

## **Prof. Dr. Jaco Dagevos, Syrians in the Netherlands: the first years of their post-flight lives**

**Keynote speech at the 11th Global Conference of the Forum for Economists International, Amsterdam, May 25, 2019**

An estimated 13 million Syrians have fled from their homes since the outbreak of the civil war in the spring of 2011, about 60 percent of Syria's population before the conflict. Most displaced Syrians live in neighbouring countries in the Middle East and in North Africa, with about 3.4 million in Turkey, 1 million in Lebanon and 660,000 in Jordan. About 1 million displaced Syrians have fled to Europe since the conflict started. Germany, with over 500,000 Syrians and Sweden with more than 110,000 Syrians are Europe's top receiving countries.

The recent influx of large numbers of refugees in Europe is also evident in the Netherlands. Since 2014, the influx of refugees in the Netherlands has increased significantly, with a peak in the autumn of 2015. The majority are Syrians.

In order to examine the position of the Syrian newcomers in Dutch society and the barriers to their integration in the Netherlands, the Netherlands Institute of Policy Research (SCP) conducted a survey among refugees who obtained an asylum status (and therefore a 5 year residence permit) between 1 January 2014 and 1 July 2016.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to gain an early understanding of the characteristics and position of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands and follow them over time. This survey collects information on the first steps of refugees into the Dutch society and helps to formulate policy recommendations.

In my presentation I describe our fieldwork approach and present the key descriptive findings of the survey. The survey shows that Syrians are just beginning to make their way into Dutch society. Participation in the Dutch labor market is currently a bridge too far; the great majority depend on welfare benefits. Syrians are rather satisfied with their lives in the Netherlands, the majority report that they have (at least) weekly contact with native Dutch and they are preoccupied by learning the Dutch language. There is, however, frequent incidence of mental health problems. Syrians resemble earlier refugee groups in many respects, which gives little cause for optimism concerning their prospects, as the integration of earlier refugee groups in the Netherlands has generally proved to be fraught with difficulty. All in all, the integration of Syrians in the Dutch society still has a long way to go, which calls for targeted and effective policy efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> We studied Syrian residence permit holders. For the sake of readability, in this article we simply refer to them as either refugees or Syrians.