

**Navigating Knowledge and Networks:
The Role of Community Volunteers and Social Capital on Employment
Rights Knowledge among Polish and Bulgarian Migrants in Rotterdam**

Master's thesis

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Abstract

This thesis investigates whether engagement with *sleutelpersonen* – active community figures connected to the municipality – affects the self-assessed knowledge of employment rights of Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants' in Rotterdam. Awareness of such rights is often low among migrants, which contributes to vulnerability to labour exploitation. To address this, the municipality involved *sleutelpersonen* in outreach efforts. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, this study combines survey data (N = 108) with interviews among *sleutelpersonen* and practitioners.

Quantitative results show no significant association between contact with *sleutelpersonen* and knowledge of employment rights. No moderating effect of bonding social capital was found. However, bonding social capital was strongly associated with knowledge of employment rights ($\beta = 0.487$, $p < .001$), which suggests the importance of close, trusting social ties. While Granovetter (1973) emphasised the informational value of weak ties, this study suggests strong ties may be more relevant for legal knowledge in recent migrant communities.

Qualitative findings help explain the limited statistical effect of engagement with *sleutelpersonen*. Although brokerage theory highlights the potential of intermediaries to connect disconnected groups (Stovel et al., 2011), individual, relational and institutional obstacles to brokerage constrained their impact. Only a few *sleutelpersonen* acted as effective knowledge brokers, diffusing information through their networks and connecting migrants to formal help. Most lacked the time, networks, or organisational capacities to have broader impact. Their ambiguous role, diverging goals, limited contact with the municipality, and inconsistent institutional support further constrained their role in the spread of information. Their embedding in a welfare organisation rather than the municipality reduced their visibility and alignment with formal information flows.

These findings suggest that strengthening bonding social capital within migrant communities may be more effective for improving rights knowledge than relying solely on community brokers. Still, *sleutelpersonen* may play a meaningful role in organising these activities and offering informal support. The study contributes to research on social capital and brokerage between migrants and institutions in local governance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Labour migrants from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have been a persistent topic in Rotterdam's municipal politics since the 2004 and 2007 EU-enlargements, which has led migrants from countries such as Poland, Romania and Bulgaria to move to the city for work in sectors such as industry and horticulture (Snel et al., 2019).¹ As of 2023, Rotterdam officially counted over 24,000 registered CEE labour migrants², though estimates suggest this number may be double (Vriend, 2023). Many of these migrants face precarious working conditions: long hours, low wages at or below the minimum wage, and other forms of workplace maltreatment (Seidler et al., 2022). Despite significant municipal attention (Snel et al., 2019), these issues have proven difficult to resolve. One barrier repeatedly identified in both academic and policy literature is the limited knowledge that many migrants have of their employment rights and available support structures (e.g., Fernández García et al., 2023; Ollus et al., 2013).

In 2021, the municipality of Rotterdam launched an innovative approach to improve contact with its hard-to-reach population of CEE labour migrants. A group of Polish migrants, initially brought together through Dutch language classes, was guided into becoming “*sleutelpersonen*” (municipal staff, personal correspondence, February 19, 2025): key community figures who voluntarily support fellow migrants and act as a sounding board for municipal policy. Though small in scale, the group grew into a pilot initiative with 25 *sleutelpersonen* by 2023, with plans for further expansion (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2023). The municipality positioned the *sleutelpersonen* approach as a tool for improving the information position of CEE migrants, strengthening their contact with local institutions, and fostering social connections (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2023). Currently there is also a Bulgarian group active (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2025).

Rotterdam is not the only actor exploring such outreach strategies. Across various domains, so-called “cultural mediators” have been used to bridge gaps between migrant communities and state institutions. Alongside municipal efforts, civil society initiatives such as a Dutch NGO and a trade union have also deployed cultural mediators to reach and inform

¹ Increasingly, research recognises CEE migrants as a heterogeneous group, not only consisting of lower-skilled or lower-paid individuals (see e.g., Snel et al., 2019). Nonetheless, this thesis focuses on CEE migrants working in lower-paid, practical professions, as this group is most commonly targeted in municipal policy and public discourse concerning labour exploitation.

² In this thesis, I use the term “labour migrant” to refer to CEE migrants in Rotterdam who work primarily in low-paid, practical jobs. I acknowledge that this term simplifies a complex reality: many migrants labelled as such may hold higher qualifications or migrate for multiple reasons. Still, I use the term as a pragmatic distinction from CEE migrants in more secure or higher-paid employment sectors.

migrants (Been & de Beer, 2018; Siegmann et al., 2022). Yet despite the growing interest in this approach, the actual effects of engagement with *sleutelpersonen*, especially on rights awareness, remain largely unexamined.³ This thesis addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between engagement with *sleutelpersonen* and knowledge of employment rights, through both quantitative and qualitative research among Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants in Rotterdam. Drawing on theoretical insights from public administration, sociology, and migration studies, this study situates *sleutelpersonen* as potential brokers of information. Moreover, it connects it to theory on social capital and its role in distributing informational resources (Putnam, 2007), by seeing whether *sleutelpersonen* potentially help connect migrants to new information (Granovetter, 1983). Yet initial practitioner insights also pointed to key challenges, such as the retention of volunteers and difficulties in reaching migrants, suggesting a need for critical assessment. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

To what extent does engagement with “sleutelpersonen” influence self-assessed knowledge of employment rights among Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants in Rotterdam?

To answer this question, the thesis adopts a mixed-methods approach, following an explanatory sequential design that explains the quantitative findings through qualitative analysis. It investigates the following sub-questions:

SQ1: To what extent is engagement with *sleutelpersonen* associated with Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants’ self-assessed knowledge of employment rights?

SQ2: To what extent is bonding social capital associated with Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants’ self-assessed knowledge of employment rights?

SQ3: To what extent does bonding social capital moderate the relationship between engagement with *sleutelpersonen* and knowledge of employment rights?

³ One exception is a recent qualitative municipal evaluation of a registration campaign in Rotterdam, which found that posters featuring local *sleutelpersonen* increased trust and recognition among CEE migrants (de Groot et al., 2024). However, this provides only indirect evidence.

SQ4: What factors enabled or constrained *sleutelpersonen* in their role as information brokers in Rotterdam?

From a societal perspective, the findings can support municipal efforts to reach this hard-to-reach migrant group and improve their labour market conditions. This is especially relevant given that many CEE migrants intend to stay in the Netherlands (Snel et al., 2015; Snel et al., 2019; Seidler et al., 2022), yet their conditions show few signs of improvement. Strategies for increasing their situation are therefore needed, also so as not to pass the disadvantage on to their children. As the legal scholar Galanter has argued, law only works when communicated (Galanter, 1985). When employees are better informed about their rights, they will be better positioned to deal with exploitation (Omar et al., 2009). Information asymmetries, on the other hand, can lead employers to take advantage (Miceli, 2004).

This study also contributes to academic debates on migrants' knowledge of employment rights, social capital, and brokerage. In doing so, it ties the literatures of public administration and sociology to that of migration studies. While prior research highlights the role of social networks in improving migrants' access to employment and information (Kanas et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2008; Stănculescu, 2019), much remains unknown about how these networks operate in the context of labour rights. This goes for close social circles as well as contacts bridging the gap between migrants and institutions. This thesis offers insights into the use of community-based figures as intermediaries between migrants and state actors for information distribution, regarding both its measured effect on knowledge of employment rights and the context that can facilitate or constrain the functioning of brokerage in practice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This section outlines relevant theories and empirical findings on the three main variables and their interrelations: the role of knowledge of rights in labour exploitation, the effect of social capital on knowledge of employment rights, and cultural mediators in migrants' rights knowledge.

2.2 Labour exploitation and migrants' knowledge of employment rights

Migrant workers frequently face everyday abuses such as poor working conditions, wage withholding, intimidation, or excessive hours, even where no legal thresholds are crossed (Davies, 2019; Pósch et al., 2024; Inspectie SZW, 2019). These abuses are increasingly framed as part of a continuum of labour exploitation, ranging from minor disadvantage to severe coercion (Boersma & Nolan, 2022; Labour Exploitation Advisory Group, 2024). Besides structural drivers like labour market segmentation (Piore, 1979) and institutional neglect (Murphy et al., 2019; Ollus et al., 2013; Siegmann et al., 2022; Wilkinson, 2013), migrant-specific obstacles increase exploitation risks.

One risk factor is their lack of knowledge of employment rights. Research across European contexts shows that many migrant workers are unaware of their labour rights or available support services (Butter et al., 2011; Fernández García et al., 2023; Ollus et al., 2013). A recent study on EU migrants in the Netherlands, with a sample including mainly Polish, Rumanian and Bulgarian migrants, indicated that their information position can be improved, as a majority of those with a low income did not know the labour union, collective employment agreement or labour inspection (Seidler et al., 2024). This corresponds to studies on migrants' lack of legal knowledge in other domains, such as healthcare (Ang et al., 2017; Pilato et al., 2023) and social rights (Seibel, 2023). Several studies highlight how such information gaps in the host country increase vulnerability to labour exploitation (Dwyer et al., 2011; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). Hastie (2018) found that unfamiliarity with laws and support services limited migrant workers' ability to access justice and claim rights. Similarly, Berntsen (2016) showed that knowledge of the regulatory system and inspection authorities increased migrant workers' bargaining leverage and helped address employer-worker power imbalances.

Different factors contribute to migrants' lack of knowledge of employment rights. Many are unfamiliar with the legal and institutional environment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). Language barriers further hinder understanding and

workplace communication (Davies, 2019; Reeger, 2018). Conflicting information from authorities and distrust of authorities like unions also play a role, especially among CEE migrants (Reeger, 2018; Refslund, 2021). Additional factors include the difficulty to find information, misinformation by management, complex rules, high turnover, indifference, low age, and weak union presence (Papadopoulos et al., 2021). Permanent contracts and union membership are associated with higher self-assessed knowledge of employment rights (Meager et al., 2002), yet union membership remains low among migrants in the Netherlands (Roosblad & Berntsen, 2017; Siegmann et al., 2022). Many Polish and Bulgarian migrants in the Netherlands work temporary jobs and lack union knowledge (Seidler et al., 2024), making these factors relevant for Rotterdam's CEE migrant population.

Although migrants' lack of employment rights knowledge is recognised as an important risk factor for exploitation, it remains underexplored. Few studies assess employees' awareness of labour law (Sadullah et al., 2015), and most focus on Great Britain (e.g., Casebourne et al., 2006; Meager et al., 2002). Research on migrants' self-assessed knowledge is even more limited (Ewers et al., 2023). This study contributes to addressing these gaps by examining self-assessed employment rights knowledge among Polish and Bulgarian migrants in the Netherlands.

2.3 Social capital and the diffusion of knowledge

Research has shown that social networks contribute to the diffusion of knowledge. A central concept is Putnam's (2007) social capital theory, which holds that individuals are better able to achieve their goals and access support and resources when they are embedded in relationships characterised by mutual trust, shared norms, and a sense of obligation. He distinguishes between *bonding* social capital, ties within a social group, and *bridging* social capital, connections to different social groups, broader society or institutions.

Networks have been found to serve an informational function (Schaefer et al., 1981). Several scholars have developed the role of bridging ties in accessing information. Granovetter (1983) introduced the idea that *weak ties* – looser connections beyond close circles – can offer valuable access to new information and resources. These ties are mainly valuable when they link individuals across different social locations and those individuals are in a position to pass on useful information. Similarly, Bourdieu (1986) emphasised the importance of connections to individuals with more knowledge or power. Ryan (2011) distinguished between horizontal and vertical weak ties; weak ties to those with more resources were found useful for migrants in work contexts. Other studies also show migrants'

bridging capital helps them navigate the host society. Ties with “locals” facilitate access to better employment and help avoid exploitation (Kanas et al., 2012; Stănculescu, 2019). Through these connections, migrants gain access to others’ resources such as information and influence (Granovetter, 1983; Ioannides & Datcher, 2004; Lin, 1999). This suggests bridging social capital can enhance migrants’ access to information on employment, and potentially employment rights.

Others have highlighted the informational function of bonding social capital. Studies on Polish migrants in the UK and the Netherlands found evidence for high levels of practical, informational, and emotional support provided by close circles of family and friends. The wider Polish community, however, was regarded with rivalry and distrust (Ryan et al., 2008; Schwabe & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2021; Torúnczyk-Ruiz, 2008), warning us not to equate shared nationality to strong ties (Ryan, 2011).

However, immigrant communities can have a role in knowledge distribution (Waldinger & Licher, 2003). Migrant community organisations can function as mediating structures between migrants and host societies, providing new migrants with information and legal advice (Martinez-Damia et al., 2024). Conversely, migrant networks may also restrict access to information. Networks might close to outsiders, limiting newcomers’ access (Bourdieu, 1986; Kndler & Wójcikowska-Baniak, 2019; Ryan, 2011). Moreover, ethnic networks can isolate members from wider society (Crowly & Hickman, 2008; Ryan, 2011), hindering upward social mobility (Hack-Polay, 2019). In some cases, they even channel migrants into exploitative jobs through personal contacts (de Menezes et al., 2012; Ollus et al., 2013), as feelings of shame may prevent information sharing on exploitation (Rosales, 2014).

These perspectives help understand how different types of social ties may shape migrants’ access to information about employment rights. By connecting migrants to individuals with greater knowledge or influence, weak ties and bridging social capital can reduce information asymmetries. Moreover, close networks can provide additional informational support, highlighting the relevance of both bonding and bridging social capital for this study.

2.4 Cultural mediators as brokers between migrants and institutions

This section conceptualises *sleutelpersonen* as cultural mediators who operate as brokers between migrants and institutions, drawing on sociological and public administration theories.

Brokers in sociological perspective

In the sociological literature, brokers are identified as intermediaries who connect otherwise disconnected actors and facilitate the flow of resources, knowledge, or opportunities (Stovel et al., 2011). In migration contexts, this disconnect can manifest between migrant communities and host societies (Stovel & Shaw, 2012). Granovetter's (1983) theory on the strength of weak ties was among the first to suggest the value of such intermediaries. Later theorists developed typologies of brokerage roles. Gould and Fernandez (1989) classified brokers based on group alignment and the direction of information flow. For example, "gatekeepers" are aligned with the receiving group and filter incoming information, whereas "representatives" are closer to the sending group and therefore effective advocates. These theories highlight that brokers enable information sharing between groups, yet their alignment shapes trust and effectiveness.

These theories show how brokerage is inherently relational. Stovel and Shaw (2012) emphasise the importance of micro-level relations, as brokerage relies on informal, personal relationships. However, this also makes brokerage inherently fragile (Stovel et al., 2011). Due to weak ties, brokers may not be completely trusted by either group and lose credibility if pulled too closely toward one side. Moreover, role conflicts may arise due to conflicting expectations. Lastly, information asymmetries can create potential for exploitation by brokers, leading to distrust (Stovel et al., 2011). These relational constraints highlight the importance of trust, clear roles and open communication between actors.

To resolve this fragility, Stovel et al. (2011) propose three stabilising mechanisms. Two describe relational dynamics: social categorisation, setting brokers apart from both groups to create clear roles; or alignment with one side ("capture"), which can reduce ambiguity and pressure but possibly limits broader trust. A third, most powerful mechanism is situated at the institutional level (Stovel et al., 2011). Embedding brokers within trusted institutions ("organisational grafting") provides legitimacy and monitoring. This requires institutions to provide nonrival resources such as meeting spaces or information materials to reduce personal costs of brokerage.

Brokerage is thus important for linking disconnected groups and enabling information flows. While relational-level obstacles can destabilise these relationships, other factors can help sustain them. These dynamics can influence the impact of the *sleutelpersonen* approach.

Brokers in fragmented urban governance spaces

Public administration scholars, particularly Koster (2014; 2016; 2019), have applied the concept of brokerage to participatory urban governance. Koster (2014) links the use of brokers in Dutch urban governance to the rise of the “participation society,” in which responsibility for social issues is increasingly shifted to citizens’ self-organisation. Citizens are invited into governance spaces and existing citizen initiatives are formalised (Cornwall, 2002; Brouwer et al., 2013). “Active citizens,” possessing organisational skills and valuable networks that others may lack, are called upon to assume leading positions. Due to these characteristics, they can act as political brokers between the retreating state and its population (Koster, 2014).

Beyond the individual capacities of brokers, local governance literature also suggests the importance of relational dynamics. Although brokers are used to facilitate local actor interactions, Dimitriadis et al. (2021) stress that such relationships are not purely collaborative but can take the form of local “battlegrounds.” As such, it is not just the presence of brokers that matters, but at the quality of interactions and actors’ recognition of mutual dependencies, which influence successful policy implementation (Mayntz, 1980). This suggests the importance of interactional dynamics in the *sleutelpersonen* approach, as they shape how policy is enacted in practice.

Although brokers operate within deliberately informal urban governance spaces, they remain shaped by state agendas of deregulation (Koster, 2014). Koster (2014) relates this to Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality, which explains how the state conditions its population to behave in certain ways. Nonetheless, brokers retain a sense of agency (Koster, 2014). This interplay between institutional constraint and individual discretion mirrors the literature on street-level bureaucracy. Lipsky (1980) describes street-level bureaucrats as frontline public servants who implement government policies in practice, exercising discretion to adapt them to individual cases. These practitioners often face institutional obstacles such as limited resources and ambiguous or unattainable expectations. As Brodtkin (2011) found, their resulting informal practices often differ from official policy scripts.

Similarly, brokers in urban governance actively “assemble” formal and informal governance elements (Koster, 2016). Discretion and flexibility thus facilitate them in transmitting resources. While they are not always formal bureaucrats, they can perform similar functions: interacting with citizens, providing support, and interpreting policy in context. However, they also face similar institutional obstacles. Applying this perspective allows a focus on the informal and tailored practices of *sleutelpersonen*, which might deviate

from original policy intent. Discretion could facilitate the diffusion of knowledge due to tailored support, or obstruct it because *sleutelpersonen* prefer different ways of supporting migrant communities.

Cultural mediators as brokers

The figure of the cultural mediator, someone with a migrant background facilitating contact between institutions and migrant communities, offers a useful conceptual bridge between brokerage theory, governance, and migration studies (Androusou, 2021). In healthcare, they have been shown to facilitate contact and trust (Miklavcic & LeBlanc, 2014; Buch Mejsner et al., 2024; Tagliacozzo et al., 2021). However, their roles are often precarious and lack training or certification (Buch Mejsner et al., 2024; Verrept, 2019). In local governance their role remains underexplored. This despite critiques that they shift responsibility for migrant accommodation away from the state (e.g., Moore, 2004; Caponio et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2008) and their increased deployment, for instance for labour migrants in the Netherlands (van Nierop et al., 2021). This study addresses these gaps by conceptualising *sleutelpersonen* as cultural mediators who act as brokers between CEE migrants and institutions in urban governance.

The combined insights from brokerage theory, participatory urban governance, and street-level bureaucracy have demonstrated how brokers are deployed by governments to exchange resources such as knowledge between citizens and governments, yet inter-actor relations, brokers' individual characteristics and institutional arrangements shape their functioning. The most important facilitating and constraining factors from the literature are summarised in

Table I, under these three dimensions.

Table 1 Facilitating and constraining factors of information brokerage between institutions and citizens in urban governance

	FACILITATING FACTORS	CONSTRAINING FACTORS
INDIVIDUAL	Organisational skills ¹	
	Valuable networks ¹	
	Combining formal and informal practices ²	
RELATIONAL	Trust ³	Conflicting role expectations ³
	Social categorisation to create clear role identity ³	Information asymmetries ³
	Alignment with one group ³	Inter-actor conflict ⁵
	Good quality of interactions ⁴	
	Mutual recognition of interdependence ⁴	
	Inter-actor collaboration ⁵	
INSTITUTIONAL	Embedding in trusted institutions ³	Limited resources ⁶
	Discretion & flexibility ⁶	Ambiguous or unattainable outcome expectations ⁶

¹ Koster (2014); ² Koster (2016); Brodtkin (2011); ³ Stovel et al. (2011); ⁴ Mayntz (1980); ⁵ Dimitriadis et al. (2021); ⁶ Lipsky (1980)

2.5 Conceptual model and hypotheses

This thesis integrates literature on migrants' knowledge of employment rights, social capital, and cultural mediators as brokers in urban governance. Together, these theories provide a possible mechanism of how information distribution through engagement with *sleutelpersonen* and social capital could positively influence migrants' knowledge of employment rights. However, such brokerage is shaped by individual, relational and institutional factors that can enable or constrain its effectiveness. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model, with the main mechanism at its centre. Around it, interacting individual, relational, and institutional contexts influence its outcome. Bonding social capital was chosen over bridging to avoid multicollinearity, as *sleutelpersonen* already represent a bridging function.

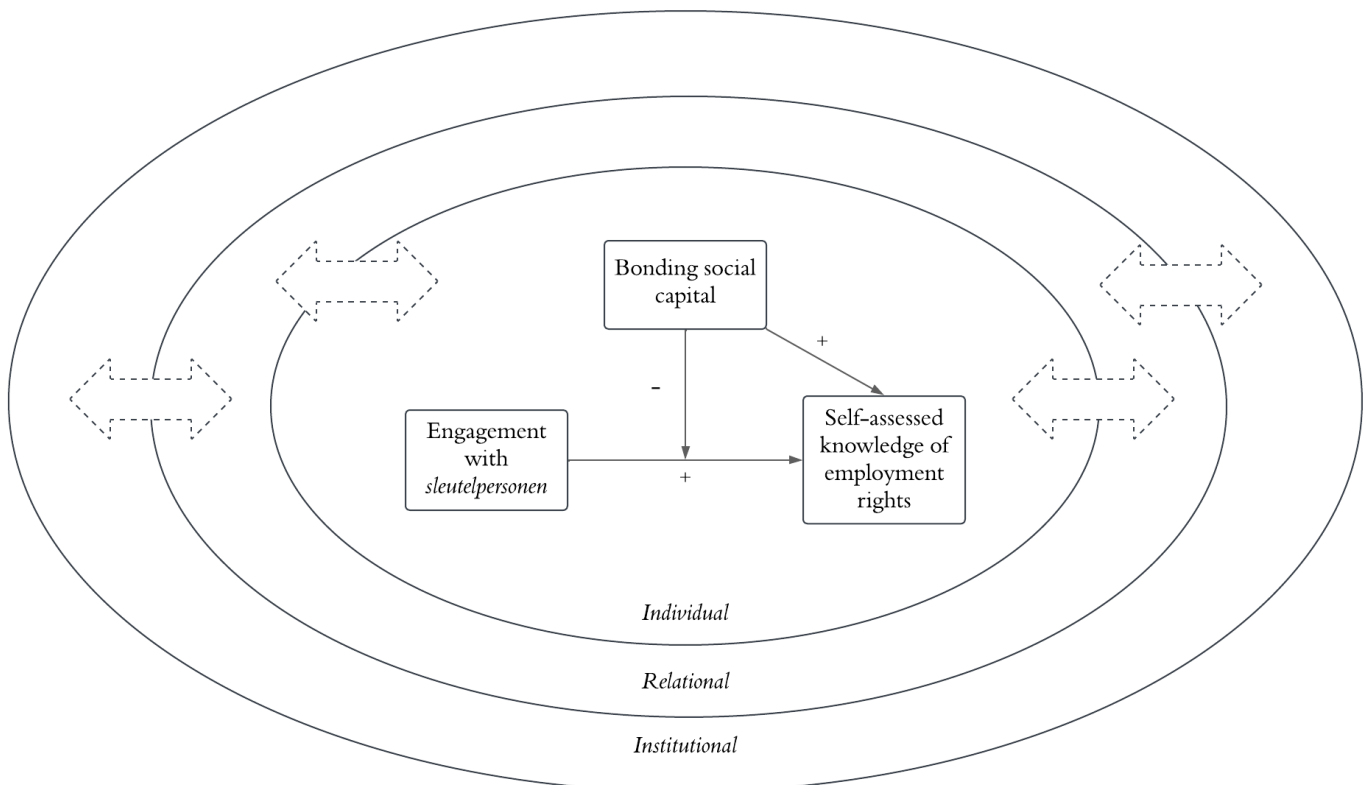
This study hypothesises that perceived support from *sleutelpersonen* positively affects Polish and Bulgarian migrants' self-assessed knowledge of employment rights. First, it is expected that higher engagement with *sleutelpersonen* is associated with greater rights

knowledge (H1), as these actors may serve as weak bridging ties and facilitate the diffusion of informational resources. Second, bonding social capital is expected to be positively associated with knowledge of employment rights, as it may strengthen information flows within groups (H2). Third, bonding social capital is hypothesised to moderate the relationship between engagement with *sleutelpersonen* and said knowledge, as people with stronger networks may have less additional benefits of *sleutelpersonen* (H3). Furthermore, drawing on brokerage and street-level bureaucracy theories, the effectiveness of *sleutelpersonen* is expected to depend on the presence or absence of facilitating and constraining factors at the individual, relational, and institutional level, as summarised in

Table 1 (H4).

This study contributes by focusing on migrants' knowledge of employment rights, particularly among underresearched CEE migrants. It also enriches social capital theory by exploring its relevance for knowledge diffusion within recent migrant networks. By bridging sociology, urban governance and migration studies, it advances understanding of cultural mediators' role in local governance.

Figure 1 This study's conceptual model



Chapter 3: Research design

3.1 Methodological approach

This study adopts a single-case study design to examine how *sleutelpersonen* support Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants' knowledge of employment rights within Rotterdam's local governance. The case is revelatory (Bryman, 2015), as little research has explored this intervention in relation to rights awareness. Rotterdam provides a relevant context due to its large migrant population and innovative approach.

A mixed-methods approach was applied, following an explanatory sequential design. This allows quantitative findings on the effect of *sleutelpersonen* on knowledge to be explained through qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The quantitative phase consisted of a survey among Polish and Bulgarian migrants, chosen for its structured approach, and ability to include large samples (Babbie, 2016; De Vaus, 2002) and overcome language barriers. Qualitative semi-structured interviews with *sleutelpersonen* and local officials provided deeper insights into contextual factors shaping effectiveness. This combination enables a comprehensive analysis of the *sleutelpersonen* approach.

3.2 Survey

Participants

This study's target population were adult Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants living in Rotterdam. The sample included 108 usable responses⁴: 62% Polish and 38% Bulgarian, with 68% female and a majority aged 25-44. Most (71%) had lived in the Netherlands for over five years, held secondary (50%) or higher (26%) education, and had limited Dutch but good English skills. Two-thirds were employed, the majority earning between 100 and 130% of the minimum wage. Employment contracts were more often temporary (45%) than permanent (37%). Women, Bulgarians and those having staid in the Netherlands for over five years are slightly overrepresented compared to population estimates (see quota in Appendix I:

Survey sampling and recruitment strategy). Further details are provided in Appendix II: **Frequency table of respondent characteristics**.

A non-probability venue-based sampling strategy was used, combined with quota sampling on gender, nationality, age, and length of stay to improve representativity (Babbie, 2016) (see Appendix I: **Survey sampling and recruitment strategy** for detailed

⁴ Based on the 75% threshold for scales and listwise deletion; see Appendix III and IV for scale development and handling of missing data.

rationale). The target sample size of 96 was based on a 95% confidence level and 10% margin of error (Bryman, 2015).⁵

Survey design and measures

The questionnaire began with a brief explanation of the study. Questions on main variables were asked first for attention span, with demographic questions placed last. Variables were measured through closed-ended questions to enhance comparability of answers for statistical analysis (Bryman, 2016). In the online version, skip logic was applied to employment-related items for respondents who were unemployed. The final page included municipal support information and an option to leave contact details to receive the results. The survey took 5-15 minutes and was available in Polish and Bulgarian, with translations checked by native speakers.

Independent variable: Engagement with sleutelpersonen

This was defined as the frequency of personal interaction with Polish or Bulgarian volunteers in Rotterdam who play a central role in their communities by helping compatriots in Rotterdam, organising social activities, or helping people get in contact with the municipality. A definition was shown above the question, as an introductory interview indicated the term is not widely recognised. It was measured with one item: “Think of your contact with such volunteers. How often do you see or hear from a volunteer in Rotterdam?”.⁶ This item was adapted from the Lubben Social Network Scale – Revised (LSNS-R) (Lubben & Girona, 2003). This validated scale is widely used to assess social engagement and was chosen for its clear language. A 9-point frequency scale, ranging from “Never” to “Daily,” was adopted to improve measurement precision during statistical analysis (De Vaus, 2002).

Dependent variable: Self-assessed knowledge of employment rights

Self-assessed knowledge of employment rights refers to respondents’ own evaluation of their knowledge of specific employee rights related to contracts, pay, and working conditions, as well as the support options available in cases of abuse. This was measured using a self-developed ten-item scale, as no standardised tool exists to measure employment rights

⁵ This means that the results can be generalised to the wider population with 95% confidence and a possible error margin of $\pm 10\%$ (Babbie, 2016). An online sample size calculator was used (<https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Sample+Size+Calculator>).

⁶ Only this single item was used, as the aim was to assess overall engagement with *sleutelpersonen*, not their position within broader networks, which would have gone beyond the scope of this study.

knowledge (Sulphey et al., 2021). Full scale and item development are described in Appendix III: **Scale development**. Statements included general awareness, specific rights, and support channels such as unions or municipal info points. An example item is: “I know that if I work overtime, I have the right to compensation, either as extra pay or time off.” Respondents rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, from “I do not know this at all” to “I know this very well.” With more points, Cronbach’s alpha generally levels off (Lissitz & Green, 1975; Nunally, 1978).

The full scale showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$), unidimensionality and construct validity. This demonstrated that the items work well as a scale and can be confidently used to measure self-assessed knowledge of employment rights (De Vaus, 2002). Two subscales – knowledge of rights (items 1-7) and knowledge of support authorities (items 8-10) – were also tested and both showed good reliability, ($\alpha = 0.89$ and $\alpha = 0.79$), supporting their use as separate outcome variables.

Moderating and independent variable: Bonding social capital

Bonding social capital refers to strong ties and mutual support within close-knit groups like family or close friends (Putnam, 2007). It was measured using the 8-item bonding sub-scale of the Personal Social Capital Scale 16 (PSCS-16) (Wang et al., 2014), a shortened version of Chen et al.’s (2009) validated PSCS, and adapted for migrants following Nascimento et al. (2021).⁷ An example item is “How many of your friends would definitely help you if you asked?” Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale from “All” to “None”. The scale scored good on internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$) across Polish and Bulgarian participants, and unidimensionality (item-total correlations ranging from 0.33-0.74).⁸ Validity was assumed due to the scale’s established use and prior validations.

Control variables

Control variables included age, gender, nationality, education, Dutch and English language skills, occupational status, and duration of stay, based on prior studies that found these factors to affect rights awareness (Adamski & Florczak, 2022; Davies, 2019; Ewers et al., 2023;

⁷ In item 2, Nascimento et al. (2021) removed “old classmates” from “How do you rate the number of your country fellows/old classmates?”, and in item 7, “fellows” was removed from “How many of your coworkers/fellows will definitely help you upon your request?”. These same adjustments were applied in this study.

⁸ The second item, “What is your number of country fellows?” has the lowest item-total correlation and slightly lowers the average. However, it was decided not to drop the item because that would only increase the Cronbach’s alpha by 0.01.

Reeger, 2018; Wong, 2011). These were included as multiple-choice questions. Income, contract type and contractor were included in the questionnaire based on Meager et al. (2002), yet not included in the final analysis as they only applied to those currently employed.

Data collection and analysis

The survey was administered both as a self-administered paper-based questionnaire and through online survey Qualtrics to maximise response rates. Research indicates that differences in findings between modes are minimal, so the data can be aggregated effectively (Denscombe, 2006; McCabe, 2004). Data collection focussed initially on the distribution of QR-coded flyers, but due to low response rates the strategy shifted to paper-based, on-the-spot completion, which proved more effective in reaching participants. Data collection took place between 20 April and 15 May 2025. It focussed on the four neighbourhoods with the highest concentrations of Polish and Bulgarian migrants: Carnisse, Oud Charlois, Tarwewijk, and Oud-Mathenesse (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2023). Responses were gathered across diverse locations, times and days.⁹ Online distribution yielded a small number of additional responses.¹⁰

Analysis was conducted in STATA. For details on data preparation, missing data handling and scale construction, see Appendix IV: **Data preparation and regression diagnostics**. For data analysis, a multiple linear regression model was used to examine the joint impact of multiple variables on one outcome variable (Field, 2013) (see Appendix IV: **Data preparation and regression diagnostics** for full justification). To investigate moderation effects, an interaction term between engagement with *sleutelpersonen* and social contacts was included. Separate models explored differentiated effects for knowledge of rights and reporting channels. Assumptions of linear regression were tested and met (Appendix IV: **Data preparation and regression diagnostics**), validating the model's use (Field, 2013). Robustness checks were conducted using alternative codings of the main predictor variable.

⁹ Locations included Polish and Bulgarian shops, churches, neighbourhood centres, language courses, dance groups, parks, playgrounds, squares, and municipal information events. Data collection took place on all weekdays and in mornings, afternoons and evenings.

¹⁰ E.g. via municipal contacts and snowballing. Distribution in Facebook groups yielded no response.

3.3 Interviews

Participants

Eight qualitative interviews were conducted. Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Appendix V: **List of interview participants**). Four practitioners currently or formerly involved in implementing the *sleutelpersonen* approach were interviewed. These included municipal staff, staff working for the contracted welfare organisation, and a staff member from the language school active in the early phase. To preserve anonymity, job titles and organisations are omitted. Additionally, two Polish *sleutelpersonen* and one Bulgarian *sleutelpersoon* were interviewed. They were selected through referrals and sufficient Dutch or English proficiency. Additionally, one Polish community figure who turned out not to be part of the *sleutelpersonen* group was retained for the valuable insights into informal community figures. Given the small number of implementers and around 25 *sleutelpersonen* in Rotterdam, the sample was deemed sufficient for meaningful insight.

Interview guide design and measures

A semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix VI: **Questionnaire**). It covered four main topics: the purpose and activities of *sleutelpersonen*; their role in information distribution; challenges in informing and collaboration; and suggestions for improvement. Themes addressed individual, relational, and structural levels, but specific facilitating and constraining factors from the literature were only introduced during analysis to avoid steering participants' responses.

Data collection and analysis

Interviews were conducted in Dutch or English, depending on participants' preference. Most took place in person at locations chosen by the interviewees, including a community centre, municipal locations, and one participants' home. One interview was conducted online via Microsoft Teams. One group interview with three participants was held at their suggestion, followed by two individual follow-ups to deepen insights and ensure participants felt able to speak freely. Interviews lasted 20 to 60 minutes and were recorded with consent. Verbatim transcripts were produced in Condens.io and manually checked. The facilitating and constraining factors to brokerage from the theoretical framework were operationalised (Appendix VIII: **Operationalisation of facilitating and constraining factors to brokerage**). Thematic analysis was applied using deductive codes from the operationalisation and inductively developed sub-categories to create more precision, with two additional codes added inductively at the individual level that emerged from the data (Appendix IX: **Code tree**Appendix VIII: **Operationalisation of facilitating and constraining factors to brokerage**

The facilitating and constraining factors are taken from the literature; referencing in Table 1.

<i>Dimension</i>	Facilitating (+) and constraining (-) factors	Operationalisation
Individual	Organisational skills (+)	Sleutelpersonen have ability to organise events or coordinate contacts
	Valuable networks (+)	Sleutelpersonen have strong or extensive ties with Polish/Bulgarian migrants and local institutional actors
	Combining formal and informal practices (+/-)	Sleutelpersonen use both institutional tools and personal relationships to spread knowledge (e.g. informal advice and formal referrals)
Relational	Trust (+)	Migrants and officials are confident in the intentions of the sleutelpersoon and confide in them; sleutelpersonen are confident in official actors and migrants
	Social categorisation to create clear role identity (+)	Sleutelpersonen are positioned as a separate social category and are recognised by others (or self-identify) as a link between Polish/Bulgarian migrants and municipality
	Alignment with one group (+)	Sleutelpersonen are generally recognised as closely aligned with either

		Polish/Bulgarian migrants or the municipality
	Good quality of interactions (+)	Interactions between sleutelpersonen and officials or migrants are described as constructive, respectful, and ongoing
	Mutual recognition of interdependence (+)	Sleutelpersonen and officials acknowledge they rely on each other to reach Polish/Bulgarian migrants
	Inter-actor collaboration (+)	Sleutelpersonen and practitioners describe joint efforts, shared goals, or co-designed activities
	Alignment (-)	Sleutelpersonen show closer alignment with either migrants or municipality
	Conflicting role expectations (-)	Sleutelpersonen or officials describe confusion or disagreement about what sleutelpersonen should do
	Information asymmetries (-)	Sleutelpersonen know more about migrants than they tell to officials, or more about institutions than they relate to migrants
	Inter-actor conflict (-)	Reports of tension, blame, not being informed, or miscommunication between sleutelpersonen and institutional actors
Institutional	Embedding in trusted institutions (+)	Sleutelpersonen are formally connected to or hosted by organisations that migrants or officials consider credible
	Discretion & flexibility (+)	Sleutelpersonen describe making case-by-case decisions, adjusting their role to different needs
	Limited resources (-)	Lack of funding, time, or support is mentioned as a barrier to fulfilling the role effectively
	Ambiguous or unattainable outcome expectations (-)	Actors mention unclear goals or feel pressured to achieve unrealistic impacts with little guidance

Appendix IX: Code tree). Coding was done in Atlas.ti.

3.4 Methodological limitations

This study faces several methodological limitations. First, generalisability of survey findings is limited by the non-probability quota sampling. Those available to be approached may not be typical. Migrants with full-time work or fewer social contacts may be underrepresented, as they might be less visible in public or group settings (Bryman, 2015).¹¹ Self-selection bias may have meant that those more engaged, less distrustful of institutions, or more interested in rights were more inclined to participate (Bryman, 2015). To reduce this, surveys were also collected in settings like language schools where all present students participated. Bias may also have influenced whom I approached, for instance based on perceived friendliness or background (Bryman, 2015). Only Dutch- or English-speaking *sleutelpersonen* were interviewed, potentially excluding those facing stronger brokerage obstacles.

Measurement limitations included potentially varied interpretations of who is a *sleutelpersoon*. Social desirability bias may have led to overreporting of knowledge or contacts (Bryman, 2015). In interviews, desirability bias and practitioners' reluctance to share challenges may have influenced responses. Language barriers also played a role, as translations and use of non-native languages may have limited clarity and nuance in both surveys and interviews.¹²

3.5 Ethical considerations

This study accounted for possible distrust of authorities among Polish and Bulgarian migrants (Refslund, 2021). Participants were never pressured to participate. Informed consent was obtained through a brief explanation and a required consent question in the survey, with more detailed information on a separate sheet. Interviews used a detailed consent form, with the option for anonymous data use. Anonymity was guaranteed for questionnaires and paper-based questionnaires were securely stored separately to prevent others from viewing responses (Birman, 2006; Van Liempt & Bilger, 2012). All software used was GDPR-compliant. Given potential sensitivity around labour rights and social contacts, participants were reminded of confidentiality and their right to withdraw. Care was taken to handle information sensitively (Van Liempt & Bilger, 2012). To contribute to indirect benefits for

¹¹ However, even probability sampling may suffer from underrepresentation (Bryman, 2015).

¹² The first language of several Bulgarian participants was Turkish, possibly impeding their full understanding of the Bulgarian survey.

participants, findings will be shared with the municipality and *sleutelpersonen* to inform policy and potentially improve support structures.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter first presents quantitative findings on the relationship between contact with *sleutelpersonen*, bonding social contacts, and knowledge of employment rights, followed by qualitative insights that aim to explain these outcomes. Together, they explore to what extent and why engagement with *sleutelpersonen* influences knowledge of employment rights among Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants in Rotterdam.

4.1 The core relationship: Limited effects of engagement, importance of social capital

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics for key variables

Limited engagement with sleutelpersonen

Engagement with *sleutelpersonen* was generally low. As shown in Figure 2, slightly over 50% of respondents reported never having had contact with a *sleutelpersoon*. Among those who did, scores were spread across the scale with no clear concentration. The median score was 1 (Table 2), confirming that most respondents had little to no engagement, while a smaller group had more frequent contact. This points to limited and uneven reach of *sleutelpersonen*. Pattern were similar for Poles ($n = 67$) and Bulgarians ($n = 41$), although differentiating limits the sample size per group.

Moderate knowledge of employment rights

The average score for knowledge of employment rights was 3.24 (SD = 1.04), indicating moderate understanding of rights and support options. However, the shortfall from the maximum reveals persisting knowledge gaps. This aligns with previous research finding migrant workers to lack knowledge on their rights and assistance options (e.g., Fernández García et al., 2023; Ollus et al., 2013). The distribution of responses is visualised in Figure 3.

When split into two components, rights knowledge scored slightly higher ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.09$) than reporting knowledge ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.26$), which indicates that respondents were somewhat more familiar with their formal rights than with how to act upon violations (Figure 4). The distributions supported this: reporting knowledge was more right-skewed and flatter, indicating that lower scores were more common and responses were more widely spread.

These patterns were similar across nationalities, but some variation exists: Bulgarians were overrepresented in the lowest knowledge categories, especially for reporting knowledge, and less present in the higher categories. In contrast, Poles were more concentrated in the

middle and higher ranges, suggesting slightly higher levels of rights awareness overall (Figure 3; Figure 4).

Moderate social capital

Bonding social capital showed a moderate mean of 2.92 (SD = 0.78) on a 1-5 scale, with a roughly normal distribution, reflecting moderate network strength. Figure 5 reveals some nationality-based variation. Bulgarian respondents were more evenly distributed, with a small group (5%) scoring in the highest category while no Polish respondents did. Conversely, 5% of Poles fell into the lowest category, where no Bulgarians were present. Polish responses clustered around the centre. This suggests that despite similar overall connectedness, Bulgarians show greater variation in social ties, whereas Poles show more concentrated moderate social capital. This difference could affect how each group accesses informal information flows.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the main variables

	Range	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
<i>Sleutelpersonen</i> contact	1-9	2.38	2.095	1	1	9	1.592	4.377
Knowledge	1-5	3.239	1.043	1	3.3	5	-.253	2.312
<i>Rights</i>	1-5	3.351	1.089	1	3.571	5	-.427	2.269
<i>Reporting</i>	1-5	2.969	1.259	1	2.667	5	.245	1.899
Social contacts	1-5	2.916	0.777	1.125	2.875	4.75	-.048	2.525

N = 108

Figure 2 Reported frequency of contact with *sleutelpersonen*, overall and by nationality

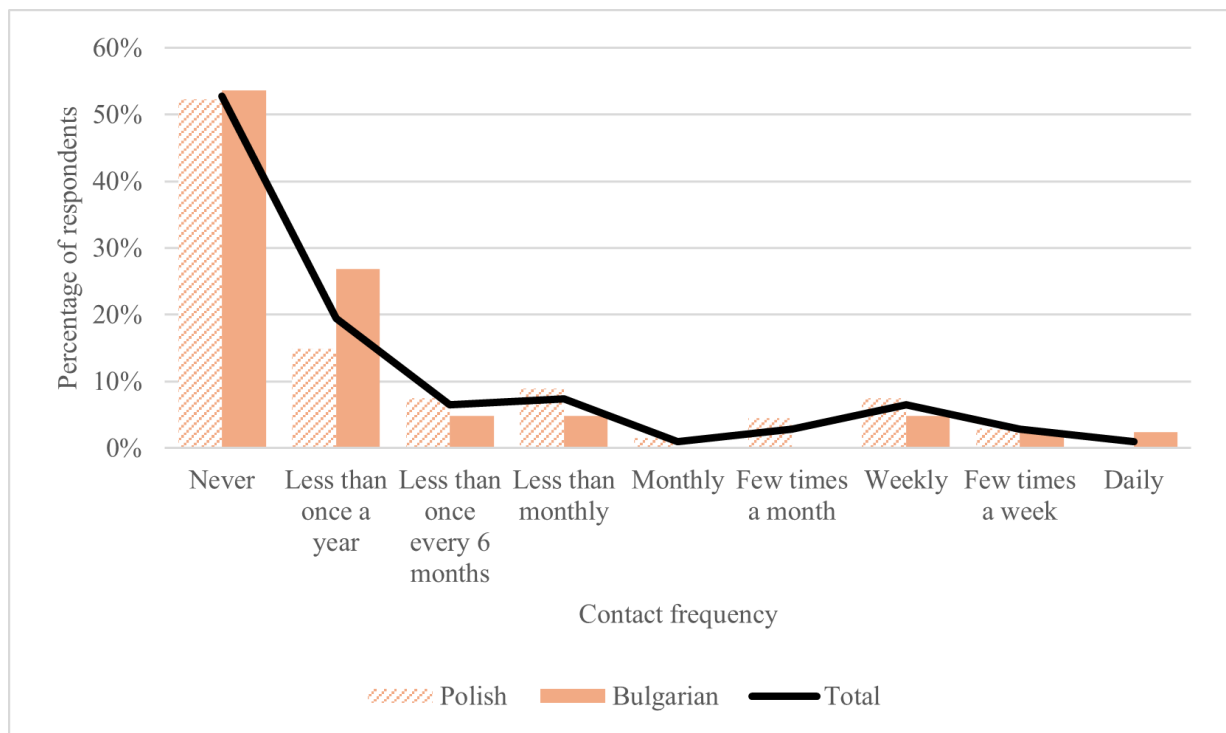


Figure 3 Reported employment rights knowledge scores, overall and by nationality

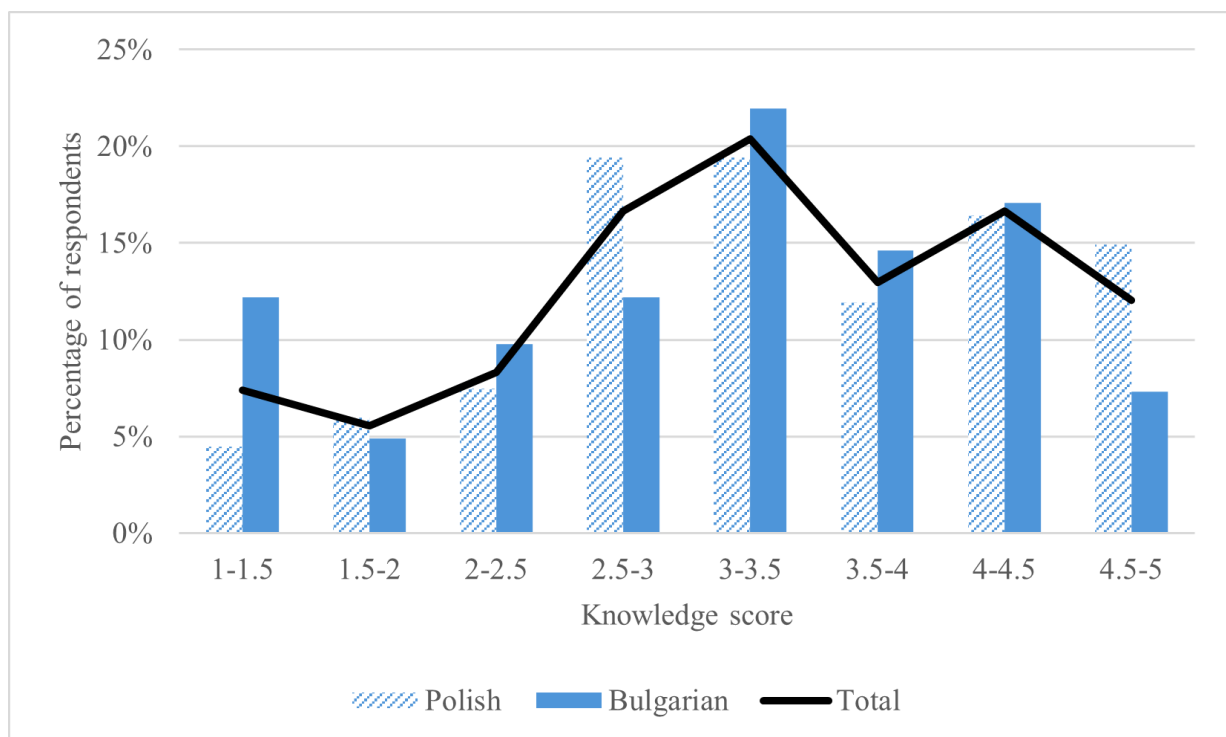
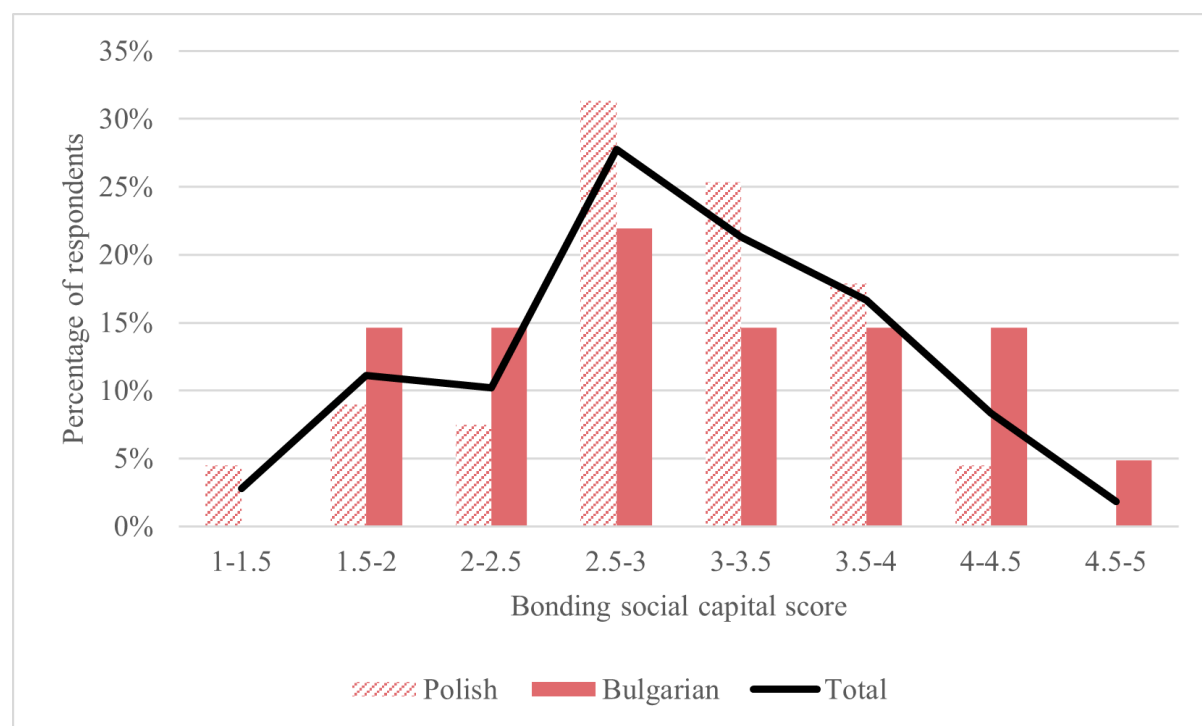


Figure 4 Average rights and reporting knowledge scores, overall and by nationality



Figure 5 Reported average bonding social capital scores, overall and by nationality



4.1.2 Correlation analysis

A pairwise correlation matrix explored relationships between key variables (Table 3). Contact with *sleutelpersonen* showed a weak but significant correlation with knowledge of employment rights. Bonding social contact demonstrated a moderate and highly significant positive correlation with knowledge of employment rights, suggesting it is more strongly related to knowledge than contact with *sleutelpersonen* is. Notably, *sleutelpersonen* contact was not significantly correlated with bonding social capital, implying that *sleutelpersonen* do not necessarily reach those with stronger or weaker networks. Rather, contact with *sleutelpersonen* bonding social capital seem to operate independently, offering distinct forms of support.

Control variables such as education and language skills (Dutch and English) were moderately and significantly correlated with knowledge of employment rights, indicating that they may influence migrants' understanding of rights. Length of stay and gender showed weaker yet significant correlations. Their inclusion as controls in the regression helps isolate the effect of engagement with *sleutelpersonen*.

Additionally, contact with *sleutelpersonen* was more common among older respondents and those not currently employed, possibly reflecting greater need or vulnerability. Social capital was higher among those with higher educational attainment and stronger language skills. These patterns further justify the inclusion of these variables as controls in the regression model.

Finally, the correlation matrix also revealed some background patterns. For instance, Dutch proficiency correlated with duration of stay in the Netherlands, suggesting language skills come with time. English proficiency, however, is more closely tied to education. Both language skills showed negative correlations with age. These patterns help contextualise how language skills shape access to information. Respondents with longer stays or higher educational attainment are more likely to have developed the language skills needed to understand employment rights information.

Table 3 Pairwise correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
(1) knowledge	1.000										
(2) <i>sleutelpersonen_</i> contact	0.163*	1.000									
(3) social_contacts	0.374***	0.088	1.000								
(4) female	0.171*	0.069	0.023	1.000							
(5) age	-0.051	0.387***	-0.048	-0.054	1.000						
(6) Polish	0.118	0.078	-0.058	0.111	0.169*	1.000					
(7) education	0.353***	0.043	0.251***	0.174*	0.033	0.237**	1.000				
(8) stay_NL	0.177*	0.163*	0.072	0.045	0.159*	0.123	0.006	1.000			
(9) Dutch_skills	0.257***	0.052	0.226**	-0.109	-0.270***	-	0.037	0.348***	1.000		
						0.191**					
(10) English_skills	0.325***	-0.163*	0.176*	0.043	-0.432***	0.158*	0.328***	0.152	0.309***	1.000	
(11) employed	0.079	-0.177*	0.073	-0.083	-0.136	-0.042	0.176*	-0.141	-0.035	0.123	1.000

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.1.3 Regression analysis

A multiple linear regression tested whether contact with *sleutelpersonen*, social contacts, and their interaction predict knowledge of employment rights, controlling for demographic and contextual variables (Table 4). The regression was run in five steps. Model 1 tested the effects of the main variables. Model 2 added control variables. Model 3 included an interaction term to test the moderation effect. Model 4 and 5 separated the knowledge variable into knowledge of rights and awareness of support options in case of employment rights violations to allow for more detailed analysis.¹³

Main effects: No effect of *sleutelpersonen*, social capital as significant predictor

Model 1 was statistically significant ($F(2, 105) = 9.78, p < .001$). This indicates that the included variables help explain variation in knowledge of employment rights. However, contact with *sleutelpersonen* had no statistically significant effect on said knowledge ($\beta = 0.03, p = .150$). The weak correlation observed earlier thus disappeared in the regression analysis. This finding contrasts with Putnam's (2007) and Granovetter's (1983) theories, which would suggest *sleutelpersonen* have an important informational function as bridging figures or weak ties.

In contrast, social contacts showed a strong, positive, and significant association with knowledge of employment rights ($\beta = 0.487, p < .001$), indicating that individuals with more bonding social capital tend to report greater knowledge of rights. This aligns with earlier findings on the informational function of social networks (Schaefer et al., 1981; Ryan et al., 2008), as well as with Putnam's (2007) social capital theory.

Adding control variables in Model 2 improved the model fit,¹⁴ indicating that demographic and contextual factors substantially contribute to explaining variation in rights knowledge. Contact with *sleutelpersonen* remained non-significant ($\beta = 0.068, p = .151$). Social contacts stayed a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.332, p = .007$). Among the controls, education showed a marginally significant positive association with knowledge, and English skills approached significance.

¹³ As a check, regressions were re-run including only those respondents with no or low salary (<130% of legal minimum wage) ($n=91$), which did not significantly alter results.

¹⁴ Explained variance increased from 15.7% to 31.4% ($R^2 = 0.3140, Adj. R^2 = 0.2433$).

Moderation effect: No role of social capital

The interaction term between *sleutelpersonen* contact and social contacts, added in Model 3, was not significant ($\beta = -0.021, p = .740$), indicating the absence of a moderation effect.

Social contacts continued to be a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.375, p = .037$), while *sleutelpersonen* contact remained non-significant ($\beta = 0.133, p = .508$). These findings suggest that having a strong or weak network of close social ties did not influence the impact of contact with *sleutelpersonen* on knowledge of employment rights.

Differentiated effects: Education and language as key predictors

When splitting the dependent variable into knowledge of employment rights and knowledge of support options, more nuanced results appear. The effect of social capital on knowledge of support options was stronger than on rights knowledge (Table 4), although the significance decreases compared to earlier models ($p = .063$ and $p = .054$). These findings suggest that social networks may be more helpful for navigating support than understanding rights.

Moreover, whereas education had a significant positive effect on rights knowledge ($\beta = 0.241, p = .033$), this effect disappeared for reporting knowledge. This corresponds to research on higher educational attainment increasing people's understanding of rights (Ewers et al., 2023; Seibel, 2023). What did, however, significantly affect migrants' awareness of these practical support options was language skills, for Dutch ($\beta = 0.285, p = .015$) as well as English ($\beta = 0.285, p = .028$). This could suggest that language skills are particularly important for knowing where to seek help in case of employment rights abuse.

Table 4 Comparison of regression results for knowledge of employment rights

VARIABLES	(1) Base model	(2) Full model	(3) Interaction model	(4) Split model: Rights knowledge	(5) Split model: Reporting knowledge
Engagement with <i>sleutelpersonen</i>	0.0649 (0.0448)	0.0682 (0.0471)	0.133 (0.200)	0.0840 (0.215)	0.247 (0.241)
Social contacts	0.487*** (0.121)	0.332*** (0.121)	0.375** (0.178)	0.360* (0.191)	0.417* (0.214)
Sleutel*Social			-0.0211 (0.0635)	-0.0124 (0.0684)	-0.0419 (0.0765)
Female		0.291 (0.196)	0.285 (0.198)	0.241 (0.213)	0.406* (0.238)
Age		0.0170 (0.112)	0.0193 (0.113)	-0.0223 (0.121)	0.103 (0.136)
Polish		0.128 (0.200)	0.132 (0.201)	0.109 (0.217)	0.207 (0.243)
Education		0.180* (0.103)	0.178* (0.103)	0.241** (0.112)	0.0462 (0.125)
Duration of stay in NL		0.0549 (0.107)	0.0529 (0.108)	0.0870 (0.116)	-0.0279 (0.129)
Dutch skills		0.134 (0.0949)	0.133 (0.0953)	0.0708 (0.103)	0.285** (0.115)
English skills		0.131 (0.0796)	0.132 (0.0800)	0.0956 (0.0862)	0.215** (0.0963)
Employed		0.134 (0.194)	0.137 (0.195)	0.190 (0.210)	-0.00932 (0.235)
Constant	1.664*** (0.371)	0.0600 (0.643)	-0.0586 (0.738)	0.172 (0.795)	-0.653 (0.888)
Observations	108	108	108		
Adjusted R-squared	0.141	0.243	0.236	0.188	0.241

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.2 No effect of engagement with *sleutelpersonen*, but why?

The results showed no direct or moderated effect of engagement with *sleutelpersonen* on knowledge of employment rights. H_1 , which posited a positive relationship between contact with *sleutelpersonen* and knowledge of employment rights, was therefore not supported by the data. Neither was H_3 , which expected bonding social capital to moderate this relationship. However, the results offered support for H_2 , as bonding social capital was consistently and significantly associated with higher knowledge of employment rights. This is in line with existing literature on the informational function of networks (Schaefer et al., 1981). These

results suggest that bonding social capital may play a more important role than contact with *sleutelpersonen* in shaping migrants' knowledge of their employment rights.

These findings raise the question of why engagement with *sleutelpersonen* does not significantly predict knowledge of employment rights, despite their intended role as brokers. The qualitative analysis that follows provides deeper insights. Interviews with *sleutelpersonen* and the officials working with them, interpreted through brokerage theory, highlight how factors such as role ambiguity, varying capacities, and complex relationships with municipal institutions shape the actual influence of *sleutelpersonen*. These dynamics help to understand the constraints that limit *sleutelpersonen* in their practical functioning.

4.3 Individual-level factors

At the individual level, a reason for the limited impact of *sleutelpersonen* on migrants' knowledge levels was found in the fact that only a small group of *sleutelpersonen* currently possess the networks, organisational skills, time, and societal familiarity necessary to effectively share information.

Motivated helpers, but limited in reach

First, many participants in the Polish *sleutelpersonen* group currently operate with limited organisational initiative or smaller networks, characteristics that Koster (2014) identifies as essential for functioning as a broker. This can be traced back to the initial design of the approach. When the group was set up in 2021, municipal staff actively recruited motivated individuals. They were invited to participate in a Dutch language class, where they also received basic training and information on rights. The language provider was later asked to organise neighbourhood activities with them. *Sleutelpersonen* recount how they regularly talked about problems of Poles in Rotterdam, and one remembers that period as empowering and motivating. Despite drop-outs, the group eventually reached around 25 members. In early 2025, responsibility for the approach shifted to a local welfare organisation, and the Polish group continued to meet at a community centre.

In effect, the municipality thus tried to “create” *sleutelpersonen* by mobilising willing citizens. However, practitioners recognised that not everyone in this group has a large network or organisational skills and are the “key” to a migrant community. Many are “active citizens” who are motivated to contribute and have the time, but may lack knowledge of the Dutch system or language. A *sleutelpersoon* also mentioned that limited Dutch proficiency, organisational and budgeting skills, and the absence of a professional network hinder their ability to independently organise activities. Moreover, their legal knowledge remains limited.

As a result, only some people in this *sleutelpersonen* group are community figures with reach and initiative, while others, though regular attendees of the meetings, might have limited reach and knowledge they can share. This might have affected their potential to connect to migrants as vertical weak ties and share resources (Granovetter, 1983; Ryan, 2011), and thus their brokerage role. The fact that half of the survey respondents had met a *sleutelpersoon*, however, suggests that their presence within migrant communities is not negligible.

Difficult to find existing community figures

Efforts to increase the number of active community figures have proven difficult. Since the transition to the welfare organisation, the supporting practitioner seeks to identify and support people who are already recognised as community figures, rather than create new ones. This has led to the creation of a Bulgarian *sleutelpersonen* group organising cultural activities. Overall, however, few such figures have been identified. Many migrants lack time or energy for unpaid volunteer work due to long working hours. Even some Polish community figures at the community centre do not attend *sleutelpersonen* meetings due to time constraints, and one *sleutelpersoon* mentioned the toll his role takes on his family life. These findings build on Koster (2014) by demonstrating time as an additional prerequisite for brokers. Moreover, it indicates that *sleutelpersonen* with limited typical brokerage skills can contribute through their time.

Another barrier is that migrants often struggle with their own issues or have not found their way in the Netherlands yet. As one practitioner said: “If you’re still in trouble yourself and don’t know the way, how can you help someone else?” Combined with lack of time and Dutch skills, and potentially aggravated by a lack of trust among Polish migrants and internal divisions among Bulgarians, this means few individuals emerge as community figures. These findings imply that the participation society paradigm (Koster, 2014) only works when structural conditions are supportive. In a context of labour exploitation, few people have the time, headspace or capacity to function as potential knowledge brokers.

Brokers with key qualities

A small number of *sleutelpersonen*, however, emerge as crucial brokers distributing employment rights information among migrants. They display the necessary organisational skills and serve wide networks, informing people through a useful combination of informal and formal channels (Koster, 2014; Koster, 2016).

Some Polish and Bulgarian *sleutelpersonen* take strong initiative. They organise cultural events, weekly dance classes, or strive to open a Bulgarian Sunday school or Polish community organisation. These activities may contribute to migrants' social capital, found in this study to significantly affect knowledge of employment rights, and create spaces for information sharing by the *sleutelpersonen*. One community figure organising used weekly social gatherings for elderly and unemployed migrants to share useful information obtained while translating at institutions. Another noted how parent networks formed around the future Sunday school could be used to inform them about rights. Practitioners and *sleutelpersonen* alike, however, noted that building attendance takes time. Moreover, their diversity of practices means that people might know *sleutelpersonen*, yet not in the context of rights knowledge.

These *sleutelpersonen* also have wide networks, sometimes spanning multiple cities. This allows them to circulate knowledge through their networks and beyond. One *sleutelpersoon* described receiving questions from people in Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, often passed on through informal chains: "If someone has a problem [...] then the question comes, through through through through through, 'yeah you know what, he can do it like this,' through through through, it comes back, not directly." Others also said their phone number circulates widely. Some *sleutelpersonen* actively use their networks to identify people in need. This reflects Granovetter's (1983) theory that weak ties introduce new information into close circles. *Sleutelpersonen* act as weak ties, brokering knowledge to migrants. Some also approach people outside their networks: "I am finding these people just like this, because everybody is struggling." This generates new weak ties, and spreads knowledge even further.

Regarding employment issues, *sleutelpersonen* combine informal advice with referrals to formal services. As found by Koster (2016; 2019), this appears effective in brokering information between institutions and migrants. People frequently approach them informally with work-related problems. One interviewee mimicked such an exchange:

Who is this? [...] 'Yes, hello, I have a problem.' Yes, go ahead. 'Yes, will it cost something?' No, man, I, that is not my job, you know? Come Saturday, Sunday, when I have time. 'Yes, yes.' [...] Then we go sit in the park.

They also act as intermediaries or with institutions or employers. These interactions can teach migrants about their rights. Moreover, *sleutelpersonen* share information proactively. One

mentioned receiving news about a municipal information evening on employment contracts and then personally encouraging others to attend: “I think you don’t really know those laws [...] and you know what? Why don’t you just go there for a bit?” According to one *sleutelpersoon*, proactive sharing helps to reach hard-to-reach or new migrants: “They don’t speak about the problems, but they are listening.” Their ability to filter and personalise information seems valuable in enhancing its relevance and reach.

Next to informal advice, *sleutelpersonen* frequently refer people to formal support services, such as the local municipal information point for CEE migrants, the municipality’s general service desk, or an organisation for homeless CEE migrants. This dual method allows *sleutelpersonen* to build trust while ensuring migrants access official resources. However, their limited number and early stage of organisation limit their reach and potentially contributed to the regression analysis finding no measurable effect.

4.4 Relational-level factors

Inter-actor obstacles further limited the ability of *sleutelpersonen* to broker information. Four main interrelating factors emerged: divergent goals conflicting role expectations (particularly for Polish *sleutelpersonen*), limited interaction with the municipality, and migrants’ low trust. These dynamics reduced both the information provided to *sleutelpersonen* and the opportunities to share it, undermining their role as intermediaries. As a result, their brokerage function has been significantly weakened, although some Polish *sleutelpersonen* had previously fulfilled that role more actively.

Changing and divergent goals

First, interviews revealed different visions on the goal of *sleutelpersonen*. While the municipality initially engaged Polish *sleutelpersonen* to build trust, spread information, and strengthen social cohesion, *sleutelpersonen* perceive the current focus since the programme’s shift to the welfare organisation as primarily cultural. This illustrates how discretionary space in policy implementation invites different interpretations (Lipsky, 1980). Consequently, some *sleutelpersonen* disengaged, feeling they were no longer making an impact. A Polish *sleutelpersoon* described frustration with the welfare organisation: “What do you really want from us? [...] to grow as a Polish community [...] [or] just to be a cultural and amusement organisation.” Those Polish and Bulgarian *sleutelpersonen* who did wish to share municipal information felt like this was no longer a priority for the municipality, unlike earlier phases when Polish *sleutelpersonen* were more closely involved.

This shift seems to have undermined information brokerage in three ways: by deprioritising it, prompting dropout of motivated Polish *sleutelpersonen*, and causing internal tensions that complicated organisation. Among the Bulgarian group, the cultural focus appeared more settled, which facilitated activity planning, yet meant organisation related to information distribution was limited. These dynamics reflect a fragmented, negotiated nature of local implementation (Dimitriadis et al., 2021), where competing visions limit a focus on information distribution.

Limited collaboration and communication

A related barrier was that several *sleutelpersonen* experienced limited collaboration and communication with the municipality. *Sleutelpersonen* from both the Polish and Bulgarian groups, as well as those working independently, expressed a desire for closer collaboration with the municipality in terms of information distribution. A Polish community figure described: “I have proposed a couple of times that I can also do an information evening or distribute information [...] But yes, still can’t get in contact with the municipality.” Some would also like to support the municipal information point but feel unable to do so since the programme’s transition. The transition thus positioned *sleutelpersonen* further from the municipality, their brokerage role aligning more with the “gatekeeper” type: part of the migrant community but not the institutional system (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). While this allows them to help migrants navigate institutions by interpreting or guiding, it limits their ability to transmit official information and makes their role more individual than institutional. Alignment as a stabilising mechanism for brokerage (Stovel et al., 2011) could thus also limit its effectiveness.

Moreover, a *sleutelpersoon* lamented limited communication about why changes occurred, whereas a practitioner stated this was clearly explained. The frustration thus appears rooted more in the weakened municipal connection than in the change of place. One *sleutelpersoon* described how decisions are made *about* them, rather than *with* them. These dynamics risk undermining trust and weakening brokerage relationships, which depend on the quality of inter-actor interaction (Mayntz, 1980; Stovel & Shaw, 2012).

Despite these tensions, examples of strong collaboration demonstrate the potential of well-functioning relationships. The previous contact of the Polish group with the municipality was perceived as positive and empowering. Currently, Bulgarian and Polish *sleutelpersonen* describe good collaboration with support staff at the welfare organisation and neighbourhood centre. They also connect them to a municipal officer who can answer many questions.

However, this collaboration often remains limited to organising events, not sharing information, thus limiting the impact on knowledge brokerage.

Confusion around support

A third relational barrier to effective brokerage lies in the misalignment of expectations regarding support and self-reliance between Polish *sleutelpersonen* and professionals at the welfare organisation. Whereas municipal staff initially played a catalysing, empowering and supportive role, the current approach places greater emphasis on self-reliance. This shift resulted in confusion and demotivation among Polish *sleutelpersonen*. As one reflected: “Our expectation was that we will be helped... their expectation was that we will organise ourselves.” They noted the lack of a leader to guide the group. The resulting inaction led some *sleutelpersonen* to withdraw. Practitioners also voiced disappointment over lost momentum. One remarked, “We had a beautiful, large group, [...] now the question is, how will this continue?” These dynamics illustrate how unclear and conflicting role expectations can destabilise brokerage (Stovel et al., 2011), limiting *sleutelpersonen*’s ability to organise activities that could also serve to spread information within their communities.

Contact with Polish and Bulgarian residents of Rotterdam

Brokers must be trusted by both sides they connect (Stovel et al., 2011). Interviews reveal that Polish *sleutelpersonen* can struggle to build trust with migrants outside their networks, who feel shame to discuss their problems. Gaining credibility often requires convincing and migrants are hesitant in joining activities. This mirrors previous research on distrust among Polish migrants and migrants’ shame in discussing exploitation (Rosales, 2014; Ryan et al., 2008). The Bulgarian *sleutelpersoon* did not face this barrier, aligning with research on higher social trust in Bulgaria than Poland (Pichler & Wallace, 2007). Still, according to interviews, tensions between Bulgarian ethnic groups may play a role in reaching migrants. These results show that not only interactions with the institutional actors, but also with migrants can limit how knowledge is transmitted.

4.5 Institutional-level factors

Ambiguous embedding in institutions and support

Since early this year, *sleutelpersonen* have been embedded in the welfare organisation. A municipal officer explained this aimed to ensure sustainable support after the municipal programme ends and increase contact with local residents. However, some Polish *sleutelpersonen* feel invisible to migrants in this setting and lack room to grow, expressing a

wish for their own space. In contrast, others praised the facilitating role of the organisation regarding space, budget for activities and staff. Some Bulgarians became involved after proactively seeking space to organise cultural activities, illustrating how participatory governance invites citizens into spaces of governance and formalises existing citizen initiatives (Cornwall, 2002; Brouwer et al., 2013). For them, the organisation matched their goals well. These cases show that although embedding can stabilise brokerage (Stovel et al., 2011), misalignment between brokers' ambitions and institutions can obstruct their organisation and thus information dissemination.

Embedding in institutions, however, requires resources for brokerage to work effectively (Stovel et al., 2011). Although *sleutelpersonen* receive some space and support, a lack of structural support and resources seems to undermine their ability to act as brokers. Participants repeatedly mentioned missing leadership, training, and support in areas like budgeting and organising activities. One metaphor captured this: "This is not our garden [...] if you have some expectation from this group, give us [...] support with all this stuff." The absence of remuneration was another frequent concern, as was the feeling that the municipality flaunts the concept of *sleutelpersonen* without offering tangible backing. Unlike paid cultural mediators elsewhere (Miklavcic & LeBlanc, 2014), *sleutelpersonen* face high expectations without adequate support, leaving them structurally unequipped to reach and inform migrants. This reflects Koster's (2014) observation that citizen organisation in urban governance is both encouraged and constrained by the state.

4.6 Synthesis: Interrelating obstacles to knowledge diffusion

As outlined in the conceptual framework, interacting individual, relational and institutional factors *sleutelpersonen* from spreading knowledge of employment rights. Some have limited networks, initiative, or knowledge of Dutch systems and rights. While a few active *sleutelpersonen* make meaningfully share rights knowledge through informal ties, their institutional embedding in a welfare organisation has reduced contact with municipal officials. The approach has shifted from supported information-sharing and activity organisation to more self-reliant cultural initiatives with less structural leadership and training. Especially for the Polish group, this has led to disengagement and limited activity. These factors weaken the ability of *sleutelpersonen* to connect migrants to employment rights knowledge, helping to explain the lack of significant effects in the regression analysis.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and discussion

This thesis set out to answer the question: *To what extent does engagement with “sleutelpersonen” influence self-assessed knowledge of employment rights among Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants in Rotterdam?* The main quantitative finding was that engagement with *sleutelpersonen* did not emerge as a significant predictor of self-assessed knowledge of employment rights. This result was unexpected given the existing literature on the importance of weak ties (Granovetter, 1981) and brokers in urban governance (e.g., Koster, 2014; 2016), which emphasises their potential to diffuse information between citizens and institutions. Nor did social capital moderate this relationship, indicating no evidence that *sleutelpersonen* are more effective for migrants with smaller social networks.

The qualitative component helped explain why engagement with *sleutelpersonen* did not show a stronger quantitative effect. Interviews revealed that only a small number of *sleutelpersonen* possess the networks, organisational capacity, and knowledge of Dutch society needed to act as effective brokers in migrant communities. Many are motivated volunteers but lack the characteristics to distribute information at scale. Relational and institutional conditions further obstructed *sleutelpersonen* in performing a role as brokers, such as diverging goals, unclear expectations, weak collaboration with the municipality, and limited tailored support at the welfare organisation. These findings align with brokerage theory (Stovel et al., 2011; Koster, 2014), which emphasises that effective brokers require both individual capacity and institutional positioning, and highlights how much of its potential is dependent on interactions and relationships. The relational level became a local “battleground” (Dimitriadis et al., 2021), with diverging goals and unclear communication. *Sleutelpersonen* were closer aligned with migrants and had limited ties to the municipality, limiting top-down information flow on employment rights (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). These obstacles to effective brokerage may explain the absence of a measurable effect on knowledge of employment rights. The absence of a moderating relationship might also be because *sleutelpersonen*’s limited capacity and ambiguous roles prevented them from effectively leveraging migrants’ close networks to enhance information diffusion.

However, bonding social capital did emerge as a significant predictor of knowledge. This finding supports social capital theory (Putnam, 2007), which highlights the value of networks for accessing resources. However, whereas theorists such as Granovetter (1981) have emphasised the importance of weak ties in information diffusion, this study suggests the importance of strong, trusting ties for rights knowledge among migrants. This corresponds to qualitative studies on the informational support of migrants’ close contacts (e.g., Ryan et al.,

2008; Schwabe & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2021). However, causality cannot be inferred. The association may reflect unobserved factors such confidence, assertiveness, or exploitation, which could confound the relationship by affecting both social capital and rights knowledge, for instance by keeping migrants intentionally uninformed (Papadopoulos et al., 2021). Additionally, the relationship may be bidirectional, as exploitation could reduce social contacts and knowledge, while low knowledge and social capital increase vulnerability. Future research could employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to establish causality, although these may be difficult to implement among mobile and hard-to-reach migrant populations. Alternatively, qualitative research could clarify causal mechanisms between bonding social capital and rights knowledge.

In addition, the analysis showed how, when distinguishing between knowledge of employment rights and knowledge of support options, education predicted the former, while English and Dutch skills predicted the latter. This nuanced finding suggests communication matters more for accessing support options than for knowledge of rights, a distinction not previously made in the migration literature (cf. e.g. Reeger, 2018). While the role of education in legal literacy has been noted (Meager et al., 2002), this has not yet been explored for CEE migrants.

This thesis' mixed-methods approach has proven suitable for capturing the complexity of the *sleutelpersonen* intervention. The conceptual model that situates the main mechanism within a context of individual, relational and institutional factors has proven useful in distinguishing obstacles to the approach, although at times the three are highly intertwined and challenging to separate.

Broader contributions to academic debates of this study are threefold. First, it adds to the limited literature measuring self-assessed knowledge of employment rights among migrants, particularly hard-to-reach groups like CEE migrants. Descriptives showed knowledge levels were only moderate, signalling a need for continued attention. Second, it is among the first to quantitatively assess social capital's effect on legal knowledge, revealing bonding social capital as a potentially crucial resource. In doing so, it adds to social capital theory by suggesting that bonding social capital, not only bridging ties, can be an important informational resource for diffusing knowledge about rights among recent migrant groups, such as CEE labour migrants. This challenges the prevailing focus on bridging ties as the primary channel for information flow (Putnam, 2007; Kanas et al., 2012). Third, it adds nuance to brokerage theory by showing how individual-level capacities, relationships with different actors, and structural embedding jointly shape the effectiveness of brokers in urban

governance (Stovel et al., 2011; Koster, 2014). In particular, it highlights that not all self-identified or institutionally labelled brokers are able to act as such, and that time, initiative, and familiarity with society are critical enabling conditions. Finally, the study contributes to scholarship on participatory governance by illustrating the limits of state-led attempts to “create” community figures in contexts of precarity. The *sleutelpersonen* approach reveals how institutional withdrawal, ambiguous roles, and shifting expectations can undermine participatory efforts, particularly when structural barriers such as labour exploitation remain unaddressed. In these efforts, the study bridge disciplinary literatures from public administration, sociology, and migration studies.

Limitations should be acknowledged. This study measured self-assessed knowledge of employment rights, which may not fully reflect actual knowledge or understanding. Future research could incorporate objective tests or case scenarios to better capture real legal literacy. What should be noted, however, is that lacking knowledge does not necessarily mean unawareness of the relative efficacy of law (Smith, 2005). Another limitation is that social capital was not differentiated by location: it remains unclear how much social capital migrants maintain transnationally (in Poland or Bulgaria) versus locally in Rotterdam. Transnational ties may affect access to information and support, so exploring this dimension would strengthen understanding. The general focus on Polish and Bulgarian communities in Rotterdam also limits generalisability. These groups are internally diverse, with differences in ethnicity and language. For example, some Bulgarian respondents spoke Turkish or identified as Roma. These factors may influence both social capital and knowledge but were beyond the scope of this study. Future research could disaggregate these subgroups or include other nationalities. Finally, recruitment challenges limited the sample size, partly due to distrust and reluctance among migrants to participate. This in itself is an important finding, signalling barriers to engagement that may affect the reach of *sleutelpersonen* and similar interventions. Studying migrants bridging social capital to local institutions and populations is a relevant angle for future research.

Overall, this thesis highlights the complexity of using community figures to disseminate knowledge among migrant workers. It shows that the impact of *sleutelpersonen* is constrained by the individual, relational and institutional context of brokerage. Increasing migrants’ social capital emerges as a promising complementary strategy, worthy of further investigation and policy attention.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

1) Invest in migrants' social networks

→ *Municipality of Rotterdam, welfare organisation*

The analysis showed that strong, trusting social ties are positively associated with knowledge of employment rights. This highlights the value of supporting initiatives that strengthen social networks among Polish and Bulgarian migrants to improve rights awareness. Such networks may spread information more effectively than individual *sleutelpersonen*. Tailored group initiatives, like the Polish community space or Bulgarian Sunday school as proposed by interview participants, could offer regular meeting points. Prior studies also show networks can form around childcare (Ryan et al., 2011; Seidler et al., 2022). As most current initiatives are centred in Carnisse, expanding activity to areas like Oud-Mathenesse may be beneficial. Bottom-up initiatives should be encouraged but supported with planning and organisational help, given participants' limited time.

2) Strengthen the *sleutelpersonen* groups through structural support

→ *Welfare organisation*

Support the existing *sleutelpersonen* groups more actively, as their motivation and availability offer a valuable resource. While they may lack certain capacities – such as Dutch language skills, know-how of Dutch society, or organisational experience – their time and willingness to help can be harnessed effectively with the right guidance. Offer structural support on organising in the Netherlands through mentoring, training, and clearer task outlines to empower them to take initiative and organise consistently-recurring activities that might attract Polish migrants.

3) (Re)connect *sleutelpersonen* with municipal communication

→ *Municipality of Rotterdam*

Although *sleutelpersonen* are no longer formally part of a municipal programme, many remain motivated to support information distribution. To harness this potential, establish or continue with clear and accessible communication channels, such as a dedicated WhatsApp group for regularly sharing flyers and updates, along with regular meetings to for open communication on roles and expectations. This fosters trust, strengthens outreach, and

ensures *sleutelpersonen* feel heard in decision-making. Moreover, these could help ensure informational activities are demand-driven, addressing a current gap noted by a practitioner.

4) Make employment rights information more accessible and understandable

→ *Labour rights NGOs (e.g. FairWork), Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), labour unions, communication team of Municipality of Rotterdam*

This study found that Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Rotterdam have gaps in their knowledge of employment rights. Those with higher education knew more. To reach more people, translate rights information into plain language, and communicate through easy-to-understand, visual tools like infographics, videos, or comics. Ideally, sharing these at workplaces would help reach those with less social capital, although this requires the participation of employers. Community events, door-to-door flyers, language schools, and *sleutelpersonen* can also help spread these materials, making rights more accessible for people with lower education levels.

5) Address language barriers to improve access to support services

→ *Municipality of Rotterdam, adult education providers, language schools*

This study showed that migrants with better language skills are more likely to know where to get help. Although free Dutch classes exist in Rotterdam, more targeted promotion and flexible, easy-access options are needed, especially for working migrants. Consider offering Dutch courses focussed on specific needs, like healthcare, employment, or housing, held in the evenings or weekends. Online classes would also help in flexibility. Additionally, although politically sensitive in Rotterdam, explore practical ways to provide basic information in migrants' native languages. This can help people understand support systems and encourage early help-seeking.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Survey sampling and recruitment strategy

A. Rationale

Due to high underregistration and informal housing (Vriend, 2023), a probabilistic sampling frame for random selection was not available. Moreover, random sampling methods such as random routes are not considered effective for difficult-to-reach sub-populations such as migrants (Reichel & Morales, 2017). Instead, this study used venue-based sampling, following Seidler et al. (2024), who argue that visiting a wide range of locations where the target group is expected to be present across different times and days can yield a valid cross-section of a hard-to-reach migrant population such as CEE migrants. To improve representativity, it was combined with quota sampling (Babbie, 2016). Quotas were informed by municipal and national data.

B. Quota calculations and assumptions

To determine the percentage distribution by nationality, municipal BRP registrations for Rotterdam were used, based on the assumption that underregistration rates are similar between Polish and Bulgarian migrants. For gender, length of stay, and age group, national-level data were used, assuming that these distributions approximate those in Rotterdam. These quotas were applied as guidelines to enhance representativeness rather than as strict sampling weights, which was deemed appropriate for the purposes of this study.

C. Sample size rationale

According to Bryman (2015), the size of the sampling error one is prepared to tolerate is dependent on the study and the researcher. For this study, 10% was deemed to balance accuracy and feasibility. While this method assumes random sampling (Babbie, 2016), it provided a useful benchmark for guiding data collection efforts.

D. Survey quota

Table 5 Estimated demographics of Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Rotterdam (2023)

(Percentages used as indicative quotas for survey sampling)

Category	Subcategory	Total	Percentage (quota)
Nationality¹	Polish	11,660	70%
	Bulgarian	5,000	30%
Gender²	Man		54%
	Woman		46%
Length of stay in the Netherlands²	< 2 years		23%
	2-5 years		23%
	5-8 years		15%
	8 years or longer		39%
Age group³	0-17 year		7%
	18-29 year		47%
	30-39 year		22%
	40 years or older		22%

¹ Data for nationality are based on BRP registrations in Rotterdam for 2023 (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2023a).

² Data for gender and length of stay are based on national-level polis administration data for 2023 (CBS, 2024).

³ Data for age group distribution are based on national-level BRP registrations for 2022 (CBS StatLine, 2024).

Appendix II: Frequency table of respondent characteristics

Variable	Sample	
	Frequency	Per cent
Gender		
Female	73	68%
Male	35	32%
Nationality		
Polish	67	62%
Bulgarian	41	38%
Age		
16-24	9	8%
25-34	34	31%
35-44	38	35%
45-54	20	19%
55-68	7	6%
Education		
Did not finish primary education	2	2%
Primary education	6	6%
Secondary education (e.g. high school)	54	50%
Vocational education	18	17%
Higher education / University	28	26%
Length of stay in NL		
Less than 4 months	3	3%
5 – 12 months	2	2%
1 – 3 years	11	10%
3 – 5 years	15	14%
More than 5 years	77	71%
Dutch skills		
Not at all	16	15%
A little	37	34%
Just fair	35	32%
Well	9	8%
Very well	11	10%
English skills		
Not at all	24	22%
A little	21	19%
Just fair	18	17%
Well	27	25%
Very well	18	17%
Employment status		
Employed	71	66%
Unemployed	37	34%
For those employed:		
<i>Gross hourly wage</i>		
< €14	11	15%
€14- €18.25	43	61%
> €18.25	15	21%
I don't know	2	3%

<i>Company</i>		
Dutch employment agency	20	28%
Non-Dutch employment agency	3	4%
Non-Dutch secondment agency	0	0%
Directly at a company	39	55%
I don't know (or other)	9	13%
<i>Contract</i>		
Temporary contract	32	46%
Permanent contract	26	37%
I don't know (or other)	12	17%
<i>N</i> = 108		

Appendix III: Scale development

A. Rationale for using self-assessed knowledge

The choice for self-assessed knowledge, rather than actual knowledge, was made because the option to ask Likert-style rather than open-ended questions facilitated data processing (cf. Seibel, 2023). This was justified by research that demonstrated a positive correlation between self-assessed knowledge and actual knowledge (Meager et al., 2002). Moreover, it has been noted that perceived knowledge might be even more important for behaviour than factual knowledge (Meager et al., 2002).

B. Knowledge scale and item development

My scale was developed by adapting two validated questionnaires to the specific case. It was based on a recently developed valid and reliable scale by Solmaz and Koçak (2025) (received via personal correspondence) for measuring awareness of rights and responsibilities in occupational accidents and diseases of Turkish employees, which section on awareness included 27 statements that could be scored on a 5-point Likert-scale. They started with several more general statements, moving on to more specific rights and responsibilities in the format of “I know that...”. An earlier scale for a study on labour law awareness in Germany and Turkey followed a similar format, although it does not calculate an index (Sadullah et al., 2015).

My scale consisted of 10 items to deal with the limited time of respondents (Schriesheim & Eisenbach, 1991). Items are provided in the full questionnaire in Appendix III (“Knowledge of you employment rights”). For item generation, Dutch employment law was reviewed, and rights were selected that are relevant for CEE migrants, based on the literature on types of exploitation or working conditions they endure (e.g. Seidler et al. 2017; 2024). One statement was about general knowledge of employment rights (“In general, I know about my rights as an employee in the Netherlands”), six statements were about knowledge of specific employment rights (e.g., “I know that if I work overtime, I have the right to compensation, either as extra pay or time off”), and three statements were about knowledge of locations where they can ask for help when experiencing problems at work (e.g., “I know that labour unions in the Netherlands can support me if I have problems at work.”). Two of these locations were selected based on Seidler et al.’s (2024) items on important authorities to defend CEE migrants’ rights and working conditions, and the

municipal information point was chosen because of the relevance for CEE migrants in Rotterdam. The language was simplified.

C. Psychometric properties of the scale

- **Reliability:** Item analysis was performed to assess the reliability of the scale. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$), supporting its reliability as a composite measure (De Vaus, 2002). Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges between 0 and 1 and should be at least 0.7 before we say a scale is reliable (De Vaus, 2002).
- **Unidimensionality:** Item-total correlations ranged between 0.45 and 0.72, which indicates that the items measure the same underlying concept and form part of a unidimensional scale. The item-to-scale coefficient ranges between 0 and 1 and should be higher than 0.3 (De Vaus, 2002). For both reliability and unidimensionality, results were similar for Polish and Bulgarian participants. Only item A3_2, which measures awareness of municipal information points, showed a notable difference between groups, with a low average score for Bulgarian respondents (0.26) and a higher score for Polish respondents (0.63). However, removing this item would increase the Cronbach's alpha for the Bulgarian group by only 0.01, which was not considered substantial enough to justify exclusion.
- **Construct validity:** To assess construct validity, exploratory factor analysis using a principal factor analysis was performed (Table 6; Table 7). This indicated that a single construct underlies all 10 items: all items loaded moderately to strongly (0.54-0.78) on a single factor, and only the first factor had an eigenvalue above 1 (4.92). The assumption of unidimensionality is supported when only the first factor has an eigenvalue above 1 (Acock, 2014).

Together, these results indicate that the items work well as a scale and can be confidently used to measure self-assessed knowledge of employment rights.

Table 6 Principle factor analysis results for knowledge scale

(obs=107)

Factor analysis/correlation	Number of obs =	107
Method: principal factors	Retained factors =	5
Rotation: (unrotated)	Number of params =	40

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	4.919	4.286	0.916	0.916
Factor2	0.633	0.405	0.118	1.034
Factor3	0.228	0.062	0.042	1.077
Factor4	0.165	0.121	0.031	1.107
Factor5	0.045	0.063	0.008	1.116
Factor6	-0.018	0.049	-0.003	1.112
Factor7	-0.067	0.092	-0.013	1.100
Factor8	-0.160	0.025	-0.030	1.070
Factor9	-0.185	0.008	-0.034	1.036
Factor10	-0.192	.	-0.036	1.000

LR test: independent vs. saturated: $\chi^2(45) = 549.85$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.0000$

Table 7 Factor loadings for knowledge scale

Factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Uniqueness
A2_1	0.692	0.138	-0.300	-0.007	0.027	0.411
A2_2	0.650	-0.253	0.210	-0.030	0.066	0.464
A2_3	0.711	-0.236	-0.072	0.253	-0.031	0.369
A2_4	0.763	-0.256	0.080	0.118	-0.002	0.331
A2_5	0.775	-0.284	0.027	-0.162	0.004	0.291
A2_6	0.721	0.124	-0.151	-0.011	0.124	0.427
A2_7	0.689	-0.101	-0.071	-0.227	-0.097	0.449
A3_1	0.706	0.261	0.014	0.088	-0.114	0.413
A3_2	0.539	0.382	0.207	0.008	0.025	0.520
A3_3	0.739	0.330	0.104	-0.031	0.004	0.334

D. Psychometric properties of sub-scales

The same statistical checks were performed for treating items 1-7 and items 8-10 as two separate scales, for knowledge of employment rights and knowledge of support options (Table 6; Table 7). Both scales showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.89$ and $\alpha = 0.79$), item-total correlations (0.62-0.79 and 0.60-0.67) and strong item loading (0.65-0.83 and 0.67-0.74) and first factor eigenvalue above 1 (3.75 and 1.52). These findings support the use of the two subscales – knowledge of rights (items 1-7) and knowledge of support authorities (items 8-10) as separate dependent variables in the analysis.

Table 8 Principal factor analysis results for rights and reporting knowledge sub-scales

(obs=105)

Factor analysis/correlation	Number of obs =	105
Method: principal factors	Retained factors =	1
Rotation: (unrotated)	Number of params =	3

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	1.462	1.609	1.281	1.281
Factor2	-0.147	0.027	-0.129	1.152
Factor3	-0.174	.	-0.152	1.000

LR test: independent vs. saturated: $\chi^2(3) = 85.14$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.0000$

Table 9 Factor loadings of rights and reporting knowledge sub-scales

Factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Uniqueness
A3_1	0.709	0.498
A3_2	0.675	0.545
A3_3	0.710	0.496

Appendix IV: Data preparation and regression diagnostics

A. Data preparation

- **Data cleaning:** Polish and Bulgarian datasets were first harmonised to ensure consistency. Variables were renamed and recoded so that answer categories matched across both groups. Some redundant or mislabelled variables were dropped or corrected. A nationality variable was added.
- **Data preparation:** After cleaning, the two datasets were appended into one combined dataset. Labels were added in English for clarity, and new variables were created for key constructs such as gender, education, employment, and engagement with sleutelpersonen. Composite scales were created for knowledge of employment rights and bonding social capital, as well as the sub-scales rights knowledge and reporting knowledge. Distributions of key variables were examined through descriptive statistics and histograms.
- **Handling missing data:** Missing data were handled through a 75% completion threshold for composite variables (Acock, 2013). For instance, respondents needed to have answered at least 8 out of 10 knowledge items to be included in the knowledge scale. Row means were calculated accordingly. Inspection of cases with missing values demonstrated that of 146 people that started the survey, only 121 had a completion rate of at least 75%. For 109 respondents, all values were present, and because the difference with 121 is not that big, listwise deletion was applied for regression analysis, dropping any case with missing values on variables included in the models. Two implications of listwise deletion are the reduced sample size and the possible introduction of bias, as for instance people who are less motivated are not included (Acock, 2013). However, due to the limited amount of deleted cases this impact was deemed acceptable.
- **Justification multiple linear regression model:** A multiple linear regression model can be used for two interval-level variables (De Vaus, 2002). Both the outcome and moderating variable in this study use a Likert scale and are treated as interval, a common practice in the social sciences even though they are technically ordinal (Navarro & Foxcroft, 2025). The main independent variable is ordinal, and although the distances between categories may not be equal, previous research (e.g. Williams, 2020; Pasta, 2009) suggests that such ordinal variables can reasonably be treated as continuous. To justify this, I used augmented component-plus-residual plots, which

help identify whether the relationship between the outcome and predictor variables is linear (Chen et al., 2003; Mallows, 1986). The plots did not show a curved pattern, supporting the use of a linear model and modelling the independent variable as continuous. Descriptive statistics and distributions were also examined to assess sample characteristics and identify potential issues. Different versions of the key independent variable were tested (binary dummy, three-category dummy, and categorical) to assess the robustness of findings.

B. Linear regression model

$$Knowledge_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot SleutelpersonenContact_i + \beta_2 \cdot SocialContacts_i + \beta_3 \cdot (SleutelpersonenContact_i \times SocialContacts_i) + \beta_4 \cdot Controls_i + \varepsilon_i$$

C. Regression diagnostics

- **Multicollinearity** was examined using a correlation matrix, in which the correlation between the main predictor and moderator was low ($r = 0.09$), well below the common thresholds of concern ($r > 0.80$ or 0.90). Variance inflation factors (VIF) for predictors ranged between 1.11 and 2.45, well below the critical threshold of 10 (Field, 2013).
- **Homoskedasticity** was tested with the Breusch–Pagan/Cook–Weisberg test ($p = 0.533$), indicating no evidence of heteroskedasticity (Pardoe, 2020).
- **Linearity** was assessed via augmented component-plus-residual plots for both the independent variable and the mediator, showing no major deviations from linearity.
- **Normality of residuals** was tested through a histogram and normal quantile plot of standardised residuals; both suggested a reasonably normal distribution.
- **Independence** of answers from different participants was likely met because the surveys were filled out individually (Field, 2013).

Appendix V: List of interview participants

Interview number	Sector	Background
INT1	Mixed	Two municipal implementers and a Polish <i>sleutelpersoon</i>
INT2	Institutional actor	Language provider
INT3	Community figure (not official group)	Polish
INT4	Institutional actor	Welfare organisation
INT5	<i>Sleutelpersoon</i>	Bulgarian <i>sleutelpersoon</i>
INT6	Institutional actor	Municipality – follow-up
INT7	<i>Sleutelpersoon</i>	Polish – follow-up
INT8	<i>Sleutelpersoon</i>	Polish

Appendix VI: Questionnaire

Note: This is an English translation of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered in Polish and Bulgarian. These versions are available upon request from the researcher.

Questionnaire about contact with volunteers, social network and work in Rotterdam

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in this study. This questionnaire is meant for Polish and Bulgarian labour migrants in Rotterdam. The study is about your contact with volunteers from your own country, your social network and your knowledge on employment rights. The goal is to better understand the influence of your social contacts on your knowledge. The answers will be used for a Master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

The survey takes approximately 8 minutes. Your answers will stay anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Participating is voluntary. You can stop at any moment without giving an explanation.

Do you have any questions? Feel free to contact me, Jet van Swinderen, at [e-mail address].

☐ I have read the above information and I give permission to use my answers for the study.

Contact with volunteers

There are several Polish/Bulgarian volunteers in Rotterdam who play a central role in their communities. They help and advise people from their country in Rotterdam, for example if someone has problems at work or needs help finding the right support. They may also organise social activities, or help people get in touch with the municipality.

Think of your contact with such volunteers.

1. How often do you see or hear from a volunteer in Rotterdam?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than once a year
- ☐ Less than once every 6 months
- ☐ Less than monthly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Few times a month
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Few times a week
- ☐ Daily

Knowledge of your employment rights

2. The following part is about how much you know about your rights as a worker in the Netherlands. For each statement, choose the option that best applies to you.

	I do not know this at all	I know this a little	I somewhat know this	I know this fairly well	I know this very well
In general, I know about my rights as an employee in the Netherlands	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I know that the working hour maximum in the Netherlands is 48 hours per week (over a period of 16 weeks or more).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that if I work overtime, I have the right to compensation, either as extra pay or time off.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that if I work longer than 5.5 hours, I have the right to take a break of 30 minutes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that my employer is required to pay me at least the minimum wage of €14,06 (if I am 21 years or older).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that my employer is not allowed to tie my housing contract to my employment contract.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that my employer must provide safety equipment, training, and measures to protect my safety and health at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. The following statements are about your knowledge of where you can ask for help if you experience problems at work, for example, too much overtime, underpayment, or unsafe working conditions.

	I do not know this at all	I know this a little	I know some what know this	I know this fairly well	I know this very well
I know that labour unions in the Netherlands can support me if I have problems at work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that the municipality offers help or information if I have problems with work (for example at the information points at the Bulgaarsestraat in Rotterdam West or the Pleinweg in Rotterdam Zuid).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I know that I can report problems at work to the Dutch Labour Authority (Arbeidsinspectie).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Social contacts

The following part is about your personal relationships. For each question, choose the option that best applies to you.

	A lot	More than average	Average	Less than average	A few
How do you rate the number of your friends?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How do you rate the number of your country fellows (those of the same nationality)?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5.

	All	Most	Some	Few	None
Among your coworkers, how many can you trust?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Among your relatives, how many can you trust?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Among all your relatives, neighbours, friends, coworkers, and fellow citizens, how many have broad connections with others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Among all your family members, relatives, neighbours, friends, coworkers, and fellow citizens, how many have a professional job?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How many of your coworkers would definitely help you if you asked?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How many of your friends would definitely help you if you asked?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Personal information

6. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other

7. What is your age?

- ☐ 16-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-68

8. What is your highest completed level of education?

- ☐ Did not finish primary education
- ☐ Primary education
- ☐ Secondary education (e.g. high school)
- ☐ Vocational education

- ☐ Higher education / University

9. For how long have you stayed in the Netherlands?

- ☐ Less than 4 months
- ☐ 5 to 12 months
- ☐ 1 to 3 years
- ☐ 3 to 5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years

10. How well can you read and speak Dutch?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Just fair
- ☐ Well
- ☐ Very well

11. How well can you read and speak English?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Just fair
- ☐ Well
- ☐ Very well

12. Are you currently employed?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. What is your gross hourly wage (before taxes are taken off)? If you are not sure, please give your best estimate.

- ☐ Less than €14 per hour
- ☐ Between €14 and €18,25 per hour
- ☐ More than €18,25 per hour
- ☐ I don't know

14. In what kind of company are you employed?

- ☐ Dutch employment agency
- ☐ Non-Dutch employment agency
- ☐ Non-Dutch secondment agency
- ☐ Directly at a company
- ☐ I don't know

15. Which type of contract do you have?

- ☐ Temporary contract
- ☐ Permanent contract
- ☐ I don't know

Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

If you would like to receive the results of the study by email in July, you can leave your email address here:

If you are experiencing issues at work, such as unpaid overtime, dependence on your employer for housing, or poor or unsafe working conditions, the following support services may be of help:

Information Points for EU Labour Migrants – Municipality of Rotterdam

Information Point Pleinweg

Pleinweg 196A, Rotterdam-South
Open: Monday from 13:00 – 19:00,
Friday from 10:00 – 14:00

Information Point Bulgaarsestraat

Bulgaarsestraat 4, Rotterdam-West
Open: Wednesday from 17:00 – 19:00

Or ask your questions at:

Wijkhub Bloemhof

Lange Hilleweg 123, Rotterdam-South
On Thursdays from 15:00 – 17:00

You can also go there with questions about other areas of life, such as housing, health, parenting, education, finances, or legal matters. The services provided at the information points are always free of charge.

Appendix VII: Interview guides

Interview guide *sleutelpersonen*

Introductie

U heeft aangegeven mee te willen doen aan een interview over de rol van *sleutelpersonen* bij het informeren van Poolse/Bulgaarse arbeidsmigranten over hun arbeidsrechten. Heel erg bedankt!

Uw antwoorden blijven vertrouwelijk. U mag op elk moment stoppen of ervoor kiezen om geen antwoord te geven. Het interview duurt ongeveer 20-30 minuten.

Mag ik vragen of u toestemming geeft voor het opnemen van dit gesprek?

Blok 1: Rollen en positionering binnen het beleid

1. Wat doet u precies als *sleutelpersoon*?
 - a. En is dit veranderd sinds de overgang van de aanpak naar wmo radar?
2. Wat is volgens u het doel van de inzet van *sleutelpersonen*?
 - a. En is dit veranderd sinds de overgang naar wmo radar?

Blok 2: Informatieoverdracht en effect op kennis van arbeidsrechten

3. De gemeente stelt in haar beleidsdocument dat *sleutelpersonen* helpen bij de verspreiding van informatie. Hoe ziet u dat?
 - a. Heeft u wel eens informatie over arbeidsrechten gedeeld? Hoe?
 - b. Komen mensen naar u toe met vragen? Wat voor vragen?
 - c. Verwijst u mensen door naar bijeenkomsten of instanties of bijeenkomsten (bijv. gemeente, helpdesk, taalschool)?
 - d. Waarom werkt dat volgens u wel/niet? (vertrouwen, taal, bekendheid?)
4. Wat merkt u van het effect op kennis over arbeidsrechten?
 - a. Merkt u verschil bij mensen die u spreekt? Wat denkt u dat mensen van u leren? Heeft u een voorbeeld?
5. Hoe ervaart u uw bereik? Wie bereikt u vooral?
 - a. Bereikt u ook mensen die anders moeilijk hulp vinden of weinig weten van hun rechten?
 - b. Alleen een kleine groep of juist veel mensen?

6. In hoeverre denkt u dat u bijdraagt aan hun kennis over arbeidsrechten ten opzichte van andere bronnen van kennis, zoals familie en vrienden of internet?

Blok 3: Uitdagingen

7. Tegen welke uitdagingen loopt u aan bij het verspreiden van kennis?
 - a. Wat zijn de grenzen van wat u mag en kan doen?
 - b. Ervaart u obstakels zoals vertrouwen, communicatie, tijd of budget?
8. Zijn er verwarring of verschil van mening geweest over de rol van *sleutelpersonen* tussen u en de gemeente of wmo radar?
9. Hoe kijkt u terug op de samenwerking met de gemeente? Wat ging goed, wat minder?
 - a. Kreeg u genoeg ondersteuning en informatie?
 - b. Heeft u het gevoel dat u genoeg ruimte kreeg om uw werk als *sleutelpersoon* op uw eigen manier te doen?
10. En met wmo radar?

Blok 4: Reflectie en aanbevelingen

Doel: Ruimte voor hun eigen inzichten en voorstellen.

11. Wat zou er nodig zijn om *sleutelpersonen* beter te laten werken?
12. Wat heeft volgens u het meeste impact gehad in uw werk?
13. Hoe ziet u uw eigen rol in de toekomst?
14. Wat zou u de gemeente of wmo radar aanraden?

Interview guide professionals

Introductie

U heeft aangegeven mee te willen doen aan een interview over de rol van *sleutelpersonen* bij het informeren van Poolse/Bulgaarse arbeidsmigranten over hun rechten. Heel erg bedankt!

Uw antwoorden blijven vertrouwelijk. Het interview duurt ongeveer 20-30 minuten.

Mag ik vragen of u toestemming geeft voor het opnemen van dit gesprek?

Blok 1: Rollen en positionering binnen het beleid

1. Wat was het doel van het inzetten van *sleutelpersonen*?
 - En is dit veranderd sinds de overgang van de aanpak naar wmo radar?
 - Wie zijn de *sleutelpersonen*?
2. Wat doen/deden zij in de praktijk?
3. Zijn er verschillen hierin tussen de Poolse en Bulgaarse *sleutelpersonen*?

Blok 2: Informatieoverdracht en effect op kennis van arbeidsrechten

4. De gemeente stelt in haar beleidsdocument dat *sleutelpersonen* helpen bij de verspreiding van informatie. Hoe ziet u dat?
 - Delen zij informatie over arbeidsrechten?
 - Komen mensen naar hen toe met vragen? Wat voor vragen?
 - Verwijzen zij mensen door naar bijeenkomsten of instanties (bijv. gemeente, helpdesk, taalschool)?
 - Waarom werkt dat volgens u wel/niet? (vertrouwen, taal, bekendheid?)
 - Zijn zij zelf op de hoogte van arbeidsrechten? Informatie/Kennis?
5. Wat merkt u van het effect op kennis over arbeidsrechten?
 - Merkt u verschil bij mensen die *sleutelpersonen* gesproken hebben? Heeft u een voorbeeld?
 - Ziet u hierin verschil tussen Poolse en Bulgaarse *sleutelpersonen* of doelgroepen?
6. Hoe ervaart u het bereik van *sleutelpersonen*? Wie bereiken zij vooral?

- Ook mensen die anders moeilijk hulp vinden of weinig weten van hun rechten?
 - Alleen een kleine groep of juist veel mensen?
 - Hebben mensen vertrouwen in hen?
7. In hoeverre denkt u dat u bijdraagt aan hun kennis over arbeidsrechten ten opzichte van andere bronnen van kennis, zoals familie en vrienden of internet?

Blok 3: Uitdagingen

8. Tegen welke uitdagingen liep/loopt u aan bij de *sleutelpersonen*aanpak (wat betreft het verspreiden van kennis)?
- Wat zijn de grenzen van wat ze mogen en kunnen doen?
 - Ervaart u obstakels zoals vertrouwen, communicatie, tijd of budget?
9. Is er ooit verwarring of verschil van mening geweest over de rol van *sleutelpersonen*?
10. Hoe kijkt u terug op de samenwerking met *sleutelpersonen*? Wat ging goed, wat minder?
11. Waarom is het overgegaan naar wmo radar?
- Wat zijn volgens u daarbij de uitdagingen en kansen?

Blok 4: Reflectie en aanbevelingen

12. Wat zou er nodig zijn om *sleutelpersonen* beter te laten werken?
13. Wat heeft volgens u het meeste impact gehad?
14. Hoe ziet u uw eigen rol in de toekomst?
15. Wat zou u de gemeente/*sleutelpersonen*/wmo radar aanraden?

Appendix VIII: Operationalisation of facilitating and constraining factors to brokerage

The facilitating and constraining factors are taken from the literature; referencing in Table 1.

<i>Dimension</i>	Facilitating (+) and constraining (-) factors	Operationalisation
Individual	Organisational skills (+)	Sleutelpersonen have ability to organise events or coordinate contacts
	Valuable networks (+)	Sleutelpersonen have strong or extensive ties with Polish/Bulgarian migrants and local institutional actors
	Combining formal and informal practices (+/-)	Sleutelpersonen use both institutional tools and personal relationships to spread knowledge (e.g. informal advice and formal referrals)
Relational	Trust (+)	Migrants and officials are confident in the intentions of the sleutelpersoon and confide in them; sleutelpersonen are confident in official actors and migrants
	Social categorisation to create clear role identity (+)	Sleutelpersonen are positioned as a separate social category and are recognised by others (or self-identify) as a link between Polish/Bulgarian migrants and municipality
	Alignment with one group (+)	Sleutelpersonen are generally recognised as closely aligned with either Polish/Bulgarian migrants or the municipality
	Good quality of interactions (+)	Interactions between sleutelpersonen and officials or migrants are described as constructive, respectful, and ongoing
	Mutual recognition of interdependence (+)	Sleutelpersonen and officials acknowledge they rely on each other to reach Polish/Bulgarian migrants
	Inter-actor collaboration (+)	Sleutelpersonen and practitioners describe joint efforts, shared goals, or co-designed activities
	Alignment (-)	Sleutelpersonen show closer alignment with either migrants or municipality
	Conflicting role expectations (-)	Sleutelpersonen or officials describe confusion or disagreement about what sleutelpersonen should do
	Information asymmetries (-)	Sleutelpersonen know more about migrants than they tell to officials, or more about institutions than they relate to migrants

	Inter-actor conflict (-)	Reports of tension, blame, not being informed, or miscommunication between sleutelpersonen and institutional actors
Institutional	Embedding in trusted institutions (+)	Sleutelpersonen are formally connected to or hosted by organisations that migrants or officials consider credible
	Discretion & flexibility (+)	Sleutelpersonen describe making case-by-case decisions, adjusting their role to different needs
	Limited resources (-)	Lack of funding, time, or support is mentioned as a barrier to fulfilling the role effectively
	Ambiguous or unattainable outcome expectations (-)	Actors mention unclear goals or feel pressured to achieve unrealistic impacts with little guidance

Appendix IX: Code tree

<i>Code-groups</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Sub-codes</i>
Individual	Organisational skills (+)	Differences in commitment
		Organising
		Participating in activities
		(Lack of) initiative
		Motivation
		Effect: more social contact
	Networks/reach (+)	Big network
		Small
		Own family and friends
		People shorter in NL
		Hard-to-reach people
		Seniors, unemployed, ill
		Different target groups
		(No) professional network
		Small group / no show
		Not much mingling with others
		Effect: more knowledge
		Effect: recruiting for language course
	Time (+) (<i>added inductively</i>)	Needs time
		People drop out
		Migrants have little time
	Own issues (-) (<i>added inductively</i>)	Mentally demanding role
		Don't know their way in NL
		Not self-reliant
		Don't speak Dutch
		Finding sleutelpersonen
		Lack of legal knowledge
	Combining formal and informal practices (+/-)	Action
		Listening
		Informing
		Practical help
		Intermediary
		Translating
		Referring
		Answering questions
		Knowledge from experience

		Knowledge from work
Relational	Trust (+)	Difference Poles and Bulgarians
		Own experience
	Social categorisation to create clear role identity (+)	Term Sleutelpersonen
	Alignment with one group (+)	Want to be more aligned with municipality
	Good quality of interactions (+)	Communication with municipality
		Communication with welfare organisation
		Communication during transition
	Mutual recognition of interdependence (+)	
	Inter-actor collaboration (+)	Collaboration municipality - other partners
		Neutral about transition to welfare org
		No challenges
		Collaboration with support staff
		Previous municipal collaboration
		Current municipal collaboration
	Distrust (-)	Internal conflict Bulgarians
		Distrust among Poles
		Shame
		Institutions distrust
		Sleutelpersonen distrust
	Conflicting role expectations (-)	Change in role since welfare organisation
		Lack leader
		No goal
		Unclear about role
		Different expectations
	Information asymmetries (-)	Obstacle for job

	Inter-actor conflict (-)	Discontent changed goal
		Different goals
		Tension around changed support
		Blame for unclear expectations
		Different target groups
		Wish for more collaboration with municipality
		Lack of communication
		Tensions
		Not involving sleutelpersonen
		Disappointment in municipality
		Disappointment welfare organisation
		Lack of collaboration
Institutional	Embedding in trusted institutions (+)	No own space
		Invisible
		No space to grow
		Wish for own organisation
	Discretion & flexibility (+)	Sleutelpersonen: Own direction due to unclear expectations
		Practitioners
		Volunteer role: positive
	Limited resources (-)	Volunteer role: negative
		Scale of problems
		No compensation
		Lack of support
		Wish for Polish-speaking mentor
		Label gives pressure
	Ambiguous or unattainable outcome expectations (-)	Expectations vs. reality
		Small group
		High expectations
		Only knowledge not enough