

Summary

Resettled refugee

Policy and social position in national and international perspective

This study's main question was: 'what is the social position of resettled refugees and are there demonstrable factors that play a conducive or hampering role in attaining this social position?'

The report consists of three parts:

- 1 a study of the literature relating to the policy pursued in the Netherlands since the end of the 1970s with regard to the resettling and reception of refugees;
- 2 a quantitative analysis of the labour market position, participation in education and crime amongst resettled refugees between 1999 and 2004;
- 3 a study of the literature relating to the policy and social position of resettled refugees in eight other resettlement countries.

Resettlement policy in the Netherlands

Resettlement in the Netherlands refers to a situation in which refugees take up residence in the Netherlands on the invitation of the Dutch government, because they were in an emergency situation or experienced a lack of prospects in another country. With this resettlement policy, the Dutch government aspires to protect refugees and to demonstrate solidarity with other receiving countries in the region. The UNHCR determines which refugees are nominated for resettlement in the participating countries. The decision as to which refugees are eligible for resettlement ultimately rests with the participating countries themselves. In order to be eligible for resettlement in the Netherlands, refugees must meet the requirements laid down in the Dutch Aliens Act [*Vreemdelingenwet*].

Over the past few decades, it is possible to distinguish between four different periods of reception of resettled refugees in the Netherlands.

- I At the time of the first quota, which was established in 1977, a maximum of 750 refugees were admitted to the Netherlands each year. There was scope for around 200 asylum seekers arriving independently and 550 resettled refugees. Government officials issued invitations to refugees during selection missions in refugee camps. These were mainly refugees from Vietnam. During this initial period, the Dutch Council for Refugees [*Vereniging Vluchtelingen Werk Nederland*] received all refugees.
- II With effect from 1981, the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture takes up responsibility for the reception of resettled refugees. Until 1999, resettled refugees were accommodated in a separate reception centre. After a few months in this central reception centre, the refugees were provided with independent residence elsewhere in

the Netherlands. Here they were able to continue the language and introduction programmes commenced in the reception centre. This method of reception was known as the 'In-house model'. In 1984, the asylum seeker quota was abandoned, as a great many more asylum seekers arrived than was anticipated. The quota for resettled refugees remained at a maximum of 250 until 1987, after which it was increased to 500.

III The selection missions were terminated in 1999 and refugees were then selected solely on the basis of dossiers. The quota also became flexible. Instead of an annual maximum of 500 individuals, it then became possible to issue invitations to a maximum of 1,500 refugees every three years. The responsibility for receiving refugees was transferred to the Ministry of Justice. In addition, the special reception centre in Apeldoorn was closed down and resettled refugees were instead accommodated in the regular asylum seekers' residence centres of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers [*Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers, COA*]. After being transferred from this accommodations to an independent residence, the refugees followed an integration programme.

IV In 2004 the selection missions were resumed, as it was not possible to issue invitations to a sufficient number of refugees on the basis of a dossier in order to achieve the set quota. A new element was introduced in the form of an initial orientation course in the country of origin. The reception of resettled refugees in regular asylum seekers' residence centres created problems. The COA therefore again opened a separate reception centre for resettled refugees (in Amersfoort in 2005). During the same year, the Minister for Aliens Affairs and Integration introduced integration criteria for the purpose of selecting refugees. The application of these criteria led in a few cases to the refusal of applications for resettlement.

Social position

The study shows that resettled refugees in the Netherlands enjoy a similar social position to other holders of residence permits (former asylum seekers with a residence permit). In comparison with other groups in society, namely persons of native Dutch heritage and Surinamese people, Antilleans, Moroccans and Turks, resettled refugees and holders of residence permits are at a disadvantage. This is demonstrated by their participation in the employment market and in education.

Participation in the employment market

Resettled refugees are less likely to be in paid employment and are more likely to receive a social assistance benefit than the rest of the Dutch population. Corrected according to place of residence (resettled refugees are more likely to live in areas of low employment), age and origin,

resettled refugees and other holders of residence permits do not appear to differ with regard to their labour market participation. Male resettled refugees are however still more likely to receive a social assistance benefit than male holders of a residence permit with a similar background.

When resettled refugees enter the labour market, this is often, as in the case of holders of residence permits, in low-paid jobs and via temporary employment agencies. The longer resettled refugees reside in the Netherlands, the more likely it is that their labour market position will improve. After a period of residence of three years or more, the vast majority of refugees are no longer employed (as a seasonal worker) in the agricultural sector. At that stage, however, 40% of refugees are still employed through a temporary employment agency.

Whether or not refugees are in employment depends on a number of factors. Men are more likely to be in employment than women, refugees with a partner are less likely to have a job than refugees without a partner and refugees with children are more likely to be employed than refugees who do not have children. This last factor plays a particular role in the case of women. It appears that refugees in medium-sized municipalities are more likely to be in employment than refugees in large or small municipalities. The proportion of refugees in employment appears to be stable to a large extent. Refugees in employment have a good chance of also being in employment during the following year. Refugees who are in receipt of social assistance benefit however also have a good chance of finding themselves in the same position during the subsequent year. An individual's position on the labour market also appears to depend upon their country of origin.

Resettled refugees and holders of residence permits from Eastern Europe and Asia participate to a relatively larger degree in the Dutch labour market than resettled refugees from African and Arabic countries.

Resettled refugees invited individually or on the basis of a dossier appear to be more likely to be in paid employment than refugees invited during selection missions.

Education

With regard to education, resettled refugees, like holders of residence permits and other groups of persons of foreign heritage, do not perform as well as persons of native Dutch heritage. It also appears that the later the stage in an individual's education, the greater the difference between refugees and other groups of persons of foreign heritage. In the context of secondary education, the difference between the groups of persons of foreign heritage (resettled refugees, holders of residence permits and the four traditional groups of persons of foreign heritage) is negligible. Pupils from these groups are divided more or less equally between the different school years and types of education. All of these groups are less likely than persons of native Dutch heritage to study at a school for

senior general secondary education or at an institute for pre-university education and are more likely to obtain a diploma at pre-vocational secondary education level. It is striking that comparatively fewer resettled refugees and holders of residence permits are registered in standard secondary education. It is likely that these individuals follow practical training or agricultural education.

Within the context of vocational education, refugees are over-represented at the lower levels. Resettled refugees and holders of residence permits are rarely found in higher education, whilst ten to twenty percent of individuals from the other groups (between the ages of 17-40) take part in higher education.

As a large proportion of resettled refugees are of a young age (under 18 years), there is a good possibility that these individuals *will be able* to achieve a better social position than their parents. For the time being, it is not possible by means of statistics to substantiate the theory that these opportunities are also being exploited.

Crime

Resettled refugees and other holders of residence permits are comparatively less likely to be under suspicion than other non-western persons of foreign heritage, however they are more likely to be under suspicion than persons of native Dutch heritage. As in the case of the comparison groups, the percentage of refugees under suspicion is highest amongst those aged between 18 and 25 years.

Resettlement in other countries

In addition to the Netherlands, a further 14 countries pursue an official resettlement policy (UNHCR, 2004, Protecting refugees, 2007). Eight of these countries have been participating in the resettlement programme for some time now and are in possession of research data on the social position of resettled refugees. It is for these two reasons that these eight countries have been included in the international description of resettlement policy. These countries are: Australia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark.

Scope

The European countries resettle 250 to 1,000 refugees each year. In relative and absolute terms, Australia, the US and Canada resettle larger numbers of refugees each year (up to 50,000 refugees). If accepted asylum seekers are also included, however, the numbers of refugees admitted to Europe and the US appear to be similar. In the US, resettlement forms a dominant part of policy in respect of refugees. Conversely, European countries make a strict distinction between asylum and resettlement. Unlike in the US, resettlement is not a subject of public debate in European countries and is motivated first and foremost by humanitarian

reasons. In the US, in addition to humanitarian reasons, domestic and foreign interests also play an important role.

Selection

Only Denmark, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom have explicitly based their policy on resettlement potential. Many of the other countries also appear to apply selection criteria, however this cannot be explicitly identified in policy documents.

Reception

Refugees are entitled to assistance for a period varying from a number of months (US) to several years (Sweden, Denmark and Finland). The US places greater demands on refugees in terms of self-reliance than other countries. In the US, the social safety net for refugees is very limited, however it appears that refugees in the US have more ready access to the labour market than those in Europe. Refugees in Europe, Canada and Australia do however generally have greater access to healthcare, housing, education and unemployment benefits.

Social position

As in the Netherlands, the labour market position of newly arrived resettled refugees in other resettlement countries is generally poorer than that of other migrant groups or the native population. In the US, the percentage of refugees in employment is relatively soon after arrival similar to that of the general population. In other countries the labour market position of resettled refugees only improves over the course of time, however the extent to which this occurs differs for each country. In Sweden and Norway, resettled refugees are almost as likely to be in employment as the native population after a period of time, however this is not the case in Denmark or the Netherlands. Furthermore, resettled refugees from Africa appear to occupy an unfavourable position on the labour market in most resettlement countries in comparison with refugees from other countries of origin.

Resettled refugees are chiefly found in the lower segments of the labour market and relatively few move on to better jobs. This is true for the majority of refugees, regardless of their origin or level of education. Policy in respect of reception and assistance also appears to make little difference. Discrimination in the labour market, non-recognised qualifications from the country of origin, limited command of the appropriate language and lack of relevant work experience in the new country are possible explanations for this phenomenon. The dispersal policy pursued by a number of countries is also cited as a reason for this. This dispersal policy means that refugees are assigned housing in a particular location. In practice, resettled refugees tend to end up in areas

of low employment, which does not usually have a beneficial effect on their opportunities on the labour market.

Final remarks

This report provides a description of the social position of resettled refugees and of how these individuals have been received and assisted. Resettled refugees in the Netherlands are employed in the lower segments of the labour market or are not in employment at all, as is the case with similar groups in the Netherlands and in other resettlement countries. In the Netherlands, it takes longer for the position of the refugees to improve than in many other countries. It is not clear to what extent the characteristics of reception and assistance affect this. Resettlement policy is, in the first instance, humanitarian policy aimed at protecting refugees. The assessment of the social position of these individuals must certainly be taken into account in the decision as to whether or not refugees should be resettled, however it cannot, for this reason, be a determining factor.