

Over me

I am an engineer from a middle eastern background. I did my full university education here, carried educational tasks at a certain university and am currently working for a tech company. I've been in The Netherlands for longer than a decade, got naturalized, reached C1 level in Dutch, and yet, I choose to communicate in English. I support the bill, but it is far from enough. Naturalization is not going to happen because you've simply made somebody live in The Netherlands for longer. Read through to see the Arab community from an insider's perspective.

Two categories

Coming from a Middle Eastern background, I personally know plenty of people who share origins and culture, and see two distinct groups.

The first consists of highly skilled knowledge workers who contribute meaningfully to the economy. The second consists of people with no qualifications whose ambitions revolve around social benefits, family reunification, and informal channels that encourage further migration. A uniform naturalization timeline ignores these structural differences. Policy should explicitly distinguish between productive, skilled migrants and others whose presence produces persistent dependency.

Not even universities aid naturalization

My education was in English and my work environments were and are English-centered. In higher education, naturalization barriers are significant.

I am first-hand familiar with cases where (1) a program is offered in Dutch and English, and (2) where only English-based classes are offered, the Dutch people end up learning in English. For (1), the Dutch and the internationals are clumped up in different classes. Integration will never occur. For (2), the international and Dutch circles rarely if ever intermix meaningfully. Even in close proximity and attending the same classes, whenever a certain culture, be that Dutch, Indian, or Arab, exceeds some threshold, they bond together in impenetrable, tightly-knit circles.

There are lots of opportunities for cultures to mix up. The people who tend to make use of these, are by prior selection open-minded. A significant majority shies away and will not show meaningful cross-culture interaction lest actively and repeatedly embedded in such situations through intentional mixing for mandatory groupwork and assignments.

University students are the cream of society, the most open-minded and the future major players in society. It often predicts the social and cultural atmosphere decades into the future. If integration fails at universities, it will fail everywhere.

With parallel societies, no number of decades suffices

In my city, entire streets function as non-Dutch harbors. I walk into shops and speak Arabic. I know barbers there who've been in The Netherlands for years and years, and barely speak any Dutch, or English for that matter. These clusters deliver so much social and cultural life that little interaction is needed outside of them, and little opportunity for integration. 10 or 40 years will make little difference when you have an ongoing parallel community.

Dutch-taught education is one gatekeeper

Despite having been here for a decade myself, I still feel like an outsider to the Dutch community. My own non-Dutch circles are sizeable, stable, and reaching enough that the gap is unmendable. My biggest regret is not having done my university education in Dutch. If time would go back, I'd take a year to master the language through courses and a basic service job, then join a Dutch-taught technical program. I have observed some people who integrate properly and feel accepted by the natives: those who communicate with them in Dutch.

Myself, and plenty I personally know who've been here for many years, aim for minimum language requirements needed for naturalization or as resumé decor. Once the certificate is obtained, the language is abandoned. The only real way to ensure people use the Dutch language, is to make sure that they need it. The tech industry in general is a massive English-speaking parallel society of its own accord. It's an economical backbone nonetheless, and therefore I see no solution but to accept the status quo, and again make amendments that ease up processes for the highly educated.

Concrete suggestions

This bill helps, but is insufficient. It requires:

At national level: favorable differentiation of highly-skilled migrants, and policies to enforce Dutch-taught education.

At university level: an active eye for snowballing ethnical/ cultural groups, and the targeting of it with randomized or intentionally heterogenous group work, in particular for mandatory activities such as assignments and group projects.

At municipal level: the avoidance of mono-cultural streets. Language cafés and buttery initiatives are again subject to prior selection, and therefore ineffective. Perhaps even the non-licensing of businesses before the owner demonstrates working proficiency (or even higher, because it rarely is the case that certified working proficiency is actually sufficient). This is shaky legal grounds, so I do not volunteer more on methods of application.

At individual level: It is easy to shift the burden to an individual moral failure, but that has not helped and will not help. People, including myself, will always opt for the short-term easier route. Should you want true integration, you have to enforce it through systematic policies before individuals place themselves at a disadvantage by venturing into unchartered communities, setting aside a year of their life to learn the language, or pursue education in a language where their expressive capacities are at half of their native or second language.

Should a reader of this comment have interest in continuing this conversation, I am reachable through my LinkedIn profile at [/in/robert-k-37a869398/](#).