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Acknowledgments

After finishing my master thesis, I was firmly determined to do a PhD. I have not regretted this decision ever since, and I would make the exact same decision knowing what I know now about the ups and downs of the life of a PhD candidate. Not to say that it was all easy, on the contrary, but I really did enjoy the process of researching a topic which truly mattered to me. Also, a lot of people made a huge difference in how I experienced being a researcher, and I would like to remind them here how thankful I am for their support in these last four years.

I could not have imagined a better trio to supervise me in my research and my discovering of the academic life than Evert, Els and Mies. I walked out of every meeting we had with even more inspiration and more confidence than I had when I walked in, and I am sure this is very exceptional. I was lucky to be able to benefit from Els' impressive knowledge of labour market issues and the richness of her network in both the academic and the policy-making worlds. Without all the time and energy she devoted to the Benchmark Work First, this dissertation would not have been the same and I am deeply thankful to her for this. I was also very lucky to be able to count on Mies for her critical reading of anything I presented to her, which always helped me improve my work and also made me grow as a researcher. She surely broadened my understanding of social policies and allowed me to see how crucial the juridical domain can be to this field. And at last, I am more than thankful for having Evert as my "promoter", for his sound guidance and kind ear during this roller-coaster adventure. I always felt that he believed in my potential as a researcher, and that I could always count on him to erase any small or big concerns I would have not only with regards to the content of my research, but also concerning academic life in general.

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