

Research for Policy

Roel Jennissen
Mark Bovens
Godfried Engbersen
Meike Bokhorst



Migration diversity and social cohesion

Reassessing the Dutch policy agenda

Summary

WRR

THE NETHERLANDS SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY



Springer Open

About the Netherlands Scientific Council

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) is an independent strategic advisory body for government policy in the Netherlands. It advises the Dutch government and Parliament on long-term strategic issues that are of great importance to society. The WRR provides science-based advice aimed at opening up new perspectives and directions, changing problem definitions, setting new policy goals, investigating new resources for problemsolving, and enriching the public debate.

The studies of the WRR do not focus on one particular policy area, but on crosscutting issues that affect future policy-making in multiple domains. A long-term perspective complements day-to-day policymaking, which often concentrates on the issues that dominate today's policy agenda.

The WRR consists of a Council and an academic staff who work together closely in multidisciplinary project teams. Council members are appointed by the Crown, and hold academic chairs at universities, currently in fields as diverse as economics, sociology, law, public administration and governance, health, and water management. The WRR determines its own work programme, as well as the content of its publications. All its work is externally reviewed before publication.

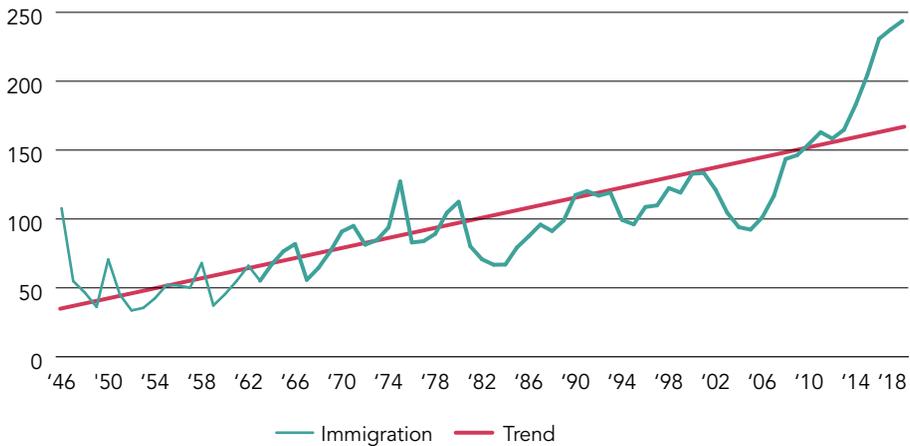
This is a summary of the book *Migration diversity and social cohesion. Reassessing the Dutch policy agenda*, available via www.springer.com. The book is a translation and adaptation of the Dutch report *Samenleven in verscheidenheid. Beleid voor de migratiesamenleving*, published by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) in 2020.

The Dutch report can be downloaded free of charge in PDF format from www.wrr.nl.

Content design: Things To Make And Do, The Hague
Cover image: Steffe Padmos
Translation: Taalcentrum VU

The Dutch government should pursue a more active policy to familiarize all new immigrants with society and to include them in it. This is necessary because migration to the Netherlands is structural in nature. The Netherlands is now a dynamic migration society, attracting people from all parts of the world. Figure 1 shows that the Netherlands received more than 150,000 migrants annually from 2010, and more than 200,000 from 2015.

Figure 1. Migration to the Netherlands, 1946-2018 (x 1000)

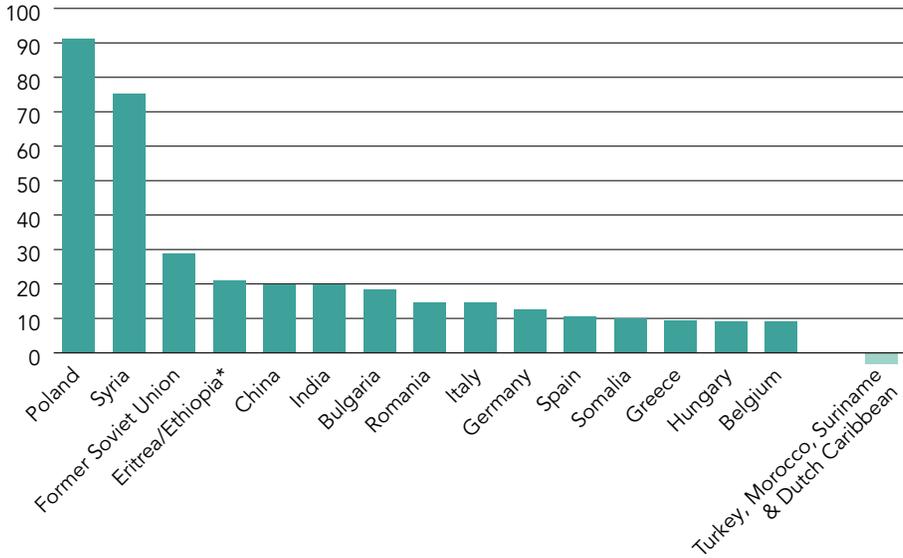


© WRR (2020) | Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS)

As a result, diversity by origin is increasing. In addition, we have to deal with more and more transient migration: a lot of those who come to the Netherlands are now just 'passing through' and eventually leave again.

Current policy does not take sufficient account of this new reality. It is still too much rooted in the world of yesteryear, when newcomers came mainly from a few 'traditional' countries of origin: Turkey, Morocco, Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean. That is now history. As shown in figure 2, today's migrants come from a wide range of very different countries, such as the former Eastern Bloc nations, Syria, India and China.

Figure 2. Net migration: top 15 countries of origin, 2008–2018
(×1000; excludes migrants of Dutch origin)



* Persons from Eritrea who were born before its formal secession from Ethiopia on 24 May 1993 may be recorded as originating in Ethiopia

© WRR (2020) | Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS)

In demographic forecasts, just about every future population scenario indicates that the number of people living in areas of high diversity by origin is set to increase. A development with considerable implications for all kinds of policy domains, such as education and the labour market. High diversity by origin and the shorter lengths of stay complicate conviviality, especially in residential neighbourhoods, at schools and in voluntary associations. There is also a risk of fragmentation, with society breaking up into a constellation of smaller groups, each seeking to cling to its own identity and in so doing turning its back on the rest.

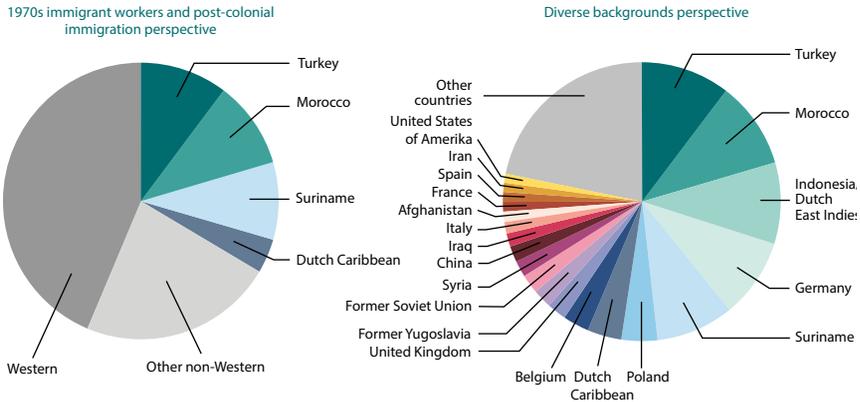
Fourfold increase in diversity

Increasing diversity in the Netherlands takes four main forms.

1. Greater diversity by origin

Most immigrants to the Netherlands in the last century came from neighbouring countries, from former Dutch colonies, from Morocco or from Turkey. Since the end of the Cold War, however, they have been arriving from all parts of the world. This has substantially diversified the segment of the Dutch population with a migrant background (see figure 3). For instance, the proportions with roots in the main ‘traditional’ countries of origin, both non-European/Anglosphere (Turkey, Morocco, Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean) and European/Anglosphere (Indonesia/Dutch East Indies¹, Germany and Belgium), declined from 70 percent in 1998 to 54 percent in 2018. It is also striking that some of the most prominent groups in 2018 had been negligible in size just twenty years earlier. There were now more people with a Polish² background than a Belgian or Dutch Caribbean one, for example, while the number originating in Syria was only marginally smaller than the figure for Belgium.

Figure 3. Two different perspectives on the composition of the population with a migrant background in the Netherlands, as of 1 January 2017



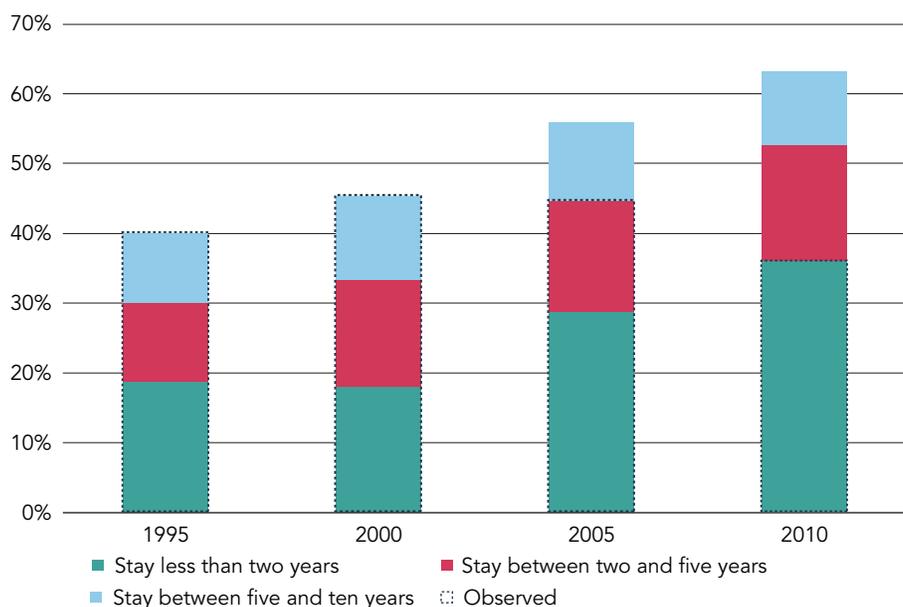
© WRR (2020) | Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS)

- 1 Immediately prior to the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies (1942-1945), approximately 300,000 Europeans lived in the archipelago. They included about 100,000 ‘totoks’ (Dutch immigrants and their descendants) and 175,000 Indo-Europeans, also known as ‘Indos’ – the offspring of relationships between Europeans (or Indo-Europeans) and native Indonesians who had been legally acknowledged by the European parent – plus 20,000-30,000 non-Dutch Europeans. Between the outbreak of the Indonesian War of Independence in 1946 and the New Guinea crisis in 1962, large numbers of people were repatriated from Indonesia to the Netherlands. Since they were mainly ‘totoks’ and ‘Indos’, we count people with their roots in the Dutch East Indies or Indonesia having a European/Anglosphere background. This also applies to ethnically non-European migrants in the decades after World War II, such as South Moluccans, Peranakan Chinese and Papuans. From the data in the population register, we cannot distinguish these groups from Europeans and Indo-Europeans with an Indonesian/Dutch East Indies background.
- 2 There has long been a Polish presence in the Netherlands, but the size of this community remained relatively small until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

2. Greater diversity by length of stay

More and more immigrants are now just ‘passing through’ the Netherlands. This is another clear change from what we were once used to. Dutch society appears to be increasingly one of ‘transient’ migration. Besides immigrants settling long-term, more and more are staying only temporarily. Figure 4 shows that, of the foreign-born immigrants who arrived in the Netherlands in 1995, almost 20 percent left again within two years. This proportion had increased to more than a third by 2010. And Statistics Netherlands expected that after five years just over half of them, and after ten years more than 60 percent, would have left again.

Figure 4. Departure rates (observed and forecast) of foreign-born immigrants by year of immigration and length of stay in the Netherlands



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS) (2014)

3. Greater diversity by motivation and status

There is also now much greater variety in terms of people’s reasons for migrating and their socio-economic status. The ‘traditional’ immigrants from Morocco and Turkey were low-skilled workers, as are many of those now arriving from Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. But others from these countries and a lot from elsewhere in the European Union (EU) and from the United States, India and China are highly educated and first come to the Netherlands as students before finding employment in information technology or the financial sector, say, or with one of the many international organizations and businesses based here. Others, such as Syrians, Somalis and Eritreans, arrive as refugees fleeing civil war and oppression. In addition, there are

differences in legal status, religion, age and a wide range of other characteristics significant for the social position of migrant groups.

4. More geographical diversity

Today’s newcomers are not distributed evenly across the country. And the same also applies to the ‘traditional’ migrant groups and their offspring. As a result, Dutch towns and cities vary widely in their ethnic make-up – not just overall, but also from one neighbourhood to another. Some are highly diverse, others host mainly members of one particular migrant group and others still remain almost exclusively ethnically Dutch. The report distinguishes eight different types of community (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Examples of Dutch communities with distinctive forms of diversity by origin



Types of Municipality



Majority-minority cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague). In these 'superdiverse' metropolitan cities, the majority of residents have a migrant background. The number of different countries of origin is particularly varied.



Metropolitan suburbs (such as Capelle aan den IJssel and Diemen). These communities are also very diverse ethnically, although the majority of their population still has a Dutch background. Diversity is increasing faster than in the adjacent majority-minority cities.



Larger provincial cities (such as Utrecht, Eindhoven and Arnhem). These also have a very high degree of diversity, but the proportion of people with a Dutch background remains much higher than in the three largest cities and their suburbs.



Medium-sized towns with one specific migrant group (such as Gouda, Almelo and Delfzijl). These are characterized by the presence of a single large non-European/Anglosphere minority group, often as a result of the recruitment of guest workers from a specific country of origin or of settlement by Antilleans on relatively large scale.



Expat communities (such as Amstelveen and Wassenaar). Towns with a large population of highly skilled migrants drawn from countries all over the world. By comparison, they have relatively few residents with a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Dutch Caribbean background.



Horticultural districts (such as Westland, Zeewolde and Horst aan de Maas). Rural or semi-rural areas with a substantial Polish and, to a lesser extent, Bulgarian population working mainly in the extensive local horticulture sector.



Border communities (such as Vaals, Kerkrade, Terneuzen and BaarleNassau). Here it is mainly residents with a German or Belgian background who ensure a relatively high degree of diversity.



Homogeneous communities (such as Urk, Staphorst and Grootegast). The vast majority of residents, more than 90%, have a Dutch background

Policy for the migration society: three key pillars

The increased diversity and transience, and the structural nature of migration to the Netherlands, call for a proactive policy approach with three key pillars.

1. From ad-hoc to systematic policy

The systemic character of migration to the Netherlands demands systematic policies for the effective reception and integration of all immigrants rather than ad-hoc responses to the arrival of each new group. It also requires greater coherence between migration and civic integration policies.

2. Consider conviviality as well as integration

The increased diversity by origin and length of stay requires an infrastructure that properly facilitates the conviviality of everyone living in the Netherlands. An emphasis on issues of conviviality does not imply that current civic integration policy should be abandoned. Core aspects of that certainly remain relevant.

3. Room for local variation

Local authorities play a key role in welcoming and integrating immigrants and in facilitating the conviviality of everyone living in the Netherlands. However, large differences exist between communities. Horticultural districts like Westland, which attract mainly temporary labour migrants from Poland, face very different policy challenges from expat communities such as Amstelveen, with large groups of highly skilled newcomers from countries like Japan and India. In some places labour-market participation is a major problem, in others housing or social cohesion, and in the larger cities all three issues are often at play. Central government should therefore give local authorities appropriate financial, legal and substantive support so that they can respond to variety at the local level.

Three sets of recommendations

In describing the three key pillars in more detail, this report focuses on three particular issues.

1. Improving the reception and civic integration of all migrants.
2. Promoting social cohesion, especially at the local level.
3. Make migration policy more conducive to social cohesion.

These generic recommendations have been elaborated into three sets of more specific ones, as outlined below.

1. Improve the reception and civic integration of all migrants

- Increase local authorities' responsibility for the settlement of migrants.
- Create reception facilities for all migrants.
- Provide differentiated civic integration services for all migrants.

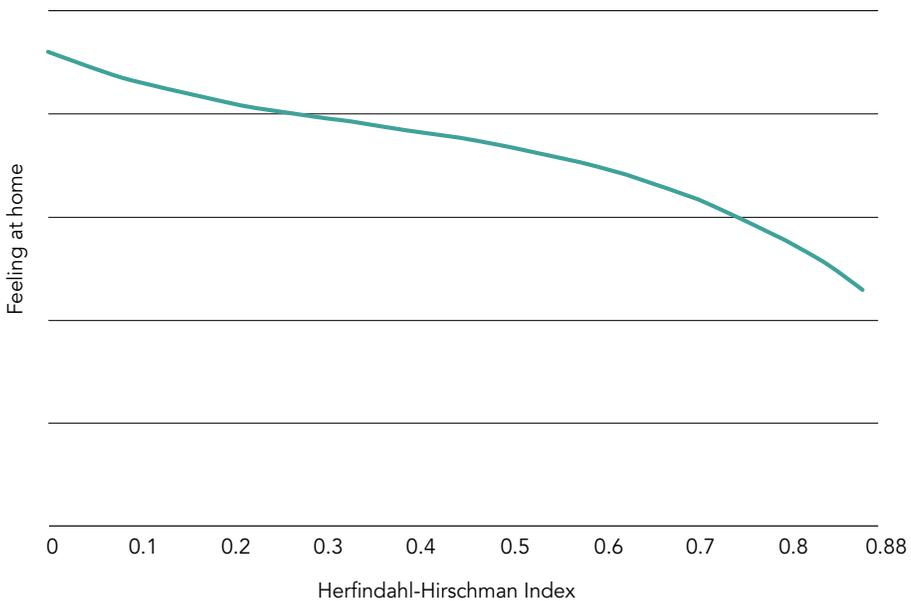
Every new immigrant to the Netherlands settles in a particular community, and the local authority there is the institution best placed to introduce them to Dutch society and to facilitate their participation in it. These bodies therefore need to think more carefully about which immigrants best suit their labour markets and communities. In the case of asylum migration, central government could allow them some freedom to select the background of the refugee statusholders settled in their areas. The government needs to create systemic provision for the reception of new immigrants. Again, this is primarily a task for local authorities; they should establish more permanent facilities that help all incoming groups – not just asylum migrants or highly skilled professionals but also labour, student and family migrants – to familiarize themselves with Dutch society. To this end it may be useful to set up a local or regional reception centre for all those settling in a particular area. One option here is to broaden the scope of existing expat centres, which tend to be rather exclusive, to create broader reception facilities that provide orientation services for all newcomers. And civic integration policies should reflect the realities of the modern migration society. Although large groups are now staying only temporarily in the Netherlands, it is still vitally important for social cohesion that all be absorbed into Dutch society. The government should therefore create civic integration programmes for all migrants, including those whose stay is not permanent and others for whom the process is not mandatory. This calls for a varied portfolio of language training and other civic integration services, tailored to the considerable diversity of today's migrant population. For asylum migrants, civic integration will remain compulsory and be heavily subsidized. For labour migrants, on the other hand, the process will be kept voluntary but employers may be asked to contribute substantially towards the costs.

2. Promote social cohesion

- Provide good physical and social infrastructure at neighbourhood level.
 - Strengthen intercultural skills in education and other parts of the public sector.
 - Enforce the basic rules of conviviality.
-

Increased diversity by origin and greater transience are straining social cohesion, especially at the local level. The more diverse a neighbourhood is, and the greater its population ‘churn’, the less its residents know and recognize each other and the less they feel at home there.

Figure 6. Diversity by origin versus ‘feeling at home’



© Jennissen et al. (2018)

Yet people have a great need for cohesion and solidarity in the place they live. The government should therefore pursue an active policy aimed at strengthening these qualities. Local authorities can promote social cohesion by ensuring good configuration of the physical environment. Safe, clean public space is essential for safety and for interaction. In addition, a rich social infrastructure helps increase cohesion. Semi-public amenities like playing fields, local shops, libraries and community centres strengthen the social resilience of a neighbourhood.

Greater diversity and transience put voluntary associations under pressure, too. Consequently, local authorities should not expect too much of this sector as a source of social cohesion between different groups.

Increasing diversity and transience call for a strengthening of professional competencies as well, especially in care, education and social housing. In schools, an intercultural approach seems to work best and to contribute towards cultural familiarity. When children feel seen and recognized at school, they have a greater sense of belonging there and perform better. An intercultural approach also takes into account the backgrounds of the more long-established groups in society.

It is up to central government to enforce the basic ground rules of conviviality: everyone living in the Netherlands should respect its constitutional democracy and contribute towards society, while at the same time being allowed space to maintain their own customs and symbols as long as this is in keeping with the rule of law and does not hinder participation. The central government can also propagate unifying ‘national stories’ and institutions.

3. Make migration policy more conducive to social cohesion and labour-market participation

- When assessing individual applications for work permits for employees from outside the EU/EFTA zone, consider taking into account their collective social cost to local authorities and regions.
- Take account of society’s capacity to absorb asylum migration.

Currently, the majority of labour migration to the Netherlands – about 70 percent in 2018 – comes from countries within the EU and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). But due to an ageing population and the economic development of EU member states in central and eastern Europe, in the future more and more labour migrants will come from outside this zone. With the average age of the Dutch population likely to continue to rise until about 2040, the proportion of inactive people will also increase. To make up for the resulting structural labour shortages, both highly skilled professional migrants and people with more modest skills are likely to be needed.

Labour migration policy should pay more attention to issues of social cohesion. We therefore advise the government to investigate whether it is possible, when assessing individual applications for work permits for employees from outside the EU/EFTA zone, to consider the collective social costs they generate for local authorities and regions in terms of housing, education and civic integration. In this regard, broader issues of employment and industrial policy also come into play. For example, temporary migration from both inside and outside

the EU can be reduced by restricting flexible labour practices. Another question is whether it is desirable for companies to depend entirely on cheap, temporary migrant workers. Not only does this lead to local social problems, it can also curtail productivity growth. Moreover, the use of cheap migrant labour removes incentives for employers to innovate and to train workers.

As for asylum migration, in this publication we discuss two possible ways in which, when shaping asylum policy, the Netherlands can stay true to its core objective of providing refugees with a safe haven while at the same time taking account of issues related to conviviality. A first option is for the country to gain greater control over the refugees it receives by expanding asylum by invitation. When inviting refugees, humanitarian determinants always remain paramount. But within that framework, factors related to ‘integration potential’ can also be taken into consideration. For example, compatibility with existing migrant networks in the Netherlands. This should accelerate absorption into Dutch society and might also enable better matching of arriving refugees to the characteristics and needs of the communities they are resettled in.

A second option is to develop a systemic policy taking into account Dutch society’s capacity to absorb asylum migrants. The German experience with numerical targets may be useful here.

In conclusion

Central government takes the lead when it comes to shaping migration and civic integration policy. Above all, though, it should create the right financial and legal conditions for local policy in areas such as education, civic integration and the jobs market.

Local authorities face the task of ensuring that everyone – transients and settlers, newcomers and lifetime residents – can feel at home in our migrant society.

Employers must also take responsibility. They benefit from labour migration to the Netherlands, after all, be that by production workers or highly skilled professionals, and should therefore contribute towards local reception facilities, decent housing and the financing of differentiated civic integration programmes.

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy

Buitenhof 34

P.O. Box 20004

2500 EA The Hague, The Netherlands

Telephone +31 (0)70 356 46 00

Email info@wrr.nl

It is important that everyone – newcomers and established residents alike – feel at home in the Netherlands. This requires a more active government policy to familiarize all new immigrants with society and to include them in it. There should be appropriate reception and civic integration facilities for all new arrivals, be they highly skilled professionals, asylum seekers, family migrants or people moving freely within the European Union. Local authorities have a key role to play in this respect, but need support in doing so. The WRR makes these and other recommendations in the report *Migration diversity and social cohesion: reassessing the Dutch policy agenda*.

A more active government policy is needed because immigration to the Netherlands is structural in nature. The Netherlands has become a dynamic migration society in which people from all parts of the world live side by side. The numbers arriving here continue to increase and there is also greater transience as more and more migrants leave again after staying only temporarily.

The publication *Migration diversity and social cohesion. Reassessing the Dutch policy agenda* is available via www.springer.com. For further information send an email to info@wrr.nl.