# Summary

# Starting over

## Background to differences in the position of Syrian permit holders in Dutch society

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# Summary, conclusions and pointers for policy

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## S.1 Introduction

Four years have passed since large numbers of asylum-seekers sought refuge in the Netherlands. Many of them were given temporary residence permits and settled in their host country. Most of them originated from Syria, and it is this group that forms the main focus of this report. The study looks at Syrian permit holders who received an asylum residence permit between 1 January 2014 and 1 July 2016, and at their partners and children who came to the Netherlands later. This study can be seen as a follow-up to the descriptive report 'Syrians in the Netherlands' (*Syriërs in Nederland*) (Dagevos et al. 2018a), but is more analytical in nature and seeks to shed light on differences between Syrian permit holders in the Netherlands and the background to those differences. Both studies form part of the same project: the Longitudinal Cohort Study of Asylum-seekers and Asylum Permit holders (see Box S.1).

**Box S.1 Longitudinal Cohort Study of Asylum-seekers and Asylum Permit holders**

In brief, the purpose of this project is to map and monitor the position of asylum-seekers and asylum permit holders who have come to the Netherlands in recent years. The project is a joint initiative of four Dutch ministries (Social Affairs and Employment; Justice and Security; Education, Culture and Science; and Health, Welfare and Sport). The project draws on data from surveys, qualitative research and administrative register data.

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) was asked to carry out a survey of Syrian permit holders in partnership with the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS). The survey covers a cohort of people who received an asylum residence permit between 1 January 2014 and 1 July 2016, and their children and partners who travelled to the Netherlands later as dependants or for family reunification. The first wave of the survey, carried out in 2017, interviewed more than 3,200 Syrians aged 15 years and older (response rate 81%). The findings formed the basis for the report 'Syrians in the Netherlands' (*Syriërs in Nederland*) (Dagevos et al. 2018a), which was published in June 2018. The present report is also largely based on that survey, but is complemented by administrative register data from Statistics Netherlands . We will continue to monitor this cohort of Syrians through survey research. The fieldwork for the second wave is taking place in the first half of 2019. Qualitative research also forms part of the project. A qualitative study on the position of Eritrean permit holders was published at the end of 2018 (Sterckx & Fessehazion 2018). Statistics Netherlands (CBS) has built up a database of linked administrative register databases enabling the position of asylum-seekers and permit holders to be tracked, and has recently published reports on this (CBS 2017, 2018). The CBS databases contain information on all origin groups who came to the Netherlands as asylum migrants during the cohort period.

We opted to carry out an in-depth study of the following six topics: family reunification and moving behaviour in the Netherlands, intentions to stay in the Netherlands, mental health, use of care, diversity in participation and sociocultural position. The choice of these themes is based on a combination of factors. The report 'Syrians in the Netherlands' (*Syriërs in Nederland*) (Dagevos et al. 2018a) produced a number of striking findings which warrant further research, for example concerning the high prevalence of mental ill-health among Syrians in the Netherlands. In this report we explore the underlying factors for this finding, for example by looking at how far mental health is affected by the time spent in asylum reception centres and the experiences of Syrian permit holders of their life in the Netherlands. The findings produce a number of useful pointers, including for the reception policy. Investigating the determinants of care use makes clear that there are certain groups who, given the state of their mental and physical health, make little use of care, possibly indicating underuse of these facilities. We also investigate whether phenomena found in earlier groups of permit holders also occur in the present group of Syrian permit holders – for example whether members of this group over time, like earlier groups, tend to move towards more urban areas. The choice of topics was also dictated by their relevance for policy. Research on family reunification shows how the size and composition of the Syrian population has changed in recent years; the number of children is increasing, and this has consequences for the education system and the intake into transition classes in primary and secondary education. Understanding who has the intention of staying in the Netherlands provides indications for future changes in the population profile – is it predominantly Syrians in the most privileged position who wish to leave the Netherlands? – and provides an impression of the attachment felt by Syrian permit holders to the Netherlands.

The government is calling for the design of programmes for permit holders which combine different forms of participation, such as learning the Dutch language, following a course of education and looking for/having employment. Our study looks at how successful these efforts to combine different types of participation are proving. We look more broadly than at labour market position alone, as few permit holders are yet in permanent paid work.

In recent decades, integration has increasingly been portrayed as a sociocultural issue, whereby opinions about migrants and migration are influenced mainly by views on cultural differences and social distance. We investigate the sociocultural diversity within the Syrian group in the Netherlands and attempt to shed light on the factors that are associated with differences in sociocultural position.

As stated, our aim in this study is to gain a better insight into the background to differences in the position of Syrians in the Netherlands. As the information on which our study is predominantly based represents a snapshot in time, it is often not possible to make any statements about causality, and in most cases we therefore refer to associations and relationships between variables. In some instances, it is clear that events have taken place earlier, for example during the flight from Syria or during the period spent in reception centres; although the direction of the causality can be debated in these cases, too, we do then refer to influence and effect.

The perspective of Syrians themselves – their positions, opinions and experiences – are the central focus in this report. The social context in which Syrians have to find their way in Dutch society is also important, for example processes of inclusion and exclusion on the part of the host society. We explore this indirectly by including interethnic contacts and the discrimination and acceptance experienced by Syrians in the explanation of differences within the Syrian group; however, how Dutch natives perceive Syrians and how these perceptions influence the positions attained by Syrians in Dutch society falls outside the scope of this report. For research on perceptions of refugees, we would refer to Huijnk et al. (2017), Kloosterman (2018) and Mensink & Miltenburg (2018).
Contributions for this study were provided by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). We first summarise the key findings for each theme (§ S.2). We then go on to look at which determinant factors are relevant for each of the six themes and whether they provide a basis for drawing a number of broader conclusions about the background to differences in the societal position of Syrian permit holders (§ S.3). We conclude with a number of considerations for policy (§ S.4).

## S.2 Six topics summarised

### S.2.1 Dynamics in the demography of Syrian status holders (chapter 2: Nathalie Boot and Zoë Driessen (CBS))

Of the total group of Syrian permit holders studied here,[1] 40% brought one or more family members to the Netherlands in the period up to 1 June 2017; this compares with 18% of permit holders from other countries of origin. Family reunification occurs relatively quickly for Syrians compared with permit holders from other countries (an average of eight months, compared with 14 months for Eritreans and 11 months for permit holders from other groups). The number of family members and dependants brought over by members of the Syrian group is also relatively high compared with other permit holders. As a result, the share of single persons is declining over time and more and more Syrians live in a family with a partner and children.

#### Syrians do not move often, movers prefer more urban areas

Syrian permit holders move between municipalities slightly less often than other groups: 6% of the Syrian group moved to a different municipality at some point during the observation period, compared with 8% of other permit holders. Families with children, in particular, move less often than persons in households without children. When they do move, Syrians generally move to more urban areas. Strikingly, the town of Enschede is among the most popular destinations, possibly due to the presence of a Syrian Christian community there. At provincial level, people tend to move from more sparsely populated to more urban provinces. In many cases, changes in household composition, for example due to family reunification, are associated with a move to a different municipality.

### S.2.2 Intentions to stay by Syrian permit holders in the Netherlands? (chapter 3, Sanne Noyon and Mieke Maliepaard (WODC))

Although asylum and immigration policy often appears to be based on the idea that people who seek asylum in the Netherlands intend to stay for a long period, experience with asylum migrants in the past has shown that a high proportion either return to their country of origin or migrate to a third country. Almost 40% of asylum migrants who came to the Netherlands in the second half of the 1990s had left again 15 years later (Maliepaard et al. 2017). At this point in time, the situation in Syria means that returning is not a realistic prospect, and it is therefore too early to say to what extent the same pattern will be observed among Syrian permit holders in the Netherlands. It is possible that people who expect to stay in the Netherlands will make greater efforts to (be able to) participate successfully in Dutch society, and understanding their intentions with regard to staying in the Netherlands is therefore relevant.

In 'Syrians in the Netherlands' (*Syriërs in Nederland*) (Dagevos & Maliepaard 2018, contribution to the study by Dagevos et al. 2018a), we reported that the majority of Syrian permit holders would like to be still living in the Netherlands in five years' time if return to Syria is not possible. In this study we also focused on the question of who thought they would return to their country of origin if this were an option. Respondents were asked two questions: 1) 'Suppose you can't go back to Syria. Would you then still want to be living in the Netherlands in five years' time?' and 2) 'Would you like to live in Syria for ever? This question is about whether you would like that, not whether it is possible at this time.' Respondents who indicated that they would still like to be living in the Netherlands in five years' time and do not want to return to Syria are regarded as having the intention to stay in the Netherlands. Just over half (55%) reported that they see their future in the Netherlands. We find no clear differences in the intention to stay in the Netherlands based on age, gender, employment situation in Syria or degree of urbanization of the municipality of residence. We do find that people with children living at home less often want to stay in the Netherlands. This is a surprising result, which is difficult to interpret on the basis of the literature. Highly educated Syrians also less often see their future in the Netherlands. It is worth noting that the differences in intentions to stay between groups are small.

#### Sociocultural proximity and positive opinion regarding social climate mitigate desire to leave

Syrians who endorse more progressive values and those who are less religious are more inclined to stay in the Netherlands. While 46% of those who adhere to the least progressive norms think they will stay in the Netherlands, this rises to 61% for those who endorse the most progressive norms. There is also an association with religion: 67% of those for whom religion has no importance at all think they will stay in the Netherlands, compared with just 49% of those who attach great value to religion. Being Muslim or Christian makes no difference here. People who take a more positive view of the social climate in the Netherlands towards migrants also more often expected to stay here. By contrast, Syrians who have more contacts with friends and family outside the Netherlands more often think

they will leave. These findings confirm the idea that people who are more aligned with the host society are more inclined to settle long-term.

### Negative perception of social climate: highly educated more often inclined to leave the Netherlands

Although people with a higher education level generally endorse more progressive values than lower-educated people, they are less often inclined to stay in the Netherlands. This can be explained partly by a mechanism similar to the 'integration paradox' (Buijs et al. 2006), whereby highly educated people actually take a more negative view of the social climate in the Netherlands and therefore less often wish to stay. Given the potential of this group in terms of participation, this is an important finding. Subsequent data collection rounds will reveal to what extent these intentions translate into actual departure.

## S.2.3 Insights into mental ill-health (chapter 4, Alet Wijga (RIVM), Mieke Maliepaard (WODC), Willem Huijnk (SCP) and Ellen Uiters (RIVM))

In the study 'Syrians in the Netherlands' (*Syriërs in Nederland*) (Dagevos et al. 2018a) , we found that 41% of Syrian permit holders suffer mental ill-health, for example often feeling sombre, down or very anxious and rarely feeling calm,and happy. This publication describes the factors that are associated with the mental health of permit holders.

### Mental ill-health in broad swathes of the Syrian group

Mental ill-health occurs commonly in all sections of the Syrian group in the Netherlands. While there are differences in the prevalence of mental ill-health between men (39%) and women (44%) and between different age groups, the prevalence is higher in all cases than in the general population in the Netherlands (which, measured using the same method, stood at 11% in 2017), Mental ill-health is almost as common among highly educated Syrians as among those with a low education level, whereas in the general population in the Netherlands the prevalence of mental ill-health declines sharply as the education level rises.

### Experiences during the flight exact a toll on mental health

Negative experiences during the flight from Syria, such as extortion/financial deception, robbery, sexual violence, abuse, shipwrecks and kidnapping, have a major impact on mental health. A majority of permit holders have experienced such things. Mental ill-health is more common in both women and men if they have had multiple negative experiences during their journey to the Netherlands. The percentage of men suffering mental ill-health rises from 34% for those without such negative experiences to 44% for those who have experienced one or more of the above events. The corresponding percentages for women are 42% and 57%.

### Mental ill-health equally common among dependants and non-dependants

It is notable that mental ill-health is no less common among those who travelled to the Netherlands as dependants (are reunified with a family member in the Netherlands) and those who did not, and who in many cases experienced a hazardous journey. Over half of Syrian women travelled to the Netherlands as dependants (the figure for men is 8%). They suffer mental ill-health as frequently as women who did not come to the Netherlands as dependants, although those who travelled as dependants usually had a safer journey. On the other hand, they spent a longer period left behind in Syria or another country where, often in the absence of the breadwinner, they may be presumed to have lived in danger, anxiety and uncertainty.

### Number of moves between reception centres influences men's mental health

For the Syrian men in this study, it was not the length of time spent in an asylum reception centre that influenced their mental health, but rather the number of times they moved between centres: the percentage suffering mental ill-health was 33% for men who had moved a maximum of twice, and 43% among those who had had to move more than four times. Among women (the majority of whom had moved a maximum of twice) we found no relationship between the number of moves and mental health.

### Relationship between financial problems and mental ill-health

After leaving behind the war – but also their home – and surviving the journey, permit holders in the Netherlands are safe from the violence of war. However, our findings show that aspects of life in the Netherlands are also associated with mental ill-health, for example having too little money to make ends meet. There is also a relationship between financial situation and mental health in the general population, but this factor carries extra weight for Syrians because so many of them are in a financially vulnerable position (see CBS 2018; Dagevos et al. 2018a). Roughly 40% of permit holders reported that they were unable to make ends meet with the money they had available; 47% of this group suffer mental ill-health, compared with 36% of those who are able to manage financially.

### Difficulty with the Dutch language, few social contacts with Dutch natives and perceived discrimination are associated with more mental ill-health

Discrimination, social contacts and command of the language are regarded in the literature as important factors influencing the well-being of permit holders. These findings are corroborated for the Syrian permit holders in our study. One in ten respondents reported that they have occasionally suffered discrimination by Dutch natives, and 60% of this group suffer mental ill-health. Having a command of the Dutch language and social contacts with Dutch natives are positively associated with mental health; both factors can, for example, have a positive influence on knowledge about the Dutch care system and communication with care providers. Strikingly, contacts with Syrians show no positive correlation with mental health; it may be that Syrians with poorer mental health seek extra support from their own ethnic group.

### S.2.4 A picture of care use (chapter 5, Willem Huijnk (SCP), Ellen Uiters (RIVM) and Alet Wijga (RIVM))

It is known from earlier research that permit holders are not always able to access (appropriate) care. Both individual characteristics of those in need of care and features of the care system (and the match between the two) can play a role in use of care. Our study investigated which factors influence use of care.

#### Little contact by Syrian permit holders with psychologist/psychiatrist

Some 68% of Syrian permit holders had been in contact with a general practitioner (GP) in the past year, 37% with a specialist and 8% with a psychologist/psychiatrist. Set against comparable age groups in the general population, permit holders have more contact with a general practitioner and medical specialist, but less contact with mental health services. Earlier research shows that both permit holders themselves and their GPs often fail to recognise mental health problems. Given the high prevalence of mental ill-health among Syrian permit holders, it is striking that relatively few of them (8%) have been in contact with a psychiatrist or psychologist.

While health problems are obviously an important reason for accessing care, differences in care use between permit holders are also associated with demographic characteristics such as sex and age. For example, more women than men use care. Not living in an urban area and having financial difficulties are also associated with lower care use. Syrians living alone have less often been in contact with a GP or medical specialist than Syrians who do not live alone, but they have more often had contact with mental health services. The finding that Syrians living alone use less GP and specialist care may indicate that they have less information and knowledge on this matter. The greater use of mental health services by Syrians living alone may suggest that living in a family could be an impediment to seeking forms of care that are sensitive for the Syrian group. Greater trust in the Dutch care system increases the chances of using care.

#### Longer period in the Netherlands and sociocultural integration associated with more use of care

There is also a link between use of care and migration-related factors. Syrian permit holders who have been in the Netherlands for a longer period appear able to find their way through the Dutch care landscape more successfully, and make greater use of care services. Greater sociocultural integration also appears to make it easier to access care services. Having social networks that include Dutch natives and endorsing less conservative views about gender roles are associated with greater use of care. This fits in with the idea that cultural differences can pose an impediment to use of care services, for example due to miscommunication. Neither command of the Dutch language nor education level have an independent effect on use of care; this may be because of the relationship with other determinant characteristics, such as opinions or social contacts with Dutch natives.

Based on these findings, it is reasonable to assume that Syrian permit holders, and especially those at a greater sociocultural remove from Dutch society, are not always able to find their way through the Dutch care system; they make less use of GP and mental health services than Syrian permit holders with equivalent health status who are socioculturally closer to Dutch society. Some caution is called for in interpreting these findings, however: whilst we know something of the subjective physical and mental health of Syrians, the care need was not measured directly. We also do not know whether they access alternatives to care provided by a psychologist or psychiatrist, for example social work or a nurse practitioner at the GP.

### S.2.5 Variation in participation (chapter 6, Emily Miltenburg and Jaco Dagevos (SCP))

There is growing support at policy level for the notion that forms of participation such as learning the Dutch language, being enrolled in regular education and being in paid work should take place not sequentially but simultaneously. In this study we investigated the extent to which different forms of participation are combined. We distinguish between economic participation (paid employment, looking for employment, internships), educational participation (being enrolled in regular education, following a Dutch language course) and societal participation (volunteer work). Following Dutch language lessons is dominant, with other forms of participation less common: few Syrians are in employment (a tenth) or looking for employment (just over a fifth). Just over a quarter are on an internship; enrolment in regular education is limited (15%). Just over a quarter volunteer on a daily or weekly basis, but the majority do not volunteer. On average, permit holders combine two forms of participation (out of a maximum of five forms of participation).[2] A quarter are only following a language course, but following a language course is also regularly combined with another form of participation, most often with volunteer work.

#### Four participation profiles: two active and two less active groups

Our analyses found four groups with characteristic forms of participation. In the largest group, *language* (66%), everyone is following a language course; engagement in the other forms of participation is relatively limited. The *active seekers* group (11%) is characterised by the combining of activities: a relatively large number of those in this group are looking for employment, they also volunteer frequently and are often on internships. Many of them are also following a language course. Enrolment in regular education is low. By contrast, the *eager learners* group (6%) stands out precisely because of the strong probability that they will be enrolled in regular education. A substantial proportion are also following a language course, and a relatively large number are also in paid employment or on an internship. Common to both the *active seekers* and *eager learners* is that they combine several forms of participation. However, these active groups account for a relatively small proportion of Syrian permit holders (17% in total). Finally, there is a group labelled *cautious start* (17%). Members of this group are not following a language course, though a substantial proportion have done so in the past, and although still low, a relatively large share have successfully completed a civic integration programme. As this group appears to have made more

progress towards integration than the other groups, their participation in other areas might also be expected to be higher. However, while the share who are in paid employment or enrolled in regular education is relatively high compared with the *language* and *active seekers* groups, the differences are not very marked. Moreover, the share who are seeking employment and who volunteer frequently is low. It seems like some members of this group do not continue their participation after completing a language course by participating in regular education or the labour market.

#### Highly educated and young people more likely to combine forms of participation

What people did before they came to the Netherlands influences the way they participate in Dutch society. Syrians who followed higher education outside the Netherlands or were employed before coming to the Netherlands relatively often match the active seekers profile, undertaking activities which can help them find their way to the labour market (such as looking for employment, volunteering and being on an internship). They were also typically active whilst in the asylum reception centre, for example learning Dutch and volunteering. They relatively often speak English and often maintain contacts with Dutch natives. Women are less likely to belong to the active seekers group. Most members of the eager learners group were still going to school in Syria and relatively high proportion of them have followed lower or upper secondary or vocational education. Relatively few followed higher education, but that can be explained by the average young age of those in this group. To a degree, we find the same background characteristics in this young group as among the *active seekers*: many of them were active during their period in reception centres, and they often have contacts with Dutch natives; they also speak English relatively often. Those in the eager learners group also rate their self-reported language proficiency in Dutch the highest. We may deduce from this that there is a privileged subset within the Syrian group who came to the Netherlands with relatively favourable characteristics and who are shaping their lives here through various forms of participation. It will be interesting to see to what extent these participation profiles lead to successful – or stagnating – integration in the coming years.

### S.2.6 A socio-cultural typology of Syrian permit holders (chapter 7, Roxy Damen and Willem Huijnk (SCP))

Perceptions within the Syrian group in the Netherlands vary. Although less prominent than a few years ago, the image is still one of a modern, well-educated group. Ranged against this is the perception of Syrians as a migrant group consisting largely of people with conservative views who are orientated primarily towards their own compatriots. To gain an insight into the sociocultural profile of Syrian permit holders, we investigated the relationship between the pattern of social contacts (with the origin group and with the native Dutch), norms and values (including in relation to gender roles and acceptance of homosexuality) and identification with the origin group and with the Netherlands, as well as feeling at home in the host country.

### Three sociocultural types

Despite the relatively recent arrival of the Syrian group in the Netherlands, differences can already be observed in their in sociocultural positions, and their sociocultural diversity is particularly striking. Our study suggests that Syrians in the Netherlands can be classified into three distinct sociocultural types, which we term 'moderate separation', 'moderate integration' and 'moderate assimilation'. We label each of these types as 'moderate' because there is still a degree of variation in sociocultural characteristics. 40% of Syrian permit holders fall into the 'moderate integration' type. Members of this group are socially, emotionally and culturally embedded in both the Syrian group and the host society; they have relatively frequent contacts with other Syrians, but also with Dutch natives and other migrants. Just over a third (36%) fall into the 'moderate separation' type: they generally maintain stronger social and emotional ties with their origin group and are relatively conservative in their values. Almost a quarter (24%) fall into the 'moderate assimilation' type; they have relatively strong social and emotional ties with Dutch society and endorse more progressive values than members of the other two groups.

### Shorter and more active stay in reception centre, command of Dutch, education and work make integration and assimilation more likely

Spending a shorter time in an asylum-seekers reception centre, undertaking activities whilst in the centre, speaking Dutch (and/or English) and going to school or working in the Netherlands are all associated with (partial) sociocultural embedding in Dutch society (the 'moderate assimilation' and/or 'moderate integration' types). Strikingly, Syrian permit holders who had more negative experiences during their flight from Syria are also more likely to be in the 'moderate assimilation' or 'moderate integration' group.
Mental ill-health, perceived exclusion and stronger religious adherence are more common among Syrian permit holders who are predominantly oriented towards their origin group (the 'moderate separation' type). A relatively high proportion of women fall into this latter type type whereas highly educated Syrians are relatively often found in the 'moderate assimilation' type.

## S.3 Background to differences: pre-migration, migration and post-migration factors

Syrian permit holders have spent most of their lives outside the Netherlands; most of them came to the Netherlands under difficult circumstances, and after spending a period in a reception centre have made a new start here. We assume that each of these phases has an influence on their lives (e.g. mental health) and their integration (e.g. form of participation and sociocultural position, including the intention to stay in the Netherlands). With this in mind, this study distinguishes between pre-migration, migration and post-migration factors. Pre-migration factors include socioeconomic status (highest education followed, employment situation and occupational level) outside the Netherlands. The length of the journey and what they went through during their flight from Syria are regarded as

migration factors. Post-migration factors relate to the period spent in a reception centre and factors relating to their lives in the Netherlands.

### Pre-migration capital: highly educated Syrians participate more actively and exhibit less sociocultural distance

There is a relationship between the characteristics of Syrians when they arrive in the Netherlands and their form of participation. Those who followed higher education in Syria relatively often meet the participation profile of *active seekers*. They typically undertake simultaneous activities which can help them find their way to the labour market (such as looking for employment, volunteering and being on an internship). They also more often have closer social and emotional ties with the native population and are somewhat less focused on their origin group ('moderate assimilation' type). At the same time, those who have followed higher education are slightly more inclined to leave the Netherlands, which is a desire related to their less positive assessment of the social climate. Whether or not a person worked in Syria mainly impacts on their degree of participation in the Netherlands (most people with the *active seekers* participation profile were in employment outside the Netherlands, while those who were at school there are overrepresented in the *eager learners* profile). We found no associations in the other areas investigated in this study. There is also no clear relationship between mental health and the education level attained in Syria or another country: broad swathes of Syrian permit holders in the Netherlands are confronted with mental ill-health.

### Migration factors: the flight from Syria

The more negative experiences people went through whilst fleeing from Syria, the more often they suffer from mental ill-health. Mental health also impacts on other areas, such as sociocultural position. Poor mental health is more prevalent among Syrians who are predominantly focused on the origin group ('moderate separation' type) than among members of the other two sociocultural groups.

### Post-migration: what effect does the experience in reception centres have on permit holders?

The study particularly shows that men who have lived in several asylum reception centres are in poorer mental health. As regards participation, it is interesting to note that those who were active during their spell in the reception centre, for example learning the Dutch language or volunteering, also participate more once they leave the centre; they are more often found in the *active seekers* and *eager learners* profiles. The shorter the period spent in a reception centre and the more activities permit holders engaged in during this time, the smaller the sociocultural distance to the host society. To what extent there is a causal effect here is impossible to say from our data, but the relationship is striking.

### Life in the Netherlands

The more people experience discrimination, the more likely they are to suffer mental health problems. Discrimination and an unfavourable perception of the social climate with regard to migrant groups also reduces the intention to stay in the Netherlands and strengthens the focus on the origin group. Syrians who are closer to the Dutch cultural mainstream, measured among other things by their views on gender equality, are much more often inclined to stay in the Netherlands. Feeling accepted and endorsing values that are regarded as the norm in Dutch society contribute to the affinity with the Netherlands. Religion also plays a role: Muslims who actively profess their faith more often fall into the 'moderate separation' type, and those who attach great importance to their religion are more often intent on leaving the Netherlands. Contacts with the native Dutch population are found to be associated with the degree of participation: those with more active profiles tend to have more contacts with Dutch natives. There is an interaction between socio-cultural distance, perceived inclusion and exclusion, mental health and forms of participation: less sociocultural distance from the host society translates into less exclusion, fewer mental health problems and more frequent combination of several forms of participation.

## S.4 Considerations for policy

A great deal of policy has been developed in recent years by Dutch municipalities, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) and central government (COA 2019; Dagevos et al. 2018b; Razenberg et al. 2018b; SER 2018). This policy is aimed at speeding up the integration of permit holders in Dutch society, among other things by increasing the opportunities provided in reception centres to learn Dutch and volunteer ('valuable waiting period') and matching placement in municipalities better to the characteristics of the individual permit holder and the local labour market ('screening and matching'). Many municipalities actively pursue a policy to better equip permit holders for employment and actively guide them to work. Below we cite a number of considerations for policy which ensue from the study findings. There will be some overlap with policy that has already been developed in recent years, and in those cases the study endorses the need to continue such policy. Although the vast majority of permit holders who have come to the Netherlands since 2014 have temporary residence permits, existing policy and policy in development is focused on promoting their integration in Dutch society. We continue this line of thinking here. Experiences with earlier refugee groups show that the majority stay in the Netherlands, justifying the emphasis on integration policy.

### Integration of permit holders requires long-term policy

This report is not the only one to show how tough the integration process for permit holders is. People have to start over. Mental health problems, organising family reunification and learning the Dutch language are just a few of the factors which mean that enrolment in regular education or participating in the labour market demands time. In itself, this is not a new factor: refugees who came to the Netherlands in the 1990s also got off to a slow start

on the labour market. This is being repeated with the Syrian permit holders (and those from other countries; see CBS 2018). It is therefore important that policy aimed at permit holders is robust and enduring (cf. Beckers et al. 2018; Klaver et al. 2019; SER 2018).

### Combining participation in work and education still uncommon

Although widely advocated by research and policy, the share of permit holders combining several forms of participation (learning the language, working and following a course of education) is limited. Our findings suggest that a majority of Syrian permit holders are actively learning Dutch through language lessons. They regularly combine this with activities such as volunteering, but far less commonly with employment or regular education. There is also a group who appear to have ended up in a kind of limbo. There is a realisation by local authorities that a parallel approach is needed (Klaver et al. 2019), but in practice this is not easy to organise (cf. Oostveen et al. 2018). And although the new civic integration system is expected to expand the opportunities for local authorities to set up such structures, it will not be introduced soon (the envisaged implementation date is now 1 January 2021). Some municipalities are currently preparing for the new system; the resultant policy changes could be focused on organising combinations of different forms of participation, drawing on successful examples that have been developed in practice in recent years.

### Attention for women

There is a risk that municipal policy will focus chiefly on participation by men and that policy attention will fade away once men have been helped into work and off welfare benefits (Razenberg et al. 2018b). Rotterdam City Council mentions this is a specific point for attention in its new approach to permit holders (Gemeente Rotterdam 2018), and other reports also highlight the importance of policy attention for participation by women from refugee groups (Oostveen et al. 2019; Razenberg et al. 2018a).
This report highlights the weaker position of female permit holders; they are in poorer mental health, participate less and more often operate predominantly within Syrian networks. This report therefore reaffirms the urgency of ensuring policy attention for the position of women.

### The reception experience: more active and less frequent changes of location

This report endorses the notion of making the most of the time spent in the reception centre ('valuable waiting period'). Permit holders who are active during this period continue to be active afterwards. They often combine different forms of participation and are also often characterised by a relative lack of sociocultural distance to the native population. Research among permit holders in Rotterdam (Weeda et al. 2018) found an association between the number of reception locations in which they live and their mental health; our study confirms this finding, at least for men. As far as possible, policy needs to take this into account, including in periods when the influx of migrants is high, because this is precisely when asylum-seekers tend to be moved frequently from one location to another.

### Mental ill-health: accessible care and expertise regarding the target group

Mental health problems are widespread among Syrian permit holders. However, only a limited proportion of them access mental health services: just one in eight Syrian permit holders with mental ill-health have (had) contact with a psychologist or psychiatrist. Not all of them need care, but it is equally very plausible that a (high) proportion have difficulty finding and accessing good mental health care. The discrepancy between supply and demand is likely to be related to factors on both sides (e.g. taboos and unfamiliarity with mental health care on the part of Syrian permit holders, and insufficient expertise and inadequate support on the part of care institutions).

This study also shows an association between greater sociocultural distance and less use of care. If the well-being of Syrians with mental health problems is to be improved, it is important that those problems are identified at an early stage and brought into the open in a culturally sensitive way. Tackling mental health problems is also important because of the interaction between (mental and physical) health and activities in other areas of life, such as education, finding work, establishing social relationships and learning the Dutch language. Targeting health problems at an early stage can thus make a major contribution to a person's position in many other spheres of life.

### Feeling welcome, sociocultural integration and mental health go hand in hand

Syrians who feel that the Netherlands offers a favourable climate for migrants are more open to contacts with Dutch natives and more often endorse progressive values. This sociocultural 'connection' is also positively associated with better mental health, more active forms of participation and the intention to stay in the Netherlands. It is plausible that people who intend to stay will make a greater effort to integrate. It is concerning that highly educated permit holders, in particular, have a negative perception of the social climate towards migrants in the Netherlands and for this reason are less inclined to stay. It is thus important to keep permit holders fully included, engaged and involved. This will not be an easy challenge for policy: the goal is an inclusive society with no discrimination and with frequent social interaction between different groups, but this is difficult to achieve in practice, if for no other reason than due to differences in language, culture and religion. Promoting participation in the labour market is an important driver in achieving these goals. Helping permit holders to find work can help increase their social contacts and make them feel more at home in the Netherlands. It can also help reduce mental health problems which, as this study shows, are triggered among other things by financial problems. Helping permit holders find work continues to present the biggest policy challenge for the coming years.

## Notes

1 In our study, these are persons who received asylum status between 1 January 2014 and 1 July 2016, but who did not themselves come to the Netherlands for family reunification or as dependants.

2 The five forms of participation are 1) paid employment or looking for employment; 2) being on an internship; 3) being enrolled in regular education; 4) following a language course; and 5) volunteer work. The routing through the questionnaire meant it was not possible for 'paid employment´ and 'looking for employment' to occur simultaneously.

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