

The cabinet's plans on naturalization and integration

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As previously announced in the [framework agreement](#), the [Schoof cabinet's coalition program](#) includes several plans related to naturalization and nationality that, taken together, will complicate access to Dutch citizenship and facilitate its loss. This "Residence Blog" provides an overview of these plans, the legal bottlenecks, and the expected effects.

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The naturalization period.

First, there is the intention to extend the standard period for naturalization from the current five years to ten years: thus doubling it. The current Kingdom Act on Dutch Nationality stipulates that the naturalized person (the person wishing to naturalize) "must have been admitted and have had principal residence in the European part of the Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, or the public bodies of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba for at least five years immediately preceding the application" ([Article 8, paragraph 1, sub c, of the Nationality of the Netherlands](#)). Deviating, shorter periods than these five years apply, among others, to persons married to or cohabiting with a Dutch national, to former Dutch nationals, and to persons who have had admission and have had principal residence in the territory of the Kingdom for ten years (Article 8, paragraphs 2 through 5, of the Nationality of the Netherlands). This concerns the period of residence before a naturalization application can be submitted. In addition, there is a statutory decision period of one year within which the Immigration and Naturalization Service ([IND](#)) must have decided on a naturalization application. In almost all cases ([98%](#)), this deadline is met. The naturalized person is then required to attend a [naturalization ceremony](#) organized by the municipality and sign a declaration of commitment. Only then is naturalization finalized.

The current five-year residency period has been in the Dutch Nationality Act since 1892. In 2014, the first discussion about extending this period arose. A [seven-year](#) period was proposed in the Rutte II government's coalition agreement. Although the minister admitted at the time that any period is somewhat arbitrary, an extension was [deemed necessary](#) to

ensure sufficient time to integrate into Dutch society. According to the [Explanatory Memorandum](#), research shows that even those who have fulfilled the civic integration requirement "have not yet achieved the fullest form of participation in society." The bill was [passed](#) by the House of Representatives but rejected by the Senate. It is legally possible to extend the residency period for naturalization. Ten years is the maximum permitted period under the European Convention on Nationality ([Article 6, paragraph 3, ECN](#)) of the Council of Europe , which the Netherlands has ratified.

Renouncing one's original nationality.

According to the coalition agreement, renouncing one's original nationality after acquiring Dutch citizenship is "the objective." This so-called renunciation obligation is already enshrined in law. Naturalized persons must relinquish their original nationality, unless this cannot reasonably be expected, according to Article 9, paragraph 1, sub b, of the Dutch Nationality Act (RWN). The Netherlands is one of the few EU countries that requires renunciation. [Germany](#), however, recently began accepting dual nationality.

Refugees (Article 9, paragraph 3, sub d, of the Nationality of the Netherlands) and individuals who cannot renounce their original nationality because the state in question does not permit it can retain their nationality. This stems from international obligations: Article 16 of the Nationality of the Netherlands stipulates that renunciation of the previous nationality may not be requested if this is not possible or cannot reasonably be expected. Almost a quarter of naturalized individuals do not renounce their other nationality because this is not possible (see table).

Under current law, individuals born in the Netherlands and having their primary residence there, as well as those married to or in a registered partnership with a Dutch citizen, are not required to renounce their original nationality (Article 9, paragraph 3, sub b and c, of the Netherlands Nationality Act). Incidentally, most dual nationalities are acquired [automatically at birth](#) , not through naturalization . According to Article 14 of the Nationality Act, individuals who have acquired dual nationality by birth must be allowed to retain it. This means that even if the government were to require more naturalized individuals to renounce their original nationality, which is only possible to a limited extent, dual nationality would still persist.

Relinquishment requirement for naturalized persons in 2014-2017

Relinquishment obligation	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total	%
Automatic loss of nationality	6,490	5,245	3,146	2,901	17,782	19%
No automatic loss, distance is possible	11,909	9,045	9,001	8,241	38,169	42%
No automatic loss, distance is not possible	4,253	4,864	6,099	5,155	20,371	22%
Other or unknown	3,792	3,859	3,822	3,898	15,371	17%
Total	26,444	23,013	22,068	20,195	91,720	100%

Source: IND (2018), Naturalization and Option Monitor 2014-2017. More recent figures are not available.

Civic Integration.

Then there is the intention to raise the language requirement for naturalization to B1 for everyone, "in principle." Shortly after the publication of the general agreement, this intention was confirmed by [the Becker motion](#), which was adopted by a majority in the House of Representatives. In the debate, [Becker defended](#) the motion by referring to the intention to extend the naturalization period to 10 years, giving people more time to learn Dutch.

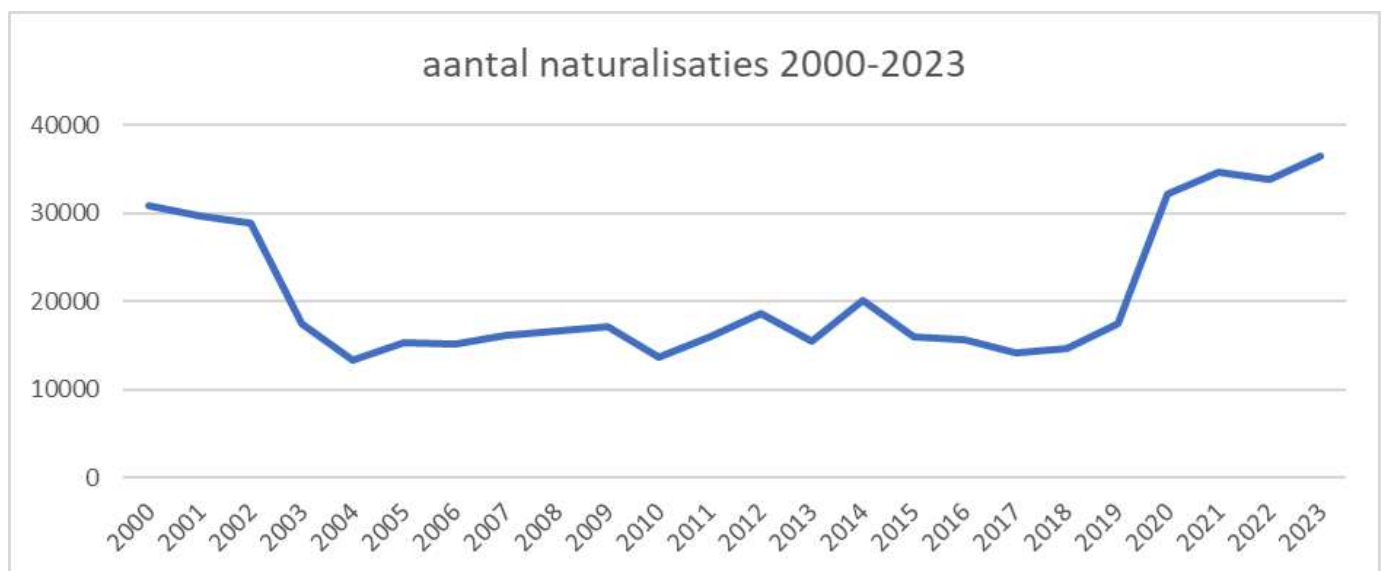
[The Rutte III coalition agreement](#) also included the intention to raise the language proficiency level for naturalization to B1. This intention was abandoned when it became clear that raising the proficiency level would lead to additional costs for which [no funding](#) was available at the time.

Naturalization required the integration exam under the Civic Integration Act (Wi)—or a comparable diploma. Until the [new Civic Integration Act](#) came into effect on January 1, 2022 (Wi2021), everyone who had fulfilled their civic integration obligation, or was exempt from it, generally met the integration requirement for naturalization. The standard level for this exam—until January 1, 2022—was A2, which had already proven unattainable for a significant number of those subject to the civic integration requirement (see below). With the introduction of Wi2021, the civic integration level for newcomers was raised to B1. Under strict conditions, someone [at the lower A2 level can take the exam](#). If the intention in the coalition agreement is translated into law, only those who achieved level B1 during the civic integration process will be eligible for naturalization. Others will have to achieve level B1 independently and with their own resources after completing the civic integration

process. This applies to both those who take the A2 exam and those who fulfill their civic integration obligation by completing the so-called "Z route." This route is intended for newcomers who will not be able to achieve A2 level within the statutory integration period of three years.

Since January 1, 2022, newcomers who have fulfilled the statutory civic integration requirement have not automatically met the civic integration requirement for naturalization. Regulations aligning with the Wi2021 are still being developed. Because raising the language requirement for naturalization to B1 requires an amendment to a general administrative measure, the other Kingdom countries must be consulted and approve the amendment in the Council of Ministers. Minister Faber [expects](#) the amendment process to take a year. Until then, an " [emergency decree](#) " has been issued to allow those who passed the civic integration exam under the Wi2013 regime, or who are exempted or released from the civic integration requirement under this law, to still submit a naturalization application.

It is expected that the number of naturalizations will decline after the language proficiency level has been raised. This already happened in 2003 when the informal interview with a municipal official was replaced by a formalized naturalization test at A2 level. This led to a halving of the number of naturalizations. It would take a long time for this effect to fade away (see graph).



Source: CBS

The naturalization rate, i.e., the number of naturalizations as a percentage of the total number of foreigners, also decreased after the introduction of the naturalization test. This shows that changes in the number of migrants coming to the Netherlands [do not explain](#) the decline in the absolute number of naturalizations.

Figures on the civic integration exam (which also serves as a naturalization test) show that the exam is a stumbling block. Over the years, the pass rate for the exam has decreased from [79%](#) under the Wi2007 to [41%](#) under the Wi2013. [Research](#) shows that certain categories of migrants in particular—the elderly, disadvantaged women, traumatized refugees, and people with little or no education—have difficulty meeting the language and integration requirements. The cause of failure lies not in unwillingness but [inability](#), stemming from a lack of education, illness, overwork, and psychological problems. With the increase to B1, the number of migrants who cannot meet the civic integration requirement and therefore cannot naturalize is expected to rise further. The proposed increase in the level conflicts with Article 34 of the [Refugee Convention](#), which stipulates that states shall facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees as far as possible.

Revocation of Dutch Citizenship:

The measures discussed above restrict access to Dutch citizenship. Revocation of Dutch citizenship is another important topic addressed in the coalition agreement. Under current law, revocation of Dutch citizenship is possible for several crimes with a terrorist motive and for so-called "jihadist travelers" (Article 14, paragraphs 2 and 4, of the Netherlands Nationality Act). According to the coalition agreement, the government intends to investigate whether revocation is also possible for "ordinary," i.e., non-terrorist, crimes.

However, revoking nationality on the grounds of non-terrorist offenses is explicitly excluded by the [European Convention on Nationality](#) (ECN). According to [Article 7, paragraph 1\(d\), ECN](#), revocation is only possible in cases of "[conduct seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the State party](#)," such as espionage or working for a foreign secret service. "Ordinary" offenses, however serious, are explicitly excluded. The government itself acknowledges that the ECN does not permit revocation on the grounds of ordinary offenses. Therefore, the coalition agreement states that the need to amend the ECN must be assessed. This also requires the cooperation of other Member States, which makes the plan seem unrealistic.

Moreover, revocation of Dutch citizenship is only possible for people who hold a second nationality in addition to Dutch. Otherwise, a person becomes stateless upon revocation of their nationality, something the Netherlands is obligated to prevent under [international obligations](#). Therefore, any expansion of the possibility of revocation of Dutch citizenship – even more so than is currently the case – would create different categories of Dutch citizens: a group whose Dutch citizenship cannot be revoked and a group with dual nationality (often with a migration background) for whom Dutch citizenship is never a secure possession.

Concluding remarks:

According to its coalition program, the cabinet "stands for an open and free society and is making an extra effort to promote integration, including civic integration. A society in which we all have equal opportunities, including employment." The proposals discussed here will hinder access to Dutch citizenship. This does not promote integration. Naturalization not only entails legal equality and political rights (the right to vote) but also promotes integration in the broader sense. For example, migrants who naturalize are [more likely to have better jobs](#) . Creating a society in which everyone has equal opportunities requires opening up access to citizenship, not restricting it.

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