

## Summary

Substantial numbers of asylum seekers came to the Netherlands during the second half of the 1990s, and roughly half of them eventually obtained a Dutch residence permit. A recent report from the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) described the integration of this group of residence permit holders, showing that roughly one in three asylum seekers who were registered in the Dutch population register between 1995 and 1999 were not longer registered in the population register anymore on December 31st 2013. Deregistration from the population register indicates registered return migration (i.e. returning to the country of origin), registered onward migration (i.e. emigrating to another country that is not the country of origin) or administrative removal (i.e. removal by the municipality because the person in question has not been heard from for a long time, usually two years). International migration is apparently also a common occurrence *after* asylum migrants have obtained a residence permit.

Since 2014, the Netherlands has once again found itself facing a substantial influx of asylum seekers, a significant portion of whom have become eligible for residence permits. An important question that has now arisen is how the position of these new permit holders will evolve over the years ahead. For instance, how many of them will end up permanently settling in the Netherlands? To this end, the Migration Department asked the WODC to conduct further research into the migration behaviour of asylum migrants who had settled in the Netherlands during the second half of the 1990s *after* they obtained their residence permits. In doing so, the WODC teamed up with Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

This report addresses the following research questions:

- 1 Of the permit holders in the 1995–1999 cohort of asylum seekers, how many individuals eventually emigrated up to and including 31 December 2015, and what type of emigration did it concern (return migration or onward migration)?
- 2 In which ways do the background characteristics differ between the permit holders who emigrated (by type of emigration) and the permit holders who still resided – or were once again residing – in the Netherlands at the end of 2015?
- 3 Which background characteristics are predictors of emigration from the Netherlands in the form of return migration, onward migration and administrative removal with unknown destination?

## Relevance

Both in the Netherlands and internationally, little research has documented the migration behaviour of asylum seekers after they are being granted asylum. We do not have a good picture of how common return migration and onward migration are, which factors eventually lead to permit holders once again leaving the country where they have obtained asylum and what their destinations are. We do know that there has been a significant emigration of Somalian permit holders to England. Due in part to the increased influx of asylum seekers in recent years, it is important that we find out more about the migration patterns among earlier cohorts of permit holders for a number of reasons. First of all, this knowledge provides more insight into what is and is not possible with respect to temporary protection. The coalition agreement of the Rutte III government proposes decreasing the duration of the

asylum permit from five years to three years, after which the permit can be extended by two years before the permit holder is potentially entitled to permanent residence in the Netherlands, suggesting that the Cabinet wants to reduce the permanent settlement of asylum residence permit holders. It is interesting to examine how such plans relate to the emigration behaviour of asylum permit holders in the past, which to a certain extent reflects the migration preferences of such migrants. Second, this knowledge can be used to inform the European admissions policy for asylum migrants, also considering the initiatives for arriving at a policy for the distribution of asylum permit holders across Europe. Should it transpire that there was a large outflow of certain groups of asylum permit holders from the Netherlands to other European countries over time, it might be better if such groups were admitted to these countries straight away, as such an approach might have a beneficial effect on their integration process. Third, better knowledge on migration behaviour after the granting of asylum can be of significant benefit to Dutch *integration* debates and policies. For instance, it might be that the permit holders who leave are mostly those who are relatively well integrated or that migrants whose ultimate goal is to settle elsewhere in the European Union fall behind when it comes to integrating in the Netherlands. Such patterns would shed new light on certain 'integration issues' in the Netherlands. Finally, it is important to keep in mind when considering the integration of asylum migrants that some of those who leave the Netherlands may end up returning later to settle in the Netherlands once more. For instance, it is possible that some of those who went to the United Kingdom will return to the Netherlands due to Brexit.

## Data and research method

This study involved the use of a data set that was compiled from the Social Statistics Database (SSD) and was initially created for the WODC study entitled *Een kwestie van tijd [A matter of time]* (Maliëpaard et al., 2017). The population of the present study comprised all migrants (1) whose reason for migration was registered as 'asylum' by CBS (i.e. having come to the Netherlands based on an asylum request), (2) whose first registry in the Dutch population register occurred between 1995 and 1999, and (3) who had been registered at a minimum at one address that was not an asylum reception centre run by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), without first having left the Netherlands directly from a COA site.

For the purposes of this study, the data file used for the previous WODC study was cleaned up: individuals who had been registered in the municipal personal records database (GBA) during the 1995–1999 period but who never resided outside a COA site were filtered out, given that they had in all likelihood never obtained a residence permit.

The data file was also enriched with variables pertaining to the destination country and the date of emigration in the cases of registered emigration, and the date of eventual administrative removal from the GBA. Finally, the observation period of the file was expanded up to and including 31 December 2015 (whereas the *A matter of time* study had only looked at the permit holders' last known country of residence up to the target date of 31 December 2013).

The first two research questions were answered by means of descriptive statistics, whereas the third research question was answered by means of survival analyses and competing risk analyses. These models determine the chance of emigration based on both time-invariant variables (e.g. the migrant's age or sex at the time of

registration in the GBA) and dynamic variables (e.g. whether a migrant participated in the labour market or has naturalized and is now a Dutch citizen).

## Limitations

Four limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, we only looked at the emigration of asylum seekers who obtained a Dutch residence permit. As such, this study does not include cases of 'reverse' migration flows, in which asylum seekers who originally obtained a residence permit in other European countries ultimately ended up *settling in the Netherlands*. Second, the migrants' legal residency was indirectly derived from GBA data as well as data that the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) provided to the CBS in the 1990s on the migrants' initial 'reason for migration'. It was not possible to create a new link with IND data from 1995 onwards in order to determine whether individuals had had their temporary permits withdrawn or not extended. Third, it should be kept in mind that the data from the population register does not always correspond to the migrant's current and 'final' country of residence. Some of those who resided in the Netherlands according to the GBA could have in fact resided outside the Netherlands for part of that period or may still reside outside the country. Moreover, the last known country of residence in case of registered emigration does not necessarily correspond to the last or final country of residence: some migrants may have emigrated once again after having left the Netherlands, either back to their country of origin or to yet another country (other than the Netherlands). Fourth, no subsequent country of residence is known for a significant group of individuals who were found no longer to be registered in the Dutch population register. These are individuals who have been administratively removed from the GBA over time by the municipalities in which they were registered. As far as we could ascertain, this removal usually takes place when the municipalities have not heard anything from the individual in question for a long time, usually two years. It is possible that the permit holder had not bothered to have their name removed from the municipal register or did not know that deregistration is required by law in the Netherlands. However, this group of administrative removals might also include individuals who eventually lost their right to a residence permit for a fixed period. Despite their removal from the population register, some of them may have remained in the Netherlands illegally for a shorter or longer period of time. Nevertheless, we assumed that most individuals who have been administratively removed ultimately left the Netherlands, based on the following reasons: (1) as far as is known, the Dutch government exercised restraint with respect to not extending or terminating residence permits for the cohort in question; (2) most administrative removals took place many years ago, with the latest occurring prior to the end date used for our study (31 December 2015), while the Benefit Entitlement (Residence Status) Act (*Koppelingswet*) and other Dutch policies designed to discourage illegal residence make it difficult to remain in the Netherlands without a residence permit; (3) since a significant portion of the administrative removals were deregistered after a relatively long period of registration in the GBA, it is unlikely that a large number of these individuals had their right to legal residence withdrawn or not extended; and (4) groups that resided illegally in the Netherlands temporarily (such as those who became eligible for the General Pardon) were not included in the group of administrative removals, whereas included in the latter group were only those who did not end up registering anew in the population register at a later point in time after they had already resided at a regular address.

## Main findings

Of those permit holders who settled in the Netherlands during the second half of the 1990s, 31.6% were no longer registered in the GBA as of 31 December 2015; according to the registrations, 4.3% had returned to their country of origin (return migration), 12.4% had emigrated to another country (onward migration) and 14.9% had been administratively removed without a subsequent country of residence being known. For the various reasons explained above, we assumed that the majority of the individuals in the latter group no longer resided in the Netherlands at the end of 2015. We also determined that roughly one in ten migrants who resided in the Netherlands at the end of 2015 had been deregistered from the population register at one point in time, having either temporarily left the country and/or illegally resided in it for a period.

Assuming that the group of administrative removals no longer resided in the Netherlands as of 31 December 2015, we could determine the total extent of onward and return migration within a certain range. If we add the total group of administrative removals to the group of onward migrants, the total percentage of onward migration would fall in the range of 12.4% to 27.3% (12.4+14.9). If we add the total group of administrative removals to the group of return migrants, the total percentage of return migration would fall in the range of 4.3% to 19.2% (4.3+14.9).

Registered onward migration was mainly to neighbouring countries, particularly the United Kingdom, followed, at some distance, by Belgium and Germany. For onward migration among Iranians, the United States was their primary destination country (23.6%). Thus, although roughly a third of the permit holders ended up emigrating, returning to their country of origin appears to have been quite rare for them; the ultimate destination for the great majority of permit holders was the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe, especially Western Europe.

While there was little registered onward migration during the first few years following registration in the population register, a significant increase set in around the four-year mark, peaking after eight years. Return migration exhibited a more linear, constant course over time, with registered return migration slowly increasing as time elapsed since the arrival in the Netherlands (see below for a discussion of the relationship between retirement and return migration). Administrative removal with an unknown destination occurred relatively often in the first years after arrival in the Netherlands and peaked at four to five years following registration in the GBA.

Clear differences were found between those who remained in the Netherlands, those who returned to their country of origin and those who subsequently emigrated, in terms of their sex, age upon arrival in the Netherlands, household composition, country of origin, degree of naturalisation, and socio-economic status. Individuals who were young adults when they arrived in the Netherlands are overrepresented in the group of onward migrants, while return migrants were usually somewhat older when they came here. Women and individuals who arrived in the Netherlands as part of family units are overrepresented among those who still resided – or once again resided – in the Netherlands at the end of the observation period. The percentage of emigrants was relatively high (62.9%) among those who did not obtain Dutch citizenship during the observation period. At the same time, however, nearly a quarter (23.7%) of those who did become Dutch citizens no longer resided in the Netherlands at the end of 2015.

It appears that those who fled due to individual circumstances have been more likely to settle permanently in the Netherlands than those who were eligible for protection due to the general situation in their home country. However, those originating from countries to which a group based policy applied more often

emigrated to a third country, according to the registrations, than returning to their country of origin (with the exception of migrants from former Yugoslavia). Group based policy (*groepsgebonden beleid*) meant that all individuals who could make a reasonable case for being from a certain country were granted residence permits based on the general situation (e.g. a civil war) in the country concerned.

Based on the survival and competing risk analyses, we could establish that both the demographic and the socio-economic characteristics of the permit holders independently influence the migration outcome. For instance, men were 1.4 times more likely to leave the Netherlands than women, while individuals who had come to the Netherlands as minors were roughly 40 per cent less likely to emigrate than those who had been between the ages of 45 and 55 at the time of registration. Cohabitation with a partner and having children in the Netherlands also reduced the chance of emigration. By contrast, among permit holders who were in a relatively weak socio-economic position (defined as receiving unemployment benefits), there was a higher chance of emigration, primarily – though not exclusively – by way of return migration. The findings with respect to the negative relationship between socio-economic position (sometimes referred to as 'structural integration') and emigration contradict results from earlier research that looked at return intentions, as measured by surveys.

The country of origin has an effect on the chance of emigration and the type of emigration that cannot be explained by the aforementioned demographic or socio-economic characteristics of the permit holders. While there was a relatively large chance of onward migration among Somalis, as mentioned above, the chance was also high among Angolans and Sudanese beyond the individual-level characteristics that are associated with onward migration. Holding all other demographic and socio-economic factors constant, individuals from former Yugoslavia had the highest chance of registered return migration, followed by Iraqis and Sudanese.

Two findings from the multivariate analyses can be seen as somewhat paradoxical. First of all, the acquisition of citizenship was found to reduce the chance of emigration only to a limited extent (less than 10%). As a result, there would seem to be a kind of *naturalisation paradox*, in that Dutch citizenship creates additional opportunities for particularly onward migration within the European Union and – to a lesser extent – return migration. In other words, Dutch citizenship also seems to function as a kind of European residence permit; after all, as Union citizens, Dutch citizens have the right to settle in other EU Member States without further admission requirements. The relatively high chance of registered return migration among naturalised Dutch citizens may indicate that Dutch citizenship serves partly as a kind of 'return migration insurance': if circumstances in the country of origin deteriorate, the naturalised migrant has the right to settle in the Netherlands once again without having to fulfil any additional entry requirements.

A second unexpected finding related to the effect of originating from a country for which the Netherlands maintained a group based policy. One would expect that coming from such a country would be associated with a greater chance of return migration. After all, the idea behind group based policy is that people are, in principle, only protected against returning due to general circumstances in the country of origin, which are capable of improving (for instance after a civil war has ended, e.g. in the former Yugoslavia). However, being from a country that was subject to group based policy was found to be mainly a determinant for registered onward migration and administrative removal with unknown destination rather than registered return migration. This fact could indicate that group based policy attracted asylum seekers who applied for asylum in the Netherlands rather than in another European country (or in North America), partly due to the relatively high

chance of obtaining a residence permit. After obtaining the residence permit, some of them then settled in the country that they actually preferred, thus indicating a kind of 'destination of expedience effect'. An alternative explanation for that effect is that individuals from such countries, being from larger cohorts, had more contact with asylum migrants elsewhere in Europe, and thus had a relatively larger opportunity to settle elsewhere with these family members and/or acquaintances.

A limitation of this study is the relatively large number of administrative removals whose subsequent destination country is unknown, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions on the total extent of onward migration and return migration from the Netherlands. In spite of this limitation, we were still able to determine that most predictors of registered return migration were not predictors of administrative removals. Conversely, various predictors of onward migration – especially the time-independent variables whose value was set upon arrival in the Netherlands (age upon immigration, country of origin, and application of group based policy to the country of origin) – also are predictors for administrative removal with unknown destination. This information allows us to formulate the hypothesis that the number of chain migrants among the administrative removals with unknown destination was larger than the number of repatriates. During the period under review, emigrating onwards to another European country without having acquired Dutch citizenship was easier for asylum migrants than it is now. It was not until the Dublin Regulation was signed in 1997 that asylum seekers were expected only to request asylum in the first safe country that they reached, while it was not until the arrival of Eurodac in 2003 that governments could use fingerprinting to identify asylum seekers who had already requested asylum elsewhere in Europe.

### **Policy implications**

Among the asylum permit holders from the second half of the 1990s, temporary residence in the Netherlands, or in Europe more generally, was an exception rather than a rule. While the cumulative extent of emigration was substantial at 31.6%, onward migration seems to have been more common than return migration. Even among asylum seekers from countries that were subject to group-based policy – where temporary protection seems to be more opportune than when asylum seekers obtain protection on individual grounds – the percentage of registered return migrants (4.9%) was limited, and the percentage of administrative removals (14.8%) was modest as well. It is also remarkable that registered return migration hardly occurred in the first years following arrival: there is only a very gradual increase in the chance of return migration over time, which seems to be explained in part by an increasing number of permit holders reaching retirement age and obtaining Dutch citizenship. It is a well-known fact that some of the retired migrants are keen on returning to their country of birth. This procedure is facilitated by the Dutch system, which allows them to take their old-age pensions with them to their country of origin. The coalition agreement of the Rutte III government proposes decreasing the duration of the temporary asylum permit from five years to three years, after which the permit can be extended by two years before the permit holder is eligible for permanent residence in the Netherlands. This study shows that the intention of providing temporary protection only matches the migration behaviour of permit holders in the past to a limited extent. For most refugees, the acquisition of a residence permit led to long-term residence in the Netherlands or – by all appearances – elsewhere in the European Union. The study also provides another insight that is relevant to return migration policy: the positive effect of

naturalisation on registered return migration could be an indication that allowing return migrants to retain their right of residence in the Netherlands (at least temporarily) facilitates return migration (internationally, such 'trial return migrations' are also referred to as 'go and see' programs).

Based on the migration behaviour of the permit holders who arrived in the Netherlands during the second half of the 1990s, the distribution of asylum seekers among European countries *based on their country of origin* seem to be useful to a certain extent only – at least now that the United Kingdom has indicated that it will be leaving the European Union. In the Netherlands, at any rate, we found that roughly three fourths of onward migration involved the three countries with which we share a land or sea border (UK, Germany, Belgium). This fact would seem to indicate that the final destination country was partly determined by the distance from the initial country of immigration. While it is true that those who originate from countries that were once part of the British Empire (e.g. Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan) had a clear preference for the United Kingdom, the question is whether a UK-less European Union has many options with respect to distributing asylum seekers based on historical bonds between countries of origin and destination countries. However, it is worth considering trying to reduce international differences in the chances of being granted asylum in the European Union. Such an approach would reduce the likelihood of migrants applying for asylum based on pragmatic reasons – i.e. in countries where the chances of being granted asylum are high – but not really wanting to reside there, making only a limited investment in integration and eventually migrating elsewhere. Possibly, such migrants might have achieved a higher degree of integration if they had settled in the final destination country straight away.

There is as yet no evidence that it is mostly disadvantaged permit holders who 'remain behind' in the Netherlands. On the contrary, individuals who occupy a weak position in the labour market actually seem to be overrepresented among the group of repatriates, in particular. As such, an improvement in the labour market position among permit holders over time points not only to increased success in the labour market but also to the selective departure of those who are further removed from the labour market. The significant onward migration within Europe suggests that more consideration could be given to a *European or bilateral integration policy*. Possibly, individuals have better job prospects elsewhere in the European Union – just on the other side of the border, for instance – than in the Netherlands, or have (more) family there. In these cases, onward migration could be a desired outcome. The current initiatives aimed at dispersing permit holders across the Netherlands by means of an individual matching policy so as to optimise labour market outcomes would then take on an international component.

### **Recommendations for follow-up research**

This study has provided important insights into an area about which little is known, both nationally and internationally, even though gaining more knowledge about it can be highly important to the Dutch and European migration and integration strategy. Future research should attempt to reduce some of the limitations faced in the study, while at the same time further examining some of the key findings presented in this report. Our recommendations include: (1) creating a link at the individual level between emigration outcomes and IND data pertaining to the development of the permit holder's residence status; (2) using other data sources, such as online and offline surveys, to establish migration outcomes and determinants; (3) examining the category of administrative removals more closely

and, partly as a result, arriving at a substantiated statistical *prognosis* of the suspected future emigration among more recent cohorts of asylum permit holders; (4) delving deeper into the underlying reasons for the strong effects of the country of origin on the chance of emigration and the resulting type of emigration; (5) conducting further research into the effect that the presence of diasporas in other European countries has on onward migration, also in light of international differences in the chances of being granted asylum; (6) studying relocation behaviour *within* the Netherlands (e.g. a significant relocation to cities has been observed); and (7) conducting research into onward migration from other European countries to the Netherlands - also given the possibility that the Netherlands will become more attractive as a final destination country within Europe after an eventual departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union.