solely on the labor market orientation and mobility patterns of migrant workers (e.g., Engbersen et al., 2013; Trabka & Pustulka, 2020). Our study contributes to the literature by providing a typology of migrant workers that not only reflects on their career trajectories, but shows how those transitions affect their frame of reference. Although the literature emphasizes the importance of the home-host country frame of reference in the context of intra-EU labor migration (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003), our results suggest that migrant workers use two additional frames of reference to interpret the quality of their work: the peer frame of reference and the transitional frame of reference. First, we show that the peer frame of reference also applies in the European migration context (Clibborn, 2021). In addition, we name the transitional frame of reference as a new frame of reference related to the increasingly common non-standard employment contracts in the European labor market.

Our study shows that migrant workers are not always temporary in the Dutch context. The four narratives indicate that language skills in Dutch or English are essential for migrant worker' successful labor market transitions in the Netherlands. Based on the narratives, promoting accessible language courses for migrant workers can be a catalyst for their career development.

Limitations and conclusion

This research has some limitations. First, it focuses on the trajectories of reference formation of migrant workers in the context of their career trajectories. Although migrant workers' motivation to move to the Netherlands is often fueled by employment-related

goals, life events in the personal sphere may also influence their careers. This idea is supported by recent literature on sustainable careers, which argues that contextual and individual factors interact in shaping career trajectories (De Vos et al., 2020). Future research is needed on the impact of broader life experiences on the trajectories of reference formation of migrant workers.

Second, the use of frames of reference varies over time. Although this article shows how the use of frames of reference results from migrant workers' various life and career trajectories, understanding changes in frames of reference over time requires more longitudinal research. Such research may be particularly important for exploring psychological processes underlying migrant workers' interpretation of working conditions and career decisions at different stages of the migration trajectory.

In conclusion, this study shows that there are differences between how migrant workers give meaning to their precarious working conditions that they experience in the host country. Their interpretations are influenced by frames of reference, which in turn are shaped by their individual (life and work) trajectories. The narratives show that migrant workers are at a risk of experiencing precarious work. Ultimately, when migrant workers perceive precarious work in warehousing more favourably when comparing this to employment in the home country, that of their peers and temporary agency work, they are more likely to engage in precarious work for a long period of time. This shows that more attention is needed for migrants' individual (life and work) trajectories, both to understand how precarious work can be eradicated and to complement scholarship on migrants' experiences.

4

CHAPTER 5

Precarious Employment Amidst Global Crises: Career Shocks, Resources and Migrants' Employability

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to contribute to conservation of resources theory (COR), by exploring how global crises influence the perceived employability of migrant workers in low-wage, precarious work.We conducted 22 in-depth longitudinal interviews with 11 Hungarian migrant workers in the Dutch logistics sector, before and during the COVID-19 crisis, using thematic analysis and visual life diagrams to interpret them.We find that resources are key in how migrants experience the valence of global crises in their careers and perceive their employability. When unforeseen consequences of the COVID-19 crisis coincided with migrants' resource gain spirals, this instigated a positively-valenced career shock, leading to positive perceptions of employability. Coincidence with loss spirals led to negative perceptions. Interestingly, when the COVID-19 crisis did not co-occur with migrants' resource gain and loss spirals, migrants experienced resource stress (psychological strain induced by the threat or actual loss of resources) and no significant change in their perceptions of employability. We contribute to careers literature by showing that resources do not only help migrants cope with the impact of career shocks, but also directly influence the valence of global crises in their perceived employability and careers.

Keywords: migrant workers; resources; global crisis; COVID-19; perceived employability; career shocks

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants often face precarious employment in Western Europe (Hassan et al., 2023). Precarious employment is "unstable and insecure in the continuity and quantity of work, restricts the power of workers to advocate for change, and does not provide protections from workplace abuses and unsafe working conditions" (Allan et al., 2021, p. 2). Since CEE migrants[1] generally move to Western Europe to find employment, exploring their employability is crucial for understanding how their aspirations manifest after entering the host country labour market (Croucher et al., 2018).

Employability refers to the ability to find and retain employment over time (Vanhercke et al., 2014). Perceived employability refers to "the individual's perception of his or her possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment" (Vanhercke et al., 2014, p. 593). Research showed that personal characteristics such as career identity (who individuals perceive to be in relation to their careers), adaptability (readiness to pursue career opportunities), human capital (education) and social capital (professional network membership) foster perceived employability (De Vos et al., 2011). Personal characteristics however cannot fully explain CEE migrants' perceived employability, as their (perceived) opportunities to find (less precarious) employment are shaped by context and time. For instance, the quality of labour regulation and social protection in host countries determine the prevalence of flexible working arrangements (Wagner and Hassel, 2016). In less regulated contexts, CEE migrant workers are often restricted to flexible, low-wage, temporary employment (Been and de Beer, 2022).

The time period CEE migrant workers spend in the host country may have significant impact as well. Individuals who spent more time in the host country, are more likely to have developed a broader professional network and gained specific work experience, which enhances their prospects of securing higher-quality employment (Manolchev and Ivan, 2022). CEE migrants' perceived employability is also likely to be affected by global events outside their direct control, such as global crises (Siegmann et al., 2022).

This paper explores the perceived employability of CEE migrant workers during global crises – defined as "events or developments widely perceived by members of relevant communities to constitute urgent threats to core community values and structure" (Boin

1 Following the official communication of the Dutch national government, we use the term 'migrant workers' to refer to workers from Central and Eastern European countries, later specifically from Hungary, who chose to find employment in a member state of the European Union other than their country of origin, later specifically in the Netherlands. We opted for this term, as it emphasizes the role of employment and job opportunities in the migration trajectory, encompasses various types of mobility within the European Union, does not necessarily implicate a permanent change of residence and includes temporary or seasonal workers, but also those who seek long-term residence in the host country (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2023).

et al., 2008, p. 83-84). In the 2020s, we experience an escalation in the number and intensity of global crises , such as human-induced ecological crises (fires, droughts,), crises tied to increased global connectivity (social, political, financial, and economic crises), as well as crises brought on by infectious diseases.

The global crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus had an adverse impact on the careers of workers in precarious employment (Kantamneni, 2020). Many workers in sectors most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, had already been in a precarious employment prior to the pandemic (Hargreaves, 2022). During the COVID-19 crisis, CEE migrants experienced deteriorating quality of working conditions (Siegmann et al., 2022). For example, social distancing regulations were not adhered to in transportation, housing, or at the workplace (Siegmann et al., 2022); access to COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and healthcare was problematic (Siegmann et al., 2022); mobility bans, and quarantine measures restricted migrant workers' mobility to and from their home countries (Martin and Bergmann, 2021). Such worsening working conditions may have materialized as multiple interrelated career shocks, which may have affected migrant workers' perceptions of finding and sustaining employment (Akkermans et al., 2018).

Career shocks may result in a negatively-valenced thought process, but can also induce positive cognitive responses, for instance when a crisis makes an individual decide to take a valued change in their career that they did not dare to take before (Akkermans et al., 2018). The (positive or negative) cognitive appraisal of opportunities in one's career can set in motion (positive or negative) thought processes that help or hinder individuals to take action in pursuing a valued career path.

Global crises do not affect individual careers uniformly (Kantamneni, 2020). Those with abundant personal resources are better able to successfully navigate their careers following career shocks than individuals with limited access to resources (De Vos et al., 2020; Akkermans et al., 2020). However, our understanding of perceived employability for individuals in contexts characterized by resource scarcity is still limited (cf. Vanhercke et al., 2015). Access to resources may likely affect perceived employability, particularly amidst global crises. Yet, research on the interplay of career shocks as a consequence of global crises and perceived employability is scant (Ren et al., 2023).

To address this gap, we explore how global crises influence the perceived employability of migrant workers in low-wage, precarious employment. Our research question is: *How do resources in times of crises affect the thought processes and actions of migrant workers considering their careers and perceived employability?* More particularly, we examine the experiences of CEE migrant workers in low-wage essential industries such as logistics and food production during the COVID-19 crises.

5.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF RESOURCES IN NAVIGATING THE IMPACT OF CAREER SHOCKS

Individuals experience diverse ranges of career shocks throughout their working lives. We understand career shocks as "disruptive and extraordinary events that are, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that trigger a deliberate thought process concerning one's career" (Akkermans et al., 2018, p. 4).

Career shocks often have clearly defined sources: while a divorce is intertwined with an individual's personal setting, a promotion links to the organizational context (Akkermans et al., 2018). However, global crises trigger shifts in multiple spheres of life, resulting in simultaneous shocks to one's career from multiple sources. To illustrate, during the COVID-19 crisis, social distancing practices hindered migrant workers in interacting with colleagues at the workplace, a potential career shock embedded in the organizational context (Siegmann et al., 2022). Furthermore, the crisis posed limitations to migrants' mobility, restricting options to return to their country of origin. When becoming ill, migrant workers needed to quarantine, resulting in loss of income and social isolation (Siegmann et al., 2022). Additionally, host country populations perceived migrant workers as a potential health hazard, fostering an adverse social climate (Paul, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis altered the context in such way that individuals simultaneously needed to mitigate the impact of multiple types of career shocks (Akkermans et al., 2020).

The direction of the impact of a career shock on careers is referred to as its valence, which can be positive or negative (Akkermans et al., 2018). The valence of career shocks is inherently subjective: while some may experience loss of employment as a negatively-valenced career shock by many, others experience this as a positively-valenced event (Wordsworth and Nilakant, 2021). While previous research posits that the valence of career shocks is inherent to the event itself (e.g., Akkermans et al., 2018), we argue that individual characteristics, context and particularly *resources* play an important role in whether migrant workers experience a career shock as positively- or negatively-valenced (cf. Wordsworth and Nilakant, 2021).

Resources, "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies" (COR theory, Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516), can help individuals overcoming the impact of career shocks (Wordsworth and Nilakant, 2021). COR theory traditionally classified individual resources according to their intended or actual use (e.g., energy resources enable the acquisition of further resources, Hobfoll, 1989). Recently, research in the migration context suggests to move beyond Hobfoll's categorization to allow identifying how conceptually distinct groups of resources contribute to migrant workers' resource accumulation and mobilization (Hall et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). We follow the resource framework of Ryan and colleagues (2008), who distinguish between personal (health, resilience), material (money, car), and social resources (stable family life, supervisory support).

Migrants are particularly prone to resource loss post-migration. First, they leave their country-of-origin social network behind (social resources, Ryan et al., 2008). Second, they need to secure employment and housing upon arrival to the host country (material resources, e.g., Cook et al., 2012) and third, – in precarious employment – they often meet physical and mental health hazards (personal resources, Vîrgă and Dragoş, 2017). Individuals with limited access to resources, likely experience a gradual loss of further resources, forming a loss spiral (Hobfoll, 1989). Previous research in the UK shows that seasonal migrant workers with low education and limited language skills often experience homelessness upon job loss (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012). In contrast, individuals with ample resources are prone to cumulative gain resources, referred to as a gain spiral (Hobfoll, 1989). For instance, migrants work experience in the host country can help them obtain further skills'(language), fostering their ability to find and sustain better employment (Parutis, 2014). Resource loss and gain spirals may influence the direction in which career shocks affect individual's careers.

We propose that dynamic patterns of CEE migrant workers' resource gain and resource loss spirals following global crises shape the valence of career shocks, in turn affect the perceived employability of migrants. To understand the valence of career shocks evolving from global crises, we need to understand migrant workers' resource mobilization patterns both within and beyond the work environment over time. In the following section, we further explain our longitudinal research design.

5.3 METHODS

Study Context

We did a longitudinal qualitative study with an phenomenological approach, conducting in-depth interviews with migrant workers before and during the COVID-19 crisis. This design allowed us to examine how individuals' careers and perceived employability change over time. We focused on CEE migrant workers in the Dutch logistics sector, since there is limited knowledge on how migrants navigate their careers in the precarious logistics sector (Barnes and Ali, 2022; Zanoni and Miszczynski, 2023). Furthermore, the logistics sector accounts for 44% of migrant workers employed through temporary work agencies in The Netherlands (ABU and NBBU, 2020). Migrant workers face precarious working conditions in this sector, including low wages, long working hours, and a general climate of insecurity regarding their employment and their housing (Kerti, 2020).

We focus on particular CEE migrants from Hungary. Despite the large national diversity of the CEE migrant workers in Western Europe, most studies on the careers of CEE migrants in precarious employment focus on the more dominant (in numbers and resources in the host country) Polish workforce (e.g., Parutis, 2014). By researching Hungarian migrant workers, we aim to gain insight into the career outcomes of a minority CEE migrant group, which due to its size could potentially have less structural access to personal and social resources in the host country (Author, 2020).

Sample and Procedure

We conducted 22 interviews with 11 Hungarian migrant workers in the spring of 2019 (T1, before the COVID-19 crisis) and the summer and fall of 2020 (T2, during the COVID-19 crisis). As part of our phenomenological approach, we combined life-history interviews with in-depth inquiry about career shocks, perceived employability, and resource mobilization (Seidman, 2006). Our interview questions built on theoretical conceptualizations of perceived employability (Croucher et al., 2018); career shocks (Akkermans et al., 2018) and resources (Hobfoll, 2001). While the interviews encompasses career shocks throughout migrants' entire life history, our analysis specifically focused on the impact of COVID-19 on migrants' career in this study.

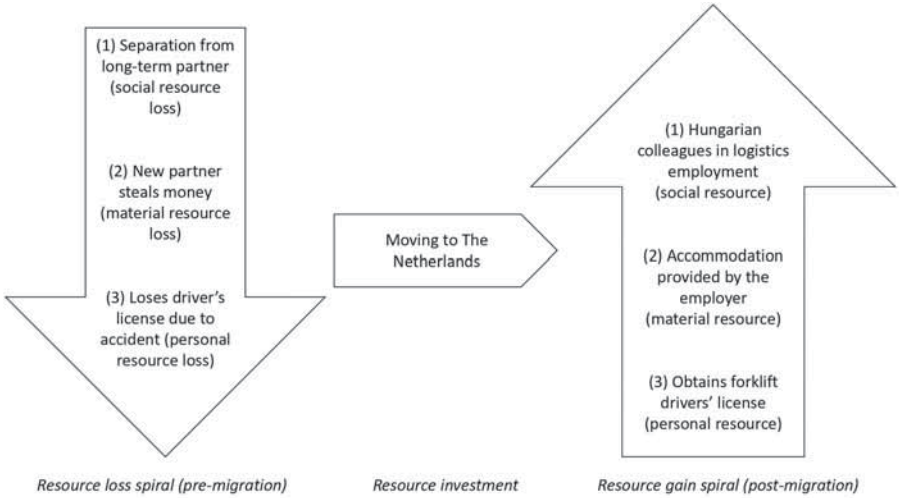
We gained access to the hard-to-reach population of Hungarian migrant workers through an open call via a social media platform. In phenomenological research the sample size is determined during data collection (Wertz, 2005). We interviewed all migrants that reacted in Spring 2019 till saturation was reached, which we established through continuous, iterative comparisons between the coding and the data. During the COVID-19 crisis, in 2020, we invited all participants for a second interview. This resulted in the final longitudinal sample of 22 interviews with 11 respondents. To ensure the anonymity of participants, we assigned pseudonyms to their accounts.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and were conducted by the first author in Hungarian. The first author was able to build rapport with the respondents due to their shared national identity, cultural background, language and experience in precarious work. While all first-round interviews were conducted in person, we had to turn to online interviewing for some of the interviews of the second round due to COVID-19 restrictions and participants' geographical distance.

Analysis

The richness of the data makes analyzing longitudinal qualitative samples a challenge. We combined thematic analysis with visual interpretations of life diagrams (constructed by the authors post-data collection) to make sense of our data (Söderström, 2020). We used three guiding concepts for the thematic analysis: COVID-19 as a career shock, resources and perceived employability. Successively, we coded the interviews for the valence of career shocks (Akkermans et al., 2018), types of resources (personal, material, social; Ryan et al., 2008), resource mobilization patterns (resource loss, resource gain, resource investment, resource stress; Hobfoll, 2001) and migrants' perceptions of employability before and during COVID-19 (Croucher et al., 2018). Two independent coders analyzed the interviews and reached agreements on conflicting interpretations to ensure interrater reliability. This counterbalanced potential bias derived from the insider researcher status of the first author. To identify resource loss and resource gain spirals over time, we constructed life diagrams. We interpreted migrants' perceived employability, by making constant comparisons between the life diagrams, how COVID-19 manifested as a career shock, migrants' resource loss and gain spirals and perceived employability outcomes. Figure 1 and Table 1 provide excerpt of a life diagram and thematic analysis table.

Figure 5.1 *Excerpt from life diagram visualizing resource loss and resource gain spirals (Participant 4, Bence)*



In the following section, we first outline the resources which are central to migrants' ability to successfully navigate their careers post-migration, and how these form resource loss and gain spirals. Second, we examine how the interplay between COVID-19 as a career shock and resource loss and gain spirals affect perceived employability.

5.4 FINDINGS

Migrants' Resource Mobilization Patterns

We found that migrant workers actively mobilized their personal, material and social resources to navigate their careers in the post-migration context. Personal resources of our respondents were for instance maintaining good mental and physical health, a sense of agency (i.e., perceived control over career decisions), and career adaptability (i.e., being able to keep up with the changing work environment). In addition to these more general personal resources, host-country specific language skills (i.e., Dutch or English), time for personal and professional development and context-specific education were important for migrants to build careers in Dutch logistics. Regarding material resources, financial stability (money, stable employment), access to accommodation (housing independent of employers or temporary work agencies) and modes of transportation (car, bicycle) support migrants in navigating their career. Lastly, social network ties and social support (colleagues, family, friends, fellow migrants in the host country) were essential for migrants careers in Dutch logistics.

Table 5.1 *Migrant workers' demographic characteristics, resource mobilization patterns post-migration, valence of COVID-19 crises and perceived employability outcomes*

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Resource mobilization post-migration	COVID-19 crisis	Perceived employability outcome
Participant 1: *Levente*	50s	Male	Bachelor tertiary education	Resource gain spiral (relocation, social network ties, stable accommodation, secure employment)	Positively-valenced career shock	Positive employability
Participant 2: *Lili*	20s	Female	Secondary vocational education	Threat of resource loss (health decline due to emotionally demanding job) and resource gain (new 'perfect' job)	Source of resource stress	Resource stress
Participant 3: *Emma*	20s	Female	Master tertiary education	Resource loss spiral (loosing employment, period of unemployment,	Negatively-valenced career shock	Negative employability
Participant 4: *Bence*	40s	Male	Primary education	Resource loss (loosing valued colleague) and threat of resource loss (connecting with family members)	Source of resource stress	Resource stress
Participant 5: *Greta*	20s	Female	Secondary vocational education	Resource loss spiral (separation from partner, loosing accommodation and employment)	Negatively-valenced career shock	Negative employability
Participant 6: *Fanni*	40s	Female	Master tertiary education	Resource gain cycle (relocation, regained social network, finding job in field of profession)	Positively-valenced career shock	Positive employability
Participant 7: *Dorka*	30s	Female	Secondary education	Resource gain cycle (relocation, finding perceivably higher quality employment)	Positively-valenced career shock	Positive employability
Participant 8: *Dominik*	20s	Male	Secondary vocational education	Resource gain cycle (giving up employment, moving home, working together with family members)	Positively-valenced career shock	Positive employability

Table 5.1 *Migrant workers' demographic characteristics, resource mobilization patterns post-migration, valence of COVID-19 crises and perceived employability outcomes (continued)*

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Resource mobilization post-migration	COVID-19 crisis	Perceived employability outcome
Participant 9: *Botond*	20s	Male	Primary education	Resource loss cycle (deteriorating health due to low quality of work, loosing employment, promised new employment does not materialize)	Negatively-valenced career shock	Negative employability
Participant 10: *Rebeka*	40s	Female	Secondary education	Threat of resource loss (deteriorating health due to low quality of work)	Source of resource stress	Resource stress
Participant 11: *Aron*	30s	Male	Secondary vocational education	Resource gain cycle (finding better quality employment, relocating to better accommodation)	Positively-valenced career shock	Positive employability

Based on a visual analysis of migrants' life diagrams, we found that the loss and gain of these resources can trigger resource loss and gain spirals. Lili, a logistics administration employee with a direct employment contract, shared that context-specific education and learning the host country language support her ability build a career in the Dutch logistics, resulting in a resource gain spiral:

"[Before the pandemic], I studied logistics which let me choose, look for a better job here, and the other one that is important is the language; it was very important that I learnt Dutch and I improved my English, and that is why I am where I am now." (Lili, T2).

Emma, an order picker in a large warehouse sorting health and beauty products, followed her partner to The Netherlands, who secured employment within his profession upon their move. She went through a resource loss spiral because of the decision to migrate. Due to a lack of language skills, limited social network ties, and overqualification for low-wage employment (she received tertiary education, she was unemployed for one year:

"I experienced it as difficult, because I did not even really want to come and learning languages was never really my strength (…) Also, we had a quite big social life back home which like disappeared all of the sudden. We realized that there is practically no one here. (…) I thought a lot about this, if I should deny everything in my CV and show up there with an empty CV and then, with that they might hire me to be a cleaner. (…) That one year at home, that was very stressful." (Emma, T1)

We found that resource loss and resource gain spirals influence career outcomes in particular when they occur simultaneously with a career shock. We elaborate on these findings below.

COVID-19 as a Career Shock: Perceptions of Employability

Based on the analysis, the influence of the COVID-19 crisis on migrant workers' careers depends on dynamic patterns of resource loss and resource gain spirals. We found that COVID-19 influenced migrants' careers in three ways. First, when coinciding with migrants' resource gain spiral, the COVID-19 crisis manifested as a positively-valenced career shock (Participants 1, 6, 7, 8, 11). When the COVID-19 crisis was seen as a positively-valenced career shock, it triggered positive emotions, leading to positive evaluations of employability (e.g., *"[The COVID-19 crisis] was good for me, very refreshing"* – Participant 8). Second, when simultaneous to a resource loss spiral, migrants experienced the COVID-19 crisis as a negatively-valenced career shock (Participants 3, 5, 9). When experienced as a negatively-valenced career shock, the COVID-19 crisis invoked negative emotions, resulting in negative perceptions of employability (e.g., *"Now I'm absolutely looking at the whole thing from the perspective that (…) if a new wave came, or anything else happened that caused a similar crash, like a virus, then which companies are the*

ones who can stay on their feet, and which ones would fire me in a second." - Participant 3). Third, when the COVID-19 crisis was not concurrent to clear resource mobilization patterns, migrants experienced it as a source of resource stress rather than a career shock. Following COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we refer to migrants' resource stress as the psychological strain resulting from being at risk of losing resources or experiencing an actual loss of resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Participants 2, 4, 10; e.g., *"The other day I was very angry (…) I got sick. (…) They [told me that] sadly they cannot give me the day off. (…) I did the work, coughing, I was coughing really hard, and I felt cold, and I was shivering from it. (…) I really need to find a new job. So somewhere where it's not four degrees."* -Rebeka, T2). This excerpt shows how stress due to the perceived risk of losing a crucial resource, health, ensures the continuity of a migrants' employment.

In the following sections, we illustrate our findings through recounting the career experiences of Levente (Covid-19 as positively-valenced career shock), Greta (Covid-19 as negatively-valenced career shock) and Bence (Covid-19 as source of resource stress).

COVID-19 Crisis as a Positively-Valenced Career Shock

The account of Levente, who worked via a temporary work agency as order picker in a warehouse distribution center at the time of the first interview, shows how the COVID-19 crisis manifested as a positively-valenced career shock. After a period of low-quality employment in the Dutch logistics, Levente succeeded in accumulating enough financial resources to move to New Zealand, where he possessed substantial social network ties. There, he managed to secure stable accommodation, followed by a job in the construction sector facilitated through his social network ties. The COVID-19 crisis coincided with this resource gain spiral, resulting in an eight-week lockdown, when all employees received a weekly minimum wage for not being able to work. Levente experienced this as a positively-valenced career shock:

"This was a sort of two-months-long vacation (…) Honestly, from my point of view, this crisis only had benefits." (Levente, T2).

During lockdown, Levente had time to engage in online courses with the aim of re-entering his original profession of software developer engineer. When comparing Levente's evaluations of his employability across the two time points, we can see that his confidence in finding employment in line with his qualifications improved substantially:

"So, in the long run, I thought I'd find a job in the IT industry, but I don't know how that would work out (…) And I'm over 50 years old, and I'm starting to slide down from this profession or to slip out. (Levente, T1)

"I'm now aiming for the top. (…) I bought these (…) online courses to (…) bring my level back up, so when I am home, I am constantly studying, and I want to go back to be a de-

veloper engineer. Basically. Not simply to be programmer, but to be a developer, (…) to be a developer engineer, an application developer engineer." (Levente, T2).

Levente's perceptions of employability show that when the COVID-19 crisis coincided with a resource gain spiral in migrants' careers, a positively-valenced career shock is experienced, which fuels positive perceptions of employability.

COVID-19 Crisis as a Negatively-Valenced Career Shock

The experiences of Greta, a booking employee at a warehouse specialized in medical appliances at the time of the first interview, illustrate how the COVID-19 crisis materialized as a negatively-valenced career shock. Greta moved to The Netherlands with her partner, quickly found employment with her partners' employer , secured a direct employment contract, and bought a house. After the first interview, Greta separated from her partner, sold their house, and lost her employment. The interaction between this resource loss spiral and the COVID-19 crisis hindered Greta in finding new employment, so she experienced the crisis as a negatively-valenced career shock:

"I became unemployed and then it was even harder to find a new job because of the virus (…) I was calling, really, every day 10-15 vacancies, well, we can't because of the Corona-virus, this and that, I always ran into this (…) virus." (Greta, T2).

Although Greta eventually found new employment in a warehouse distribution center, her perceptions of employability changed considerably across the two interviews. During the first interview, Greta aspired for long-term employment and eventually a promotion at the organization she was working for, but during the second interview she perceived her employment as a 'means to an end':

"I only want to move forward within my current workplace. (…) Now I have been here for a year and a half and I am still there that I can move ahead by three-four positions. For which you have to work. And of course, every time you get into a new position then it is not boring" (Greta, T1).

"Well, actually, as long as they have work that needs to be done, I can work there. And if they decide that they don't need me anymore (...) Then I'll go to the UWV [employee insurance agency, to request unemployment benefits]." (Greta, T2).

The analysis indicate that occurrence of the COVID-19 crisis with migrants' resource loss spirals, makes them experience negatively-valenced career shocks, leading to negative perceptions of employability.

COVID-19 Crisis as a Source of Resource Stress

The experiences of Bence show how the COVID-19 crisis was perceived as a source of resource stress. At the time of the first interview, Bence worked via a temporary work agency as orderpicker at a warehouse specialized in sorting glass bottles. Having limited Dutch and English language skills, Bence relied on Hungarian colleagues to translate between him and his supervisors. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, the temporary work agency relocated Bence to a new location, without any other Hungarian workers:

"I was recruited to work here because of the virus. And then in the end I was supposed to be back in Rotterdam for a long time now, where the other Hungarian guy is. But they do not want to release me from here." (Bence, T2)

The resource stress of losing the only colleague Bence could communicate with in his native language (resource loss) was coupled with the introduction of COVID-19 measures. The two-week quarantine time, which was required of him upon his return, hindered Bence in visiting his family in Hungary (threat of resource loss). This aggravated the resource stress he experienced:

"I was super upset, to tell you the truth, because I wanted to go back to Hungary at the end of April (…) Then I said I will stay, I won't be quarantining for 15 days." (Bence, T2)

The analysis indicates that the COVID-19 crisis caused resource stress of migrants when not coupled with resource gain and loss spirals. Resource stress emerged from the loss of resources (losing a colleague) and the risk of losing resources (connecting with family members), although a previous resource gain experienced after migration prevented a resource loss spiral. Our analysis did not indicate a direct link between resource stress and perceived employability: there was no clear patterns in changes in perceived employability between the two time periods for this group of workers. In the following section, we further interpret these findings.

5.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Global crises disproportionately affect the careers of workers in precarious employment, such as migrants (Cao and Hamori, 2022). This paper aimed at contributing to COR theory, by exploring how global crises influence the perceived employability of migrant workers in low-wage, precarious employment. Based on the analysis of 22 longitudinal interviews with Hungarian migrant workers, we find that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on migrant workers' careers is resource-dependent, materializing either as a positively-valenced or negatively-valenced career shock or as a source of resource stress. When the COVID-19 crisis coincided with migrant workers' resource gain spirals, migrants perceived the crisis as a positively- valenced career shock, which resulted in positive

perceptions of employability, as well as concrete actions to improve one's employability and mental well-being. Coincidence with loss spirals led to negative perceptions. When the COVID-19 crisis was not subsequent to clear resource mobilization patterns, it fueled resource stress due to either the risk of losing or the actual loss of resources. We found no linear link between resource stress and perceived employability outcomes.

Our findings offer a critical perspective on migrant workers' resource accumulation and loss due to career shocks. Prior to the analysis, we expected that migrant workers' patterns of resource accumulation would be underpinned by principles of conservation of resources, including the primacy of loss (individuals are more affected by resource loss than gain) and gain paradox principle (when individuals are deprived of resources, the value of gains becomes more amplified; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Our analysis did not support any of these principles. This can be explained by the basic nature of the resources in migrants' resource gain and loss cycles in our study. When resources constitute basic human needs, such as access to accommodation, financial stability or health, their loss and gain are equally salient in the resource accumulation process.

The influence of the COVID-19 crisis on migrant workers' careers resonates the Matthew effect, implying that in the wake of career shocks 'the rich get richer and the poor poorer' (Fugate et al., 2021). Those experiencing a depletion of resources because of resource loss spirals need to focus on securing new resources to sustain themselves before considering how a career shock potentially affects their future career. Migrants' reflections on career shocks and how these affect their perceptions of finding new employment is contingent on having the necessary resources. This implies, that career shocks, rather than actively influencing migrants' career thinking, are just another form of adversity to tackle in precarious contexts.

We contribute to career literature in three ways. First, we explicitly address how a specific configuration of contextual and individual characteristics, circumstances, and resources influence career outcomes by focusing on COVID-19 crisis as a career shock on Hungarian migrant workers' perceived employability. Second, we empirically show that the COVID-19 crisis did not manifest as a negatively-valenced career shock for all migrant workers but was perceived as a positive event when coinciding with resource gain spirals (cf. Spurk and Straub, 2020). Third, adding to previous literature that claims that resources support dealing with the impact of career shocks, we find that resources play an even more crucial role, and determine whether migrant workers consider a career shock as a positive or negative event (Akkermans et al., 2020). Our findings hold implications for practitioners. Facilitating migrants' access to resources is a shared responsibility of policy makers, temporary work agencies, client organizations and migrants themselves. The resources identified in this study as conducive to migrants' ability to navigate their careers can serve as a framework for policy reform (improved social safety net, regulation of interdependent employment contracts, developmental opportunities and house rental agreements), human resource management practices (language courses, inclusion at work) and individuals' career self-management (improving social networks, safeguarding physical and mental health).

This study also has limitations, which present avenues for future research. We adopted a broad definition of personal, material, and social resources, but did not consider how external factors influence migrant workers' perceived employability. Further exploring migrants' perceptions about labour market conditions (labour shortages) and about the cultural environment (cultural similarity) can contextualize the role of resources and career shocks in migrants' perceived employability.

Despite the strengths of our longitudinal qualitative research design, we detected recall bias of our respondents between time periods, where they reported different emotions regarding the same event. This suggests that migrants workers' access to resources directs recall bias: they evaluated events more positively when followed by resource gain spirals and more negatively when followed by resource loss spirals. Their further resource mobilization patterns altered their recollection over time (cf. Cassar, 2007). Conducting a diary study following the onset of global crises would probably eliminate recall bias and allow for a more in-depth exploration of the psychological processes through which career shocks impact migrant workers' perceived employability.

While our study offers insight into the experiences of migrant workers in a specific context, it does not consider the inter-group dynamics between minority and majority migrant worker groups, and how these affect individuals' access to resources. We call for comparative longitudinal qualitative research to explore differential access to resources between different migrant worker groups in essential industries.

Last, we regarded the group of Hungarian migrant workers as internally homogenous, not considering their intersecting identities. We strongly believe that the careers literature would benefit from studies focusing on how gender, age, social class, ethnicity, educational and migration background influence individuals' access to resources, ability to deal with the impact of career shocks and eventually career outcomes.

Ultimately, expanding research on global crises as career shocks calls for context sensitivity, especially for resources beyond the control of individuals. In an adverse context, such as low-wage sectors characterized by precarious employment, resources are crucial for migrant workers' ability to deal with the impact of global crises. It is the shared responsibility of policy makers, temporary work agencies, client organizations and migrants themselves to actively work together on facilitating access to resources and creating a conducive environment in which migrants can thrive.

5

CHAPTER 6

Embodied experiences in warehouse work: Reflections of a migrant woman researcher

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ABSTRACT

Precarious migrant work tends to be physically demanding and labor intensive. Employers often view migrant workers through a masculine lens, emphasizing their bodily strength, lack of caring responsibilities and willingness to take on demanding, low-wage jobs at the expense of their own well-being. Despite, migrant women are increasingly engaged in precarious, physical work. Migrant women experience precarious work through their bodies, and conform to, cope with, negotiate and resist ideal worker norms at the workplace. In this paper I reflect on my embodied experiences as a migrant woman researcher working as a warehouse worker in the Netherlands. In particular, this paper is about how I experienced the management, peer-imposed and internalized ideal worker norms and how I interpret my feelings and reactions to these experiences. I (self-)reflect on five critical days of my fieldwork when I had to face masculine, physically healthy, Dutch-speaking, autonomous and customer-focused ideal worker expectations. My five critical days form an autoethnographic story about being a migrant, a woman, and a researcher in precarious work. This paper points to the role of privilege, escape and guilt in embodied experiences and showcases the value of writing differently for gaining an embodied understanding of ideal worker norms in low-wage employment.

Keywords: embodied experiences, ideal worker norms, migrant, gender, warehousing, autoethnography

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The ideal worker norm — characterized by the white, career-driven, masculine individual who is free from caregiving responsibilities and praised for total commitment to their work and employer — remains deeply entrenched in organizations offering high-skilled employment (Acker, 1990; Kelly et al., 2010; Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2020). However, in-low wage employment, with neoliberal economic policies legitimizing processes of labor market flexibilization in Western Europe, the ideal worker is increasingly seen as flexible, open to temporary employment and generally willing to withstand precarious work, without voicing complaints (McLaughlin, 2010, McCollum & Findlay, 2018). These expectations — coupled with the predominantly physical nature of work to be performed — have contributed to the alienation of local workers from low-wage jobs, leading to labor shortages and the increased reliance on migrant workers in low-wage employment sectors, such a construction, agriculture, meat processing and increasingly warehousing (Dörflinger et al., 2021). Employers see Central and Eastern European migrant workers in these sectors as hard-working, uncomplaining employees who are willing to show high levels of productivity, low rates of sickness absence and low unionization rates, forming the image of the ideal flexible migrant worker (Baxter-Reid, 2016; Dawson et al., 2018; Hopkins, 2017; McAreavey, 2017).

While previous research has explored the precarious position of women migrant workers across different contexts (Dalton & Jung, 2019; Segarra & Prasad, 2019; Sambajee & Scholarios, 2023) our understanding of the role of women's body in performing precarious work is still limited. In low-wage work, migrant women are required to do physical labor – using their bodies to harvest fruit in agriculture, chop meat at the assembly line in food production or pack and sort products in warehousing. Migrant women's body is not only a physical vessel through which they carry out work and absorb lived experience, but also a site of social and cultural meaning through which they perform their gender and negotiate their migrant selves (Butler, 1990; Trethewey, 1999). It is through their bodies that employers exert control over migrant women, transporting, training, supervising and housing them, ultimately becoming variable commodities valued as means of capitalist production (Baxter-Reid, 2016; Zanoni & Miszczyński, 2023).

In this paper, I reflect on my embodied experiences of the management, peer-imposed and internalized ideal worker norm during six weeks of fieldwork as a warehouse worker and I interpret my feelings and reactions to these embodied experiences. I am a migrant, a woman and a researcher. I was born and raised in a small town in Hungary. I moved to the Netherlands in 2015, to pursue higher education with the help of a full scholarship. From 2015 to 2019, next to my studies, I worked in several low-wage jobs, including dishwasher, supermarket shelf stocker and restaurant server before securing a doctoral position in academia. I have invested significant time and energy into learning the Dutch language, which I speak with intermediate proficiency. I am hard working, curious and intrinsically motivated regarding my work.

In writing this paper, I was encouraged by recent scholarship on bringing forth migrant and women academic's voices (Abdellatif et al., 2024; Bourabain, 2024; De Coster & Zanoni, 2019; Hari et al., 2024) and inspired by autoethnographic stories and writing differently (Clavijo & Mandalaki, 2024; van Amsterdam, 2014; van Amsterdam et al., 2023). Authoethnography is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). An autoethnographic story is "a highly personalized, revealing text in which an author tells stories about his or her own lived experience" (Richardson 1994, p. 521). My autoethnographic story in this paper centers around five critical days out of six weeks working in the warehouse. Through the recollections of these days, my aim is to show how I grappled with the ideal worker norm at the workplace, and how my lived experiences are connected to previous embodied experiences in my multitude of low-wage, high-wage and anything in-between jobs in the Netherlands. Throughout my autoethnographic story, I draw attention to the role of privilege, escape and guilt in fieldwork. I elaborate on the fieldwork in the following section.

6.2 THE WAREHOUSE

The warehouse distribution sector is one of the primary employers of labor migrants in the Netherlands, where 58% of employees with a migration background are from Central and Eastern Europe (Heyma & Vervliet, 2022). Most workers in the sector have non-standard working arrangements: they either work through a temporary work agency or have flexible employment contracts (Heyma & Vervliet, 2022). I joined a multicultural team of warehouse workers for six weeks (32 hours/week) specialized in sorting, storing and redistributing furniture, pseudonymized as FurnitureCo. The warehouse employees work across two warehouse distribution centers, both located in a prominent industrial area in the south of the Netherlands. Working time for full-time warehouse employees is from 7:00-16:00, Monday to Friday, including 8 working hours per day with unpaid breaks. While the majority of warehouse employees are employed directly by FurnitureCo, some employees, mostly migrant workers, work through one of the three temporary work agency partners of the organization. FurnitureCo employs workers with diverse demographic characteristics, the majority of workers being Dutch white men between the ages of 20 and 65, with a minority group made up of women, workers with a second generation migration background and first generation migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. As the tasks of warehouse employees at FurnitureCo can be learned through on-the-job training, there are no formal educational or work experience requirements for job applicants.

During the fieldwork, I loaded and unloaded furniture to trucks, sprayed couches with water-resistant finish, printed shipping labels, packaged smaller pieces and moved furniture around the warehouse either manually or with an electric cart. The fieldwork took place in January and February, 2024. During the fieldwork, I recorded my experiences in 18 audiovisual journal entries of approximately 10 minutes to one hour in length. The

journal entries were structured along two semi-structured prompts: *What happened today at work?* and *How did I feel today?* To actively reflect on embodied experiences, three reflection moments (of one to two hours each) were held between the first, and the second and third author during the fieldwork to discuss embodied experiences.

I give meaning to the embodied experiences through five critical days that collectively form an autoethnographic story. I selected these days as critical because, on those days, I felt particularly disembodied from the ideal worker norm. The autoethnographic story is guided by the question: *How did it make me feel?* In my writing, I intertwine excerpts from the journal entries, the reflection moments with my co-authors and post-fieldwork reflections with the help of narrative storytelling. The recollections of the days are written in present tense because they reflect an ongoing sensemaking of my experiences. This ongoing sensemaking is partly shaped by the conversations with my co-authors. They were curious, anxious and worried about my physical and mental well-being during the fieldwork, and helped me find my voice in this autoethnographic story. The combination of first hand journaling inputs supported by guided reflexivity in the author team allows for an in-depth exploration of embodied experiences with ideal worker norms in low-wage warehouse work.

6.3 EMBODIED EXPERIENCES IN THE WAREHOUSE

Day 1: The day I realize what I got myself into

It is December 15th, one month before the start of fieldwork. Today, I am getting a special guided tour of the warehouse. In the early afternoon, I take two buses to get to the warehouse, the second being a minibus with only a few passengers. I presume they are going to work for their evening shift. When I get off the bus, I find myself in a large industrial zone, surrounded by big grey warehouses, all with different company logo's on them. I know that thousands of people work here, many of them migrants.

The director welcomes me and offers to take me on the tour of the warehouse. He introduces me to the warehouse manager and the team leader, who all join for the tour. These three Dutch men collectively embody management: they are the ones who decide how work is done here. The warehouse is made up of large halls, filled with all kinds of furniture, but the most prominent are the large couches and wardrobes. There is dim sunlight coming through the slim rooftop window, but it feels dark inside, with all the alleyways of packages and the lack of visual stimulus. This place is different than the others I worked at before. As a shelf stocker and a waitress, even as a dishwasher, I was at an arm's length away from the customer. At the warehouse, I find it difficult to imagine that these pieces of furniture will sit in someone's house after they have been sorted.

I already want to prove myself to management, trying to speak Dutch to them. They are enthusiastically telling me about the tasks at each of the work stations, although I do not pick up on everything. We walk to each of the work stations: picking, packing, spraying. Management tells me that work pressure is low today, it is Friday after all. As we walk by the stations, the workers look at me as if I was management myself. For a good reason, I

talk to management about the work, while barely interacting with the workers. It makes me feel like I am a new layer of control here. My introduction to their space feels abrupt. I feel guilty that I did not plan my entry better. I feel uneasy about meeting them.

The manual nature of the work surprises me – there are no automated conveyor belts for packing goods or an algorithmic management system like in well-documented Amazon warehouses. This is a traditional warehouse, where workers are using their bodies to package, lift and push furniture onto and off of carts or forklifts. Management tells me that teamwork is important here, if a package is too heavy, workers should wait for one of the colleagues to come by and help. Still, I see a worker visibly struggling with no help in sight. I notice that there are mainly men working here. It makes me wonder about how physical the work is going to be. I catch myself repeating to management that this is 'zwaar werk' (heavy work), and they cannot do anything but agree. The tour eventually comes to an end. We agree that I will start in exactly a month's time. Having seen the warehouse, this thought fills me with unease.

Day 2: The day I became the Hungarian spy

It is January 17th, the third day of fieldwork. It has been snowing for three days. I am getting used to a new routine: waking up at 5:00am, de-icing the car at 5:45am, getting in the car at 6:00am, driving in complete darkness, having a coffee with colleagues at 6:30am and starting work at 7:00am. In my street, there is ample migrant housing, by now we have gotten used to de-icing our cars side by side in the morning. This harsh shift from the cushy, academic schedule feels brutal – for the first time, I truly realize the privilege that comes with doing academic work.

It is my third day of working at the packing station. My task is to pack small items – lamps, pillows, vases – into a box, tape the box closed, and put a sticker on the box with the customer's details on it. At the packing station, I mainly work with older workers. Many of them used to work as truck drivers for the company, but were given adjusted tasks after developing health issues – limping, lower back problems, arthritis in their hands. I think working at the packing station is sort of a privilege, after many years of service those with health issues can spend time here till they reach retirement. Our section leader, a woman, teaches me how to choose the box, use the tape roller, stick on the stickers. This job carries little autonomy.

I catch myself constantly looking at the clock to see the time passing. The work feels pointless to me. Above the entrance of our hall there is a large sign that says 'the next one that sees your work is our customer'. The sign feels like another layer of control. There are not many orders, so I help the section leader with unpacking the packages that were returned by the customer. One of them looks familiar. I realize that I was the one who packed it on my first day. The lamp has a little scratch on the bottom. It makes me feel frustrated at first, but when I hear the prices that we sell these lamps for, I sympathize with the customer. The exercise of packing and unpacking brings me back to an interview I conducted with a Hungarian migrant woman who worked in a drugstore

warehouse; when I asked how sorting mascara's created value for herself and others, she looked perplexed, clearly unsure how to respond.

Management introduced me to the workers earlier this week as a researcher looking at the work processes, but there is a lot of confusion. My new colleagues one by one ask me what am I here to do exactly. One of them asks who I am sniffing around for, the other if I am a Hungarian spy. As the days go by, management also seems more and more puzzled, they check up on me from time to time. Today, the warehouse manager walks by casually and I openly ask him if they do something for the physical well-being of the employees. For me, it feels like a conversation of equals, but I doubt that other workers approach management so directly. I do not notice at first, but I instinctively cross my arms when talking to him. He implies that he does not appreciate this. I feel reprimanded.

It is finally time for lunch. I am starting to recognize the importance of the lunch room where workers gather during their breaks. Most migrant workers do not enter this space, but rather spend their breaks at their work stations. Dutch workers eat their sandwiches in the lunch room. I find it difficult to socialize, there seem to be sort of cliques. There is a group who always sits together, talks in Dutch, and has a good time. I feel lost between these spaces. Still, I do not eat with migrant workers at their work station, because I do not want to miss out on the discussions in the lunch room. Today, I sit with one of the truck drivers who already came back from doing deliveries by lunch time. I explain to him why I am here, and all he says is: Je bent gek! (You are insane!)

It is 4:00pm. I drive home with the sun setting already, counting the hours I have left to spend at my own disposal. Cooking is an hour, walking my dog is another, a quick shower, and the day is over. I need to sleep early, it is not enough to go to bed at 10:00pm to feel ready for this kind of work the next day.

Day 3: The day I got the flu

It is January 30th, the twelfth day of fieldwork. I have been loading trucks with furniture for seven days now in the mornings. The second part of the day I usually help a colleague with picking large furniture and dragging it onto his electric cart, and then offloading it at the dock for next day's delivery. I am sitting with my colleagues at 6:30, having a coffee in the lunch room. I am feeling cold this morning, so I go to the bathroom to check if I have all my usual layers on. Undershirt, long-sleeve shirt, a polar sweater, and my black work jacket. The latter has a large letter 'P' spray-painted on its back, I assume an attempt from a previous worker to damage company property when leaving the company. The safety shoes leave my ankle exposed. It is especially cold today, freezing cold.

At 7:00, I grab a furniture roller and find a team to help. The trucks are usually loaded in pairs, but I am considered an 'extra', so I always load with two other persons. I am starting to feel feverish. At first, I think it is just fever from the exhaustion, my body re-acting to the transition to physical work, so I continue working. My colleagues ask me with each item I feel comfortable to lift. I am getting more confident with lifting couches and fauteuils, but I am reluctant to touch wardrobes and large table tops. I wonder if my work even helps here, or if it just creates extra workload.

My nose starts running, so I take several allergy pills. During the lunch break, I am chatting with colleagues over a tea to help my oncoming sore throat. They explain that employees who do not report sickness absence for a calendar year are gifted some extra holiday days by management. At the warehouse, workers are encouraged to work, even when sick. One of my colleagues proudly explains that he has not taken sickness absence for more than 10 years. He explains that his secret is a ginger lemon concoction that he drinks every morning. He asks me if I am getting sick. I explain that it is probably my dust allergy, nothing to worry about. I simply cannot afford to be sick during fieldwork.

I struggle through the day with a runny nose, sore throat, growing fever and muscle pain. I feel weak when I drive home. An hour later, I am already in bed. My partner tells me that I should not go to work the next day. I explain to him that if I called in sick I would not only loose the respect of management, but also that of my colleagues. I am not someone who does not show up for the team. I used to work ten hours shifts as a waitress and taught bachelor workgroups while having the flu. He is right though, I feel too sick to be lifting furniture the whole day.

It is 6:00am, January 31st. Having woken up with a fever, not being able to get out of bed, I decide to report sick. The protocol in the warehouse is that sickness absence needs to be reported via phone to the team leader. I have a short call with him, and he wishes me a prompt recovery. The flu completely takes over, and I end up reporting sick for three days in total. By the third day, I hear the doubt in the team leader's voice. This makes me question myself if I am even sick enough to call in sick, although I am spend most of the day in bed.

The next week, I come back with renewed energy. My colleagues welcome me back with varying enthusiasm, some noting that I must have been very sick to not have come to work for three days because of it. These are my last days in this warehouse before entering the second warehouse and I cannot help but feel that being sick tainted how people perceive me. I presume they think I was trying to get out of my responsibilities. This bothers me a lot.

They place me at the quality control station. Here, the team leader needs to supervise some processes. He is visibly sick and tells us that he has a horrible headache, and that he already took four paracetamols to bring down his fever. He also has the flu. What sort of example does this show to the other workers? This makes me realize that taking sickness absence is not a real options for others. While I could use sickness as a means to escape the warehouse, others have to go on without any means of escape.

Day 4: The day my foot got crushed

It is February 20th, the 27th day of fieldwork. I have been working at the second warehouse for about two weeks now. Even management warned me about this place, about work being more physical, exhausting, heavy. To me, it feels that the work is largely the same, just amplified. More furniture to sort, more trucks to load. There are no women working in this warehouse.

Since entering the second warehouse, I have fallen back on bad habits. The work exhausts me to the extent, that I have no capacity to cook or do other household chores in the evenings. I come home, generally pick up a kapsalon [popular Dutch fast food] at the little shop in front of the house, and lie on my couch before having to go to sleep again. I sleep too little and my body aches. I often find myself reaching for a cigarette as a way to cope with warehouse work – before the drive, after the drive, during the breaks, in the evenings. It reminds me of an interview I had done with a Hungarian migrant woman, who said she never drank when she was a social worker, but since working in the warehouse, she turned to having a beer in the evenings. I understand her now. I feel disembodied doing these things – like if I was watching someone else living this life.

My colleagues treat me differently at the second warehouse from the beginning: I am one of the workers, with my own responsibilities and tasks. This also makes me feel increasingly confident about my warehouse skills: I can print stickers by myself, can control the list of delivery for each truck and can sort incoming goods. Working here feels more like work, with less opportunity to fall back on being a researcher. Maybe this is why I feel more unsafe here, or maybe it is because the warehouse is taller, smaller and even less automatized, to the extent that we pull carts with our own bodies across the warehouse. I also feel less safe psychologically. Workers talk a lot, especially about each other. 'Look how slow that little guy is'. 'That one is allowed to go to the mosque every Friday, I wonder how he makes up for that hour lost'. We mostly spend lunches in silence here, with some eating at the loading docks, some at their work station, some in the lunch room.

It is 7:00am. I start the day by helping out with spraying the couches. The spraying station is on the third floor of the warehouse, isolated from the rest of the work stations. It is the middle of winter, but I still feel warm here, and wonder how hot it gets in the summertime. Spraying the couches is migrants' work, who do not wear a protective mask while spraying, despite clear indications in the spraying manual about severe adverse health effects. When I ask their self-appointed leader about it, he says he would probably already have cancer by now if it really was that dangerous – he has been spraying without a mask daily for more than six years. Other workers are hesitant to do the spraying, even if one or two of the migrant workers call in sick. This indicates to me that not only management but also local workers know about the dangers of the spray, migrants' bodies becoming disposable in the process. It is difficult to talk with my colleagues here, most are temporary agency migrant workers who do not speak Dutch or English. This morning, everyone seems tired. When I arrive, all they tell me is 'robota, robota' (work in Polish). It means we need to start the work: unpacking the couches, lifting them on racks and pushing them to the spraying station where one of us will spray them. Then, they need to dry for a day before we wrap them manually, and take them down with the elevator to the loading docks. This work is the most physically taxing in the warehouse, and I visibly struggle with it.

It is 1:00pm. Before the lunch break, we finish with the spraying and my help is no longer needed. I go back to the loading docks to help prepare tomorrow's delivery. I have

already made sort of a friend at this station, Tomasz. Tomasz is a big, strong Polish guy who helps me drag the wardrobes off of carts when they are too heavy. The couches and chairs I do alone. I see a cart with a large three seater couch coming along. I do not think twice about it. I secure the cart, tilt the couch on my body and pull. It suddenly twists in the air, shifting out of balance, falling on my foot with a loud clap. The pain does not register at first. I am just embarrassed that I dropped the couch and people have seen it. Tomasz comes up to me to check if I am okay. My feet is pulsing, but I tell him I am okay, I do not want to miss out on work because of this, like with the flu at the other warehouse. For the rest of the day, it feels like the only thing keeping my foot together is the safety shoe. I limp around, getting my tasks done, but I am scared to see what is under the shoe till the day is finally over. When changing into my driving shoes, I see that the entire top of my foot is purple. A scary sight.

I still decide to come to work the next day. I do not use this injury as a means of escape. By doing so, I feel like I am proving something to someone, probably that I am a good worker to management. This is not my first time going to work after a workplace injury. I remember doing dishwashing with fully bruised hands after having fallen with my bike the night before, doing a ten hour shift as a waitress after five crates of beef fell on me or after I sprained my ankle after slipping in the kitchen. I am used to putting my body at strain so that the work gets done.

I start my 28th day of fieldwork by going to the emergency response officer, to show him my foot. The first thing he asks me is if the couch is damaged. I tell him it is not, but to be honest, I have no idea because I did not even think about that. He tells that as long as I can move my foot, it is most likely not broken.

I also show a picture of my foot to the team leader later that day. He seems quite shocked that I still came to work. Weirdly enough, this makes me feel validated. Working all day, with my crushed foot in the warehouse, all I can think about is how long can you be lucky here. If you work here for 20 years, how likely is it that a couch will not fall on your foot, or worse?

Day 5: The day I left the warehouse

It is February 22nd, the 29th day of fieldwork. My one but last day in the warehouse. The director of the company comes to work with us. At first, I think he is here to experience the work, but he later tells me he just wants to control the work processes. I notice everybody behaves at their best when he arrives. I am assigned to load the truck with him and another colleague. The director tells me that he does this often, showing camaraderie by coming to work side by side with the workers, but he clearly has no grasp of the work processes. It becomes an interesting dynamic – me teaching him the ropes of how to control the delivery, how to put the items on the furniture roller, how to arrange them in the truck. He jokes to me about how hard the work is, and how us Eastern Europeans are all so strong, willing and good at this kind of work. What an absurd thing to say.

It is 7:00am on my final day. I start the day by loading trucks. By now, I know most of the workers at this station well, they opened up to me about their lives, experiences,

opinions of management and of others in the warehouse. It feels like I am part of a clique. Colleagues in my clique tell me that everybody talks behind each other's backs here. 'They say that you are a wonderful person to your face, a great worker, but behind your back they say all sorts of other things'. On my last day, I notice other cliques pointing at mine and whispering. At lunch, someone from my clique half-mockingly pushes someone from another. Another kicks the elevator door when complaining about a worker he perceives to be too slow. It feels like an escalating situation, to the extent where it might become a physical confrontation. I do not think I can work another week here. Something is brewing.

After lunch, I give out some cards to colleagues who helped me over the past weeks. They seem grateful. Then, I start with preparing the delivery for the next day. I see one of my colleagues struggling with a couch, so I approach him and offer to help. He pushes a cart at me and shouts in Dutch: 'Go away. Find some work elsewhere'. I am quite shocked, but understand that my help is not welcome. Is it because I am a woman, because I am a migrant or because I am a researcher? Is it because I can leave, but they cannot? It could also be that he simply does not like me as a person. Difficult to tell. I tell Tomasz about the confrontation a few minutes later. He does not seem surprised, but explains that some people just want to get their work done and not interact with others at the warehouse. I still feel like there is more to this, he just does not want to hurt my feelings.

Unexpectedly, the warehouse manager asks me to come to his office. Together with the team leader, they give me flowers and tell me that I can go home. I am quite surprised, it is not even 2:00 pm. It feels wrong to say goodbye so haphazardly. I walk around the warehouse and briefly tell the people who were my colleagues for the past weeks that I am leaving. I cannot shake the feeling that this is too abrupt, too soon, and that I somehow wronged all of those who opened up to me by leaving them behind. I entered the warehouse feeling guilt, and now, at my exit, I am filled with guilt again.

6.4 REFLECTING ON EMBODIED EXPERIENCES

Having done research on migrant workers' quality of work in low-wage warehouse distribution for almost five years, I thought I had a clear idea about how it *feels* to do this type of work. In interviews, migrants told me about their physically exhausting work, the cold, the dreary work environment. For years, I used stock photos of warehouses in my research talks, without having ever worked in a warehouse, and talked about migrants' experiences without having experienced them myself. My experience as a warehouse worker made me realize the intensity of physical work in warehousing, got me entangled in complex social dynamics and took me on a journey of having to grapple with the ideal worker norm. My autoethnographic story points to the role of privilege, escape and guilt in my embodied experiences as a migrant woman researcher. I elaborate on these in the following section.

Recognizing and reflecting on the researcher's *privilege* is common practice in autoethnographic research (Anderson, 2021; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; DeLuca & Maddox,

2016; Moosavi, 2022) At first assessment, I had a similar socioeconomic background with my colleagues at the warehouse. Many of them came from small towns, either in the Netherlands or in their home countries, had caring responsibilities for their elderly parents, and participated in at least secondary education. Despite, my opportunity to follow higher education with the help of a scholarship, the support I had in academia to learn the Dutch language and the ability to have employment that does not pose an active health and safety risk differentiated me from the warehouse workers. Generally reserved for those coming from a higher socioeconomic background, I perceived my work as a researcher meaningful (Autin & Allan, 2020). My in-betweener role – being a worker, but also a researcher – allowed me to directly address management with questions and feedback which distinguished me from my colleagues, who would reserve these for their performance evaluation interviews, or would not address them at all. I worked in the warehouse without a salary (while having stable income as a researcher), without having to rely on low-wages, the insecurity of a temporary work agency contract and in low-season, without having to deal with unexpected fluctuations of workload. Arguably, some of the precarious elements of the work (e.g., salary, overtime) did not affect me directly. While this allowed me to focus on how it *feels* to do the work, I cannot claim that I had an authentic experience of working as a warehouse worker due to my privileged position.

My autoethnographic story confirms that privilege is about context and circumstance (Evaristo, 2019): I have often felt disadvantaged in my own working life in the Netherlands due to language barriers, the lack of information networks, my caring responsibilities for my elderly parents abroad, or even my temporary employment contract as a PhD student. Conversely, in the warehouse, my identity as a migrant with Dutch language skills and as a woman with less physical strength than others, and therefore being accepted for bearing less physical strain in a stereotypically masculine organization materialized as an advantage over other workers. Specifically, in the recollection of my five critical days, my privilege materialized as: struggling with the harsh change in working time, when for others this was normal (Day 2), having a confrontation with management about addressing them so boldly, whereas others would not have done so (Day 2), reporting sick for three days on my third workweek, which could have resulted in my dismissal if this was during a probationary period (Day 3), getting help from others when asked, whereas others continued to struggle alone (Day 5).

These examples of how my privilege materialized represent an *escape* from the field: moments when I could fall back on my role as a researcher, rather than fully embracing the warehouse worker role. The question of field exit has garnered much attention in ethnographic research (Ismail, 2022; Iversen, 2009; Michailova et al., 2014). Research on field exit focuses on how the researcher leaves the community behind. In my autoethnographic story, I had the opportunity to intermittently exit the field when facing difficulties, to which I refer to as escape. I contrast these examples of escape with my previous experiences in low-wage work, as a dishwasher, shelf stocker and as a waitress. In those roles, escape was not an option – I was expected to go to work even when sick

or injured, and I also expected this from others. As I reflected on my previous experiences in low-wage work during the fieldwork, I initially thought that I myself changed through years of experience as a researcher, and became less resilient and less eager to prove myself as a good worker. However, I later realized that this was more tied to my role as an in-betweener, especially after I did not report sick following the injury on my foot (Day 4). I felt like I impressed management, and almost proudly showed them photos of my purple foot, to demonstrate to them: 'Look, I am a good worker, and this proves it to you'. I interpret this behavior as a coping mechanism, emerging from my diversion from the ideal worker norm in the warehouse.

Last, *guilt* has a central role in my autoethnographic story. Sense of guilt is inherent to doing fieldwork (Gable, 2014; Punch, 2012). Despite assessing the impact of my research on the community prior to fieldwork, I did not actively reflect on my implicit biases and assumptions about both myself and the individuals I would work with before the fieldwork. I felt, and feel pangs of guilt about my self-perceived unpreparedness when entering the field, about not being able to help those who struggled with the work, about sitting in the lunchroom rather than joining migrant workers at their work stations, and about being able to escape the field, both intermittently and ultimately due to my privileged position as a researcher. I feel guilt that I continuously tried to prove myself to management – showing that despite being a woman, I could lift, despite being a migrant, I could speak Dutch and despite being a researcher, I could bring value to the work floor. I feel guit that I tried to redefine my sense of self at the warehouse, tried to alienate myself from the identities that are so central to who I am as a person, all to conform to the ideal worker norm imposed largely by management, and less strongly by my peers. I elaborate further on my embodied experiences with the ideal worker norm in the next section.

6.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to reflect on my embodied experiences with the management and peer-imposed ideal worker norm during fieldwork as a warehouse worker, and to interpret my feelings and reactions to these embodied experiences. My autoethnographic story shows that the ideal worker in warehousing is masculine, physically healthy, Dutch-speaking, customer-focused, autonomous and prioritizes work over their own well-being. I diverted from and conformed to this expectation in multiple ways.

First, at most workstations, I was the only woman. I noticed that the working hours in the warehouse posed significant challenges for individuals with caregiving responsibilities—something the workers themselves also pointed out to me. For those with caregiving responsibilities, warehouse work offers limited opportunities for work-life balance or flexible working arrangements. This lack of flexibility directly confirms the ideal worker norm in the warehouse, which assumes employees can prioritize work above all else and have no significant responsibilities outside of work. For those with caregiving tasks, often women with children or dependent parents, this expectation is often unrealistic and unsustainable in the long term. Second, I felt physically weak for

doing warehouse work. I initially refrained from doing tasks that seemed too heavy, but later when attempting to autonomously carry out these tasks to reassert competence, suffered a work injury which reiterated feelings of incompetence. The ideal worker norm in the warehouse implicitly pressures employees to push beyond their physical limits, which can result in physical harm. This ultimately perpetuates a culture where those who cannot conform to these ideals feel marginalized and less competent.

Next, I was one of the few migrant workers at the warehouse who spoke Dutch. This allowed me to navigate the workplace more effectively than many of my colleagues, who often faced barriers due to language differences. Being fluent in Dutch helped me build relationships with both coworkers and supervisors, facilitating better collaboration and access to information about tasks. Conversely, I diverted from the customer-focused ideal worker norm. I experienced difficulties with grasping who the customer is, mainly having experienced customer-facing roles in low-wage work before. For example, I felt no remorse when accidentally damaging a couch, or no concern where a lamp was returned due to a scratch on its bottom. This disconnect made me feel out of sync with the workplace culture, which not only emphasized customer satisfaction but also celebrated employees who prioritized the interest of the customer.

Additionally, I often had to rely on other's help to physically carry out assignments autonomously, which contributed to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. In a workplace that valued competence, I found it difficult that I was not considered a valuable member of the team. Last, I decided to take time for recovery when being sick despite the culture of being expected to come to work even when feeling unwell. This decision was significant, as it directly challenged the workplace norm that equates presenteeism with dedication and productivity. Overall, my experiences of not fully conforming to the ideal worker norm points to the challenges faced by individuals who do not fit the ideal worker norm in warehouse work. Each of these aspects—whether related to physical ability, customer focus or prioritizing health—revealed how rigid norms can create barriers that hinder inclusion in low-wage work, and ultimately harms migrants' well-being.

Our findings contribute to the literature in two ways. First, we contribute to literature on precarious work by presenting an embodied account, showing that the role of the body, and its symbolic and material function in the emotive, physical and sensory experience of doing low-wage work is essential for understanding migrants' lived experience. We further show that embodiment is not only gendered, but also ties to professional (e.g., being a researcher) and cultural identity (e.g., language), pointing to the intersectional nature of embodied experiences in low-wage settings. We find that embodiment is not only central to migration as a journey, but also to precarious migrant work as a lived experience (Dunn, 2010; Gorman-Murray, 2007; Mai, 2013; McDowell et al., 2007; Morrice, 2017).

Second, we contribute to literature on precarious work by showing the value of writing differently and showcasing autoethnographic stories (Clavijo & Mandalaki, 2024; van Amsterdam, 2014; van Amsterdam et al., 2023). Much of research on migrant workers' experiences in low-wage settings builds on qualitative interviews or observations, rather

than first-hand accounts of doing the work (Alberti et al., 2013; McAreavey, 2017; Netto et al., 2020, cf. Keller, 2024). Despite its limited value for theory building due to being embedded in a single worker's experience, this autoethnographic story offers a complex and contextual account of embodied experiences with ideal worker norms. Doing autoethnography on the lived experience of low-wage work allows for high levels of reflexivity by being in touch with one's sense of self, providing a perhaps more in-depth reflection on lived experience than traditional qualitative research methods allow for.

In this paper, we touch upon, but do not fully engage with the notion that disembodiment with the ideal worker norm can trigger individuals to redefine their sense of self, thus engage in embodied identity work (Netto et al., 2020; McAreavey, 2017). Future (auto)ethnographic research could focus on this process in other low-wage sectors characterized by precarious work, such as construction, cleaning, agriculture or meat processing. We conclude by calling for scholars to immerse themselves in the lived experiences of their research subjects in low-wage work to fully grasp their embodied experiences. We hope that my autoethnographic story resonates with researchers who might have had to grapple with privilege, escape and feelings of guilt in their ethnographic fieldwork and that we inspire more compassionate scholarship in organization studies.

CHAPTER 7

From ‘blame game’ to virtuous cycles: Exploring stakeholder responses to HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work through action research

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ABSTRACT

Despite initiatives such as HRM strategies and sectoral and governmental regulation, the precarious quality of temporary agency migrant work is a persistent policy challenge in the Netherlands. We argue that precarious conditions are sustained by HRM tensions - fundamental contradictions in the triangular employment relationship between user firms, temporary work agencies, and migrant workers. These tensions inert change and prevent collaborative efforts to improve the quality of temporary agency migrant work. Building on paradox theory we map and explore stakeholder responses to HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work in the Netherlands. We analysed 22 stakeholder interviews and three focus groups with 11 participants. The analyses revealed three HRM tensions that result in vicious cycles, (1) the flexible workforce tension (between the user firm and temporary work agency), (2) the expectation alignment tension (between the user firm and migrant workers) and (3) the package deal tension (between temporary work agency and migrant worker), which we present in the HRMT-TEMP Diagram. Across the interviews we find predominantly defensive responses. However, the focus groups prompted proactive responses from stakeholders concerning the flexible workforce and expectation alignment tension as well as defensive responses concerning the package deal tension, creating potential for virtuous or vicious cycles of precariousness. We contribute to literature by first mapping HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work and second by exploring potential actions that stakeholders external to the triangular employment relationship (such as trade unions, policymakers, and NGOs) can take to bend vicious cycles of precariousness to virtuous ones.

Keywords: HRM tensions, temporary agency work, migrants, participatory action research, paradox theory, virtuous cycles

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, organizations have embraced variations of workforce flexibilization to meet fluctuations in demand and hire of temporary work (Atkinson, 1984). Next to an increase in part-time work and job rotation, employers' wish for flexibilization to match labor demand and supply triggered workforce externalization practices, prompting organizations to turn towards sub-contracting, the temporary hiring of self-employed workers, and the use of temporary work agencies to match their human resource needs (Kalleberg, 2000). Temporary agency work is an alternative work arrangement concerning a triangular employment relationship between the worker, the temporary work agency, and the user firm, where the employment relationship is situated between the temporary work agency and the worker, while the user firm is responsible for the supervision and the direction of the temporary work assignment carried out by the worker, with a commercial relationship between the user firm and the temporary work agency (Koene et al., 2004). While one could expect a decline in temporary employment in tightening labor markets where human resources are scarce (Houseman et al., 2003), temporary agency work has experienced a stable rise in the European Union (EU) throughout the past two decades, growing to make up 2.4% of total employment by 2023 (EU-LFS, 2024). The Netherlands has the highest share of temporary agency work in the EU, with 4.6% of total employment (EU-LFS, 2024).

Temporary agency work in the Netherlands is concentrated in sectors historically associated with low-skilled labor, such as agriculture and warehousing, where organizations need to adhere to seasonal demands and minimize labor costs to gain competitive advantage (ABU & NBBU, 2020). Due to low wages, physically taxing manual labor, and lack of job security, employers in these sectors struggle to attract local workers and turn to temporary agency migrant work to meet their need for flexible labor. While the precarious[2] working conditions of temporary agency migrant workers in Dutch agriculture and warehousing have long been documented, the COVID-19 pandemic shed new light on migrants' exposure to health risks at work, their limited access to and substandard quality of housing, and lack of social protection (e.g. health care provision, Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021).

Such conditions persist despite legislation on equal treatment and protection of temporary agency (migrant) workers[3] on the EU and Dutch national levels and labour

2 In this paper, building on Allan et al. (2021) we understand precarious work as the experience of having a 'bad job' in the 21st century, as "work that is unstable and insecure in the continuity and quantity of work, restricts the power of workers to advocate for change, and does not provide protections from workplace abuses and unsafe working conditions" (p. 2).

3 These legal measures include Directive 2008/104/EC (EU-level), the "Wet allocatie arbeidskrachten door intermediairs", two advisory reports by Taskforce for Migrant Workers' protection, proposed legislation 'Wet Meer zekerheid flexwerkers' (Dutch national level) and Collective Labour Agreement for Agency Workers 2021-2025 (sectoral level).

agreements on sectoral level. While this legal framework arranges certain aspects of HRM (e.g., salaries) , there are tensions - fundamental contradictions between parties to the employment relationship (Thompson, 2011) – as to how HRM should be organized. An example of such a tension is where the responsibility lies for HR practices such as pension arrangements, care leave provisions, or learning and development practices, that are not legally mandated for either the temporary work agency or the user firm. Previous research found that temporary work agencies' struggle for instance to collaborate with user firms for ensuring occupational health and safety at the workplace (Mattila et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth and intensified HRM tensions in organizations, therefore understanding responses to these tensions is especially timely (Collings et al., 2021).

While parties to the triangular employment relationships have an important role in managing HRM tensions, also those beyond the employment relationship, such as NGOs, trade unions or governments have a stake in how HRM is organized in temporary agency migrant work. Involving a wide range of stakeholders in understanding responses to HRM tensions can be conducive to collaborative approaches towards improved quality of work (Retkowksy et a., 2024).

In this paper we aim to identify HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work and to explore how stakeholders respond to these tensions. Employing participatory action research to foster consensus on actions for change, we pose the research question*: How do stakeholders involved in temporary agency migrant work in the Netherlands respond to HRM tensions in the triangular employment relationship?* To answer this research question, we use participatory action research, conducting 22 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, followed by three focus groups in which we brought 11 stakeholders together. We make two central contributions. First, we map HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work, and broaden the scope of HRM tensions analysis to stakeholders beyond the bounds of the triangular employment relationship (Bennett et al., 2023; Mathew et al., 2023). Second, we explore the potential of co-inquiry and co-creation to overcome tensions with participants that have partial knowledge, experience and expertise and different stakes in temporary agency migrant work.

This article is structured as follows. First, we compare HRM tensions in traditional and triangular employment relations. This is followed by our reading of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on temporary agency migrant work through the lens of paradox theory, which has been widely used in HRM scholarship to map and understand responses to tensions (Bennett et al., 2023; Collings et al., 2021; Mathew et al., 2023; Mabey & Zhao, 2016).

Next, we discuss our participatory action research design, including the selection of stakeholders for the interviews and focus groups. Subsequently, we present three HRM tensions that emerged from the analysis in the HRM Tensions in Temporary Agency Migrant Work Diagram (HRMT-TEMP Diagram), and analyze stakeholder responses to these tensions. We conclude by discussing our findings in light of the theory.

7.2 HRM TENSIONS IN TRADITIONAL AND TRIANGULAR EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

HRM tensions are inherent to the traditional employment relationship between the employer and employee (Keegan et al., 2018, Thompson, 2011). These tensions originate from structured antagonism, "an inherent process that continuously generates conflicts about the distribution of the surplus created by work, and about how the work that generates this surplus is organized" (Edwards, 1986)[4]. Structured antagonism leads to trade-offs between employers' efforts to maximize profits and gain control over production and workers' resistance to these efforts (Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021). This results in tensions, which can be understood as conflicts fueled by fundamental contradictions between parties to the employment relationship that influence the development and implementation of HR practices, and can trickle down to everyday interactions between employers and employees at the workplace (Thompson, 2011). Examples of HRM tensions in traditional employment relationship include the double role of the HR professional as both strategic partner of the employer and employee champion (Aust et al., 2017) and the tension between corporate social responsibility and economic rationality (Ehnert, 2013). Furthermore, the tension between HR strategy (aligning long-term business planning with human resource needs) and HR operations (ensuring that HR processes are in order) or the tension between HR differentiation (decentralization to address unique needs) and HR integration (centralization to harmonize policies and practices) (Keegan et al., 2018). This shows that in the traditional employment relationship, the HR function and particularly the HR professional has to continuously manage tensions to balance different interests (Keegan et al., 2018).

While in the traditional employment relationship the HR function, with all its tensions, is clearly positioned within the employing organization, in triangular employment relationships HR responsibilities are shared between temporary work agencies (recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, performance management, training and development), user firms (health and safety, daily on-site management) and the worker (career self-management). This results in more nuanced configurations of tensions. Some tensions in triangular employment relations concern the coordination of HR responsibilities between temporary work agencies and the user firm, where temporary work agencies struggle to collaborate with user firms for ensuring organizational health and safety (Mattila et al., 2022), and worker employability (Martini, 2021). Furthermore, a tension exists between coordinated regulation and profit-seeking – where particularly the rogue temporary work agencies adopt strategies to circumvent regulations to increase profits,

4 Research on HRM tensions is rooted in pluralist strategic HRM and labour process theory (Keegan et al., 2018). Considering that migrant workers are at a higher risk of experiencing precarious working conditions and research rooted in labour process theory shows more sensitivity to disadvantaged working conditions, we build our argumentation on this stream of literature, and do not incorporate managerial-centric approaches.

which produces tensions with organizations who follow the rules (Cajander et al., 2023). The expectation that social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) would self-regulate the temporary agency work sector did not bring the intended outcomes (Heinrich et al., 2020), and both employers, temporary work agencies and institutional bodies frequently call for more stringent regulations (Been & Beer, 2022). Furthermore, in recent research on temporary agency and platform work, Retkowsky and colleagues (2024) found support for tensions between economic and well-being considerations, andb between the standardization and the customization of career support for flexible workers.

Despite existing research on tensions in triangular employment relations, our understanding of HRM tensions in one of its most precarious and contextually contingent forms—temporary agency migrant work—remains limited. Temporary agency migrant work has a cross-border and cross-cultural character, resulting in unique HRM tensions. For instance, the tension between cultural sensitivity (taking into account migrant workers' cultural backgrounds in HR policy) and standardized policies (creating uniform HR practices for all employees), or the tension between seasonal employment (employing migrant workers for seasonal work) and long-term, reliable workforce (ensuring that migrant workers performing well will return for the next season) (Andrijasevic & Sacchetto, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic had an important role in bringing to the forth HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work in the Netherlands (Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021), where the prevalence of COVID-19 infections was much higher among temporary agency migrant workers, often resulting in unemployment and discontinuity of their housing arrangements, simultaneously limiting options to travel home due to closed borders. In the following section, through the lens of paradox theory, we explain how HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work became salient during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how stakeholders' defensive responses resulted in an inertia of precarious conditions for migrant temporary agency workers.

7.3 COVID-19 AND THE SALIENCE OF HRM TENSIONS IN TEMPORARY AGENCY MIGRANT WORK

Paradox theory allows for understanding how contradictory interests can co-exist and be managed in temporary agency migrant work (Keegan et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016). Paradox theory distinguishes between latent and salient tensions. Smith and Lewis (2011) define latent tensions as "contradictory yet interrelated elements embedded in organizing processes that persist because of organizational complexity and adaptation" (p. 389). When tensions become salient, organizational stakeholders actively experience them, which leads to feelings of unease, or strain when making decisions, reacting to situations, and choosing directions in organizational contexts (Fairhurst et al., 2002; Putnam et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Three environmental factors can induce the salience of HRM tensions. First, when there is plurality of views in decentralized power contexts, stakeholders' can voice their

contradictory views in decision-making, resulting in salience of HRM tensions. Second, environments that are politically, legally and socially changing can increase the salience of tensions due to triggering stakeholders to manage tensions when adapting to their new context. Last, resource-scarce settings constrain stakeholders' decision-making, confronting them with tensions of choice between different, often lose-lose options, again increasing salience of HRM tensions (Keegan et al., 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Putnam et al., 2016).

Temporary agency migrant work provides a unique context for HRM tensions. Temporary agency migrant work being common in the Netherlands, it provides employment to nearly half a million migrant workers, the majority of whom are EU nationals from Central and Eastern Europe (NBBU, 2022). Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrant workers, while often highly educated, generally have minimal if any Dutch language skills, a limited understanding of labour regulations and lack a social network in the Netherlands (Cremers, 2023). Temporary work agencies provide package deals to CEE workers, arranging amongst others, their relocation from their home country, housing, access to healthcare and daily transportation to work (Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021; Szytniewksi & van der Haar, 2022). CEE migrant workers' housing is often in remote locations, and has sub-standard quality where migrants have to share their room with several fellow workers (Baalbergen et al., 2024). Even when securing a direct, permanent employment contract with the user firm over time, the shortage of private sector housing restricts CEE migrants in finding accommodation independently (Loomans, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified and revealed plurality, change and scarcity in temporary agency migrant work, making HRM tensions salient. To explain, at the wake of the pandemic in the Netherlands, many migrant workers in non-essential employment lost their jobs and consequently their temporary work agency-provided housing, becoming trapped in their host countries, while being exposed to health risks with limited social rights, sometimes even facing homelessness (Skowronek et al., 2022). Government labelled work in sectors such as greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing 'essential', causing that migrant workers had to continue working in environments where social distancing and quarantine regulations were rarely upheld (Skowronek et al., 2022). In agriculture, due to labour shortages, the harvest was contingent on CEE migrant workers, who were transported from their countries of origin disregarding social distancing rules, indicating little care for their health and safety (Ulceluse & Bender, 2022).

While temporary agency migrant work was largely invisible to the local population, being performed in greenhouses or warehouses outside of densely populated areas, during COVID-19, Dutch media widely published on its precariousness ('Migration during corona' blog, Adviesraad Migratie). This prompted differential responses from stakeholders: the Dutch government established a taskforce for migrant workers' protection (Rijksoverheid, 2020), and non-governmental organizations and trade unions were calling on the government to strengthen the regulation of temporary work agencies and extend migrant workers' social rights (Ratzmann et al., 2024; Janssen, 2021). Employers and temporary work agencies struggled to determine who is responsible for dealing with the

impact of the pandemic on their workers. For instance, they debated the responsibility for the provision of protective clothing and facemasks, testing and health care. Most stakeholders blamed temporary work agencies for their practices, who in turn pointed to rogue organizations in their sector for lacking accountability (ABU, 2024). In essential sectors, often characterized by low wages and already precarious working conditions, temporary work agencies and user firms struggled to meet their human resource needs, exacerbating the importance of cross-border temporary agency recruitment (Houwerzijl, 2024). This shows that the COVID-19 pandemic did not only bring a plurality of views and political, legal and societal change, but also (re)affirmed that low-wage employment sectors, such as greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing, are heavily dependent on migrant workers, pointing to a (human-resource) scarce environment. Therefore, through changing the environment within which temporary agency migrant work is embedded, the COVID-19 pandemic transformed latent HRM tensions to salient ones.

7.4 DEFENSIVE AND PROACTIVE RESPONSES TO HRM TENSIONS

According to paradox theory, stakeholder responses to HRM tensions can be more defensive or more proactive. Defensive responses include suppressing, opposing and splitting while adjusting is categorized as a proactive response (Keegan, 2018). We explain these responses using the example of the tension between temporary work agencies and user firms in the coordination of occupational health and safety trainings for migrant workers (see Table 1).

Table 7.1 *Potential stakeholder responses to HRM tensions in a triangular employment relationship*

Response	Definition	Example behaviour
Suppressing	Overruling or dominating the tension	User firm takes full control of training temporary agency workers
Opposing	Confronting the other stakeholder to take responsibility	Open conflict, impasse
Splitting	Dividing the responsibilities without coordination	Each contributes a part of the training to release the tension
Adjusting	Accommodating each other's needs by cooperation and continuous adaptation	Joint design and organization of the training

First, user firms would show a *suppressing response* to this tension by overruling or dominating the paradox, and taking full control over the occupational health and safety training without consulting the temporary work agency. The result of this response is temporary relief from the tension, as the temporary work agency is exempted from providing input for how the training should be organized, however, tensions are likely to arise if a migrant worker gets injured due to insufficient training. Second, temporary

agencies would adopt an *opposing response* by confronting the user firm on the question of offering occupational health and safety training, despite the user firm's reluctance to offer this to workers. This would lead to active, open conflict, which would provide temporary relief to both parties due to staying close to their own interests, however it would result in an impasse as neither party would be willing to compromise. Third, user firms and temporary work agencies would adopt a *splitting response* by dividing the responsibilities of organizing the training, the temporary work agency offering a general training to workers upon recruitment, and the user firm offering an in-depth, more organization specific training on site. While this approach would provide temporary relief from the tension, the tension could reemerge, for instance if workers receive contradictory information across the two trainings. Last, temporary work agencies and user firms would have an *adjusting response* by accommodating each other's needs and cooperating on designing the content and the format of the training together, agreeing to periodic meetings and evaluation of the training. This approach would provide long-term relief from the tension, as continued communication and consultation between stakeholders is ensured (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Keegan et al., 2018).

Stakeholder responses potentially create virtuous or vicious cycles. These cycles are defined as "iterative spirals or self-reinforcing sequences of events that grow out of the ways that actors process contradictions" (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 81). Opposing responses – when stakeholders openly confront each other and neglect each other's needs – are conducive to *vicious cycles* where tensions would exponentially escalate, while adjusting responses create potential for *virtuous cycles*, due to addressing tensions constructively (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Keegan et al., 2018). We argue that virtuous cycles could help address precarious working conditions in temporary agency migrant work. In the following section, we explain our research methods.

7.5 METHODS

Research method and sample

Our participatory action research design fits within a critical realist paradigm (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). A critical realist paradigm allows for identifying HRM tensions (occurrence of events and their underlying causal mechanisms) while supporting stakeholders responses to these tensions through involving them in understanding these tensions. (events understood through stakeholders' perceptions) (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

Table 7.2 *Sample demographics*

Stakeholder	Phase 1: Interviews (2021)	Phase 2: focus groups (2023)
Temporary work agency	1. **General director**, temporary work agency, production, construction, logistics 2. **Supervisor recruitment**, temporary work agency, food, logistics, healthcare 3. **General director**, temporary work agency, warehouse distribution 4. **Operations manager**, temporary work agency, production, logistics, hospitality 5. **General director**, temporary work agency, greenhouse horticulture 6. **General director**, temporary work agencies' employers' association	1. **HR director**, temporary work agency, greenhouse horticulture 2. **General director**, temporary work agency, greenhouse horticulture 3. **Engagement officer**, temporary work agency, warehouse distribution
User firm	7. **HR manager**, user firm, warehouse distribution 8. **HR director**, user firm, warehouse distribution 10. **Entrepreneur**, user firm, greenhouse horticulture 11. **Entrepreneur**, user firm, greenhouse horticulture 12. **Entrepreneur**, user firm, greenhouse horticulture 13. **Policy specialist labour**, greenhouse horticulture employers' association	4. Entrepreneur, user firm, greenhouse horticulture
Migrant worker	N/A	5. **Migrant worker** with experience in warehouse distribution 6. **Migrant worker** with experience in warehouse distribution
Trade union	14. **Project leader**, trade union migrant workers project 15. **Trade union officer** temporary agency work 16. **Trade union officer** international transport and logistics	7. **Trade union consultant**, agriculture 8. **Trade union project leader**, agriculture
Policy maker	17. **Chair Governmental Advisory Board**, labour migration 18. **Governmental policy advisor,** labour migration and Covid-19 19. **Policy advisor,** labour inspectorate	9. **Team coordinator** governmental policy advice on flexible work 10. **Policy advisor** on information dissemination for labour migrants, researcher on decent work
NGO	20. **eam coordinator**, NGO migrant exploitation 21. **Advisor**, NGO human trafficking 22. **Project officer**, NGO migrant exploitation 23. **Coordinator**, NGO migrant homelessness	11. **NGO volunteer**, migrant workers' rights

Our multi-method research design comprises stakeholder interviews and focus groups. We conducted 22 stakeholder interviews focusing on factors influencing the quality of working conditions of Central and Eastern European migrant workers at the outbreak of the Covid pandemic. Considering that the quality of temporary agency migrant work is directly influenced by parties to the triangular employment relationship (temporary work agency, user firm, migrant worker), but also stakeholders beyond (government, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, trade unions), we interviewed a broad range of stakeholders whose interests are integral to HRM tensions. As we were focusing on structural responses to HRM tensions by stakeholders, we selected stakeholders who hold part of the discretionary power in the boundaries and the execution of the HRM function in the Dutch employment context. Hence, we used a heterogenous sample of representatives of temporary work agencies, user firms, trade unions, policy makers and NGOs. We invited these stakeholders to participate in the study via email, informing them of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and ethical clearance. After interviewing key stakeholders, we used snowball sampling to identify further participants. We concluded data collection when no new information arose during the interviews. The interviews were conducted online between January and March, 2021. Example questions from the interviews included 'Which actors and institutions have an influence on HR practices for Central and Eastern European migrant workers?' and 'What are some factors that make it attractive for organizations to employ Central and Eastern European migrant workers?' and 'Could you give an example of an actor or institution that have or have not been effective in mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on Central and Eastern European migrant workers' working conditions?'.

As a follow up, we held three focus groups about migrant workers' quality of temporary agency work with 11 participants. We used the participatory method of group model building for structuring these sessions (Vennix, 1999). In group model building, participants are co-creators of knowledge and are involved in analyzing complex problems in order to provide policy recommendations, which increases their sense of ownership and commitment (Richardson & Andersen, 1995). As we focused on empowerment and improving the quality of temporary agency migrant work, we also involved migrant workers, next to the stakeholders we already interviewed. We approached the interview participants, who either agreed to participate in the study or referred us to other potential participants. The sessions lasted 3,5 hours each and were held in person between March and May 2023. Each session had a different aim: the first session focused on identifying factors that contribute to migrants' quality of temporary agency work, the goal of the second session was to model these factors into a causal loop diagram, while in the third session we validated the model and identified policy recommendations for improving the quality of temporary agency work. The sessions were led by the third author, who is a group model building expert. The overview of the participants across the two subprojects is included in Table 7.2.

Analysis

We used content analysis to interpret our data. First, we thematically coded the interviews for fundamental contradictions between parties to the triangular employment relationship (Thompson, 2011). We abductively applied these codes to transcripts of the focus groups, and identified three central HRM tensions, namely: (1) the flexible workforce tension (between the user firm and temporary work agency), (2) the expectation alignment tension (between the user firm and migrant workers) and (3) the package deal tension (between temporary work agency and migrant worker). Acknowledging that visualization is an important tool for paradox theorizing (Pradies et al., 2023), we constructed the HRMT-TEMP diagram to embed these tensions in the triangular employment relationship and surrounding stakeholder interests.

After identifying and mapping the tensions, we used a coding diagram to identify stakeholder responses to these tensions both across the interviews and the focus groups. While responses to HRM tensions are traditionally categorized based on stakeholder behaviour (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Keegan et al., 2018; e.g., what did the stakeholder do to deal with tensions), we also coded for their cognitive processes in dealing with these tensions (e.g., how did the stakeholder perceive and mentally process the tension). We identified 144 data excerpts in the stakeholder interviews that were considered as stakeholder responses to the tensions, and one interaction in the focus groups for each of the tensions. We abductively coded the excerpts for defensive (suppressing, opposing, splitting) and proactive (adjusting) responses to the three HRM tensions across the stakeholder interviews and the focus groups to identify patterns (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Keegan et al., 2018). We elaborate on our findings in the section below.

7.6 FINDINGS

Based on the analysis, we identified three HRM tensions in the triangular employment relationship between user firms, temporary work agencies, and migrant workers: (1) flexible workforce tension, (2) expectation alignment tension and (2) package deal tension. We first define and situate these tensions and explain which interests within temporary agency migrant work are at stake. We then explain patterns in stakeholder responses that we found in the stakeholder interviews and focus groups. The visualized tensions are presented in the HRMT-TEMP diagram in Figure 7.1 below.

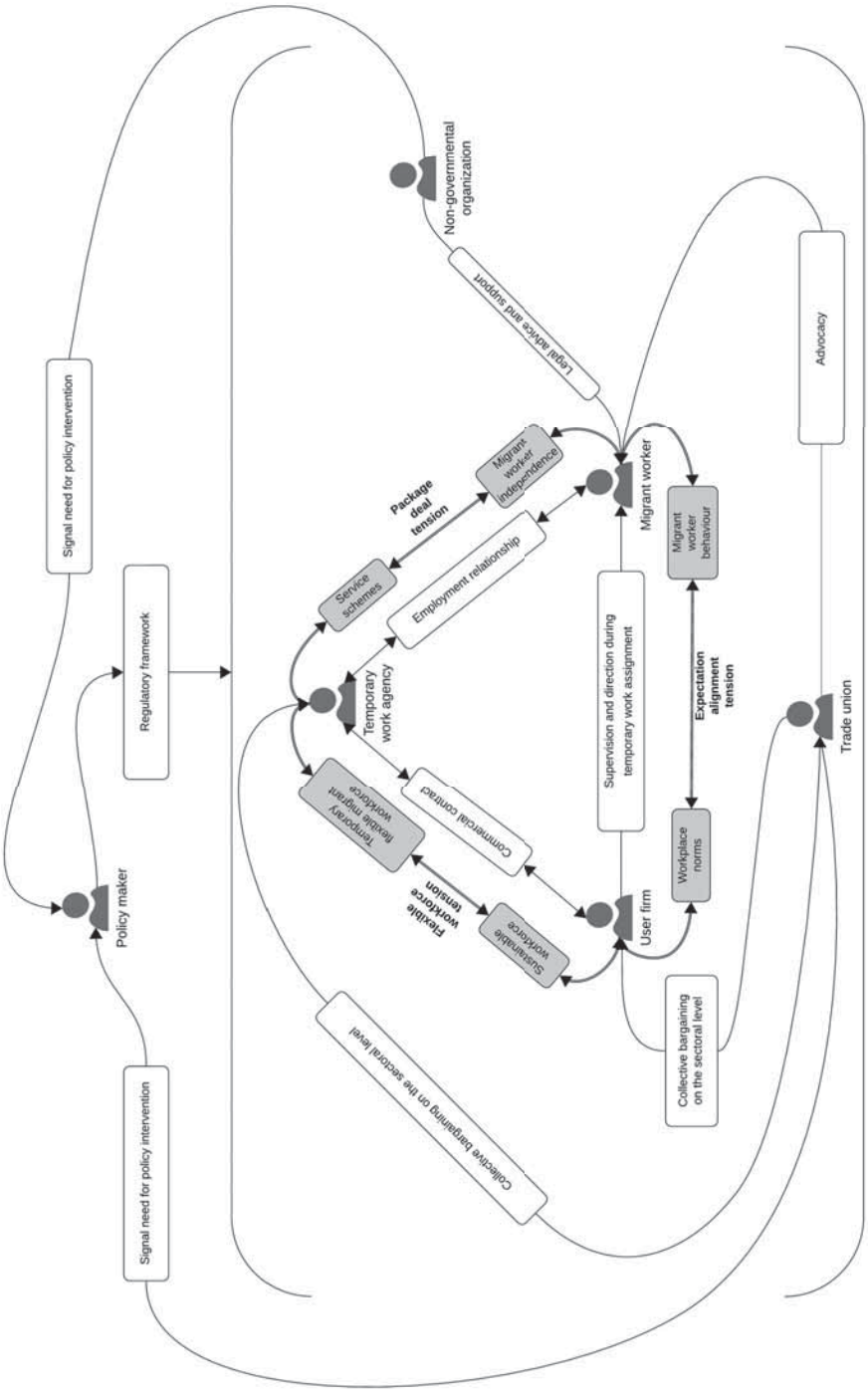

Figure 7.1. HRM Tensions in Temporary Agency Migrant Work Diagram (HRMT-TEMP Diagram)

Tension 1: Flexible workforce tension

The first tension we labelled as the flexible workforce tension. This tension is situated between the strategic HRM planning of user firms and the recruitment and selection practices of temporary work agencies. Due to labour shortages and difficulties with attracting local workers for low-skilled greenhouse-horticulture and warehouse distribution employment, user firms have struggled with acquiring a sustainable workforce. As the HR manager of a user firm in warehouse distribution explains:

"For [migrant workers] it's not about building a future in Netherlands anymore, and that's not interesting for us because we do want people that stay here until their pension. We are not for the short term. We want to employ people for the long term." (HR Manager, user firm in warehouse distribution, 2021)

In contrast, temporary work agencies hire CEE migrant workers on flexible employment contracts, which then eventually – conditional on good performance – are transformed into a permanent employment contract with the temporary work agency. This means that while CEE migrant workers' employment is not necessarily temporary, the temporary work agency can move these workers between different user firms, making CEE migrants' work temporary for the user firm. This implies that temporary work agencies have become brokers of labour in the greenhouse horticulture and warehouse distribution sectors, essentially taking over the whole process of recruitment and selection from user firms. As the HR director of a temporary work agency explains:

"We don't provide temporary workers, because 80% of our people work steady. They always, like they have steady job for really long. Almost 60% have permanent contracts [with the temporary work agency]. So, when we talk about temp agencies, I guess we have an image of agencies who have today work, tomorrow not, this week, yes, but the next week? [sic] Our clients do not hire us because they need a temporary worker, but because what we do is not their core business." (HR director, temporary work agency, 2023).

This means user firms depend on temporary agencies for the continued supply of labour, resulting in tensions between user firm's strategic planning of a sustainable workforce that they can rely on in the long-term, and temporary work agencies' recruitment and selection of flexible CEE migrant workers who are contractually tied to the agencies. This sustains the business model of temporary work agencies and they supply labour that the user firms cannot find by themselves. In the following section, we explain the responses to this tension.

Stakeholder responses to flexible workforce tension

In the stakeholder interviews, we identified 33 excerpts that included stakeholder responses to the flexible workforce tension. The majority of these stakeholder responses were defensive, namely suppressing (20) and splitting (10), while from temporary work agencies and user firms, we noted adjusting responses (3) to the flexible workforce tension. Non-governmental organizations, trade unions and policy makers only showed defensive responses to this tension, highlighting migrant workers' precarious position rather than acknowledging the mismatch between the user firms' demand for labour and temporary work agencies' recruitment practices. Examples of responses to this tension are included in Table 2.

Table 7.3 *Stakeholder responses to flexible workforce tensions from the interviews*

Stakeholder	Responses	Data excerpts
Temporary work agency	Suppressing (5) and adjusting (1) responses	"*The flexibility of the agency sector is welcome because [migrant workers] want to go back to [their home country] once in a while and that (…) is not possible on a permanent contract. (…) It also has to do with the fact that the risk for the agency is too big to give them a permanent contract because they do not know if [the migrant worker is] placeable.*" (Suppressing, Participant 6, General director, temporary work agencies' employers' association)
User firm	Suppressing (6), splitting (6) and adjusting responses (2)	*"I think the difference between the busiest time of year and, and the least busy time of year is about 10 to 15 full time equivalents and we can do that with agency workers. So, we have had a very stable workforce and we do not need to scale up and down a lot through the year. So, I think that is what makes us unique is that we have such a stable work, work planning and a stable workforce."* (Splitting, Participant 7, HR manager, user firm)
Trade union	Suppressing (1) and splitting responses (1)	"*In the country where [migrant workers] come from the agencies, they run ad campaigns, to recruit people. And they promise a lot. It is real misleading. And if you have got 200 euros left, and you know, it is not enough, and I promise you stuff like that. You will take the bus.*" (Suppressing, Participant 13, Project leader, trade union migrant workers project)

Table 7.3 *Stakeholder responses to flexible workforce tensions from the interviews (continued)*

Stakeholder	Responses	Data excerpts
Non-governmental organization	Suppressing (6) and splitting (1) responses	"*We understand the idea of the temporary work, but it is - it is getting abused and – and because it is supposed to be temporary and people live on it for few years, on this type of agreement, and when there is the time, they should get advanced to the better stage, because there are like stages of the agreements, that - that the workers are supposed to [get]. They get kicked [out]. And then they get a new person. Because - because they do not want to get invested, [temporary work agencies] want to have a freedom of kicking everyone, anyone at any time.*" (Suppressing, Participant 22, Coordinator NGO)
Policy maker	Suppressing (2) and splitting (2) responses	"*The flex market, especially in periods of crisis, makes it for all the people in the flex market very difficult. And it also happened during the period of financial crisis. Also for migrant workers. So, I think the fundamental discussion of the flex market in the Netherlands is a really big issue and if you can, can change that, you will also improve the situation of migrant workers.*" (Splitting, Participant 17, Governmental policy advisory)

In the focus groups, stakeholders showed adjusting, proactive responses to this tension. As we show in the excerpt below, participants that traditionally represent competing interests (trade unions and temporary work agencies) engaged in a proactive conversation regarding the flexible workforce tension, increasingly aligning their perceptions through the discussion. It is important to note here, that Participant 1 and 7 had a migration background, which they also reflect on as they discuss their experiences:

"Participant 2 (General director of temporary work agency): *I am missing is also what is the reason why the migrant is working in another country. And sometimes there are… They want to stay here and build a living also here, and sometimes is just temp workers here [sic].*
Participant 7 (Trade union consultant): *Only we have one difference. I don't think there is maybe one or hundred who already knows by coming to the Netherlands: I'm going to stay. I didn't meet any migrant workers. I'm here for 20 years and that was not the meaning of my…*
Participant 1 (HR director of temporary work agency): *We both decided to stay in the Netherlands, also like I was like for one year. And then I stayed. So yeah, I think you're right about what you say.*
Participant 7 (Trade union consultant): *It also depends what your goal is. Because you can, if you can earn money quicker than you thought, you can also decide to leave.*

Participant 1 (HR director of temporary work agency): *And also, if you are ashamed to go back because you didn't earn as much money as you thought you would. Or you got in debt in the Netherlands, and you can't come back."*

Overall, we found that stakeholders primarily gave defensive responses (suppressing and splitting) to the flexible workforce tension during the interviews. The interaction during the focus groups, allowed stakeholders to recognize the importance of both poles of the tension, resulting in a more proactive, adjusting response.

Tension 2: Expectation alignment tension

The second tension is between workplace norms and CEE migrant workers' behaviour. This tension is embedded in the way user firms manage employee relations and the way individual employees react. User firms value migrant workers who show high performance, have positive interactions with fellow workers at the workplace, and are motivated to learn the Dutch language. User firms find this particularly important in workplaces where both Dutch and migrant workers are employed., Some CEE migrant workers react by treating their employment as transactional, spending their breaks with fellow migrant workers and communicating in their native language, and by not taking part in language courses offered by the workplace. As the HR manager of a user firm in warehouse distribution explains:

"Polish employees they close in this cluster, in this comfort zones very often. During the breaks they go outside, and they stay in their cars (…) I think this is mainly case only of the Eastern Europeans, especially Polish people, because they cannot integrate really that much with the rest of the workforce. So they just yeah go outside, stay together." (HR Manager, user firm in warehouse distribution, 2021)

This creates a tension between the expectations of user firms about and CEE migrant workers' behaviour.

Stakeholder responses to expectation alignment tension

We identified 62 excerpts in the interviews that we considered as stakeholder responses to the expectation alignment tension. While the majority of these responses were defensive, in particular, suppressing (43) and splitting (3), temporary work agencies and user firms formulated several adjusting responses in dealing with the expectation alignment tension (16). These were either responses that aimed at clarifying workplace norms to migrant workers or supportive systems and were tailored to meeting their unique needs (translation, language courses, training opportunities), rather than emphasizing equal treatment with other workers. Similarly to the flexible workforce tension, non-governmental organizations and trade unions only showed suppressing responses to the expectation alignment tension. We include examples of stakeholder responses to this tension in Table 3.

Table 7.4 *Stakeholder responses to expectation alignment tension from interviews*

Stakeholder	Responses	Data excerpts
Temporary work agency	Suppressing (8), splitting (2) and adjusting (3) responses	"*We are trying to give English and Dutch lessons but it's very difficult to get your classes full. (…) So I thought it was a very good idea and we are doing it about 2-3 years standards, but no, there are not a lot of people who participate in that kind of training.*" (Suppressing, Participant 4, Operations manager temporary work agency)
User firm	Suppressing (24) and adjusting responses (13)	*"We need to delve ourselves a bit more into the cultural differences between the workers' country of origin and the country we live in. (…) You have to guide the people, you have to put more attention to tell them how it is different to be working here than in Poland. We encourage them that if they see something they think could be done better, they just need to come and say it* (Adjusting, Participant 11, Entrepreneur, user firm)
Trade union	Suppressing responses (4)	*"We had issues with people who are not allowed to drink water when it was 30 degrees here in the Netherlands, and during their work, that sort of things."* (Suppressing, Participant 14, Trade union officer temporary agency work)
Non-governmental organization	Suppressing responses (7)	*"It is very demanding to work in distribution centre. The norms are very high and Dutch, average Dutch unemployed person is not ready, and in some cases not being able to reach this norm, to meet with these norms"* (Suppressing, Participant 19, Team coordinator NGO)
Policy maker	Splitting response (1)	*"We also interviewed 400 migrant workers at a housing location last year. (…) People seemed to be very cautious. So, [we asked]: 'How are things at work?' Then we actually heard almost nothing negative."* (Splitting, Participant 18, Policy advisor)

In the focus groups, stakeholders showed adjusting responses when discussing the expectation alignment tension. As shown in the excerpt below, the focus groups allowed participants to openly discuss the expectation alignment tension. While, as the excerpt below shows, the initial response in the discussion was formulated as suppressing, the other two participants tried to contextualize the experiences of the user firm representative, resulting in collective adjusting response:

"**Participant 4 (Entrepreneur, user firm):** *We see in our company that we have to push people to learn the language. There is a big problem for many people who don't speak any language in which we can communicate. So, no English, no German. And at that side, it's also not possible to get a better job. You still stay in production because if the management cannot communicate with you, how can you understand what you have to do*

or have to bring to others. And if the language is not OK or we cannot communicate with these people, that's very difficult.

Participant 7 (Trade union consultant)*: But if we look at the quality of working conditions, they can create a possibility to follow the language lessons because you have a good work life balance. So, you have more time to do it. You don't have to work 60 hours, so you are not too tired to follow the lessons. So, I think quality and you can have also more money maybe, to pay for the lessons.*

Participant 5 (Migrant worker): *Even if you know English and you are learning Dutch, it takes time and it's difficult. And in the meanwhile, there is a lot of fewer opportunities if you don't speak Dutch. So, for example, me, I'm still learning. And I only can do like warehouses and cleaning, all the things that I want, I cannot because of that. So yeah, I can learn it by my own, but also the companies that I have found, they don't give the facilities to learn."*

To summarize, we found that next to defensive responses (suppressing and splitting), stakeholders – in particular – user firms, also showed adjusting responses in the interviews. In the focus groups, participants shift suppressing responses towards more proactive, adjusting ones by allowing an exploration of conditions when language trainings can be applied effectively.

Tension 3: Package deal tensions

The third tension was between service schemes and migrant workers' independence. This tension is situated between the extension of temporary work agencies' HR function to services including housing arrangements, transportation to work and healthcare facilitation (a 'package deal'), and migrant workers' independence in the Dutch labour market. Temporary work agencies often provide (sub-standard quality) of housing, transportation and healthcare schemes to migrant workers. This not only ties migrant workers to temporary work agencies, as if they would search for new employment, they would also need to find new housing, but also extends employer's control to migrant workers' private lives. While temporary work agencies argue that package deals offer a cost-effective solution to migrant workers' housing in a market riddled with housing shortages, trade unions and NGOs worry that these arrangements make workers' situation more precarious. As the team coordinator of an NGO explains:

"They [temp agency] can, they can claim a fixed amount of rent per week, but they do not need to guarantee hours to the people that work for that money, so they can just extract this fix, this fixed amount, while the people do not work enough to even pay for that. So, it is really a system that can be exploited." (Participant 19, Team coordinator NGO)

This creates a tension between the extension of the temporary work agencies' HR function to housing arrangements and migrant workers' independence to find new employment without restrictions.

Stakeholder responses to package deal tension

We found 49 stakeholder responses to the package deal tension in the interviews. Most response to the package deal tension were defensive, with mainly suppressing responses (32) and some splitting responses (11) as well. When discussing the package deal tension, temporary work agencies also showed adjusting responses (6). Similarly to the flexible workforce tension, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and policy makers only showed defensive responses to this tension, focusing solely on the exploitative nature of dependencies between employment, housing, transport and access to healthcare. We include examples of stakeholder responses to this tension in Table 4.

Table 7.5 *Stakeholder responses to package deals in from interviews*

Stakeholder	Responses	Data excerpts
Temporary work agency	Suppressing (9), adjusting (6) splitting (5) responses	*"To attract [migrant workers], to make them decide to work for us you have to be, I think a reliable player. They see that you're not a cowboy, but you are an organized company with the right certificates (…) So housing is a very important part to convince people to come."* (Suppressing, Participant 1 General director temporary work agency)
User firm	Suppressing (6) and splitting (1) responses	*"And what we see to be honest, let's say we have some issues that especially from the Polish ladies. They are even very ambitious sometimes but when we live in a house together and then you are one who is making promotion. They will never give a bad performance appraisal to someone else living in the same house. (…) they help each other."* (Suppressing, Participant 2, supervisor recruitment, temporary work agency)
Trade union	Suppressing responses (8)	*"It is extremely important for them [Temp agencies] that they make money on the housing from the migrant workers. So, the more people you can stuff into an old building. That is your profit. In the meat industry specifically, it is unbelievable that something like that can exist even in Europe."* (Suppressing, Participant 13, Project leader trade union)
Non-governmental organization	Suppressing (6) and splitting (4) responses	"*If you are sick, your contract can automatically stop. So, well this, this, this legal construction and uncertainty of work, uncertainty of payment and, and connection work and housing, this make it possible, makes it possible, that, let us say a kind of legal and ethical norms are perpetrated*" (Suppressing, Participant 21, Project officer NGO)

Table 7.5 *Stakeholder responses to package deals in from interviews (continued)*

Stakeholder	Responses	Data excerpts
Policy maker	Suppressing (3) and splitting (1) responses	*"There are a large number of temporary working agencies that are, well just doing what they need to do. They have appropriate housing; we have seen a lot of facilities that are quite good. They have a (…) paid right wages, they have contacts with unions. Of course, there are issues and then they are solved on way that everybody agrees that this is in an appropriate way. And, and in the same time there are temporary work agencies that do bad on purpose, sometimes due to a lack of information (…) But there is the gray area, but there is also the, the black area, which is on purpose, taking profits from the migrant workers. And, and this, this category of temporary work agencies somehow you should be able to take them out of the markets, and that is what we advise the scheme for, wow you can do that."* (Splitting, Participant 17, Governmental policy advisory)

We noted that the package deal tension brought the most confrontation between participants of the focus groups. The two most polarizing topics were user firms' hiring of temporary work agencies which have not received a quality label by an independent evaluating institution, and the separation of employment contracts and housing agreements, both of which were topics of the political debate at the time of data collection. These topics brought opposing responses from stakeholders, where rather than moving towards compromise and the accommodation of each other's interests, responses to the tension became polarized. An excerpt shows stakeholders' opposing responses:

*"***Participant 4 (Entrepreneur, user firm):** *I told you in my introduction that we are working in the summertime four times more people than in wintertime. (…) In wintertime we have to push out many people, because you don't have work for them.*
Participant 1 (HR director of temporary work agency): *You know, as long as the people know, OK, I will go to work at this company for three months and I will, that's also my choice. Because some people want to come for a really short period of time. The problem starts if the agency doesn't inform people well up front and they don't know they will work for your company for three months and then they have to move to another job, right?*
Participant 4 (Entrepreneur, user firm): *But I think the most of them knows that it's for a shorter period. But the most of them also want to stay because they are happy with our company. And they don't want to go for winter time back to Romania or Poland or whatever.*
Facilitator: *And then they're dependent on you for providing housing. And if they would have other housing where they could stay, they would be less dependent.*
Participant 4 (Entrepreneur, user firm): *Yeah, but there is no work in the area in that period. How can they pay that house?"*

To conclude, we found that only temporary work agencies showed adjusting responses to the package deal tension in the interviews, while all other stakeholders engaged in

suppressing or splitting responses. In the focus groups, stakeholders engaged in opposing responses, which polarized the debate without accommodation of stakeholder interests in dealing with the package deal tension.

7.7 DISCUSSION

Interpreting the findings

Our aim in this article was to identify HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work and to explore how stakeholders respond to these tensions. We have identified three tensions embedded in the triangular employment relationship between temporary work agencies, user firms and migrant workers. We find that stakeholder responses to these tensions across the interviews are predominantly defensive, involving suppressing (95 out of 144) and splitting (24 out of 144) responses. Regarding the flexible workforce tension, we have also identified proactive, adjusting responses from temporary work agencies and user firms. Furthermore, we found proactive, adjusting responses from user firms and temporary work agencies to the expectation alignment tension and from temporary work agencies to the package deal tension (in total 25 out of 144 responses). Non-governmental organizations, trade unions and policy makers only showed defensive (suppressing or splitting) responses to all three tensions. These findings can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, these findings could mean that stakeholders surrounding the triangular employment relationship do not acknowledge the interests of temporary work agencies and user firms, and engage in a 'blame game'. Conversely, these findings might indicate the strong position of temporary work agencies and user firms in shaping the precarious working conditions of migrants, which results in stakeholders being reluctant to compromise further. Overall, user firms' and temporary work agencies' (partially) adjusting responses are hindered by defensive responses from stakeholders surrounding the triangular employment relationship, which could prevent long-term relief from tensions.

In the focus groups, we identified two patterns. First, stakeholders showed proactive responses to the flexible workforce and expectation alignment tensions, which according to literature could foster virtuous of cycles for tensions, and create long-term relief from the tension for stakeholders. Second, stakeholders showed opposing responses to the package deal tension, which while leading to short-term relief from the tension, can cumulate in vicious cycles which continue to cause stress and feelings of discomfort for stakeholders when making decisions. These findings support previous research that showed that participatory approaches prompt stakeholders to formulate more proactive responses (Retkowksy et a., 2024), but also shows that in the case of especially paradoxical tensions (in environments characterized by plurality, change and resource scarcity), participatory approaches can also trigger stakeholder polarization.

We contribute to literature on HRM tensions in three ways. First, we map HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work, a policy-resistant context, where legislation and sectoral agreements did not prevent the continuation of precarious working conditions.

By doing so, we advocate for the importance of going beyond traditional organizational contexts in HRM tensions research (Bennett et al., 2023; Collings et al., 2021; Mathew et al., 2023; Mabey & Zhao, 2016). Second, responding to previous calls to broaden up the field of tensions research, we involve the responses of external stakeholders to HRM tensions, including trade unions, policy makers and NGOs (Keegan et al., 2018). Third, we use a participatory approach to explore stakeholder interactions, and find that these can bring both positive and negative outcomes (virtuous and vicious cycles of tensions). This implies that participatory approaches can also lead to unexpected consequences when tensions are especially complex (Retkowksy et a., 2024).

Limitations and Future Research

Our participatory action research design strengthens the grounding of our findings in interactions between the main stakeholders in the quality of labour of CEE labour migrants. However, this study also has its limitations. First, despite local municipalities emerging as important stakeholders with an interest in HRM tensions we did not include them in this study to avoid the localization of tensions to a specific area in the Netherlands. For future comparative studies on HRM tensions in flexible employment, especially where the housing of workers constitutes an HR practice, we call for research to involve regionally divergent local municipalities and compare and contrast tensions between these. Second, we focused on HRM tensions embedded between the parties of triangular employment relationship, and did not explore tensions outside of the employment relationship. We call for future research to broaden HRM tensions research by exploring tensions that have a relation to but partially fall outside of the triangular employment relationship (e.g., between temporary work agencies and trade unions or policymakers and user firms).

Conclusion

Ultimately, our findings show that participatory action research has the potential to bring out opposing or adjusting responses from stakeholders in policy-resistant contexts. We call on stakeholders in temporary agency migrant work to strive to accommodate each other's interests and show proactive, adjusting behaviour when responding to tensions, as these can lead to reducing precarious work in temporary agency work in the long-term. To achieve this, stakeholders' openness to compromise is essential (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

CHAPTER 8

Discussion

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation was to explain and improve Central and Eastern European migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing sectors in the Netherlands. To accomplish this aim, I focused on three key issues: (1) identifying the underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers; (2) exploring how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions; (3) and identifying measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of work. In this discussion, I outline the main findings and theoretical contributions for each of the key issues. This is followed by the practical contributions. Subsequently, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of the dissertation and outline an agenda for future research on migrant workers' quality of working conditions.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Key issue 1: Which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers?

The first key issue concerned the underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers. While previous theoretical frameworks addressed factors that contribute to marginalized workers' precarious work, these do not explain the persistence of precarious work, the role of non-traditional stakeholders in precarious work, and often lack contextual sensitivity (Allan et al., 2021 Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Duffy et al., 2016; Piore, 1979). I addressed the first key issue in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

To explore which underlying factors explain the persistence of low quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers, I mapped the feedback loops that explain CEE migrants' quality of working conditions in the Western European food production chain (agriculture, food processing, warehouse distribution and hospitality, Chapter 2). I found that (1) quality of labour regulation and social protection, (2) the use of temporary work agencies and (3) migrants' availability for precarious work are central feedback loops explaining CEE migrants' quality of working conditions. Regarding quality of labour regulation and social protection, feedback loops around the collective action of migrants, migrants' level of job-to-job transitions and the agency of migrant workers were found to be especially influential. Concerning the use of temporary work agencies, feedback loops underlying migrants' perceived good work ethic and migrants' length of stay in the host country explained the quality of working conditions. Last, with regards to migrants' availability for precarious work, feedback loops around mobility barriers and the power distance between migrants and employers emerged to influence quality of working conditions.

In another study, I focused on the role migrant workers' mobility agency and the boundaries encompassing this agency as underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers (Chapter 3). I explored how multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work affects the mobility agency of CEE migrant workers in low-wage employment in the Netherlands. I identified three boundaries that define the space of migrants' mobility agency, namely (1) hyperflexibility, (2) multiple dependencies and (3) voice. Regarding hyperflexibility, I found that the perceived flexibility characterizes all spaces of migrants' agency to negotiate and challenge their precarious working and living conditions. Related to multiple dependencies, I found that migrant workers' rely on the temporary work agency for services beyond employment, such as transportation from the country of origin to the host country, housing, daily transportation to work and facilitating access to healthcare. Regarding voice, I described migrant workers' limited opportunities to articulate their concerns regarding working and living conditions. It emerged from the analysis that stakeholders engage in four types of boundary work through these boundaries. I found that boundary making has a negative influence on migrants mobility agency, building barriers to exercise such agency, whereas boundary arranging and boundary buffering has a positive influence that can break down barriers, while boundary coalescing has mixed effects on migrants' mobility agency.

Theoretical contributions

The chapters on the first key issue concerning the underlying factors that explain CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions contribute to theory by showing the systemic character of quality of working conditions, and the role of stakeholders in this system. First, I showed that precarious quality of working conditions has a non-linear, systemic character, complementing previous theoretical frameworks that conceptualize marginalized workers' precarious work in input-output models (Allan et al., 2021 Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Duffy et al., 2016; Piore, 1979) and research on CEE migrant workers that follow cause and outcome logic (Alberti, 2014; Wagner & Hassel, 2016; Rogalewski, 2022). Combining all the findings from previous input/cause-output research into a feedback system explains the persistence of low quality working conditions of migrant workers over time. Next, I showed that both stakeholders embedded (temporary work agencies and user organizations) and external (employers' organizations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, the media and governmental actors) to the employment relationship play an important role in sustaining and challenging the dynamic system of low quality working conditions (Scuzzarrello and Moroşanu, 2023, Langley et al., 2019).

These chapters show, that quality of working conditions has a persistent character due to the dynamic complexity of the underlying system and due to stakeholders' boundary making activities aimed at sustaining the status quo. This implies, that (low) quality of working conditions cannot be attributed to a single factor (e.g., enforcement of labour regulation) or a single stakeholder (e.g., temporary work agencies), but that systemic understanding and collaboration between stakeholders is necessary to improve migrants' quality of working conditions.

Key issue 2: How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?

The second key issue of this dissertation concerned how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions. While ample research has been conducted on CEE migrants' experiences with quality of working conditions, this largely focused on the agriculture sector (Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Siegmann et al., 2022), on the experiences of Polish workers (White, 2016), and used cross-sectional interviews, which do not allow for contextualizing migrants' experience across time. I address the second key issue in studies presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

Concerning the key issue on how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions, I first explored how Hungarian migrant workers' frames of reference influence their perceptions of working conditions in Dutch warehousing (Chapter 4). I identified four trajectories that influence migrant workers' frame of reference: (1) from high skill to low-skill employment, (2) from low-skill to low-skill employment, (3) temporary work trajectories and (4) embedded trajectories. In addition to frames of reference identified in previous research, such as home-host country frame of reference and peer frame of reference (Clibborn, 2021; Könönen, 2019; Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003), I found that migrants also relied on transitional frames of references when trying to reduce the cognitive dissonance they experience when being subjected to precarious work. I found that temporary work trajectories prepare migrant workers to accept employment with precarious conditions if this offered a permanent employment contract.

A second study on the key issue on how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions is presented in Chapter 5, in which I aimed to understand how global crises influence the perceived employability of migrant workers in low-wage, precarious work. This chapter focused on the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis. I found that the COVID-19 crisis influenced migrant workers' perceived employability, when they perceived the crisis as a career shock. Interestingly, when the COVID-19 crisis was perceived by migrant workers as a positive career shock, it had a positive influence on their perceived employability.

The third study on the second key issue concerning how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions is addressed in Chapter 6, where I took an insider perspective to reflect on my embodied experiences with the ideal worker norm as a warehouse worker. I found that the ideal worker is masculine, able-bodied, physically healthy, Dutch-speaking, autonomous and customer-focused ideal. I discuss the role of privilege, escape and guilt in my embodied experiences and show the value of writing differently to gain an embodied understanding of precarious quality of working conditions in warehousing.

Theoretical contributions

I contribute to theory on the second key issue of this dissertation on how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions, by showing that migrants' experiences with quality of working conditions cannot be understood in isolation (De Vos

et al., 2020). Rather, these experiences are closely intertwined with migrants' life and work trajectories, access to resources and embodied identities. By integrating insights from both interviews and my personal narratives, I provide insights into the lived realities of CEE migrant workers, highlighting how their life and work trajectories, access to resources and embodied identities in the context of precarious work shape their experiences in the Dutch labor market. These chapters collectively show how precarious quality of working conditions decreases migrant workers' well-being and psycho-social labor market outcomes, but also points to types of coping mechanisms, resources, and behaviors in relation to ideal worker norms that can support migrants' mobility agency to secure better quality employment.

Key issue 3: What measures can institutions, organizations and migrant workers take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions?

The third key issue addressed in this dissertation concerns the measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions. I particularly aimed at identifying avenues for collaborative actions that stakeholders can take, in contrast with previous research, that largely focused on how individual stakeholders can improve the quality of working conditions (Alberti et al., 2013; Been & de Beer, 2022; Berntsen, 2016; Peró, 2020). I address this third key issue in Chapter 7 of the dissertation.

In the study in Chapter 7, I built on the theme that emerged from the analysis of the other chapters in the dissertation to understand migrants' quality of working conditions: temporary agency work. I identified stakeholder responses to HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work. I found three key HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work: (1) the flexible workforce tension, (2) the expectation alignment tension and (3) the package deal tension. When stakeholders were talking about each other (during the interviews), I found predominantly defensive responses to these tensions, whereas, when stakeholders were analyzing the situation together (during the focus groups), this prompted more proactive responses concerning the flexible workforce and the expectation alignment tension, whereas they remained defensive regarding the package deal tension. Regarding the first two tensions, I find potential for virtuous cycles of precariousness, where the quality of working conditions would improve. In the case of package deal tensions the participatory approach prompts vicious cycle of precariousness, potentially due to the strength of the positionality of stakeholders and/or the strong negative nature of the tension (Strumińska-Kutra & Scholl, 2022). This chapter shows that participatory approaches can prompt positive reactions from stakeholders to HRM tensions, contingent on the nature of the tension at hand.

Theoretical contributions

The value of this chapter lies in streamlining knowledge from previous chapters on quality of working conditions and migrants' experiences with these, and focusing on the

central determinant across these studies, temporary agency migrant work. This chapter shows that participatory approaches can trigger change for quality of working conditions through proactive responses from stakeholders. In contrast, it also shows that participatory approaches can lead to unexpected consequences for HRM tensions when these tensions are especially polarizing (Bartels & Friedman, 2022; Strumińska-Kutra & Scholl, 2022). This shows that participatory action research is not a one-size-fits-all solution to complex social problems, and that in case of HRM tensions where either the positionality of stakeholders or the negative nature of the tension is strong, the power-related risks of participatory action research need to be extensively assessed before engaging in a participatory action research project to build consensus for change (Strumińska-Kutra & Scholl, 2022).

The main findings and theoretical contributions for each of the key issues are included in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 *Main findings and theoretical contributions*

Chapter	Key issue	Research question	Main findings	Theoretical contributions
Chapter 2	*Key issue 1: Which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers?*	Which feedback loops explain the quality of working conditions of Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the food production chain of Western Europe?	CEE migrants quality of working conditions in Western Europe depends on and reinforces (1) quality of labour regulation and social protection (and therein collective action of migrants, migrants' level of job-to-job transitions and the agency of migrant workers), (2) the use of temporary work agencies (migrants' perceived good work ethic and migrants' length of stay in the host country) and (3) migrants' availability for precarious work (mobility power and power distance between migrants and employers).	I contribute to theory by showing the systemic character of quality of working conditions (Chapter 2) and the role of stakeholders in sustaining and challenging this system (Chapter 3). 1.
Chapter 3		How does multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work influence the mobility agency of CEE migrant workers in low-wage employment in The Netherlands?	Three boundaries define the space of migrants' mobility agency in the Netherlands: (1) hyperflexibility, (2) multiple dependencies and (3) voice. Stakeholders' boundary making has a negative influence, boundary arranging and buffering have a positive influence and boundary coalescing has a mixed effect on migrants' mobility agency when working through these boundaries.	

Table 8.1 *Main findings and theoretical contributions (continued)*

Chapter	Key issue	Research question	Main findings	Theoretical contributions
Chapter 4	*Key issue 2: How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?*	How do frames of reference influence Hungarian migrant workers' perception of working conditions in Dutch warehousing?	Four trajectories of frames of reference formation: (1) high-skill to low-skill, (2) low-skill to low-skill, (3) temporary and (4) embedded work trajectories. Migrants use their frames of reference to overcome the cognitive dissonance when they become subjected to precarious work.	I contribute to theory by showing how migrants' experiences with quality of working conditions are closely intertwined with migrants' life and work trajectories (Chapter 4), access to resources (Chapter 5) and embodied identities (Chapter 6).
Chapter 5		How do resources in times of crises affect the thought processes and actions of migrant workers considering their careers and perceived employability?	When the COVID-19 crisis coincided with migrant workers' resource gain spirals, the COVID-19 crisis was perceived by migrants as a positively-valenced career shock, with a positive impact on perceived employability. When the COVID-19 crisis coincided with migrant workers' resource loss cycles, migrants perceived it as a negatively-valenced career shock, with a negative impact on perceived employability. When COVID-19 did not co-occur with resource loss or resource gain spirals, migrants experienced resource stress.	

Table 8.1 *Main findings and theoretical contributions (continued)*

Chapter	Key issue	Research question	Main findings	Theoretical contributions
Chapter 6		How did I experience the management, peer-imposed and internalized ideal worker norms and how do I interpret my feelings and reactions to these experiences?	The ideal worker norm in the warehouse is characterized by the masculine, physically healthy, Dutch-speaking, autonomous and customer-focused ideal worker expectation. This ideal worker norm was imposed by peers and management and influenced my embodied experiences as a migrant woman researcher. Privilege, escape and guilt have a central role in these experiences.	
Chapter 7	*Key issue 3: What measures can institutions, organizations and migrant workers take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions?*	How do stakeholders in temporary agency migrant work in the Netherlands respond to HRM tensions in the triangular employment relationship?	Three key HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work: (1) the flexible workforce tension, (2) the expectation alignment tension and (3) the package deal tension. In interviews defensive responses from stakeholders, in focus groups proactive responses to former two, but defensive response to latter. Potential for virtuous (in case of former two) and vicious (latter) cycles through participatory approaches.	I contribute to theory by showing the potential of participatory approaches for improving quality of working conditions through positive responses from stakeholders. I also contribute by showing that participatory approaches can also bring unexpected consequences (Chapter 7).

8.3 PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of this dissertation point to the role of stakeholders in improving migrants' quality of working conditions. In particular, this dissertation shows that stakeholders at the institutional, organizational and worker-levels need to engage in action to achieve better quality of working conditions for migrant workers. On the institutional level, I outline action points for the government, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, employers organizations and media representatives. On the organizational level, I discuss collaborative actions for temporary work agencies and user organizations. On the worker level, I outline how migrants themselves can improve the quality of their working conditions.

Institutional level

First, on the institutional level, the government could strengthen the enforcement of labour regulations by implementing targeted labour inspections. Shortlisting organizations that have already violated the regulations in other aspects than quality of working conditions (e.g., tax violations), could improve the effectiveness of inspections. Furthermore, the government could prompt national health services to facilitate targeted social and psychological support for migrants. The dissertation shows that migrant workers often fall beyond the scope of social protection (e.g., not having access to homeless shelters) and waiting time for getting mental health support is lengthy. Installing mobile teams that provide both social and psychological support for migrant workers in their native language around the Netherlands could help migrant workers in need. Additionally, the dissertation shows that reporting precarious quality of working conditions comes with a high threshold for migrant workers. Migrants reporting these conditions fear retaliation from their employers and can only expect limited financial compensation for their grievances at court, if any. Setting up transparent channels that encourage migrant workers to report their precarious quality of working conditions could contribute to the improvement of quality of working conditions. The dissertation also shows that migrant workers often have limited information and understanding of their rights. Furthermore, responsibilities traditionally belonging to the employer dissipate between the user organization and temporary work agencies. The government and non-governmental organizations could work on establishing easily understandable, accessible information channels through which both migrant workers and employers can learn about their rights and responsibilities, such as mobile information points, websites or periodic information campaigns.

Next, the dissertation shows that the media has an important role in bringing attention to precarious quality of working conditions. While much of the current media attention focuses on low quality of working conditions, the media could promote dialogue and collaboration by highlighting the shared responsibility of the local government (municipalities), labour inspection, user organizations and temporary work agencies in addressing precarious quality of working conditions. Additionally, the dissertation shows that

migrant workers' quality of working conditions is closely tied to their housing. Local government has an important role in determining which organizations can establish operations within their municipalities (. Proactive planning for housing for migrant workers within the municipality when such organizations establish their operations could serve as preemptive action to address housing shortages.

The dissertation shows that migrant workers have low unionization rates. Trade unions could address migrants' degree of organization through adopting inclusive trade union practices. An example of this could be hiring trade union representatives who speak the native language of migrant workers or recruiting workers at their housing sites. Furthermore, trade unions have an important role in facilitating complaint mechanisms for migrant workers.

Last, employers organizations play an important role in quality of working conditions. The dissertation shows that employers organizations have been successful in combatting labour exploitation by sectoral self-regulation in the past, particularly regarding the separation of rental agreements and employment contracts. Employers organizations could further educate their members about good employership, and inform them about HR practices that could help reduce attrition and contribute to building a sustainable migrant workforce, thereby motivating organizations to improve the quality of working conditions. This dissertation also shows that language courses offered by employers often fail to serve their purpose of improving migrant workers' host country language skills. Employers organizations could formulate and communicate best practices regarding language courses to their members, or even centrally organize language courses for migrant workers employed by their members. Based on this dissertation, it is important that both migrant workers on temporary and permanent employment contracts have access to these language courses.

Organizational level

This dissertation demonstrates that temporary work agencies and user organizations have a shared responsibility in improving migrant workers' quality of working conditions. Temporary work agencies and user organizations can benefit from investing in the skill development of migrant workers – be that their language skills or skills that promote their employability both within and outside of the organization. Temporary work agencies and user organizations should engage in continuous employee listening by means of employee surveys and having regular performance conversations with migrant workers to detect improvement areas in their employment policy and practices. Ultimately, temporary work agencies and user organizations are central to ensuring the protection of migrant workers' health and safety at the workplace, and should actively engage in prevention programs to ensure that migrant workers can remain active in the labour market in the long-term.

Individual level

This dissertation brings attention to actions that migrant workers can take to improve their quality of working conditions. When migrant workers experience precarious working conditions, they should actively document these – by means of collecting pay slips, registering the hours they worked and by reading official documents before providing their signature. Based on this dissertation, contingent on improved frameworks for reporting precarious quality of working conditions, migrants should also actively pursue avenues to report their grievances to the authorities. One of the core findings of this dissertation is that language skills are essential for obtaining better quality employment. The active pursuit of opportunities to improve language skills – through digital applications, language courses offered by their employers or the local government, or language practice communities in local libraries – can help migrant workers to obtain higher quality of working conditions. Last, this dissertation shows that obtaining information about rights and responsibilities is central to understanding what are characteristics of precarious quality of working conditions in the Netherlands. Locating formal channels to obtain this information before and during working abroad is crucial for migrants' self-empowerment.

8.4 STRENGTHS

The findings from the studies in this dissertation strengthen theory development in three ways. First, our systems approach – particularly causal loop diagrams constructed based on systematic literature reviews – shows how the precarious working conditions of migrant workers is underpinned by feedback between individual, organizational and institutional factors. Such a feedback approach can be applied to other complex societal problems, such as poverty, homelessness, climate change or global hunger. Second, we show that precarious work is a structural issue in the low-wage labour market, and cannot be problematized as an isolated problem for a select group of migrants. I find that individual resources are not sufficient to help migrant workers improve their working conditions on their own, but that these need to align with structural change from stakeholders (e.g., enforcement of labour regulation). Last, this dissertation shows the value of action research in bringing together dispersed practitioner networks and creating consensus for change with them through participatory activities. I hope that our approach to focus not only on describing, but also improving quality of working conditions, will inspire researchers to adopt action research methods.

This dissertation has four central strengths related to the approach used. First, across the chapters, I adopted an interdisciplinary framework by integrating knowledge on quality of working conditions from the industrial relations, HRM, sociology of work and critical management studies disciplines. Second, I integrated insights from the worker, organizational and institutional levels of analysis. Third, I took on different roles across the chapters, including critical outsider, sympathetic outsider, participant in-betweener and outsider knowledge broker. Last, I showcased the value of qualitative methods in researching migrants' precarious work.

8.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its strengths, this dissertation also has limitations. First, the focus of inquiry was restricted to a specific migrant worker group (CEE migrant workers) economically active in specific sectors of the labour market (greenhouse horticulture and warehousing) focused on one country (the Netherlands) in one region (Western Europe). While this allows an in-depth understanding of quality of working conditions for these workers in this context, the findings discussed in the chapters are based on these particular contexts. When I map the factors contributing to (low) quality of working conditions, other sectors with migrant-dominated employment may have different feedback loops sustaining precarious work (Chapter 2). In addition to traditionally migrant work-sustained industries, such as construction, domestic work and road transport, I also call for mapping feedback on precarious working conditions in healthcare, a sector increasingly characterized by labour market shortages, and migrant labour in the Netherland. Furthermore, CEE migrants make up a specific subset of migrants who are simultaneously privileged (free movers, no entry obstacles) and vulnerable (often not recorded in the population register, 'invisible'). This situation is different for third-country nationals (non-EU citizens) who are increasingly employed in low-wage work. The system of visa sponsorships brings visibility to third-country nationals, but also increases their vulnerability through being tied to one employer. Future research could focus on the boundaries of their mobility agency, and stakeholders' boundary work (Chapter 3). Considering reports of third country nationals who engage in informal labor to sustain themselves in the host country (e.g., food delivery using borrowed accounts), future research could also focus on their self-directed boundary work to change their quality of working conditions (Chapter 3).

Second, while this dissertation has an overall focus on the role of having a CEE migration background (all chapters) and a partial focus on the role of gender (Chapter 6) and nationality (Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6), it does not account for within-group differences between CEE migrants. While this dissertation shows that many young men migrate to the Netherlands to do low-wage work, I also find that there is a substantial number of women and older workers who also engage in labour migration (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). I call for research to explore how workers with different characteristics experience their quality of working conditions. Here, it is important to take into account that some CEE migrant workers have access to more resources in the host country dependent on whether they belong to a majority group (e.g., such as Polish workers, and those speaking Slavic languages, whereas Hungarian workers are generally isolated due to speaking a language with a different origin). Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that some worker groups have structural disadvantages in their home country labour market, which can also contribute to their decision to migrate, and their subsequent experiences with working conditions (e.g., Roma and LGBTQ+ workers). This calls for future research on how some migrant workers' societal position in the home country makes them more vulnerable to precarious work than others. Last, this dissertation does not focus on how CEE migrant workers' characteristics interact with each other

in influencing (experiences with) their quality of working conditions. Future research would benefit from exploring the role of intersectionality in migrants' quality of working conditions, particularly incorporating aspects of age, gender and nationality.

Third, this dissertation does not account for the personal ecosystem of migrant workers. Therefore, I did not dedicate attention to what it means for individuals to leave parents, siblings, children and friends behind, or take them to the host country often resulting in gendered expectations for care responsibilities. Therefore, I call for future research to explore how migration affects CEE migrants' personal ecosystem in the host country. Furthermore, I advocate for research from the perspective of those in migrants' personal ecosystems – parents, siblings, children and friends, and inquiry aimed at understanding what it means for a home country society and local communities to lose abled bodied workers in villages, cities and what migrants' remittances – be those financial or knowledge-based – bring to these groups.

8.6 CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to explain and improve Central and Eastern European migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing sectors in the Netherlands. I accomplished this aim by addressing three key issues. First, I identified the underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions – highlighting the systemic character underlying quality of working conditions and the role of stakeholders in upholding or challenging this system. Second, I explored how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions by focusing on how their frames of reference influence their perceptions, by researching how global crises affect their perceived employability and by understanding embodied experiences through ethnographic fieldwork. Third, I identified measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of their working conditions through engaging them in participatory action research.

This dissertation shows that collaborative action is required from stakeholders to improve quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers in greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing in the Netherlands. These actions are not only required from traditional stakeholders in the employment relationship (e.g., temporary work agencies and user organizations) but also from those influencing the institutional framework (government, employers organizations, trade unions) and the broader host-country context within which migrant workers are embedded (non-governmental organizations, media representatives). Most importantly, this dissertation shows that migrant workers themselves should actively advocate for better quality of working conditions – be that through collective action, reporting precarious working conditions or simply supporting each other on the work floor. I conclude this dissertation by asserting that improving migrant workers' quality of working conditions is our moral imperative as citizens. To work towards a more just and inclusive society, we must all mobilize for fair labour practices for migrant workers.

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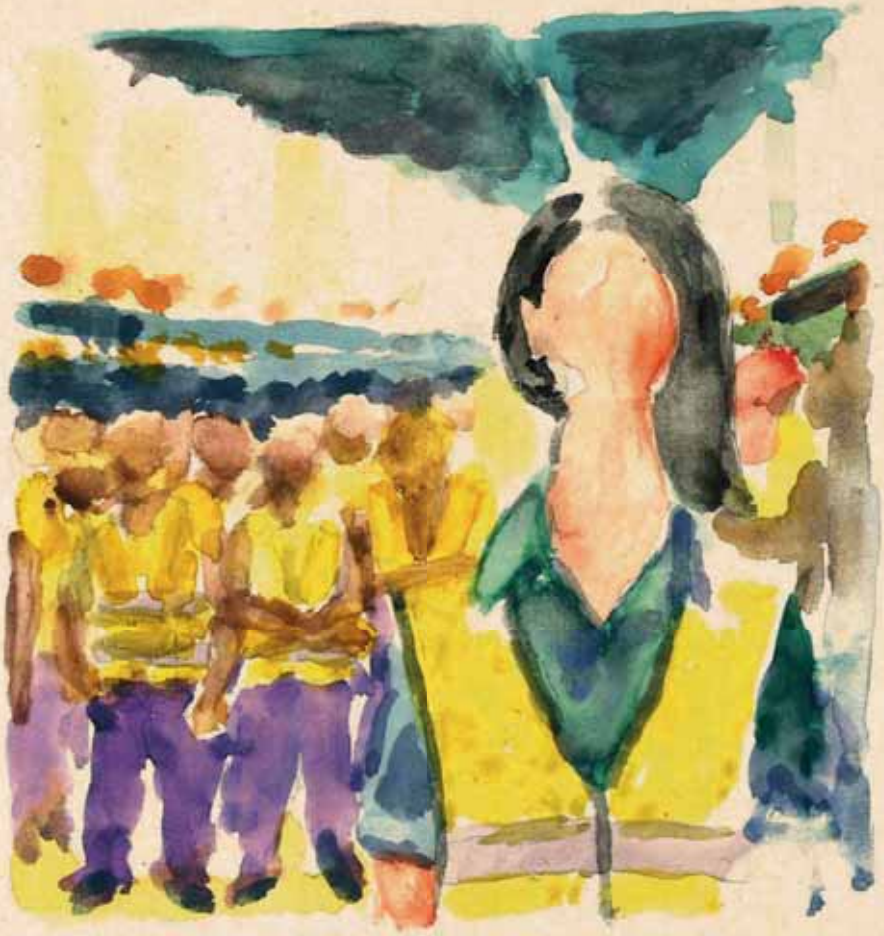

CHAPTER 9

Scientific Summary in English

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on explaining and improving Central and Eastern European migrant workers' quality of working conditions in the greenhouse-horticulture and warehousing sectors in the Netherlands. Migrant workers' precarious quality of working conditions is a persistent policy challenge in the increasingly flexible Dutch labour market (Cremers, 2023; Siegmann et al., 2022). Precarious work makes migrants' working lives insecure, unstable and uncertain, pushes the responsibility of the risks of the work to migrants, limits their capacity to voice their concerns, provides them with minimal social protection, and subjects them to inequal and unfair treatment at the workplace (Allan et al., 2021; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). Since the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, 2011 and 2013, Central and Eastern European (CEE) workers have grown to make up one of the largest migrant groups in the Netherlands (CBS, 2024, see Table 1). Enticing, migrant-targeted advertisement of work opportunities and cross-border hiring in historically precarious, low-wage industries has contributed to the growth of the CEE migrant worker group, specifically in the Dutch greenhouse horticulture and warehousing sectors (Acocella et al., 2024; Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Pijpers, 2010; Siegmann et al., 2022). The dissertation focuses on (1) identifying the underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers (Chapter 2, 3); (2) exploring how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions (Chapter 4, 5, 6); (3) and identifying measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of work in the Dutch greenhouse horticulture and warehousing sectors (Chapter 7). This dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrates cross-level analysis, critically assesses the role of the researcher in scholarship on migration, and showcases the value of qualitative research methods.

9.2 MAIN FINDINGS

Which underlying factors explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers?

The first key issue concerned the underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers. While previous theoretical frameworks addressed factors that contribute to marginalized workers' precarious work, these do not explain the persistence of precarious work, the role of non-traditional stakeholders in precarious work, and often lack contextual sensitivity (Allan et al., 2021 Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Duffy et al., 2016; Piore, 1979). I addressed the first key issue in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

To explore which underlying factors explain the persistence of low quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers, I mapped the feedback loops that explain CEE migrants' quality of working conditions in the Western European food production chain (agriculture, food processing, warehouse distribution and hospitality, Chapter 2). I found that (1) quality of labour regulation and social protection, (2) the use of temporary work

agencies and (3) migrants' availability for precarious work are central feedback loops explaining CEE migrants' quality of working conditions. Regarding quality of labour regulation and social protection, feedback loops around the collective action of migrants, migrants' level of job-to-job transitions and the agency of migrant workers were found to be especially influential. Concerning the use of temporary work agencies, feedback loops underlying migrants' perceived good work ethic and migrants' length of stay in the host country explained the quality of working conditions. Last, with regards to migrants' availability for precarious work, feedback loops around mobility barriers and the power distance between migrants and employers emerged to influence quality of working conditions.

In another study, I focused on the role migrant workers' mobility agency and the boundaries encompassing this agency as underlying factors that explain the quality of working conditions for CEE migrant workers (Chapter 3). I explored how multi-stakeholder configurational boundary work affects the mobility agency of CEE migrant workers in low-wage employment in the Netherlands. I identified three boundaries that define the space of migrants' mobility agency, namely (1) hyperflexibility, (2) multiple dependencies and (3) voice. Regarding hyperflexibility, I found that the perceived flexibility characterizes all spaces of migrants' agency to negotiate and challenge their precarious working and living conditions. Related to multiple dependencies, I found that migrant workers' rely on the temporary work agency for services beyond employment, such as transportation from the country of origin to the host country, housing, daily transportation to work and facilitating access to healthcare. Regarding voice, I described migrant workers' limited opportunities to articulate their concerns regarding working and living conditions. It emerged from the analysis that stakeholders engage in four types of boundary work through these boundaries. I found that boundary making has a negative influence on migrants mobility agency, building barriers to exercise such agency, whereas boundary arranging and boundary buffering has a positive influence that can break down barriers, while boundary coalescing has mixed effects on migrants' mobility agency.

How do CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions?

The second key issue of this dissertation concerned how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions. While ample research has been conducted on CEE migrants' experiences with quality of working conditions, this largely focused on the agriculture sector (Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Siegmann et al., 2022), on the experiences of Polish workers (White, 2016), and used cross-sectional interviews, which do not allow for contextualizing migrants' experience across time. I address the second key issue in studies presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

Concerning the key issue on how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions, I first explored how Hungarian migrant workers' frames of reference influence their perceptions of working conditions in Dutch warehousing (Chapter 4). I identified four trajectories that influence migrant workers' frame of reference: (1) from

high skill to low-skill employment, (2) from low-skill to low-skill employment, (3) temporary work trajectories and (4) embedded trajectories. In addition to frames of reference identified in previous research, such as home-host country frame of reference and peer frame of reference (Clibborn, 2021; Könönen, 2019; Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003), I found that migrants also relied on transitional frames of references when trying to reduce the cognitive dissonance they experience when being subjected to precarious work. I found that temporary work trajectories prepare migrant workers to accept employment with precarious conditions if this offered a permanent employment contract.

A second study on the key issue on how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions is presented in Chapter 5, in which I aimed to understand how global crises influence the perceived employability of migrant workers in low-wage, precarious work. This chapter focused on the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis. I found that the COVID-19 crisis influenced migrant workers' perceived employability, when they perceived the crisis as a career shock. Interestingly, when the COVID-19 crisis was perceived by migrant workers as a positive career shock, it had a positive influence on their perceived employability.

The third study on the second key issue concerning how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions is addressed in Chapter 6, where I took an insider perspective to reflect on my embodied experiences with the ideal worker norm as a warehouse worker. I found that the ideal worker is masculine, able-bodied, physically healthy, Dutch-speaking, autonomous and customer-focused ideal. I discuss the role of privilege, escape and guilt in my embodied experiences and show the value of writing differently to gain an embodied understanding of precarious quality of working conditions in warehousing.

What measures can institutions, organizations and migrant workers take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions?

The third key issue addressed in this dissertation concerns the measures that institutions, organizations and migrant workers can take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions. I particularly aimed at identifying avenues for collaborative actions that stakeholders can take, in contrast with previous research, that largely focused on how individual stakeholders can improve the quality of working conditions (Alberti et al., 2013; Been & de Beer, 2022; Berntsen, 2016; Peró, 2020). I address this third key issue in Chapter 7 of the dissertation.

In the study in Chapter 7, I built on the theme that emerged from the analysis of the other chapters in the dissertation to understand migrants' quality of working conditions: temporary agency work. I identified stakeholder responses to HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work. I found three key HRM tensions in temporary agency migrant work: (1) the flexible workforce tension, (2) the expectation alignment tension and (3) the package deal tension. When stakeholders were talking about each other (during the interviews), I found predominantly defensive responses to these tensions, whereas, when stakeholders were analyzing the situation together (during the focus

groups), this prompted more proactive responses concerning the flexible workforce and the expectation alignment tension, whereas they remained defensive regarding the package deal tension. Regarding the first two tensions, I find potential for virtuous cycles of precariousness, where the quality of working conditions would improve. In the case of package deal tensions the participatory approach prompts vicious cycle of precariousness, potentially due to the strength of the positionality of stakeholders and/or the strong negative nature of the tension (Strumińska-Kutra & Scholl, 2022). This chapter shows that participatory approaches can prompt positive reactions from stakeholders to HRM tensions, contingent on the nature of the tension at hand.

9.3 DISCUSSION

The discussion of this dissertation offers an overview of the theoretical contributions, limitations, future research and practical implications.

Theoretical contributions

The chapters on the first key issue concerning the underlying factors that explain CEE migrant workers' quality of working conditions contribute to theory by showing the systemic character of quality of working conditions, and the role of stakeholders in this system. These chapters show, that quality of working conditions has a persistent character due to the dynamic complexity of the underlying system and due to stakeholders' boundary making activities aimed at sustaining the status quo. This implies, that (low) quality of working conditions cannot be attributed to a single factor (e.g., enforcement of labour regulation) or a single stakeholder (e.g., temporary work agencies), but that systemic understanding and collaboration between stakeholders is necessary to improve migrants' quality of working conditions. I contribute to theory on the second key issue of this dissertation on how CEE migrant workers experience their quality of working conditions, by showing that migrants' experiences with quality of working conditions cannot be understood in isolation (De Vos et al., 2020). Rather, these experiences are closely intertwined with migrants' life and work trajectories, access to resources and embodied identities. Last, I add to theory on the third key issue of this dissertation on the measures that institutions, organization and migrant workers take to contribute to improving the quality of working conditions, by showing that participatory action research is not a one-size-fits-all solution to complex social problems, and that in case of HRM tensions where either the positionality of stakeholders or the negative nature of the tension is strong, the power-related risks of participatory action research need to be extensively assessed before engaging in a participatory action research project to build consensus for change (Strumińska-Kutra & Scholl, 2022).

Limitations and future research

The dissertation acknowledges limitations with regards to the limited scope of the focus of inquire, the lack of focus on within-group differences CEE migrant workers and the lack of incorporation of migrant workers' personal ecosystem. The dissertation calls for future research on the boundary work of third-country nationals (non-EU citizens), for future research on adopting intersectional approaches to understand within-group differences of CEE migrant workers and future research to map the personal ecosystem of CEE migrant workers.

Practical contributions

The findings of this dissertation point to the role of stakeholders in improving migrants' quality of working conditions. In particular, this dissertation shows that stakeholders at the institutional (government, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, employers organizations and media representatives), organizational (temporary work agencies and user organization) and worker-levels (migrant workers) need to engage in action to achieve better quality of working conditions for migrant workers.

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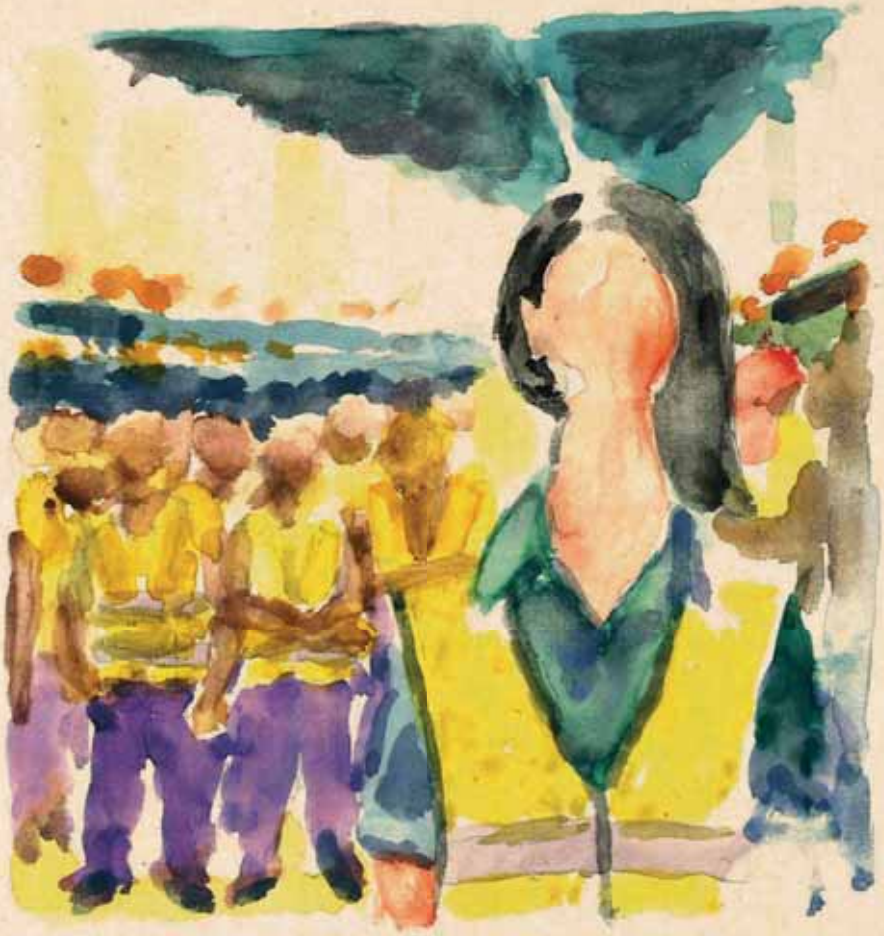


CHAPTER 10

Wetenschappelijke samenvatting in het Nederlands

10.1 INLEIDING

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de verklaringen voor en mogelijke verbeteringen van de arbeidsomstandigheden van Midden- en Oost-Europese (MOE) arbeidsmigranten in de Nederlandse glastuinbouw en distributiecentra. In de steeds flexibeler wordende Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt blijft de slechte kwaliteit van arbeidsomstandigheden onder arbeidsmigranten een hardnekkige beleidsuitdaging (Cremers, 2023; Siegmann et al., 2022). Ondernemingen verleggen risico's die inherent zijn aan ondernemen naar migranten, door hen instabiele contracten te bieden. Dit vergroot hun onzekerheid over werk en inkomen, beperkt hun mogelijkheden om misstanden aan te kaarten en maakt hen kwetsbaar voor ongelijke behandeling (Allan et al., 2021; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). Sinds de EU-uitbreidingen in 2004, 2011 en 2013 vormen MOE-werknemers een van de grootste migrantengroepen in Nederland (CBS, 2024, zie Tabel 1). Actieve werving in het buitenland voor werk in historisch instabiele sectoren, zoals de glastuinbouw en distributiecentra, hebben bijgedragen aan deze groei (Acocella et al., 2024; Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Pijpers, 2010; Siegmann et al., 2022).

Dit proefschrift richt zich op:

1. De factoren die de kwaliteit van arbeidsomstandigheden van MOE-arbeidsmigranten verklaren (Hoofdstukken 2 en 3).
2. De ervaringen van MOE arbeidsmigranten met hun arbeidsomstandigheden (Hoofdstukken 4, 5 en 6).
3. Maatregelen die instellingen, organisaties en arbeidsmigranten kunnen nemen om de kwaliteit van arbeid te verbeteren (Hoofdstuk 7).
4. Het onderzoek kent een interdisciplinaire benadering, integreert analyses op verschillende niveaus en reflecteert kritisch op de rol van de onderzoeker in migratiestudies. Het onderstreept daarnaast de waarde van kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden.

10.2 BELANGRIJKSTE BEVINDINGEN

Welke factoren verklaren de kwaliteit van arbeidsomstandigheden voor MOE-arbeidsmigranten?

De eerste onderzoeksvraag richt zich op de factoren die de kwaliteit van arbeidsomstandigheden van MOE-arbeidsmigranten verklaren. Eerdere theoretische modellen verklaren wel de onzekerheid van werk onder gemarginaliseerde groepen werknemers, maar bieden onvoldoende inzicht in de structurele aard van dit probleem en de rol van niet-traditionele belanghebbenden (Allan et al., 2021; Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Duffy et al., 2016; Piore, 1979).

In Hoofdstukken 2 en 3 worden drie kernfactoren geïdentificeerd die bijdragen aan de aanhoudende slechte kwaliteit van arbeidsomstandigheden in de West-Europese voedselproductieketen:

1. De regulering van arbeid en sociale bescherming.
2. Het gebruik van uitzendbureaus.
3. De beschikbaarheid van arbeidsmigranten voor flexibel en onzeker werk.

Feedbackloops binnen deze drie domeinen beïnvloeden de positie van migranten. De mogelijkheden tot collectieve actie van migranten, hun mobiliteit en arbeidsrechten spelen bijvoorbeeld een belangrijke rol in de mate van sociale bescherming. Uitzendbureaus beïnvloeden de arbeidsomstandigheden via de verwachtingen over het veronderstelde arbeidsethos MOE werknemers en de verblijfsduur van migranten. Tot slot bepalen barrières in mobiliteit (bijvoorbeeld door afhankelijkheid voor huisvesting) en machtsverschillen tussen werkgevers en migranten in hoeverre arbeidsmigranten in een kwetsbare positie blijven.

Daarnaast wordt in Hoofdstuk 3 onderzocht hoe migranten hun mobiliteit binnen de arbeidsmarkt ervaren en welke grenzen dit beïnvloeden. Er worden drie barrières geïdentificeerd:

1. Hyperflexibiliteit: De mate waarin werkgevers en uitzendbureaus de flexibiliteit van migranten afdwingen.
2. Meervoudige afhankelijkheid: Migranten zijn afhankelijk van uitzendbureaus voor niet alleen werk, maar ook huisvesting, vervoer en gezondheidszorg.
3. Beperkte voice: De mogelijkheid om misstanden aan te kaarten is gering.

De studie laat zien dat zogenoemde grensvorming (boundary work) door stakeholders een directe invloed heeft op de bewegingsruimte en rechten van arbeidsmigranten.

Hoe ervaren MOE-arbeidsmigranten hun arbeidsomstandigheden?

De tweede onderzoeksvraag richt zich op de perceptie van arbeidsmigranten over hun werkomstandigheden. Bestaand onderzoek focust vooral op de landbouwsector, Poolse werknemers en gebruikt cross-sectionele interviews, waardoor veranderingen in de tijd onderbelicht blijven (Kroon & Paauwe, 2014; Siegmann et al., 2022; White, 2016).

In Hoofdstuk 4 staat centraal hoe referentiekaders van Hongaarse migranten hun perceptie van werk in Nederlandse distributiecentra beïnvloedt. Er werden vier loopbaantrajecten geïdentificeerd die de referentiekaders beïnvloeden:

1. Van hoog- naar laaggeschoold werk
2. Van laag- naar laaggeschoold werk
3. Veelvuldige tijdelijke uitzendcontracten
4. Transitionele referentiekadervorming

Daarnaast wordt in Hoofdstuk 5 gekeken naar de impact van de COVID-19-pandemie op de employability van arbeidsmigranten. De crisis bleek zowel negatief als positief te werken: sommigen zagen het als een bedreiging voor hun loopbaan en leven, terwijl anderen het als een kans gebruikten om betere banen te vinden.

In Hoofdstuk 6 wordt een zelfreflexieve benadering gehanteerd om de "ideale werknemer" in magazijnen te analyseren. De getoonde ideale werknemer is mannelijk, gezond, Nederlandstalig, autonoom en klantgericht. Privileges en ontsnappingsmogelijkheden spelen een grote rol in hoe migranten zich in deze omgeving kunnen handhaven.

Welke maatregelen kunnen bijdragen aan betere arbeidsomstandigheden?

De derde onderzoeksvraag richt zich op maatregelen die belanghebbenden kunnen nemen om de arbeidsomstandigheden te verbeteren. In tegenstelling tot eerder onderzoek dat zich richt op individuele interventies, wordt hier de nadruk gelegd op gezamenlijke actie (Alberti et al., 2013; Been & de Beer, 2022; Berntsen, 2016; Peró, 2020).

In Hoofdstuk 7 worden drie HRM-spanningen in uitzendwerk geïdentificeerd:

1. Flexibele arbeidskrachten – Balans tussen flexibiliteit en stabiliteit.
2. Afstemming van verwachtingen – Verschillende percepties van werkvoorwaarden.
3. De package deal – Combinatie van werk, huisvesting en diensten.

Uit de analyse blijkt dat gezamenlijke reflectie via focusgroepen leidt tot proactieve oplossingen voor de eerste twee spanningen, terwijl de derde spanning (de package deal) tot vicieuze cirkels van onzekerheid voor arbeidsmigranten leidt.

10.3 DISCUSSIE

Theoretische bijdragen

Dit proefschrift laat zien dat arbeidsomstandigheden worden beïnvloed door complexe en dynamische systemen. Kwaliteitsverbetering vereist samenwerking tussen verschillende stakeholders en systemische verandering. Daarnaast toont het onderzoek aan dat arbeidsmigranten hun werkomstandigheden niet los kunnen zien van hun bredere levens- en werktrajecten.

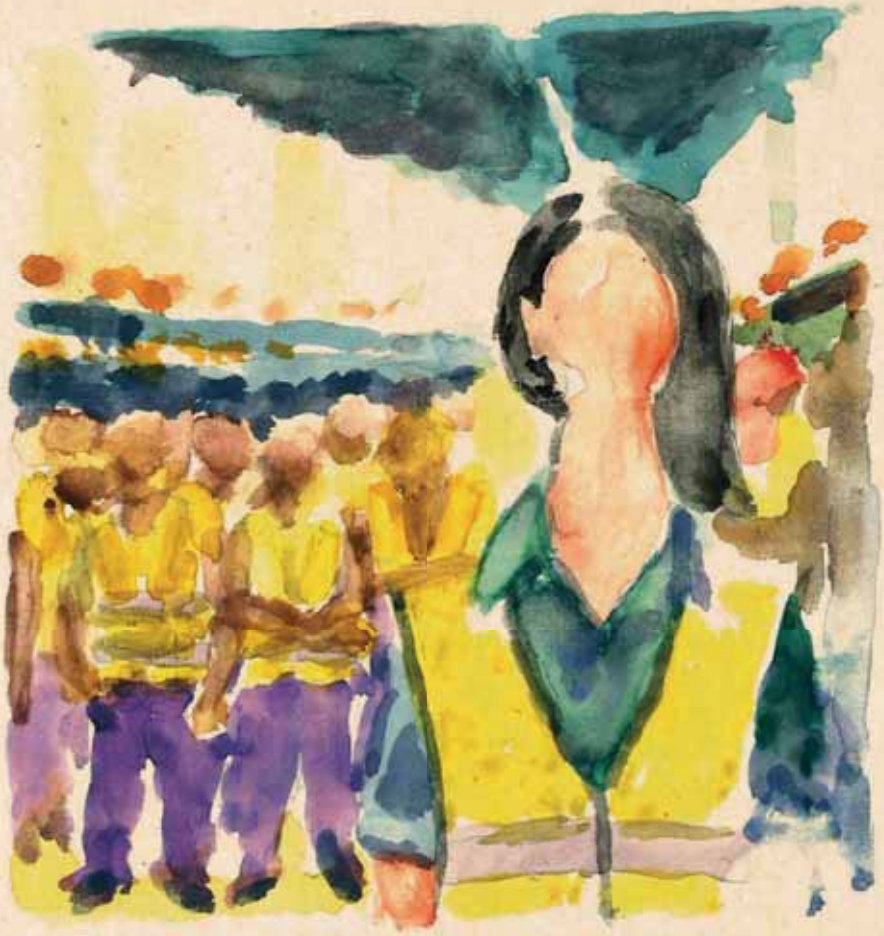
Beperkingen en toekomstig onderzoek

Dit proefschrift kent ook beperkingen, zoals de focus op MOE-migranten en het gebrek aan aandacht voor verschillen binnen deze groep. Toekomstig onderzoek zou zich moeten richten op:

1. De rol van derdelanders (niet-EU-ingezetenen).
2. Intersectionele benaderingen om diversiteit binnen MOE-migranten beter te begrijpen.
3. Het persoonlijke ecosysteem van arbeidsmigranten.

Implicaties voor de praktijk

Instellingen, organisaties en migranten zelf moeten actief bijdragen aan verbeteringen in de arbeidsomstandigheden. Dit vereist actie op institutioneel (overheid, NGO's, vakbonden), organisatorisch (uitzendbureaus, werkgevers) en individueel niveau (migranten).



CHAPTER 11

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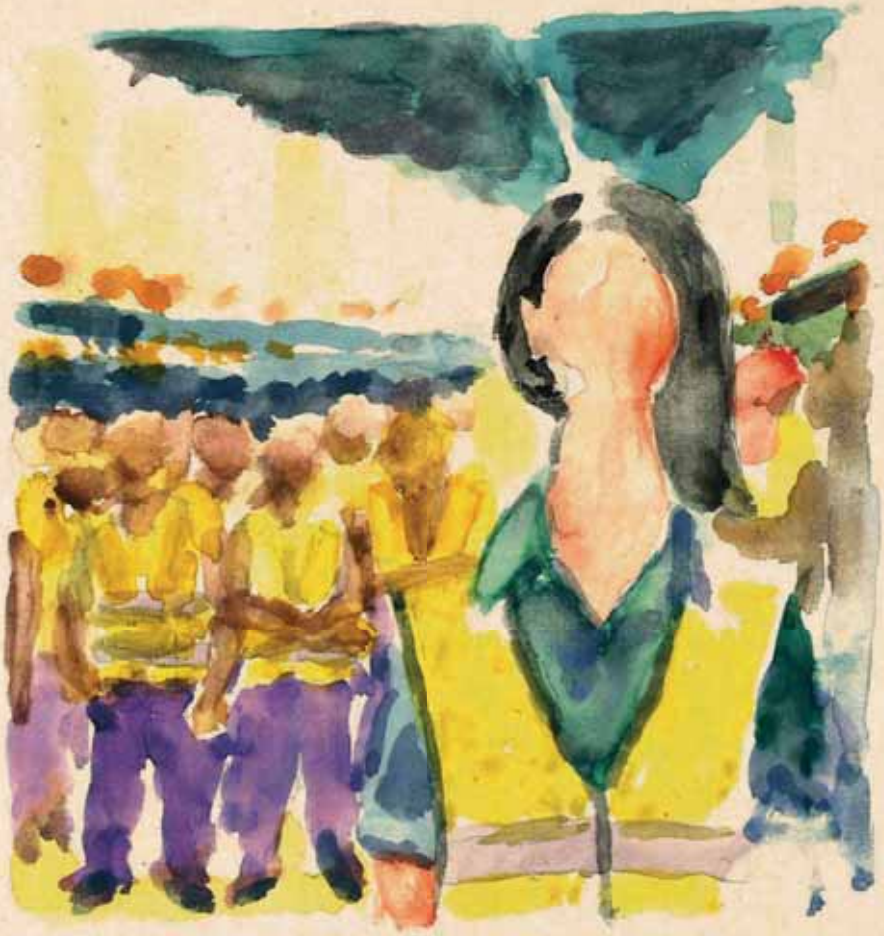

CHAPTER 12

Acknowledgements

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As I reach the end of the PhD journey, I find myself reflecting on the people who have been my greatest sources of strength, love, and encouragement. Being far away from home has never been easy, and the physical distance has often made this process even more challenging. Yet, despite the miles between us, my parents have always been there for me. The sacrifices they have made and the values they have instilled in me have shaped not only my academic journey but also the person I have become. I would like to thank my life-long friends, Nikita, Michaela, Szonja, Petra, Dylan, Bando, Gergő and Kata for their unwavering support over the years, and the many trips that we went on together that allowed me to disconnect from writing this dissertation, and enjoy life in the sun.

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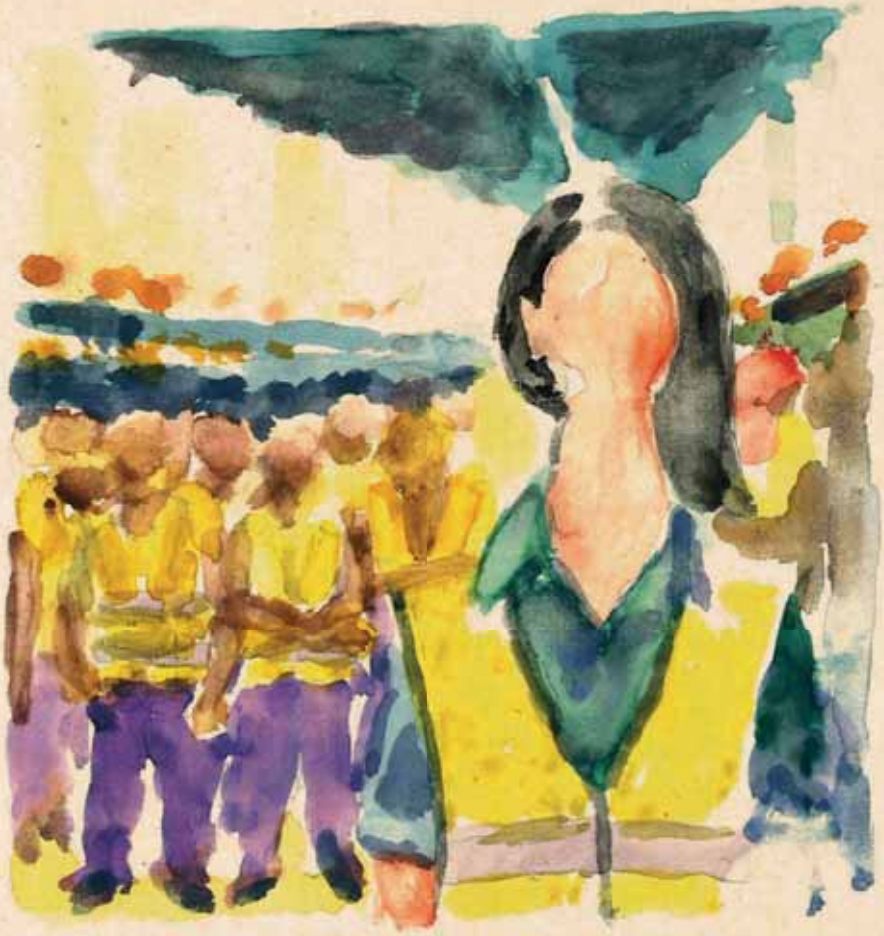
A PhD may be an individual pursuit, but no one undertakes it alone. I am profoundly grateful for the people who have lifted me up, reminded me of my strength, and filled this journey with warmth, laughter, and purpose. With this chapter now closed, I look forward to the road ahead, knowing that whatever comes next, I will carry the love and support of those who have made this possible. From the bottom of my heart—thank you.

12



CHAPTER 13

Appendix

CHAPTER 2: EUROPEAN MIGRANT WORKERS' QUALITY OF WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE FOOD PRODUCTION SECTOR: A CAUSAL LOOP DIAGRAM

Table 13.1 *Concept definitions*

	Concept	Definition
1.	Agency of migrant workers	Migrants' behavioural tactics and actions to improve their working conditions (e.g., resistance to managerial control)
2.	Collective action of migrant	Migrants' collective behavioural tactics and actions to improve their working conditions (e.g., strike).
3.	Conforming to perceived good work ethic	Migrants' compliance with the high standards of work expected from them.
4.	Cost competitiveness in the market	The level of competition between companies for cheap labour.
5.	Language skills	Migrants' ability to speak the host-country specific language.
6.	Length of stay in the host country	The amount of time migrant workers spend in the host country.
7.	Level of job-to-job transitions	The frequency of migrant workers' transition between different jobs.
8.	Multiple dependencies of migrants	The extent to which migrants are reliant on their employer beyond their income (e.g., transportation to work, accommodation).
9.	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards	The extent to which migrant workers perceive a gap between the labour standards of the home and host country (in the literature, often coined as dual frame of reference).
10.	Perceived good work ethic of migrants	The extent to which employers perceive CEE migrant workers as appropriate for low-skilled employment with low quality of working conditions.
11.	Power distance employers and migrants	The relative control that employers can exert over employees.
12.	Quality of labour regulation and social protection	The extent to which the legal framework safeguards migrant workers' rights and interests.
13.	Quality of working conditions	The extent to which there are ample employment opportunities, the intolerance of child labour and forced labour, adequate earnings and productive work, decent working hours, stability and security of work, a good balance between work and family life, fair treatment in employment, safe work, adequate social protection, workplace democracy and effective social dialogue and a conducive socio-economic context for decent work (Anker, 2003).

Table 13.1 *Concept definitions (continued)*

	Concept	Definition
14.	Turnover rates of migrant workers	The percentage of migrants who leave their employment over a set period of time either voluntarily or involuntarily.
15.	Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants	The extent to which organizations hire migrant workers through temporary work agencies.
16.	Migrants' availability to do precarious work	Migrant workers' readiness to accept low quality working conditions in their employment.
17.	Workplace conflict	The extent to which migrant workers experience unresolved disputes with fellow employees or with managers at their workplace.

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
1.	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants	If the agency of workers increases, the collective action of migrants increases.	+	• Alberti (2014) • Birke & Bluhm (2020) • Evans et al. (2007) • McCabe & Hamilton (2015) • McDowell et al. (2007) • Potter & Hamilton (2014) • Refslund (2021) • Rogalewski (2022) • Sporton (2013) • Voivozeanu (2019) • Wilkinson (2014)	(e.g., Birke and Bluhm, 2020; Potter and Hamilton, 2014)	"In the meantime, there are hints of resistance, even within the group of absolute newcomers. In the case we examined, some of the workers became angry because of what they perceived as unequal pay for identical activities. They discussed approaching the works council but refrained from doing so at the last moment. Many of them later attended a collective counselling meeting organised by local anti-racist groups with the help of a trade union official." (Birke & Bluhm, 2020: 46).
2.	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection	If the collective action of migrants increases, the quality of labour regulation and social protection increase.	+	• Baxter-Reid (2016) • Been & de Beer (2022) • Bengtsson (2013) • Berntsen (2015) • Caroli et al. (2010) • Cosma et al. (2020) • Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010) • Hardy et al. (2012) • Hassel et al. (2016) • Kuhlmann and Vogeler (2020) • Refslund (2012) • Refslund & Sippola (2020) • Rye (2018) • Wagner & Hassel (2016) • Wagner (2015)	(e.g., Hardy et al., 2012; Wagner and Hassel, 2016)	"The trade union Unite tried to negotiate minimum standards regarding working conditions and has successfully done so with one major national employer." (Hardy et al., 2012: 355).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
3.	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work.	If migrants conform more to perceived good work ethic, their availability to do precarious work increases.	+	• Fialkowska and Matuszczyk (2021) • Findlay et al. (2013) • Friberg and Midtboen (2013) • Green et al. (2016) • Hopkins (2017) • Lever and Milbourne (2017) • Lugosi et al. (2016) • Kaprans (2022) • Scott (2017) • Stachowski & Rasmussen, (2021)	(e.g., Fialkowska and Matuszczyk, 2021; Kaprans, 2022)	"Polish farmworkers pride themselves on being "good workers", valued for their strong work ethic. Their efforts to secure this competitive advantage in the labour market is crucial, especially when the migration regime has effectively limited other options for employment whilst migrants were trying to secure their employment for the forthcoming seasons. As "good workers", however, they contribute to their exploitation at the workplace." (Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, 2021: 7).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
4.	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants	If cost competitiveness in the market increases, organizations use temporary work agencies more often to hire migrants.	+	• Aasland & Tyldum (2016) • Caroli et al. (2010) • Evans et al. (2007) • Findlay & McCollum (2013) • Friberg & Midtboen (2019) • Green et al. (2016) • Hardy et al. (2012) • Hassel et al. (2016) • Hopkins (2014) • Hopkins et al. (2016) • Janta et al. (2011b) • Lloyd and James (2008) • McCollum & Findlay (2015) McCollum et al. (2013) • McKay and Markova (2010) • Pijpers (2010) • Refslund (2012) • Refslund (2016) • Refslund (2021) • Rogaly (2008) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010) • Scott (2013a) • Shubin & McCollum (2021) • Thompson et al. (2013) • Wagner & Refslund (2016).	(e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013)	"Indeed, evidence of delivering cost savings was regarded as a necessary factor in securing further contracts with the supermarkets. In addition, the unpredictability over the frequency and volume of supply meant that these companies were faced with the daily juggling act of matching output levels with staffing levels to ensure necessary output while simultaneously ensuring labour costs were kept to a minimum. All of the organisations were able to match these seemingly contradictory pressures through the use of temporary workers." (Thompson et al., 2013: 136).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
5.	Language skills – Collective action of migrants	If migrants' language skills improve, their collective action increases.	+	• Aasland & Tyldum (2016) • Been & de Beer (2022) • Berntsen (2015) • Dundon et al. (2007) • Fitzgerald & Hardy (2010) • Refslund (2021) • Rogalewski (2022)	(e.g., Fitzgerald and Hardy, 2010; Rogalewski, 2022)	"It was emphasized that language was a key barrier to participation in mainstream branches, and it took longer than expected to get Polish branch members proficient enough in English to move onto the established branch structure." (Fitzgerald & Hardy, 2010: 140).
6.	Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants	If migrants' language skills improve, the power distance between employers and migrants decreases.	–	• Andrzejewska & Rye (2012) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Davies (2019) • Friberg & Midtboen (2019) • Kroon & Paauwe (2014) • McDowell et al. (2008) • Potter & Hamilton (2014) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010)	(e.g., Friberg and Midtboen, 2019; McDowell et al., 2008)	"They generally had weaker bargaining power vis-a-vis employers due to a lack of language proficiency and relevant cultural and social capital and were more vulnerable for exploitative treatment from employers looking for cheap and docile labor." (Friberg & Midtboen, 2019: 339).
7.	Length of stay in the host country – Language skills	If migrants' length of stay in the host country increases, their language skills improve.	+	• Aasland & Tyldum (2016) • Alberti (2014) • Hopkins (2012)	(e.g., Aasland and Tyldum, 2016; Hopkins, 2012)	"Many seem to see their hotel jobs as an entry point into the Norwegian labour market, but do not expect to remain long in their current job. These hotel workers are less satisfed with the working conditions than the Swedes, perhaps because their lack of relevant language skills and unfamiliarity with local conditions mean access only to back-of-house positions for many." (Aasland & Tyldum, 2016: 99).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
8.	Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards	If migrants' length of stay in the host country increases, their perceived gap between home-host labour standards decreases.	–	• Aasland & Tyldum (2016) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Berntsen (2015) • Manolchev & Ivan (2022) • McCollum & Findlay (2015) • Moriarty et al. (2012) • Rye (2014) • Rye (2018) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010) • Thompson et al. (2013)	(e.g., Manolchev and Ivan, 2022; Rye, 2018)	"Life in Hitra/Frøya may be favourable to alternatives in the migrants' homelands; however, as their stays are prolonged, the frame of reference changes, and their evaluations may likewise change as well. This relates to what Nieswand (2006) refers to as the status paradox of migration. Wages are at frst seen by the migrant as generous, as they are multiples of those in the homeland. Later, if the migrant settles down in the host country and thus changes his/her frame of reference, the very same wages levels will be considered 'just normal' (Piore, 1979)." (Rye, 2018: 195).
9.	Level of job-to-job transitions – Collective action of migrant	If migrants' level of job-to-job transitions increase, their collective action decrease.	–	• Alberti (2014) • Arnholtz & Hansen (2013) • Mešić & Woolfson (2015) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010) • Wagner & Refslund (2016)	(e.g., Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010; Wagner and Refslund, 2016)	"Labour migration within agriculture is primarily about seasonal work. This strongly contributes to the 'dis-empowered satisfaction' in two ways. Firstly, the short-term character of the work makes it diffcult to establish collective action between the workers, as this usually requires interaction over time." (Rye & Andrzejewska, 2010: 50).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
10.	Multiple dependencies of migrants – Level of job-to-job transitions	If migrants' multiple dependencies increase, their level of job-to-job transitions decrease.	–	• Berntsen (2015) • Findlay & McCollum (2013) Kroon & Paauwe (2014) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010) • Voivozeanu (2019)	(e.g., Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Voivozeanu, 2019)	"The attraction of using SAWS operators is [legal dependency scheme] that Romanians and Bulgarians are limited to working in agriculture, whereas A8 nationals have been free to, and aspire to, work in other parts of the British labour market.The power of the standard labour recruitment firms stems therefore from the fact that UK farmers struggle, not only to recruit domestic UK labour, but also to retain A8 migrant labour." (Findlay & McCollum, 2013: 15).
11.	Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants	If migrants' multiple dependencies increase, the power distance between employers and migrants increase.	+	• Agar & Mancholev (2020) • Berntsen (2015) • Birke & Bluhm (2020) • Cosma et al. (2020) • Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, (2021) • Mešić & Woolfson (2015) • Potter & Hamilton (2014) • Rye (2014) • Scott (2017) • Szytniewski, & van der Haar (2022) • Wagner (2015) • Wilkinson (2014)	(e.g., Cosma et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2014)	"Employment is often tied to exorbitantly priced, multi-occupancy accommodation. Workers cannot leave that accommodation without also losing their employment." (Wilkinson, 2014: 503).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
12.	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work	If migrants' perceived gap between home-host labour standards increases, their availability to do precarious work will increase.	+	• Aasland & Tyldum (2016) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Collins et al. (2022) • Cosma et al. (2020) • Dundon et al. (2007) • Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, (2021) • Friberg & Midtboen (2019) • Green et al. (2016) • Irimias and Michalko (2016) • Jentsch et al. (2007) • Knight et al. (2014) • Lulle (2021) • Manolchev & Ivan (2022) • McDowell et al. (2009) • Refslund & Sippola (2020) • Rogaly (2008) • Rydzik & Anitha (2020) • Rye (2014) • Rye (2018) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010) • Scott (2013a) • Scott (2013b) • Scott & Brindley (2012) • Voivozeanu (2019)	(e.g., Collins et al., 2022; Voivozeanu, 2019)	"Low wages and precarious working conditions in the country of origin make workers determined to accept posted employment, even when it involves a number of risks (such as not receiving wages or as remaining in employment only for a short while). For them, whose options in the country of origin are precarious as well, being posted abroad becomes desirable when considering the significantly higher earnings involved." (Voivozeanu, 2019: 93).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
13.	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic	If the perceived good work ethic of migrants increases, migrants conform more to this increased good work ethic.	+	• Barnard et al. (2018) • Baum et al. (2007) • Baxter-Reid (2016) • Caroli et al. (2020) • Collins et al. (2022) • Fialkowska & Matuszczyk (2021) • Findlay et al. (2013) • Findlay & McCollum (2013) • Friberg & Midtboen (2019) • Green et al. (2016) • Hopkins (2011) • Hopkins (2014) • Jentsch et al. (2007) • Jones (2014) • Kaprans (2022) • Lever & Milbourne (2014) • Lever & Milbourne (2017) • Lyon & Sulcova (2009) • Markova et al. (2016) • McCollum & Findlay (2015) • McCollum et al. (2013) • McDowell et al. (2007) • Milbourne & Coulson (2021) • Moriarty et al. (2012) • Rogaly (2008) • Rydzik & Anitha (2020) • Scott (2013b) • Scott (2013c)	(e.g., Friberg and Midtboen, 2019; Jones, 2014)	"According to employers interviewed in this study, immigrants possessed all the characteristics that native-born workers were presumed to lack. Immigrants were not just perceived as hard workers with a superior morale but were described as willing to accept the demands for flexibility required in the lower tiers of both industries." (Friberg & Midtboen, 2019: 337).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
				• Scott (2017) • Shubin & McCollum (2021) • Theunissen et al. (2022) • Thompson et al. (2013) • Wills et al. (2009) • Wright (2007)		
14.	Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers	If the power distance between employers and migrants increases, the agency of migrant workers decreases.	–	• Agar & Mancholev (2020) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Baxter-Reid (2016) • Birke & Bluhm (2020) • Devine et al. (2007) • Dundon et al. (2007) • Hopkins (2011) • Kaprans (2022) • Lever & Milbourne (2017) • McDowell et al. (2007) • Piso (2016) • Prause (2021) • Rogaly & Qureshi (2017) • Rydzik & Anitha (2020) • Schweyher (2021) • Stachowski & Rasmussen (2021)	(e.g., Barnard et al., 2018; McDowell et al., 2007)	"Although an English-only rule was enforced at BI when workers were being issued instructions in the office and in inter- actions with guests, it is clear that own-language use is an issue in the control and regulation of this labor force. (…) The use of their own languages is a way for the workers to evade disciplinary control, to share jokes, and to make remarks about both managers and guests and thus is a significant part of their resistance to managerial interpellation and surveillance, even though it may also create divisions between workers." (McDowell et al., 2007: 16-17).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
15.	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market	If the quality of labour regulation and social protection improves, the cost competitiveness in the market decreases.	–	• Caroli et al. (2010) • Green et al. (2016) • Hassel et al. (2016) • McCollum & Findlay (2015) • Mense-Petermann (2018) • Milbourne & Coulson (2021) • Prause (2021) • Schneider & Gugganig (2021) • Schweyher (2021) • Wagner & Hassel (2016) • Wagner & Refslund (2016)	(e.g., Caroli et al., 2010; Schweyher, 2021)	"French companies have been encouraged to look beyond the 'cheap labour' route and have developed a range of alternative approaches. In the UK, firms face very limited constraints, such that their 'logic' has been to make ever greater use of a cheap, pliant and insecure workforce." (Caroli et al., 2010: 307).
16.	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions	If the quality of labour regulation and social protection increases, the quality of working conditions increases.	+	• Agar & Mancholev (2020) • Arnholtz & Hansen (2013) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Biering et al. (2017) • Birke & Bluhm (2020) • Caroli et al. (2020) • Currie (2007) • Hardy et al. (2012) • Kuhlmann & Vogeler (2020) • Refslund (2016) • Rogaly (2008) • Ruhs (2017) • Schweyher (2021) • Stenning & Dawley (2009)	(e.g., Refslund, 2016; Rogaly, 2008)	"The case studies show how some employers use labour migration to push towards weaker collective bargaining and lower wages by employing EU8/2-workers below the wage level set in collective agreements (cf. Dølvik, 2013b; Friberg et al., 2014). Overall this leads to deteriorating working and wage conditions with workers experiencing pressure on wage levels, working hours and conditions e.g. work pace and planning of hours (cf. Stuvøy and Andersen, 2013: 257), and could potentially result in future labour market segmentation as well as significant replacement of low-skilled natives in the affected sectors." (Refslund, 2016: 614).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
17.	Quality of working conditions – Language skills	If the quality of working conditions increases, migrants' language skills increase.	+	• Aure et al. (2018) • Fialkowska & Matuszczyk, (2021) • Hopkins (2011) • Janta & Ladkin (2009) • Janta et al. (2011a) • Janta et al. (2012) • Potter & Hamilton (2014) • Sporton (2013) • Stachowski (2020) • Szytniewski & van der Haar (2022)	(e.g., Hopkins, 2011; Szytniewski and van der Haar, 2022)	"Some CEE workers were struggling to improve their English language skills, as they were being excluded from social groups by the directly employed workers, and were sometimes put on harder jobs as a group, rather than mixing with English- speaking workers and having a chance to practise speaking in English, further denying them the chance to move up the formal hierarchy, or to get a directly employed job." (Hopkins, 2011: 496).
18	Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants	If the quality of working conditions increases, migrants' multiple dependencies decrease.	–	• Baxter-Reid (2016) • Berntsen (2015) • Birke & Bluhm (2020) • Cosma et al. (2020) • Davies (2019) • Manolova (2022) • Mesic & Woolfson (2015) • Potter & Hamilton (2014) • Rogaly (2008) • Rogaly & Qureshi (2017) • Schneider & Gugganig (2021) • Scott (2017) • Szytniewski, & van der Haar (2022) • Theunissen et al. (2022) • Voivozeanu (2019) • Wilkinson (2014)	(e.g., Berntsen, 2015; Theunissen et al., 2022)	"Although some might prefer to rent privately, it is often impossible with the precarious agency contracts on which they work, as they do not have a guaranteed weekly income. Also, when migrants do decide to rent by themselves, some mentioned experiencing discriminatory or xenophobic attitudes from potential landlords. The intertwined housing and work situation characterizing posted migrant employment reinforces dependencies among migrant workers, as they lose their accommodation when they leave a particular employer." (Berntsen, 2015: 386).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
19.	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates	If the quality of working conditions increases, migrants' turnover rates decrease.	–	• Alberti (2014) • Andrzejewska & Rye (2012) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Datta et al. (2007) • Devine et al. (2007) • Hopkins et al. (2016) • Janta (2011) • Janta & Ladkin (2009) • Kroon & Paauwe (2014) • Rydzik et al. (2012) • Rye (2014) • Stenbacka (2019) • Szytniewski, & van der Haar (2022) • Tannock (2015) • Theunissen et al. (2022)	(e.g., Janta, 2011; Tannock, 2015)	"Several respondents who left the sector explained their reasons for leaving by including details such as dissatisfaction with the job because of racism, mistreatment from the management or just low pay." (Janta, 2011: 813).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
20.	Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict	If the quality of working conditions increases, workplace conflict decreases.	–	• Aure et al. (2018) • Agar & Manolchev (2020) • Barnard et al. (2018) • Baxter-Reid (2016) • Caroli et al. (2010) • Devine et al. (2007) • Dundon et al. (2007) • Evans et al. (2007) • Hopkins (2011) • Hopkins (2012) • Hopkins (2017) • Kaprans (2022) • Knight et al. (2014) • Lever & Milbourne (2014) • Lever & Milbourne (2017) • Lugosi et al. (2016) • Manolchev & Ivan (2022) • McCabe & Hamilton (2015) • McDowell et al. (2007) • McDowell et al (2009) • Parutis (2014) • Refslund & Sippola (2020) • Rogaly & Qureshi (2017) • Rye & Andrzejewska (2010) • Sporton (2013) • Stachowski (2020) • Stachowski & Rasmussen, (2021) • Tannock (2015) • Wilkinson (2014) • Wright (2007)	(e.g., Agar and Manolchev, 2020; Sporton, 2013)	"Anatoli explained that the atmosphere at Greenleaf was very competitive because not everyone was paid the same rate. This caused migrants to keep to themselves, and Anatoli was unwilling to even speak to other Lithuanians for fear of being asked how much he earns. He spoke good English yet had recently decided to stop volunteering as an interpreter between Greenleaf and newcomers, after being accused by fellow Lithuanians that he was 'spying on them for the Boss'" (Agar & Manolchev, 2020: 262).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
21	Turnover rates of migrant workers – Level of job-to-job transitions	If the turnover rates of migrant workers increase, their job-to-job transitions increase.	+	• Hassel et al. (2016) • Janta (2011) • Moroşanu et al. (2021) • Parutis (2014) • Theunissen et al. (2022)	(e.g., Hassel et al., 2016; Moroşanu et al., 2021)	"For example, Danish Crown laid off 632 workers in 2012, and one year later, 95 per cent of the workers had found a new job, had begun retraining for a new profession or had retired." (Hassel et al., 2016: 1231).
22.	Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country	If organizations use temporary work agencies more often to hire migrants, migrants' length of stay in the host country decreases.	–	• Aasland & Tyldum (2016) • Andrzejewska & Rye (2012) • Agar & Mancholev (2020) • Baum et al. (2007) • Caroli et al. (2010) • Findlay & McCollum (2013) • Jentsch et al. (2007) • Lever & Milbourne (2017) • McDowell et al. (2007) • McKay & Markova (2010) • Pijpers (2010) • Scott (2017) • Sporton (2013)	(e.g., Pijpers, 2010; Scott, 2017)	"The lengths of these contracts, usually two to three months, allow people to alternate their stays in the Netherlands with short periods of return - a week or several weeks - to Poland. The design of the contracts is such that workers can stay with the international employment agency for many years." (Pijpers, 2010: 1086).

Table 13.2 *Support for Mechanisms of Quality of Working Conditions in the Literature (continued)*

	Link	Explanation	Valence of link	Support	Support as indicated in manuscript	Example of supporting evidence
23.	Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants	If organizations use temporary work agencies more often to hire migrants, the perceptions of migrants' good work ethic increase.	+	• Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, (2021) • Findlay et al. (2013) • Hopkins (2011) • Jones (2014) • Lever & Milbourne (2014) • McCollum et al. (2013) • McDowell et al. (2009) • Szytniewski & van der Haar (2022).	(e.g., Felbo-Kolding and Leschke, 2021; Lever and Milbourne, 2014)	"While previous studies have indirectly suggested that employers view all CEE migrants as a homogeneous group, this study indicates that employers and labour market intermediaries may have a more nuanced hiring hierarchy, distinguishing between the supposed suitability of different CEE groups for different jobs." (Felbo-Kolding & Leschke, 2021: 15).
24.	Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions	If migrants' availability to do precarious work increases, the quality of working conditions decreases.	–	• Currie (2007) • Edwards et al. (2009) • Green et al. (2016) • Guldenmund et al. (2013) • Hopkins (2017) • Manolchev & Ivan (2022) • Shubin & McCollum (2021)	(e.g., Edwards et al., 2009; Shubin and McCollum, 2021)	"Workers had a degree of space in the work process, and they expressed satisfaction with training. This situation reflected limited Taylorisation of work and also the closeness of working relationships. An irony, however, is that relative contentment with low-wage and low-skill jobs contributed to their continued reproduction." (Edwards et al., 2009: 54).
25.	Workplace conflict – Collective action of migrant	If workplace conflict increases, the collective action of migrants decreases.	–	• Hopkins (2012) • Lever & Milbourne (2014) • McDowell et al. (2007) • Refslund & Sippola (2020).	(e.g., McDowell et al., 2007; Refslund and Sippola, 2020)	"Because workers' interaction is an important factor in the emergence of robust collectivism among migrant workers, segregation and inter-group competition is often actively imposed by employers to prevent workers from interacting." (Refslund & Sippola, 2020: 1017).

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
1.	Aasland & Tyldum (2016)	Opportunities and risks among migrant workers in the hotel industry in Oslo	*Nordic Journal of Migration Research*	Quantitative
2.	Agar & Manolchev (2020)	Migrant labour as space: Rhythmanalysing the agri-food industry	*Organization*	Qualitative
3.	Alberti (2014)	Mobility strategies, 'mobility differentials' and 'transnational exit': the experiences of precarious migrants in London's hospitality jobs	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	Norway	Working conditions; careers; labour market segmentation; labour market segregation	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Language skills – Collective action of migrants Length of stay in the host country – Language skills Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Agriculture, food processing, Hospitality	United Kingdom	Spaces of migrant labour; rhythmanalysis; researcher positionality	Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Occupational and geographical mobility; mobility power; transnational exit power	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Length of stay in the host country – Language skills Level of job-to-job transitions – Collective action of migrant Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
4.	Andrzejewska & Rye (2012)	Lost in transnational space? Migrant farm workers in rural districts	*Mobilities*	Mixed method
5.	Arnholtz & Hansen (2013)	Labour market specific institutions and the working conditions of labour migrants: The case of Polish migrant labour in the Danish labour market	*Economic and Industrial Democracy*	Quantitative
6.	Aure et al. (2018)	Will migrant workers rescue rural regions? Challenges of creating stability through mobility	*Journal of Rural Studies*	Qualitative
7.	Aziz (2015	Female migrants' work trajectories: Polish women in the UK labour market	*Central and Eastern European Migration Review*	Mixed method

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture	Norway	Circular migration; transnationalism; social capital; social context; space	Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Hospitality	Denmark	Labour market institutions; labour market segmentation; collective bargaining; individual characteristics	Level of job-to-job transitions – Collective action of migrant Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions
Food processing	Norway	Integration; segregation; mobility; engagement with landscape; stability	Quality of working conditions – Language skills Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Gender regimes; family obligations; work trajectories; challenging gender expectations; career progression	No support for links in final model.

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
8.	Barnard et al. (2018)	Beyond Employment Tribunals: Enforcement of Employment Rights by EU-8 Migrant Workers	*Industrial Law Journal*	Qualitative
9.	Baum et al. (2007)	Cultural diversity in hospitality work	*Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*	Qualitative
10.	Baxter-Reid (2016)	Buying into the 'good worker' rhetoric or being as good as they need to be? The effort bargaining process of new migrant workers	*Human Resource Management Journal*	Qualitative
11.	Been & de Beer (2022)	Combatting exploitation of migrant temporary agency workers through sectoral self-regulation in the UK and the Netherlands	*European Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing, agriculture	United Kingdom	Employment rights; employment tribunals; constraining and enabling factors; right to equal treatment	Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Development; promotion opportunities; experiences; integration; aspirations	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Human resource management; buying into the 'good worker' rhetoric; labour power;	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Not explicit	United Kingdom, Netherlands	Sectoral self-regulation; trade unions; employer's organization; precarious work; exploitation	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Language skills – Collective action of migrants

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
12.	Bengtsson (2013)	Swedish trade unions and European Union migrant workers	*Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative
13.	Berntsen (2015)	Precarious posted worlds: Posted migrant workers in the Dutch construction and meat processing industries	*International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*	Qualitative
14.	Biering et al. (2017)	Work injuries among migrant workers in Denmark	*Occupational and Environmental Medicine*	Quantitative
15.	Birke & Bluhm (2020)	Migrant Labour and Workers' Struggles: The German Meatpacking Industry as Contested Terrain	*Global Labour Journal*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Warehouse distribution	Sweden	Trade union strategies; trade union revitalization; organizing strategy	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection
Food processing	Netherlands	Posting of workers; socio-economic precariousness;	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Language skills – Collective action of migrants Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Multiple dependencies of migrants – Level of job-to-job transitions Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants
Agriculture; Hospitality	Denmark	Work injuries; older migrants; recent migrants;	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions
Food processing, warehouse distribution	Germany	Labour process; exploitation, resistance, collective action; power	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
16.	Caroli et al. (2010)	Delivering flexibility: contrasting patterns in the French and the UK food processing industry	*British Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative
17.	Collins et al. (2022)	'Working while feeling awful is normal': One Roma's experience of presenteeism.	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
18.	Cosma et al. (2020)	The Human Cost of Fresh Food: Romanian Workers and Germany's Food Supply Chains	*Review of Agrarian Studies*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	France; United Kingdom	Competitive pressures; institutional framework; labour market institutions; numerical flexibility; internal functional flexibility	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Agriculture	United Kingdom	Sickness; presenteeism; sick pay; Covid-19	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic
Agriculture	Germany	Covid-19; structural disempowerment; visibility; collective action; media; legislation; seasonal labour; class solidarity; dual frames of reference	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
19.	Currie (2007)	De-skilled and devalued: The labour market experience of Polish migrants in the UK following EU enlargement.	*International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*	Qualitative
20.	Datta et al. (2007)	From coping strategies to tactics: London's low-pay economy and migrant labour	*British Journal of Industrial Relations*	Mixed method
21.	Davies (2019)	From severe to routine labour exploitation: The case of migrant workers in the UK food industry	*Criminology & Criminal Justice*	Qualitative
22.	Devine et al. (2007)	Cultural diversity in hospitality work: the Northern Ireland experience	*The International Journal of Human Resource Management*	Mixed method
23.	Dundon et al. (2007)	Bitten by the Celtic Tiger: Immigrant Workers and Industrial Relations in the New Glocalized Ireland	*Economic and Industrial Democracy*	Qualitative
24.	Edwards et al. (2009)	Managing low-skill workers: a study of small UK food manufacturing firms	*Human Resource Management Journal*	Mixed method

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Deskilling; qualifications; upward occupational mobility; experiences; legal regime; gender dimension	Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions
Hospitality; food processing	United Kingdom	Coping strategies; tactics; migrant division of labour; remittances; gender roles; social exclusion	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates
Food processing; warehouse distribution; hospitality	United Kingdom	Labour exploitation; labour market intermediaries; housing; non-standard employment; workplace pressure; health and safety; low pay	Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Cultural diversity; demographic characteristics; social integration; human resources;	Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Hospitality	Ireland	Trade unions; exclusion; glocalization; industrial relations; work permit;	Language skills – Collective action of migrants Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Food processing	United Kingdom	Low-wage employment; low-skills equilibrium; work intensification; Taylorisation; small firms; training; work pressure; control	Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
25.	Evans et al. (2007)	'Subcontracting by stealth' in London's hotels: impacts and implications for labour organising	*Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society*	Mixed method
26.	Felbo-Kolding & Leschke (2021)	Wage Differences between Polish and Romanian Intra-EU Migrants in a Flexi-Secure Labour Market: An Over-Time Perspective	*Work, Employment and Society*	Quantitative
27.	Fiałkowska & Matuszczyk (2021)	Safe and fruitful? Structural vulnerabilities in the experience of seasonal migrant workers in agriculture in Germany and Poland	*Safety Science*	Qualitative
28.	Findlay & McCollum (2013)	Recruitment and employment regimes: Migrant labour channels in the UK's rural agribusiness sector, from accession to recession	*Journal of Rural Studies*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Subcontracting; labour organizing; temporary agency work; piece rate; living wage campaign	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants
Agriculture; hospitality	Denmark	Sectoral segmentation; categorical stereotyping; co-ethnic social networks; language education; qualifications; long-term wage developments	Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants
Agriculture	Germany	Seasonal workers; occupational health and safety; structural vulnerability; agency; self-exploitation	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of working conditions – Language skills
Agriculture; food processing; hospitality	United Kingdom	Recruitment; employers; labour recruiters; labour migration channels; spatial impacts	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Level of job-to-job transitions Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
29.	Findlay et al. (2013)	The role of recruitment agencies in imagining and producing the 'good' migrant	*Social & Cultural Geography*	Qualitative
30.	Fitzgerald & Hardy (2010)	'Thinking outside the box'? Trade union organizing strategies and Polish migrant workers in the United Kingdom	*British Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative
31.	Friberg & Midtbøen (2019)	The making of immigrant niches in an affluent welfare state	*International Migration Review*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Ideal migrant worker; recruitment agencies; spatially selective recruitment; bodily 'goodness';	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants
Agriculture; food processing	United Kingdom	Trade union organizing; inclusion; whiteness; local networks; international networks	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Language skills – Collective action of migrants
Food processing; hospitality	Norway	Immigrant niches; structure of employment; natives unwilling; natives unwanted ; social status	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
32.	Green et al. (2016)	Fuelling displacement and labour market segmentation in low-skilled jobs? Insights from a local study of migrant and student employment	*Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*	Mixed method
33.	Guldenmund et al. (2013)	An exploratory study of migrant workers and safety in three European countries	*Safety Science*	Mixed method
34.	Hardy et al. (2012)	Trade union responses to migrant workers from the 'new Europe': A three sector comparison in the UK, Norway and Germany	*European Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Low qualifications; flexibility; dual frames of reference; labour market segmentation; compartmentalization; recession;	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions
Agriculture	Denmark; United Kingdom; Netherlands	Safety; registration; language skills	Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions
Food processing	United Kingdom; Norway; Germany	Trade union strategies; temporary work agencies; collective agreements; statutory minimum wage	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
35.	Hassel et al. (2016)	Winning the battle or losing the war: the impact of European integration on labour market institutions in Germany and Denmark	*Journal of European Public Policy*	Qualitative
36.	Hopkins (2011)	Informal hierarchies among workers in low-skill food manufacturing jobs	*Industrial Relations Journal*	Qualitative
37.	Hopkins (2012)	Inclusion of a diverse workforce in the UK: The case of the EU expansion	*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*	Qualitative
38.	Hopkins (2014)	Explaining variations in absence rates: Temporary and agency workers in the food manufacturing sector	*Human Resource Management Journal*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	Germany; Denmark	EU liberalization; trade unions; dualization; union solidarity; outsourced work	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Turnover rates of migrant workers – Level of job-to-job transitions Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Food processing	United Kingdom	Informal workplace hierarchies; deskilling; language; culture; temporary agency work	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Language skills Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants
Food processing	United Kingdom	Inclusion; diversity; language skills; hostility; temporary agency work;	Length of stay in the host country – Language skills Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Workplace conflict – Collective action of migrant
Food processing	United Kingdom	Absence management; managerial control; temporary work agency; health; shift of risk from capital to labour	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
39.	Hopkins (2017)	Analysing the 'migrant work ethic'–Comparing managers' perceptions of local workers and Central and Eastern European migrants in the United Kingdom	*European Urban and Regional Studies*	Qualitative
40.	Hopkins et al. (2016)	Absence management of migrant agency workers in the food manufacturing sector	*The International Journal of Human Resource Management*	Qualitative
41.	Irimiás & Michalkó (2016)	Hosting while being hosted: A perspective of Hungarian migrant hospitality workers in London, UK	*Tourism and Hospitality Research*	Qualitative
42.	Janta (2011)	Polish migrant workers in the UK hospitality industry	*International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*	Mixed method
43.	Janta & Ladkin (2009)	Polish migrant labor in the hospitality workforce: Implications for recruitment and retention	*Tourism Culture & Communication*	Qualitative
44.	Janta et al. (2011a)	Migrant Relationships and Tourism Employment	*Annals of Tourism Research*	Mixed method
45.	Janta et al. (2011b)	Employment experiences of Polish migrant workers in the UK hospitality sector	*Tourism Management*	Mixed method
46.	Janta et al. (2012)	Migrant networks, language learning and tourism employment	*Tourism Management*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	United Kingdom	Work ethic; labour market power; language skills; transferability of qualifications; temporary agency work; absence rates	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions
Food processing	United Kingdom	Human resource management practices; non-standard work; absence management;	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Emotions; work experiences; working efficiency; social contact	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Profile of workers; career progress; qualifications; intention to stay; recruitment through personal connections	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Turnover rates of migrant workers – Level of job-to-job transitions
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Recruitment; retention; seasonal work; transient employment	Quality of working conditions – Language skills Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Adaptation; co-nationals; comforting ethnic ties	Quality of working conditions – Language skills
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Employment experiences; self-development; long-term commitment	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Social networks; language acquisition; human resource management;	Quality of working conditions – Language skills

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
47.	Jentsch et al. (2007)	Migrant workers in rural Scotland: 'going to the middle of nowhere'	*International Journal on Multicultural Societies*	Mixed method
48.	Jones (2014)	'It Was a Whirlwind. A Lot of People Made a Lot of Money': The Role of Agencies in Facilitating Migration from Poland into the UK between 2004 and 2008	*Central and Eastern European Migration Review*	Qualitative
49.	Kaprans (2022)	'They laughed at me, but I left that job': Occupational agency of Latvian migrant workers in the United Kingdom	*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*	Mixed method
50.	Knight et al. (2014)	The labour market mobility of Polish migrants: A comparative study of three regions in South Wales, UK	*Central and Eastern European Migration Review*	Qualitative
51.	Knight et al. (2017)	Social network evolution during long-term migration: a comparison of three case studies in the South Wales region	*Social Identities*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture; hospitality	United Kingdom	Rural labour markets; length of stay; low quality employment; word of mouth recruitment; integration; housing;	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Food processing	United Kingdom	Temporary agency work; market-making strategy; labour shortages; ideal worker	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants
Agriculture;	United Kingdom	Occupational agency; workplace relations; occupational self-esteem	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Food processing	United Kingdom	Labour market mobility; non-urban settings; language competency; social networks; recruitment agency	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Food processing	United Kingdom	Social networks; non-ethnic social network ties; cultural integration; language skill acquisition; labour market mobility	No support for links in final model.

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
52.	Kroon & Paauwe (2014)	Structuration of precarious employment in economically constrained firms: the case of Dutch agriculture	*Human Resource Management Journal*	Qualitative
53.	Kuhlmann & Vogeler (2020)	United against precarious working conditions? Explaining the role of trade unions in improving migrants' working conditions in the British and German meat-processing industries	*Journal of Public Policy*	Qualitative
54.	Leschke & Weiss (2020)	With a little help from my friends: social-network job search and overqualification among recent intra-EU migrants moving from East to west	*Work, Employment and Society*	Quantitative
55.	Lever & Milbourne (2014)	Migrant workers and migrant entrepreneurs: changing established/ outsider relations across society and space?	*Space and Polity*	Mixed method

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture	Netherlands	Precarious employment; structuration; family businesses; top of the supply chain pressure; piece pay rate; socially responsible employment management systems	Multiple dependencies of migrants – Level of job-to-job transitions Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants
Food processing	United Kingdom; Germany	Trade unions; meat processing; sectoral minimum wage; subcontracting; trade union resources	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions
Agriculture; hospitality	EU15 countries; Switzerland; Norway	Social networks; objective overqualification; subjective overqualification; sectoral segmentation, language proficiency	No support for links in final model.
Food processing	United Kingdom	Established; outsider; temporary agency work; zero hour contracts; migrant entrepreneurship	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants Workplace conflict – Collective action of migrant

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
56.	Lever & Milbourne (2017)	The structural invisibility of outsiders: The role of migrant labour in the meat-processing industry	*Sociology*	Mixed method
57.	Lloyd & James (2008)	Too much pressure? Retailer power and occupational health and safety in the food processing industry	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
58.	Lugosi et al. (2016)	Work(ing) dynamics of migrant networking among Poles employed in hospitality and food production	*Sociological Review*	Mixed method
59.	Lulle (2021)	Reversing retirement frontiers in the spaces of post-socialism: active ageing through migration for work	*Ageing & Society*	Qualitative
60.	Lyon & Sulcova (2009)	Hotel employer's perceptions of employing Eastern European workers: a case study of Cheshire, UK	*Tourism Culture & Communication*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	United Kingdom	Self-exploitation; established; outsider; hyperflexibility; supply chain pressure	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Food processing	United Kingdom	Supply chain pressures; supermarkets; leeway; retailer power; flexible temporary agency work; health and safety	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants
Hospitality; food processing	United Kingdom	Workplace networking; intergroup relations; intragroup relations	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Agriculture	United Kingdom; Norway; Finland	Active aging; welfare systems; transnationalism; role of gender; intergenerational motivation	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Employer experiences; recruitment through social networks; language skills; effective communication; cultural awareness training	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
61.	Manolchev & Ivan (2022)	'Dances with Daffodils': Life as a Flower-picker in Southwest England.	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
62.	Manolova (2022)	Inclusion through irregularisation? Exploring the politics and realities of internal bordering in managing post-crisis labour migration in the EU	*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*	Qualitative
63.	Markova et al. (2016)	Migrant workers in small London hotels: Employment, recruitment and distribution	*European Urban and Regional Studies*	Mixed method
64.	McAreavey, & Krivokapic-Skoko (2019)	In or Out? Understanding How Social and Symbolic Boundaries Influence the Economic Integration of Transnational Migrants in Non-Metropolitan Economies	*Sociologia Ruralis*	Qualitative
65.	McCabe & Hamilton (2015)	The kill programme: an ethnographic study of "dirty work' in a slaughterhouse	*New Technology Work and Employment*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture	United Kingdom	Seasonal work; picking; precarious work; flower picking	Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions
Agriculture; food processing	United Kingdom	Differential inclusion; irregularization; bureaucratic bordering; permanent temporariness; power; status; package deals; co-ethnic online support	Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Recruitment; super-diversity; co-ethic recruitment; ethnic queuing; competence; ideal worker	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic
Agriculture; food processing	United Kingdom	Economic integration; inclusion; exclusion; social boundaries; symbolic boundaries	No support for links in final model.
Food processing	United Kingdom	Dirty work; slaughterhouse; production line; cohesion	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
66.	McCollum & Findlay (2015)	'Flexible'workers for 'flexible'jobs? The labour market function of A8 migrant labour in the UK	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
67.	McCollum et al. (2013)	Rethinking labour migration channels: the experience of Latvia from EU accession to economic recession	*Population, Space and Place*	Qualitative
68.	McDowell et al. (2007)	Division, segmentation, and interpellation: The embodied labors of migrant workers in a greater London hotel	*Economic Geography*	Qualitative
69.	McDowell et al. (2008)	Internationalization and the spaces of temporary labour: the global assembly of a local workforce	*British Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing; Hospitality	United Kingdom	Flexibility; employment relations; economic and political structures	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Food processing	United Kingdom	Labour migration channels; intermediaries; informal social networks	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Segmentation; dual process of interpellation; micropolitics; performance	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country Workplace conflict – Collective action of migrant
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Temporary labour; urban setting; transnational connections	Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
70.	McDowell et al. (2009)	Precarious work and economic migration: emerging immigrant divisions of labour in Greater London's service sector	*International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*	Qualitative
71.	McKay & Markova (2010)	The operation and management of agency workers in conditions of vulnerability	*Industrial Relations Journal*	Qualitative
72.	Mense-Petermann (2018)	Eastern European service contract workers in the German meat industry—A case study in market making of a transnational labour market	*ZiF-Mitteilungen*	Qualitative
73.	Mešić & Woolfson (2015)	Roma berry pickers in Sweden: Economic crisis and new contingents of the austeriat	*Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*	Qualitative
74.	Milbourne & Coulson (2021)	Migrant labour in the UK's post-Brexit agri-food system: Ambiguities, contradictions and precarities	*Journal of Rural Studies*	Mixed method
75.	Moriarty et al. (2012)	'Taking on almost everyone?' Migrant and employer recruitment strategies in a booming labour market	*The International Journal of Human Resource Management*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Migrant division of labour; whiteness; ideal worker	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants
Food processing	United Kingdom	Temporary agency work; vulnerable workers; seasonal need for labour; flexible employment	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Food processing	Germany	Transnational labour market; institutional framework; exploitation	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Agriculture	Sweden	Austeriat; trade union responses; erosion of labour standard; working and living experiences	Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Level of job-to-job transitions – Collective action of migrant
Agriculture; food processing; warehouse distribution	United Kingdom	Migrant labour supply; post-Brexit; flexible modes of working; marginalization	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Food processing	Ireland	Recruitment strategies; soft skills; preference for migrant workers; work ethic; ideal worker; recruitment through social networks	Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
76.	Moroşanu et al. (2021)	'One improves here every day': The occupational and learning journeys of 'lower-skilled' European migrants in the London region	*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*	Qualitative
77.	Parutis (2014)	"Economic migrants" or "middling transnationals"? East European migrants' experiences of work in the UK	*International Migration*	Qualitative
78.	Pijpers (2010)	International employment agencies and migrant flexiwork in an enlarged European Union	*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*	Qualitative
79.	Piso (2016)	Migrant labour in rural tourism: Continuity and change	*International Journal of Tourism Research*	Qualitative
80.	Potter & Hamilton (2014)	Picking on vulnerable migrants: precarity and the mushroom industry in Northern Ireland	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
81.	Prause (2021)	Digital Agriculture and Labor: A Few Challenges for Social Sustainability	*Sustainability*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Occupational advancement; hard work; creativity; symbolic boundaries	Turnover rates of migrant workers – Level of job-to-job transitions
Agriculture; hospitality	United Kingdom	Deskilling; career progress; cultural capital	Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Turnover rates of migrant workers – Level of job-to-job transitions
Agriculture	Netherlands	International employment agencies; circular labour migration; migrant flexiworkers	Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Recession; availability of migrant labour; social networks; temporary agency work	Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers
Agriculture	United Kingdom	Exploitation; forced labour; continuum of exploitation; unequal power relationship; immigration status; precarious employment; accommodation; top of supply chain responsibility	Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Language skills Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants
Agriculture	Germany	Digitalization; Taylorism; intensification of work; dependency; working-class fragmentation	Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
82.	Refslund (2012)	Offshoring Danish jobs to Germany: regional effects and challenges to workers' organisation in the slaughterhouse industry	*Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*	Qualitative
83.	Refslund (2016)	Intra-European labour migration and deteriorating employment relations in Danish cleaning and agriculture: Industrial relations under pressure from EU8/2 labour inflows?	*Economic and Industrial Democracy*	Qualitative
84.	Refslund (2021)	When Strong Unions Meet Precarious Migrants: Building Trustful Relations to Unionise Labour Migrants in a High Union-Density Setting	*Economic and Industrial Democracy*	Qualitative
85.	Refslund & Sippola (2020)	Migrant workers trapped between individualism and collectivism: The formation of union-based workplace collectivism	*Economic and Industrial Democracy*	Qualitative
86.	Rogalewski (2022)	Trade unions challenges in organising Polish workers: A comparative case study of British and Swiss trade union strategies	*European Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	Denmark	Subcontracting; industrial relations; European integration; division of labour; collective agreement coverage	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection
Agriculture	Denmark	Industrial relations; collective agreement coverage; segmented labour market	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions
Food processing	Denmark	Strong unions; inclusion and organization of migrant workers; industrial relations; union density; workplace power	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Language skills – Collective action of migrants
Food processing	Finland; Denmark	Segregation of workers; workers' closeness; feeling of unity; shared problem perception; reference groups; collective labour market strategies	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Workplace conflict – Collective action of migrant
Not explicit	United Kingdom	Trade unions; organizing migrant workers; collective agency; union revitalization; goal displacement	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Language skills – Collective action of migrants

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
87.	Rogaly (2008)	Intensification of workplace regimes in British horticulture: the role of migrant workers	*Population, Space and Place*	Qualitative
88.	Rogaly & Qureshi (2017)	'That's where my perception of it all was shattered': Oral histories and moral geographies of food sector workers in an English city region	*Geoforum*	Qualitative
89.	Ruhs (2017)	The impact of acquiring EU status on the earnings of East European migrants in the UK: Evidence from a quasi-natural experiment	*British Journal of Industrial Relations*	Quantitative
90.	Rydzik & Anitha (2020)	Conceptualising the agency of migrant women workers: resilience, reworking and resistance	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
91.	Rydzik et al. (2012)	Mobility, migration and hospitality employment: Voices of Central and Eastern European women	*Hospitality & Society*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture	United Kingdom	Intensification of work; labour control; piece rate; labour contractor	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants
Food processing; agriculture; hospitality	United Kingdom	Labour geography; oral histories; working trajectories	Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Agriculture; food processing hospitality	United Kingdom	Change in immigration status; earnings;	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Intersectionality; exploitation; resistance; agency; reworking; resilience; victimhood	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Participatory action research; role of gender; working trajectories; mobility	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
92.	Rye (2014)	The Western European countryside from an Eastern European perspective: Case of migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture	*European Countryside*	Qualitative
93.	Rye (2018)	Labour migrants and rural change: The "mobility transformation" of Hitra/ Frøya, Norway, 2005–2015	*Journal of Rural Studies*	Mixed method
94.	Rye & Andrzejewska (2010)	The structural disempowerment of Eastern European migrant farm workers in Norwegian agriculture	*Journal of Rural Studies*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture	Norway	Rural in-migration; rural idyll; dullness	Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates
Agriculture	Norway	Rural migration; transnational labour mobility; population growth;	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work
Agriculture	Norway	Structural disempowerment; seasonal employment; weak negotiating position; exploitation	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Language skills – Power distance employers and migrants Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards Level of job-to-job transitions – Collective action of migrant Multiple dependencies of migrants – Level of job-to-job transitions Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
95.	Rye et al. (2018)	From Family to Domestic and Global Labour? A Decade of Proletarisation of Labour in the Norwegian Horticulture Industry	*European Countryside*	Quantitative
96.	Schneider & Gugganig (2021)	Saving Bavarian Hops in a "Parallel Universe": Lessons on the Biopolitics of Agricultural Labor in Germany During the Corona Pandemic	*Culture Agriculture Food and Environment*	Qualitative
97.	Schweyher (2021)	Precarity, work exploitation and inferior social rights: EU citizenship of Polish labour migrants in Norway	*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*	Qualitative
98.	Scott (2013a)	Labour, migration and the spatial fix: evidence from the UK food industry	*Antipode*	Qualitative
99.	Scott (2013b)	Migrant–local hiring queues in the UK Food industry	*Population, Space and Place*	Mixed method
100.	Scott (2013c)	Migration and the employer perspective: pitfalls and potentials for a future research agenda	*Population, Space and Place*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Agriculture	Norway	Structural transformation; family business; flexible migrant labour; proletarization	No support for links in final model.
Agriculture	Germany	Covid-19; seasonal migrant workers; essential workers; indispensability; disposability; health	Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Not explicit	Norway	Social rights; EU citizenship; welfare support; precarity; homelessness	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Food processing	United Kingdom	Spatial fix; maximizing labour power; reliance on migrant labour	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work
Food processing; agriculture	United Kingdom	Migrant-local hiring queues; low-wage workplace; preference for migrant labour	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic
Food processing	United Kingdom	Perspective of employers and employment agencies; migration channelling; good worker	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
101.	Scott (2017)	Informalisation in low-wage labour markets: a case study of the UK food industry	*Population, Space and Place*	Qualitative
102.	Scott & Brindley (2012)	New geographies of migrant settlement in the UK	*Geography*	Mixed method
103.	Shubin & McCollum (2021)	Migrant subjectivities and temporal flexibility of East-Central European labour migration to the United Kingdom	*Population, Space and Place*	Qualitative
104.	Sporton (2013)	'They control my life': The role of local recruitment agencies in East European migration to the UK	*Population, Space and Place*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	United Kingdom	Informalization; race to the bottom; job insecurity; work intensification; worker expendability; worker subordination; employment intermediation	Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country
Food processing	United Kingdom	Migrant settlement; rural regions; urban-colonial; world-city; dispersed self-employed; dispersed lifestyle	Perceived gap between home-host labour standards – Migrants' availability to do precarious work
Agriculture; food processing; hospitality	United Kingdom	Temporal flexibility; uncertainty; instability; flexiworkers; worker identity; replaceability	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Migrants' availability to do precarious work – Quality of working conditions Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants
Food processing; hospitality	United Kingdom	Recruitment agencies; ethnically segregated labour markets; temporary workers	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Quality of working conditions – Language skills Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Length of stay in the host country

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
105.	Stachowski (2020)	Processes of socio-spatial exposures and isolations among Polish labour migrants in rural Norway: Exploring social integration as a lived experience	*European Urban and Regional Studies*	Qualitative
106.	Stachowski & Rasmussen (2021)	From Valued Stayers to Working Hands? The Social Consequences of Changing Employment Relations among Polish Migrants in Farmed Salmon Industry in Rural Norway	*European Countryside*	Qualitative
107.	Stenbacka (2019)	Responsibilities, Caring Practices and Agriculture: Farmers' Perspectives on Recruitment and Employer–Employee Relationships	*Sociologia Ruralis*	Qualitative
108.	Stenning & Dawley (2009)	Poles to Newcastle: Grounding new migrant flows in peripheral regions	*European Urban and Regional Studies*	Mixed method
109.	Szytniewski, & van der Haar (2022)	Mobility power in the migration industry: Polish workers' trajectories in the Netherlands	*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*	Qualitative
110.	Tannock (2015)	Bad attitude? Migrant workers, meat processing work and the local unemployed in a peripheral region of the UK	*European Urban and Regional Studies*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	Norway	Socio-spatial exposures; integration; rural context; ethnically divided labour market; mutual engagement; social capital; interactions with host society members	Quality of working conditions – Language skills Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Food processing	Norway	Integration; employment relations; status; rural areas; recruitment through social networks	Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Conforming to perceived good work ethic – Migrants' availability to do precarious work. Power distance employers and migrants – Agency of migrant workers
Agriculture	Sweden	Recruiting practices; employment relationship; caring practices	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates
Food processing; warehouse distribution	United Kingdom	Regional labour markets; low-skills equilibrium	Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Quality of working conditions
Food processing; warehouse distribution	Netherlands	Mobility power; labour market intermediaries; employment agencies; spatial clustering; social bubbles; evolution of worker agency; word of mouth recruitment	Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants – Perceived good work ethic of migrants Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Language skills
Food processing	United Kingdom	Financial crisis; recession; good worker rhetoric	Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
111.	Theunissen et al. (2022)	Fragmented Capital and (the Loss of) Control over Posted Workers: A Case Study in the Belgian Meat Industry	*Work, Employment and Society*	Qualitative
112.	Thompson et al. (2013)	'Good when they want to be': migrant workers in the supermarket supply chain	*Human Resource Management Journal*	Qualitative
113.	Voivozeanu (2019)	Precarious Posted Migration: The Case of Romanian Construction and Meat-Industry Workers in Germany	*Central and Eastern European Migration Review*	Qualitative
114.	Wagner & Hassel (2016)	Posting, subcontracting and low-wage employment in the German meat industry	*Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*	Mixed method
115.	Wagner (2015)	EU posted work and transnational action in the German meat industry	*Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	Belgium	Posted workers; subcontracting; labour control; labour process; structural vulnerability ; client capital's loss of control	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of working conditions – Turnover rates Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Turnover rates of migrant workers – Level of job-to-job transitions
Food processing; warehouse distribution	United Kingdom	Supermarket chains; human resource management; temporal flexibility	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Length of stay in the host country – Perceived gap between home-host labour standards
Food processing	Germany	Posted workers; trade unions; layers of precarity; meat industry	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Level of job-to-job transitions Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants
Food processing	Germany	Coordinated market economy; social partners; system of institutional exploitation	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market
Food processing	Germany	Transnational action; coalitions with societal actors; resistance	Collective action of migrant – Quality of labour regulation and social protection Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants

Table 13.3 *Descriptive Overview of Review Sample (continued)*

	Author and year	Title	Journal	Study design
116.	Wagner & Refslund (2016)	Understanding the diverging trajectories of slaughterhouse work in Denmark and Germany: A power resource approach	*European Journal of Industrial Relations*	Qualitative
117.	Wilkinson (2014)	Demonising 'the other': British Government complicity in the exploitation, social exclusion and vilification of new migrant workers	*Citizenship Studies*	Qualitative
118.	Wills et al. (2009)	London's migrant division of labour	*European Urban and Regional Studies*	Quantitative
119.	Wright (2007)	The problems and experiences of ethnic minority and migrant workers in hotels and restaurants in England	*Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society*	Qualitative

Sector	Country	Major themes	Support for links
Food processing	Germany; Denmark	Power position of trade unions; industrial relations; segmentation	Cost competitiveness in the market – Using temporary work agencies to hire migrants Quality of labour regulation and social protection – Cost competitiveness in the market Level of job-to-job transitions – Collective action of migrant
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Exploitation; social exclusion; absence of citizenship rights;	Agency of migrant workers – Collective action of migrants Multiple dependencies of migrants – Power distance employers and migrants Quality of working conditions – Multiple dependencies of migrants Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict
Hospitality; food processing	United Kingdom	Migrant division of labour; urban setting; point-based system	Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic
Hospitality	United Kingdom	Work experiences; demographic profiles; low pay;	Quality of working conditions – Workplace conflict Perceived good work ethic of migrants – Conforming to perceived good work ethic