

Migration and Development in the Netherlands

Despite the significant contribution of immigrants to Dutch society, economically, politically and culturally, the anti-immigrant mood and the influence of diasporas reveal that migration and integration are still contentious issues.

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The population of the Netherlands numbers around 16.5 million. Of these, some 3.3 million or 20 per cent are considered *allochtonen*. This specific Dutch notion is sometimes wrongly translated as aliens, immigrants or foreigners, but in fact means that the person, or one of the person's parents, was born outside the Netherlands, regardless of whether this person has Dutch nationality or not. Dutch people born in the Netherlands are called *autochtonen*, which means indigenous or native. A distinction is also made between Western and non-Western immigrants.

During the period 1995 to 2007, the number of people migrating to the Netherlands annually varied between 90,000 (2004) and 133,000 (2001). In 2008, there was a record 140,000 immigrants. In particular, the number of labour migrants from Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania increased, while less people came from the traditional migrant countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles. Also, the major reason for migrating to the Netherlands changed from 'family reunion' to 'labour'. Another trend is the decrease in the share of asylum seekers, which dropped from 30 per cent of immigrants in 2000 to less than 5 per cent in 2007. In the period 2000 to 2007 their absolute number reached 41,500; most came from Iraq (12,400), Somalia (6,600) and Afghanistan (4,600).

The *Immigratie – en Naturalisatie Dienst* (IND) is the implementation agency that decides on residence permits and Dutch citizenship. Currently, some 20 per cent of asylum seekers obtain a temporary permit to stay. The Aliens Act of 2001 (*de Vreemdelingen Wet*) provides for residence permits to be valid for one year only. The permit can be extended twice, after which the immigrant can apply for a permanent residence permit. If a permanent residence permit is not granted, the asylum seeker will lose his/her accommodation, as offered by the Dutch local authorities, and must leave the country. If the asylum seeker stays illegally and is held by the police twice, they are considered an 'unwanted' person and could be jailed for six months. The Act also contains strict income requirements for family reunification. This particularly affects second and third generation

descendants of Turkish and Moroccan migrants. Many are accustomed to marrying a partner from their country of origin, but face difficulty in meeting the financial requirements due to their difficult position in the labour market.

In 2005, the Government introduced the Act of Integration Abroad (*Wet Inburgering in het Buitenland*), which requires immigrants to pass a 'civic integration exam' on Dutch language and society before being allowed to enter the country. This Act is a tool to curb family formation and reunion, and is discriminatory in its application as foreign nationals from 'Western' countries are exempt. With the introduction of the Integration Act of 2006 (*Wet Inburgering*), all foreign nationals resident in the Netherlands, with the exception of EU, European Economic Space (EES) and Swiss citizens, are required to pass an integration exam. The exam also applies to foreign nationals (permanently) resident in the Netherlands prior to the introduction of the law. Those who do not pass the exam are not eligible for a permanent residence permit.

Impact on Dutch society and integration

The impact of immigrants on Dutch society is considerable. Their contribution to the economy is not limited to low-qualified labour, as the number of highly-qualified and educated *allochtonen* has increased. Ethnic entrepreneurship is also on the rise (see Box 8). Culturally, the Dutch entertainment industry and literature are unthinkable without migrants. *Allochtonen* are also increasingly politically involved and represented in local, regional and national governments. However, their overrepresentation in low paid occupations and high unemployment levels continue to be problematic. In 2008, the unemployment rate among non-Western *allochtonen* was 9.0 per cent, three times higher than *autochtonen*.

In 2006, the Social and Cultural Plan Bureau (SCPB) warned of the one-sided attention given to the social-cultural integration of *allochtonen* at the cost of their labour market position. It did so because of a change in the immigration and integration discourse during the past decade. Previously, the dominant idea was that of a society with ethnic minorities maintaining their cultures and languages. The discussion focused on their rights and access to the labour market. In the nineties, a gradual shift took place towards an emphasis on the duties of the individual migrant. Minorities' policies were replaced by integration policies. The arrears of *allochtonen* were seen as a consequence of the deviation of their

culture from the mainstream values and norms of Dutch society.

Since the turn of the century, public opinion has considered the integration of *allochtonen* into Dutch society as a failure, and discontent has grown rapidly. This is reflected in the rise of politician Pim Fortuyn, leader of an extreme anti-immigrant party. Fortuyn wanted to stop immigration and described Islam as a 'backward culture'. He was murdered in 2003, but the tone was set. When Rita Verdonk of the Liberal Party (VVD) became Minister for Aliens Policy and Integration, she acted as a strong politician with clear-cut messages: less immigration and the stronger cultural integration of *allochtonen*. After Verdonk, a new coalition between the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Labour Party (PvdA) in 2007 brought more tranquillity. Nebahat Albayrak, State Secretary at the Ministry of Justice and responsible for aliens policy, took measures to assure more meticulous asylum procedures and supported the Dutch municipalities to develop local asylum policies.

However, migration and integration are still contentious issues. Geert Wilders, the Dutch parliamentarian and leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV) attracted attention with his anti-Islam movie *Fitna*. Wilders wants to forbid the Koran, which he compares to *Mein Kampf*. According to polls in March 2009, if national elections were to be held now, the Party for Freedom would obtain 20 per cent of the Dutch vote and become the largest party in the Parliament. With this in mind, policymakers from the traditional parties (Christian Democrats and Liberal Party) declared that they would consider the possibility of forming a coalition with the Party for Freedom. Even the Labour Party made a shift to favour a strict integration policy.

Dutch identity, populism and new nationalism

According to a survey by the Social and Cultural Plan Bureau, in April 2009 some 35 per cent of the population hold the view that the Netherlands would be a more pleasant country if there were less immigrants. Around 40 per cent consider the presence of different cultures as of benefit to the country. Taking into account the capriciousness of public opinion, it would be reasonable to conclude that pro- and anti-immigrant groups more or less balance each other in Dutch society.

The public discourse and political debates, however, suggest that there is a rising anti-im-

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migrant mood, which is accompanied by populist policies and a strong tendency to define a Dutch national identity. Pim Fortuyn gained political support with populist slogans such as 'I say what I think' and 'At your service', meaning that, contrary to the politicians in power, he was listening to the silent majority. In 2008, Rita Verdonk called her movement 'Proud of the Netherlands' and initially obtained much support. She was outdone by Geert Wilders, whose Party for Freedom movement purports to stand up for the 'real Dutch'.

In its worst form, the new nationalism expresses itself through populist slogans depicting 'multiculturalists' as fascists and by denouncing Islam. In its more civilised form, the new nationalism is defining the integration issue as a cultural issue. It underscores a desire to strengthen the 'Dutch identity'.

Part of the new nationalism can be explained by the fact that the Netherlands used to be a strongly pillarized society, wherein the position of each individual was defined by its membership of a religion or a secular political ideology. Since the sixties, as in other West-European countries, this closed system evolved into a more open one. Dutch society developed into a permissive one. It now allows for diversity in values, attitudes and behaviours. There is broad acceptance of, among others, outside marriage couples, divorce, homosexuality, abortion and soft drugs. It is precisely this liberation that conflicts with the closer social systems in which many migrants are brought up. Paradoxically, this has reinforced a rather static idea of Dutch culture and society. What

the proponents of the Dutch identity refuse to see is that people have multiple identities and that national identities are not fixed in time and space.

Diasporas and development in countries of origin

Migrants contribute to social and economic development in their countries of settlement and, increasingly, to development in their countries of origin as well. Due to improved means of communication and transport, bonds with people 'at home' are increasingly maintained. Family remittances are by far the major economic contribution made by migrants, but other forms of transfer have a development impact too. For example, migrant entrepreneurship is often transnational and linked to the country of origin (see Box 8). Migrants can also be involved in knowledge transfer, development cooperation projects and even peace building initiatives.

Migrant communities usually have their own home country or diaspora organisations whose main aims are to support countrymen in the process of adaptation to the specific circumstances in the country of (temporary) settlement and with integration into the new society. Such organisations often support small-scale development projects in their home countries as well. Migrant communities have networks that extend beyond national boundaries. They have access to specific knowledge, cultural knowledge and language skills that can be used for development cooperation in home countries. Their resources can even span several generations.

For the past few years, the official Dutch development institutions have been aware of the potential of the various diasporas. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its 2008 Memorandum on Migration and Development mentions six policy priorities of its migration and development programme. These are:

1. More attention to migration in development dialogues, and vice versa
2. Institutional development in the area of migration management
3. Encouragement of circular migration/'brain gain' with an emphasis on labour migration
4. Strengthening of involvement of migrant organisations
5. Strengthening of the linkage between migrant remittances and development
6. Promotion of sustainable return (and re-integration)

In the dialogue between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diaspora are partners as various as the African Diaspora Policy Centre (bridging African diaspora and policymakers at the EU level), the Global Society Foundation (capacity building of diaspora organisations) and the SEVA Network Foundation (development activities based on Hindu philosophy). Experience gained so far proves that the success of all programmes implemented by the Dutch Government, international organisations and

diaspora organisations, depends on the legitimacy of the diasporas to speak on behalf of the people 'at home' and the capacity and reliability of partner organisations in the countries of origin. ■

References

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BOX 8: Transnational migrant business

A few years ago, Ms Karima Q had a dress shop in Arnhem, a town in the eastern part of the Netherlands with 145,000 inhabitants. As she had no experience in the clothing industry, she connected with her network in Turkey. Two great-nephews were willing to teach her how to import and purchase clothes. They also introduced her to firms in Izmir and Istanbul. There she became acquainted with the owners of a 'good shop' similar to what she had in mind. They put her in contact with the wholesaler with whom she now cooperates and who informed her about colleagues in the Netherlands. Karima now has a transnational business that contributes to economic development in the Netherlands as well as Turkey. She is one of the many non-Western entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, whose number has substantially increased from 21,000 in 1994 to 58,000 in 2006, a growth rate that is higher than among native Dutch. Non-western entrepreneurs are strongly represented in sectors such as groceries, textiles and clothing, and telecommunications. Around 40 per cent have their businesses in Randstad Holland, where the largest number of migrants live.