

## SOURCING STRATEGIES, CHANNELS AND GEOGRAPHIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT OF A HIGHLY SKILLED WORK-FORCE

A case study of companies in the petroleum and maritime sectors in a non-urban location in Norway

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With 1 figure and 3 tables

Received 24. February 2011 · Accepted 12. December 2011

**Summary:** The geographical dimension covered by the international migration research literature is usually concerned with a host-/home-country perspective. However, little attention has been paid to the function of the region as a “clearing house” through which companies in a recruitment process can identify and screen potential candidates that have already settled the country. This paper investigates the recruitment channels used by companies for recruiting highly skilled internationals to the Sunnhordland region in Norway. The empirical evidence, combining secondary data and company case study data, has shown that regional and national recruitment channels play important roles in the search for highly skilled migrants that originally come from outside Norway. In particular, the data show two important roles of higher education in Norway. The first is in the training of suitable candidates originally from outside Norway in accordance with the needs of Norwegian businesses. The second is the way in which years spent in Norway as a student represent an important “testing ground” for individuals considering future settlement in the country. The ability to find information about potential candidates directly through references, on the basis of who the candidates have worked for, or inquiring through more informal networks, further demonstrate the value of the region’s role in recruitment, starting from the sourcing process to choice and attractiveness of the destination in question.

**Zusammenfassung:** Der geographische Fokus der internationalen Migrationsforschung liegt in der Regel auf der Perspektive von Gast- und Heimatland. Wenig Augenmerk wurde bisher hingegen der Funktion einer Region als Quelle für hochqualifiziertes ausländisches Personal zuteil, das sich bereits im Land niedergelassen hat. Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht die Anwerbungspraktiken von Unternehmen für hochqualifiziertes internationales Personal in der Region Sunnhordland in Norwegen. Auf der Grundlage von Fallstudien und sekundären Daten wird aufgezeigt, dass bereits zugewanderte ausländische Fachkräfte eine wichtige Zielgruppe bei der Anwerbung hochqualifizierten Personals darstellen. Insbesondere verdeutlichen die Daten, die wichtige Funktion der Hochschulausbildung in Norwegen. Zum einen ist die Ausbildung an norwegischen Hochschulen auf die spezifischen Anforderungen der Wirtschaft ausgerichtet und garantiert somit eine gute Vorbereitung ausländischer Kandidaten. Zum anderen bildet die Zeit der Hochschulausbildung gewissermaßen eine Testphase, in der die individuelle Bereitschaft und Fähigkeit der längerfristigen Niederlassung in einem fremden Land erprobt werden kann. Die verschiedenen Wege, Informationen über mögliche Kandidaten zu finden, sei es auf der Basis von Referenzen vorheriger Arbeitgeber oder auch über verschiedene eher informelle Kanäle, demonstriert darüber hinaus das besondere Potential der Region in dem Anwerbungsprozess.

**Keywords:** Recruitment strategies, highly skilled, migration, companies, Norway, rural area, economic geography

### 1 Introduction

The global mobility of human capital has received attention as one of the drivers of globalization (DICKEN 2007; EWERS 2007), leading to a more flexible and adaptive work-force and a high degree of international orientation in many companies (IREDALE 2001; KHOO et al. 2007a). Migration can be studied

from a number of perspectives that to a different degree pay attention to the various structural characteristics that influence the dimensions directions, drivers, social and economic effects of migration flows.

The existing literature on the migration of highly skilled work-force covers Multinational Corporations (KHOO et al. 2007a; TZENG 1995; WILLIAMS 2009), migration through ethnic networks and the role of eth-

nic communities (CREESE et al. 2008; NAGEL 2004), the expatriate culture (BEAVERSTOCK 2005; BENSON-REA and RAWLINSON 2003; BOGREN 2008), migration and the role of educational institutions (EWERS 2007) and recruitment agencies (FAULCONBRIDGE et al. 2009) as well as recruitment channels, demographic and household characteristics (CREESE et al. 2008). Evidently, highly skilled migration involves combinations of geographical directions and distances. In addition, national and international migration policies (BURKERT et al. 2008; IREDALE 1999), migration and the global city (BURKERT et al. 2008; EWERS 2007; NAGEL 2004), non-urban migration (DERWING and KRAHN 2008) and recruitment and regional/national marketing (DERWING and KRAHN 2008) have also been the focus of labour migration research in general, including the literature that in particular address the highly skilled. The regional dimension in these literatures mainly concerns regional attractiveness, regional destinations or the region as an actor involved in the company's recruitment processes. Hardly any of these literatures have mentioned how the local recipient region can be a recruitment source for highly skilled foreign employees.

The focus on regional qualities and the region's role in recruitment and retention are discussed in the 'Creative Class literature (e.g. FLORIDA 2002; PRATT 2002; GRABHER 2004) that includes questions about how places are able to attract certain competences. These studies have however mostly concerned individuals, networks and culture business in urban hot spots. With its sociological approach this does especially concern issues about how creative communities live, socially interact and work together. Another much referred literature among geographers concerning knowledge intensive labour is the global-city literature which explains location and knowledge interaction among professionals and firms (e.g. SASSEN 2001; BEAVERSTOCK 2005; EWERS 2007). Both approaches represent geographical clusters that socially, culturally, economically and related to geographical scale are quite different from most industrial communities found in Norway. Nor do these two categories of literature grasp the details concerning different categories of businesses, professionals and managerial practises. Our study concerns highly qualified well paid attractive employees that are offered additional packages of expat services (paperwork, housing, school arrangements etc.) This is in contrast to the almost bohemian lifestyle of the creative class as described by FLORIDA.

This paper is partly based on research results from a study by BRULAND (2010). Our focus has been

the strategies and channels used by companies in the petroleum, maritime and marine resource sectors for recruiting highly skilled foreign migrants to the Sunnhordland region in Norway. We address how the national and regional economic context influences on both the need and the search for higher skilled engineers and other forms of technological expertise. We also address how the national and regional dimension has an important impact on how companies develop their recruitment strategies.

The national and regional context requires some further empirical presentation Western Norway, including the Sunnhordland region of 61,000 inhabitants, is located two and a half hours by car south of Bergen, the second largest city in Norway located in Hordaland county. It hosts some of the largest manufacturing sectors in the Norwegian economy (e.g. petroleum, maritime and marine industries). High levels of investment have resulted in a general labour shortage in Norway. The national unemployment rate has been around 3%, and between 2,5–3,00 in Sunnhordland the last three years (NÆRINGSBAROMETERET 2011; STATISTICS NORWAY 2011) This generally tight labour-market situation, in combination with small wage differences across the country has kept inland migration at a relatively low level. A further reason for low mobility is *The Basic Agreement between the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) including all its national and local associations and individual enterprises, and LO Norway, including all its unions and associations (divisions)*, ensures collective wage levels. The implication of this arrangement is marginal wage levels differences for the same type of occupation and industry across the country (NÆRINGSLIVETS HOVEDORGANISASJON 2010). There are also reports on severe shortage of engineers and ICT-key personnel. A recent published survey from The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration reports that among our major industries, 16% of the companies in the Hordaland county have serious recruitment problems. This is much higher than the 11% national average (NAV 2011). Many private businesses and public work-places, experience problems of getting access to enough qualified personnel. A current shortage of highly qualified personnel and particularly categories of technical personnel is predicted to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future (ARBEIDS-OG INKLUDERINGSDEPARTEMENTET 2007–2008). High levels of investment and production activity within major industries, combined with a major generational shift of engineers over long period, are the main reasons for this shortage (TEKNISK

UKEBLAD 2010). As a result, some of the future demand for highly skilled personnel will have to be filled through international recruitment.

The remaining part of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 investigates some of the existing theoretical contributions to the research on highly skilled migration, especially concerning the term “highly skilled migrant” and the various regional recruitment channels. Section 3 presents some statistics on Norway and labour migration. Section 4 details the qualitative methodological approach of the case study presented in the analysis. The case study findings on choice of recruitment channels are presented in section 5, whilst section 6 discusses the findings and the influences of the region in companies’ recruitment strategies, with some concluding remarks about the relevance of including a regional dimension when investigating the recruitment of a highly skilled international work-force.

## 2 Highly skilled migrants and their recruitment channels

A growing literature highlights the structures, processes and effects around work-related mobility. After considering the many perspectives on the subject, KOSER and SALT (1997, 287) comment: “It is unsurprising that the existing literature does not agree on a single label for highly skilled migration.” A broad classification is to distinguish between different definitions that include a focus on:

1) mobility details, differentiating between short-term and long-term migration (BOGREN 2008; TZENG 1995);

2) personnel qualifications, such as higher secondary education (BURKERT et al. 2008), and specialists, including specialists with large stocks of human capital with both formal and informal skills (WILLIAMS et al. 2004);

3) organizational positions, such as executives and managers (IREDALE 1999), investors and business persons, NGO employees and entrepreneurs (EWERS 2007). These categories are, however, far from mutually exclusive. Table 1 gives a more detailed overview of terms and definitions.

With reference to table 1, we consider “highly skilled migrant” the most suitable term for our study. It includes migrants with formal tertiary education qualifications, as well as those who do not hold formal qualifications, but whose skills and experience match those of their formally qualified peers. Finally, it also includes those who are well qualified

through their education and in addition have further qualifications through work experience. The latter category often represents the most preferred, but can be difficult to recruit in a situation where there are many attractive job offers on the market. The definitions of highly skilled migrants as we read it in the literature we have referred to hardly comments on how labour market conditions affects how the companies themselves choose to implement this term.

The definition of highly skilled, as it is understood by the companies engaged in the various recruitment projects that we have studied, includes both those with a previous professional track record as well as fresh university candidates.

Our case study focuses on international recruitment to Sunnhordland, including both short (1–3-year contracts) and longer-term migration, whilst seasonal workers such as short-term migrants who work in the country for less than six months are omitted because they are not registered in statistics as Norwegian inhabitants. Nevertheless, we should remember that the companies included among our cases hire this kind of short-term labour in addition to the positions that are our focus here.

Highly skilled recruitment can be considered as a business strategy for introducing new knowledge that can foster innovation and a competitive advantage (EWERS 2007; KOSER and SALT 1997; NAGEL 2004; WILLIAMS et al. 2004), or to generally overcome skill shortages (MILLAR and SALT 2007) and within a short time period (KHOO et al. 2007b). As EWERS (2007, 121) states: “When specific skills are lacking, the easiest way to improve a knowledge base is to import one.” Migrants’ own motivations, choices and decisions, including company and location preferences and requirements concerning work content and conditions, are also highly relevant for an understanding of migration behaviour (BEAVERSTOCK 2005; BOGREN 2008; EWERS 2007; KOSER and SALT 1997; NAGEL 2004; SHEPPARD and BARNES 2005; VERWIEBE et al. 2010).

In principle, highly skilled migrants can be recruited in a number of ways. The sourcing strategies involve two dimensions: geographical range and channels. According to SEIP (2007), some highly skilled migrants come to Norway through intra-company transfers in large Multinational Corporations (MNCs), whilst others migrate outside company structures. Migrants are recruited by international recruitment agencies, by personnel offices or international business networks, through advertisements, through institutions such as the European

Tab. 1: Definition overview from examples in existing literature

Main Focus	Term	Definition	Mobility details	Reference
Personnel qualifications	Highly skilled professional/Highly skilled migrant	Those with university degrees or extensive experience		– IREDALE (1999) – KOSER and SALT (1997) – KHOO et al. (2007a)
	Highly skilled employee	Those with a university degree	Both long-term and short-term migration	– WILLIAMS et al. (2004) – BURKERT et al. (2008)
	Multinational transferee	Considered high-level employees by the companies transferring them	Temporary workers on 1-3 years High degree of mobility	– TZENG (1995)
Organisational qualifications	Transnational professionals and expatriates	Those who make careers related to migration (specific skills not specified)	Temporary migrants. High degree of mobility	– COLES and FETCHER (2007) – BOGREN (2008)
	Elite labour	Workers fulfilling positions at the pinnacles or organisational hierarchies or specialist roles	Both long-term and short-term migration	– FALCOUNBRIDGE et al. (2009)

Employment Services<sup>1)</sup> (EURES) and through universities and research institutions (in our case this includes both universities and colleges in the region and in Norway as a whole). Our empirical evidence will give some further details on these matters.

### 3 Investigating highly skilled recruitment from a Norwegian perspective

Register-based data in a recently published OECD report on labour market integration in Norway (OECD 2009) show that around half of the tertiary-educated immigrants from OECD countries,

<sup>1)</sup> EUR-ES (European Employment Services) is a cooperation network formed by public employment services. Trade unions and employers' organisations also participate as partners. The objective of the EURES network is to facilitate the free movement of workers within the European Economic Area (EEA) (the 27 members of the European Union, plus Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland) and Switzerland.

as well as non-OECD countries (including Turkey), had a Norwegian university degree. Further evidence of strong ties between the industry and Norwegian universities can be found in a report issued from The Norwegian Society of Graduate Technical and Scientific Professionals. This report shows that nearly 80% of the member graduates in engineering and natural sciences spring 2010 had employment contracts before their final exams (TEKNA 2010). This also explains why several larger companies are actively engaged in career campaigning events at universities both in Norway and abroad. The reason for this is a combination of companies recruiting candidates of a well-known quality, but also to be able to fill vacancies in an extremely tight labour market (NAV 2011).

An overview of recruitment channel options for a region, based on the case study findings, is presented in table 2. Recruitment channels have been divided into two categories: direct recruitment, which is business and labour market related, and indirect recruitment, which refers to other channels through which the migrants have migrated.

Tab. 2: Examples of recruitment channels found in the case study data

Direct recruitment	Indirect recruitment (via)
Intra-company transfers	Tourism
EURES	Regional or National educational institutions
Recruitment agencies	Ethnic networks
Targeted educational institutions abroad	Family
Company takeover	Previous recruitment by others – inter-regional turnover
Inter-company networks	
Internet/Media	

Some regions do easily attract highly skilled labour while others represent less favourable job destinations.

Why does a highly skilled migrant decide to move to city A and not city B, or why do larger urban areas seem more attractive to migrants than smaller towns? RITSILÄ and HAAPANEN (2003, 437–438) state: “Qualified individuals choosing a residential location expect a supply of relevant jobs, as well as interesting educational, cultural and recreational opportunities for themselves and their families. Thus, the location decisions of skilled labour are connected to the infrastructure and production of regions.” Peripheral and smaller nations, regions, cities and smaller towns, such as the towns in Sunnhordland, cannot compete with global cities in offering a range of job categories, services and cultural facilities to potential immigrants. Traditionally, Norway has been an attractive labour market for lower- and medium-skilled jobs in trades such as manufacturing, construction and private and public services because of high wage levels. At the same time, the labour market has struggled to recruit highly skilled personnel because of language barriers and the lack of attractive “global cities”. Those who move to Norway often do so for lifestyle reasons such as recreational and adventure activities. Some have already been introduced to these possibilities through tourist visits, whilst others may have previously studied at Norwegian universities, or know the country through family and ethnic networks.

Smaller towns have also salary levels that fully match what is found in larger urban areas of the country.

More peripheral locations can succeed in recruitment when candidates are actually targeting specific job positions. In those cases, some basic infrastructural components such as acceptable housing facilities, kindergartens, schools and a second job in dual-career households are sufficient regional character-

istics. The immediate quality of the *site* (referring to the settlement) is one component. Another is *situation*, which refers to the accessibility of more jobs or shops or service facilities. A larger urban area such as Bergen (260,000 inhabitants) can offer a more varied range of shops, services a cultural facilities, a diversified range of jobs and an international airport.

The *situation* component indicates that some places and regions will be in a more favourable position than others. The inhabitants of Sunnhordland are 2.5 hours distance by car from Bergen and its international airport, which is normally considered too far away for a daily commute in this region. This leads to the conclusion that including geography when analysing a company’s recruitment strategy, introduces a more holistic perspective on the recruitment process. “The mobility of international human capital is geographical, but as part of a web of place-based national, urban, corporate and structural factors, as well as individual push and pull factors.” (EWERS 2007, 122) Thus, whilst a desirable position within a company can increase the value of a migration destination, it is crucial that the destination meets a certain minimum standard of living. The region’s *situation* as well as distinctions between short-term and long-term recruitment, had an impact on our informants’ choices of recruitment channels, as will be further discussed in part 6.

### 3.1 Norway as a labour migration destination

Our study has shown that it is important to stress the definition of highly skilled, both as a research term, but also the way it is practised by companies that are in a recruitment position.

Our research experience is also that the regional and national geographical context and economic conditions affect how this term is understood. Before

presenting our empirical evidence on recruitment strategies in further detail, it is necessary to give some facts about Norway's position as a recipient of international labour migration. According to the OECD report on labour market integration in Norway (OECD 2009), **around 10% of the Norwegian population** was born in another country. This level is almost identical to Denmark and 5% lower than in Sweden, Germany and the UK. Much of the recent labour migration from the EU/EEA<sup>2)</sup> countries have been labour-market related, whereas non-OECD migration has been mainly humanitarian. Nationals from the Nordic countries have been exempt from the general rule of needing residence and work permits since 1954, resulting in a large Swedish immigrant population that has linguistic and cultural ties to Norway. In 2006, 181,000 employees with foreign citizenship were registered as living in Norway, and 18% of these were from other Nordic countries. The European labour force survey of 2006/2007 shows that 37% of immigrants (foreign born) have tertiary education. Half of those with a higher education have a degree from Norway (OECD 2009). Almost two-thirds of highly qualified foreign-born inhabitants in Norway are also in a job that can be classified as highly skilled by the International Standard Classification of Occupations (International Labour Organisation 2011). Among the OECD countries, only Switzerland has a higher share of a foreign-born labour force with higher education.

#### 4 Case study methodology

The aim of this study has been to understand strategies, challenges and complexities of international recruitment in a regional context. This case study was carried out in September 2009 during the international financial crisis. The comments we recorded indicated that the crisis did have a temporary effect, resulting in a lower level of activity. The effects were lower levels of recruitment of lower-skilled staff, whereas the focus on higher-skilled recruitment seemed to remain on the same level as recent years.

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<sup>2)</sup> European Economic Area. Since 1 May 2004, the European Economic Area (EEA) has united the 25 EU Member States and the three EEA EFTA States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) in an Internal Market governed by the same basic rules. These rules aim to enable goods, services, capital, and persons to move freely about the EEA in an open and competitive environment. EEA (2011):European commission, Treaties office. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/> (16.08.11).

Retaining qualified personnel in a situation where the activity was lower than usual also became a priority, as the need for competence and capacity of resources was crucial to obtain at short notice when bidding for new contracts.

This study includes empirical data and qualitative data from a case study of in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with a total of 16 informants located in the municipalities of Bømlo and Stord in Sunnhordland. A purposeful sampling strategy aimed to cover a broad range of the most important internationally oriented industries in the petroleum and maritime sectors. Four interviews were with management (CEOs or management dealing with personnel issues in Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs; with fewer than 250 employees) and three in large enterprises, to reflect the presence of both these two categories in the regional economy. Interviews were also carried out with four representatives from the local municipal administration, including both the mayors in the respective municipalities. The objectives of these interviews have been to address issues on how they presented the communities with its infrastructure in their recruitment projects and also to investigate the extent to which infrastructure and other qualities related to these communities were necessary for attracting highly qualified personnel from abroad. In addition, three migrant workers were interviewed to complement the information from different interview sources. However, our main focus in this study was recruitment process viewed from the viewpoint of the firm.

It should also be mentioned that Atheno AS ([www.atheno.no](http://www.atheno.no)), a region-business incubator owned by governmental and private business organizations, has been a valuable source in the process of identifying firms and key personnel actively involved in international recruitment (two interviews with Atheno staff were specifically about international recruitment strategies among businesses in the region). The firm cases offered valuable insights about motivations, strategies, processes and experiences with international recruitment. All interviews took place at the work-place of the interviewee and lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

#### 5 Case study results

The case study presented below focuses on 1) strategies and choice of recruitment channels, and 2) the influences of geographical range and context.

Data from the case study presented in table 3 showed that each company used multiple recruitment channels in direct recruitment of highly skilled internationals. The choice of recruitment channel was determined by many factors, such as availability, previous recruitment experiences, existing networks and preferences regarding short- or long-term employment engagements. Data also showed that many of the highly skilled internationals had been recruited through indirect recruitment channels, thus entering their current company through a local/regional or national recruitment network. These findings demonstrates the importance of including *all geographical levels* when addressing the issue of international recruitment, whether seen from the viewpoint of the enterprise, the recruitment service provider, policymakers or public labour market institutions (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service; NAV) operating on a national or regional/local scale.

The engagement of a recruitment agency was quite common among the companies usually because of capacity constraints both dealing with the identification of candidates and different practicalities around the recruitment process (immigration paperwork, housing and school arrangements etc). Buying this service also ensures an arm-length distance to the candidates: One of the company informants put it this way:

”When you use a recruitment agency that hires and then outsources personnel to others, you set a standard, and if the standard is not met by the personnel introduced to you, you can send the candidates back to the recruitment agency”. This statement also suggests that the informants enjoyed the flexibility offered by such agencies in terms of not being required to face any obligations to retain personnel on a long-term basis.

One the other hand, some of the companies preferred to run the recruitment process themselves as this direct engagement could strengthen the obligations the employees had to stay. This strategy was attributed to the avoidance of high turnover costs: “We don’t want to engage highly skilled personnel via a recruitment agency, because you spend a lot of time with on-the-job training, and you never have any guarantee that they will stay and not quit to start working for another company”.

Local knowledge often plays its part when engaging a recruitment agency. RUSTEN et al. (2005) identified social closeness and trust, gained through a shared culture and face-to-face interaction, as reasons that some companies preferred an agency from the same town or region. Of those who used

**Tab. 3: Overview of companies’ use of direct and indirect recruitment channels, bold indicates the channel mostly used**

Variable name	Direct recruitment	Indirect recruitment
Company A	<b>X</b>	X
Company B	X	<b>X</b>
Company C	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Company D	<b>X</b>	X
Company E	<b>X</b>	X
Company F	<b>X</b>	X
Company G	<b>X</b>	–

recruitment agencies to locate highly skilled internationals, most had chosen agencies located in the Sunnhordland region. This also meant that the agency knew the communities, infrastructure, services and qualities of the community and could promote this to the potential candidates in an enthusiastic way. As one informant explained: “Some of these local agencies have a lot of valuable competence, by working with this matter for many years. They have systemized how to get them [ed. the recruits] through the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) system, with the papers and the administration, and in addition, they know the area here”.

All informants reported that their companies had both experiences with intra- and intercompany networks when recruiting from abroad and considered both categories to be valuable recruitment arenas. All companies participating in this case study either owned units outside Norway, or worked closely with foreign companies.

NAGEL (2004) considers employee mobility as crucial for the distribution of expertise within global companies. This circulation between workplaces can be characterized as a “tour of duty” and is common in many Transnational Corporations (TNCs) (EWERS 2007). We find these forms of “competence circulation” among our cases. For one informant, the intra-company network had provided the informant’s company with expertise that otherwise would have been very hard to obtain in Norway. It is also a way of developing closer links with company units located elsewhere.

Hardly any informants reported that they selected their international employees on the basis of EEA member country of origin, and informants felt no restrictions recruiting outside the EEA area. EURES had only actively been used by two of the informants and neither was satisfied with the candidates they had obtained through this organization. Their experience was that engaging personnel through this

institution was far more time-consuming than giving the contract to a private recruitment agency.

All informants preferred using recruitment agencies or intra-company networks for international recruitment, and had a range of requirements for the candidates. First, there was of course the requirement of high-level competence, ensuring the candidates' capability to fill the needed position. Second, even though most informants specified that they did not ask the recruitment agency to target specific countries, they did prefer candidates who could speak a Scandinavian language to match the daily spoken language at their workplace. It was not only practical and convenient of social reasons, but even a work security issue with advantage of just having to deal with one language. Even if a Scandinavian language was a preferred requirement, many mentioned English language skills as a most appreciated additional qualification. Several of our informants reported that the local airport with daily direct flights to Oslo was an important infrastructure quality, as well as having the Bergen international airport just a couple of hours away by car. Lack of housing accommodations for short-term rent, and difficulties finding available jobs for accompanying spouse were however frequently reported by the informants.

SEIP (2007) has, in a study based on a selection of private companies in Norway, registered the three most important recruitment arenas for highly skilled international employees. His results correspond well with the findings from the in-depth interviews from Sunnhordland. In both cases, private recruitment agencies and intra- and intercompany networks were frequently used, whilst EURES seem to play a minor role in highly skilled recruitment. However, note that it might be possible that some private recruitment agencies collaborate with EURES and that the role of this organization is a more hidden part of the process. Contrary to the findings of our case study, SEIP (2007) lists international advertising as the most frequent recruitment channel. It is unclear if this type of advertisement includes online applications and active marketing conducted by a firm, or through an agent. Either way, international job advertising was not mentioned by the informants in our case study as a frequently used arena of recruitment. All informants except one had company web pages in English. However, whilst the larger companies had facilities for submitting an online job application, hardly any of the SMEs in our study had anything similar. One of the informants in the latter category argued that he did not see a great value in advertising vacancies on their web site because of their small company size.

Regarding direct recruitment channels used in international recruitment, all our informants reported using recruitment agencies, intercompany networks and the Internet, with emphasis on the first two. The use of indirect and direct recruitment channels for highly skilled migrants is shown in table 3.

A majority of companies in our study reported using a company takeover as a means of recruiting international labour, and several had used an intra-company takeover and foreign educational institutions as recruitment arenas. Some also reported that they occasionally targeted individual candidates on the basis of information from colleagues or other informal sources.

Most company informants reported that their company had recruited highly skilled migrants through regional and national recruitment channels – what we have referred to as indirect recruitment channels.

Which recruitment channel(s) were chosen and which geographical range candidates were recruited from were dependent on what the region could offer. The different factors influencing recruitment strategies, services and sources that we have discussed so far can be summarised by figure 1. In general, previous experiences with recruitment to the region, seems to provide the basis for most recruitment strategies. Factors that also seem to influence these strategies are the region's structural conditions (such as regional infrastructure and existing labour market) and collaboration efforts between regional actors. Also, short-term and long-term recruitment requires different strategies, as does required skill-level and experience. In determining where candidates were recruited from, business networks plays a vital role.

## 6 Discussion and concluding remarks

Our empirical evidence showed that companies seemed to prefer candidates with an existing regional or national attachment. In some cases this would be candidates recruited from Norwegian universities, and in other cases personnel that already had some work experience in Norway. Many highly skilled migrants are recruited through these regional and local channels. Norwegian educational institutions play several important roles in labour recruitment, as they train candidates in accordance with the needs of Norwegian businesses, as well as provide an important "testing ground" for individuals considering future settlement in Norway. The region as a potential



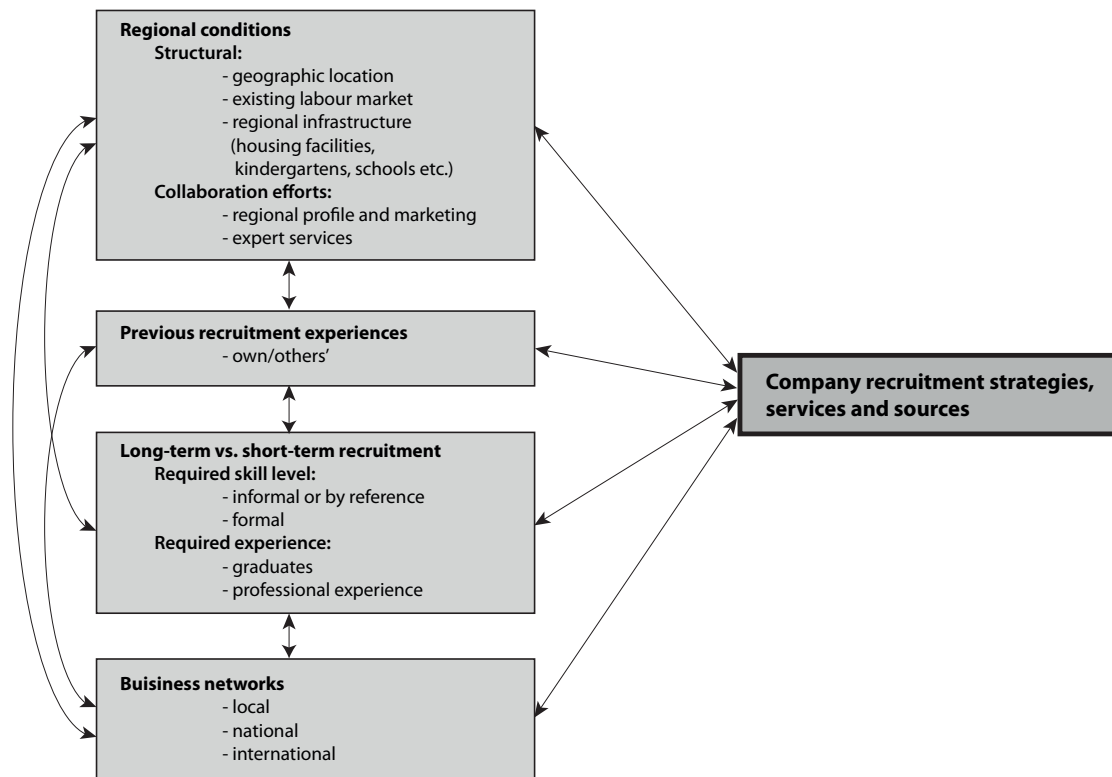


Fig. 1: Strategies and structures affecting the recruitment process

source for candidates played an important part in recruitment strategies developed for long-term recruitment of both nationals and internationals. As a risk-aversion strategy, many informants emphasized the importance of regional attachment through family, friends or hobbies as a vital factor for successful retention of labour in addition to the employment itself. The regional qualities thus became very important in the recruitment process, as they were both present in the marketing and advertisement of jobs, as well as in the process of selecting “suitable” candidates for the job. The informants pointed out the need to advertise the countryside qualities of the region, so they would attract personnel that would be comfortable with this sort of environment. When recruiting for long-term contracts, one informant’s experience was that recruiting employees with origins from “similar types of places” meant they would find living in Sunnhordland more preferable than an urban lifestyle, and they would therefore stay in the region longer. Recruiting from universities among the Nordic countries had proved to be successful, but the climate could be a critical issue. Other informants had similar experiences even in cases of recruitment of persons living in

Eastern Norway: “I know there’s a great risk that he/she might return as soon as he experiences the first autumn storm” Another said: “There’s nothing for you to do here on the island if you are a guy from Oslo who only drinks coffee lattes”. Limiting and targeting the geography in the recruitment processes represents important risk reducing strategies among the companies included in our study. For short-term positions, place/country of origin and “suitability” was not emphasized in the same manner as retention was not an issue. In general, targeted international recruitment projects seemed more frequently launched for short-term contracts of a certain scale, where there was less focus on retention.

The literature of highly skilled migration referred to in this study does not incorporate the role of the region in the development of recruitment strategies, but rather focuses on the role of place/region at a later stage in the recruitment process (which of course is relevant also). However, investigating how the region plays a part in the development of recruitment strategies can contribute to a further understanding of the recruitment strategies in themselves. In this case, the physical climate, to live by the sea, the safe and small

community, the local labour market, the possibilities of enjoying out-door activities etc. were all elements included when deciding *where* the migrants would be recruited from and by which channels. This sourcing strategy was primarily the case for long-term recruitment. One of our informants put it this way: “We advertise locally because we want them to have local attachment. Experience shows that those who have some sort of local connection stay with us for a longer period of time”. This does not mean that they were opposed to recruiting international labour. As mentioned above, highly skilled migrants were often recruited through local recruitment channels. Rather, the informants seemed to prefer a stepwise process of recruitment, where they first searched regionally and nationally before eventually reaching the international level if the two previous arenas produced no results. The need to minimize resources on training personnel that would only stay for a short period (turn-over cost), as well as minimizing resources spent on language training were reported as main reasons for this sourcing strategy.

As many highly skilled migrants seemed to have come through indirect recruitment channels, using the term “highly skilled migrant” as opposed to “multinational transferee” or “expatriate” seems more fruitful as it is more neutral in its characterisation of the migrants’ level of mobility. Another point that has been mentioned previously is that a company can choose between standard recruitment, consultancy firms or independent professionals, utilizing staff employed elsewhere or relying on sub-contractors. Here the region plays a vital role, as the range of employment options for companies will very much depend on a combination of the attractiveness of the company as a work-place and the overall qualities of the region (site/situation). This means that a region with many local candidates, might be less oriented towards recruiting through international recruitment channels. We especially found this to be the case when recruiting for long-term contracts.

The geographical dimension covered by the international migration research literature is usually concerned with a host-/home-country perspective. However, little attention has been paid to the function of the region as a “clearing house” through which companies in a recruitment process can identify and screen potential candidates that have already settled in Norway. Foreign students at universities and colleges, or personnel already working in a country are examples of recruitment stepping stones that should not be overlooked. The level of regional collaboration also played a vital role in recruitment strategy develop-

ment. Many informants stated that a closer collaboration between companies recruiting and the local administration when receiving new employees could make recruitment easier (i.e. leaving some paperwork to a public administration office specialised in this). Also, many informants stated that increased regional collaboration between both private and public actors could make it easier for all to recruit dual-career households. As this form of collaboration had not been formalised at the time of the interviews, many informants felt there were many suitable candidates they were not able to recruit due to lack of available positions for their husband/wife in the same area.

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