

Summary Dutch Council for Refugees IntegrationBarometer 2009

*A study into the integration of
refugees in the Netherlands*



What is the IntegrationBarometer?

The Council for Refugees IntegrationBarometer is a periodical study into the integration of refugees in the Netherlands. This is the third edition: the previous studies were published in 2005 and 2006. The Dutch Council for Refugees sees integration as a two-way process between society with its citizens and organisations on the one hand and the newcomers on the other. It is inevitable in such a study that only a few aspects of this complex process will be analysed. In this IntegrationBarometer we look at demographic aspects, the refugee status, and the participation of refugees in the labour market. In addition, some specific aspects of integration, such as language skills, social interaction, and identification are also looked at as well.

What are the findings?

The most notable aspect is that above all integration takes time. The longer refugees live here, the better they learn to speak Dutch, make Dutch friends, and get qualifications.

The participation in the labour market is low, but also increases over time. Women and groups from certain countries have relatively low participation in the labour market and a high dependency on benefits.

By far the most refugees see their future in the Netherlands and in general feel safe and happy here.

There is a great desire for naturalisation as quickly as possible.

Compared to other immigrants, refugees are spread much more evenly across the country, but there is a trend of relocation from the north to the west.



VluchtelingenWerk IntegratieBarometer 2009

*Een onderzoek naar de integratie van
vluchtelingen in Nederland*



The full report (in Dutch), compiled by the Regioplan research bureau on assignment to the Dutch Council for Refugees, can be obtained from the website of the Dutch Council for Refugees at: www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl. A printed version of the report can also be ordered via the website.

• **Over ten years seventy thousand refugees have settled in the Netherlands**

Over the last ten years seventy thousand refugees have settled in the Netherlands (measured in accordance with the definition of the CBS). This group is extremely diverse. Some groups have already been here for many years (former Yugoslavia, Iran), while others have only been given a residence permit more recently (Somalia, Iraq). Single minor asylum seekers mainly come from Sierra Leone, Angola, and China, while families applying for asylum tended to come from completely different countries. Compared to other immigrants, on average refugees are more likely to be male, single, and somewhat older.



Jeanne Nsengiyumva, country of origin: Burundi

- **Refugees are evenly spread across the entire country**

The geographic spread of refugees is closer to that of the total Dutch population than that of other immigrants. This is hardly surprising since the government operates a special dispersion policy in relation to refugees. Nonetheless, they do tend to live in the larger cities. This applies in particular for refugees from Sudan, China, and Sierra Leone. Refugees do tend to move home more often, especially while they are still living in reception centres. Although then they have no say in the matter. It seems as though many refugees are moving from the north to the west, but not necessarily to one of the four major cities. The population is relatively stable in the east and south of the country.

- **The Netherlands is a nice place to live**

In general refugees feel very much at home living in the Netherlands, although that feeling diminishes somewhat the longer they have been living here. The least pleasant aspect for refugees is the weather, followed by the amount of regulations and bureaucracy. In third place is discrimination and the perception that they are not really accepted as foreigners. When asked what they like in particular about living in the Netherlands, then the highest score is given to safety, freedom, and the friendly people who live here (survey¹).

- **Major differences in labour market participation**

On average 43% of refugees have a paid job, although it is noticeable that a much higher percentage of men work than women. Of the women 29% have a job. Over time, refugees close the gap with other immigrants (of whom 47% have paid work), but never completely. Refugees start from a worse position in the labour market compared to the benchmark group of immigrants, amongst other things due to the lengthy asylum procedure. Immigrants either already have work (migrant workers) or another form of income (via partners through family reunification); refugees usually enter the labour market as 'non-working jobseekers'. Refugees from Sierra Leone have a level of participation in the labour market comparable with that of the indigenous population, while refugees from Somalia have a much lower level of paid employment. This can probably be explained by the difference in age, gender, and the length of residence.

- **Labour market participation can still grow**

The number of jobseekers amongst refugees is relatively high (28%) compared with the indigenous and immigrant benchmark groups. This means there is a potential for a considerable increase in the level of paid employment amongst refugees. A third of refugees are dependent on social security benefits and therefore live on the poverty line.

The findings of the survey show that almost a third of refugees who have lived in the Netherlands for a longer period are following study or training courses or have already completed such. It is apparent that those who have better qualifications, are younger, and have lived in the Netherlands longer have a relatively better social position.

- **Language skills improving**

A large proportion of refugees are currently following an integration course or have already completed one. Three-quarters of those surveyed said they could speak Dutch without too much difficulty. Two-thirds said they could also read Dutch without too much difficulty. This study also showed that language skills are a precondition for successful integration (survey).

- **More contact with Dutch people**

Refugees said that the longer they lived in the Netherlands, the less they 'mainly socialise with people from their own country and other foreigners'. The contact with Dutch people has increased slightly, but refugees who have already been here a long time seem on the whole to socialise 'an equal amount with all groups'. Of this group, almost half have Dutch friends. This applies in particular for those refugees with university qualifications, but also for refugees who live outside the larger cities (survey).



Drungo Tsjawg, country of origin: Tibet

- **Great desire for naturalisation**

Many refugees want to naturalise as quickly as possible, and a large proportion of them already have Dutch nationality. They have chosen to do so for reasons of safety, security, and to be able to travel. The survey also showed that there was a strong orientation on the Netherlands as a permanent home. Since tighter restrictions were introduced in the law (2003), however, naturalisation has become more difficult.

- **Limited return and onward migration**

The vast majority of refugees saw the Netherlands as their permanent home. But after a period of time, the group contemplating onward migration or a return to the country of origin increases somewhat. This is especially the case amongst those without children (survey). Of the refugees who were awarded refugee status between 1998 and 2008, around 7% had emigrated again. This mainly concerned (voluntary or forced) returns (Iran, former Yugoslavia, and former Soviet Union), or onward migration to such countries as Great Britain (refugees from Sudan, Somalia, and Afghanistan). On the other hand, one third of these returned to the Netherlands again. For the benchmark group of other immigrants, the registered emigration was much higher (25%). However, for a considerable number of refugees (around one third) there was no known address or emigration destination. This concerned those people who had been given a (temporary) residence permit in the last ten years. Thus the percentage of onward migration and return to the country of origin is probably much higher in reality.

¹ see box on page 4



Shokry Ahmad Faraj, country of origin: Iraq

What are our policy recommendations?

In the opinion of the Council for Refugees, the findings of this survey show we are going in the right direction, but that a lot still has to happen in the Netherlands to make sure that refugees can fully participate in society.

The Council for Refugees has made the following recommendations:

1. Refugees want to naturalise and would like to make the Netherlands their permanent home. However, Parliament has continued to make naturalisation and family reunification more difficult. If we want newcomers and their families to come to our country, we have to make it easier for them, not more difficult.
2. Employment is the key to integration, and offers an escape route from welfare benefits. A large number of refugees are still trying to find work. Proper integration would therefore be very beneficial economically.
3. Dutch education and training qualifications offer an access route to the labour market. Refugees should therefore be given an opportunity to follow education and training courses wherever possible, and moreover it should be easier for previously acquired experience and knowledge to be recognised.
4. Integration is a long-term process. It is therefore important that the government, local councils, and other concerned parties continue to support refugees in their integration – even after they have been here for many years.
5. The spread of refugees throughout the Netherlands is more similar to that of the total population than that of other immigrant groups. It is therefore essential that precisely in the smaller local council districts professional organisations and volunteers continue to be involved in the integration of refugees.
6. Refugees appreciate above all the safety, freedom, and the friendly people in the Netherlands. These aspects are not to be taken for granted, and it is important that we continue to invest in them. The less pleasant aspects for refugees in order of importance are the weather, the bureaucracy, and the intolerance towards foreigners. Nothing can be done about the first aspect, and bureaucracy is also hard to tackle. But intolerance is a social evil that diametrically opposes any form of integration, and something which everybody should be constantly on their guard against.
7. This study focuses primarily on the role of refugees in their integration. The Council for Refugees, however, believes that integration is a two-way process. That is why follow-up research is necessary into the willingness of Dutch society to accept integration; its citizens, employers, and government organisations.

How was this study carried out?

Statistics Netherlands (CBS) identified data for the target group 'refugees' in its files especially for this study. In short, this group included all those who had been given a (temporary) residence permit in the last ten years, who had permanent refugee status on 1 January 2008, and who were registered in the local council personal records database. This population group was then analysed for various demographic aspects, refugee status, type of residential area, relocation trends, labour market participation, and benefit dependency. For each aspect, a comparison was made with immigrants who had arrived in the same period but who had not applied for refugee status and with the indigenous population. Research bureau Regioplan carried out a survey (questionnaire) amongst 473 refugees and held additional interviews. The questionnaire also looked at such aspects as type of residential area and relocation trends, but also at language skills and social integration, qualifications and skills, work and income, social interaction, and identification with the Netherlands. Regioplan subsequently analysed the results of both the survey and the CBS data research and described its findings in the IntegratieBarometer 2009. Where findings are based on the survey this is indicated explicitly with '(survey)'.



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