Summary and conclusions

Refugee groups in the Netherlands

The integration of Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian and Somali migrants

This report describes the position of people living in the Netherlands who originate from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Somalia. Typically, the majority of these persons came to the Netherlands as asylum-seekers. Those whose asylum requests were met by the granting of asylum status are referred to as refugees or status-holders. In addition, some members of these groups came to the Netherlands to study, to marry or for family reunification. As most can be regarded as refugees, we refer in this report to refugees and refugee groups. Persons without residence status fall outside the scope of this study. Persons originating from the above countries make up the four largest refugee groups in the Netherlands. Earlier research from 2003 showed that their position at that time was not a very encouraging one. New data allow us to determine the position of these groups today and to ascertain what developments have taken place. We are also able to make comparisons on many points with the four traditional migrant groups in the Netherlands (persons of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean/Aruban origin).

Survey of Integration of New Groups (SING)

The findings in this report are largely drawn from the Survey of Integration of New Groups (Survey integratie nieuwe groepen), the fieldwork for which was carried out in 2009 (referred to as SING’09). This national survey interviewed approximately 1,000 people from each group aged 15 years and older. Information was gathered on a wide range of topics, such as civic integration and language acquisition, education, labour market position, housing, health, social contacts and identification with and orientation towards the Netherlands and the country of origin. For some of these topics, comparison is possible with the findings from the 2003 edition of the survey.

Total of around 150,000 persons

There are around 38,000 people of Afghan origin, 52,000 people originating from Iraq, 31,000 from Iran and 27,000 from Somalia living in the Netherlands (figures as at 1 January 2010). In total, they number just under 150,000 persons and account for 8% of the non-Western population of the Netherlands. The total number of persons from the four refugee groups together is just higher than the total number of persons of Antillean origin living in the Netherlands (approx. 140,000), the smallest of the four traditional non-Western groups. The refugee groups contain a very high proportion of young people compared with the Dutch population as a whole. This applies in particular for the Afghan and Somali groups, roughly half of whom are aged under 25 (compared with 30% in the population as a whole). Just over a third of people of Somali origin (aged 15 and over) live alone. This is partly explained by the age profile of this group, but also by the fact that many of them...
came to the Netherlands as single minors. Households with children are more common in the other groups.

Iranian group in the Netherlands the longest; Somali group the shortest

Migration from Iran to the Netherlands peaked in the second half of the 1990s; the number of Iranian migrants fell sharply thereafter and has remained low since the middle of the 1990s. On average, Iranian migrants have spent the longest in the Netherlands of all for refugee groups. In the early 1990s, substantial number of Somali asylum migrants also came to the Netherlands, but their number fell rapidly in the second half of the decade. The substantial onward migration of Somalis in the period 1998-2005, mainly to the United Kingdom, caused the Somali population in the Netherlands to shrink in the first half of the present decade. However, this onward migration subsequently fell sharply, and Somali immigration rose markedly again after 2005. Migration from Afghanistan peaked in the second half of the 1990s and in the years 2000 and 2001, after which it fell rapidly, and after 2003 the number of people of Afghan origin living in the Netherlands barely increased. Most of the migrants from Iraq came to the Netherlands in the second half of the 1990s, though a new peak has been reached in recent years. The rise in the influx of Iraqis and Somalis from 2005 onwards is due to the policy of categorial protection that applied for these groups until recently.

These differences in migration history have an influence on the composition of the groups. People of Iranian origin have spent the longest in the Netherlands on average, and given the limited influx of new migrants, this group could be said to be ‘dormant’ in terms of migration. People of Afghan and Iraqi origin have been in the Netherlands for a shorter period, and the recent increase in Iraqi migrants means that some of them have spent only a few years in the Netherlands. The same is true of many Somali migrants, a large proportion of whom have come to the Netherlands during the last five years.

In addition to the period of residence in the Netherlands, the age at which people came to the Netherlands influences the position they attain. The SING ‘09 survey (respondents aged 15 years and older) shows that most migrants from these groups came to the Netherlands as young adults (average age around 24 years; and 20 years for those of Somali origin).

Proficiency in Dutch language in Turkish and Moroccan groups

Given the relatively short period of residence, it is not surprising that problems with the Dutch language are reported. People of Somali origin most often say they have trouble with Dutch; people of Iranian origin least often report difficulties: half of them say they never have difficulty holding a conversation in Dutch. On average, their command of Dutch is at around the same level as the Moroccan group. Persons of Iraqi, Afghan and Somali origin more often have problems with Dutch, though on average they do not differ from the Turkish group (who generally have a poorer command of Dutch than the Moroccan group). The finding that the language proficiency of the refugee groups does not differ from that of two of the large non-Western migrant groups is striking, since on average the latter have spent much longer in the Netherlands.
Civic integration enhances Dutch language proficiency
Completing a civic integration course has a positive effect on Dutch language proficiency. More important, however, is the age at which a migrant came to live in the Netherlands: the younger they were, the better their command of Dutch. A high education level also has a positive effect, especially where that education has been received in the Netherlands. Poor health impedes Dutch language acquisition.

High degree of satisfaction with civic integration
Migrants who have followed a civic integration programme are generally very enthusiastic about it. Almost 80% of Iraqis and Afghans and nearly 90% of Somalis who have completed a programme report that they are satisfied or very satisfied with it. People of Iranian origin who have followed a course are less positive (60% are satisfied or very satisfied). Overall, the vast majority report that they feel their command of Dutch improved as a result of following a programme, while their social contacts increased and they gained a greater insight into what makes the Netherlands and its people tick. They attribute less importance to civic integration in helping them find work. Civic integration seems to appeal mainly to a large middle category; people with a lower and a higher education level are less satisfied. The same applies for people who have dropped out of civic integration programmes without demonstrable results, and for those in poor health. People with a lower education level and people in poor health are also less likely to complete a civic integration programme successfully.

Wide differences in education level
Migrants from Iran are generally very well educated; in fact, the proportion who have completed higher education is greater than in the native Dutch population. Iranian migrants to the Netherlands are largely an elite group. At the other end of the spectrum are the migrants from Somalia, who have a very low education level, considerably worse than that of the Turkish and Moroccan groups living in the Netherlands. The education level of migrants from Afghanistan and Iraq are fairly similar; both groups contain a highly educated group comparable with the native Dutch population, but also contain far more persons who have completed no more than primary education and far fewer people who have completed an education at senior secondary level. This may be associated with different waves of migrants coming to the Netherlands: a first wave of well-educated migrants fleeing regimes that were ill-disposed towards them, followed by waves of lower-educated migrants who left their homeland to escape violence or poverty or who came to the Netherlands for family reunification and/or formation.
Migrants of Iranian origin not only have the highest education level, but have also most often been educated in the Netherlands: almost 60% have done so, compared with around 40% in the other groups.

The education level of all groups improved between 2003 and 2009. The percentage achieving a higher education qualification increased, while the share who had completed no more than primary education fell.

High proportion of Iranian and Afghan students in (general) senior secondary education
The course of the integration process in the years ahead will depend in part on the education level achieved by young people from these groups. Figures on the level of education being followed by third-year students show that a very high proportion of students of Iranian and Afghan origin are on courses at senior general secondary or pre-university level. In fact, Iranian students are on these programmes just as often as native Dutch students. Iraqi students lag behind here (the share on these programmes is the same as in the Surinamese group). Few students of Somali origin are in courses at this level, and this group also occupies the least favourable educational position when compared with students of Turkish and Moroccan origin.

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**Figure S.1**
Education level achieved by non-school-going 15-64 year-olds, by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)

- **Afghan**: 26% max. primary education, 24% pre-vocational education/junior general secondary education, 16% senior secondary vocational education/senior general secondary education/pre-university education, 5% higher professional education/university education
- **Iraqi**: 28% max. primary education, 28% pre-vocational education/junior general secondary education, 14% senior secondary vocational education/senior general secondary education/pre-university education, 21% higher professional education/university education
- **Iranian**: 41% max. primary education, 36% pre-vocational education/junior general secondary education, 36% senior secondary vocational education/senior general secondary education/pre-university education, 21% higher professional education/university education
- **Somali**: 58% max. primary education, 10% pre-vocational education/junior general secondary education, 58% senior secondary vocational education/senior general secondary education/pre-university education, 7% higher professional education/university education
- **Native Dutch**: 28% max. primary education, 23% pre-vocational education/junior general secondary education, 28% senior secondary vocational education/senior general secondary education/pre-university education, 28% higher professional education/university education

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*a* Includes a small group aged 65 years and older among the migrant groups.

Source: SCP (SING ’09) weighted figures; native Dutch: CBS (EBB’09), figure 4.1
Table S.1
Students in year three of secondary education (senior general secondary/pre-university), by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Origin</th>
<th>Percentage in Senior General Secondary/Pre-university</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Dutch</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CBS (figures supplied on request), figure 4.5

Not everyone leaves secondary school with a qualification. School dropout – i.e. leaving without a basic qualification – is most common among students of Somali origin. It is also more common among students of Iranian and Iraqi origin than among native Dutch students. Students of Afghan origin least often leave school without a basic qualification, and the dropout rate among Afghan students in senior secondary vocational education is also strikingly low. Once again, students of Somali origin are in the worst position here.

**Low employment, high unemployment**

The central problem in the integration of refugee groups is the high unemployment rate and, as a consequence, the fact that only a limited proportion of these groups are in work. A person is counted among the unemployed labour force if they have no paid work but are actively seeking work and are available for work for more than 12 hours per week. The unemployment rate is calculated on the basis of the total number of persons in the total labour force, i.e. both employed and unemployed. A third of the Somali labour force are unemployed. The figure for persons of Afghan and Iraqi origin is not much different, at 28%. A fifth of the Iranian labour force are unemployed. The difference compared with the native Dutch labour force is enormous. Members of the refugee groups are also unemployed considerably more often than members of the traditional migrant groups, where the unemployment rate was between 10% and 12% in 2009. Youth unemployment is particularly high, though unlike the native Dutch and the traditional migrant groups, unemployment is also very high among the over-45s.

Table S.2
Unemployed labour force as a proportion of working people (net activity rate), by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Origin</th>
<th>Unemployed Labour Force as a Proportion of Working People (Net Activity Rate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>28 (in population aged 15-64 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>28 (in population aged 15-64 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>20 (in population aged 15-64 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>33 (in population aged 15-64 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Dutch</td>
<td>4 (in population aged 15-64 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (Sing’09), native Dutch (StatLine), table 5.1 and 5.2
A high unemployment rate means a low percentage of people in work, or a low net activity rate. This is calculated for the total population aged between 15 and 64 years. Once again, the Somali group are in the worst position. Very few women from this group are in paid employment (17%). The low net activity rate of young people and the high youth unemployment rate in the Somali group can be explained by the high percentage of this group who are still at school. The net activity rate of Iranian migrants is the highest of all the refugee groups. This puts them at the same level as migrants from Morocco – though that group does have the lowest net activity rate of the four main migrant groups.

Analyses show that there is a relationship between not having work and the fact that members of refugee groups often hold foreign qualifications which are not widely accepted on the Dutch labour market. A poor command of the Dutch language also reduces their chances on the labour market. Health problems, associated among other things with a long period spent in reception facilities, also pose an obstacle to labour market participation. Members of refugee groups who have only spent a short time in the Netherlands are also often unemployed.

The figures on unemployment and net activity rate are sobering. Nonetheless, the labour market position of refugee groups has improved over the last six years; in 2003, unemployment was higher and the proportion in work lower than in 2009. This positive trend affected all groups.

Employees from refugee groups often in low-paid positions below their capacities

Many employees from the refugee groups are in low-level positions and on temporary employment contracts. Afghan and Iraqi employees work at the bottom of the occupational ladder (elementary and low-level jobs) more often than Turkish and Moroccan employees. The same applies to an even greater degree for Somali employees. By contrast, Iranian employees have been relatively successful in finding employment in middle-ranking and senior jobs. The difference between the Iranian group and native Dutch employees in this regard is remarkably small.

Many employees (around 40%) from the refugee groups report that they are overqualified for their present job or have been trained for a different job. The proportion of self-employed workers is fairly large in the Iranian group, but very low in the Somali group. The chance that a business started by someone from a refugee group will still be trading after a year has gradually increased over the last ten years, but there is still a wide gap compared with businesses started by native Dutch entrepreneurs (around 15 percentage points), a larger proportion of which are still operating after a year.

Refugee groups more spread across the country than traditional migrant groups

Refugee groups are more dispersed across the country than the main migrant groups. This is due to the fact that Dutch municipalities have a statutory duty to house a set number of refugees, and this leads to a certain distribution across the country. Over time, however, a proportion of these people relocate to the west of the Netherlands, in particular Iranian migrants. Afghan and Iraqi migrants are overrepresented in the
eastern region of the Netherlands, while Somalis are overrepresented in the south. Compared with the refugee groups, members of the four largest migrant groups more often live in the west of the country, and also more often live in one of the four major cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht). Refugee groups relatively often live in ethnically concentrated neighbourhoods: 37%, compared with 13% of native Dutch citizens. Migrants of Somali origin are the most strongly represented in such neighbourhoods of all refugee groups (46%), followed by those of Afghan and Iraqi origin (both 36%). Iranian migrants have the lowest representation in these neighbourhoods (29%). Members of refugee groups do however live in concentrated neighbourhoods relatively less often than members of the four largest migrant groups.

Wide health differentials, especially in older age groups
Members of refugee groups are generally less healthy than the native Dutch population. Information is available on three indicators of health (physical health, mental health, perceived health).

Figure S.2
Persons who perceive their health as good or very good, by ethnic origin and age, 2009 (in percentages)

Figure S.2 presents the findings for perceived health (a comparable picture emerges for the other indicators named). The differences between the refugee groups and the indigenous Dutch are fairly small in the youngest age group, but increase rapidly in the other age groups; the difference in health status is very marked for young people (15-24 years) and older persons (45-64 years). Generally speaking, migrants of Somali origin are in better health than the other refugee groups. One reason for this lies in the high proportion of young people within this group. The longer someone has spent in a reception facility,
the poorer their mental health; the same applies where their partner or children live in the country of origin.

Poor health has an impact on people’s position in other domains. Analysis suggests for example that it has an adverse effect on things such as successful completion of civic integration programmes, learning the Dutch language and finding paid work.

**More use of care provisions due to poor health**
Migrants from the refugee groups make more use of care provisions than the native Dutch. This applies especially for those of Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian origin. This is reflected in more visits to the general practitioner, consultation of medical specialists and hospital admissions. There is no higher contact frequency with mental health care services compared with the native Dutch, except for people of Iranian and, to a slightly lesser extent, Afghan origin.
This frequent contact with care provisions is largely explained by poor (perceived) health. If allowance is made for this perceived poor health, the differences in care consumption between the refugee groups and native Dutch citizens disappear, except for visits to the GP.

**Frequent leisure-time contacts with native Dutch**
A substantial proportion of the refugee groups have a mixed or predominantly native Dutch circle of friends. Around a third of those of Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian origin have more contact with members of their own group; this proportion is higher among those of Somali origin. Refugee groups maintain contacts with the native Dutch considerably more often than members of the Turkish and Moroccan groups. The ethnic profile of their circle of friends and acquaintances corresponds to that of persons of Surinamese and Antillean origin. One reason for this could be that the refugee groups are much smaller than the traditional migrant groups, so that the chances of meeting members of their own ethnic group are smaller. The fact that they are less likely to live in ethnically concentrated neighbourhoods in the cities could also be a factor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic profile of leisure time contacts, by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>more contact with members of own group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (Sing’09), table 8.4
Figures for the period 2003-2009 show an increase in the percentage of members of the four refugee groups with a predominantly native Dutch circle of friends and acquaintances.

Other information on social contacts suggests that many persons of Somali origin display active social behaviour. They have lots of contacts, both with members of their own group and with the native Dutch; 46% have contact with a native Dutch person and with someone of Somali origin at least once a week. Roughly a third of the other refugee groups maintain such ‘double loyalties’.

Persons of Iranian origin have a native Dutch partner (married or unmarried) most often (29%). 16% of persons of Somali origin who are in a relationship have a native Dutch partner. This applies for 11% of those of Iraqi origin and 4% of those with an Afghan background.

**Traditional views on the role of women in the Somali group**

Persons of Somali origin adhere to a traditional role division between men and women. Migrants of Iranian origin are a good deal more progressive and their views on this topic differ little from those of the native Dutch. Persons of Iraqi and Afghan background lie somewhere between the two. The views of those of Somali origin on the roles of men and women most closely resemble those of persons of Turkish and Moroccan origin; the other refugee groups hold roughly the same views as persons of Surinamese and Antillean origin.

There are fewer differences between the refugee groups when it comes to the importance of family ties, which are considered very important by all groups. Persons of Iranian origin differ most from the other refugee groups, but are still closer in their views to the other refugee groups than to the native Dutch population.

**Migrants of Somali origin attach great importance to their religion**

Almost every Somali migrant in the Netherlands regards themselves as a Muslim. This is a big difference compared with migrants from Iran, roughly half of whom describe themselves as belonging to a religion. A substantial proportion of those of Iraqi origin are also non-religious. Persons of Somali and Afghan origin who adhere to a religious faith are almost without exception Muslims. A substantial minority of believers of Iranian and Iraqi origin (approx. 20%) adhere to Christian beliefs.

Migrants of Somali origin are the most strongly focused on their religion, experience their faith in a very personal way and attach great importance to following religious rules (see table S.4). Persons of Iranian origin are their opposites on all these points, whereas believers of Iraqi and Afghan origin resemble each other closely and lie between the other two groups. A relatively high proportion of Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian Muslims rarely visit a mosque.
Table S.4
Religious conviction, religious behaviour and adherence to religious rules, by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Afghan</th>
<th>Iraqi</th>
<th>Iranian</th>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>regards self as religious</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find it hurtful if someone says something bad about my religion</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attends religious gatherings: never/less than once per year</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims should be allowed to live entirely according to the rules of Islam(^a)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prays five times a day(^a)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Items only submitted to Muslims.

Source: scp (SING’09), table 8.8, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11 and 8.12

Dual identification: with own group and with Dutch society
Around two-thirds of refugee group members feel strong ties with their own group, stronger than their ties with the Netherlands. Nonetheless, almost half feel Dutch. This is a high percentage, especially compared with migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin.

Table S.5
Feels self to be a member of own group and feels Dutch, by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feels self to be member of own group</th>
<th>Feels Dutch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: scp (SING’09), table 9.1 and 10.1

At home and safe in the Netherlands
Many members of refugee groups feel at home in the Netherlands and also feel safe there (see table S.6). The latter will undoubtedly be related to their experiences in their country of origin. Expressed as a score, people of Somali origin are the most positive about the Netherlands, giving a score of 7.8 out of 10. The average scores given by the refugee groups are higher than those given by the native Dutch. Persons of Iranian origin consistently give a slightly lower score on these topics.
Table 5.6
Feeling at home, feeling safe in the Netherlands and score for the Netherlands, by ethnic origin, 2009 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Afghan</th>
<th>Iraqi</th>
<th>Iranian</th>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>native Dutch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes, feels at home</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes, feels safe/very safe</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average score</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCP (Sing’09), table 9.3 and 9.4

Approximately three-quarters of the other refugee groups think the Netherlands is a hospitable country for migrants, which is open to other cultures and which respects the rights of migrants. Those of Iranian origin hold these views less frequently. Migrants from the traditional groups and the native Dutch are considerably more sceptical on these topics, so that in this respect members of the refugee groups are more positive in their views about the Netherlands than the traditional migrant groups and the native Dutch population.

While migrants from the refugee groups are predominantly positive in their views about the hospitable and open character of the Netherlands, they are less enthusiastic about the opportunities that the Netherlands offers to migrants. Those of Iranian origin are the most sombre in their views on this; they also most often feel that there is discrimination against migrants in the Netherlands, and report that they have experienced this personally more often than members of the other refugee groups. The integration paradox appears to be at work here: people with a higher education level are less positive about the acceptance of migrants in the Netherlands and feel more discriminated against. A similar paradox has also been observed among better-educated migrants from the traditional groups.

Ties with country of origin
A large majority in all refugee groups have at least occasional contact with relatives in their country of origin. Persons of Iranian origin have the most contact, those of Somali origin the least; persons of Iraqi and Afghan origin occupy a midway position. A substantial proportion have no contact at all with family in their country of origin; the figure ranges from around 40% in the Somali group to 10% in the Iranian group. Although migrants of Somali origin maintain the fewest family contacts with their country of origin, they are also the group who most often send money or goods back to their homeland (27% in 2008). The situation among those of Iranian origin is the reverse: they have the most contact with family in their country of origin but send such remittances least often (12% in 2008). Among Afghan and Iraqi households, 24% and 17%, respectively, sent money and goods to their country of origin in 2008. The majority of migrants of Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian and Somali origin do not make return visits to their country of origin. This is primarily because it is not possible for them
to travel (safely) to their homeland and because they no longer have any family there. Migrants of Iranian origin return most frequently: 9% return each year, and more than a third pay occasional visits to their homeland. 95% of migrants of Somali origin never return; among those of Iraqi and Afghan origin 73% and 79%, respectively, never visit their country of origin.

Although migrants are regularly troubled by homesickness, a large majority would no longer wish to live in their country of origin. Even those who would like to do so regard it as very unlikely. The decisive factor here is the poor situation in the country of origin; returning is simply not an option at present.

Profile of the groups

Iranians: modern and critical

Compared with the other refugee groups studied here, the Iranian group are in many ways in the most favourable position. A number of factors explain this. First, they have lived in the Netherlands for a relatively long time: on average, Iranians were the first of the four refugee groups to come to the Netherlands. After the initial wave, the influx of migrants from Iran has been relatively low, and partly because of this, the Iranian group are slightly older on average than the other three groups, while the second generation is somewhat larger and older. The Iranians are a well educated and modern group. This is reflected in their views on issues such as the roles of men and women. They are a largely secular group, and those who do belong to a religion characteristically adopt a fairly relaxed attitude to religious rules and are not terribly religiously active. They tend to be highly focused on contacts with the native Dutch and often identify themselves as Dutch. Although migrants of Iranian origin do better on the labour market than the other refugee groups, their position is still characterised by high unemployment and low employment. A substantial group have failed to convert a high education level into a favourable labour market position. Those who have found work, by contrast, are very often active on the higher rungs of the occupational ladder. Despite this, many working migrants of Iranian origin – as in the other refugee groups – feel that their work is a poor match for their qualifications. A further characteristic of the Iranian group is that, although they often identify themselves as Dutch, they also express greater criticism of Dutch society than the other refugee groups. They least often feel at home in the Netherlands (though 73% still do), give Dutch society the lowest score (though still well above average) and least often concur with the image of the Netherlands as a hospitable, open society which offers legal certainty. They also feel the most discriminated against.

Somalis: young, problematic, but feel at home in and satisfied with the Netherlands.

Of all the refugee groups studied, Somalis are in by far the worst position socioeconomically; their socioeconomic position is worse than that of the three other refugee groups and that of the four traditional migrant groups. To some extent, the migration history of this group explains their position in Dutch society. The political situation in Somalia has been unstable since the early 1980s, and the continuing violence means that people from
all sections of the population have fled the country. A substantial proportion of them came to the Netherlands as single minors. The violence in Somalia means they have received far less education in their own country than the other refugee groups, especially those who have come to the Netherlands recently. This means they are in a weak starting position in Dutch society, and this is something they have difficulty in making good. The Somali group contains the highest number of young people of all the refugee groups studied here.

More than half of Somali migrants who are no longer in education have been educated to no more than primary level. Migrants of Somali origin therefore have a lower education level on average than migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin. Young Somalis who are in education also lag a long way behind the other refugee groups and other non-Western groups. Overall, the position of young Somalis is problematic; they are found mainly in the lowest tracks of secondary education and often leave school prematurely; many young Somalis end up in crime (see the Annual Reports on Integration for 2009 and 2010); their position on the labour market is very poor, with high rates of youth and adult unemployment and a low employment rate; very few Somali women participate in the labour market; those Somalis who do have work are generally employed in low-level and low-quality jobs; self-employment is virtually unheard of in this group; they are in the worst housing situation of all refugee groups considered here; they more often live in ethnically concentrated areas, and then primarily in rented apartment buildings, with relatively little living space.

Migrants of Somali origin display active social behaviour, often with their own group, but also frequently with the native Dutch. In this sense they are a relatively open group, who somewhat resemble the Moroccan group in the Netherlands in this respect. Like the Moroccan group, they also attach great importance to their religion; almost all Dutch migrants of Somali origin are strict and practising Muslims. Many of them hold conservative views about the roles of men and women. None of this, however, stands in the way of a positive attitude towards Dutch society; on the contrary, they give the highest score of all four groups to Dutch society and the native Dutch, most often concur with the image of the Netherlands as a hospitable, open society which offers legal certainty and least often feel victims of discrimination. Their physical and mental health is also better than that of the other refugee groups.

The intermediate position of the Afghan and Iraqi groups

On virtually every topic discussed in this study, the Afghan and Iraqi groups were found to resemble each other very closely and consistently occupied a midway position between the Iranian and Somali groups. This means it is less easy to define the profile of these groups sharply. The peak in migration in both groups occurred in roughly the same period. One difference is that the influx of Iraqis has grown strongly since 2005, while this has not been the case for the Afghan group. Both groups contain a considerable number of well-educated people (more than the Surinamese and Antillean groups, whereby we make no distinction between qualifications obtained in the Netherlands or abroad). Iraqi and Afghan students at Dutch schools are also doing well; if we look at the third year of secondary education, Afghan students are more often in the higher
echelons (senior general secondary/pre-university) than Surinamese students, while Iraqi students are on these programmes just as often as Surinamese students. Afghan students stand out through their low dropout rates.

As with the other refugee groups, the position of Afghans and Iraqis on the labour market is anything but favourable. High unemployment figures and a strong representation in low-level and temporary jobs dominate the picture. The general health status of the two groups is comparable, though Iraqi migrants more often struggle with overweight. The intermediate position of migrants of Afghan and Iraqi origin also extends to sociocultural domains. The proportion of persons of Afghan origin with a native Dutch partner is strikingly low.

A look to the future
What expectations can be drawn from this study as regards the integration of the refugee groups? First and foremost, we may assume that a high proportion of these groups will continue living in the Netherlands. Although homesickness is very prevalent, as are ideas about onward migration to other countries, in many cases these wishes are very unlikely to be realised. To a large extent, the desire to repatriate is thwarted by the situation in the various countries of origin, and as long as that situation does not change, most of the people concerned will remain in the Netherlands. Of those who would like to migrate to another country, 80% expect that they will still be in the Netherlands in five years’ time.

Many of the findings in this study are sobering, especially those regarding labour market position, the poor physical and mental health of many members of the refugee groups and the position of migrants originating from Somalia. Yet there are also reasons for optimism. Despite their relatively short period in the Netherlands, despite the fact that the second generation is as yet having virtually no impact on the integration situation and despite their often poor health status, we see that in many areas these groups are in no worse a position than the traditional migrant groups. This applies, for example, with regard to the Dutch language. In addition, members of the refugee groups often maintain contacts with the native Dutch and feel both safe and at home in the Netherlands.

Another reason for some optimism are the developments which took place in the period 2003-2009. Each of those developments points in the right direction: educational level has improved, unemployment has fallen and the percentage of people in work has risen, and more and more members of the groups studied have a circle of friends and acquaintances that consists predominantly of native Dutch people.

A further positive point is that the children of migrants are performing well in education, with the one exception of Somali pupils. The educational outlook for young members of the Iranian group appears to be extremely positive, and the same applies for a substantial proportion of the Afghan and Iraqi groups. Their representation in the higher tracks of secondary education offers the prospect of their going on to higher education and thus hopefully acquiring a successful position on the labour market. All
the signs are that the integration of second-generation migrants of Iranian, Afghan and Iraqi origin will proceed much more quickly than in the Turkish and Moroccan groups in the Netherlands. The education level of the primary migrants from the refugee groups appears to be the decisive differentiating factor here. Seen from this perspective, the integration of the refugee groups virtually follows the traditional pattern of many migrants in countries such as the United States, where the first generation has difficulty and feels little connection with the host society. By contrast, their children do achieve success, mainly through investment in education. This ostensibly hopeful picture thus assumes by implication that the first generation is a lost cause. That would be a failure to appreciate the potential of many of these migrants, however. The fact that this potential is often not fully tapped appears to be associated with factors such as foreign qualifications, problems with the Dutch language and poor health.