

Summary

A matter of time?

Integration of refugees in the Netherlands: a cohort study

What is the current status of the structural and socio-cultural integration of refugees who settled in the Netherlands in the second half of the 1990s? This is the main question underlying the current study, in which four areas of integration are investigated: education, labour market participation, social contacts and registered criminality. The research population consists of refugees who arrived in the Netherlands between 1995 and 1999 as well as their family members – who followed them at the very latest, one year later – *and* who were still living in the Netherlands in 2012, that is, roughly fifteen years after the initial migration. For each area of integration, to the extent the data allowed, the following research questions were addressed: what is the status of refugees and their family members in terms of their integration in different domains? How did their integration develop since they settled in the Netherlands? And which factors stimulated, or on the contrary, hindered integration? Where possible, the position of refugees is compared to that of other migrants or that of the native population.

Demographic characteristics

Between 1995 and 1999 about 96,000 refugees settled in the Netherlands. On January 1st, 2013, 61% of this group were still living in the country. The top-five countries of origin are Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia and former Yugoslavia. Slightly more than half of the research population consists of men (57%). The cohort of refugees that settled in the Netherlands in the second half of the 1990s was quite young: one-third was under 18 years of age; in 2013 the mean age of the members of the cohort was forty. Initially, the cohort lived relatively spread out over the Netherlands, but in the period between 2000 and 2012 these migrants increasingly moved to urban areas, particularly in the west of the country.

Education

The social position of migrants in society is, to a large extent, determined by their education. Refugees are relatively successful regarding this aspect of integration. They perform better than other non-western immigrant youth (mostly children of labour or family migrants), though they haven't caught up with native students. This is the case for performance in primary school (in terms of test scores) and secondary school (in terms of distribution across education levels), as well as regarding the share of students in special education. There are considerable differences between the origin groups, however. Students from Iran and Afghanistan perform at almost the same level as native students, while students from sub-Saharan (particularly Somalia) perform less well. In primary education, Somali students perform worse than other non-western students; particularly in arithmetic/mathematics. In addition, they are overrepresented in special education compared to other non-western students.

There are differences in educational outcomes between refugees who were under the age of six at the time of settlement in the Netherlands or who were born there (the younger group) and refugees who were between six to seventeen years at the time of settlement (the older group). The distribution of the younger group across educational levels is more similar to that of the native population than that of the older group. The educational level at 21 years of age indicates that the younger group is likely to reach parity with native Dutch students, although it does take refugee students more time to receive their diploma. The average level of education for the older group remains lower than that of natives, but is nevertheless considerably higher than that of other non-western migrants.

Students from refugee groups differ from native students considerably in terms of the preferred field of education. They resemble other non-western migrants more closely. In intermediary vocational education for instance, the field of economics is more popular among refugees than among natives. In higher education differences in the fields of education are less pronounced, but still visible: refugees more often enrol in social sciences, business, law or a study in the field of healthcare than natives do.

Labour market participation

Labour market participation is an important indicator of structural integration and an important theme for research and policy. Findings indicate a 'refugee gap' directly after the settlement: labour market participation of refugees is much lower than that of family migrants or labour migrants who settled in the Netherlands during the same period. Although this gap decreases over time, a gap with both labour migrants and natives remains. Fifteen years after the settlement, labour market participation – defined as having a paid job for more than 8 hours a week – of refugees (57%) is comparable to that of family migrants (60%), but lags behind that of labour migrants (70%) and of the native population (80%).

There are large differences across ethnic groups in labour market participation. Migrants from former Yugoslavia and sub-Saharan - Somalia excluded – have the highest probability of finding a job, while this probability is the lowest for migrants from Somalia and Iraq. Factors which contribute to successful labour market participation include having a Dutch diploma and Dutch nationality, a younger age at migration to the Netherlands, and having a partner.

In times of economic crisis, refugees, just like family migrants, are more likely to lose their jobs than labour migrants or the native Dutch. A possible explanation is that the former groups are more often employed in sectors that are sensitive to market conditions, and less often have permanent positions.

Social contacts

The extent to which refugees develop social contacts with natives and/or members of their own ethnic group is an indication of their social integration. Of the cohort of refugees who settled in the Netherlands in the second half of the 1990s, a quarter is socially isolated ten to fifteen years after the initial settlement: this group neither has contacts with members of their own ethnic group, nor with the native Dutch.

One-third of the research population have, on the other hand, 'double ties': they maintain social contacts with both groups. Furthermore, one-fourth of the cohort only engages in social contacts with the native Dutch, and less than a fifth only with members of their own ethnic group. There are differences among refugees from different countries of origin. Refugees from Somalia most often have 'double ties', and are least likely to live socially isolated. The opposite is true for refugees from Iraq.

Compared to more recent cohorts of refugees, it appears that cohorts which have been in the Netherlands for a longer time developed more contacts with the native Dutch population, and less often solely with members of their own ethnic group. The odds of developing social contacts with natives (regardless of the contacts one has to one's own ethnic group), depends on a number of factors. Refugees who speak Dutch and who have been in the Dutch educational system are more likely to develop interethnic contacts. In addition, the healthier refugees are, the more likely they are to engage in interethnic contact.

Registered criminality

Refugees are overrepresented in criminality figures when the composition of different groups is *not* taken into account. They are more strongly overrepresented than other migrant groups who settled in the Netherlands during the same period and this overrepresentation increases slightly as the time of residence increases. Refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, and especially those from Somalia are more often overrepresented in crime statistics: their chances of being the suspect of a crime are five times higher than the native Dutch.

When differences in demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the groups are taken into account in the analyses, the *over*representation of refugees in criminality figures changes into an *under*representation, both compared to the native Dutch, and even more strongly so when compared to other non-western migrants and their children. This switch from overrepresentation to underrepresentation is caused by the fact that the research cohort consists of relatively young, single and unemployed refugees, all characteristics that increase the chances of being a suspect of a crime. When controlled for such characteristics, refugees are less likely to be suspected of a crime than native Dutch.

Conclusions

The structural position of refugees from the '95-'99 cohort initially lags behind that of natives, as is to be expected. Though their position improves over time, in the first fifteen years after migration, refugees do not reach parity with natives, particularly on the labour market. At the same time, the performance of refugees who arrived in the Netherlands as children as well as of the second generation in the field of education is promising. Despite their short stay in the Netherlands, they are outperforming other non-western minorities. In addition, refugees in our cohort frequently engage in contacts with natives (successful social integration) and are underrepresented in crime statistics compared to natives with a similar profile.

There are sizeable group differences in all fields of integration. Somali migrants in particular lag behind other groups. Factors such as a lower age at migration and

a larger reservoir of human capital (higher education, Dutch language ability) contribute to successful integration.

Two findings in particular stand out. Firstly, the low labour market participation rate, and secondly, the high percentage of refugees who are socially isolated. Particularly in combination, these two factors can cause marginalisation of a significant part of the refugee population in the Netherlands. Preventing this is both in the interest of the refugees themselves and Dutch society at large.