

Evaluation of the Dutch Remigration Act

A quantitative analysis

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SUMMARY

Background of the evaluation

On 1 April 2000, the Remigration Act came into effect in the Netherlands, while the ‘old’ remigration regulation expired. The Remigration Act offers people who belong to certain target groups and who have insufficient means to return to their country of origin independently the facilities to realise this wish. The act applies to recognized refugees, approved refugees and people who (or one of their parents) were born in Turkey, Morocco, Surinam, Tunisia, the Cape Verde Islands, former Yugoslavia, the Malaccan Islands, Greece, Italy, Spain or Portugal. The Remigration Act consists of a basic remigration grant and a remigration benefit. The basic remigration grant provides a non-recurrent allowance to cover the travel en removal expenses and accommodation expenses incurred during the first two months after moving. Besides the non-recurrent allowance for the moving expenses, the remigration benefit includes a monthly allowance and a health insurance.

ITS was asked by the WODC to conduct a brief quantitative evaluation of the results and effectiveness of the Remigration Act. The purpose of the study was to provide insight in the degree to which (potential) returning emigrants¹ use the facilities offered by the Remigration Act. To what extent do potential returning emigrants make a thorough inquiry about the facilities offered by the Act, do they apply for the facilities and which facilities do they use for their return? The effectiveness of the act was also evaluated. Does the act indeed facilitate the actual return of people who have insufficient means to realise it under their own power? In order to be able to answer these research questions we drew on data from the databases of the *Sociale Verzekeringsbank* (Social Security Bank; SVB) and the *Nederlands Migratie Instituut* (Dutch Migration Institute; NMI). Both organisations are involved in the administration of the law. The investigation was carried out from August 2005 to November 2005 (inclusive).

Results of the evaluation

The *provision of information and counselling* to people who are considering remigration to their country of origin, showed fluctuations in the 1997-2004 period. Both in 1997 and 1998, the total number of contacts with people asking for information and advice about the remigration facilities was 14,000. In 1999 it decreased to about 10,000 contacts. After the Remigration Act came into effect in 2000, the number of contacts increased to 14,000. In 2001 and 2002 the number of contacts was approximately 13,000, after which the number steadily increased to about 17,500 in 2004.

In general, information and counselling, when the Remigration Act was in effect, were given to people from one of the target countries. The main countries of origin were Turkey, Surinam, Morocco, former Yugoslavia and Spain. A minority of the contacts consisted of recognized refugees or approved refugees, but there has been a clear increase in these numbers since the Remigration Act came into effect. Most applicants inquiring about remigration facilities were male and between 45-55 years old. Incidentally, the applicant’s partner was structurally included in the counselling sessions.

¹ In our definition, the term ‘returning emigrants’ refers to those people who fall under the scope of the remigration regulations and who have left the country with the aid of a remigration facility. The term refers to the ‘main applicant’. Unless explicitly mentioned, we do not take into account accompanying partners and children.

The *appeal to the Remigration Act* includes the number of applications taken into consideration. The number of applications increased from 745 in 2000 to nearly 2000 in 2004. The number of applications in 2003–2004 had doubled compared to 2001. The majority of the people whose application was considered have a Turkish, Moroccan, Spanish or Dutch nationality. The proportion of applicants holding a Dutch nationality increased from 12 percent in 2000 to 25 percent in 2004.

The number of people actually *returning using a remigration facility* fluctuated from 1997 until 2004. In April 2000, shortly before the Remigration Act came into effect, the number of returning emigrants decreased from 400 in 1997 to approximately 300 in 1999². In 2001 the number increased to 660 returning emigrants leaving with the aid of a remigration facility. After 2001, the number stabilized, but 2004 saw a sharp increase to a total of 1,331 returning emigrants.

Most emigrants returning with a remigration facility, did so with the help of the remigration benefit. Over half of the returned emigrants receiving a remigration benefit, i.e. the main applicants, were 50 to 65 years old. At the time of the Remigration Act there was a substantial increase in the number of applicants aged 45–50; from 6 percent in 1999 to 22 percent in 2004. Moreover, the majority of the applicants was male and received a remigration benefit for single people or for people who are married or living together. The main destinations for returned emigrants with a remigration benefit were Turkey, Morocco and former Yugoslavia. Since 2001 the number of returned emigrants to Surinam has increased considerably.

Although the basic remigration grant is being used by a minority, it has become more popular in recent years. Returning emigrants who received a basic remigration grant clearly differed from returning emigrants who received a remigration benefit. They were younger, most were under 45, more often female and a significant number were single parents. The main destinations were Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal. Since 2000, 70 to 90 percent of the returning emigrants with a basic remigration grant have left for these countries.

At the end of June 2005 the *number of benefit claimants* amounted to 9,832. This number refers to the number of ‘main applicants’ ever to have left on a remigration benefit and who were still drawing this benefit by the middle of 2005. When we take partners and underage children into account who were accompanying the returning emigrants, by mid 2005 the number of people drawing a remigration benefit amounted to 15,967: 8,932 benefit claimants, 6,375 partners and 660 underage children. By the end of June 2005 approximately 70 percent of all benefit claimants had left under the old remigration regulation, i.e. before 1 April 2005.

There are differences between the benefit claimants who received a remigration benefit before and after the Remigration Act came into effect. The proportion of ‘zero’ benefit claimants under the Remigration Act is significantly lower than under the old remigration regulation: approximately 25 percent versus 61 percent. A zero-benefit can occur when a transferable benefit like AOW (Old Age Pension), ANW (Survivor’s Benefit) and WAO (Disability Benefit) exceeds the remigration benefit. The difference is mainly related to the number of benefit claimants drawing an AOW-benefit. Under the ‘old’ remigration regulation this number was much higher than under the Remigration Act; 3,493 and 369 benefit claimants respectively. The average age of the benefit claimants under the old remigration regulation was also higher. Mid 2005 sixty-seven percent of the ‘old’ benefit claimants drawing a remigration benefit were 65 years old or over. Under the Remigration Act this applied to a quarter of the benefit claimants.

Other differences were mainly related to the improvements of the Remigration Act. For instance, compared to the old remigration regulation, in the Remigration Act the list of target countries was extended to include Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. Additionally, the facilities were opened to applicants from the target groups holding a Dutch nationality, under the condition that they relinquish this nationality and acquire the nationality of the country of their destination. This condition was mainly applicable to Surinamese people. Moreover, the age limit of the remigration benefit was lowered from 50 to 45. The data reflect these changes. The proportion of benefit claimants with a

² This number does not include the so-called zero-benefits. The registration system of the SVB changed at the time of the Remigration Act.

Dutch nationality who received a remigration benefit increased from 0 to 9 percent. Furthermore, under the old remigration regulation 0.7 percent of the benefit claimants was 45 to 50 years old. After the Remigration Act came into effect this increased to 15 percent. The variety of the main countries of destination also increased. In the past, most benefit claimants went to Turkey and Morocco. Now other countries, like former Yugoslavia, Surinam and the Mediterranean countries are gaining ground.

Effectiveness of the Remigration Act

The effectiveness of the Remigration Act was evaluated on the basis of several criteria. First we considered *developments over time*. As was previously mentioned, the use of the remigration facilities fluctuated in the period between 1997-2004. Before the implementation of the Remigration Act the use of the facilities showed a downward tendency, but after the implementation it increased again. After stabilizing in 2002 and 2003, the number of people using a remigration facility increased significantly in 2004. This fluctuation is related to policy developments with respect to the Remigration Act. The decrease can for a large part be attributed to the expected implementation of the Remigration Act. Many people postponed their decision to re-emigrate until more information was available about the implications and the coming into force of the Remigration Act. The considerable increase in 2004 was a consequence of the announcement in 2003 of the plans to abolish the Remigration Act. People applied for a remigration facility before it was too late, a situation which still continues today.

A second criterion was the fact that after the Remigration Act came into effect, *more people left* using a remigration facility than before. The increase in the use of the remigration facilities cannot be attributed to autonomous developments in the target groups, but is directly related to the improvements realised by the Remigration Act. The use of the facilities was particularly augmented by extending the number of target countries (Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal), opening the remigration facilities to people from the target groups holding a Dutch nationality, and lowering the age limit for the remigration benefit from 50 to 45.

A third criterion to test the effectiveness of the Remigration Act was the relatively *small number of people who have gone back on their decision*. Between 2000 and 2004 there was a total of 94 “repenters”, while 3,711 persons re-emigrated under the Remigration Act. This implies that only a small number of returned emigrants regretted their decision after having left with the help of a remigration facility, and wish to resettle in the Netherlands.

The last criterion was that the annual number of applications for remigration facilities is in line with *what is to be expected*. In a ITS survey carried out in 2000³, people belonging to the target groups of the Remigration Act were asked if the new law gave rise to (re)consider remigration. On the basis of this survey it was estimated that between 750 and 2,000 people would apply for a remigration facility annually. The actual number of applications varied between 745 and 1,929, which seems to be consistent with the expectations beforehand about the appeal to the Remigration Act.

³ Tillaart, H. van den, Miedema, F., Dijkman, T. & Olde Monikhof, M. (2000). Oriëntatie op de Remigratiewet. Bosniërs, Marokkanen, Surinamers, Turken en Zuid-Europeanen over remigratie naar het herkomstland en de mogelijke rol daarbij van de Remigratiewet. Nijmegen: ITS.

Final conclusion

The main question was whether the Remigration Act has facilitated the return of people who have insufficient means to realise their return under their own power. On the basis of the current investigation we cannot draw any conclusion as to the extent to which people without sufficient means use a remigration provision, as the necessary data, such as income, occupation and education are not registered. However, we can conclude that the Remigration Act facilitates the *remigration* of people who wish to return to their own (or their parents') country of origin. In addition, the use of the remigration facilities has increased. After the implementation of the Remigration Act, more people were leaving annually with the aid of a facility than under the old remigration regulation. For a large part, this can be accounted for by the extension of the target groups and the lowering of the age limit for a remigration benefit.

The question to what extent the Remigration Act offers *sufficient* possibilities to realise a return remains unanswered. As this question fell outside the scope of the investigation, no data were collected. However, based on qualitative information we received from the NMI, we can observe a number of tendencies. The wish to return to the country of origin is mainly determined by personal conditions, but also by the political, social and cultural circumstances in the destination country. The Remigration Act offers people without sufficient means and who genuinely wish to return the *opportunity* to realise this. Without the Remigration Act, for these people remigration is not feasible in any case. However, the choice is strongly determined by the conditions attached to the use of especially the remigration benefit, which include the compulsory relinquishing of the Dutch nationality, difficulties taking out a health insurance in the destination country and the return option of one year. In addition, the discussion about abolishing the Remigration Act has resulted in the exact opposite of what the act intended. The legal basis laid down in the act was also meant to give returning emigrants more security. However, this aim was thwarted by the announcement in 2003 of the intentions to abolish the law.

In short, from a quantitative point of view, the Remigration Act has been effective. The act offers more people a real possibility to return to their country of origin than did the old remigration regulation. However, on the basis of the present data we cannot determine whether the facilities offered by the Remigration Act are sufficient for people wishing to return to their country of origin. To investigate this, a more qualitative approach is required.