

The Role of Sensemaking in Coping Mechanisms

For Migrant Workers in Dutch Agriculture

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Introduction

The Netherlands are the second biggest exporter of food by dollar value, only surpassed by the United States (Rintoul, 2020). Due to the smart implementation of different technologies, farmers in the Netherlands were able to increase the yields per square kilometre to unrivalled levels (Viviano, 2021). Technology, however, is not the only factor that keeps Dutch agriculture going as for planting and harvesting, some manual labour is required.

According to the agricultural census conducted by Statistics Netherlands (2020), Dutch agriculture consists of 156 thousand full-time jobs. Out of these 156 thousand, nearly 30 thousand full-time jobs are so-called fixed-term contracts which are often fulfilled by seasonal workers. In the horticultural sector, the share of seasonal workers is the largest, with nearly 60 per cent of all labour input performed by seasonal workers (Statistics Netherlands, 2020). A large number of these seasonal workers are coming from Eastern-European countries, mostly Poland, Romania and Bulgaria (Statistics Netherlands, 2019). These seasonal migrant workers are indispensable for Dutch agriculture as it would be impossible to find enough Dutch workers to fulfil these hard agricultural jobs (ABU, 2018).

Jobs in agriculture are hard, and workers often have to work in a wide variety of tough conditions, resulting in a variety of mental and physical difficulties (Luque-Ribelles, Palacios-Gálvez & Morales-Marente, 2018; Fuchs, Kouiminitzis & Kirch, 2007; Fraser, Smith, Humphreys, Fragar & Henderson, 2005). Some of these hard conditions are hard to overcome due to plants growing cycles. There are two periods in which a lot of work has to be done in a short amount of time. This results in a high workload and long working hours (Douw & Spierings, 1998). Besides these high workloads, these periods often coincide with tough secondary conditions like high temperatures (Ronda-Pérez et al., 2012). Finally, even in the areas where standards for working conditions have been set, these standards are not always met. The Dutch inspection for social affairs (SZW) noted that in 2015 at least 50% of inspected farms did not meet working condition standards. Despite these poor working conditions, large numbers of migrant workers continue to work in agriculture.

Most research on working conditions in European agriculture has been conducted from a macro-perspective and give a more general overview of what conditions migrant workers have to work under and why migrant workers are more likely to work under poor conditions. An example could be a study by Ronda-Pérez et al. (2012) which looked at the higher chances of exposure to poor working conditions by migrant workers. Or, Rye and Scott's (2018) research on, which factors cause migrant workers to be more likely to experience poor working conditions and poor wages. Existing 'macro perspective' literature thus mainly looks at the extent of, and reasons why migrant workers work under poor conditions.

One of the more obvious reasons for these migrant workers to work these hard jobs is the relatively high salaries that they could earn in the Netherlands compared to their home countries (Velizarova & Kirov, 2018; Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen, 2018). The minimum income in the Netherlands is 3 times as high as in Poland, 4 times as high as in Romania and 6 times as high as in Bulgaria (Eurostat, 2021). If these high earnings would be the only reason for their continuous work in the Netherlands, surely most migrant workers would return. But according to one of the respondents in this research, only forty per cent of first-year migrants returned for a second year. So surely there must be more reasons why some people return while others do not. In this regard, coping mechanisms could prove to be of importance as they help people to deal with difficult situations, like poor working conditions. According to Velizarova & Kirov (2018) and Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018), migrant workers employ different coping mechanisms to deal with precarious situations.

Research on coping mechanisms by migrant workers has paid some more attention to experienced working conditions. These studies focus on how people cope with poor working conditions. Velizarova & Kirov (2018), for instance, have highlighted that: *“strong social ties are the main mechanisms for minimising the subjective feeling of being exploited; they are seen as a support network which can catch you if the job goes badly”*

In this regard, it is important to look at an individuals' actual experiences. Therefore, you look at the differences between actually experienced conditions and the subjective feelings about those conditions. In their study, Velizarova & Kirov (2018) are interested in an individuals' experiences to the extent that they compare objective experiences with subjective experiences.

Coping mechanisms have been researched in different countries and sectors, like cleaning and construction in Denmark (Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen, 2018) and caretaking in the Netherlands (Bruquetas-Callejo, 2019). The coping mechanisms that are being employed by individuals differ between countries and sectors. Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018) mentioned that the desire of maintaining employment was the most important coping mechanism for individuals, while Bruquetas-Callejo (2019) spoke about material constraints at home and the desire for self-realization as most important coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms thus differ between individuals, countries and industries. What these studies do have in common is that they look at how migrant workers are actively improving their subjective experiences. So far, no specific research on coping mechanisms of migrant workers in Dutch agriculture has been conducted. As previous studies showed different coping mechanisms for different industries, migrant workers in Dutch agriculture likely make use of a different set of coping mechanisms as well.

Furthermore, coping mechanisms are often seen as tactics and strategies to improve subjective experiences (Velizarova & Kirov, 2018). Most research concerning coping mechanisms does look at actions taken by individuals to actively improve their experiences. These researches do pay relatively little attention to initial subjective experiences that are formed by a process called sensemaking. Sensemaking takes place automatically before people start thinking about whether they would need to make use of coping mechanisms or not.

The process of sensemaking looks at how people, via a process of acquisition, reflection and action, integrate experiences into their understanding of the world around them (Kolko, 2010). Sensemaking thus forms objective experiences into an individual (subjective) interpretation of these experiences. This way sensemaking is important concerning the usage of coping mechanisms as it stands at the basis of an individuals' initial experiences.

In this study, I will look at what role the process of sensemaking plays, in coping mechanisms that are being used by migrant workers in Dutch agriculture. I will explore how from an individuals' perspective, migrant workers can deal with their poor working conditions. What role does sensemaking play? And what different coping mechanisms are being employed by migrant workers? To answer these questions the following research question has been formulated:

What role does sensemaking play within different coping mechanisms, for migrant workers, to deal with poor working conditions in Dutch agriculture?

To answer this question, interviews with migrant workers who are working on Dutch farms have been conducted. In these interviews questions concerning experienced working conditions and how migrant workers deal with these conditions have been asked. The results of these interviews were analysed to explore common trends within the interviews. Next, results from the analysis have been compared to the existing literature regarding coping mechanisms and sensemaking for migrant workers in agriculture. Differences, similarities and additional information has been elaborated upon.

With the results of this research, a contribution will be made to the literature about coping mechanisms. I will look at whether Migrant workers in Dutch agriculture make use of similar coping mechanisms as discussed by Velizarova & Kirov (2018), Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018) and Bruquetas-Callejo (2019). Furthermore, I will look at the role that sensemaking plays within these coping mechanisms. This way I will give an insight into how and why coping mechanisms are applied. Finally, I will make a contribution to the literature about working conditions for migrant workers, by looking at how working conditions are being experienced by individuals. This way more knowledge is gained about how individuals

experience their working conditions. Which could prove to be useful in follow up studies regarding working conditions.

Concerning practical relevance, results from this study will give an insight into how migrant workers experience their working conditions and how they can deal with these conditions. A better understanding of this sensemaking process and the coping mechanisms shown by migrant workers could help the government and employers in improving workers' access to these coping mechanisms. For workers, this would result in improved working conditions and it would give them an easier and better time working in the Netherlands.

In this report, first, the key concept of working conditions will be defined and existing literature about working conditions of migrant workers and coping mechanisms will be discussed. Next, the concept of sensemaking will be elaborated upon. Afterwards, the research methods will be discussed followed by an analysis of the results from the interviews. Finally, a conclusion and discussion will be given.

Theoretical Background

In this study, I will look at what role sensemaking plays within the coping mechanisms of migrant workers in Dutch agriculture. As I will be looking at coping mechanisms regarding poor working conditions it is important to define what is meant by poor working conditions. In this theoretical chapter, I will first give my definition of working conditions. Next, I will look at the literature regarding the working conditions of migrant workers in Europe from a macro-view. Then, I will look at the literature about coping mechanisms from a micro-view. Finally, I will introduce the concept of sensemaking and explain how this process will be useful within this study.

Definition of Working conditions in Dutch agriculture

According to the Dutch Work Conditions Act of 1999, working conditions can be divided into four different areas, namely: (1) Environmental influences, (2) Mental Strain, (3) Physical Strain and (4) Safety.

Within these 4 broad areas, different poor working conditions exist. Douw & Spierings (1998), in their study of how Dutch agriculture could be scaled up, came up with a list of areas that needed improvement before scaling would be possible 'bottlenecks'. The 'bottlenecks' described by Douw & Spierings (1998), are related to risks regarding the safety and well-being of agricultural workers. This way they are related to working conditions as well i.e. good working conditions should take care of both, safety and well-being.

Since their study Dutch agriculture has increased in scale and productivity. It became one of the most effective, and in terms of production per square kilometre, unrivalled producers of different vegetables (Viviano, 2021). By combining the 'bottlenecks' described by Douw & Spierings (1998) with the Work Conditions Act of 1999, a good definition of working conditions for Dutch agriculture could be given.

Where the Work conditions Act divides working conditions into four different areas, Douw & Spierings (1998) divided working conditions into two different themes: (1) Health and (2) Well-Being. The areas from the work conditions act could be placed within the two different themes. Here, environmental influences (e.g. working with harmful pesticides, working with dust and asbestos, harsh climate conditions like high and low temperatures and bad lighting), physical strain (e.g. physical work that demands a lot from the body) and safety (e.g. working with machines and animals, which could lead to injuries if no proper instructions and/or training are given) would make up the theme health. While mental strain would be part of the theme of well-being (e.g. task content, participation, team spirit, depression and anxiety)

Table 1: Areas of working conditions and their constituting factors.

Areas (WCA, 1999)	Themes (Douw & Spierings, 1998)	Factors
Environmental Influences	Health	Pesticides, Dust and asbestos, Climate conditions, Lighting
Mental Strain	Well-Being	Task content, Participation, Team spirit, Depression, Anxiety
Physical Strain	Health	Physical Load
Safety	Health	Working with machines and animals

Working conditions in the context of Dutch agriculture thus constitute both directly observable phenomena fitting with Douw & Spierings' (1998) health theme as well as with their less visible but still important theme of well-being.

In this study, I will look at how migrant workers can cope with their experienced working conditions and the role of sensemaking in this process. In this regard, working conditions will consist out of these two themes and make use, but will not be limited by, the pre-determined factors shown in table 1.

Macro-studies Working Conditions

Research on working conditions and related safety and health problems have a long tradition in Europe. Plenty of research has been conducted in the areas of working conditions- and safety and health in agriculture (e.g. Belt & Werkgroep, 1985; Douw & Spierings 1999). There have also been different researches towards the specific working conditions for migrant workers on European farms (e.g. Ronda-Pérez et al., 2012; Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999). In this literature, the phenomenon of working conditions is looked at from a macro perspective. The most important questions are related to showing the trends in and extent of bad working conditions. In research, relatively little attention has been paid to how these working conditions have been experienced by (migrant) workers themselves.

Literature shows us that migrant workers face worse working conditions than non-migrant workers (Ronda-Pérez et al., 2012). They are more likely to suffer from bad working conditions due to lower literacy rates, bad knowledge of local languages and different standards for what bad labour conditions are due to cultural differences and experiences at home (Rye & Scott, 2018; Guldenmund, Cleal & Mearns, 2013).

At greatest risk are manual migrant workers. They are more likely to suffer from poor conditions like vibrations, loud noises, high temperatures, tiring or painful work positions, standing or walking, repetitive movements, working at high speeds, variable working times, changes in the work schedule and not being able to choose when to take days off (Ronda-Pérez et al., 2012).

The phenomenon of bad working conditions exists and migrant workers are more likely to suffer from bad working conditions. The macro perspective used in different studies has been very helpful in showing that, but how do these people feel about having to work under these conditions? In this research, I will focus on individual migrant workers. I want to see how individuals make sense of their experienced working conditions and make their voices heard.

One noteworthy exception to the sole macro approach concerning working conditions in agriculture is a study by Loose & Lamberts (2010). They researched the employment of migrants in agriculture and horticulture in Flanders. In their research Loose & Lamberts (2010) conducted interviews with migrant workers, in agriculture and horticulture and asked them questions about their experienced quality of work, in the form of job content, working conditions, working relations and terms of employment. This experienced quality of work, however, is just a small part of their study and as other parts are more important still relatively little attention is paid to this subject.

Regarding the quality of work, Loose & Lamberts (2010) note that migrant workers are in the first place glad that they have work, and they are mainly motivated due to economic motivations. Conditions and terms which are not optimal are taken for granted. Workers do say that they experience their work to be intensive, easy to learn and boring. They are mainly working in easy to learn jobs and have little task variety. Finally, migrant workers said that they had positive experiences with their co-workers, who come from many different backgrounds. The workers experienced that they were working in the same conditions and had similar stories of origin, which founds a bond between them. Regarding the relationship with the employer, most migrants said that they were content and wanted to keep the employer satisfied, in the hope of returning the following year.

Although Loose & Lamberts (2010) did look at what individuals thought about their working conditions, it was not the main objective of their study. Like other macro-oriented studies, they wanted to give an overview of what the agricultural sector looks like. And even though their study does offer some insight into the experiences of individual workers, these voices are used to give an insight into the sector as a whole.

For my research, these studies regarding the macro-studies in working conditions in agriculture are of great importance as they do offer a great deal of valuable information about

the context in which migrant workers are working. They do however not answer questions like: why do migrant workers keep working? or, how are migrant workers able to deal with poor working conditions? To answer these specific questions a micro perspective would be more useful. Therefore, in this study, I will focus on this micro perspective.

Micro-studies Coping Mechanisms

On a more micro level, migrant workers face different difficult situations ranging from poor working conditions and labour exploitation (Velizarova & Kirov, 2018; Bruquetas-Callejo, 2019; Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen, 2018), to sexual intimidation (Luque-Ribelles et al., 2018) and different stress factors related to their ability to live and stay in the country they are currently working in (Winkelman, Chaney & Bethel, 2013). None of these studies, however, have been conducted in the context of migrant workers in Dutch agriculture.

Velizarova & Kirov (2018) conducted interviews with thirteen Bulgarian nationals who were working in different European countries. Eight of them were working in agriculture of whom none in Western Europe. Bruquetas-Calleja (2019) did her study on a Dutch case for migrant care workers and Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018) looked at the cleaning and construction industry in Denmark. All coping mechanisms discussed in these studies could prove to be useful for migrant workers in Dutch agriculture. But it is also possible that a different context will result in different outcomes. Now, I will take a look at what coping mechanisms were studied by other researchers.

Coping mechanisms that are being used by migrant workers according to other researchers are (1) Social Networks (Velizarova & Kirov, 2018), (2) Maintaining employment (Pljevaljic-Simunkas & Thomsen, 2018). , (3) Material constraints at home (Burquetas-Calleja, 2019) and (4) Self realization (Burquetas-Calleja, 2019).

Velizarova & Kirov (2018) showed that migrant workers who have access to strong social networks, consisting of friends and family, had higher work satisfaction than people who did not have access to such a network. This higher satisfaction was present, even in cases where the actual (objective) working experiences, scored on a scale of labour exploitations by the ILO, were far from good. By comparing work satisfaction (subjective experiences) with objective experiences, Velizarova & Kirov (2018) showed that having a strong social network allows respondents to reflect on some of the poor working conditions and have a better experience.

Fear of losing one's job proves to be an important coping mechanism as well (Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen, 2018). There is a clear pattern between migrants' dependency on others and maintaining employment and income. This dependency creates an unequal balance of power between workers and employers, which results in migrant workers complying

with their employers wishes out of fear of losing their jobs (Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen, 2018). This feat in itself works as a coping mechanism to deal with poor working conditions, as poor conditions are preferred over not having an income.

Both studies of Velizarova & Kirov (2018) and Simkunas & Thomsen (2018) show external factors that allow migrant workers to deal with difficulties. Whereas social networks could have a positive effect on actual experiences. Complying out of fear of losing one's job merely is a reason that makes sure that migrant workers keep going. Both mechanisms, do not take into account, how conditions are experienced initially. Furthermore, both coping mechanisms do require the presence of external parties, either social networks or employers, to use. They thus say little about how individuals can cope with difficulties.

When looking at what happens at a more individual level Bruquetas-Callejo's (2019) research regarding coping mechanisms of migrant care workers in the Netherlands seems to be more relevant. According to Burquetas-Callejo (2019), migrant care workers show a pattern where survival and self-realization were the triggers for transnational migration. These triggers for migration are then used to cope with poor working conditions, in their employment abroad. The reasons why migrant workers left their country of origin in the first place, being: economic constraints (survival) and the need for self-realization, allow them to cope with poor working conditions (Burquetas-Callejo, 2019).

In contrast to the study of Velizarova & Kirov (2018) and Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018), Bruquetas-Callejo's (2019) narratives are more individual and thus could be used by all workers, even those who do not have access to strong social networks, or those who do not fear losing their job. What is interesting, however, is that both coping mechanisms of economic constraints and self-realization are being applied retrospectively. Workers first have to face poor working conditions, before either of the narratives could be applied. Both narratives do not pay attention to how working conditions are experienced initially.

Existing literature thus shows different individual coping mechanisms that allow people to, retrospectively, cope with poor working conditions. Furthermore, different coping mechanisms that make use of external parties prove to be useful for individuals as well. What is missing, however, is a further understanding of how people come up with their initial subjective experiences. Even before different coping mechanisms could be employed, experienced subjective conditions could differ between individuals and influence the subsequent usage of different coping mechanisms.

In this regard, the concept of sensemaking could prove to be a useful lens to look at working conditions and coping mechanisms. This lens would allow for looking at experienced working conditions in a different way. With sensemaking, more emphasis is placed on how specific

conditions are perceived and thus on how poor working conditions are subjectively being experienced by individuals. This could help explain why similar working conditions could be experienced differently by different individuals. As conditions are experienced differently, the need for coping mechanisms differs as well. Therefore, it is important to look at these initial experiences as well, as they form the starting point for coping mechanisms.

Sensemaking

“Sensemaking is central because it is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action”. (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409)

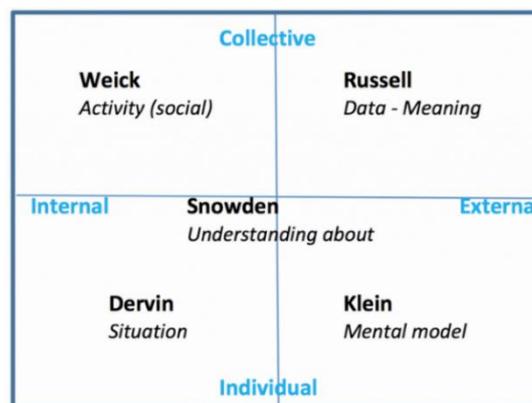
Sensemaking is about the process of giving meaning to certain things, which results in certain actions. The process of sensemaking starts automatically when experiencing something. In the context of this research, this will prove to be useful as this could explain the differences in initial subjective experiences between migrant workers.

Sensemaking is a theoretical concept with different models and different perspectives. These different models describe different ways that people make sense of things. Because these different models have different units of analysis, the model that best fits the research context should be used (Hayward Jones, 2015).

In figure 1, the models of five major sensemaking theorists are located on two axes: Individual-Collective and Internal-External (Hayward Jones, 2015). Sensemaking is thus a very broad concept. For this research, Weick’s and Dervin’s perspectives will be most interesting as they see sensemaking as an internal process. This allows for sensemaking to be used automatically by migrant workers while experiencing poor working conditions.

Furthermore, both individual (Bruquetas-Callejo, 2018) and collective (Velizarova & Kirov, 2018; Loose & Lamberts, 2010) strategies are being used as coping mechanisms. Therefore, sensemaking will be looked at both as an individual and a collective process.

Figure 1, Major Sensemaking Theories. Source: Hayward Jones (2015)



Dervin describes the process of sensemaking as follows: “*Coming out of situations with history and partial instruction, arriving at new situations, facing gaps, building bridges across those gaps, evaluating outcomes and moving on.*” (Dervin, 1998. P.39)

In essence, Dervin says that people who face challenges, try to find ways that would help them to deal with these challenges. People will look internally at their norms, beliefs and experiences and see whether there is something that could help them to overcome a difficult situation. When faced with poor working conditions, people will look internally and see whether they have experiences that could help them overcome the poor working conditions. When they have fulfilled their activity they will look back and see whether what they did helped them to overcome the difficulties. If successful, the individual has found a way to make sense of poor working conditions. As this process happens automatically, experienced conditions turn out to be subjective.

This view could help us understand why different individuals have different experiences with the same conditions. As a result, some individuals might be able to continue working, while others need to cope with their experiences first. For example – individuals could have previous work experiences which are worse than the poor conditions they experience at the moment. Therefore, they do not experience their conditions as poor. As a result, they do not need to employ a coping mechanism. – In instances like this, the process of sensemaking influences whether and how coping mechanisms should be employed.

According to Weick (1995) “*Sensemaking is grounded both in individual and social activity*”. Sensemaking thus could also be heavily influenced by social activities. Work can be seen as a social activity as it is only in rare instances where work is conducted alone. As such the activity of working and the people an individual works with influence an individual's sensemaking process. There could be instances, where the sensemaking process of an individual becomes subordinate to the sensemaking of a group as a whole.

Similar to Dervin's view, Weick argues that sensemaking takes place internally. However, not only individual experiences are being used to make sense of different situations. Collective experiences could become dominant. For example – an individual who does not have any experience with poor working conditions could use colleagues' experiences as a reference. Stories of bad working conditions by colleagues could form the reference point for an individual. This way an individual can use someone else's experiences, to make sense out of their experienced conditions. - This way collective identity and experiences by others can influence the sensemaking process of an individual.

Besides the theoretical basis of sensemaking as described by Dervin (1998) and Weick (1995), the process of sensemaking can also be described more actively. Kolko (2010)

describes the process of sensemaking as follows: *“Sensemaking is a constant process of acquisition, reflection and action. It is an action-oriented cycle that people continually and fairly automatically go through to integrate experiences into their understanding of the world around them”* The differences between the theories of Dervin (1998) and Weick (1995), of sensemaking being individual or collective, could both be applied to the process of sensemaking as described by Kolko (2010).

In this study, I will look at what role the process of sensemaking plays within different coping mechanisms. Both individual- as well as collective sensemaking, will be looked at. By using the concept of sensemaking to look at literature about coping mechanisms, I will make an addition to this literature, as I believe that sensemaking fulfils an important role within the coping process. This role is often overlooked as sensemaking takes place automatically. Sensemaking could allow individuals to perceive their working conditions to be better than they objectively are. As working conditions are subjectively perceived to be better than they objectively are, it will be easier for migrant workers to cope with the conditions they face.

I will look at what role sensemaking plays in coping with poor working conditions by migrant workers in Dutch agriculture. To this end, the following research question will be answered: *“What role does sensemaking play within different coping mechanisms, for migrant workers, to deal with poor working conditions in Dutch agriculture?”*

Methodology

The goal of this research is to find out what the role of sensemaking is, within different coping mechanisms to deal with poor working conditions. Therefore, this research must offer the ability to understand the contexts in which decisions are made and actions take place, which thus makes it possible to make statements about specific phenomena in their real-life context (Myers, 2013). This can be achieved with qualitative research methods as *“Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and what they say and do”* (Myers, 2013, p.5).

Semi-Structured Interviews

To get a better understanding of migrant workers and how they experience their working conditions, semi-structured interviews have been conducted. Semi-structured interviews bring structure to interviews which allows for better inclusion of existing concepts and ideas about the phenomena. It allows for better comparisons between answers of different interviewees. Theories and concepts from earlier studies were included in the interview guide (Appendix I) to see whether they would apply to the respondents. At the same time, this approach offers the necessary freedom to ask additional follow-up questions to get an understanding of why interviewees do what they do.

Initially, this research focussed on the concept of modern slavery and working conditions. During the interviews, however, the focus shifted away from modern slavery. Originally, the interview guide was designed to explore what working conditions were being experienced by migrant workers and how they made sense of these conditions. Due to the focus shift, the interview guide still contains a set of questions called ‘modern slavery’. Many of the questions in this topic do relate to working conditions in some way, as modern slavery often coincides with really poor working conditions and other bad circumstances.

Other topics that were included in the interview guide were: working conditions, economic exploitation, previous job experiences and some questions about personal background. The concept of sensemaking was integrated into all topics. Follow up questions were being asked to see how respondents thought about the situations and experiences they described.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, obtaining reliable qualitative data on migrant working conditions is difficult. Planning interviews was hard and took a lot of time. Employers were often not willing to allow access to their locations, likely because they know that even despite their best intentions some poor working conditions cannot be solved easily (Douw & Spierings, 1998). Even when access to a working location was given it remained difficult to receive information from individual workers due to them not wanting to participate in interviews. Many

migrant workers look at external interviewers with distrust. They are sceptical about the nature of the interviews and often think that answers will be shared with their employers. As they do not want to upset their employers they would rather not participate if they faced poor working conditions. Then there is the third challenge regarding a language barrier. Many migrant workers are not able to speak Dutch, nor are they able to communicate at a high enough level in English or German.

Due to these challenges, and the great effort and time needed to find migrant workers who were willing to participate in the interviews, not the strictest selection criteria could be used. The following 3 criteria could be applied to interviewees: (1) Eastern-European nationality, (2) Working in Dutch agriculture and (3) sufficient knowledge of Dutch, English or German.

Even with these limited criteria, only a small portion of migrant workers in the Netherlands would meet the requirements, mainly regarding language proficiency. This could affect the results of this study, as it is possible that workers with worse language proficiencies, experience different conditions or make sense of their working conditions in different ways.

For this research seven face-to-face interviews have been conducted (Table 2). five of these respondents are Polish nationals while two are Romanian. Respondents have different backgrounds. All respondents did finish secondary school, and some started working immediately afterwards. Others continued their education and respondent (5) finished a Bachelor's degree. Respondent (1) is the only respondent who had children at home during her work in the Netherlands. All other respondents did have other family members in their country of origin. three respondents (2, 4 & 7) do have experience working in other countries than the Netherlands or their country of origin. All respondents are aged between twenty-five and sixty years old.

Table 2: Respondents

Respondent:	Gender:	Nationality:	Years experience (As a migrant worker):	Dominant work:	Interview Language:
1	F	Polish	>20	Plant cuttings	German
2	M	Romanian	<5	Asparagus	English
3	M	Polish	>10	Blueberries / maintenance	English/Dutch
4	F	Romanian	>5	Picking redcurrant	English

5	M	Polish	>10	Picking raspberries	English
6	F	Polish	<5	Picking raspberries	English
7	M	Polish	<5	Picking raspberries	English

The number of seven interviews might seem to be on the low side. However, due to the sensitive nature of the subject, seven is close to similar studies on similar subjects. Velizarova & Kirov (2018) for example only conducted thirteen interviews, while being able to conduct interviews in interviewees native language and not being constrained to a specific sector.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after being conducted. After transcribing, the recordings were deleted to protect respondents' privacy. The transcriptions themselves have not been shared with the respondents as all of them mentioned that they would not be able to check their transcriptions during the working season. Therefore, some summarizing questions were asked at the end of the interview and when recording stopped some initial notes of the interview were shared with the interviewee to check whether the interviewee and interviewer were on the same line.

When the first transcriptions were completed the coding process started. For the coding process, a template analysis was used. This coding structure allows for a combination of structure and flexibility (King, 2012). First, parts of the transcriptions were coded in-vivo. These codes were then grouped in the following pre-determined themes: (1) working conditions, (2) past working experiences, (3) workers' background, (4) sensemaking, (5) modern slavery, (6) economic exploitation.

During this phase, it became clear that there was little information about the theme of modern slavery, while other themes contained a lot of interesting information. Therefore, it was decided to switch the focus away from modern slavery and look deeper into sensemaking and coping with poor working conditions.

After the in-vivo codes were divided into themes, an inductive process of coding started. Sets of In-vivo codes were grouped into first-order categories and received an overarching, first-order category, code. For example "because in Poland I have no chance to uhm, to make that money. It's not possible" and "You can work in Poland. The money here is much better than in Poland yeah" were coded as: "High salaries". Next, these first-order codes were compared with each other and where possible further combined to become second-order categories. For

example “High salaries” and “More work is more money” were coded as “Monetary compensation”. This process of adding extra levels of codes was repeated until no more overarching codes could be created within the specific themes.

During this process, it became evident that the themes of modern slavery and economic exploitation were no longer needed as separate themes, due to the change of focus in the study. Therefore, all codes which initially were placed in one of these two themes were re-distributed over the other themes. Furthermore, the theme of past working experiences was placed under the wider theme of background. In the end, there were three themes left in which all answers given by the respondents could fit: (1) Background, (2) Experienced Conditions and (3) Sensemaking & Coping.

Next, the codes in the final template (Appendix II) were compared to literature about sensemaking, coping mechanisms and working conditions to check whether the results from the interviews were still grounded in theory. As the interview guide was based on existing literature, the codes fit well. For example, the working conditions as described by the respondents were divided into four different categories, which match with the four categories: environmental influences, mental strain, physical strain and safety (WCA, 1999), as defined previously

Concerning the concepts of sensemaking and coping mechanisms, a more inductive approach was taken. As a result, the answers were a little different compared to other studies. Yet, as the questions, were pre-determined and based on theoretical concepts, the results do show similarities with existing literature. For example, the code of ‘Social aspects’ contains information about how interviewees can use their social connections to make sense of or cope with poor working conditions. This is somewhat similar to the results of the study by Velizarova & Kirov (2018), where they concluded that strong social networks function as a coping mechanism for migrant workers.

Next, the template was examined and it proved to cover all different aspects of the interview. There was no information left out and the template gave a good overview of what the respondents had said. The information also proved to be sufficient to answer the research question.

Quality of Research

To ensure good quality of research the following assessment criteria have been used: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Symon & Cassel, 2012).

Credibility is about a good fit between constructed realities by respondents and constructed realities by the researcher which are attributed to them (Symon & Cassel, 2012). To this end,

this research builds upon well-established knowledge of sensemaking which has already been established in the literature. As it was not possible to make use of member checking, as the interviewees were unable to read their transcriptions, additional summarizing questions were added at the end of the interview. Furthermore, during the interviews, the interviewer often repeated respondents' answers and asked whether this was what they meant or not. Finally, after the interviews, the interviewer shared the first notes made during the interview to check whether these matched with what the respondent said.

As the research is focused on an individual's sensemaking, an elaborate description of a worker's context is needed. By giving a thick description, readers will be able to judge for themselves whether results from this research could be transferable to other contexts.

Dependability is often called reliability (Symon & Cassel, 2012), and this will be reached by making use of a semi-structured questionnaire and recording and systematically transcribing the interviews. This makes it possible to reproduce the study in a similar way which allows for an audit of the process by third parties.

Finally, the quality criteria of confirmability. To ensure this quality criterion is met I will show how data from the interviews was transformed into specific outcomes. To this end, the results section consists mainly of direct quotes. Conclusions made as a result of these quotes are based on trends shown in the interviews and existing literature.

Ethics

"Understanding how research effects and affects those it touches and attending to the rights and wrongs of this influence and the possible harms or benefits that might accrue, has become an increasingly explicit, even formalized concern" (Holt, 2012, pp. 90).

Due to the sensitive nature of this study ethics are of great importance, to make sure that this study does in no way whatsoever negatively affect the respondents in any way. Therefore, respondents have been fully informed about what the intention of this research is by forehand, and they were able to stop the interview at any time. Furthermore, all recordings of the interviews were deleted as soon as they were described as this was agreed with the respondents. All answers given during the interviews are anonymised and the numbers given to the specific interviews are at random. This way it is harder to trace answers back to specific individuals.

Research integrity is another important aspect of ethics. To reach this goal full transparency has been given regarding research methods, data collection and data analysis. All information aside from personal information about the interviewees is accessible. If further information is

required, the researcher whose contact details are available on the front page could be contacted.

Results

In this chapter results from the interviews will be shown. The main goal of this chapter is to make the voice of the respondents heard and let them tell their own stories. I will present findings that give insights into the working and living conditions of migrant farmworkers to contextualize the answer to my research question. Next, I will share the findings that show how the concept of sensemaking is being used in the processes of different coping mechanisms. Therewith, providing the necessary information to answer my research question.

Experienced Conditions

In what follows I will provide relevant information on the poor working conditions of migrant workers. I will include actual working conditions as well as poor living conditions and difficulties regarding leaving home.

Poor Working Conditions

Work in agriculture is hard. All respondents mentioned hard conditions in which they have had to work: *“No good job, and uhhh..”* or *“No is for very hard or very hot. No like work? Normal! Everything hard.”*. Due to the seasonal character of the work, a lot of work has to be completed in a short amount of time. Fruit and vegetables have to be harvested when they are ripe as they would turn bad otherwise. During the season workers experience long working days. 10-hour working days are no exception: *“Sometimes I am really really exhausted and I want sleep everyday whahaha. But we do not have the time because we start at 7 and sometimes we end like 6”*. These intense periods are preceded and succeeded by less intensive periods where workers experience a lower workload and shorter working days. This requires flexibility from workers: *“Depends if it is a lot finish 4. If it is not a lot finish 2, 3 o clock. Sometimes even finish 12 o clock”*. Different respondents mentioned that they prefer to have more stable working hours (programs):

“Muchi good have one program. Have one program today little hour tomorrow full. No is nice.”

Besides a great deal of variability in the amount of available work, the seasonal character of the work often coincides with performing physical work in high temperatures. Both outside under the influence of the elements, as well as inside in greenhouses. Even though climates here can be somewhat controlled, temperatures often rise even higher than outside. The combination of high temperatures and a great variety in workload can lead to tough situations. One of the respondents recalled the following situation:

"Uhm big orders and outside in the weather. When it's 40 degrees outside and we have to stay here till 8. Because the order has to be ready. That is. There is nothing you can really do then. As it is hot, but the order is not ready."

Situations like this do not only occur during summer. Different agricultural products also require work to be done during other seasons. Here workers face completely different challenges, mainly bad weather and cold. One of the respondents mentioned the following situation:

"pffff let me think. Yeah, I think in winter when we cut the plants. There was snow, snowing I think maybe 5, 6 hours only snow. Nothing old. It was very cold but you have to do it. Have to finish. It was very hard."

Both situations mentioned above are examples of work that has to be finished under tough conditions. Due to the growth cycles of the plants, work cannot wait to be performed under more pleasant conditions. The only option is to start early: *"It's full hot outside, con 40 degree. Have one program much kort (short). Start much early and finish early. This for condition is impossible to when full hot outside."*

The high workload and often physical work results in high strains on the human body. A Romanian respondent who harvested asparagus said the following: *"Asparagus every day every time every second digging"* and *"My body, I don't have power, a lot of pain. Back, hands, kaput."* Another respondent noted that the physical load on the body resulted in *"Full problem con il back. I go and to doctor for fix this"*. At the end of the season, all respondents mentioned that they are tired and require some time to rest and regain energy. Most respondents also mentioned that the work they were doing is fine for a short amount of time, but that it would not be doable to perform similar work for a longer period without adequate rest. As respondents noted *"It is oke, not bad, but it, you cant work here asparagus for months. 2, 3 months. But 1 year is impossible."* and *"For now it is okay because it is hot and we have a vacation but for 1 year it is to much work. 6 days not good. Only for 3 months"*.

Poor Living Conditions

As migrant workers leave their own country for work, I would argue that living conditions cannot be seen as separate from working conditions. Compared to, regular workers, migrant workers' working and living conditions are closely connected. They have to leave their own home and often end up in housing close to their jobs, provided by their employer. There are few opportunities for workers to find housing themselves and only very few can do so. In general, the living conditions of migrant workers are a direct result of what housing is arranged by their employer. As a place to stay is a necessity, living conditions become part of the overall working conditions.

One respondent described his living conditions as *“definitely the hardest part”*. Out of the seven respondents, six were living in housing arranged by their employer. The seventh arranged housing herself but she had to travel a great distance to get to work. All respondents mentioned that they were free to arrange housing themselves if that would be preferred. However, different respondents noted that this is very difficult. Either *“problem with not then have contract good”* or *“No speak very good English or Nederlands (Dutch)”*. Concluding that finding housing themselves is: *“It's impossible, it's impossible”*.

In general, respondents were satisfied with the housing provided by the employer, but they did mention a few issues. Two out of six respondents who have their housing arranged by their employer mentioned that not being able to choose who they live with can be difficult. Living with people from different cultures sometimes leads to problems *“Yes. It is live con full de people, no con much people is not easy. Every person has one personality”*. Or a lot of people are put into small spaces: *“Because you never know when someone new comes into your room. And then suddenly you almost need to share beds with 20 centimetres between beds.”*.

Finally, one respondent mentioned that heat forms a big obstacle concerning housing as well. *“It's just too warm in the rooms. You just can't fall asleep it's too warm. You have no AC so it's impossible sometimes”*. Many migrants face challenges in housing and are dependent on what housing their employer has to offer.

Besides difficulties regarding housing situations, migrant workers have to adapt to life in a different country. All respondents who mentioned differences in daily life did say that they like those differences. They did however require some time and effort to get used to.

“Everything was new. I could not imagine what everything would look like, everything was different. At home, it doesn't look like this. And I had to ask a lot of questions, like what is that? What is that? Where should that go? And that was hard in the beginning.”

Migrant workers thus face some additional challenges regarding their daily life. These are often grounded in cultural differences, as life in the Netherlands just is different compared to life at home. These differences require adaptation by the migrant workers.

Difficulties as a result of leaving home

Similar to poor living conditions, difficulties faced by migrant workers because they have to leave their homes are not optional. It is simply not possible for migrant workers to combine living at home and working in the Netherlands. Therefore, these difficulties should be attributed to their working conditions as well.

Most migrant workers do have to leave someone or something behind. For some, this is one of the hardest aspects to deal with when it comes to their work abroad. When asked what the

hardest part of working in the Netherlands was one of the respondents said: *“I miss my home, my family, my mother, sister”*.

One other respondent said that: *“Because the children were still little, so I stayed for a maximum of 5 weeks and going back home for 2 or 3 months, before coming back.”* This person had to travel more often and work less because the home situation did not allow for working long periods. Thus decreasing earnings as less time could be spent working.

Therefore, it is no surprise that many migrant workers decide to come and work in groups. *“It is much easier for people having family here. Or no family but just sister brother.”* At least five out of seven respondents did come to the Netherlands with a friend or family member.

When asked whether they would recommend the work they do to family and friends back home, all respondents agreed that they would, as overall they saw their time and work here as a positive thing. One respondent gave an elaborate answer on which kind of people would benefit most from working in the Netherlands:

“Young people, young females, that start with the work. I would think that then I would like to stay in the Netherlands to live. But when you have children that go to school, small children then you have to go home. But for young people, it is better here than in Poland.”

Seasonal workers thus face a wide variety of hard, working conditions, and they are fully aware of the fact that the work they do is not easy. Despite these difficulties and poor working conditions, many migrant workers have been coming back to the Netherlands to work for years. So there are factors that outweigh the negatives. Migrant workers are thus able to cope with the difficult situations they face.

Sensemaking and Coping

In the following chapter, I will provide relevant information on how migrant workers can deal with the poor working conditions they face. This chapter will be structured around different factors that allow migrant workers to make sense of and ultimately cope with poor working conditions. But first, the main motivator for working in the Netherlands, the monetary compensation, will be elaborated upon.

Monetary Compensation, the main Motivator

As described above, there must be factors that keep migrants motivated and there must be ways in which migrant workers make sense of their conditions and can cope with the negatives. The main motives for coming in the first place, and returning repeatedly are financial.

"Money in Life. It's not all money matter, and life better, life if you want to buy something. Here you can. In Romania maybe only money to live."

"The money I think. Because in Poland. You can work in Poland. The money here is much better than in Poland yeah."

The salaries earned with their seasonal work in the Netherlands are a lot higher than what they could earn at home. Polish respondents mentioned that the salary here is easily four times as high as what they could earn with similar jobs in Poland. One respondent said that *"Some people stay here because here is easier than in Poland. Here you can work for the minimum and then you have money for what you want"*. A Romanian respondent said that if they would stay in their home country *"When you receive money you just buy food or something, you cannot. If you want phone to buy. It's possible but hard. If you have a good job. You must learn 5 years"*. According to this respondent, it is possible to earn a good salary at home, but only if you have a proper education, which not everyone can afford. One respondent further said that: *"For me, it is important to have work to have money have no worry and in future come back to Romania. Mal, my family there. Everything is there."*

Besides being able to afford more luxury items, which they would not be able to afford at home, different respondents were saving money for a greater goal. Two of them were building a house in Poland and Romania and they said: *"Much money finish much faster my house"* and *"Yes, yes because I have money I could finish my house and this is the most uh important"*.

When asked whether respondents thought that they received a fair wage for the work that they performed, respondents said that they thought they did. They compared salaries to what they would earn back home and looked at what they could buy with their earnings in the Netherlands. All respondents were satisfied with their earnings. Only one respondent remarked on the possibility of earning a little more:

"I don't have a lot of knowledge about how much company makes, and how much of that they need to spend on us, so I feel like that earning could be better. But I also understand that they would like to make some money."

In the end, all respondents agreed that they are satisfied with their earnings as they can live comfortably and can save enough money for the goals they have set themselves. The monetary compensation they receive was the main reason for coming to the Netherlands in the first place, and it remains important for the respondents throughout their repeated work stays in the Netherlands.

Monetary compensations are thus the main motivator for people to come and work in the Netherlands. And in some way they certainly help people to cope with some of the poor

conditions they face, as one of the respondents noted: *“Negatives are also. I think personally pretty easy to fix. But for some reason it is not. But they are still outweighed by the difference in pay so yeah”*.

These monetary compensations on their own, however, do not explain the fact why some people return to work in the Netherlands repeatedly while others do not. One respondent who was also responsible for finding workers noted that: *“Half I think, maybe 40 per cent come back.”* Monetary compensations thus for sure are the main motivator for individuals to come and work in the Netherlands. Furthermore, in some instances, individuals could use their earnings as a way to cope with some difficulties. But if this would truly be the sole reason, more than half of the workers would return, as salaries are similar for everyone.

Thus, even though different respondents did mention that monetary compensations were the main reason why they kept working, it cannot be seen as a coping mechanism in itself, as the high salaries are to be expected for migrant workers when coming here. As such these compensations are not as useful for coping with poor working conditions, nor as a way in which migrant workers can make sense out of their experienced working conditions. Monetary compensations mainly influence the decision on whether or not migrant workers want to start working in Dutch agriculture in the first place. Nonetheless, monetary compensations are an important part of the story.

Previous Job Experiences

A factor that is of great importance regarding coping with poor working conditions and or making sense of these conditions are previous job experiences. All respondents did mention that previous job experiences helped them to deal with difficult situations. Respondents noted that during their work they would sometimes think about other difficult work experiences they faced in the past. Those work experiences helped them to place current conditions in another perspective. Often this process happens automatically and according to Dervin (1998) using previous knowledge and experiences to face new challenges are examples of sensemaking.

One of the respondents used to work on train tracks in Poland. He described his previous job as follows: *“Sometimes it's warm it's very hot. There was this time it was outside 45 degrees and I work between the rails. And when the rails are connecting to each other by the electric charge it was 70 degrees Celsius. And you have to work the whole day. In 45 degrees. I lost 16 kilogrammes of my weight in 3 weeks.”* This respondent further said that the jobs he had to fulfil here were by far not as physically straining as his previous job. And when talking about the long working days the following was said: *“For me is normal. Sometimes when you work for example 3 or 4 weeks. 50 hours it's a little bit hard ja. But it's normal. For me it's normal. On the train tracks, I worked sometimes 300 hours per month.”* Due to his previous work

experiences, he does not find the work here to be that hard, and conditions are fine because he used to work under more difficult circumstances.

Another respondent compared the work she did now with previous work she did in the Netherlands: *"They all worked in the production hall but I was working everywhere. With the boys from logistics, in the office with the stickers so I was everywhere. So I need to talk and learn a lot. And they did not taught me. They did not tell me you will do this this this. Baaoooh"* she described this work as really stressful and: *"My mind was full. So I am really happy that now I am here. So finally I can rest from this."* This respondent thus has similar considerations. In her previous job, there were some mental aspects she did not like. As these aspects are not present in her current job she has more positive experiences now.

A third respondent had job experiences in different countries and talked about a job he preferred above what he did now: *"I would preferably work with electronics"*. The job itself was nice, but the circumstances in which the job had to be fulfilled were not as good: *"Because in Czech republic it is sometimes uhhh I don't like Polish people so I just let them go. And here you know if you are doing your job you will have that job until it runs out. And that's a good thing."* He further mentioned that he prefers the situation surrounding the job in the Netherlands: *"But it also in here I can talk with people on the fruits. We have a very nice crew. So in my head, it is much better work here than in Czech Republic. Because there I was not able to talk with people. Did not even have a connection with the group. So in Netherlands in general it is, you have much better connection with people that you work with."*

All respondents who have worked at different jobs can use these working experiences to place their current working experiences into perspective. For many, previous jobs have had different difficulties as well, and for some working conditions used to be poor. What can be seen, is that these previous experiences are being used to make sense of the conditions they are facing now. As different respondents compared their current working conditions with conditions they have faced in the past, they often became more positive about the work they were currently doing. By knowing that they have worked under worse conditions in the past, they can make sense of and downplay the severity of their current experiences.

The combination of monetary compensation as a motivator for coming to the Netherlands to work, and using previous work experiences to make sense of poor working conditions was present for all respondents. This combination does allow workers to handle poor working conditions and continue working. The combination of these two factors allowed all respondents to return to the Netherlands for at least a second year. This could be an indication that the combination of both factors allows migrant workers to cope with poor working conditions.

There are however more factors that are being used as coping mechanisms by migrant workers. These factors are more social and have been talked about by different respondents.

Social Interactions to deal with Difficulties

The first of these more social factors is related to social interactions. Whereas, Romanian respondents clearly stated that their motivation and willingness to work was purely for financial reasons. They also used previous job experiences to make sense out of their work, but neither of them did mention any positive social aspect which helped them to cope with difficulties. In contrast, all Polish respondents mentioned a few social aspects which helped them to cope with difficulties faced as a result of poor working conditions.

Polish respondents did mention that initially, they had reasoning similar to that of the Romanians as described above. They came for the money and that's it. Over time, however, they found different additional factors which allowed them to cope with difficulties.

"Because of the people. I think that is the most important thing in my opinion in the work."

"Yes in general it is good, a lot of people come here and stay for like 20 years. So I think: if they are happy it is okay."

"Yeah, first I came for the money. Then it was just meeting people and seeing how it looks."

Different social aspects can be observed here, as respondents mentioned that people are becoming an increasingly important factor as well. Four out of five Polish respondents mentioned that they like the social contacts they make during their work and that this helps them to stay motivated. As a group, they can make their work more enjoyable: *"I like the people uhh in home company, most of them is from Poland. Is also good reason", "I like it uhm. And yeah the people. It is good atmosphere here."* and *"so people are nice here haha. So I think it is good here."*

Next, being able to talk during work and the presence of people to talk to during free time improves the overall experience of work and stay in the Netherlands. One of the respondents noted: *"I think was great time. Also between people, we live together and students also good time so."* This way the actual objective working experiences are increased, as social interactions have a positive influence on the mental strain of the job.

Besides improving the objective working experiences, these social connections between people also allow for people to share experiences. By sharing experiences an individuals' experience can be influenced by a more central group experience. This group experience can then be used by an individual to make sense of poor working conditions, like the example of where work cannot be that bad because people you know have been doing it for 20 years.

To benefit from these social factors people must be able to communicate with each other. One of the Romanian respondents said the following:

“For first time come here, for me. No is uhh very easy. First-time Romansk, here is work more people Poland and uhm. Come here no speak English only little little very little. Very little. Only Hey or how much. And same for person Poland. No everybody speaking English. Is no easy to start conversation.”

This could suggest why the social factors described above are present for the Polish workers, why being absent for Romanians, as most migrant workers in Dutch agriculture are Polish (Statistics Netherlands, 2019). This makes it easier for them to find people which whom they can communicate and form a social network. Furthermore, as Polish migrants have been coming to the Netherlands for a long time, working locations are more likely to be somewhat adapted to Polish workers. For example, working locations have Polish information signs, which were observed at different interview locations.

Having a social network has more benefits than just making work easier and more enjoyable. For instance, people can help each other. One Romanian respondent said that: *“Have full help for explain everything. Need for go to bank or to supermarket. Every time have one person who knows every time. Moment we need help, every time have one person for help.”* This respondent mentioned that she was lucky that she was able to call her sister who was fluent in English, as she could help her out via telephone.

For people who have a social network, it becomes easier to share experiences. Furthermore, people who have been coming to the Netherlands for a longer time can help new arrivals with getting used to life in the Netherlands. This may decrease stress levels for new arrivals and reinforce a social group feeling. Finally, a stronger group feeling could also result in situations where individuals actively help each other out. *“Sometimes the other people help us and then it becomes easier”*. Thus improving actual working conditions.

Desire to Live in the Netherlands

A final factor that helped different Polish respondents to cope with their working conditions was, that they like living in the Netherlands. They like the culture, work ethics and living standards. Compared to life in Poland they found life in the Netherlands to be much more enjoyable. One of them stated: *“When you go on the roads. Take a stroll on a bike or anything. When you encounter someone random and you look into their eyes by accident or you are just going, they will say hello to you. You can say back and they smile.”*

The same respondent mentioned that he wanted to stay in the Netherlands. He said: *"I would look for different jobs in here. Living in Netherlands, in general, is much less stressful than in Poland"* and *"you can survive much easier"*.

Another respondent said that she wanted to live in another country than her home country *"It is like an adventure"* and *"I do not want to be in one place too long. I lived in Poland like 24 years and I think so that's much"* This respondent further said that she wanted to buy a house here in the future, but for now first wanted to: *"I want flat and I want to also learn Dutch so after that maybe I will come back haha"*.

Their desire to live in the Netherlands became an additional coping mechanism, as they knew that if they wanted to stay in the Netherlands they should work here as well. By having an additional goal to aim for, it becomes easier to cope with poor working conditions. Furthermore, as they perceive their living conditions in the Netherlands to be better than their situation in Poland, their experiences with Polish living conditions help within the sensemaking process. These experiences are used as a narrative to look at their current situations. Similar to how sensemaking was useful regarding working conditions, it proves to be useful here as well. As bad experiences from life in Poland will help them to make sense of bad experiences in the Netherlands.

Besides these two Polish respondents, two other Polish respondents mentioned that they were considering staying and living in the Netherlands. They had however not yet decided whether they wanted to do this for sure. One of them said that he was starting to make somewhat of a career in the Netherlands *"I feel little bit I grow in company. Every year I have better work than before."* Furthermore, he stated that he would marry his girlfriend within two years and that they would make the decision, on whether they would want to stay in the Netherlands or not, together.

The second respondent, stated earlier that he was using the money he earned to build a house in Poland and that this house would be finished this year. However, he also said that: *"I don't like what is now happening with the government in Poland. I don't know what they are going to do. Is pfff is more difficult than everyone thinks."* He thus stated that: *"Sometimes I think maybe I want to yeah uhm come and live here. Stay forever I don't know. Sometimes I am thinking about that."*

The political and economic situations in Poland, according to this interviewee, were worsening year by year as *"When I see, I see in my pocket what they are doing. They do something, new decision, from in my pocket is only less money in next year."* Furthermore, *"Everything is going up so for people who lived in Poland it's not good."* He notices a decrease in spendable income, while prices are going up. He further talks about uncertainty: *"I don't know what will*

be in Poland next year. Everything is rising, rising. The expense of living is rising much faster than your salary." This makes him think about staying in the Netherlands. Even though the house which was the reason for him to start working in the Netherlands in the first place will be finally finished this year.

Finally, the fifth Polish respondent did not express a wish of living in the Netherlands. This was an older respondent who had her children and family in Poland. However, she did say that for young people, it would be better to stay in the Netherlands.

Uncertainty about the future in Poland, due to a worsening economic situation and political developments, in combination with current living experiences in the Netherlands, results in a situation where some workers develop a desire to stay in the Netherlands. This desire to stay gives workers additional goals which help them to cope with poor working conditions. The poor working conditions experienced by individuals thus become less of a problem, as they have greater additional goals. Therefore, the worsening economic and political situation in Poland and the accompanying desire to live in the Netherlands can be seen as a coping mechanism. While experiences with living in Poland are being used in the process of sensemaking, to create a first subjective opinion about living conditions in the Netherlands, which as with subjective working conditions, often are better than objective experiences would suggest.

Discussion & Conclusion

Based on respondents' experiences of their working conditions in Dutch agriculture, a pattern emerges where migrant workers experience poor working conditions, but continue working in the industry. This pattern helps to answer the research question: *“What role does sensemaking play within different coping mechanisms, for migrant workers, to deal with poor working conditions in Dutch agriculture?”*

Respondents mentioned different ways in which they were able to cope with poor working conditions, and the concept of sensemaking seems to be of importance in this regard. Sensemaking allows migrant workers to form their first subjective experiences about their working conditions. These subjective experiences are then the experiences that are being coped with. The process of sensemaking thus happens in all situations, for all individuals.

Respondents elaborated on the poor working conditions they face - working in high or low temperatures, long working days, tough physical work, monotonous work, difficult living situations and difficulties with staying away from home – and how these conditions often are not as bad as they seem. First of all, respondents noted that they are being well compensated for their work and that they earn salaries that they could not earn in their home countries. For many, this was and is the main motivator for coming to the Netherlands. At first glance, it may seem that that is everything there is to it. Migrant workers perform hard work under poor conditions, but they are being compensated for it by receiving relatively high salaries.

As mentioned before this is not the whole story, as according to a respondent only 40% of workers return for a second year. If monetary compensation would be the only factor this percentage would most likely be higher.

Monetary compensations are the main motivator for working in the Netherlands in the first place. This was mentioned by all respondents. When individuals are working in the Netherlands the higher monetary compensations are to be expected and other factors and experiences become more important. Respondents mentioned that for them to keep coming back the positives should outweigh the negatives (difficult situations). Therefore, it is important to look at how people can deal with difficult situations. The difficult situations that were mentioned by respondents are: experienced (bad) working conditions, experienced (bad) living conditions and experiences regarding leaving home.

Respondents in this study mentioned different factors which helped them in dealing with these difficult situations, namely: (1) Monetary Compensations (seven times), (2) Previous Job Experiences (seven times), (3) Social Interactions (five times) and (4) Desire to Live in the Netherlands (four times).

Both factors: monetary compensation and previous job experiences were mentioned by all respondents as a factor that allows them to deal with the difficult situations they face. However, I would like to argue that both factors do not fulfil the role of a coping mechanism. As mentioned before, monetary compensation is the main motivator for migrants to come and work in the Netherlands in the first place and thus its role in dealing with difficult situations is limited, as the high salaries are to be expected. It could help in dealing with difficulties and getting the job done, but its overall influence on coping with difficulties is limited. As monetary compensation are similar for all migrant workers, it does not explain why some people return for successive years, while others do not. The role that experienced working conditions play is more complicated, and this is where the role of sensemaking within coping mechanisms comes into play as well.

Using Kolko's (2010) frame for the process of sensemaking, you could note that individuals experience poor working conditions in their job (acquisition). These objective experiences however are not how individuals perceive these experiences to be. Their subjective experiences are different. Individuals do arrive at situations with a certain history (Dervin, 1998), of which previous job experiences are a good example. Individuals who have experienced worse situations, do not perceive objectively poor conditions to be as poor as they may seem (reflection). By automatically creating an improved subjective experience (1*) from a poor objective experience, individuals are more likely to be able to continue their work (action). If the subjective experiences (1*) still are not at a level where individuals can continue working, coping mechanisms can be used to further improve subjective experiences. Coping mechanisms are thus being employed to move from subjective experiences (1*), to subjective experiences (2*). This situation is reached after individuals have used different coping mechanisms, see figure 1. If successful, this allows individuals to cope with their poor working conditions. Sensemaking thus plays an important role as it is a first step that is taken automatically, to form subjective experiences. These subjective experiences are then the experiences that individuals can cope with.

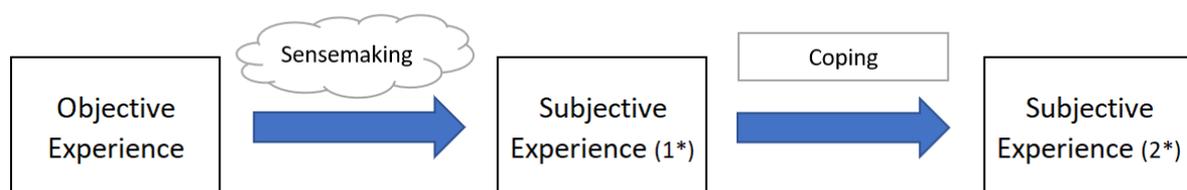


Figure 1, Role of Sensemaking (Own Drawing), based on Kolko (2010)

All seven respondents said that previous job experiences helped them to deal with poor working conditions they face in their job. Furthermore, all seven respondents have completed multiple years of work as a migrant and are thus part of the group of returning migrant workers.

Therefore, I would argue that previous working experiences and the subsequent role of sensemaking are of great importance for dealing with poor working conditions.

The other two factors mentioned by respondents in this research: social interactions and desire to live in the Netherlands are more traditional coping mechanisms, similar to those in other studies related to coping mechanisms of migrant workers by Velizarova & Kirov (2018), Burquetas-Calleja (2019) and Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018). In these studies, coping mechanisms are being employed actively and do not happen automatically as is the case with sensemaking. As mentioned before and as can be seen in figure 1, sensemaking does take place before any of these alternative coping mechanisms could be employed. As a result, coping mechanisms help people to cope with their subjective experience (1*), which may not be at an acceptable level yet and move to a more manageable subjective experience (2*).

Regarding the two remaining factors, five respondents mentioned that they used social contacts to cope with difficult situations. Respondents said that social contacts helped them to get up to speed with life in the Netherlands. Furthermore, respondents said that these contacts allowed them to have nice conversations during their work as well as during their free time. They were able to talk about their experiences and as they were all having similar experiences they could deal with them together. This is similar to what Velizarova & Kirov (2018) found in their study, as they showed that migrants with strong social networks have better subjective working experiences compared to migrant workers who do not have access to such strong social networks.

Out of the five respondents who mentioned that they used social contacts as a way to cope with difficulties, four mentioned that they also had a potential desire to stay and live in the Netherlands. All four mentioned that they did not have the intention to stay initially but that this desire developed over time. They see opportunities in the Netherlands, which they would not have in their home countries. These opportunities and the willingness to stay in the Netherlands to take up these opportunities could be compared to the narrative of self-realization as described by Burquetas-Calleja (2019). In her research, Burquetas-Calleja (2019) mentioned that migrant workers are actively looking for ways to realize a better future for themselves. As a result, migrant workers are willing to deal with some experienced difficulties as they have a greater goal of living in the Netherlands. Respondents said that they knew that if they wanted to stay that they need to have a job. This is similar to the coping mechanism of maintaining employment as described by Pljevaljic-Simunkas & Thomsen (2018). Therefore, they said that they wanted to continue working at least until they found another easier job. The desire of living in the Netherlands and the need for a job to reach this goal allowed these workers to cope with difficulties.

Interestingly enough all five respondents who mentioned social contacts, including the four who further mentioned a desire to living in the Netherlands, were Polish. Both Romanian respondents did not mention any of these mechanisms. This could be because a large proportion of migrant workers is Polish, while only a smaller portion is Romanian (Statistics Netherlands, 2018), thus decreasing the likelihood that they meet fellow countrymen during their work. As a consequence, the likelihood that the two coping mechanisms described above could be used by Romanians is decreased. This could explain why both Romanian respondents were more focused on returning home after they had earned enough money. This does indicate that at least for some workers, previous working experiences in combination with the incentive of high salaries is enough to endure the poor working conditions faced and return for subsequent years of work in the Netherlands. On the other hand, workers who do find additional ways to cope with difficulties can improve their experiences in such a way that they develop a desire to stay in the Netherlands.

Both social contacts and the desire to live in the Netherlands can thus be seen as more traditional coping mechanisms. Similar mechanisms have been discussed in other studies as well. What is different from these other studies is the role that sensemaking plays within these coping mechanisms. Earlier studies mainly look at how individuals can cope with difficulties and move from experience A to experience B. Disregarding the role of sensemaking within the overall process of coping with difficulties. As I have shown the importance of sensemaking within different coping mechanisms I would like to conclude by answering my research question: *“What role does sensemaking play within different coping mechanisms, for migrant workers, to deal with poor working conditions in Dutch agriculture?”*

Sensemaking plays an important role within the coping process as an intermediate step. Objective experiences are automatically formed into subjective experiences via the process of sensemaking. These subjective experiences are then the experiences that individuals can cope with. In the context of Dutch agriculture, this means that the process of sensemaking allows many migrant workers to experience their working conditions to often be at an acceptable level. Many migrant workers have experienced worse working conditions in the past. Therefore they experience their working conditions to not be as poor as they objectively may seem to be.

Practical relevance

As European agriculture is highly dependent on a migrant workforce - Germany relies on 300,000 seasonal workers, whereas 90 per cent of Italy's and 80 per cent of France's agricultural workforce are foreigners. (Reid, Ronda-Pérez & Schenker, 2020). Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers faced poor and unhygienic working and living

conditions (Reid et al., 2020) Yet, migrant workers keep on returning to work in agriculture. As migrant workers are essential for European agriculture to persist it is of great importance to understand how migrant workers can cope with the poor working conditions they face.

Insights from this study could help in creating a better understanding of how migrant workers can cope with the difficulties they face, and the role that sensemaking plays within coping. As a result, employers could capitalize on the different mechanisms that are being used by migrant workers to improve their subjective working experiences. An example of this could be that an employer decides to hire more people from one specific country with similar backgrounds. Next, the employer could promote and facilitate social contacts between their employees to increase workers' access to specific coping mechanisms. This would allow workers to share their experiences and talk with each other. Thus improving their working experiences.

This would result in a more satisfied workforce, which would increase the likelihood that migrant workers would continue working for their employer and return for another year. Thus increasing the employers' chances of having a steady workforce. Furthermore, for migrant workers, higher work satisfaction would result in having better overall experiences during their work abroad. These improved experiences have little influence on the motivator of monetary compensation which motivates workers to come in the first place, as these earnings could stay the same. As motivation does not change and work satisfaction improves, the general experiences of migrant workers could be improved.

Sensemaking and coping, however, should not be seen as a final solution to the problem of poor working conditions. Employers should strive towards a situation where working conditions are as good as they could be. Sensemaking and coping would remain important to deal with difficult situations that cannot be easily improved by employers.

Reflection and recommendations for future research

In this research, only seven interviews have been conducted. Although this is not a small number compared to similar research in such sensitive subjects see e.g. Velizarova and Kirov (2018) who were able to interview thirteen respondents in their native language or Bruquetas-Callejo (2019) who was only able to interview ten people from her target audience between July and November 2017.

Due to the limited sample size results of this research cannot be generalized over a larger population. This was never the intention of this research, as I was interested to see what role sensemaking would play within different coping mechanisms. Nonetheless, it is still important

to mention as this does necessitate the need for more studies to see how and whether the findings of this study would apply to different, and larger populations as well.

Furthermore, due to the limited available time, and having no access to a budget, it was impossible to interview respondents who were not able to speak either English, German or Dutch. It may well be the case that workers who lack knowledge of any of these languages have different experiences about their working conditions, as lack of knowledge of the local language is an important factor in being more likely to experience poor working conditions (Rye and Scott, 2018; Guldenmund et al., 2013)

As discussed above, the process of sensemaking is of great importance as the first step within different coping mechanisms. Current literature concerning coping mechanisms, as by Velizarova and Kirov (2018), Pljevaljic-Simkunas & Thomsen (2018) and Bruquetas-Callejo (2019) do pay little attention to sensemaking as an initial process that forms subjective experiences and look at how people can cope with poor working conditions.

What is clear, is that sensemaking is used by everyone. It happens automatically and thus, individuals experience objective experiences in subjective ways. These subjective experiences are then the experiences that are being coped with by individuals. And these are also the experiences that current literature regarding coping mechanisms has mainly focussed on.

To find out how the sensemaking process happens exactly and how it influences subsequent coping mechanisms, an ethnographic study would be a good option, as this would allow researchers to delve deeper into how sensemaking takes place for people from different cultures. Furthermore, quantitative research in the form of surveys could be performed to find out how and which, different coping mechanisms are being used by different groups or populations, and why differences between specific groups occur.

Results from the interviews of this research did hint that there might be a connection between the fact that Polish respondents did use social interactions as a coping mechanism and subsequently some of these respondents also had a desire to stay in the Netherlands, while both factors were absent for Romanian respondents. It could be possible that due to the higher number of Polish workers, compared to Romanian workers, in Dutch agriculture (Statistics Netherlands, 2020), additional coping mechanisms developed over time and that similar patterns might emerge for Romanian migrant workers in due time. Future research could look into potential explanations regarding differences like these. And see whether both groups may show similar patterns. In this regard, migration studies regarding Polish migration to the Netherlands in the past could be useful, as historic patterns could be compared to the current situation of Romanians. Next, these patterns could be used to estimate whether Romanians

would follow a similar path compared to the Poles and whether we could expect similar sensemaking processes and coping mechanisms from them in the future.

Finally, regarding literature about working conditions as performed by Ronda-Pérez et al., (2012), Rye and Scott, (2018) and Guldenmund et al., (2013). This research does show that migrant workers individually experience their working conditions different, compared to what they objectively might be. It is still important to show the scale on which poor working conditions exist in Europe as this allows for action to be taken. Subjective experiences are however at least as important, as conditions that may objectively be the toughest, might not subjectively be experienced to be the worst by the workers who have to endure these conditions. Therefore, it would be important to pay some additional attention to how working conditions are experienced by workers.

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Appendix

I. Interview Guide

Introduction: *Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. My name is Stijn, I am 24 years old and I am a student at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. I am researching the working experiences of seasonal migrant workers in Dutch agriculture. Therefore, I will ask you questions about your current and previous working experiences. Finally, I am interested in your sensemaking process, in other words, why do you do what you do.*

A few important things about the interview:

- *Answers will be anonymised*
- *The interview will be recorded, for transcribing. The recording will be deleted afterwards.*
- *You do not have to answer questions you do not feel comfortable with.*
- *You could end the interview at any time*

If everything is clear I would like to start the interview.

Opening questions:

During the whole interview, it is important to ask for specific examples if the interviewee talks about interesting things.

- *For how long have you been working as a seasonal migrant worker?*
- *Where have you worked during all these years?*
- *What are your general experiences with these different workplaces?*
- *What did you like best, and why?*
- *What did you like least, and why?*
- *What did you do in Poland [Country of origin]?*
- *How did you like this job, why did you decide to start working as a seasonal migrant worker?*

Working conditions:

Use previous answers to bridge towards working conditions. Ask the following questions for different places where the interviewee has worked.

- *Could you describe what a regular day of work looks like for you?*
- *How do you feel about this? Do you like the work you do?*
- *What are the hardest conditions in which you have had to work? [Environmental, Mental, Physical & Safety]*
- *How do you make sense of working in these conditions?*
- *Have you ever considered quitting? / Why did you switch jobs?*
- *What are the toughest conditions you had to work under, out of all jobs described earlier?*
- *Do/did situations like this occur often?*
- *How did you deal with these conditions? Did this make you quit? Or Why did you continue working?*

So we have talked about the conditions in which you had to work and how you feel about these conditions. Now I have a few questions about how you found the jobs in the first place, and why you decided to apply for them.

- *How did you find end up at your current job?*
- *How did you find your first job as a seasonal worker? (through friends, employment agency, other)*
- *Does this job meet the expectations you had beforehand? (regarding work activities, pay etc.)*

- Did your previous jobs do as well? How did they differ?
- Were your expectations formed by others? How did the situation you ended up in, match with these expectations?
- *If these expectations do not meet the real situation. Do you feel deceived?*

You have described some poor working conditions earlier. Now looking back at them:

- Do you feel like you have a choice in deciding how or when to fulfil these activities?
- Do you have a feeling that force or threat is involved in making sure that these tasks are fulfilled?
- How does this make you feel?

You mentioned that the main motivation for doing the work you do is for financial benefit. Now, I have a few questions about this.

- Do you have a written contract?
- Is the contract in a language you understand?

- How is your salary determined? [Fixed (monthly, weekly), Hourly, Per Unit]
- Is your salary paid on time? Do you always receive the right amount?
- How does this make you feel?

- How does the salary you earn compare to what you would earn in your country of origin?
- Do you think that you receive a fair wage for the work you do?
- Why do you think that?
- How does this make you feel?

It is unavoidable that you encounter some costs like travel expenses, rent and buying food. I do have a few questions about these costs as well.

- What costs do you encounter, before and during your work in the Netherlands?
- Do you have to take care of all these things yourself, or does your employer provide for some of the things you need?
- How do you feel about the services provided by your employer? [quality & costs]
- Are you free to decide not to use the services provided by the employer if you would want to?
- How does this make you feel?
- Given the costs you encounter. Do you still feel like you receive a fair wage?
- Are you able to save enough money, to make the work worth your while?
- How do you feel about this?

Closing interview:

So now I would like to end with some general summarizing questions.

- What is your general overall experience with the work you do in the Netherlands?
- Do the benefits [most likely pay] outweigh the negatives [hard work, being away from home]?
- Would you recommend the work you do to family and friends back home?
- Why?

These were the questions I wanted to ask. Is there anything you would like to add to the things that have been said or asked, which could be of importance?

Thank you for your time!

II. Final Template

- Background

- Past Working Experiences
 - Country of experience
 - Years of experience
 - Kind of work
 - Work periods
- Education
- Family
- Living Situation

- Experienced Conditions

- Working Conditions
 - Environmental Influences
 - Temperatures
 - Dust & mud
 - Inside or outside
 - Precipitation
 - Mental Strain
 - Work Pressure
 - Different work activities
 - Stress
 - Repetitive
 - Flexible working hours
 - Language barriers
 - Physical Strain
 - Exhaustion
 - No energy
 - Overload
 - Back problems
 - Long working hours
 - Safety
 - Injury
 - Protective equipment
- Living Conditions
 - Life necessities
 - Groceries

- Free Time
- Housing
 - Rent
 - Little space
 - Many people
 - Temperatures
- Other people
- **Sensemaking & Coping**
 - Monetary Compensations
 - High salaries
 - More work is more money
 - Previous Experiences
 - Tough work experiences
 - Physical
 - Environmental
 - Social Aspects
 - People at work
 - Others' experiences
 - Nice people
 - Giving advice
 - Desire to Live in the Netherlands
 - Good living conditions
 - Possibility to build a life
 - Work is improving
 - Easier jobs
 - Earnings increase
 - Situation at home
 - Political situation
 - Economic situation
 - Nice Atmosphere & Culture

III. Research Integrity Form

Name: Stijn Derks	Student number: s1046773
RU e-mail address: Stijn.Derks@RU.NL	Master specialisation: ODD

Thesis title: The Role of Sensemaking in Coping Mechanisms – For Migrant Workers in Dutch Agriculture

Brief Description study: In this study, I explore how the process of sensemaking is being used by Migrant workers in Dutch agriculture, as an intermediate step to cope with the difficulties they face. Different migrant workers can make use of different coping mechanisms. However, the process of sensemaking is present for everyone.

It is my responsibility to follow the university's code of academic integrity and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of my study. This includes:

- providing original work or proper use of references;
- providing appropriate information to all involved in my study;
- requesting informed consent from participants;
- transparency in the way data is processed and represented;
- ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data;

If there is any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research, I will complete another Research Integrity Form.

Breaches of the code of conduct with respect to academic integrity (as described / referred to in the thesis handbook) should and will be forwarded to the examination board. Acting contrary to the code of conduct can result in declaring the thesis invalid

Student's Signature: _____  _____ **Date:** 08-08-2021

To be signed by supervisor

I have instructed the student about ethical issues related to their specific study. I hereby declare that I will challenge him / her on ethical aspects through their investigation and to act on any violations that I may encounter.

Supervisor's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

IV. Consent Form

As a consequence of this consent form a user of the theses repository may use the thesis for private study and/or educational and research purposes, in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act (Auteurswet), with full mention of the name of the student and the location of the thesis.

Student number: s1046773

Student name : Stijn Derks

Thesis title : The Role of Sensemaking in Coping Mechanisms – For Migrant Workers in Dutch Agriculture

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