



# The Good and the Bad: Do Immigrants' Positive and Negative Evaluations of Life After Migration Go Hand in Hand?

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## Abstract

Research on migration and integration has informed us about the systemic inequalities and disadvantages that migrants face in the residence country. Less is known about migrants' positive experiences, and whether these co-exist with negative experiences. This study's contribution lies in exploring to what extent positive and negative evaluations go hand in hand and among whom in what way. By coding and analysing open-ended questions of the New Immigrants Survey, we explore this among 955 immigrants from Bulgaria, Poland, Spain and Turkey who have been in the Netherlands for around 5 years. Results illustrate that these migrants most often positively evaluate matters in the economic domain, whereas the domain that is most often negatively evaluated concerns (being apart from) family. Which positive and negative evaluations are mentioned simultaneously differs among migrants, where migrants from Spain more often combine a negative evaluation of the Dutch whether with a positive evaluation of the Dutch being friendly. Migrants with a temporary intention to stay are more likely to combine a positive evaluation of the economic domain with negative experiences in the integration domain. This study hereby illustrates that the current emphasis in migration research on "the bad" overlooks positive matters that migrants experience simultaneously.

**Keywords** Migrants' perceptions · Discrimination · Integration · Migration · Inclusion

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## Introduction

Decennia of migration and integration studies have informed us about the key problems that immigrants encounter after migration to a new residence country (Alba & Foner, 2014; Diehl et al., 2016; Schunck, 2014). The socio-economic position of immigrants has been problematized since relatively many immigrants are unemployed, and if employed relatively often in the lower echelons of the labour market, with lower levels of labour market security and lower earnings than the native population (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017; Kogan, 2004). Similarly, the social relations that immigrants develop have been problematized (Hao & Kawano, 2001; Martinovic et al., 2009). In the situation that immigrants are forced to or choose to live in neighbourhoods with large shares of co-ethnics and mainly engage with co-ethnics, it is thought they lack social resources that are relevant to be included in the residence country. These issues in the socio-economic and social domain are related to socio-cultural integration (Ersanili & Koopmans, 2010; Fokkema & De Haas, 2015). In this field of research, it is problematized that immigrants' identification with the residence country may be limited and that certain core democratic or cultural values are not subscribed to by immigrants (Dollmann, 2021; Van Doorn et al., 2013; Verdier et al., 2012; Vollebergh et al., 2017). Media and politicians in Western Europe often stress these issues and incompatibilities surrounding migrants and most scientific research studies and reports on the systemic inequalities between immigrants and the native populations. It is however less well known whether immigrants *themselves* also perceive these matters as the main problems of life after immigration to the residence country. Mainly qualitative research has illustrated migrants' "messy reality" and diverse experiences of integration and life in the residence country (Eijberts & Ghorashi, 2017; Erdal, 2013; Geurts et al., 2021), but insights in these experiences among larger groups of immigrants and thus the generalizability of these findings are lacking. This study offers these insights by taking an explorative approach in which (combinations of) migrants' positive and negative evaluations of life after immigration are studied. In doing so, this study provides future directions for hypotheses on how the intersections of both negative and positive evaluations affect migrants' integration processes in Western Europe.

Firstly, this paper provides evidence for the extent to which immigrants who lived for on average 5 years in the Netherlands perceive certain matters about their life in this residence country to be negative. We complement this perspective of what is "bad" about life in the residence country with the perspective of what is "good", again from the immigrants' own point of view. Even though the mirror of explanations of little success is the explanation of more success, most integration research less often explicitly focuses on what goes well. This study uses open-ended questions as part of a large-scale survey to obtain insight in what migrants themselves mention to be positive and negative evaluations of life in the residence country, which adds to our understanding of migrants' lived experiences in Western Europe. Our first research question is therefore: *To what extent and in what domains do recent immigrants have positive and negative experiences of life in the Netherlands?*

Besides describing the good and the bad as experienced by immigrants, this paper will secondly address to what extent these positive and negative evaluations of life in the Netherlands co-exist. Immigrants who are positive about what immigration has brought them probably also face issues in the new country they live in. Immigrants who are negative about certain aspects of their life in the new country may be (more likely to be) positive on other aspects (Eijsberts & Ghorashi, 2015). Yet we do not know to what extent such positive and negative evaluations (in certain domains) go hand in hand since earlier research hardly addressed such positive and negative evaluations simultaneously. Our second research question therefore reads: *To what extent do recent immigrants simultaneously have positive **and** negative experiences of life in the Netherlands?* This study is, as far as we know, the first to acknowledge this possible interplay and “messy reality” using migrants’ own experiences through the use of large-scale data and in doing so is able to assess to what extent such simultaneous experiences are present across several social groups.

Finally, we study a set of possible individual drivers of such combinations of positive and negative experiences. Previous migration research highlights reasons for immigrants to migrate, from which we can derive potential positive experiences that migration will bring (Castles, 1998; Engbersen et al., 2013; Kanas & Steinmetz, 2021; Massey et al., 1993); economic migrants will try to improve their economic position; family migrants can be expected to be optimistic to be (re-)united with family; and immigrants who moved away from a country of which they disapprove of the political or cultural climate, or flee because they need protection, are expected to be more positive about the living situation in the new country. Next to migration motive, we expect variation among immigrants in the extent to which certain aspects of the good and the bad go hand in hand, for example, based on immigrants’ intention to stay (De Haas & Fokkema, 2011), educational level (Buzdugan & Halli, 2009) and gender (Ala-Mantila & Fleischmann, 2018). We acknowledge that this is just a selection of factors that may provide insights into what combinations on positive and negative experiences are most prominent. The research we conduct here is therefore mostly explorative, to see what combinations among whom are (more) likely to be experienced. As such, our final research question reads: *To what extent are migration motive, intention to stay, origin country, educational level and gender related to experiencing certain negative and positive experiences of life simultaneously?*

Based on answers to open-ended questions of what is perceived as positive and negative about life in the Netherlands among 955 immigrants from Bulgaria, Poland, Spain and Turkey, we thus provide evidence whether and how immigrants combine positive and negative evaluations of life after migration. Like many other immigration countries, the Netherlands has witnessed political and societal debate about the volume of migration and about problems that would concentrate among the immigrant population. Related to the origin countries included here, policy in specific focuses on abuses that labour migrants face in the Netherlands. Perhaps different from some other countries, where the dominant discourse may be that immigrants are needed to fill labour market shortages, the positive side of immigration is less often discussed in the Dutch context, which is illustrated by news articles on immigration often having a negative tone (Van Klingeren et al., 2015). The Netherlands

is therefore a relevant context to explore and answer the three research questions among recent migrants, which will contribute to our understanding of the formative period after migration. Indeed, the biggest changes in immigrants' lives in a new country arguably happen in the first years after migration (Diehl et al., 2016). In doing so, we moreover contribute to previous migration, integration and participation literature in two ways: we firstly argue for the need to acknowledge migrants' simultaneous negative and positive evaluations of life after migration and explore to what extent this is the case. Secondly, we study to what extent there are differences in for whom certain negative and positive evaluations go hand in hand by exploring patterns across several key characteristics to contribute to our understanding of the interrelationship between these positive and negative evaluations of life after migration. An overview of these combinations can inform us on what hinders (or moderates) anticipated outcomes of such negative and/or positive evaluations.

## Recent Migration and the Relation Between Origin and Residence Country

Migration has become more dynamic and transnational in the last decennia (Engbersen et al., 2013). The opportunities for contact with the country of origin, either in terms of contacts with friends and family or keeping updated of what is going on in the country of origin, expanded rapidly (Schunck, 2014). Still, the situational differences between origin and residence countries have a major impact on for who it is possible and likely to migrate, and based on what reason.

Traditionally, migration is considered to be a cost–benefit calculation (Borjas, 1994; Constant & Massey, 2003; Dustmann et al., 2010). Immigrants have expectations about improvement of their living situation by moving to a new residence country. For people who left the origin country to work elsewhere, this is most straightforward in economic terms. Contexts that do not offer (the preferred) employment and opportunities for sufficient earnings are push-factors. Migration may also be motivated by expectations about better career opportunities elsewhere (Borjas, 1989). Migration from contexts with little labour opportunities to areas with little unemployment remains a major migration pattern. With increasing restrictions on labour market migration from immigrants outside the EU, it has been argued that study-migration may offer a new route (Luthra & Platt, 2017). However, study immigrants, mostly entering universities, have a rather different socio-economic outlook than the on average more low-skilled labour market entries from a large share of economic immigrants.

More recently, the migration literature has shown that because of the large variety of factors that play a role in migration decisions, an aspirations-capabilities perspective fits reality better (De Haas, 2011). From this perspective, it is more evident that migration will result in simultaneously positive and negative evaluations. The focus on immigrants' agency in this model implies that immigrants may evaluate their experiences in the residence country differently, depending on the reasons that they provided for moving and accounting for immigrants' relationships to the origin and residence country at the same time. All origin countries addressed in this study

had a higher level of unemployment at the time, a lower GDP per capita and lower average earnings than the Netherlands. Moreover, Bulgaria, Poland and Spain are (and were already in 2013) members of the European Union, creating opportunities for free movement between these countries and the Netherlands. This is different for migrants from Turkey who have to apply for a visa, where economic reasons seldomly provided a permission for migration. Migration from Turkey is predominantly family-motivated. In the 1980s and 1990s, when recruitment of workers as arranged in the 1960s and 1970s was no longer needed in the Netherlands, migration was dominated by family-re-unification (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). Also today, non-EU migration for reasons of labour has become increasingly difficult in many of the European countries and family-related migration takes up a large share of migration. Migrants who moved to the Netherlands in 2012/2013 from the origin countries we study here—Bulgaria, Poland, Spain and Turkey—were at the time not in a situation of conflict and did not qualify for a refugee status in the Netherlands. They are not likely to belong to the immense group of people worldwide, fleeing from conflict and repression. Next to asylum applications, immigrants may choose to work, study, join a family or partner in a new residence country and not stay in the origin country because they disapprove of the political or cultural situation in the country of origin.

## Positive and Negative Evaluations of Domains of Integration

In the literature on integration, different domains are distinguished (Ager & Strang, 2008). Often these are summarized into economic, social and cultural domains of integration or participation (sometimes, political integration is defined as a fourth domain) (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003; Phaet & Swyngedouw, 2003; Schunck, 2014). In this literature immigrants' positions in these domains are frequently compared to the position of natives (e.g. Heath et al., 2008; Heath & Li, 2017). From that comparison, it often follows that immigrants are less well-off economically (e.g. Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017; Li & Heath, 2020) are socially oriented predominantly to co-ethnics (e.g. Martinovic et al., 2009) and less culturally oriented to the residence country than natives (e.g. Ersanili & Koopmans, 2010). However, an important question is what a relevant group of comparison is (Tolsma et al., 2012). In the period just after migration, it seems more likely that immigrants compare their situation to their life before migration instead of (only) comparing it to the position of the native population in the residence country. Even when immigrants may be in disadvantaged positions according to the standards of the residence country, they still may perceive and evaluate their position in a positive way, for example, because it is an improvement compared to life in the origin country. We, therefore, argue it is key to bring in migrants' perceptions, as it may paint a different picture than drawn in previous research comparing migrants to natives.

Studies have highlighted the huge diversity of outcomes in integration and participation brought about by a diverse set of factors, including individual-level characteristics of immigrants. Such individual drivers are likely to affect migrants' (positive and negative) experiences in the residence country (Black et al., 2011; Hendriks, 2015; Nisic

& Melzer, 2016). In this article, we explore to what extent these known key individual-level drivers of integration outcomes also affect the extent to which negative and positive evaluations of life after migration go hand in hand. Immigrants may be likely to focus their life, and thus experiences, on a domain that is linked to their migration motive, a driver that is expected to be strongly included in immigrants' evaluation of their situation in the residence country. Immigrants who (mainly) migrated for work will be more likely to mention both positive and negative features of the work domain. Family migrants are expected to have positive and negative evaluations mostly of the social domain. Political migrants and those who wanted to stay in the Netherlands because they simply wanted to live there for a while are expected to mention positive and negative aspects of the socio-cultural aspects of life in the Netherlands.

Another known key driver of migrants' integration processes is immigrants' intention to stay (Chabé-Ferret et al., 2018; Geurts and Lubbers, 2017), which is often related to linear cost–benefit theories. The assumption is that immigrants who intend to stay make more investments in resources and capital relevant in the residence country (Chabé-Ferret et al., 2018). Immigrants whose intention is to stay longer in the residence country may be a select group of immigrants who have more positive experiences in the residence country (Adda, Dustman & Mestres, 2006; Wachter & Fleischmann, 2018). Immigrants who intend to stay may also be likely to ignore and downplay negative experiences. Migrants who are not willing to stay may be open to express positive experiences but at the same time, their negative evaluations may support their decision to leave as they intended to do. We moreover study gender and educational level differences in combinations people experience in positive and negative evaluations. Gender and level of education have been studied widely as key indicators of integration (e.g. Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2017; Heath & Li, 2017). In cases where immigration follows a more traditional pattern where men move first and women join later, it may hold that women are more focused on the social domain and men on the economic domain. As for education, theories on the integration paradox have shown that higher-educated immigrants experience higher levels of (group) discrimination than lower-educated immigrants and are in general more aware and critical towards the residence country (Tolsma et al., 2012; Geurts et al., 2020). Therefore, when immigrants are asked to express themselves about what is negative about their life after immigration, higher-educated immigrants may more often mention spontaneously that discrimination is an issue or mention other negative evaluations, with less or no expression of positive evaluations. Where previous research has to a certain extent illustrated the role of such characteristics for experiences of life in the residence country, this study will explore whether these characteristics are related to combining certain positive and negative experiences simultaneously.

## Data

We analysed immigrants included in the fourth wave of the New Immigrants Survey (NIS2NL) survey data, conducted in early 2018, as this wave included open-ended questions on positive and negative experiences of life in the Netherlands. NIS2NL is specifically designed to analyse early integration processes after migration (Lubbers et al., 2018). This survey includes recent migrants from Bulgaria, Poland, Spain and Turkey

who were registered as a new citizen of the Netherlands around 2012/2013.<sup>1</sup> Statistics Netherlands drew a random sample of immigrants from these countries from the Dutch municipality registers. In September 2013, this sample of migrants older than 18 years old was invited to participate in a written or online survey. Invitations and questionnaires were translated into the migrants' mother tongue. Migrants were sampled within 18 months after their registration in a Dutch municipality. The first wave was collected in November 2013 and March 2014 (mean response rate of 32.3%), after which the second and third waves followed after about 15 months each (with a mean response rate of 58.7 and 68.2%, respectively). Respondents who took part in wave 3, who agreed to participate in another wave and were still living in the Netherlands according to statistics Netherlands were approached for the fourth wave in January 2018. This resulted in a sample of 996 migrants. The response rates for the fourth wave were 73.2% for migrants from Poland, 80.9% for migrants from Turkey, 83.3% for migrants from Bulgaria and 84.2% for migrants from Spain.

Any study on what immigrants experience as positive or negative in a setting in which they are surveyed has to acknowledge selection and temporality. In this study, immigrants who lived for over 5 years in the Netherlands are asked about their evaluations of life after immigration in the residence country. Those who are surveyed may be a selection of immigrants who are relatively positive about life after immigration because they did not leave the residence country in the first 5 years after immigration (as statistics from the Netherlands have shown that on average 50% of the immigrants return to the origin country or move elsewhere in a 5-year window). Still, these immigrants who are still in the residence country after 5 years can vary in their outlooks and experiences.

The dropout between the four waves of the NIS2NL survey will be selective as it is thus affected by return migration or migration elsewhere. With respect to dropouts between earlier waves, it appears that migrants who had a Dutch partner had a higher Dutch language proficiency, were employed, were highly educated, experienced less group discrimination or had a permanent intention to stay were less likely to dropout. This dropout between earlier waves is therefore selective, where a dropout could be interpreted as an indication of too many negative experiences/too little positive experiences in the residence country. In a way, this results in a sample in the fourth wave that represents the settling migrant population in the Netherlands, as the group that remains in the Netherlands is different from those who does not. Although this dropout is thus selective, we argue these are common selection processes which also apply to results of previous studies on integration processes among longer residing migrants.

## Operationalization

### Subjective Evaluation of Life in the Netherlands

This paper studies both the negative and positive experiences of migrants' life in their residence country. We do so based on two open-ended items which were the final questions of the survey: "What are the positive aspects of your life in the Netherlands?"

<sup>1</sup> At the time of data collection, ethical approval was not necessary for such a non-interventional study.



and “What are the negative aspects of your life in the Netherlands?”<sup>2</sup> Respondents were able to share their answers in their own language of preference, answers were translated to Dutch.

For both items, we applied thematic open coding to cluster answer categories into a range of domains in life (Allahyari et al., 2017; Popping, 2015). Coding has been conducted by two researchers, coding each case by hand to contribute to the reliability of the coding. Most respondents provided one or two words to formulate their answer (e.g. on what is negative: “taxes”; “difficult language”; and “rain”). Subjects that tap into an overarching theme were later merged, e.g. work, income, costs of living and taxes were merged into the economic domain. Some domains were mentioned both on the positive and the negative side of life (such as issues surrounding family, the economic situation and the evaluation of Dutch people) whereas others did not (including climate and language matters). Table 1 offers an overview of the domains distinguished and the number of respondents in each domain. Appendix A1 and A2 present a more detailed overview of the distinguished domains, key words and which sub-domains are included in each respective category. If multiple answers (in different domains) were given, these answers were each categorized in the respective cluster, meaning that one respondent can be part of multiple domains distinguished. For example, if a respondent responded to the second open-ended item that one experiences Dutch people to be intolerant and that one’s labour market position does not match one’s expectations, this respondent is coded as having a negative experience in both the ‘Dutch people’ and the ‘economic’ domain.

### Independent Variables of Interest

To understand to what extent there is variance among migrants with respect to whether certain positive and negative experiences go together, we include several characteristics that are used as predictors of interest. First, migrants’ highest obtained educational level attained in either one’s country of origin (measured on a country-specific scale), the Netherlands, or another country is included. All education items were standardized into the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) scale of 2011 (UNESCO, 2012), which ranges from (0) pre-primary education to (8) doctoral or equivalent. We included this linearly. We further included migrants’ gender being either (0) man or (1) woman. Next, we include migration motive (measured at wave 1), divided in line with previous research (Van Tubergen & Van de Werfhorst, 2007) into (1) economic, (2) family, (3) in education or (4) other or no specific reason. Finally, we included migrants’ intention to stay categorized into (1) temporary, (2) circular, (3) permanent and (4) do not know and the origin country.

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, migrants from Turkey were shown the question on positive evaluations twice instead of the question on negative evaluations. Many still shared negative experiences as they assumed this was the intention. Additional analyses without these respondents illustrated that the presented patterns and conclusions remain similar. For reasons of power and interest, we present the analyses with migrants from Turkey included.



**Table 1** Distinguished domains in the open-ended questions

Domain	Positive or negative?	N
Economic	Negative	219
Economic	Positive	530
Family	Negative	338
Family	Positive	165
Loneliness	Negative	96
Language	Negative	145
Integration	Negative	129
Education	Negative	8
Climate	Negative	261
Dutch people	Negative	123
Outgroups	Negative	24
Institutional	Negative	45
Health system	Negative	49
Development	Negative	13
Distance to home country	Negative	190
Better life	Positive	387
Dutch people	Positive	245
Organized, better system	Positive	301
Health system	Positive	49
Education	Positive	47
Other	Positive	160
Opportunities	Positive	211
Experiences	Positive	61

Source: NIS2NL wave 4

Overall, missing values on these variables were limited (4.1% in total) and we therefore chose to listwise delete these respondents, resulting in a final sample of 955. Descriptive statistics of the independent variables included in this study are presented in Table 2. To provide further insight in the sample, we presented additional descriptive statistics per origin group in Appendix A3.

## Analysis and Results

### Analytical Strategy

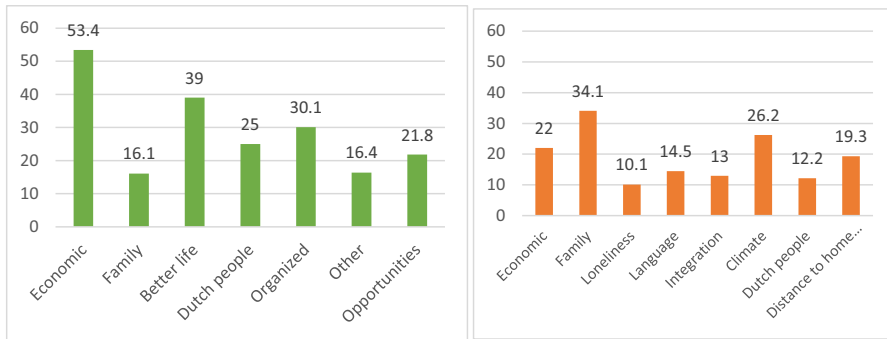
To inform our research questions, our analyses include three steps. The first two provide descriptive evidence, where the last step uses regression analyses to estimate relationships. In the first step, we show the shares of respondents that mention positive and negative experiences in the distinguished domains. To

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics  
(*N* = 955)

	Range	Mean	SD
Highest educational level	0–8	1.77	2.60
Sex (0 = man, 1 = woman)	0–1	.59	.49
Migration motive <sup>1</sup>			
Economic	0–1	.52	.50
Family	0–1	.26	.44
Education	0–1	.08	.28
Other or no specific	0–1	.13	.34
Intention to stay			
Permanent	0–1	.41	.49
Circular	0–1	.12	.32
Temporary	0–1	.32	.47
Do not know	0–1	.14	.35
Origin country			
Turkey	0–1	.21	.41
Poland	0–1	.35	.48
Bulgaria	0–1	.16	.36
Spain	0–1	.29	.45

Source: NIS2NL wave 4, <sup>1</sup> measured at wave 1

improve readability and ensure enough power in the multivariate analyses later on, only domains are presented that include more than 10% of the sample. Next, we are interested in the extent to which these negative and positive experiences in various domains go hand in hand. We therefore present the share of respondents that mentioned both a negative and a positive aspect of life in the Netherlands. Again, only those domains that include more than 10% of the sample are presented. Finally, in order to explore whether there are differences among migrants to what extent positive and negative experiences in the Netherlands are combined, we use logistic regression analyses where the outcome of interest are different combinations of positive and negative experiences in two domains. These multivariate logistic regression analyses allow for testing which individual factors relate to outcomes that are dichotomous (Sieben & Linssen, 2009), in this case combining certain negative and positive evaluations (= 1) or not (= 0). Table 4 presents the analyses on various combinations of domains that include more than 10% of the sample who expresses a specific combination of domains, which are the largest combinations of negative and positive domains present. Tables A4 and A5 in the appendix present similar analyses for different combinations of positive and negative evaluations as the outcome, presenting the analyses on combinations including less than 10 per cent of the sample, but more than 7.5%. Any effect that has a *p* value lower than 0.05 is considered statistically significant, the amount of stars illustrate the strength of significance. The various models presenting the results of these different outcomes are labelled as M1 to M19. In the Appendix, Tables A6 and A7 present the explained variance and the odds ratios for each effect in the respective models.



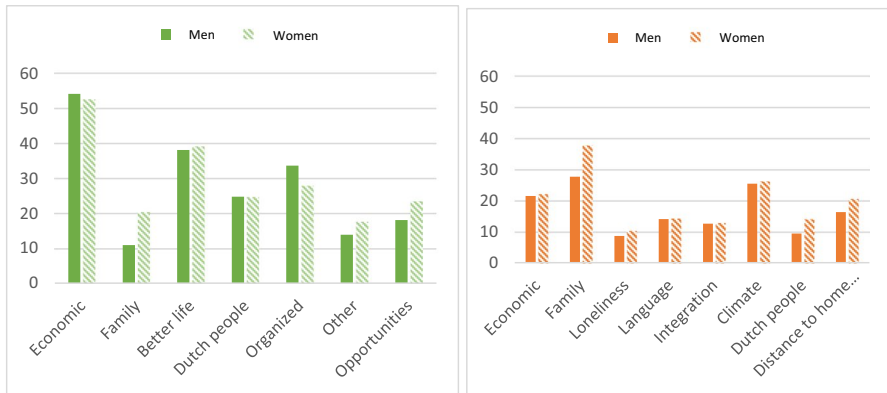
**Fig. 1** Share of total number of respondents that mention positive (green bars) and/or negative experiences (orange bars) in certain domains ( $N=955$ )

### The Frequency of Positive and Negative Experiences

Figure 1 illustrates that more than 53% of the recent migrants in the Netherlands consider aspects in the economic domain as something positive. Almost 40% of the respondents mention experiences around having a better life in the Netherlands positively. The third most frequently mentioned domain concerns the Netherlands being well-organized, as mentioned by 30.1%. Domains that were evaluated positively as well, but mentioned less often are: Dutch people being friendly (25%), having opportunities in the Netherlands (21.8%), having family around (16.1%) and other reasons such as the infrastructure (16.4%).

With respect to domains that are most frequently mentioned when sharing negative aspects of life in the Netherlands, missing family is mentioned most often (34.1%). Next, negative evaluations of the climate in the Netherlands are mentioned by 26.2% of the sample. Negative experiences in the economic domain are mentioned by 22% of the sample. Other domains that came to the fore, yet mentioned less often as the three domains discussed are: experiencing too much distance to the home country (19.3%), having issues with (learning the) language (14.5%), struggling with integration into the Dutch society (13%), experiencing Dutch people to be direct and rude (12.2%) and feeling lonely in the Netherlands (10.1%).

We moreover explored to what extent these patterns presented above differ across key individual drivers. For example, Fig. 2 presents the most frequently positive and negative domains mentioned for both men and women. Among various domains, there seem little differences between men and women in the extent to which experiences in certain domains are mentioned. Significant exceptions are the domain of family mentioned positively (among men: 10.9%, among women: 20.4%). Moreover, almost 34% of men mentioned the organized domain whereas this is the case for less than 28% of women. With respect to negative evaluations, there is only a significant difference between men and women in the frequency of mentioning matters in the family domain (among men: 27.7%, among women: 37.8%). In additional descriptive statistics, Figures A1 and A2 illustrate differences across migration motives and origin groups in the frequency of mentioning these positive and negative evaluations.



**Fig. 2** Share of men and women that mention positive (green bars) and/or negative experiences (orange bars) in certain domains ( $N=955$ )

### Which Positive and Negative Experiences Go Hand in Hand?

Next, we are interested in exploring to what extent negative and positive experiences of life in the Netherlands can be experienced simultaneously. In Table 3, the share of respondents is presented based on mentioning a negative experience in a certain domain (ranging from the economic domain to experiencing distance to the home country) who also mentioned a positive experience in another domain. The positive domains mentioned are in line with the ones presented in Fig. 1.

In general, Table 3 illustrates that negative and positive experiences go hand in hand among quite a share of the respondents. Results for example illustrate that among those who mentioned missing family as a negative aspect of life in the Netherlands, in most of the domains on the positive side, over 34% has mentioned that domain too. For example, 34.4% of those who considered missing family a negative aspect of life in the Netherlands mentioned the opportunities as something positive. The general pattern that arises thus suggests that positive and negative aspects of life in the Netherlands are present at the same time. Seemingly, some negatively evaluated domains are more likely to be combined with positive evaluations than others. It shows that among migrants who negatively evaluated the family and climate domain, around 30 to 40% also share positive evaluations in various domains. This contrasts the patterns among migrants who negatively evaluated domains of integration, loneliness and Dutch people as the share of those who also share positive evaluations only ranges from 10 to 20%.

Differences across domains that represent positive aspects of life in the Netherlands are seemingly small. Put differently, results do not show that mentioning the language domain negatively is more likely to go together with mentioning positive domain A versus positive domain B. Instead, we find that among those who consider language a negative aspect of life, the likelihood of mentioning a positive aspect is similar across all domains (ranging from 17.2% for the better life domain to 22.1% for the “other” domain). Whilst several negative and positive evaluations can thus be combined, results do not point towards certain domains being more likely to be mentioned at the same time.

**Table 3** Share of respondents that mentioned a positive evaluation in a certain domain among those who mentioned a negative evaluation in a certain domain

Mentioned as negative	Mentioned as positive						
	Economic	Family	Better life	Dutch people	Organized	Opportunities	Other
Economic (N=219)	26.8	26.3	22.3	29	25.4	31.9	25.5
Family (N=338)	41	43.3	39.2	34.5	37	34.4	44
Loneliness (N=96)	12.4	10.5	10.1	13.9	10.9	14.1	13.9
Language (N=145)	17.6	20.5	17.2	19.8	19	22.1	18.5
Integration (N=129)	17.2	12.3	11.6	19.4	17	17.8	15.7
Climate (N=261)	34	32.3	28.9	34.1	36.7	41.1	30.1
Dutch people (N=123)	13.9	14	11.1	20.2	13.5	15.3	17.1
Distance to home (N=190)	34	32.2	28.9	34.1	36.7	41.1	30.1

Source: NIS2NL wave 4

## Which Migrants are More Likely to Combine Certain Positive and Negative Experiences?

Table 4 presents the results of logistic regression analyses on the likelihood of mentioning both a negative and positive aspect of life in the Netherlands in certain domains. Table 4 presents the results of the largest combinations of categories (at least 10% of the sample). Tables A4 and A5 in the appendix present results of outcomes on combinations include less than 10, but more than 7.5% of the sample.

Table 4 shows that educational level is hardly associated with being more or less likely to mention a certain combination of positive and negative evaluations of life in the Netherlands. One exception is that higher-educated migrants are more likely to mention positive aspects in the organized domain and negative aspects with respect to family in the Netherlands (versus not being part of this combination). In addition, Table A4 suggests that higher-educated are more likely to combine negative experiences in the economic domain with positive experiences in for example the better life and Dutch people domains compared to not combining these experiences.

With respect to gender, we find no differences between men and women in the likelihood of combining certain positive and negative aspects of life in the Netherlands. In the appendix, results show that women are more likely than men to combine both positive and negative aspects in the domain of family as well as more likely to mention positive experiences with respect to opportunities yet negative experiences in the family domain, compared to not having mentioned both experiences.

Respondents' migration motive mainly illustrates differences between those with an economic migration motive and those with a family migration motive. Compared to migrants with an economic motive, those with a family migration motive are less likely to mention positive and negative aspects in the economic domain versus not mentioning both, as well as being less likely to experience positive aspects in the organized domain and negative aspects in the climate domain (compared to not combining both). Results in the appendix moreover show that migrants with a family motive, versus an economic motive, are less likely to mention positive aspects of Dutch people and negative aspects in the economic domain as well as less likely to mention positive aspects in the organized domain and negative aspects in the economic domain. Seemingly, migrants with an economic motive are thus more likely to experience negative aspects in the economic domain and at the same time experience positive aspects in other domains. The appendix moreover shows that compared to migrants with an economic motive, those with an education motive are more likely to mention positive aspects in the economic domain and simultaneously mention negative aspects in the integration and Dutch people domain (compared to not mentioning both of these domains). This finding again underlines that those with an economic migration motive are more likely to experience negative aspects in the economic domain and combine it with positive experiences in other domains.

Looking at migrants' intention to stay, results show that migrants with a temporary intention to stay, compared to having a permanent intention to stay, are more likely to indicate positive experiences in the economic domain combined with negative experiences in the climate domain as well as the domain of experiencing distance to the home country (versus not combining these experiences). In the





appendix, findings underline that those with a temporary intention to stay are more likely than those with a permanent intention to stay to mention positive aspects in the economic domain and negative aspects in the integration domain (compared to not mentioning both evaluations). Yet, those with a temporary intention to stay are less likely to combine negative aspects in the economic domain with negative experiences in the language domain (compared to not combining these domains). Finally, those with a circular intention to stay are less likely than those with a permanent intention to combine a positive experience in the better life domain with a negative aspect in the economic domain (versus not combining them).

Finally, we find various significant differences across origin groups. In Table 4, results show that compared to migrants from Poland, migrants from Turkey, Bulgaria and Spain are more likely to experience positive experiences in the better life domain and negative experiences in the climate domain as well as mention positive aspects in the organized domain and negative experiences in the climate domain. Moreover, migrants from Poland are less likely to combine positive experiences in the economic domain with negative experiences in the distance to the home country domain compared to migrants from Turkey, Bulgaria and Spain. Seemingly, the negative experiences in the domain of the weather in the Netherlands play a major role among especially migrants from Spain as when changing the reference category to Spain, all other origin groups are significantly less likely to be included in a combination where the climate is evaluated negatively.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Decennia of scientific research on migration and integration have given insights in migrants' diverse issues associated with life after migration and the disadvantages migrants face compared to native populations. These insights are key for our current understanding of how immigrants' fare in residence countries. Moving beyond objective indicators and comparisons, this study contributes to this understanding by putting migrants' perspective first (De Haas, 2011). This helps us to get a better understanding in what may counterbalance migrants' negative outcomes after immigration, what the reference for comparison is and how positive outcomes may still go together with critical assessment of what does not go right. Next to "the bad" such as experienced inequalities, disadvantages and discrimination, this study thus questioned to what extent "the good" can be experienced by migrants at the same time. In doing so, we stressed migrants' lived experiences of the messy reality including both negative and positive evaluations of domains in life in the residence country, which provides a more comprehensive picture of migrants' daily life than when emphasizing "the bad" only, which has been stressed in qualitative research earlier (Eijssberts & Ghorashi, 2017; Erdal, 2013). Based on open answers in a survey among 955 immigrants, this study has offered three insights with respect to this question: which positive and negative evaluations are shared by migrants themselves, to what extent positive and negative evaluations in certain domains are mentioned simultaneously and for whom it is more likely to mention certain negative and positive evaluations simultaneously. In this final step, we analysed to what extent these patterns vary across migrants' migration motive,

intention to stay, origin country, gender and educational level which are seen as key indicators of various domains of participation (e.g. Ala-Mantila & Fleischmann, 2018; Buzdugan & Halli, 2009; De Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Fokkema & De Haas, 2015; Kanas & Steinmetz, 2021; Wachter & Fleischmann, 2018).

First, our results illustrate that when asked about life in the Netherlands, a majority of migrants share negative and positive evaluations in a range of domains, from matters related to one's economic position and family to matters of integration and the climate in the residence country. The range of negative evaluations that is shared tap into the main domains of integration that are often studied using objective indicators, such as migrants' economic position and opportunities, (the lack of) social relationships and cultural integration such as language acquisition (Ager & Strang, 2008). Perhaps notably missing in both the positive and negative evaluations mentioned is political participation, which may be explained by the recent migration status which limit opportunities for such participation.

Second, we found that a large share of migrants reports both negative and positive evaluations of life in the Netherlands. Interestingly enough, results did not suggest that specific domains that were negatively evaluated were more easily or more likely combined with specific domains that were positively evaluated. In general, evaluating a certain domain as negative is combined with a positive evaluation of a number of domains, all to around the same extent. Yet, results did suggest that those who shared negative evaluations in the domain of family and climate combine these relatively often with positive evaluations (of any domains). This differs from those who negatively evaluated domains of integration, loneliness and Dutch people, of whom the share of migrants mentioning any positively evaluated matter was substantively lower. Put differently, certain negative experiences (such as issues related to integration and the native population) are more difficult to go together with positive experiences in the residence country than others.

Finally, the extent to which positive and negative evaluations are combined differs among migrants. Especially migration motive, intention to stay and origin country play a part in which domains positive and negative evaluations are experienced at the same time. With respect to migrants' motive, we for example find that migrants with a study motive are more likely to combine a positive evaluation of the economic domain with a negative evaluation of integration and Dutch people than migrants with an economic migration motive. Compared to those with a permanent intention to stay, migrants with a temporary intention to stay are more likely to evaluate the economic domain more positively and combine it with a negative evaluation of the climate, the distance to the home country and the integration process. We also found various differences across origin groups. These are partly related to the dominant migration motives or demographics that characterize immigrants from specific origins, but are also clearly linked to specific origin country characteristics: the climate, how life is organized, the labour market and the socio-political situation. For example, migrants from Spain were more likely to combine negative evaluations of the climate with positive evaluations of other domains compared to other origin groups. Seemingly such individual drivers, which also cover origin country to residence country relations and differences, are important for which and to what extent negative and positive evaluations are experienced at the same time. These findings build on previous research

illustrating that such individual-level explanations matter for experiences of life in the residence country in general (e.g. Diehl et al., 2016; Kanas & Steinmetz, 2021; Wachter & Fleischmann, 2018), to which our study adds that these drivers can affect how various experiences are combined simultaneously as well.

The observation that migrants have various positive and negative evaluations of life in the residence country at the same time benefits from further exploration in future research. Respondents were in general rather brief in the open answers. This might have been due to the fact that these open-ended questions were the final questions of a longer standardized questionnaire. A survey targeting a large group of immigrants developed to collect answers to open-ended questions and experimenting with stimulation to fill out the questions may be an interesting tool to get better insights in the phenomena, providing respondents with the opportunity to express their initial thoughts in a first question and to stimulate them to think further on the topic in follow-up questions. The more quantitative approach taken in this study builds on previous qualitative research (Eijbarts & Ghorashi, 2017) and offers the opportunity to make generalizations of these experiences and analyse among whom certain experiences are more likely, based on text analyses. The theme extraction performed can be further developed by adding automated cluster techniques, which is in particular interesting to generate combinations of positive and negative answers, when much and different sources of text need to be analysed (Allahyari et al., 2017; Jackson & Trochim, 2002). In addition, answering these research questions benefits from examination across other migrant groups who are for example longer-established in the residence country are part of the second generation or who have obtained refugee status. Supposedly, the type, amount and combinations of negative and positive matters experienced will change over time and these are likely to differ between those who were born in the residence country and those who were not.

Another interesting avenue for future research would be to study the consequences of experiencing certain negative and positive matters in the residence country simultaneously, as it may inform the understanding of migrants' behaviour and choices that are difficult to fully grasp by studying "the bad" alone. For example, previous research has posed questions on why certain migrants stay put with a job when it does not match their educational qualifications or why some migrants do not report discrimination. By acknowledging the positive matters that migrants experience at the same time, such questions may be (better) understood. Deciding to stay in spite of experiencing discrimination or being overeducated for a job can for example be explained by migrants experiencing a general improvement in circumstances compared to life in the origin country. As such, this study yields and poses new hypotheses on the importance of "the good" and "the bad" and how this relates to various outcomes of migrants' integration and participation in the residence country. Future studies could explore these hypotheses on several behavioural outcomes.

Altogether, this study has illustrated that besides negative experiences, migrants mention a range of positively evaluated matters of life in the residence country simultaneously. This informs previous migration research studying mainly the disadvantages and issues migrants face after immigration. Such studies would profit from the inclusion of migrants' lived reality that consists of various negative and positive experiences at the same time. Although migrants' negative experiences such as facing discrimination or experiencing employment issues should be studied and understood, this study illustrates that such an emphasis on only "the bad" veils various positive

experiences that can be experienced at the same time. Acknowledging “the good” in addition to “the bad” therefore draws a more comprehensive picture of migrants’ experiences and relatedly may inform understanding migrants’ behaviour and choices to act and react in a certain way. This study sheds light on these matters by illustrating that positive and negative evaluations of life in the residence country often go hand in hand. For future quantitative research, these positive experiences may be the relevant moderators to understand various outcomes for immigrants, in particular in these dynamic years right after migration. Addressing the positive and negative conjointly thus increases our understanding of migrants’ experiences, choices and behaviour.

**Supplementary Information** The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-022-00993-8>.

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