

## Summary

### Flight with little baggage

#### The life situation of Dutch Somalis

##### S1 Flight to the Netherlands

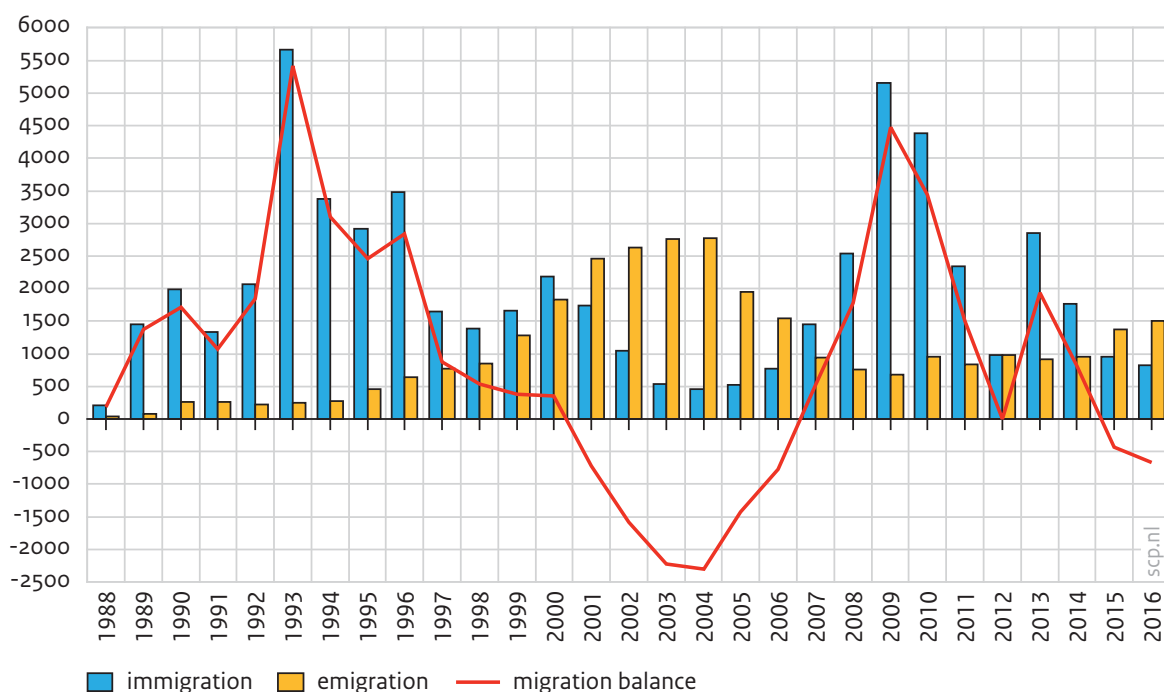
There are around 40,000 Dutch citizens of Somali origin living in the Netherlands. They have fled the armed conflicts and persistent unrest that have tormented Somalia since the 1980s. Dutch Somalis are the second largest African-origin group in the Netherlands, after Dutch Moroccans. It is known from earlier studies that on average, Dutch Somalis are at a considerable distance from the labour market and Dutch society, reflecting the very low education level of many of them and their difficulty with the Dutch language. This study looks at their position in 2015 and compares it with that in 2009. Our main focus is on first-generation Dutch Somalis. This report draws on data from two surveys: a total of 970 Dutch Somalis – mainly from the first generation – were surveyed in 2009 and over 600 in 2015 about their life situation and experiences in the Netherlands. In addition, ten experts were interviewed about their perception of this group.

#### Migration history

Two peaks can be identified in the migration history of Somalis to the Netherlands. The first occurred in 1993 and was related to the dictatorship of Siad Barre and his fall in 1991. The second peak occurred in 2009 as a result of the guerrilla war against the Somali government and the Ethiopian army in the south of Somalia. The number of asylum migrants from Somalia was much lower in the intervening period, and in 2001-2006 the migration balance was actually negative, meaning that more people with a Somali background left the Netherlands than arrived. The majority of those who left emigrated to the United Kingdom, though a proportion returned to the Netherlands after a number of years.

Figure S1

Immigration, emigration and migration balance of Dutch Somalis, 1988-2016 (in absolute numbers)



### Young, single and lots of single-parent families

Dutch Somalis are a young group, of the total number who are registered in the Netherlands, half are aged under 20 (based on figures from Statistics Netherlands [CBS]). A third of this group are members of the second generation, i.e. were born in the Netherlands. Our survey data do not enable us to paint an accurate picture of how they are faring.

Dutch Somalis generally have large families, with an average of three children. A relatively high proportion of these children live in single-parent families – roughly a quarter of all first-generation Dutch Somalis form single parent households. According to Dutch statistics, three-quarters of Dutch Somalis are unmarried – mainly because they are still so young. We have no information on the incidence of Islamic marriages. Dutch Somalis tend to marry within their own group; 70% of all marriages since 2010 were between a first-generation Dutch Somali and a first or second-generation Dutch Somali.

## S2 Dutch Somalis have few resources in the Netherlands

### More than two-thirds have followed no more than primary education

The persistently unstable situation in Somalia has also impacted on the education system. Partly because of this, Dutch Somalis have a very low education level: 68% of those no longer attending school have completed no more than primary education, and only 8% have a higher education qualification (compared with 34% of Dutch natives). Dutch Somalis are not only very poorly educated compared with Dutch natives, but also relative to other migrant groups: People with a Moroccan and Turkish migrant background also have a

lower education level on average than Dutch natives, but almost twice as many are higher education graduates compared with Dutch Somalis (16% and 13%, respectively). The percentage of people with a Turkish or Moroccan background who have completed no more than primary education is substantially lower (32% and 37%, respectively) than among Dutch Somalis (though much higher than among Dutch natives).

Dutch Somalis who were born in the Netherlands or moved here at an early age (before age 13) have a better education level than those who moved to the Netherlands at a later age. Children who move to the Netherlands at a very early age go straight into mainstream education and there is more time to eliminate educational disadvantage. Children who are older on arrival can join a transition class before entering mainstream education. However, it is difficult to eradicate disadvantage within the mainstream education system, especially for older children who cannot read or write. Parents themselves also often have a low education level, have difficulty with the Dutch language and are unfamiliar with the Dutch school system. This has an impact on their ability to provide adequate support for their children.

Earlier asylum migrants, who came to the Netherlands before 1998, are better educated on average than those who arrived later; 20% of the former group have a higher education qualification. As a result of the persistent unrest and subsequent anarchy in Somalia, later asylum migrants are increasingly poorly educated:

A supplementary explanation is the selection effect. Those who are better placed generally flee before people who are in a less favourable starting position.

84% of those who came to the Netherlands between 2010 and 2015 report that they have followed no more than primary education. The new influx of asylum migrants with an even lower education level caused the average education level of Dutch Somalis to fall between 2009 and 2015.

### Majority have difficulties with the Dutch language

The majority of Dutch Somalis report that they sometimes or frequently have difficulty with the Dutch language. In particular, those coming to the Netherlands with no more than a primary education background and those who were aged over 35 when they came to the Netherlands have a relatively poor command of Dutch. Young people, those with a higher education level and those who were born in the Netherlands or came to the country at an early age have a relatively good command of Dutch.

### Good health, but more frequent visits to the doctor

There is no difference between Dutch Somalis and Dutch natives as regards their perceived physical and mental health. One explanation for this is the *healthy immigrant effect*: the refugees who arrive in the Netherlands are those who were strong enough to make the journey, and therefore constitute a positive selection (Haker et al. 2016). Another explanation is related to age: on average, Dutch Somalis are much younger than the native Dutch popula-

tion, and young people are generally substantially healthier than older people. Dutch Somalis who were born in the Netherlands or moved here at an early age report better physical health than those who moved to the Netherlands as adults.

Dutch Somalis visit their GP more often than Dutch natives. Despite the fact that there is no difference in perceived health compared with Dutch natives, this can be explained by the higher disease burden (more diabetes and chronic pain), but also by the fact that refugees go to the doctor with all kinds of questions and concerns (Haker et al. 2016).

### S3 Positive view of the Netherlands, but less so than in 2009

Dutch Somalis generally take a positive view of the Netherlands. Two-thirds of them see their future in the Netherlands, and the same proportion feel at home here. However, these opinions are less positive than six years ago. There are several possible reasons for this. As indicated above, the composition of the group has changed due to the influx of mainly very poorly educated migrants with little prospect of paid work. Another factor may be changes in the social climate in the Netherlands towards migrant groups in general and Muslims in particular.

#### Dutch Somalis are satisfied in the Netherlands, but feel less at home

A quarter of Dutch Somalis would like to return to Somalia, but the majority do not see this as a realistic option. A large majority (68%) think they will still be living in the Netherlands in five years' time.

Dutch Somalis feel less at home in the Netherlands than in the last survey in 2009, when 80% said they felt at home; this had reduced to two-thirds in 2015. Dutch Somalis are fairly satisfied with their lives in the Netherlands, giving an average satisfaction score of 7.6 out of 10. Despite their meagre incomes and weak labour market position (see section S4), Dutch Somalis are more satisfied than the Turkish and Moroccan groups (averages of 6.3 and 6.6, respectively) and Dutch natives (average of 6.6). One possible explanation may be their frame of reference: the level of safety in the Netherlands. At the same time, experts highlight the day-to-day stress of living in the Netherlands faced by this group, which could in turn be a reason for their illness burden and more frequent visits to the doctor. Compared with the 2009 survey, there has been no significant change in how satisfied Dutch Somalis are with life in the Netherlands.

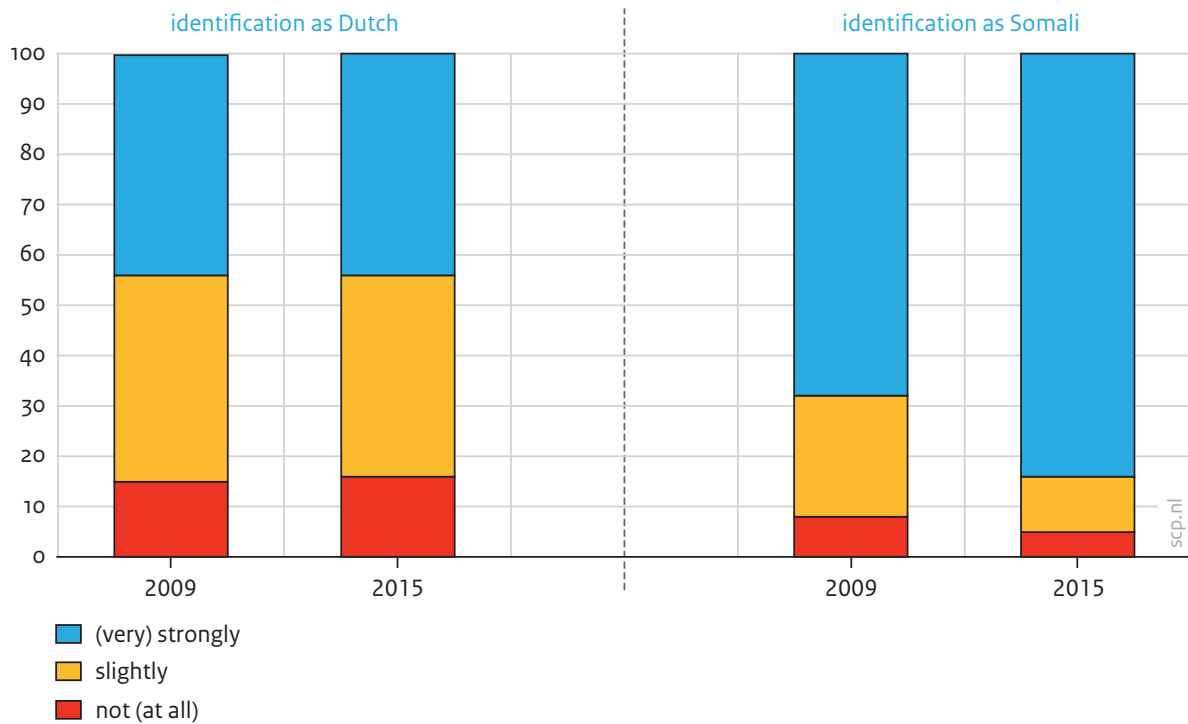
#### Strong (and increasing) identification with origin group

Dutch Somalis feel Dutch to roughly the same extent as Dutch Moroccans, but more so than Dutch Turks: one in six do not feel Dutch (at all); four in ten feel slightly Dutch and just over four out of ten feel strongly or very strongly Dutch. Their identification as Somali is stronger: more than eight out of ten feel strongly or very strongly Somali; one in ten feel slightly Somali and one in 20 do not feel Somali (at all).

Compared with the data from 2009, their identification with the Netherlands has remained virtually unchanged (Figure S2). Interestingly, their identification with the origin group has increased: in 2009, 68% of Dutch Somalis identified themselves strongly or very strongly as Somali; in 2015 the figure was 84%. This may be related both to the perception of an unfriendly climate in the Netherlands and to the changed profile of the group of Somalis in the Netherlands (more recent influx).

Figure S2

Identification as Dutch and Somali, 2009 and 2015 (in percentages)



Source: SCP/CBS (SIM'15)

Almost all Dutch Somalis (95%) are Muslims. Nine out of ten religious Dutch Somali women wear a headscarf; that is more than religious women of Turkish (49%) and Moroccan (78%) origin. However, if we look at the first generation separately, there is no difference between women with a Moroccan and Somali background. Dutch Somalis attend religious gatherings just as often as their counterparts with a Turkish and Moroccan background, but identify more strongly with Islam.

### Increased preference for social distance from Dutch natives

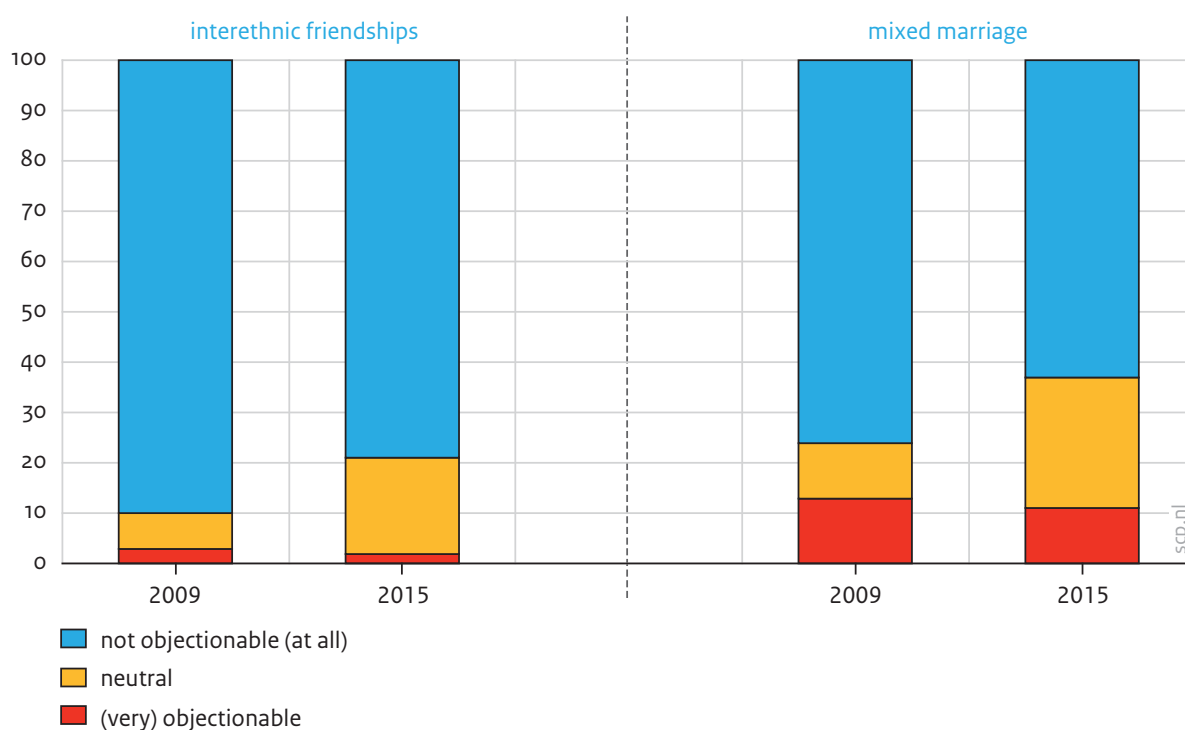
To measure attitudes regarding social distance, respondents are generally asked how objectionable they would find it if their children (where present) were to make friends with lots of Dutch native children or if they were to have Dutch native partner. Mixed marriages generally elicit more resistance than interethnic friendships (cf. Andriessen 2016), and this also applies for Dutch Somalis: only 2% report that they would find it objectionable or very

objectionable if their children were to have lots of native Dutch friends, while 11% would object to an interethnic marriage with a Dutch native (Figure S3).

Compared with the data from 2009, the desire of Dutch Somalis to maintain a social distance from Dutch natives has increased. In the 2009 survey, 90% reported that they would not find it (at all) objectionable if their children had lots of Dutch friends; in this survey, this had fallen to 79%. In 2009, 76% said they would not find it (at all) objectionable if their children had a Dutch native partner; that figure had fallen to 63% in 2015. This contrasts with other migrant groups, where the desire to maintain a social distance from Dutch natives has been decreasing (Andriessen 2016).

Figure S3

Degree of desired social distance from Dutch natives, 2015 (in percentages)



Source: SCP/CBS (SIM'15)

### Increased contacts in the neighbourhood

A substantial proportion of Dutch Somalis have contacts with Dutch native friends/acquaintances and/or with Dutch native neighbours/local residents; 62% have contact with Dutch native friends at least once a week, and 66% with neighbours/local residents. Compared with the data from 2009, there has been no change in the degree of contact with Dutch native friends and acquaintances. However, there has been an increase in contacts with Dutch native neighbours/local residents: in 2009, 58% of respondents reported such contacts at least once a week. The proportion who have contact with Dutch native neighbours/local residents never or less than once a year fell from 20% in 2009 to 9% in 2015. Almost seven out of ten Dutch Somalis have frequent (at least weekly) contact with Somali

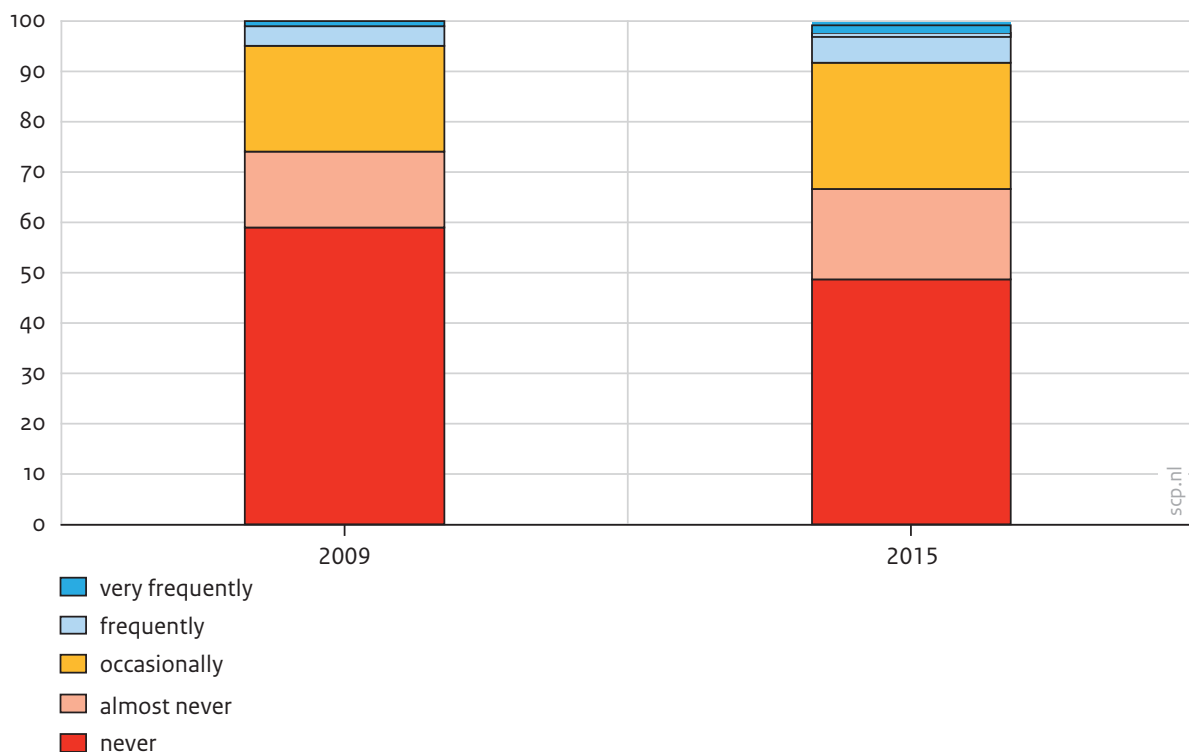
friends/acquaintances and over six out of ten have frequent contact with Somali neighbours/local residents. As with contact with Dutch native friends/acquaintances, Dutch Somalis maintain the same degree of contact with Somali friends/acquaintances as in 2009, but have more frequent contact with Somali neighbours/local residents. It thus appears that Dutch Somalis have become more socially active in their neighbourhoods in recent years by maintaining more contact with neighbours with both a Dutch and Somali background.

### Increase in perceived discrimination

Two-thirds of Dutch Somalis have never or almost never experienced discrimination by Dutch natives. This compares with around half in the groups with a Turkish and Moroccan background. Dutch Somalis experienced personal discrimination more often in 2015 than in 2009 (Figure S4). In 2009, three-quarters had never or almost never experienced discrimination and 5% had experienced it often or very often; in 2015, the percentage who had (almost) never experienced discrimination had fallen to 67%, while the percentage who had experienced discrimination often or very often had risen to 8%. The increase in perceived discrimination may be related to a climate that is experienced as negative, particularly towards Muslims. The changed composition of the Dutch Somali population may also play a role here.

Figure S4

Frequency of discrimination personally experienced by Dutch Somalis, 2009 and 2015 (in percentages)



Source: SCP/CBS (SIM'15)

## 54 Weak position on the labour market

Only a quarter of Dutch Somalis are in paid work, and the labour participation rate of women (18%) is even lower than that of Dutch Somali men (31%). Those with a higher education level (59%), those who have lived in the Netherlands the longest (39%) and those who were born in or moved to the Netherlands at an early age (47%) are most often in paid employment.

Roughly one in three Dutch Somalis (34%) were unemployed in the period 2014-2016. The unemployment rate is more than twice as high as in the non-Western migrant population as a whole and almost six times as high as among Dutch natives.

The majority of Dutch Somalis who are in work do not have permanent employment contracts; almost three out of five (59%) have flexible contracts. Additionally, Dutch Somalis are often employed for just a few hours per week: nearly a third (31%) work for less than 12 hours per week, compared with roughly one in eight for Dutch natives (12%). A third of Dutch Somalis are employed at the lowest occupational level, a substantially higher proportion than among Dutch natives and people of Surinamese and Antillean origin. The occupational level of working Dutch Somalis is reasonably comparable with that of working people with a Turkish and Moroccan background.

### Low income and widespread poverty

More than half of Dutch Somalis (52%) are in receipt of social assistance benefit. That is a substantially higher proportion than among non-Western migrants as a whole (15%), and in the four largest non-Western migrant groups in the Netherlands, social assistance dependency varies between 10% and 16%. The proportion of Dutch natives on social assistance benefit is much lower (2%). Frequent lack of paid work, high benefit dependency and low average occupational level of those in work translate into an extremely weak income position for Dutch Somalis. The average annual income of this group (12,200 euros) is less than half that of Dutch natives (26,300 euros).

Logically, poverty and a low income go hand in hand, and it is therefore not surprising that a relatively high proportion of Dutch Somalis – more than two-thirds (68%) – have an income that is below the poverty line. By way of comparison, this applies for only 5% of Dutch natives and 21% of non-Western migrants as a whole. The situation of young Dutch Somalis is even more alarming: no fewer than 82% of Dutch Somali children (aged under 18) live in a poor household. These figures indicate that Dutch Somalis have great difficulty keeping their heads above water. Their financial worries come on top of the existing concerns about building a (new) life in the Netherlands. Stress and uncertainty moreover often weigh on people's health and therefore on their energy to participate in society.

### Sharp increase in volunteering

Some 30% of Dutch Somalis had done voluntary work in the year prior to the survey. That is higher than in the four largest non-Western migrant groups in the Netherlands (Turkish



migration background: 18%; Moroccan: 22%; Surinamese: 22%; Antillean: 25%), but lower than for Dutch natives (37%). The 2009 survey also included a question on voluntary work. A sharp rise can be observed between 2009 and 2015 in the percentage of Dutch Somalis doing voluntary work, from 13% to 30%. According to the experts consulted for this study, this increase is related to the contribution in kind that local authorities can require from social assistance beneficiaries since the introduction of the Participation Act on 1 January 2015. Failure to make this contribution can have consequences for the amount of benefit.

Another form of informal participation is providing informal care to friends or family with health problems. Dutch Somalis provide informal care as often as people with a Turkish and Moroccan migrants background (28%, 30% and 32%, respectively). Dutch natives provide informal care more often (41%). One explanation for this may be the Dutch Somalis less often have family members in the Netherlands who are dependent on care, for example parents or grandparents (Van Houwelingen et al. 2016).

## 55 Conclusion

Earlier studies have already painted a worrying picture of the position of Dutch Somalis. Their low average education level and poor command of Dutch means their participation in the labour market is very limited, and the picture is also not a positive one in other areas. Our new data show that the changed profile of the group has led to a deterioration of their starting position: the education level of recent refugees is even lower and command of the Dutch language is still a problem. In addition, the social climate towards Muslims in the Netherlands has not improved. This creates a picture that gives no cause for optimism: only a quarter of Dutch Somalis are in paid work, and those who are find themselves often in small, temporary, low-skilled jobs. On the other hand, there is evidence of informal participation: 30% of Dutch Somalis report that they do voluntary work and 28% are providing informal care. Members of the Somali community often help each other. The percentage doing voluntary work, in particular, has risen sharply in recent years, possibly because of the ability conferred on local authorities by the Participation Act to require a contribution in kind for receipt of benefit. That contribution can also take the form of informal care provision. According to some experts, another explanation is that the transition to generic policy has led to certain forms of support being withdrawn and being partly replaced by help and support provided within the community itself. This is an indication of resilience within the group, but could also cause its members to focus more on their own community. This has indeed been the case in recent years: Dutch Somalis feel less at home in the Netherlands and perceived discrimination, identification as a Somali and the preferred social distance from Dutch natives have all increased. An important caveat here is that, compared with members of the Turkish and Moroccan migrant groups, for example, Dutch Somalis take a relatively positive view of the Netherlands. The ties within the Somali community are sometimes experienced as oppressive: 60% feel that the social control within the community is high, and 43% say that there is pressure on group members to conform to Somali

rules and customs. There is more perceived social control in the Turkish community, but the pressure to conform to group rules and customs is felt to be less strong in the Turkish and Moroccan groups.

Compared with their Turkish and Moroccan counterparts, for example, Dutch Somalis have a reasonably positive view of life in the Netherlands. This is probably related to the frame of reference that is used: compared with a country of origin that is ravaged by war and anarchy, the Netherlands is safe and well organised. At the same time, we see that the perceived socio-emotional distance from Dutch society has grown since 2009: the preferred social distance of Dutch Somalis from the native Dutch population has increased, they feel less at home in the Netherlands and they experience more discrimination. In particular, Dutch Somalis who were born in or moved to the Netherlands at an early age feel less at home and more often experience discrimination. They are likely to compare their position not so much with the situation in Somalia, but rather with the position of their native peers, and will conclude from this that they are in a less favourable situation. The less than wholly positive social climate towards migrants, and particularly Muslims, does nothing to help them feel they are part of Dutch society.

Looking at the differences within the Dutch Somali community reveals that those who were born in the Netherlands or arrived before the age of 13 are doing better in several respects. They have followed mainstream Dutch education from the start or streamed into the newcomer education system which focuses on enabling children to progress to mainstream education. This group are more often in paid work than those who came to the Netherlands at a later age, and have better resources: a relatively higher education level, a better command of Dutch and better physical health. Despite this more favourable position, however, they still lag a long way behind the Dutch native population. This can give rise to continuing concerns, especially if we take into account the sociocultural orientation. On the one hand, this group are more embedded in Dutch society, but on the other they do not have strong emotional ties to the Netherlands. The danger is that people will be marginalised for long periods; that is not only bad for themselves, but can also give children a poor start, slowing down the elimination of disadvantage.

Single Dutch Somali women with children and Dutch Somalis who moved to the Netherlands more recently and as adults, and who have followed little or no education, are particularly vulnerable. The revised Civic Integration Act made the latter group responsible for their own integration into Dutch society. Several experts have pointed out that this is a very difficult task, especially for those with low literacy. Not surprisingly, therefore, the success rates in the civic integration examination are very low among Dutch Somalis. Without additional support, this group will not readily integrate. It is also questionable whether the civic integration programmes are sufficient for this group, given their focus on literacy, language acquisition and guidance into paid work. Participants in the programmes who are unable to read and write need very intensive support to learn the language, and guiding

them into paid work is difficult given their low-skilled status. Enabling this group to participate in society will require more extensive support.

According to the experts consulted, there are also parenting issues within the Dutch Somali community. This is due in part to differences in the way child-rearing is viewed and practised in Somalia, where it tends to be a collective responsibility. In the Netherlands, parents often have to do everything alone. In addition, Dutch Somalis often have few resources: their income is generally low, they are often living in poverty, have little understanding of the Dutch school system and sometimes a poor command of the Dutch language. This means that many parents are not able to offer their child effective support, and this impacts on their educational opportunities. There is a real danger that this will lead to the transfer of disadvantage from generation to generation. Policy needs to focus on the future of the children and young adults in this group. They need extra support to help them participate fully in Dutch society, and in turn to contribute to that society. Given the severity and accumulation of problems in the Somali community, an intensive approach would appear to be important here.