

Minorities in the Netherlands

In the early 1980s, the Netherlands adopted an official ‘minorities policy’ that in many ways resembled Canadian or Australian multiculturalism. Subsequently, this approach was publically criticised for its perceived inability to achieve socio-economic and cultural integration of some immigrant groups. In the last few years, immigration and ethnic diversity have become heated political themes, and Dutch politics have taken radically different directions compared with the recent past. This text has been revised in 2013 by Elsa Koleth and Stephen Castles

In 2010 the foreign-born population of the Netherlands was 1.9 million (11.2 per cent of the total population of nearly 17 million), while the foreign population (people with non-Dutch citizenship) was 760,000 (4.6 per cent of the total population) (OECD, 2012: Table A4 and Table A5). This indicates that about 60 per cent of immigrants have become Dutch citizens. The main origin countries of the foreign-born were Turkey (197,000), Surinam (186,000), Morocco (168,000), Indonesia (138,000) and Germany (122,000). People of many origins had settled in the Netherlands – one of the fastest-growing groups was people from Poland who increased from 17,000 in 2000 to 67,000 in 2010 (OECD, 2012: Table B4).

However, these figures do not give the full picture of the great diversity of the population, since many people of non-European ancestry were already Dutch citizens at the time of immigration, while children of immigrants born in the Netherlands are often Dutch citizens. According to the Netherlands Government’s Integration Report 2010 (Statistics Netherlands, 2010):

On 1 January 2010, one in five people in the Netherlands had a western or non-western foreign background. Half of them were born in the Netherlands and so belong to the second generation. The proportion of people with a non-western foreign background has increased slowly in the past ten years. Almost half of Turks and just over half of Moroccans in the Netherlands belong to the second generation; for Surinamese and Antilleans, this is just over four in ten. The increase in these four traditional non-western groups is caused mainly by the growth of the second generation.

In the 1970s, ethnic minorities became concentrated in the four biggest cities

(Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), where they often lived in distinct neighbourhoods. Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillean workers mainly got unskilled jobs and they bore the brunt of economic restructuring in the 1980s, with unemployment rates of 20-40 per cent for some groups (Muus, 1995). Unemployment rates fell in later years (Statistics Netherlands, 2005), yet by 2011, people with a 'non-western background' were still over three times more likely to be unemployed than native Dutch people: 13.5 per cent of the 'non-Western foreign background' population were unemployed, compared with .4.2 per cent of the 'native Dutch' (CBS, 2011).

In the 1980s, the Netherlands passed laws against racism and discrimination at work and in public places. Municipal voting rights for resident non-citizens were also introduced. The 1983 Minorities Policy was based on multicultural principles, declaring the need for social policies to integrate minorities as groups and to maintain their cultural identities. This policy covered Mediterranean workers and their families, people of Surinamese and Antillean origins, Moluccans, refugees (but not asylum seekers), gypsies and caravan dwellers.

But the Minorities Policy was criticized for doing little to overcome unemployment, poor educational performance and social disadvantage. In 1994, a new Integration Policy was introduced. This had two elements. The 'newcomers policy' consisted of courses on Dutch language, social orientation and vocational training, plus individual case management to secure entry into further education or the labour market. 'Integration policy' was concerned with improving the educational and labour market position of minority youth, and ameliorating living conditions in mixed neighbourhoods (Entzinger, 2003).

In recent years, there has been a major shift in attitudes and policies towards immigrants. A first step was the 1998 Civic Integration of Newcomers Act, which made integration courses compulsory. Then politician Pim Fortuyn shocked many observers by rapidly gaining popular support with strong anti-immigrant rhetoric. When Fortuyn was assassinated in 2002, the Pim Fortuyn List (PFL) became the second strongest party, forming part of a coalition government where it held the immigration portfolio. However, the PFL fell apart and lost most of its seats in 2003. The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats returned to power – but with an anti-immigration agenda. Things got worse in 2004 when filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, who

had made a film about Muslim women's experience of domestic violence, was murdered by a Muslim of Moroccan background.

In 2006, the government introduced new rules requiring immigrants to pass a 'civic integration examination' on Dutch language and society before being allowed to enter the country. The new Integration Act, which came into force in January 2007, introduced a further integration examination as a precondition for obtaining an unlimited residence permit. Preparatory courses are provided on the free market, at the immigrants' own expense. Persons acquiring Dutch citizenship must attend a compulsory naturalization ceremony. The Netherlands seems to be moving from the multicultural policies of the 1980s towards a new form of compulsory assimilation. This rapid turnaround in policies is seen by many as emblematic of a broad crisis in approaches to immigration and minorities throughout Europe. The traditional Dutch tolerance of cultural difference was being replaced by accusations that immigrants had not met 'their responsibility to integrate' and constituted a threat to Dutch society – Muslim minorities were the main targets (Vasta, 2007).

The 2010 Dutch elections signalled a significant shift in the Dutch political landscape, bringing in a right-wing minority government, with the support of the far-right Freedom Party, PVV, under the leadership of Geert Wilders. The Coalition pledged to impose a ban on the burqa, tighten immigration flows into the country and cut public spending (Traynor, 2010). The government also announced measures for compulsory repatriation of failed asylum seekers.

At first, the new restrictive policies on immigration – especially on family reunion – led to a sharp fall in entries: the 2005 inflow of foreigners was only 63,000 – the lowest since 1988. But inflows of foreigners increased after 2007, reaching 110,000 in 2010 – the highest level for many years. Poland was the largest source country with 14,500 new entrants in 2010 (OECD, 2012: Table B1). Indeed the number of people from Central and Eastern Europe doubled in the five years prior to 2011, with more than two thirds of these immigrants coming from Poland (Wobma and van der Vliet, 2011). After 1 May 2007 employment permits were no longer required for Poles to enter the Netherlands.

The trend towards more restrictive policies was also evident with regard to citizenship law. Major changes were made in 2009: henceforth citizenship could be

withdrawn from naturalized immigrants deemed to ‘have severely harmed Dutch interests’. The naturalization ceremony was changed to include a ‘statement of allegiance’ in which the future citizen swears ‘to respect the values and rights implied by Dutch citizenship’ (OECD, 2011: 304). Around the same time, rules for family reunion were further tightened up. An increased level of Dutch language proficiency was required for passing the Civic Integration Examination, which prospective family migrants have to take in their home countries. The legal differentiation between family reunion and family formation was abandoned by the Immigration and Naturalization Department, leading to an increased minimum income requirement of 100 per cent of the minimum wage (OECD, 2011: 304).

Major cuts were also made to integration programs under the new right-wing minority government in 2010. These were partly in response to the Eurozone crisis, but were also motivated by anti-immigrant sentiments:

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration ... will see its budget for the integration of non-Western foreigners drop by nearly 80 per cent over the next five years... The funds for civic integration – language and orientation courses – have been particularly hard hit, and resources will drop to one-tenth of what they were in 2010 (44.6 million Euros in 2015, down from 439.7 million Euros in 2010). (Collett, 2011).

The government aim was that migrants should pay for the compulsory integration courses themselves. The provinces (the administrative layer between the national states and the municipalities) were also expected to pay a larger share of the costs of integration programmes. It was planned that integration should be main-streamed into general state-level funding for education, health, and other social policies. Funding for NGOs was also cut. As an article published by the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute pointed out:

Overall, cuts to integration programming seem disproportionately affected by Dutch austerity measures and stand in contrast to the political concern that immigrants are increasingly segregated from mainstream communities (Collett, 2011).

This issue was highlighted in the Netherlands Government’s own 2010 *Integration Report*, which found high levels of concentration of second-generation people with a

foreign background – especially those with a non-Western background. in disadvantaged urban areas. This meant that these young people often had poor educational, health and labour-market outcomes. However, the *Report* found that such spatial concentration had declined in recent years, and that the educational gap between young people of migrant background and the native Dutch was getting smaller. Mixed neighbourhoods were reported to bring positive outcomes, both for people of migrant background and for the Dutch who lived in them (Statistics Netherlands, 2010).

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