



Running out of time, while the integration was paused for two years

**A retrospective study into the linguistic, social and
economic experiences of status holders in the
Netherlands during COVID-19**

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During the past years, I have developed an interest in the situation of status holders in the Netherlands through volunteer work and during my studies. Once I had to choose the topic of my Master's thesis, it was not hard to decide on the topic as we were in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and I regularly read about the challenges of status holders during this period.

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Abstract

This qualitative research aims to provide insights into the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19. In this retrospective study, ten interviews with status holders and six interviews with professionals from societal or municipal organisations working for status holders were conducted. The results reveal that during online formal language classes status holders experienced a disruption of their learning progress and their functional social contact with other students and teachers. Status holders had sufficient digital access and acquired sufficient digital skills and knowledge to participate in online formal language classes, but not every status holder was initially perceived by interviewed professionals to have sufficient digital skills and knowledge to participate in online formal language classes. Status holders experienced continuing social bonds with family outside the Netherlands (through online communication) and family living nearby in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, status holders experienced difficulties with maintaining and establishing social bonds with other status holders, with diverse (such as Dutch) people in society and with (social) institutions due to COVID-19 measures that restricted in-person meetings. Status holders expressed difficulty with communicating in Dutch during phone calls. Only one interviewed status holder was engaged in paid work at the start of COVID-19, but lost her job during COVID-19. Some other status holders were engaged in volunteer work during COVID-19, which they considered to be important in order to practice the Dutch language and feel useful. In addition to the predetermined research question, status holders provided additional insights about their experiences during COVID-19, emphasising their challenges during the arrival in the Netherlands, decreasing language proficiency due to limited opportunities to practise Dutch, and pressurised well-being and mental health during COVID-19. This research extends prior literature by applying a rarely used perspective namely that of status holders, instead of the perspective of professionals speaking on behalf of status holders. My unique sample provides insight in the experiences of status holders in the Netherlands, and that the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders may not fully represent the most important aspects of the integration process of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem statement

Every year thousands of refugees and asylum seekers undertake dangerous journeys to Europe, fleeing from war or persecution in their country of origin. In 2021, over 123,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe (UNHCR, 2022). Journeys are often dangerous due to long overseas journeys in small boats or smuggling strategies. A significant number of people who start this journey to Europe, do not even reach Europe as thousands lose their lives or go missing during their journey (UNHCR, 2017). In 2021, at least 3,130 – but possibly even more – people died or went missing during their journey to Europe (UNHCR, 2022). Once in Europe, refugees and asylum seekers have to face border protection programs, crowded asylum centres and lengthy asylum procedures. Their situation remains difficult once they reach their destination country, as in European society they have to deal with unfavourable treatment in education, employment, access to healthcare and housing, discrimination, prejudices and racism (European Union, 2021).

From the moment the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe (at the start of 2020), refugees and asylum seekers in European countries had to deal with an additional challenge; the COVID-19 virus was first discovered in Wuhan (China) in December 2019. In March 2020 the virus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022). The WHO defined the pandemic as “a global outbreak of coronavirus, an infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus” (WHO, 2022). COVID-19 turned into a global health crisis and countries all over the world decided to take measures restricting social, economic and educational life to control the situation. In response to the situation, the Netherlands announced a so-called ‘intelligent lockdown’ in March 2020. Among the first general measures were washing hands regularly, sneezing and coughing in the elbow and not shaking hands with others. The Dutch government decided that schools had to close temporarily and switch to online education, while for example daycare and restaurants also had to close. Also, when possible, people were strongly advised to work from home.

Although COVID-19 affected everyone in society, vulnerable groups such as refugees and migrants were affected more. Refugees and migrants are considered vulnerable people because most of them are people with a labour market disadvantage, less likely to have a job and more dependent on social benefits (Tang & Li, 2021; Wang, 2020). Additionally, the integration process of migrants and refugees was harder during the COVID-19 crisis (European Commission, 2021). In the specific case of status holders in the Netherlands – “asylum seekers become status holders once they receive a residence permit and consequently become part of the Dutch society” (Ministerie van Justitie, 2022) – COVID-19 measures limited the possibilities to participate and integrate into society (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022).

The language deficiency of status holders made it hard to understand government measures (e.g. in the Netherlands difficult terms such as ‘social distancing’, ‘infection rate’ and ‘intelligent lockdown’ were used for communication) and to ask for (medical) support. Also, building social networks was challenging with restrictions in place to stay at home and social distancing (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021). Moreover, status holders were disproportionately affected concerning infection or mortality due to COVID-19 (KIS, 2021b; Pharos, 2021). During the first wave of COVID-19, people with a migration background had a two to three times higher chance to end up in the hospital (compared to people without a migration background) due to a COVID-19 infection (KIS, 2021b) and a 150% higher chance to pass away as a result of a COVID-19 infection (Pharos, 2021). During the second wave of COVID-19, people with a migration background had a two to four times higher chance to become infected with COVID-19 (KIS, 2021b). Besides status holders already had a labour market disadvantage before COVID-19 in their first years in the Netherlands. If status holders were able to find

work during COVID-19, it was often in precarious labour situations, where they were relatively exposed to the virus, often with on-call or short-term contracts which are easily terminated (CBS, 2021).

Despite research by the Dutch government (Ministerie van Social Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021) and societal organisations (e.g. Pharos, KIS) on the vulnerabilities of status holders, more effort and knowledge are needed to prevent status holders from being disproportionately affected during the continuing COVID-19 crisis or future crises (KIS, 2021b). Previous research about the implications of COVID-19 for status holders in the Netherlands has mainly focused on readily available statistics, e.g. infection rates or the number of completed integration trajectories during COVID-19. Other studies have called for more research on how migrants have coped with the changes and challenges due to COVID-19 measures (Yen et al., 2021; Barker, 2021). What lacks in previous research is the voice of status holders themselves. Only one study examined the experiences of status holders with different backgrounds in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of status holders themselves, using a limited sample of three status holders and two professionals (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022).

Thus, new insights into the experiences of status holders in the Netherlands since the widespread presence of COVID-19 and the accompanying implication would add to existing research in the Netherlands and beyond. To get a better view of the experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic, ten interviews were held with a total of thirteen status holders and six interviews were held with professionals from societal and municipal organisations working for status holders. This is a retrospective study, meaning that status holders share their memories of past experiences during COVID-19. This research is focused on three concepts: linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders. The linguistic experiences are targeted at their experiences regarding formal language lessons since COVID-19.

1.2. Research objectives

This research has two main objectives, the first one being more theoretically oriented and the second one more practically:

1. To add new insights about the formal language lessons, and social and economic experiences of status holders during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands, to national and international literature by focusing on theoretical concepts such as integration, language education, digital division, social capital and precarious work.
2. To provide social networks, social organisations, municipalities and the government with insights into the lived experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19, by giving voices to status holders themselves and professionals working for them in societal or municipal organisations.

1.3. Research questions

Based on the problem statement and research objectives, the main research question (RQ) of this research is: *How were the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands in the context of COVID-19?*

The resulting sub-questions (SQ) are:

SQ 1. How did status holders in the Netherlands experience formal language lessons since COVID-19?

SQ 2. How did status holders in the Netherlands experience social bonds, bridges and links during COVID-19?

SQ 3. How did status holders in the Netherlands experience work during COVID-19?

1.4. Thesis outline

The structure of this thesis is as follows. The first chapter introduced the problem statement, research objectives, RQ and SQs. The second chapter provides contextual information about the definition of status holders and their formal integration process, and reviews previous studies into the linguistic, social and economic experiences of refugees and asylum seekers more broadly, and status holders in the Netherlands before and during COVID-19. The third chapter contains an explanation of the methodological approach. The fourth chapter contains the results of the interviews with status holders and professionals. Lastly, the fifth chapter presents the resulting discussion and conclusions.

2. Conceptual framework

First, this chapter explains the terminological difference between migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and status holders. Subsequently, this chapter elaborates on the Dutch integration policy and process for status holders in the Netherlands. Second, I will touch upon earlier literature and conceptual debates related to the linguistic, social and economic experiences of refugees, migrants and status holders before and since COVID-19.

Barker (2021, p.34) provides four aspects of social integration: “a) forming social networks, b) developing a sense of belonging, c) linking social integration to the workplace, and d) language learning”. To adjust the four aspects of social integration to the context of status holders in the Netherlands, I use a previously published report about the impact of COVID-19 on status holders in the Netherlands from the Dutch government (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021). The report of the Dutch government emphasises the linguistic, social, and economic aspects of status holders’ integration experience during COVID-19. As these three aspects are mentioned as having the most profound impact on the lives and integration of status holders during COVID-19, my research focuses on three out of the four aspects from the social integration framework proposed by Barker (2021): linguistic experiences (related to formal language learning), social experiences (related to social networks consisting of social bonds, bridges and links), and economic experiences (related to (volunteer-)work).

2.1. Context

This paragraph first provides definitions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in general and a more specific definition of status holders in the Netherlands. Second, this paragraph explains the integration policy and process for status holders in the Netherlands.

2.1.1. Refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and status holders

In migration research, different terms are used to identify people that are – for different reasons – on the move. The terms refugee, asylum seeker or migrant are used often and sometimes interchangeably. However, the definition of these respective terms is not always clear or agreed upon in policy and research.¹ In this research, I use the definitions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

First, a refugee is defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention as, “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR, n.d.).

Second, asylum seekers are defined as “people on the move and seeking international protection, before a decision is made about their appeal for refugee status”. In their country of arrival, asylum seekers must prove they fulfil the criteria to receive protection as a refugee (UNHCR Nederland, 2022a).

¹ The definitions of ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ are contested because there is a large debate about what defines refugees and migrants. Legal texts and public narratives consist of binaries such as legal and illegal migrants, and or migrant and refugee (Hamlin, 2022). Not only media, but also politicians and NGOs (such as UNHCR) put the terms ‘migrants’ and ‘refugees’ in binary position. The term ‘refugee’ carries a legal meaning, defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, the term ‘refugee’ is often applied to a much broader category of people. Besides, Scalettaris (2007, p.39) argues that, “a clear-cut distinction between ‘forced migration’ (‘refugees’) and ‘non-forced migration’ (‘migrants’) does not account for the way migratory processes actually work and take place in the real world”. In more recent debates, new terminology tries to sidestep the loaded political connotation of the terms. In research of e.g. the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the term ‘vulnerable migrant’ replaces ‘refugee’, “to refer to people needing protection and assistance, even if they are not refugees, including victims of trafficking” (Hamlin, 2022). New terms seem to be more inclusive, but lack a legal meaning. Hemlin (2022) argues that “the terms are meant to remind people that there are individuals deserving of care and compassion who do not fit the legal definition of a refugee” (Hamlin, 2022).

Third, the term migrant is used for “people who move from place to place inside or outside country borders, for example, because of (seasonal) labour, education or family”. Most of these migrants are not forced to leave their country of origin but leave in hope and search of better chances. They are free to return to their country of origin whenever they want (UNHCR Nederland, 2022b).

Fourth, I define the term status holders. When asylum seekers and refugees reach the Netherlands, they apply for a residence permit and wait for approval of the respective permit in asylum centres (translated in Dutch as ‘asielzoekerscentrum’, hereafter indicated as ‘AZC’). In the Netherlands, the Immigration- and Naturalisation Office (IND) investigates and decides whether an asylum seeker is to be acknowledged as a refugee. Asylum seekers who are acknowledged as a refugee, receive the ‘refugee status’. Once refugees and asylum seekers are granted a residence permit, they are called ‘statushouder’ in Dutch (in this research translated to ‘status holder’ in English) and enrol in a formal integration trajectory for the Netherlands. Although this research explicitly concerns status holders, sometimes the term refugee, asylum seeker or migrant is used in this chapter – the conceptual framework – when information does not specifically concern status holders in the Netherlands but refugees, asylum seekers or migrants more generally.

In the Netherlands, a total of 184,000 refugees and asylum seekers received a residence permit between 2014 and the first half of 2021 (this number also contains family reunification) (CBS, 2022). Figure 1 shows the number of issued residence permits by nationality between 2014 and the first half of 2021 (CBS, 2022).

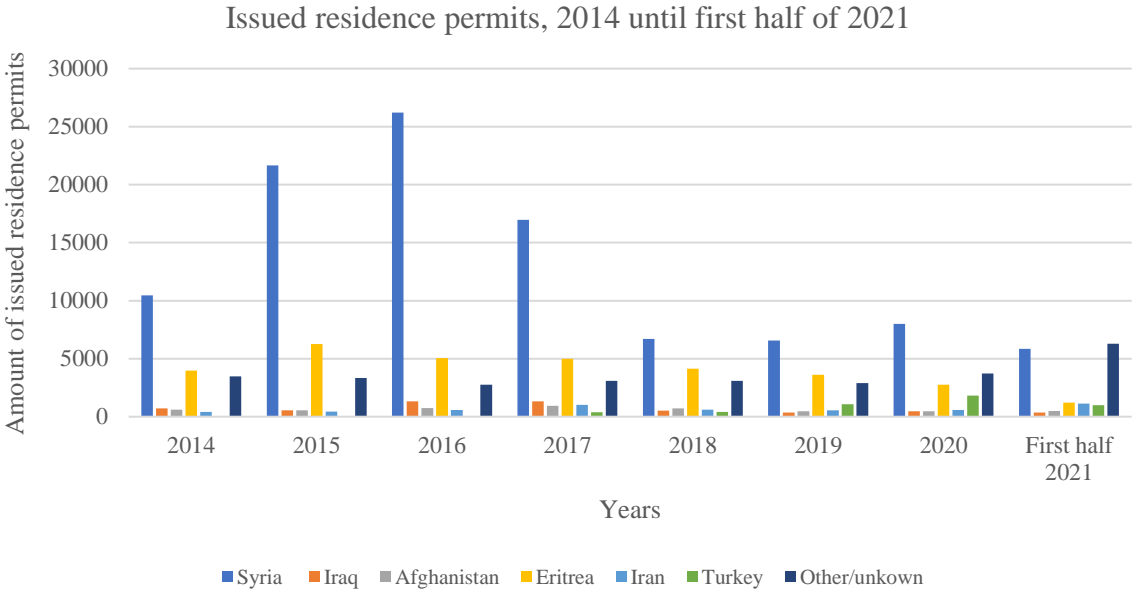


Figure 1. Number of issued residence permits by nationality (CBS, 2022)

To end this section, it is important to remark that status holders are not a homogenous group. Status holders differ in gender, income, family status, educational status, duration of stay in the Netherlands and knowledge of the Dutch and English languages (Tang & Li, 2021; Woldeyesus, 2020). Although there might be similarities, the experiences of status holders are most certainly different for every person.

2.1.2. Formal integration policy and process in the Netherlands

The UNHCR defines integration as, “A mutual, dynamic, multifaceted and ongoing process. From a refugee perspective, integration requires preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one’s own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a

willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population” (UNHCR, 2011). Yet how integration is defined by researchers, people and politics vary widely in every context (Alfred, 2017). The next paragraphs shortly introduce the development of integration policy and process for status holders in the Netherlands.

Since 1998, status holders in the Netherlands are obligated to participate in the integration process, to reach a certain degree of independence – especially in the context of the Dutch language. More recently, on January 1 2022, a new Integration Law was implemented in the Netherlands. However, the interviewed status holders for my research are all subject to the Integration Law introduced in 2013, and therefore the requirements of this respective law are discussed hereafter.

Under the Integration Law of 2013, integration participants themselves became responsible to arrange their integration process. Integration participants have to apply for integration courses and exams themselves. If needed, integration participants can receive funding for the language courses and exams through a loan program. Status holders do not have to repay the loan if they complete their integration exams within three years.

As of January 1 2013, status holders have to participate in one of the three courses outlined below (refer to Figure 2) and complete an exam referred to as ‘Knowledge of the Dutch society’ (in Dutch ‘Kennis van de Nederlandse Maatschappij’) (DUO, n.d.).

Dutch as second langague (NT2) course	Integration course	Literacy course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status holders who want to study or work in the Netherlands • Program 1 (B1-level): study or work at mbo 3 level, or mbo 4 level • Program 2 (B2-level): study or work at hbo- or university-level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status holders who want to learn Dutch for everyday conversations • Program: A2-level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status holders who cannot read or write • Program: learning how to read and write, in Dutch • Afterwards, the Integration course needs to be completed as well

Figure 2. Three integration courses (January 1, 2013 - January 1, 2022)

In addition to the initial outline of the 2013 Integration Law, two additional mandatory components were added in 2015 and 2017 (DUO, n.d.) (see Figure 3 for the mandatory exams with additions). Integration participants who started their integration process between January 1 2015 and October 1 2017, had to do one additional exam ‘Orientation on the Dutch labour market’ (in Dutch ‘Oriëntatie op de Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt’). Status holders who started their integration process between October 1 2017 and January 1 2022 are subject to an additional obligation: they had to sign the participation statement (in Dutch ‘participatieverklaring’). Thereby, status holders had to show their involvement in the Dutch society and their willingness to actively contribute to the society by completing training or workshops about, for instance, health or manners. Besides, municipalities provided integration participants with more social support, to familiarise status holders as soon as possible with their town of residence and the Dutch society (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2020).

Mandatory exams of Integration Law 2013, with additions	Dutch language, writing
	Dutch language, reading
	Dutch language, speaking
	Dutch language, listening
	Knowledge of the Dutch society
	Orientation on the Dutch labour market (from January 1, 2015)
	Participation statement trajectory (from October 1, 2017)

Figure 3. Mandatory exams of the Integration Law 2013, with additions (January 1, 2013, until January 1, 2022)

However, the Netherlands Court of Audit (in Dutch ‘Algemene Rekenkamer’) expressed heavy criticism towards the integration law (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017). They argued that integration participants needed more support at the start of their integration process, more information about the laws and regulations of integration, and a clearer overview of the course offerings. Besides, they argued that the government had to supervise the quality of integration courses. Moreover, the Netherlands Court of Audit argued that three years was too short for most status holders to complete the integration process (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017; Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2020).

According to the Dutch government, proper conduct of the integration process of status holders is important because the governmental vision is that through learning the Dutch language, status holders are enabled to participate in the Dutch society and have better job opportunities (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2022).

However, integration programs throughout Europe, including the Netherlands, are criticised for their restrictiveness and for their implicit goal of limiting migration (Blankvoort, Hartingsveldt, Rudma & Krumeich, 2021). Multiple researchers argue that the primary goal of obligatory integration policies and processes is aimed at restricting and controlling the inflow and settlement of migrants (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018; Blankvoort et al., 2021).

Pulinx & Van Avermaet (2017, p.60) argue that “In western Europe, present-day integration policies often make use of the notion ‘active citizenship’, aimed at encouraging migrants to participate socially, politically and economically in the host society. New members of society are not only expected to respect the law but in addition to making an active contribution to civil society initiatives”. This statement implies that the government and society have expectations about the meaning of good- and not-so-good citizens. Pulinx & Van Avermaet (2017, p.60) state that “The good citizen participates in the voluntary and associative sector, contributing to neighbourhood initiatives and integrating as fully as possible in the host society. The not-so-good citizen takes a more passive attitude towards life and society, looking primarily to the government and its institutions and not him/herself when action is required”. The fact that status holders have to take an integration course (consisting of a language course and a course in societal knowledge) means that they are not yet considered to be the ‘right’ kind of citizen. Moreover, European countries such as the Netherlands apply different policies to different types of migrants: refugees from outside Europe are obligated to integrate, while migrants from other European countries are fully exempted from any form of integration policy or process (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018).

2.1.3. Summary of the context

This subchapter defined refugees, asylum seekers, migrants in general and status holders in the Netherlands more specifically. As my research concerns status holders in the Netherlands, the understanding of this concept is highly relevant. Status holders are refugees or asylum seekers that were granted a residence permit. They start their integration process after they are accommodated in a home somewhere in the Netherlands. Consequently, their integration process is also explained based on

integration policies of the last two decades. Some researchers critique the process of integration in the Netherlands and other European countries. The critique focuses mainly on restrictive integration policies, in which status holders (in contrast to other types of migrants) are not directly included in society but need to pass exams about the Dutch language and society, to be considered as good-citizens and included in society.

2.2. Linguistic experiences

2.2.1. Formal language classes

Based on the policy-inspired perspective on integration, learning the language of the host country is required to participate in society and the labour market. Therefore, formal language lessons are often the central and most time-consuming part of the integration process (Barker, 2021). Before the Integration Law of 2022, in most cases status holders stopped their language learning process when they reached A2-level since that was the minimum level to pass the integration process. Status holders were divided over three different language learning levels: literacy course, civic integration course, or state exams NT2 (for status holders who at least finished high school in their country of origin and want to prepare for work or education in the Netherlands). However, according to the Netherlands Court of Audit, A2-level is a solid basis to participate in the Dutch society, but not always sufficient for participation in the labour market or education (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2020). Since the start of 2022, most status holders learn Dutch at B1-level while preparing for the labour market or education, whereas some status holders learn Dutch at A1-level (see Figure 4 for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)).

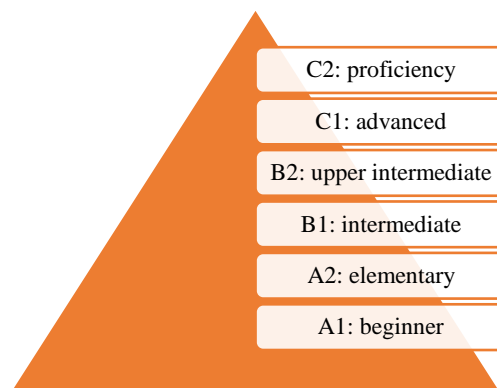


Figure 4. CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) levels (Council of Europe, n.d.)

Thus, based on Dutch politics, learning the Dutch language is an important part of the integration process (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2020). However, integration policy and the process and its linguistic component are considered controversial and politically loaded in prior literature.² Goullier (2007, p.18) critiqued that CEFR system, “The ways in which the CEFR [language system] is used have implications for social cohesion, access to employment, citizenship, mobility and mutual understanding in Europe”. Researchers are concerned about the unintended impact of this system (Tracy, 2017). Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers (2020, p.63) added, “For most societal or professional roles, one does not need to master each skill at the same level. A taxi driver or a kindergarten assistant might need oral skills (listening and

² García (2017, p.12) critiqued the consequences of integration policy, since it “often means no more than ensuring that migrants speak the language of the political state into which they come. The rationale for this position is that adult migrants cannot participate in the national society and its economy unless they speak the national language”. According to García (2017), linguistic integration of refugees and asylum seekers should not be a condition for meaningful participation in society. Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers (2020, p.61) expressed similar critique about language tests, “When used in migration and integration policies, however, it appears that tests are often used as if they measure integration, willingness to integrate or success in the integration process. It should be clear that the reasoning behind this is largely unsupported by research. The direct relationship between societal integration and language proficiency alone is not sustained by research”. Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers (2020) argued that ‘successful’ integration or willingness to integrate cannot be measured by language proficiency because it is impacted by a much wider range of variables (e.g. educational background, age, level of literacy, trauma).

speaking) at a higher level than the skills needed in reading and writing, for example. Since most learners perform better in receptive skills (reading and listening) than in productive skills (speaking and writing), and better in oral (listening and speaking) than in written modes (reading and writing), a lower threshold for writing would make the requirements more achievable for a larger group of learners. It should also be stressed that setting requirements in writing and reading skills discriminate against the most vulnerable of migrant groups: refugees and low-literate learners with limited prior schooling and low levels of literacy". Thus, researchers argue that the language learning system and linguistic requirements of integration policy in European countries such as the Netherlands could be more focused on the personal needs and plans of integration participants. The recent Dutch Integration Law 2022 seems to respond to such critique about vulnerable migrant groups with low levels of literacy, as it provides the opportunity for more vulnerable status holders to integrate through formal language classes and exams at A1-level.

2.2.2. Experiences with formal language lessons since COVID-19

Formal language classes – as part of the integration process of status holders – were disrupted because education was relocated to the online classroom. It took a while before language schools were opened again in an online format since the Dutch government waited some time before allowing online integration education (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2020). Once language schools opened for online education, the switch to online education was challenging for refugees, asylum seekers and language schools. Three consequences of online language education for integration participants are further explained:

First, refugees and asylum seekers were affected by the switch to online education because their language classes were important for social and emotional support and understanding of the pandemic to support their safety and stability (Primdahl, Borsch, Verelst, Jervelund, Derluyn & Skovdal, 2020; Barker, 2021). Besides, language classes are important settings where refugees and asylum seekers make connections outside the classroom developing social bonds, bridges and links (Barker, 2021). These concepts are elaborated on later, in Paragraph 2.3.1. With online language classes, the opportunities to build social connections with other students or teachers were greatly reduced.

Second, the switch to online language classes assumed that every refugee or asylum seeker had access to the Internet and knowledge about how to use the Internet for educational purposes. Unfortunately, this was not the case for many refugees and asylum seekers. The differences in digital access and knowledge among refugees and asylum seekers are related to the concept of the 'Digital Divide'. Earlier research about the digital divide relates to the haves and have-nots in the digital era, those who have access to and knowledge of the digital world, and those who have not (Hargittai, 2002). A recent article by Aissaoui (2020, p.1) about the digital divide in light of COVID-19 explained the digital divide as, "the gap in access to, use of or impact of information and communication technology between individuals, households and countries".

Although some refugees and asylum seekers have sufficient or even excellent digital skills and knowledge, many of them belong to more vulnerable groups with limited skills and limited confidence in using information and communication technology (Potocky, 2021). The IOM (2022) argued that during COVID-19, "migrants who lack access to online connectivity, digital devices and skills have been further isolated". However, it does not appear correct to generalise the statement that refugees and asylum seekers seriously lack digital access. An increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers have access to the Internet (through networks and devices), for instance, because it became increasingly less expensive in their countries of origin. In the 2010s, studies already showed that the use of the Internet and information and communication technologies is becoming increasingly common among refugees and asylum seekers (Jauhiainen, Eyvazlu, Junnila & Virnes, 2022). Thus, it seems there is widespread accessibility of the Internet globally, even in remote communities nowadays, but skills and knowledge of the Internet and information and communication technologies might be lacking among refugees and

asylum seekers (Verdi, 2020). Accordingly, Potocky (2021, p.99) argues that recent studies “confirm that refugees in resettlement generally have limited digital skills for necessary integration tasks such as navigating websites and accessing the credibility of online information”.

Third, another consequence of the switch to online education is the disruption of the learning progress of refugees and asylum seekers. Physically being present in class ensures a better understanding of the learning material and nonverbal communication (Badran, Elgershuizen, Malschaert & Driessen, 2021). Ying, Siang & Mohamad (2021, p.1507) researched the challenges of second language learners during COVID-19 and argue that “learners’ lack of confidence and communication through virtual lessons has made it much more difficult for them to speak or utter the words appropriately”. Already without online language classes, learners were scared to make mistakes while speaking the language of their host country because they (personally feel like they) lack adequate command of the language. Besides, the online classroom limits interaction with other language learners and the language teacher. However, two-way communication between students and teachers is difficult to achieve in an online environment. Moreover, Ying, Siang & Mohamed (2021, p.1507) argue that “learners feel demotivated to learn in such circumstances because they are constantly confronted with a computer”. Additionally, opportunities for status holders to practice Dutch outside their houses were limited due to social COVID-19 restrictions (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2020). In the Netherlands, some status holders even decided to pause their language courses (VluchtelingenWerk, 2020). VluchtelingenWerk (2020) suggests that status holders do not make the same progress in online formal language classes as in offline formal language classes and were therefore afraid to fail the exams – with the consequence of having to pay back their loans because the integration budget is limited and they might not succeed in time (VluchtelingenWerk, 2020). Besides, without the maintenance of their language proficiency refugees and asylum seekers had to make a substantial catch-up once physical language classes continued. In the meantime, their complete integration process (also social and economic integration) was disrupted since language proficiency is considered to be one of the main requirements for participation in society.

2.2.3. Summary of linguistic experiences

The linguistic part of the integration process of integration participants such as status holders in the Netherlands is – based on political perspective – considered to be one of the most, if not the most, important parts of the integration process. The language exams implicitly form a barrier which prevents integration participants from inclusion in society until successfully take each language exam. However, researchers heavily critique this political perspective on integration (Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers (2020; García, 2017). They argue that ‘successful’ integration is based on much more factors than becoming proficient in the host country’s language. Moreover, they argue that language integration policies do not sufficiently consider individual backgrounds, needs and plans. As such, policies set unequal requirements for integration participants.

Since COVID-19, integration participants such as status holders in the Netherlands have experienced different challenges regarding their linguistic integration process. The switch from offline to online language classes had three important consequences for integration participants. First, they might have missed making social connections with other students and teachers during the language lessons. Second, integration participants have different digital experiences, skills and knowledge so participating in online language lessons was probably easy for some, and harder for others. Third, online language lessons likely disrupted the learning progress of integration participants because among other reasons, they became more reluctant to speak and there was less interaction between students and teachers. Besides, opportunities to practice the language beyond the classroom were limited due to social COVID-19 restrictions. In the meantime, this disruption of the status holders’ learning progress had to be compensated for through additional learning efforts within the already limited time for completion of the integration process.

2.3. Social experiences

The social experiences of refugees and asylum seekers are researched through the concept of social capital. Social capital is built through social networks, that improve communication possibilities between network members (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2021). Social networks are created, operated and maintained by network members and used for sharing information, ideas, norms and values.

2.3.1. Social capital and networks: bonds, bridges and links

The theory of social capital is often used in research about the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. First, I briefly explain the historical conceptualisation of social capital. The concept of social capital is approached and interpreted differently in theory, research and practice (Buffel, Verté, Vyncke & Willems, 2009; Van Esch, Brandsma, Groenening & Dickhout, 2006). Most concepts of social capital are rather abstract. Social capital relates on the one hand to the social networks of an individual or community, and the other hand to the trust and reciprocity of social networks (Van Esch et al., 2006). Thus, social capital refers to the notion that social networks have value, for individuals, communities and society as a whole. The concept of social capital is not something coined recently. The concept traces back to classical theorists such as Emile Durkheim (van Esch et al., 2006). Three other well-known theorists have played an important role in the conceptualisation of social capital: Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

Bourdieu (1986) considers social capital to be a resource connected to an individual's membership in a larger group. Through social connections, social capital is a source to access economic and cultural resources. He focuses on social networks that provide access to resources within groups (Van Esch et al., 2006). Alternatively, Coleman (1988, 1990) considers social capital a 'public good' and a relational characteristic of people in certain communities and not so much as an individual asset. Coleman thus defines social capital as the aspects of social structures that support members of a community to take action (Van Esch et al., 2006). Putnam (1993, 2000) builds on the definition of Coleman but emphasises aspects of social capital such as trust, norms and networks, that facilitate mutual collaboration (Van Esch et al., 2006). Sociologist Robert Putnam (2000, p.19) defined social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that rise from them". Two elements are important in his definition: social networks, and norms of reciprocity and trust (Buffel et al., 2009). The value of social capital is higher for individuals with more differentiated social relations. Similarly, Dahinden (2013, p.44) argues that "networks with a high variety that includes diverse ties (i.e. at the same time 'strong and weak ties') which represent different forms of capital, embody more network capital than networks that are characterised by low variety".

These definitions of social capital imply either a contribution to collective benefit or individual benefit. However, social capital does not only have positive effects. Cavaye (2004) mentioned the 'dark side' of social capital. The more social capital, the better does not always hold. The 'dark side' of social capital is the potential exclusion of outsiders by socially homogeneous groups. Or, as Cavaye (2004, p.5) argues, "Social networks can also lock people into declining social sectors such as ethnic groups involved in low-wage informal work".

Three resulting concepts from social capital that are used more often in migration research, are social bonds, bridges and links (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2021; Buffel et al., 2009). First, "social bonds are connections that migrants form among family or co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national groups" (Barker, 2021, p.36) or in other words, "with others with a shared sense of identity" (Ndofo-Tah et al., 2019, p.17). Social bonds thus strengthen homogenous groups, with strong ties between people with predominantly the same socio-economic status and demographic characteristics (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2021). However, as Ndofo-Tah et al. (2019, p.17) argued, "it is important not to assume that groups sharing key characteristics – such as ethnicity, faith or national background – all benefit from bonding relationships". Social bonds are important in the integration process because they might prevent isolation (Ager & Strang, 2008; Ndofo-Tah et al., 2019). They also provide the possibility to exchange

practical and emotional support and to share cultural and social activities during which refugees' and asylum seekers' practices, religion, traditions and language can be preserved.

Second, "social bridges include a migrant's relationship with other diverse members within their community" (Barker, 2021, p.36). Social bridges exist between people from different backgrounds. So the demographic characteristics are less similar compared to social bonds, and different ethnicities, races and cultures are mixed. For refugees and asylum seekers, bridging social capital happens through dialogue and activity participation within and between immigrant communities and with members of the host society (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2021). Social bridges do not have the same levels of trust and reciprocity as social bonds but are sufficient enough to interact and exchange support (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019). Social bridges with members of the host society are important for refugees and asylum seekers; the friendliness of people they meet in their daily lives makes them feel 'at home', more secure and welcome. Not only occasional social contact but also the sustainable and longer-lasting involvement of local people seem to have longer-term social and economic benefits to refugees and asylum seekers (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Third, "social links are relationships to structures of the state" (Barker, 2021, p.36). Social links do not only include structures of the state because social links can also apply to links with other institutions and agencies such as non-governmental organisations or the private sector (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2021). Once the Dutch government issues refugees and asylum seekers a residence permit, different institutions are concerned with the integration process. Municipalities accommodate status holders and support them socially in their integration process (Oostveen & Razenberg, 2021). Additionally, there are numerous initiatives of societal organisations that provide status holders with additional support during their integration process, e.g. by organising activities and workshops. Therefore, social links might be important to access power, resources and participation in society. For equal access to services, social links require additional efforts from refugees and asylum seekers themselves and the society, to overcome barriers such as the lack of knowledge about the environment, or language deficiencies (Ager & Strang, 2008).

2.3.2. Social experiences since COVID-19

Existing research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all forms of social integration and social connections. Social support and connections are important for most refugees and asylum seekers, but lockdowns and social restrictions made it much harder to improve social networks by e.g. visiting neighbours, relatives and other outdoor activities (Babuç, 2021).

Refugees' and asylum seekers' ways of forming social bonds, bridges and links have changed due to the pandemic (Barker, 2021). Among other reasons, due to government restrictions on staying at home as much as possible – while status holders, in general, live with relatively large families in less spacious houses. Social bonds (with family) strengthened or weakened because some families indicate that it was pleasurable to spend more time together, but other families indicated that tensions occurred or increased (Babuç, 2021).

The forming of social bridges was disrupted by government restrictions such as the intelligent lockdown and stay-at-home orders (Ager & Strang, 2008). As a result of the restrictions, status holders were limited in their interaction with other society members. Some of their social contacts might have been adapted to online communication, but as already mentioned online communication is not equally accessible to everyone. Previous research (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022) explains that refugees and asylum seekers have much smaller networks than the average Dutch person and are therefore more likely to get isolated or lonely as their family is living far away or in an asylum centre. Research by Kox & Van Liempt, 2020b) also argued that "Some organisations fear that refugees might experience loneliness and become socially isolated". Thus, the decrease in social contacts makes dealing with the crisis and measures often relatively hard for refugees and asylum seekers (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022). Woldeyesus (2020) found that religion was very important for a lot of refugees and

asylum seekers during the COVID-19 crisis. Despite government restrictions, they still visited the church, to remain under ‘God’s protection against the virus’ (Woldeyesus, 2020). In the article by Woldeyesus (2020), it turns out that refugees’ and asylum seekers’ connection to their nationality and religion is an essential part of their social identity which influences their behaviour and decisions in the context of adhering to COVID-19 measures (or not).

Moreover, social links were hard to develop since government services were only available online therefore refugees and asylum seekers needed access to digital devices, and internet connections combined with digital literacy, to maintain or develop social links. Not only did status holders use social links to a lesser extent during COVID-19, but also municipalities reached out less to status holders during COVID-19 (KIS, 2021c). KIS (2021c) argued for instance that due to COVID-19 status holders received significantly less support in accessing the labour market. However, there is not much other context-specific information available about the challenges for status holders to maintain and establish social links during COVID-19.

Overall, the consequences of the pandemic have influenced refugees’ and asylum seekers’ social integration, since it was challenging to receive support from relatives and friends and the society at large (due to fewer social bonds and bridges), combined with more limited access to information and tools to support their integration (due to fewer social links) (Barker, 2021). In the end, integration often requires that people can build social networks and get involved in the Dutch society, but during the crisis, this was only possible to a lesser extent (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 measures might have had more impact on the social lives of female refugees and asylum seekers, since the possibilities of getting and maintaining contact were limited due to cultural norms. Research by Razenberg, Kahmann & De Gruijter (2018) shows that before COVID-19 physical gatherings exclusively for women were organised by local societal organisations, to share information and personal experiences. A societal organisation named Jude Foundation organised ‘Vrouwencafés’ (translated ‘Womencafés’) where refugee women and Dutch women engaged in conversations about certain themes such as talents, habits and pregnancy (Jude Foundation, 2022). Another societal organisation, Stichting Mano, organised an event called ‘Storytelling’, where women in groups of eight to ten shared their life stories and discussed how they can represent themselves and their life stories (Stichting Mano, 2022). These gatherings played an important role in the social lives of female refugees and asylum seekers, but during lockdowns, these activities were not easily changed into online alternatives (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022).

However, although social integration during the COVID-19 crisis was challenging, Badran and colleagues (2021) found that refugees and asylum seekers also showed agency in handling these challenges. They appealed to their social network for help: people in the church community, friends, relatives or a language buddy. They asked for help for diverse reasons: doing groceries, translating information and letters, helping their children or lending money. Asking for help is sometimes easier said than done because refugees and asylum seekers are usually not used to asking for help. The Dutch society has an individualistic nature, with less sense of community in comparison to what most refugees and asylum seekers were used to in their country of origin (Badran et al., 2021). Additionally, refugees and asylum seekers often tried to assist others during the crisis as well. Many were involved in social networks and tried to help others by providing information and support. This also helped to build social activities and contacts in the Netherlands. Their social connections in the Netherlands offered them the opportunity to help others, while refugees and asylum seekers can experience feelings of frustration and powerlessness because they can do little for family and friends in their country of origin (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022).

2.3.3. Summary of social experiences

In this subchapter social experiences of refugees, asylum seekers, and status holders in the Netherlands were framed through social capital theory. First, this subchapter conceptualised social capital theory.

Consequently, it explained three resulting concepts of social capital: social bonds (connections with family or co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national groups), social bridges (connections to diverse members of the society with different backgrounds) and social links (connections to institutions such as the government or societal organisations). These three concepts form the social connections, networks, and capital of status holders in the Netherlands.

COVID-19 likely influenced the social experiences of refugees, asylum seekers, and status holders in the Netherlands to a certain extent. Government-imposed measures restricted social contact and therefore it was challenging to maintain and build social capital. The quality of social bonds presumably either increased or decreased, as families were suddenly full-time dependent on each other inside their homes. Moreover, social bridges were hard to maintain and establish for most refugees, asylum seekers and status holders as social interaction with other society members was limited due to social restrictions. Most refugees, asylum seekers and status holders have small networks in their host country and as only online contact with others was allowed, some of them likely experienced loneliness or social isolation. Still, earlier research suggests that refugees, asylum seekers and migrants supported each other during the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, social links with government institutions or societal organisations were equally hard to maintain and establish because all services had to be accessed online. Therefore some refugees, asylum seekers and status holders became more reluctant to ask for information and support. Last, previous research pays special attention to the impact of COVID-19 measures on the lives of female refugees, asylum seekers, and status holders as social gatherings played an important role in their lives and integration with limited online alternatives.

2.4. Economic experiences

2.4.1. Work experiences

Another significant part of the integration process is considered to be economic integration. Participation in the labour market is – by the government – seen as the driver and as the result of integration (De Gruijter & Razenberg, 2019). The Dutch government (Tweede Kamer, 2018) stated that paid work is not only the ticket to economic independence but also integration and participation in the Dutch society. The Dutch minister of Social Affairs and Employment argued that having a paid job is the ultimate way to integrate, learn Dutch and participate in society (Tweede Kamer, 2018).

However, it is very challenging for status holders to find work in the Netherlands. Research by the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS), shows – per nationality – what percentage of adult status holders that arrived since 2014 found work (CBS, 2022). Taking the average percentage of all nationalities, about forty percent of the status holders that arrived in 2014 found work six and a half years after they arrived in the Netherlands (see Figure 5). As a result of the limited participation in the labour market, many status holders are dependent on social benefits. Moreover, there is a significant gender gap among status holders. Compared to male status holders, the economic position of female status holders is even more vulnerable because the employment rate among female status holders is generally low (De Gruijter & Razenberg, 2019). KIS (2021a) researched the integration of female status holders in the Netherlands, to indicate the gender gap in the labour market, and concluded that in 2019 11 percent of Syrian women worked while 44 percent of Syrian men found work. Still, labour market participation increases over time (see Figure 5). Still, the societal position of status holders remains highly unfavourable in comparison to other migrant groups (such as western or European migrants) who tend to find work much sooner (SER, 2019).

Percentage of working status holders in the Netherlands



Figure 5. Percentage of working status holders, CBS (2022)

The labour market participation of refugees and asylum seekers is challenging for different reasons. Basic (2021, p.2) mentions barriers to access to the labour market such as “limited knowledge of the host country’s labour market, lack of access to relevant networks, subjection to discrimination and health”. A paper by Dagevos & Odé (2016) specifically focused on status holders in the Netherlands and mentions four explanations for their labour market disadvantage. First, labour market participation depends on the educational background of status holders, which differs greatly per individual. Some only finished primary school in their country of origin, while others graduated from universities in their country of origin. Second, earlier research showed that a Dutch diploma is often valued more than a diploma from the country of origin; sometimes the latter diplomas are not acknowledged at all. However, studying for a Dutch diploma takes a lot of time and effort before it pays off and some status holders do not have the aspiration or capability to do so. Third, Dutch language deficiency can be another reason for the labour market disadvantage. Fourth, status holders often lack social and functional networks that can support them towards self-sufficiency.

These explanations for the low labour market participation of status holders in the Netherlands were confirmed by the SER (2019). Additionally, Brell, Dustmann & Preston (2020) argue that many status holders have to deal with specific and differing challenges, such as a sudden and unprepared flee from their country of origin, (psychological) health issues, long career breaks and uncertain prospects. These experiences – which differ from experiences among other migrant groups – are referred to as the ‘refugee gap’. Moreover, research by SER (2019) found that the limited labour market participation is not only caused by past experiences of status holders themselves, but also by Dutch people and employers. The research by SER (2019) posits that employers are more reluctant to hire or invest (e.g. schooling) in status holders because they have a temporary residence permit. The prejudices of employers seem to play a role in the possibility of status holders entering the labour market (Ponzoni, Ghorashi & Van der Raad, 2017). According to SER (2019) and the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2018), these prejudices are often unconscious but still result in discrimination against status holders who try to participate in the labour market. Prejudices ensure that individual status holders are judged on the (alleged) characteristics of the entire group. As a result, the competencies and skills of status holders (migrants with non-western backgrounds) may be underestimated because of (presumed) origin, age and gender. To support status holders in accessing

the labour market, there are different initiatives from public, private and societal organisations such as guidance or mentoring programs (Bebic, 2021).

Thus, most refugees and asylum seekers do not manage to find work during their first years in their host country. However, if refugees and asylum seekers manage to find work, it is often either in under-employment or in precarious jobs (Ager & Strang, 2008). Under-employment means that the level of a job is not equal to the level of skills and qualifications of an employee. Precarity is a concept that stems from research in the 1960s by Bourdieu, about the difference between permanent workers and temporary workers in Algeria. During the next decades (in the 1970s and 1980s) the term was used in academic research related to poverty instead of employment. In general, the term precarity was either used to indicate labour market conditions (e.g. by Bourdieu) or to indicate precarious lives as a feature of life in a broader sense (Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson & Waite, 2014). In European countries, nowadays the term precarity is primarily focused on precarious conditions at work, related to employment (Waite, 2008). In my research, precarity also relates to precarious work. Kalleberg (2009, p.2) used this definition as well and defined precarious work as “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky from the point of view of the worker”. Precarious jobs are often characterised by temporary and flexible contracts; therefore their income is unstable which makes it hard for precarious workers to save money for unexpected events such as the outbreak of a pandemic (Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021; Fasani & Mazza, 2020c). Precarious work often involves so-called “3-D jobs” – dirty, dangerous and demanding (sometimes even demeaning and degrading). These jobs are typically in hospitality, security and cleaning services (OECD, 2020). The jobs are characterised by physical work, low salaries and long working days in poor conditions (Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021). There is still limited research about the personal experiences of status holders in precarious working conditions in the Netherlands. Last, refugees and asylum seekers are not the only workers experiencing precarity, as precarious work often crosses different axes of vulnerability such as being female, young, migrant, low-skilled or lower-educated (McNamara, McKee & Stuckler, 2021; Waite, 2008). In general, a precarious working environment hurts the (migrant) workers’ individual (e.g. education, stress) and social life (e.g. family, community) (Kalleberg, 2009). Besides, precarious workers are more vulnerable to times of economic decline (Fasani & Mazza, 2020b).

In addition to paid work, status holders can engage in volunteer work. Active participation in society through volunteer work, where connections with Dutch people are made and knowledge of the ‘Dutch culture’ is established, is also known as social participation (Movisie, 2022). Active social participation provides the opportunity to participate in society in a more accessible way, compared to labour market participation. However, similar to labour market participation, there are still certain barriers for status holders concerning social participation. An example of these barriers is given by Ghorashi & Rast (2018), as they argue that the perception or meaning of volunteer work differs strongly between status holders and Dutch people because volunteer work sometimes has a low status in the countries of origin. Research by Pharos (2018) showed success factors for the organisation of volunteer work: using role models from the target group who can reach and inform others about volunteer work, sharing success stories about the value of volunteer work and about offering accessible volunteer work where proficiency of the Dutch language is not always a condition.

2.4.2. Economic experiences since COVID-19

When the COVID-19 virus turned into a pandemic, the economic security of many people was compromised. In response to COVID-19, borders were closed, businesses had to shut down, in specific jobs employees had to work from home, and considerable financial emergency funds and benefits from governments were necessary to prevent employers from going bankrupt and employees from being fired (Barker, 2021; Falkenhain, Flick, Hirseland, Naji, Seidelsohn & Verlage, 2021).

Refugees and asylum seekers usually have a disadvantaged position in the labour market and are therefore more vulnerable in times of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fasani & Mazza, 2020a; Fasani &

Mazza, 2020c). Pharos (2020) notices the higher chance of status holders losing their job or being affected more by cost-cutting measures of businesses and organisations during COVID-19.

Fasani & Mazza (2020a) researched the increased economic vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers during the pandemic and found multiple explanations. As newcomers in the labour market, refugees and asylum seekers often still experienced linguistic barriers and worked more often in precarious jobs. Refugees and asylum seekers with precarious jobs had a higher chance of getting unemployed or under-employed, which could result in a loss of income having an enormous impact on refugees and asylum seekers with limited savings (Guadagno, 2020; Falkenhain et al., 2020). Moreover, refugees and asylum seekers workers were more prone to being infected with COVID-19 as they tend to work in crowded conditions and jobs with more physical contact where keeping their distance from other people was not possible (Fasani & Mazza, 2020a). Although migrant “key workers” had a limited chance of losing their job during the pandemic, their chance of infection was significantly higher. On the other hand, migrants not working in “key professions” might have been able to avoid infection but they were affected economically since sectors such as hospitality – where many migrants work – closed down (Fasani & Mazza, 2020a). However, remote working was not an option for every employee. As already discussed with linguistic experiences, refugees and asylum seekers might have had less digital knowledge and skills which are often necessary to work remotely (Falkenhain et al., 2020). Lastly, it is important to notice that not every refugee or asylum seeker worked in low-skilled or precarious jobs. There were also higher-educated refugees and asylum seekers with higher-skilled occupations (with a higher chance of working remotely) (Berntsen & Skowronek, 2021).

A previous study (Babuç, 2021) on the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on Syrian migrants (with residence permits) in Turkey showed that families experienced a change in their economic situation due to COVID-19, which increased uncertainties and anxieties in their daily lives. Almost every interviewee had at least one family member that was forced to stop working because of the lockdowns, and therefore they experienced a loss of daily income. Moreover, this study showed that female migrants were experiencing a loss of income or jobs differently than male migrants. Since male migrants were mostly responsible for earning an income for their entire household/other familial relations, they seemed to experience more socio-economic-related anxieties stemming from a fear of losing their job or part of their income (Babuç, 2021).

In the Netherlands, during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, status holders with part-time jobs generally lost 0.3 FTE of their work, likely due to the COVID-19 crisis (Divosa, 2021). Status holders often had temporary contracts and were working in sectors (such as hospitality or temporary employment sector) that were hit hard by the crisis (SER, 2021). A previous study (Woldeyesus, 2020) about the experiences of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in The Hague during the COVID-19 pandemic, showed that status holders in jobs requiring a background in higher education and permanent contracts experienced the economic consequences for their daily lives in less severe ways. The same was held for status holders who were living from a social assistance benefit because their monthly income from the government did not change (Woldeyesus, 2020). Another article confirmed this finding, as Falkenhain et al. (2020, p.460) argued that not every interviewee (asylum seeker or migrant) was affected in the same way by the pandemic: “While some expressed insecurity and disorientation, others reacted to the pandemic-induced disruptions with confidence and self-determination”. On the other hand, the article by Woldeyesus (2020) showed that status holders with precarious jobs had to deal with increased and serious health risks while performing their jobs, and felt less secure about the continuing of their work (Woldeyesus, 2020). In another study (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022) three status holders in the Netherlands were interviewed, and they indicated that despite the crisis the everyday working life of most status holders continued. On the other hand, this article outlined how a status holder lost her job because the restaurant where she worked had to close as a result of worsened business. Likely the person was not an exception, because a significant number of working status holders worked in restaurants with flexible contracts and, among others, this sector was

severely affected by the pandemic. Last, it is important to note that status holders are not the only ones who lost their income or job due to COVID-19, this is a broader societal problem. However, status holders are more than average affected since they are just entering the Dutch labour market and simultaneously have to deal with other challenges (Badran et al., 2021; Kox & Van Liempt, 2020a).

2.4.3. Summary of economic experiences

The economic experiences of refugees, asylum seekers, and status holders in the Netherlands are mainly linked to labour market participation (paid jobs) or active social participation (volunteer jobs). Generally, it is hard to find work for integration participants or status holders in the Netherlands specifically. In the Netherlands, different reasons for the limited labour market participation are found: Deviating educational backgrounds of status holders, different values (sometimes lower value or no acknowledgement) of diplomas from countries of origin, language deficiencies, and a lack of social and functional networks. If status holders do manage to find work, it is often in under-employed or precarious jobs. Moreover, status holders are encouraged to engage in active social participation – volunteer jobs – yet finding volunteer work is not a given for different reasons.

COVID-19 changed the economic experiences of working status holders. Migrants with part-time contracts in precarious jobs had a higher chance of getting unemployed because some sectors had to deal with reduced business. Other migrants, working in ‘key professions’, did not experience increased economic vulnerability but had to deal with a higher chance of getting infected with COVID-19. In the Netherlands, some status holders with part-time contrast in specific sectors such as hospitality lost (part of) their job. In contrast to lower-educated or under-employed working status holders, it seemed the economic situation of status holders in the Netherlands with either social benefits or full-time higher-educated jobs (being able to work remote) did not change much.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on the theories that are relevant to research the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19. To research the experiences of status holders with formal language lessons in the Netherlands during COVID-19, this chapter explained how – mainly from a political viewpoint – language learning is considered to be the most important part of the integration process. Some researchers criticise this perspective by arguing that ‘successful’ integration is substantially more complex. Previous research about the experiences with formal language lessons of integration participants during COVID-19 showed several challenges involved with the change from offline to online language classes. Besides, previous research showed that language deficiency among integration participants might have caused misinformation about the pandemic because integration participants struggled to find the right information online. To research the social experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19, this chapter elaborated on the concept of social capital with its resulting concepts of social bonds, social bridges and social links. Previous research related to the social experiences of integration participants during COVID-19 showed that COVID-19 restrictions caused challenges to maintain and building social connections. Social bridges and links seemed to be limited to online contact while expanding networks was near impossible. The economic integration and labour market participation of integration participants were already challenging before COVID-19. Recent studies about the economic experiences of integration participants during COVID-19 showed that specifically, the ones with precarious jobs or part-time jobs had to deal with increased economic vulnerability as some (partly) lost their jobs due to reduced business. Status holders with social benefits or full-time jobs were affected to a lesser extent by the economic implications of COVID-19.

3. Methodology

This chapter contains an explanation of the research methods that were used to answer the RQ. The data collection consisted of interviews with both status holders and professionals working for societal organisations that work with status holders. Therefore, the description of the research design, the data collection and the data analysis are divided into two parts. First, it is described for the interviews with status holders. Second, it is described for the interviews with professionals. Lastly, the chapter addresses the limitations and ethical considerations of the methodology used in this research.

This study explores the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19, in retrospective. A retrospective study focuses on interviewees' past experiences and discusses the experiences during the interview process (Fitzgerald & Surra, 1981). I reflect on the limitations of the retrospective approach later in this chapter, in 3.4.2. (Validity).

Until today, there is limited research published about this topic from the perspective of status holders themselves. Therefore, my inductive research studied a yet under-researched topic (Bernard, 2017). The qualitative approach of my study suited the research objective since qualitative studies are meant to understand "how actors construct and interpret the world surroundings, and how these interpretations affect their actions, identities and everyday experiences" (Barglowski, 2018, p.154). Moreover, the scientific knowledge of this study can be characterised as interpretive, because it acknowledges that there is not the same truth for everyone, but the truth is personal and depends on personal experiences and interpretation (Bryman, 2012).

To provide insights about the experiences of status holders during COVID-19, status holders were interviewed through in-depth personal interviews (Gu, 2019; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviewing is a useful method for topics that can openly be discussed. Besides, through interviews interviewees are given a voice and are positioned at the centre of their experiences (Gu, 2019). This qualitative method was also more appropriate to use with vulnerable interviewees because it allowed for some flexibility and sensitivity that was important – which other methods such as questionnaires do not allow (Aldridge, 2014). An interview-only approach had its limitations, additional methods such as participant observation could have given a more complete view of the experiences of status holders (Becker & Geer, 1957). During participant observation, I could have observed how status holders were experiencing online formal language classes and discussed them accordingly. Besides, it may allow for building a relationship of trust with the interviewees. However, my research aims to give voice to a somewhat larger group of status holders than previous research did before and considering the scope of this research an interview-only approach was more realistic.

3.1. Status holders: research design and data collection

3.1.1. The research design for interviews with status holders

To provide insights about the experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19, status holders themselves were interviewed.

In qualitative research, it is important to be reflexive and transparent about the case selection of interviewees (why and which cases), because they influence the results (Barglowski, p.157). To find interviewees, different societal organisations (about 50 in total) working for status holders were approached in March and April 2022. The organisations received an email with an explanation of the research objective and two requests: 1) whether the organisation was able to connect me with status holders, 2) and/or whether a professional of the organisation was willing to share his/her perspective on how status holders have experienced COVID-19.

Consequently, Stichting Mano (located in Rotterdam) and Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren (located in Alphen aan den Rijn) responded positively, as both organisations were willing to connect me to status holders. The organisations were both situated in the province South-Holland, in the Netherlands (see Figure 7). Initially, there was a third organisation willing to connect me with status holders, but this organisation did not respond to my emails and calls anymore.

For the selection of the interviewees, I told the societal organisations (Stichting Mano and Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren) that I was open to interviewing any status holder since it was hard to find organisations that were willing to help. Besides, I expected that if I would have been too selective concerning gender, ethnicity, nationality, duration of stay in the Netherlands or educational level, it might have been almost impossible to find status holders that were willing to share their experiences. Still, as a request, I asked the organisations to connect me to status holders with as many different demographic characteristics as possible. In the end, two strict conditions for the selection of interviewees remained: 1) the interviewee had to be a status holder, or very recently naturalised, and 2) the interviewee had to speak English or Dutch well enough to have a conversation about his/her experiences.

Accordingly, Stichting Mano and Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren both found five status holders willing to share their experiences about COVID-19 for my research. Out of these ten status holders, three brought a family member to the interview. In total, I interviewed thirteen status holders. Although I had not been very selective concerning the characteristics and demographics of the interviewees, still the final group of interviewees turned out to be relatively heterogenous in terms of age, country of origin, duration of stay in the Netherlands, and other characteristics. On the next page, Table 1 shows the complete demographic characteristics of the interviewees.



Figure 6. Map of the places where the interviewed status holders live

Table 1. Demographic information of the interviewed status holders

	Gender*	Age**	Country of origin	In the Netherlands since	Residence permit since	Living arrangement	Marital status	Employment or educational status	Formal integration process	Finished language level	Educational background in country of origin
I.1	Female	31	Syria	5 years	5 years	With husband and three children	Married	Unemployed	Finished	A2	Secondary school
I.2	Male	55	Syria	7 years	5,5 years	With wife and two children	Married	Studying to become translator & volunteer work	Finished	B1	Secondary school
I.3	Female	38	Iraq	7 years	6 years	Alone	Unmarried	Studying BBL-level 1 (MBO) & parttime employed in retail	Finished	A2	Secondary school
I.4	Male (R1)	41	Turkey	2 years	1 year	With wife and two children	Married	Parttime self-employed	Not finished	NT2/B2	Higher educated (Master's degree)
	Female (R2)	37	Turkey	1 year	1 year	With husband and two children	Married	Unemployed	Not finished	A1-A2	Higher educated (Master's degree)
I.5	Male	22	Yemen	1,5 years	1 year	With wife (since 2 months)	Married	Unemployed & HBO study from September 2022	Not finished	A2	Primary school

I.6	Male (R1)	40	Turkey	3 years	2 year	With wife and two children	Married	Unemployed & studying (course in Cloud Engineering)	Not finished	B1	Higher educated (Master's degree)
	Female (R2)	37	Turkey	3 years	2 year	With husband and two children	Married	Unemployed	Not finished	B1	Higher educated (Bachelor's degree)
I.7	Male (R1)	21	Afghanistan	7 years	1 year	With two brothers, one sister and parents	Unmarried	Unemployed (not allowed)	Not finished	A2	None
	Female (R2)	23	Afghanistan	7 years	1 year	With three brothers and parents	Unmarried	Unemployed (not allowed)	Not finished	A2	None
I.8	Male	33	Syria	6 years	5 years	Alone	Unmarried	Studying BBL- level 4 (MBO) & parttime internship	Finished	B1	Higher educated
I.9	Female	34	Syria	7 years	5 years	With two children	Married	Studying BBL (MBO) & parttime internship	Finished	B1	Primary school
I.10	Female	52	Sudan	3 years	1,5 years	With one child	Unmarried	Unemployed	Not finished	A1-A2	Higher Educated (Bachelor's/Master's degree)

* Gender: R1 and R2 refer to the interviewees since during some interviews two people were interviewed together.

** Age: the age of the interviewees might not always be correct.

3.1.2. Data collection of interviews with status holders

Prior to the interview

The original goal of the data collection was to interview the status holders before the professionals, to ensure a bottom-up approach that would provide the opportunity to find out about the status holders' experiences first. However, in reality, it did not work out. According to the planning of this research, all interviews had to be performed in May and June, and not every professional was flexible with scheduling the interview, due to for example holidays. Therefore, I had to be more flexible with scheduling the interviews and the interviews with status holders and professionals were conducted simultaneously.

In total, thirteen status holders were interviewed during ten interviews. I contacted the status holders via WhatsApp. In a message, I introduced myself, and the research topic and asked whether they would be willing to participate in the research. The communication went very well, everyone immediately agreed to plan the interview. Consequently, I suggested some options for days and times to do the interview and let the status holders pick a day and time. To make the interviewees feel comfortable, the interview location needed to 'suit' the interviewees (Rowley, 2012). Therefore, the interviews took place in an informal or 'everyday' location of their choice. In most cases, I was invited to status holders' homes in Rotterdam or Alphen aan den Rijn. In other cases, I met with the interviewees in public locations such as the library or a café (see Table 2).

Inside interviewees' homes, there was complete privacy to talk about their experiences. Besides, seeing the interviewee in the context of their home offers additional information about their (living) situation – which I included in the research diary (see Appendix 7.4.) (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Three interviewees chose to meet in a public space, such as a café or a library. However, public spaces can be noisy, or lack privacy (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The café where I met with one interviewee was indeed noisy. Although it did not seem to bother the interviewee, I struggled to fully concentrate on the conversation due to the loud noises around me. In the library, it was difficult to find a private place with no one else within hearing distance. I noticed that when people came within hearing distance of the interviewee and me, it created tension for both of us. During one of the interviews, the interviewee and I even decided to find another place in the library when two people joined the table we sat at.

Table 2. Details about the date and location of the interviews

Interviewee	Date	Location
I.1	May 24, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.2	May 25, 2022	At the library
I.3	May 31, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.4 (R1 and R2)*	June 1, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.5	June 1, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.6 (R1 and R2)*	June 8, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.7 (R1 and R2)*	June 8, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.8	June 9, 2022	At a café
I.9	June 10, 2022	At the library
I.10	June 11, 2022	At the interviewee's home

* During interviews 4, 6, and 7 two status holders were interviewed at the same time. The result chapter refers to the interview number and does not specify which respondent (R1 or R2) provided the input.

During the interview

The semi-structured and in-depth personal interviews with status holders were guided by an interview guide, with a topic list of questions in accordance with the RQs and conceptual framework. Every conceptual theme (linguistic, social, and economic experiences) is related to a set of questions.

The interview started with an introduction about myself, the research objectives, and the interview structure. Additionally, interviewees were provided with a form of consent prior to the interview and asked to give verbal consent. The consent form explained that participation was anonymous and that acquired data was stored securely. Moreover, interviewees were told that they could stop their participation at every moment if they would feel uncomfortable.

Consequently, the interviewees were asked to answer demographic questions (e.g. about gender, age, nationality, duration of stay in the Netherlands, living arrangement, marital status and employment). Thereafter, questions relating to linguistic, social experiences and economic experiences followed.

The questions about linguistic experiences were mainly about, formal Dutch language lessons during COVID-19 and digital skills, access and knowledge during COVID-19. Second, questions about social experiences were mainly focused on social bonds, bridges and links during COVID-19. Third, the economic experiences were mainly about paid- or volunteer work during COVID-19. The interview guide ended with two closing questions: whether the interviewees share something with me that we had not yet discussed, and whether they had any personal questions for me. In addition to the main interview questions, I prepared probing questions which I sometimes used for further explanation of interviewees' answers. The complete interview guide is attached in Appendix 7.1.

The order of the questions and the way of questioning differed per interview, depending on what suited the interviewee (Gu, 2019; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Over time, I came across some interesting themes that were mentioned more often during the interviews. Therefore, I adjusted the interview guide sometimes during the process. This was an iterative process in which data collection and preliminary data analysis coincided (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Gradually, I discovered that it worked best to start the interview off with an informal conversation about how the interviewee was doing, to give space to whatever they wanted to share at that moment. In this way, the interview approach was flexible and allowed for in-depth experiences to be shared (Bryman, 2012). As an interviewer, I tried to be open-minded to interesting new topics and themes that emerged during the interview process. I discovered over time that interviewees shared their experiences more freely and extensively when I tried to have an open conversation with them, instead of ticking the boxes of my interview questions. Boeije (2014, p.63) confirmed that "detailed and rich information is mostly obtained in a conversation in which both partners genuinely enjoy participating and feel respected by the other person. It is the interviewer who is mostly responsible for creating trust and openness".

Moreover, every interview took about 35 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in both English and Dutch, depending on the language proficiency and preference of the interviewee. Finally, all interviews were recorded by mobile recorder.

3.2. Professionals: research design and data collection

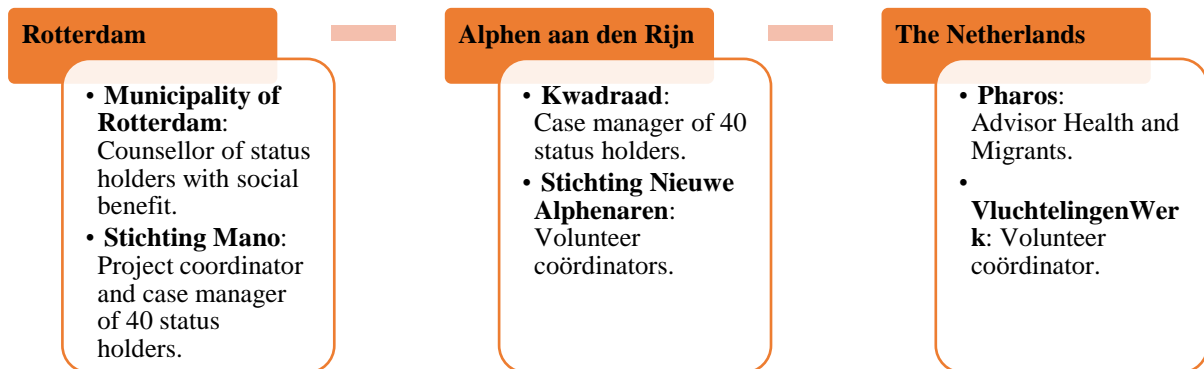
3.2.1. The research design of interviews with professionals

Previous research into the experiences of status holders in the Netherlands (during COVID-19) was often conducted by societal organisations (partly subsidised by the Dutch government) (Pharos, KIS) or the Dutch government itself (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid), and based on the perspectives of professionals on the experiences of status holders, instead of based on the personal experiences of status holders themselves. To establish whether a discrepancy exists between the perspective of people speaking on behalf of status holders (i.e. professionals) and status holders themselves, I interviewed both.

Once Stichting Mano and Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren agreed to connect me to status holders, I focused on the locations of these organisations and the Netherlands in general. In the end, I interviewed two

organisations in Rotterdam, two organisations in Alphen aan den Rijn, and two national-based organisations in the Netherlands (see Figure 8).

Figure 7. Overview of the interviewed organisations and professionals



Hereby, I provide background to organisations and the relevance of the interviewed professionals:

- The municipality of Rotterdam is responsible for the integration of status holders in Rotterdam. Counsellors support the integration process of status holders (e.g. towards formal language education and employment). The interviewed professional works for the municipality as a Youth Counsellor of unemployed status holders who receive social benefits. Once status holders start with a study or work, she does not support them anymore.
- Stichting Mano is a societal organisation in Rotterdam, focusing on more vulnerable people in Rotterdam who receive extra support with their participation in society. Stichting Mano receives structural funding from the municipality of Rotterdam, to financially support activities. Besides, the organisation receives donations from individuals, companies, and other organisations. A significant part of their activities focusses on the support of status holders in Rotterdam. The organisation supports status holders with workshops and classes focused on the Dutch language, social networks, digital skills, finance, and psychological help. The interviewed professional is a project coordinator and case manager of about forty status holders.
- Kwadraad is a societal organisation in Alphen aan den Rijn. The organisation support status holders in the Alphen aan den Rijn. The organisation is hired by the municipality of Alphen aan den Rijn, to guide the integration process of status holders. The interviewed professional is a case manager of forty status holders. She supports status holders towards self-sufficiency during their first year in Alphen aan den Rijn.
- Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren is a societal organisation focused on connecting status holders to Dutch people to bridge the gap between these groups, and to help status holders towards social participation and self-sufficiency. The organisation receives donations from individuals, several churches in the area, and the municipality of Alphen aan den Rijn. The interview was scheduled with one professional, but she invited a colleague to join the interview as well. The interviewed professionals were two volunteer coordinators and both buddies of a status holder family. The professionals do not have a direct line with status holders but receive information about the status holders through volunteers, and their own experiences as a buddy of a status holder family.
- Pharos is a national expertise centre for health inequalities. The organisation is focused on supporting professionals or municipalities or counsellors towards inclusive work, by forming a bridge between science and society. Pharos receives subsidies from the Dutch government, foundations, municipalities and private parties. The interviewed professional has a role in the

program Health and Migrants. She is mainly concerned with status holders' integration and health. She does not have a direct line with status holders but receives information about the situation of status holders through so-called 'experience experts' that have been status holders themselves.

- VluchtelingenWerk is a societal organisation that supports refugees and asylum seekers. The organisations receive subsidies from individuals, companies, lottery organisations, the Dutch government, and other organisations. The national office of VluchtelingenWerk asked a volunteer coordinator in Rotterdam to do the interview. He did not directly stand in contact with status holders, but indirectly through stories of the volunteers.

3.2.2. Data collection of interviews with professionals

Prior to the interview

The interviews with professionals were conducted simultaneously with the interviews with status holders.

My contact person at Stichting Mano did the interview herself, while my contact person at Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren provided an email address of a colleague to perform the interview. Additionally, the other four organisations responded to my email asking whether they were available for an interview. In the mail correspondence that followed, we agreed on a specific date and location. The professionals were able to decide on the interview location. Some interviews were online, while others were in-person (see Table 3).

In-person interviews are often considered to be advantageous, "because they provide the most natural conversational setting, the strongest foundation for building rapport, and the best opportunity to observe visual and emotional cues" (Johnson, Scheitle & Howard Ecklund, 2021, p.1143). In contrast, online and especially phone interviews (because the interviewer and interviewee can not see, but only hear each other) are considered to be disadvantageous, they are "more likely to result in misunderstandings, limited in their ability to generate meaningful conversations, and challenging contexts for knowing when and whether to ask sensitive questions" (Johnson, Scheitle & Howard Ecklund, 2021, p.1144). However, I experienced that online or phone interviews are more practical and can save both the interviewer and interviewee travel time and costs. Considering that the aim of the interviews with professionals was not to learn about their personal experiences, but about their perspective on the experiences of status holders, I experienced that online or phone interviews with professionals worked well. Besides, I did not ask sensitive questions and observing visual and emotional cues was less important considering the aim of the interviews with professionals. I have not encountered misunderstandings during the conversations.

Table 3. Overview of the interviewed professionals, with date and location

Interviewee via	Date	Location
I.11 Pharos	May 31, 2022	Online
I.12 Stichting Nieuwe Alphenaren	June 8, 2022	At the interviewee's home
I.13 Stichting Mano	June 15, 2022	At Stichting Mano
I.14 Gemeente Rotterdam	June 16, 2022	At the municipality of Rotterdam
I.15 VluchtelingenWerk	June 24, 2022	Online
I.16 Kwadraad	August 3, 2022	Via phone call

During the interview

Similar to the interviews with status holders, the interviews with professionals were guided by an interview guide with a topic list of questions in accordance with the RQ and conceptual framework. The interview started with an introduction about myself, the research objectives, and the interview structure.

Additionally, interviewees were provided with a form of consent prior to the interview and asked to give verbal consent. The consent form explained that participation was anonymous and that acquired data was stored securely.

To combine the experiences of status holders with the perspective of professionals on the experiences of status holders, the interview guide for interviews with professionals was similar to the interview guide for interviews with status holders. However, in contrast to the interview questions for status holders, the demographic questions were more focused on the role and position of the professional, in the organisation and with regard to their contact with status holders.

Moreover, instead of starting with questions about linguistic, social and economic experiences, I started with some general questions. The professionals were asked about their vision of how status holders have experienced COVID-19. The goal of this question was to note what experiences they would come up with first. Thereafter, questions about linguistic, social and economic experiences followed. The content of these questions was similar to the ones for status holders, but the questions were asked differently since it was not about the personal experiences of professionals but their perception of the experiences of status holders. The complete interview guide is attached in Appendix 7.2.

Similar to the interviews with status holders, the interviews with professionals asked for a flexible and open-minded approach. I noticed that it was more interesting to have an open conversation instead of asking every question in the same order. Still, I made sure that every concept was covered during the interviews. In contrast to the interviews with status holders, the interviews with professionals were conducted in Dutch only. They generally took between 35 and 60 minutes. Every interview, except for one, was recorded by mobile recorder. The interview with Kwadraad was not recorded since the interviewee preferred to have an unrecorded phone call. During the phone, call I made detailed notes.

3.3. Status holders and professionals: data analysis

Once the data from the interviews with status holders and professionals was collected, the data analysis followed. The interview recordings were transcribed first. All interviews were conducted in Dutch or English and were transcribed accordingly. The interviews with status holders were transcribed without transcription software. The interviews with professionals were partially transcribed with the online audio and video transcription software Sonix. The parts that were transcribed with the software were checked on accuracy and afterwards improved if necessary.

Thereafter, the transcripts were uploaded to qualitative data analysis and research software ATLAS.ti. First, the interview analysis consisted of coding the interview transcripts. In the first round of coding, I familiarised myself with the data by listening to the recordings, transcribing and reading interview notes from my interview journal and transcripts. Second, through deductive coding, codes were created based on the associated research questions, conceptual framework and interview questions. Third, inductive coding followed. Additional codes were added based on the content of the interview transcripts, to make sure all relevant information was included (Bryman, 2012, Rowley, 2012). Several rounds of inductive coding were performed until all relevant information was coded and enough repetition in the data was found, to apply an iterative procedure. Besides, there was an iterative process between the data collection and the data analysis by personally reflecting on preliminary results already during the data collection to ensure that all themes and concepts were covered in all interviews and saturation could be reached during the data collection and analysis (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Meanwhile, a coding frame was designed to keep track of the different codes and their meaning. The coding frame plus an explanation of the merging and dividing of codes during the coding process is attached in Appendix 7.3. Based on the codes, the results were written. The final version of this research will be shared with most of the interviewed professionals, as many of them requested to receive the results.

3.4. Ethical considerations, validity and reliability

3.4.1. Ethical considerations

Studying the situation of status holders, who often belong to more vulnerable groups in society, leads to various research challenges and ethical dilemmas (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). Gu (2019) elaborates on five ethical and practical considerations that are important to be aware of while interviewing asylum seekers and migrants, such as status holders. I use Gu's research (2019) to reflect on the ethical consideration of my research.

First, during the interviews, I tried to be aware of my role as an 'outsider' researcher (by not being an asylum seeker or migrant myself), which likely affects the research (Gu, 2019). An advantage of being an outsider researcher may be that more surprising conversations emerge, because of the – likely to be present – culture gap between the interviewees and me. However, the diverging culture, backgrounds, ethnicity, and native language of the interviewees and me might also be a disadvantage to understand each other. To bridge the gaps, I tried to show reflexivity, empathy and sensitivity during the interviews. As already explained (in section 3.1.2.), I tried to have an open conversation with the interviewees, instead of strictly following the interview guide I gave the interviewees space to share their experiences freely. During the interviews, I noticed that my efforts succeeded since the interviewees shared – own their initiative – experiences unrelated to the predetermined research question.

Second, the different genders, ages and social classes of the interviewees and I might have influenced the interview process. According to Gu (2019, p.572), "interviewers and interviewees are shaped by culturally ascribed meanings of masculinity and femininity, therefore gender will affect both the interaction atmosphere and the extent to which personal experiences are shared". My gender, as a female researcher, might have affected interviews with women and men differently. Considering that I am a female researcher, female interviewees might have been more open during the interview, since they may assume shared assumptions and experiences (Ahmed, Hundt & Blackburn, 2010). During three interviews, I interviewed both a man and a woman at the same time. In one case, the woman arrived in the Netherlands recently and much later than the man and was not able to fully participate in the interview due to her language deficiency. In the other two cases, the woman and man talked equally during the interview. During the other interviews, I have not noticed that male interviewees shared fewer experiences compared to female interviewees, or were less open. In some cultures, there are cultural rules for interaction between genders and people of a particular age or social class. My age and position as a student researcher may have affected how status holders perceived me and my research. It might have caused more open and honest communication since I was conducting this interview on my initiative instead of at the request of an organisation that might have had secondary objectives. Moreover, status holders from different social classes and socio-economic backgrounds might need an extra explanation about the research objectives and interview process. As a researcher, I have been patient and flexible during the interviews. I tried to explain the interview objectives and interview process clearly, at the very start of the interview. During the interviews, I noticed that some status holders took the initiative to talk about experiences even unrelated to the research objectives, while other status holders were much more expectant with sharing their experiences and waited for me to ask about specific experiences. Besides, some interviewees expressed uncertainty about the value of their experiences to my research. I reassured them that every shared experience is valuable to this research. By adapting to the context of every interview, I have tried to be patient and flexible towards every interviewee. Additionally, I asked politely for consent to record the interview, which all interviewees accepted (Gu, 2019).

Third, since the interviews were aimed at gathering in-depth information about status holders' experiences, it was important that interviewees felt comfortable while talking. The Dutch or English language proficiency of interviewed status holders was sufficient enough to have a conversation.

However, when I asked probing questions to learn more about specific experiences, I noticed that some interviewees were struggling with comprehensively elaborating on their experiences. In this situation, I did not persist but continued with another question. Moreover, to make the interviewees feel more comfortable, the speed of the interview was adapted to their pace (Gu, 2019). I did not rush through the interview questions, but I took the time to adapt to the pace of the interviewee.

Fourth, deviating cultural factors of the interviewees and I were considered during the interviews. The interviewees and I come from different life worlds and could therefore have different understandings of words or concepts. Some topics might have been sensitive for the interviewees, such as their income or legal status. Therefore, sensitive topics were addressed cautiously. In research with vulnerable groups such as status holders, it is important to build a relationship of trust. However, it is nearly impossible to build a relationship of trust with an interview-only approach. To gain the trust of the interviewees as much as possible in this context, I started the interviews off by asking how they were doing to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to share whatever they wanted to share. Prior to the interview, I stressed that it was possible to stop the interview at any time if the interviewees would feel uncomfortable. Moreover, if I sensed that interviewees felt uncomfortable with certain questions, I assured them that they were never obliged to respond. Moreover, not only their answers to the interview questions were important, but also their non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and body gestures (Gu, 2019). To include non-verbal communication in the data collection, I took notes about this in my personal interview diary.

Fifth, according to Gu (2019) researchers in principle believe that interviewees will benefit from participating in research because through their participation understanding of their lives and experiences is enhanced. During my interviews, some interviewees indicated that they participated in my research to provide more insights about their experiences to a larger public. One interviewee was motivated to participate in my research because he wanted to help a student with graduating. To thank the interviewees for their time and effort to participate in my research, I brought a small gift (chocolate cookies from a local bakery). The status holders were not informed about this prior to the interview, I offered the gift at the end of the interview while I thanked them for their participation.

Last, it is important to acknowledge that gathering data is never value-free, or without bias. The context of interviewers and interviewees influences the data collection. As an interviewer, I took personal values, emotions and biases into the interview and that could have influenced how I asked questions and how the interviewees perceived me (Gu, 2019). As a researcher, I was committed to providing insights about the experiences of status holders during COVID-19 because the voices of status holders themselves were lacking in previous research. This commitment was fostered by my interest in the situation of status holders in the Netherlands, and trying to improve their situation. The implication of my interest is that I may have focused more on the challenges – in order to shed light on situations that can be improved – instead of the positive experiences of status holders. Moreover, I was aware that interviewees have agency, in what they tell and what they do not tell. Hence, during interviews, I observed the behaviour of the interviewees and myself and reflected upon them in additional interview notes in the form of a personal research diary. In the research diary, I wrote about personal reflections, ideas, experiences, and feelings that emerged before, during or after the interviews (see Appendix 7.4.) (Boeije, 2014). I used the research diary during the writing of my results, to remind myself of the setting and experiences of each interview.

3.4.2. Validity

Validity refers to whether the research measures what it said it would measure (Babbie, 2021). Validity can be distinguished into internal validity and external validity.

Internal validity

“Internal validity refers to the extent to which an investigation is measuring what it is supposed to measure” (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The internal validity of research can be threatened by certain biases.

One of the threats to internal validity is recall bias. Considering the retrospective approach of my research, recall bias might have occurred with interviewed status holders as they were asked to share memories of their experiences during COVID-19, or among professionals, as they were asked to share memories of their perspective on the experiences of status holders during COVID-19. Moreno-Serra, Anaya-Montes, León-Giraldo & Bernal (2022) mention several relevant concerns that relate to recall bias in retrospective studies. First, “recall may change depending on the language that is used” (Moreno-Serra et al., 2022, p.2). Interviewed status holders probably still think about their experiences in their native language, and had to translate their experiences into Dutch during the interviews. Hence, the translation may have affected the experiences they shared with me. Second, “recall ability decreases over time, so long recall periods may potentially lead to little or no memory about specific events” (Moreno-Serra et al., 2022, p.2). When the interviews were conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic started just over two years ago thus it is likely that the interviewees did not remember every experience equally well. Third, “especially in the case of traumatic events, respondents may give incorrect answers for fear of retribution from other community members or government authorities, but also due to trauma-induced recall errors related, for instance, to mental health coping mechanisms” (Moreno-Serra et al., 2022, p.2). Research shows that refugees and asylum seekers, also status holders, often have psychological issues such as anxiety disorder or depressive disorder (Laban, 2011). Therefore, interviewed status holders may have not remembered past experiences or situations accurately.

To address the recall biases and increase the internal validity, I tried to make the interviewees feel comfortable during the interviews. I noticed that the interviewees felt more comfortable sharing experiences when I did not follow my interview guide very strictly, but let them in control of the conversation. Meanwhile, I still made sure that every concept was discussed, although not always in the same order or to the same extent. Therefore my research might be less internal valid, but it was a well-calculated decision to make the interviewees feel comfortable during the conversation because it may have increased their ability to remember experiences well, and it may have increased their honesty and openness of the interviewees. Besides, ensuring the anonymity of the interviewees may have increased the honesty and openness of interviewees, and decreased the socially desirable answers of interviewees.

Additionally, I provide openness about the acquired data; the interview recordings, interview transcripts, interview diary and coding book were carefully documented and saved.

External validity

External validity refers to the extent to which results can be generalised to the entire population of the research, or other situations and places (Mortelmans, 2018). External validity and generalisability are difficult to achieve in qualitative research (Boeije, 2014). Boeije (2014, p.180) explains, “some authors proclaim that qualitative research yields findings that only need to be valid for the cases under study”. One of these authors is Patton (1999), who argues that the generalisation of results is difficult because qualitative findings are by nature context- and case-dependent. According to her, the focus of qualitative research is more on “illuminating important cases rather than generalising from a sample to a population” (Boeije, 2014, p.180).

Accordingly, the results of my research do not likely represent the larger population of status holders in the Netherlands. However, they provide detailed insights into the personal experiences of thirteen status

holders in the Netherlands. I have tried to increase the external validity of this research, by carefully describing the research process and methods.

3.4.3. Reliability

Reliability means that the research instruments, the interviews with status holders and professionals, measure the same or comparable results if the same research process would be repeated (Babbie, 2021; Boeije, 2014; Mortelmans, 2018). However, this is nearly impossible as this retrospective study investigates the past experiences of status holders, and their experiences likely differ per day and context – depending on how the interviewees are feeling (Babbie, 2021).

Still, to increase the reliability of this research as much as possible, this chapter extensively described the research design, data collection and data analysis of my research.

4. Results

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first three parts answer the three SQs of this research, describing and analysing the results of the interviews with status holders and professionals. The fourth part contains additional findings that do not directly match the content of the SQs but seem important to mention as they provide more perspective on how status holders experienced COVID-19.

4.1. Status holders' experiences with formal language lessons

SQ1: How did status holders in the Netherlands experience online formal language lessons during COVID-19?

This subchapter focuses on the experiences of status holders regarding formal language lessons during COVID-19. These formal language lessons make up a large part of their integration process. The interviewed status holders started their integration process before January 2022 and were therefore subject to the 2013 Integration Law including later additions. To complete their integration process, the interviewed status holders must pass Dutch language exams in writing, reading, speaking and listening. The formal language lessons prepared most status holders for language exams at A1-level and A2-level, while some are exempted from the formal language classes for special reasons and others continued learning at higher levels of the CEFR framework.

During COVID-19, the formal language lessons of status holders were moved from offline to online. Among the interviewed status holders, five turned out to have finished their integration process at the time of the interview (interview 1, 2, 3, 8, 9). Some of them were still participating in formal language classes, yet voluntarily (interview 2, 8, 9). As they also experienced online formal language classes, their experiences are also included in the analysis of the interviews.

Among the other five status holders, two status holders had extensive experience with online formal language classes as part of their integration process (interview 4, 6) and one status holder had a bit of experience with online formal language classes (interview 7). The other two status holders, waited until COVID-19 restrictions permitted the continuation of offline formal language classes (interview 5, 10). They were not the only ones who paused their formal language classes. Two professionals noted that, based on their observations, plenty of status holders stopped or paused their language classes during COVID-19 because the status holders did not possess sufficient digital skills and knowledge at the start of online formal language classes nor were they able to acquire sufficient skills to keep up with the online formal language classes (interview 15, 16).

In the conceptual framework, three consequences of the switch to online formal language lessons were highlighted, relating to digital access, skills and knowledge, disruption of the learning progress, and limited social interaction. These consequences form the structure of the results below.

4.1.1. Digital access, knowledge, and skills

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all formal language classes were moved to an online classroom and organised via Teams, Zoom or another software tool facilitating remote education. To participate in online formal language classes, status holders needed a digital device (such as a phone, tablet or laptop), an internet connection at home and sufficient digital skills and knowledge to participate in the online formal language classes, or the drive to acquire digital skills and knowledge for online formal language classes.

The extent to which interviewed status holders had digital access and digital knowledge differed per person, but overall most status holders did not seem to experience many problems. Regarding digital

access, every interviewed status holder had access to a laptop, as they owned a laptop themselves, or were provided with a laptop by a societal initiative or their language school.

While access to a laptop or internet connection was not an issue among the interviewed status holders, digital skills and knowledge to participate in online formal language lessons were not present with every status holder at the moment COVID-19 restrictions caused the switch to online formal language lessons (interview 2, 9). Some status indicated that they had sufficient or even excellent digital skills and knowledge, to participate in online formal language classes (interview 4, 5, 6). To illustrate their digital proficiency: One status holder was simultaneously engaged in a fulltime online study to become a cloud engineer (interview 6), and another sold goods online via Amazon when still residing in his country of origin and is currently rebuilding his online company in the Netherlands (interview 4).

However, one status holder (interview 9) indicated that, before COVID-19, she did not have the digital skills and knowledge that she needed for online formal language lessons. Before online formal language lessons were initiated, she would only use her smartphone instead of a laptop. However, she argued that during COVID-19 she was forced to figure out how to work with a laptop to participate in online formal language lessons. She coped with this challenge by consulting YouTube instruction videos and explanations on Google. She indicated being very pleased with the acquired know-how on using a computer (interview 9).

“Vroeger gebruikte ik de computer nooit. Altijd tijdens inburgeringsexamen en daarna taallessen, was niet achter computer zitten, met boeken en papier. Alleen die, toen heb ik inburgeringsexamen voor B1 examen via de computer. Daarna tijdens de Corona moet ik Zoom gebruiken, Teams gebruiken en ik heb echt weinig ervaring. Maar het is goed. Ja eerst was het moeilijk, maar daarna heb ik geleerd. En nu ben ik gewend. ... Voordeel van Corona. ... Het is eigenlijk meestal zelf geleerd. YouTube, Google. [I: Waarom vond je het eerst moeilijk?³] Want we zijn niet gewend. En ik, het is niet nodig. Ik gebruik altijd mijn telefoon voor mailen. Maar het is nu, ook meer belangrijk tijdens mijn studie. Ook vorige twee jaren, toen kinderen ook thuisonderwijs.” (interview 9, para.56-66)

Translated: *“In the past, I never used the computer. During integration exams and formal language lessons, it was not behind the computer, but with books and paper. Then, I had to do the integration exam for B1 behind the computer. Thereafter during Corona, I had to use Zoom, and Teams and I had very little experience. But it is good now. Yes, at first it was hard, but then I learned. And now I am used to it. ... The advantage of Corona. ... It is mostly self-learned. YouTube, Google. [I: Why was it hard at first?] Because we are not used to it. And we did not need it. I always used my phone for email. However, now it is also more important during my study. Also, the past two years, when my children had home schooling.”*

Some other status holders shared positive experiences regarding online formal language classes. The most frequently mentioned positive experience is related to the ease of access, as online classes required no travel time and related costs (interview 2, 4, 6, 9). One professional observed that some status holders were pleased they did not need to travel to language schools anymore (interview 13), but only in rare cases according to another professional (interview 15).

“Ja moeilijk [online classes], maar... Het is een beetje makkelijk. Geen reizen naar bijvoorbeeld Rotterdam of andere steden. ... Dat duurt veel tijd en dat duurt veel geld.” (interview 4, para.96, 112)

Translated: *“Yes, it is hard [online formal language classes] but.... It is also a bit easy. No travelling for example, to Rotterdam or other cities. That takes a lot of time and costs a lot of money.”*

³ ‘I.’ refers to input of the interviewer

Furthermore, the results of the interviewed status holders indicate few issues related to the pivot to an online education environment, merely some initial difficulties were experienced after which they quickly adapted to the situation using newly acquired skills and knowledge. In contrast to the interviewed status holders, professionals argued that based on their observations, limited digital access and knowledge among status holders at the start of COVID-19 caused considerable challenges once online formal language classes started (interview 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). Professionals suggested that the challenge to participate in online formal language classes (was perceived to be) too much by other status holders, as they stopped their language classes (interview 15).

Professionals explained that social initiatives provided status holders without digital access, with a laptop at home. From the perspective of professionals, access to a laptop was needed to participate in online formal language classes and to complete exercises at home (interview 15, 16). Additionally, societal organisations tried to close the digital knowledge gap among status holders by initiating training (interview 14) and providing status holders with step-by-step graphic guides on how to download and use Zoom or other programs needed for online formal language classes (interview 13).

4.1.2. Learning progress

Some status holders who participated in online formal language lessons during COVID-19 experienced a disruption of their learning progress due to different causes (interview 2, 4, 6, 7). On the one hand, status holders experienced that the teaching methods of online formal language classes were different and contained fewer opportunities to practice Dutch with other students and teachers. On the other hand, status holders suggested that the behaviour of teachers, fellow students and themselves during online formal language classes disrupted their learning progress.

Some status holders implied that the behaviour of teachers, fellow students and themselves hurt their learning progress during online formal language classes (interview 2, 4, 7). In comparison to offline formal language classes, one status holder experienced, that teachers paid limited attention to individual students during online formal language classes (interview 2).

“Ik vind het moeilijk om, je krijgt geen aandacht met de docent. Docent in de war. Wil met die spreken en met die spreken. Je moet met de chat praten dus hij kijkt niet goed aan.” (interview 2, para.147)

Translated: *“I think it is hard to, you do not get the attention of the teacher. The teacher is confused. Wants to speak with someone, and someone else. You have to talk with the chat so he [the teacher] does not look you in the eyes.”*

Besides, some status holders further suggested the attitude of other students in the online classroom lowered the educational quality. They experienced difficulties concentrating when other students turned off their cameras (interview 2, 7), or kept microphones switched on at all times (interview 4) during formal online language classes. For one status holder, in particular, it was also a challenge to hear and understand everything that was said by fellow students and teachers during online formal language classes (interview 4).

Regarding her behaviour during online formal language classes, one status holder explained that it required more effort to focus during the online formal language lessons, compared to offline lessons. The status holder explained that studying a new language from home was also challenging due to the absence of physical activation. She could just stay in bed during the online formal language lessons, instead of having to wake up, dress up and be active (interview 7).

“Ik krijg beetje stress online. Ook geen zin meer. Als jij ligt op bed, nee, slapen. Maar als je gaat naar school, gewoon wakker worden, actief. Dan grote verschil.” (interview 7, para.52)

Translated: “I get a little stressed out online. Also, I do not feel like doing it [learning Dutch] anymore. If you are in bed, no, sleeping. But if you go to school, just wake up, and be active. That is a big difference.”

One interviewed couple of status holders (interview 6) – both trained as teachers in their country of origin – argued that their learning progress during formal online language classes was less effective mainly due to less contact with other students. However, still, the practical advantage of participating from home outweighed the less effective online formal language classes and limited interaction with other students.

Ja, ik denk dat fysiek [formele taal-] cursus is beter (R2). Meer effectief (R1). Maar online cursus hebben we contact alleen met docenten, met andere cursisten hebben we bijna niet contact. Dat is echt moeilijk. Soms breakout rooms, praten we met elkaar maar niet zoals in een klas (R2). Wij zijn twee docenten. Dus [offline] klas is beter dan online (R1). Natuurlijk, natuurlijk (R2). Maar ja ik weet het niet, het is makkelijk voor ons [online formele taallessen] (R1). (interview 6, para.49-54)

Translated: “Yes, I do think physical [formal language] course is better (R2). More effective (R1). With online [formal language] courses we have contact with the teachers, but barely with other students. That is difficult. Sometimes we use breakout rooms, and we talk with each other but not like in the [offline] classroom (R2). We are two teachers. So the [offline] class is better than online (R1). Obviously, yes (R2). I do not know, it is just easier for us [online formal language classes] (R1).

Two status holders indicated that the online formal language lessons included fewer opportunities to practice Dutch speaking with the teacher or other students (interview 2, 7). For this reason, one status holder decided to wait until formal language lessons were organised offline again (interview 5). In the interview, he reflected on his positive current experience with the offline formal language classes where he highlighted that he is very content to practice Dutch with fellow students and his teacher.

“Een nieuwe taal wil leren, oefenen is echt belangrijk. Je moet oefenen. Met offline [formele taallessen] je kan niet oefenen. ... Mijn klas nu, geen regels Corona, mijn klas nu is met zestien. Zestien cursisten, studenten. Het gaat echt goed met mij want ik kan, ik kan met mensen praten. Meeste studenten zij kunnen Nederlands praten, zij zijn nieuw. En de [taal] cursus is intensief... Beetje moeilijk om met de studenten te oefenen. Maar ik heb de docent en ik kan met de docent oefenen. En dat is goed voor mij en heel belangrijk.”(interview 5, para.53-55)

Translated: “While learning a new language, practising is important. You have to practice. With offline [formal language classes] you cannot practice. ... My current class, no Corona rules, we are with sixteen. Sixteen students. I am doing well because I can talk to people. ... For me, that is very good and very important.”

4.1.3. Social contact

When formal language classes were moved to online classrooms, status holders no longer saw their fellow students and teachers in person anymore. One of the mentioned experiences of online language education was the lack of possibilities to create social contacts and networks with other status holders and teachers during online formal language classes (interview 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9).

“Ja, je weet Zoom, via Zoom. Maar kan het niet echt horen, woorden horen of je hebt geen kans op socialiseren met andere cursisten en docenten.” (interview 4, para.100)

Translated: “You know, via Zoom. You cannot hear, hear words or have a chance to socialise with other students and teachers”.

Additionally, one status holder (interview 2) explained that social contact with other students and teachers during formal language lessons can be used to expand social networks outside the classroom. However, as he explained that was not possible during COVID-19.

“Ik heb eigenlijk nu alles uit mijn medestudent, ik ken jou niet. Ik was met jou in de les, maar ik ken jou niet. ... [I: Wat vind je daarvan?] Ja vervelend, echt. Met de les, jij maakt ook sociale uitbreiding. Jij bent mevrouw, dit, meneer. Dat is ook voor jouw netwerk. [I: Maar tijdens Corona...] Nee. Nee. Alleen online, “Ok, dag, dag, klaar”.” (interview 2, para.196-204)

Translated: *“With fellow students, I do not know you. I was with you in class, but I do not know you. ... [I: How do you feel about that?] Yes, unfortunate. With the class, you make social expansion. You are Miss this, Sir that. That is also for your network. [I: But during Corona...] No. No. Just online, “Ok, bye, bye, done”.”*

Professionals also suggested, based on their observations and conversations with status holders, that most status holders were disappointed about the lack of social contact with other students and teachers during formal language lessons. Most status holders preferred physical lessons which implied meeting new people to expand their networks (interview 14, 15).

4.1.4. Summary of the formal language lessons experiences during COVID-19

To summarise the experiences of online formal language lessons during COVID-19, half of the interviewed status holders participated in online formal language lessons. Two other status holders waited until restrictions were lifted, to participate in offline formal language lessons. Not because they lacked digital access or digital skills and knowledge, but because they preferred to participate in offline formal language classes where in-person interaction to practice the Dutch language with teachers and fellow students is possible. Besides, none of the interviewed status holders lacked digital access as they owned a laptop or were provided with one by social initiatives or language schools. Regarding digital skills and knowledge, two status holders did not possess sufficient digital skills and knowledge once online formal language classes started but they managed to acquire sufficient skills to participate in online formal language classes. Moreover, three status holders stated they possessed excellent digital skills and the required knowledge for participating in online formal language classes. The experiences of interviewed status holders contrast with the observations of interviewed professionals. The professionals argued there was a considerable number of status holders unable to participate in online formal language classes as they did not possess or acquire sufficient digital skills and knowledge. Lastly, some status holders experienced a disruption in their learning progress due to online formal language classes. Two status holders indicated that practising the Dutch language with teachers and other students was harder during online formal language classes. Additionally, three status holders argued that teachers had limited attention to individual students and fellow students caused distracting behaviour in the online classroom. One status holder also explained that she struggled with her behaviour, as she found it challenging to concentrate during online lessons from home. Last, several status holders missed social interaction with teachers and fellow students, to practice Dutch and build social networks that might also be relevant beyond the walls of the classroom.

4.2. Status holders’ experiences with social bonds, bridges and links

SQ2: How did status holders in the Netherlands experience social bonds, bridges and links during COVID-19?

This section answers SQ2, regarding the social experiences of status holders during COVID-19. The social experiences of status holders are mainly related to their social contact and interaction with either family, co-ethnic, co-religious or co-national groups (social bonds), the Dutch resident population (social bridges) or institutions (social links). During COVID-19, many status holders easily stayed in

contact with family or co-ethnic, co-religious or co-national groups. However, initiating and maintaining contact with the Dutch resident population seemed more challenging. Moreover, contact with institutions was characterised by online communication, which was also challenging for some status holders.

4.2.1. Social bonds

This paragraph divides the social bonds of status holders into three parts: social bonds with family in their country of origin, with family in the Netherlands and with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national status holders. Although contact with family in the country of origin already took place online before COVID-19, physical contact with family in the Netherlands and with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national status holders was restricted by government measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Social bonds with family in the country of origin

The social bonds of status holders in the Netherlands with family in their country of origin or other countries in the region were already online before COVID-19. This way of communicating did not change during COVID-19. Professionals noted, based on their observations, that if status holders were able to stay in contact with family in their country of origin or other countries in the region, they were still able to do that during COVID-19 (interview 13, 14). One status holder had even more time to contact his family and was very pleased that contact with family remaining in his country of origin increased during COVID-19 (interview 2).

“Mijn ouders wonen op dit moment in Qatar. Ik ben daar één broer nog, en zus. Iedereen daar. Die wonen daar. [I: Kon je makkelijk contact met hen houden tijdens Corona?] Ja, dat is goed. Via telefoon. ... Ik heb ook tijd voor mijn ouders. Via telefoon. Normaal gesproken, één telefoon per week. Tijdens Corona elke twee dagen. Dat is ook leuk.” (interview 2, para.499)

Translated: *“My parents currently live in Qatar. I also have one brother and sister in Qatar, everyone is there. They live there. [I: Were you able to contact them during Corona?] Yes, that was good. By phone. ... I had more time for my parents. Via the phone. Normally, one call per week. During Corona, every two days. I like that.”*

However, for some, the nature and importance of that communication did change during COVID-19. One status holder was more concerned about a family living in war zones since COVID-19 was a crisis on top of an ongoing war (interview 1). A professional also mentioned that status holders seemed concerned about their families in Lebanon, where in 2020 an explosion blew up the Port of Beirut and many people died or got injured (interview 14).

Social bonds with family in the Netherlands

During COVID-19, the social bonds of status holders with family in the Netherlands changed for some but not for every individual. Among the interviewed status holders, four had family living nearby during COVID-19 (interview 1, 2, 3, 9). Two status holders had families living in the same city. One of these two visited her family every day and kept on doing so during COVID-19 (interview 9). When one of her family members got infected with COVID-19, a few days later all family members were infected. In contrast, the other status holder was careful with visiting her family members during COVID-19, in particular with her mother due to her poor health condition (interview 3).

“Ja beetje speciale situatie met mijn moeder. Dan heb ik veel zorg om alles schoon, netjes. Als mijn broer komt, hij komt alleen. Schoon en zijn niet ziek.” (interview 3, para.29)

Translated: *“Yes, special situation with my mother. Then, I had a lot of worries to keep everything clean, and tidy. When my brother comes, he comes alone. Clean and not sick.”*

One professional stated, based on experiences in practice, that social contact between family members living close to each other did not change during COVID-19, like with Dutch families (interview 14).

“Ja dat... Net zoals bij veel Nederlandse families, dat ging gewoon door.” (interview 14, para.172)

Translated: *“Yes... Just like with many Dutch families, it just continued.”*

The two other status holders had family living at a greater distance in the Netherlands, or right across the German border (interview 1, 2). One of them had a sister living in Germany, whom the status holder did not visit for two years as a result of COVID-19 (interview 1). She argued that it was not possible to welcome her sister in the Netherlands since all shops and restaurants were closed and they would not have been able to do something outside the house. The status holder argued that it was hard because normally they would meet every summer holiday in either Germany or the Netherlands. The other status holder had a brother in the northern Dutch province of Friesland, “far away” (interview 2). He argued that he did not see his brother because it was “not possible during COVID-19”. Before COVID-19, they met up once or twice a year but during COVID-19 they did not see each other at all. Although he missed seeing his brother, he was content with the option to videocall him occasionally.

“Mijn zus woont in Duitsland. Eén jaar kan niet op bezoek, kan niet gaan. Corona echt lastig. Ja. [I: Ga je normaal daarheen? Of zij komt hierheen?] Eén keer ja, bij zomervakantie. [I: En toen kon het één of twee keer niet?] Twee jaar, bijna niet. Echt moeilijk.” (interview 1, para.361-365)

Translated: *“My sister lives in Germany. One year we were not able to visit each other. Corona is difficult. Yes. [I: Do you normally go there, or does she come here?] One time yes, during the summer holiday. [I: And you could not because of Corona, for one or two times?] Two times. Difficult.”*

Social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious or co-national status holders

Social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious or co-national status holders – also known as friends for most status holders – can be split into two parts: maintaining existing connections and building new connections. Connections with other status holders are very important for many of the interviewed status holders (interview 2, 4, 5, 6, 8). They enjoy spending time together and supporting each other in their integration process. However, COVID-19 restrictions formed an obstacle to meeting other status holders in person so most status holders adapted to the situation by having online contact.

Maintaining existing connections

Status holders who lived in the Netherlands before COVID-19 had already built some connections and friendships. Some of them did not have (much) family nearby but had contact with other status holders from their country of origin (interview 1, 2, 7, 8).

Other status holders, who arrived in the Netherlands during COVID-19 befriended other status holders in the AZCs or other people from their home country living in the Netherlands (interview 4, 6). Instead of physically meeting each other, status holders mostly had contact via WhatsApp-groups with each other due to COVID-19 restrictions, to ask each other questions and help each other out based on their own experiences (interview 4). A professional estimated that it is essential for most status holders to have contact with other status holders because they can help each other, for example towards finding work or other experiences (interview 13).

“WhatsApp groep, ja. Als we vragen in deze groep, hoe kan ik doen? Ik heb een probleem. En andere mensen, andere statushouders, hebben ook hetzelfde probleem. We hebben nodig. Om te praten. Contact hebben.” (interview 4, para.429)

Translated: *“WhatsApp groups, yes. If we ask in the group, how can we do this? I have a problem. And other people, other status holders, have the same problem. We need it. To talk. To have contact.”*

One status holder still met with other status holder friends in secret, despite government measures restricting social gatherings (interview 8).

“Ja wij geheim eigenlijk. Bij iemand thuis en die woont op veertiende verdieping. Samen eten. Ja, dat moet.” (interview 8, para.233)

Translated: *“Yes, secretly. At someone’s house and he lived on the fourteenth floor. Having dinner together. Yes, we had to.”*

This status holder also explained how easy it was to find other status holders, in the same situation, when he arrived in the Netherlands five and half years ago (interview 8). At that time, all of his appointments with the municipality and societal organisations such as VluchtelingenWerk were on location and in person. Such occasions were when he got to know his current friends, who also came from Syria and shared a similar history. This way of expansion of the social network was unavailable for status holders just arriving in the Netherlands shortly before or during COVID-19, as all institutional appointments and language classes were moved to an online environment, restricting physically meeting anyone.

Building new connections

Thus, based on my interviews with status holders, building new connections was hard during COVID-19 since status holders did not meet other status holders in a language class or with other appointments as part of their integration process. In addition, the interviewed status holders who arrived shortly before or during COVID-19 indicated that the difficulties related to connecting to other status holders posed an additional personal challenge as they perceived connecting with other status holders as important (interview 4, 5, 6).

“Het is echt belangrijk om nieuwe mensen te leren kennen. ... Tijdens Corona was echt moeilijk. Ik had geen vrienden. Overal. Geen vrienden. Het was echt moeilijk. Geen voetbal, geen vrienden bezoeken. Ik heb vriend in Bergen op Zoom, Rotterdam, maar ik kon niet hun bezoeken. Het was echt moeilijk. Ik ging naar hun misschien twee of drie keer en dan was het klaar met mij. Coronatijd was echt moeilijk in voetbal spelen, vrienden bezoeken, alles, met alles.” (interview 5, para.39, 41)

Translated: *“It is really important to learn new people. ... During Corona, that was difficult. I did not have friends. Nowhere. No friends. It was really difficult. No football, no visiting friends. I have a friend in Bergen op Zoom, Rotterdam, but I could not visit him. It was really difficult. I went to see my friends, maybe two or three times and then it was done with me. Corona time was really difficult, in playing football, visiting friends, everything, with everything.”*

While it was hard to make new connections with other status holders, one status holder was also reluctant to make new connections because her health was more important to her than meeting new people (interview 10). When she heard about the small Sudanese community in and around her hometown, she still waited for her vaccination before she met up with any of them.

This status holder was not the only one who was extra careful with maintaining and building social relations during COVID-19. Among the interviewed status holders, seven status holders indicated that they were very careful with COVID-19. One status holder was convinced that she had a large responsibility towards older, more vulnerable people in society and therefore limited social interactions (interview 1). Several status holders explained their preventive measures: using disinfection alcohol (interview 3), washing hard and body thoroughly (interview 6), and washing children’s clothes after school (interview 1). Another status holder couple was very careful because one of them had chronic health issues (interview 4). In another family, the whole family took precautionary measures to prevent

infection with COVID-19 as the mother was sick and therefore extra vulnerable (interview 7). This status holder personally suffered because of a profound fear of passing COVID-19 on to her mother.

“Ik elke dag mijn handen tot hier [wijst naar bovenarmen] in water chloor en schoonmaken. Overal en elke dag. ... Ik voel al mijn spieren was zo hard.... Van de bang”. (interview 7, para.88, 161, 163)

Translated: *“Every day, I put my hands until here [points to her upper arm] in chlorine water, to clean. Everywhere and every day. ... I feel, all my muscles were hard... From being scared.”*

4.2.2. Social bridges

The experiences regarding social bridges of status holders are focused on their social contact with the Dutch resident population, such as neighbours or Dutch language buddies. In the Netherlands, there are many initiatives to connect status holders to Dutch volunteers (buddies), often to practice the Dutch language. During COVID-19, status holders and other people in the Dutch society were sometimes, depending on government measures, restricted from physically meeting each other.

Already before COVID-19, status holders generally did not have much contact with Dutch people like their neighbours (interview 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12). Two status holders indicated that their neighbours were too preoccupied to have contact with them (interview 1, 9), whereas two other status holders indicated that they would like to be in contact with neighbours which they were not (interview 2, 4).

“Alles belangrijk [alle soorten contacten]. Ja natuurlijk. Ook contact met ..., ook maakt niet uit wat is hun geloof maar dat is belangrijk om samen. Dat is ook fijn. Maar hier mis ik dat. [I: Hoe bedoel je dat?] Ik mis hier ja, bij mijn gebouw wonen zes woningen. Tot nu toe alleen vijf jaar, in Rotterdam, alleen "Hi", "Hoi", geen gesprek. [I: En dat mis je?] Ja hier, dat mis ik.” (interview 2, para.331-341)

Translated: *“All kinds of contact are important. Yes of course. Also, contact with... it does not matter what their religion is, but it is important to be together. That is good. I miss that here. [I: What do you mean?] I miss that, yes, in my building are six apartments. Until now, I live there for five years in Rotterdam, just “Hi”, “Hoi”, no conversation. [I: So you miss that?] Yes, I miss that here.”*

One of the latter two stated to be disappointed about the limited contact between his family and neighbours because his neighbours do not (want to) speak Dutch and only talk to people with the same native language (interview 4).

“Deze flat, de mensen hebben geen contact met andere mensen. Ja dat is een probleem voor ons. We hebben Nederlands praten nodig, met andere mensen. Maar deze mensen praten met elkaar, in moedertaal. Misschien sommige Somalië of Arabisch. Ik vind dat niet nuttig en niet mooi voor mijn kinderen en mijn vrouw en ik. Ja voor de ontwikkeling [van de Nederlandse taal]. Bijvoorbeeld de bovenburen Syrische gezin. Beneden... Of beneden, of boven. Beneden is Syrische gezin, naast de andere kant Syrische gezin. Alleen een Nederlandse man woont deze kant, maar geen contact. Want hij heeft geen kinderen, hij is heel... [I: Op zichzelf?] Ja. Hele goede man maar hij wilt geen contact hebben. Dus we hebben geen kans Nederlands te praten.” (interview 4, para.298-311)

Translated: *“In this flat, people do not have contact with other people. Yes, that is a problem for us. We need to practice speaking Dutch, with other people. However, these people only talk to each other in their native language. Maybe Somali or Arabic. I do not think that is useful and good for my children, my wife, and me. Yes, for the development [of the Dutch language]. For example, the upstairs neighbours are a Syrian family. Downstairs... Or downstairs, or up. Downstairs is a Syrian family, and next to them is another Syrian family. Just one Dutch man lives on this side, but no contact. Because he has no children, he is very... [I: Reserved?] Yes. He is a very good man, but he does not want to have contact. So we have no chance to speak Dutch.”*

“Je vraagt altijd wel van, heb je contact met de burens? Nee, dat is dan ook niet zo en in Coronatijd al helemaal niet.” (interview 12, para.130)

Translated: “You always ask, do you have contact with the neighbours? No, then they do not and especially not during Corona time.”

Only one status holder indicated that she appreciated having regular contact with her neighbours since she was accommodated during COVID-19, but only after she was vaccinated against COVID-19 (interview 10).

“Ik heb goed contact met mijn burens hier. Ik heb nice burens. Ik heb aardige burens. Hier is Nederlandse mevrouw. En van Eritrea. Heel veel aardige. Hij heeft kleine zoon. Soms kom hier mijn huis, sharing eten en samen naar centrum. Samen. That is nice. [I: Also during COVID-19?] During COVID-19, nee. Ik zeg tegen hem, voordat ik vaccinatie nemen, ik moet niet contact.” (interview 10, para.122-126)

Translated: “I have good contact with my neighbours. I have nice neighbours. There is a Dutch woman here. And from Eritrea. Very nice. He has a young son. Sometimes they come here to my house, share food and visit the centre together. Together. That is nice. [I: Also during COVID-19?] During COVID-19, no. I told him before I take the vaccination, I cannot have contact.”

While status holders were extra careful with social contact to prevent COVID-19 infection, Dutch people themselves were too. However, professionals indicated that volunteers are frequently elderly people (i.e., more vulnerable to COVID-19). Based on observations, two professionals argued that some volunteers decided to stop volunteering because they feared being infected (interview 12, 14). This might have hindered status holders’ contact with Dutch people during COVID-19. However, the interviewed status holders did not indicate that their Dutch buddies stopped volunteering during COVID-19. Two status holders just noticed that contact with their buddy was often outside or via the phone (interview 4, 6).

4.2.3. Social links

The experiences regarding social links of status holders are concentrated around the online communication with institutions, the difficulty of scheduling appointments with institutions, and the absence of activities that institutions organised before COVID-19.

Scheduling online appointments or having phone calls in Dutch

As a result of COVID-19, most institutions such as the municipality or societal organisations were forced to cancel physical appointments due to government measures and switched to online appointments. During the integration process, status holders usually have frequent contact in person with institutions, yet during COVID-19 contact was often online. Additionally, to visit shops, status holders often had to make online appointments to schedule a timeframe in which they were allowed to visit shops.

Some status holders experienced linguistic challenges with communicating over the phone in Dutch, which was sometimes necessary to communicate with different kinds of institutions or organisations during COVID-19 (interview 6, 7). Two status holders indicated that communication over the phone in Dutch was challenging, due to their language deficiency (interview 6, 7).

“Bijvoorbeeld in onze huis, we hadden een probleem. We wilden een bedrijf bellen (R1). We hebben professionele hulp nodig (R2). Ja, we praten zoals dit. Maar ze begrijpen het niet (R1). Via telefoon contact maken is echt moeilijk. Begrijpen is echt moeilijk (R2).” (interview 6, para.105-108)

Translated: “For example, in our house, we had a problem. We wanted to call a company (R1). We needed professional help (R2). Yes, we talk like this but they do not understand (R1). Making contact via the phone is hard. Understanding is really difficult (R2).”

“Andere gesprekken [online] ja, bijvoorbeeld met dokter, behandeling. [I: Ja, dat was dan online?] Ja. [I: En dat was moeilijk?] Moeilijk en ja, een beetje vreemd. Niet leuk. Soms kan andere persoon ook niet jouw gezicht zien. Geen face to face. Ik krijg beetje stress online.” (interview 7, para.48-52)

Translated: *“Other [online] conversations yes, for example with the doctor for treatment. [I: Was that online?] Yes. [I: Was that difficult?] Difficult, yes and a little bit strange. Not good. Sometimes the other person cannot see your face. No face-to-face. I experience stress online.”*

Besides, during COVID-19, government measures restricted visits to institutions and stores. Status holders had to make online appointments to schedule a timeframe for meetings with counsellors or visiting shops. However, that proved to be difficult due to a lack of experience with online appointment systems. Some status holders experienced these difficulties as they were accommodated during COVID-19 and required furniture and other things to set up or repair their homes (interview 4, 6). After finally having their own place, they were not immediately able to create a place where they felt at home.

“We hadden veel dingen kopen, om te repareren, om te leven ja. We hadden geen, bijvoorbeeld vork. Dat is heel belangrijk.” (interview 4, para.220)

Translated: *“We had many things to buy, to repair, in order to live yes. We had no, for example, fork. That is important”.*

“We moeten spullen kopen, maar alle winkels waren dicht. Anderhalve maand woonden we alleen met matrassen, en gelukkig koelkast en oven.” (interview 6, para.32)

Translated: *“We had to buy stuff, but all shops were closed. One and a half months, we only had mattresses and fortunately a fridge and oven.”*

Professionals argued, based on their observations, that many status holders stopped contacting organisations for their problems (interview 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). Another professional suggested that some status holders had nothing other than a mattress at home (interview 15), and another professional that some status holders experienced financial problems as they struggled with making digital appointments necessary for solving financial problems (interview 12).

“Ik weet dat er heel veel cliënten zijn geweest die gewoon op de grond sliepen. Of een matras op de grond dan bijvoorbeeld, omdat ze niet, geen bed konden kopen of iets dergelijks of nauwelijks dingen in hadden in hun huis. Omdat ze niet wisten hoe ze moesten kopen.” (interview 15, para.112)

Translated: *“I know that there were many clients who slept on the ground. Or on a mattress on the ground, for example, because they were not able to buy a bed or something like that and barely had stuff in their house. Because they did not know how to buy it.”*

“Ze zijn ook wel, waren gewend om overal naartoe te gaan, ik noem maar wat naar Geldzorg [voor financiële ondersteuning] of... Ja dat kon ook niet. Dus dan moesten ze afspraken maken en dan vaak online. Nou dat, dat heeft ook tot gevolgen gehad dat mensen dan dingen lieten lopen omdat ze dat contact niet konden leggen.” (interview 12, para.54)

Translated: *“They were used to going everywhere, for example, Geldzorg [for financial support] or... Yes, that was not possible anymore. So they had to make appointments and these were often online. Well, that has resulted in situations where people let things pass up because they did not know how to make contact.”*

One professional noticed, based on his experiences, that every time a strict lockdown was lifted, status holders suddenly came to the organisation bringing along their mail, with approximately half the mail consisting of payable invoices (interview 15).

Professionals also suggested that the way of communicating between professionals and status holders changed during COVID-19, online communication caused more distance between status holders and professionals (interview 12, 13, 14, 15). One professional, who worked for the municipality, indicated increased difficulty around contact for both professionals and status holders because of the shift to an online environment (interview 14). She obtained an exemption from online communication during COVID-19 and was therefore able to still see her clients (status holders) in person.

“Dat vond ik wel echt heel fijn [veel contact op kantoor in plaats van bellend]. Want dat geven ze ook steeds aan. Ja van, ik heb echt al een half jaar niemand gezien van de gemeente en ik ben heel blij dat ik eindelijk iemand heb aan wie ik mijn vragen kan stellen. Ja, en dat kan natuurlijk wel telefonisch. Maar ja, het is toch anders en je ziet niet hoe ze [status houders] erbij zitten.” (interview 14, para.42)

Translated: *“Yes, I liked that [contact at the office instead of calling clients]. Because they [status holders] also indicate it regularly: I have not seen anyone from the municipality in the past six months and I am really happy to finally see someone to whom I can ask my questions. Yes, and while that is possible via the phone, it is different and you cannot see how they [status holders] are doing.”*

The absence of activities organised by institutions

Institutions did not only provide help with finding a language class or work experience before COVID-19 but also organised activities for status holders to meet other status holders and Dutch residents.

Some status holders stayed in AZCs during part of the COVID-19 crisis because they were not accommodated yet (interview 4, 5, 6). They indicated that activities organised by the AZC and societal organisations were very important, particularly to learn Dutch during interaction with volunteers (interview 4, 6). However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, all activities were cancelled.

“In AZC waren ook veel activiteiten, voor kinderen, voor volwassenen. Ze zijn ook gestopt. Alles gestopt. ... Dus het ging slecht. We wilden leren deze taal.” (interview 6, para.15, 17)

Translated: *“In AZC were a lot of activities, for children and adults. They have been cancelled. Everything is cancelled. ... So it did not go well. We wanted to learn this language.”*

Other interviewed status holders were accommodated (years) before COVID-19. Two status holders indicated that they (and their families) also missed the activities organised by societal organisations in their city (interview 1, 8).

“Ik heb alleen met Stichting [...] hulp met mijn dochter, juf. Na schooltijd komt lezen samen, huiswerk maken, heel goed ook. Met mij alleen hebben activiteiten, voor vrouwen. Ja altijd, bijvoorbeeld naailes of veel museum ook, workshop samen. Veel activiteiten voor vrouwen. [I: Ok, en dat kon tijdens Corona niet?] Nee, tijdens Corona nee. Echt lastig. Bijna één jaar geen activiteiten. Voor kinderen ook, altijd hebben ook activiteiten voor kinderen. Mooie en leuke dagen. Maar ook bijna één jaar, zelfde, kan niet. [I: Wat vond je daarvan?] Echt lastig, ja, echt lastig. Want deze, bijvoorbeeld ik ben klaar met A2. Ik heb beetje tijd met activiteit en praten Nederlands ook om beter, ook voor kinderen spelen of veel activiteiten. Echt lastig deze tijd.” (interview 1, para.185-193)

Translated: *“I receive help from a charity, for my daughter. After school, someone comes to read and make homework, which is very good. For me, they [the charity] have activities, for women. Yes always, for example, sewing lessons, visiting a museum or doing a workshop together. Many activities for women. [I: Ok, and that was not possible during Corona?] No, not during Corona. Difficult. For almost one year there were no activities. For children, they have activities for children. Good and fun days. But also for almost one year, it was not possible. [I: How did you feel about that?] It was really difficult, yes, really difficult. Because, for example, I have finished A2. I have more time for activities and practising Dutch. Or for children too, to play and join activities. This time was very difficult.”*

One professional confirmed, based on her experiences, that activities are indeed important to status holders (interview 13). Already before COVID-19, she observed cases of isolation and loneliness among status holders and in response organised low-threshold opportunities – where status holders do not need any experience whatsoever – such as visiting the Euromast, Keukenhof, or participating in creative or workshops involving music. For women, she initiated special workshops or training related to creativity, coping with stress or assertiveness. Through participation in these activities, status holders were able to meet new people and practice the Dutch language in another setting than the classroom. According to two professionals, these activities were missed by status holders during COVID-19 (interview 13, 16).

4.2.4. Summary of social bonds, bridges and links during COVID-19

This paragraph analysed status holders' experiences with social bonds, bridges and links during COVID-19. The experiences of status holders with social bonds were divided into three sections. First, COVID-19 did not seem to have changed the social bonds of status holders with family in the country or region of origin because contact was already online. Second, five status holders had social bonds with family in the Netherlands or across the German border. The family of two status holders lived in the same city; for one of these two status holders contact with her family did not change at all as they still visited each other despite COVID-19 restrictions. The other status holder was more careful with visiting her family, especially due to her mother's poor health condition. Additionally, two status holders had family living in the Netherlands or across the German border, due to COVID-19 they did not see their family for two years. One of them argued that it was not possible to meet each other due to social COVID-19 restrictions, and the other status holder argued that her family did not visit because shops and restaurants were closed in the Netherlands and there was nothing to do for her family due to COVID-19 measures. Third, social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national status holders were limited by COVID-19 restrictions. Status holders changed their form of contact by moving to online communication with other status holders they already met before COVID-19, while one status holder admitted he still met his friends in person despite social restrictions. Moreover, four status holders indicated it was hard to build new connections during COVID-19. Not only COVID-19 restrictions that limited social interaction caused limited opportunities to build social bonds, but also the careful behaviour of status holders themselves.

Moreover, status holders' social bridges with Dutch residents were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions to some extent. Status holders do not seem to have had much contact with the Dutch population such as neighbours before and during COVID-19, which some were disappointed about but others not. In contrast, one status holder indicated that she did have contact with her neighbours regularly since she was accommodated during COVID-19, but only after she was vaccinated against COVID-19. As many interviewed status holders indicated that they were more reluctant to meet up with other status holders (social bonds) during COVID-19, they probably have been increasingly careful in meeting Dutch people as well. Although status holders' experiences do not confirm this notion, professionals suggested that the share of the Dutch population relatively frequently in contact with status holders also became more careful during COVID-19; volunteers (buddies) – often older and therefore more vulnerable people – decided to stop supporting status holders during COVID-19 based on the professionals' experiences. However, the interviewed status holders did not confirm this; two merely noticed that contact with volunteers was often outside or via the phone yet not less frequent.

The way of communicating with institutions, and social links, did change for many status holders during COVID-19. Status holders had many physical appointments with institutions such as the municipality and societal organisations before COVID-19, yet since COVID-19 virtually every appointment was online. Some status holders experienced linguistic barriers with online communication, especially over the phone when they did not see their conversation partner. Other status holders experienced difficulties

with scheduling online appointments to visit shops. Both had consequences to the lives of status holders in a broader sense, based on professionals' suggestions that some status holders had nothing else than mattresses in their house; based on my results from the interviews with status holders, the first main cause seems to be the inability to schedule an appointment for a shop visit digitally, and second, status holder's reluctance to contact supporting organisations for help with mail and finances because they are hesitant to communicate (in Dutch) over the phone. Besides, some status holders missed bonding activities to interact with others during COVID-19, which were organised by institutions and social organisations before COVID-19.

4.3. Status holders' experiences with paid and volunteer work

SQ3: How did status holders in the Netherlands experience work during COVID-19?

This section answers SQ3, regarding the work experiences of status holders during COVID-19. The results describe experiences regarding both paid work and volunteer work.

Some of the interviewed status holders were engaged in paid work or volunteer work before and during COVID-19. One status holder was engaged in (self-employed) paid work and looking for a job during COVID-19 (interview 4), and two others were engaged in volunteer work during COVID-19 (interview 2, 5). Others were combining study and work during COVID-19 (interview 3, 8, 9). Three status holders did not work at all (interview 1, 7, 10). During COVID-19, paid and volunteer jobs of some status holders were terminated (interview 3) or contracts were reduced because of government measures which meant some companies or organisations had to (temporarily) close.

Although this result may be biased because status holders are expected to find work according to the political (and sometimes societal) perspective on integration, based on the interviews with status holders, many expressed motivation to work either paid or voluntarily (interview 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Similarly, an interviewed professional argued that the willingness to work is present among most status holders, especially with younger status holders between 20 and 35 years old (interview 12).

4.3.1. Paid work

One status holder experienced the loss of paid work during COVID-19 (interview 3). She managed to find a new job during COVID-19, while another status holder experienced difficulties with finding paid work during COVID-19 (interview 4).

Loss of paid work

A professional, working for an expertise centre (concerned with the situation of status holders in the Netherlands), observed a slight improvement in the degree of status holder labour market integration (interview 11). However, she and another professional also noticed that this development was put to a halt by COVID-19 measures since working status holders often had temporary contracts that were easily terminated and/or worked in sectors that had to (temporarily) shut down (interview 11, 15).

One interviewed status holder lost her job during COVID-19 (interview 3). She worked at a department store and her contract was not extended due to reduced business during COVID-19. The status holder had a hard time after she was fired; due to government measures, she was forced to stay at home and felt like there was nothing she could do other than sit at home.

“Ik heb zeven maanden [gewerkt] en mijn contract daarna niet verlengd want in januari, nee februari want we hebben nog regels. Heel veel werken zijn gestopt, heel weinig blijven werken in de winkel. Ik heb gezien, de mensen komen heel weinig naar de winkel om te kopen. Rare situatie en we weten niet wat gaat gebeuren. ... Was echt moeilijk. Alleen thuis, beetje oefenen, boek lezen van Nederlandse taal,

sporten thuis. Niet veel eigenlijk. Kan niks doen. Alles gesloten. Koud en regen. Winter. Kan niks veel doen.” (interview 3, para.21, 313)

Translated: *“I have worked for seven months and my contract was not renewed, because in January, no, February we still had rules. Many of my colleagues stopped, and very few stayed working. I saw that very few people came to the shop to buy things. It was a strange situation and we did not know what was going to happen. ... It was difficult. Alone at home, just practising, reading a Dutch book, exercising at home. Not much to do. I could not do anything. Everything was closed. Cold and rain. Winter. I was not able to do anything.”*

Professionals estimated that other status holders lost their jobs as well (interview 11, 14, 15).

“Ik heb wel een aantal keer meegemaakt dat echt jongeren hun baan zijn verloren. In horeca, want dat is natuurlijk heel makkelijk om een baan in te vinden. Zeker. Dus dat is zeker gebeurd.” (interview 14, para.204)

Translated: *“I have experienced several times that young status holders lost their jobs. In hospitality, because it is really easy to find a job in hospitality. So that certainly happened.”*

Challenges to finding paid work

According to an interviewed professional, finding suitable work is important but difficult for many status holders (interview 11). In general, most status holders do not find paid work in the first years after receiving their residence permit. Another professional argued that finding a paid job often requires (social) networks and sufficient language proficiency, but for most status holders that takes time (interview 15). Two professionals argued, based on their observations, that the longer it takes before status holders find a suitable job, the harder it becomes (interview 11, 13). They observed that most status holders arrive in the Netherlands with a lot of energy and resilience, but when procedures upon arrival and their integration process take longer, some status holders experience reduced motivation and aspiration to find work.

One interviewed status holder was an Amazon seller in his country of origin, so he tried to resume this business in the Netherlands (interview 4). To do so, he required financial funds and therefore looked for a (part-time) job to earn money and, additionally, practice the Dutch language in person. However, he indicated that it was difficult to find a (part-time) job suiting his (highly-educated) profile and prior experience, not even mentioning the prerequisite of practising Dutch in person. As a result of the personally imposed criteria, this status holder did not find a suitable job, while jobs for the higher educated were mostly performed remote during COVID-19.

“Ja dat is moeilijk, maar dat is over Corona en taal. Corona en taal. Ja want bijvoorbeeld, ik kan alleen huiswerk, nee niet huiswerk, ik kan alleen een baan die je kan in thuis werken. Maar ik wil Nederlands praten met andere mensen. Ik wil buiten huis. Dat is een beetje, ja lastig. Dus ik kan niet echt, ik zoek geen baan met Corona tijd want ik weet dat, ik kan niet.” (interview 4, para.335, 339, 343)

Translated: *“Yes that is difficult, but it is about Corona and language. Corona and language. Yes because for example, I can only have a job at home. But I want to speak Dutch with other people. I want to work outside the house. That is difficult, yes difficult. So I cannot, I do not look for a job with Corona time because I know, I cannot.”*

The mentioned status holder who was fired at the department store, went looking for another job during COVID-19 (interview 3). She indicated to her work coach at the municipality that she was looking for a job and after a few weeks, she found a job at another department store. She was very pleased with this job opportunity as she did not enjoy staying at home.

One professional explained, based on his observations, that not every status holder was affected by COVID-19 in terms of maintaining or finding paid work (interview 15). He noticed that some status holders had already arranged a job before they entered the Netherlands. Still, for most it usually takes more time to learn Dutch and/or English, to build the required social networks necessary for finding job opportunities. For the latter status holders, COVID-19 slowed down this process even more. Another professional (working for the municipality, supporting status holders without work) argued that finding suitable work is equally important for every status holder because suitable work improves personal well-being more than just a less fitting job, on top of work providing self-sufficiency to status holders (interview 11).

“Dus werk is gewoon heel belangrijk, passend werk, waarbij iemand zich goed voelt. Als dat nog weer verder aflight, hoe langer het duurt, hoe moeilijk het wordt natuurlijk. Mensen komen met heel veel energie en veerkracht in Nederland aan, maar omdat bij ons alles zo lang duurt en veel procedures duren zo lang en dan die inburgering duurt zo lang. Maar het duurde tot nu toe natuurlijk jaren voordat iemand weer stappen kon zetten en dat heeft zo'n impact op hoe vitaal iemand is en hoe het is met die veerkracht. Dat is zonde, dat is vernietiging van arbeidskapitaal van mensen.” (interview 11, para.44)

Translated: *“So work is just really important, suitable work, where someone feels good. If that takes longer to find work, the harder it gets of course. People arrive in the Netherlands with a lot of energy and resilience, but procedures take long here, and the integration can take long. Until now, it took years before someone [status holder] was able to progress along, which influences the vitality and resilience of someone. That is a waste, a waste of human capital.”*

4.3.2. Volunteer work

Several status holders were doing volunteer work before and during COVID-19 and indicated that their job was very important to them (interview 2, 5, 6, 8, 9).

Although more than half of the interviewed status holders performed volunteer work, one professional argued, based on his experiences, that before COVID-19 it was already hard for status holders to find volunteer work due to the stigma associated with hiring status holders (interview 15). This professional was disappointed about the lack of opportunities involving volunteer work for status holders; according to this professional, status holders are motivated to work (even unpaid), but the professional perceived that employers are reluctant to hire status holders.

“Het is, er zit een heel stigma rond vluchtelingen aannemen. Zelfs voor vrijwilligerswerk is dat moeilijk, om als vluchteling aan de slag te gaan. Dan is het vaak, ja, we willen er toch iemand die heel goed Nederlands kan op of zo. Terwijl, ook al is het misschien een beetje met ouderen van een verzorgingstehuis op stap gaan naar het park of zo, dan denk ik van nou, dit is toch leuk? Die oudere vindt het ook leuk om Nederlands te helpen. En om gewoon een beetje te praten. En voor die statushouder zou het super mooi zijn om Nederlands te leren, op die manier Nederlands te oefenen. Maar nee, dat dat is dan niet goed genoeg. Dat vind ik altijd heel jammer. Want ze willen zo graag aan de slag. Ook is het onbetaald.” (interview 15, para.135)

Translated: *“It is, there is a stigma around hiring refugees. Even for volunteer work it is hard, to find volunteer work as a refugee. It is often, we would like to hire someone who speaks Dutch very well. At the same time, even if it is going to the park with the elderly, I think, that is fun, right? Elderly people like to help with Dutch. And to just talk. And for the status holders, it would be great to learn Dutch as result. But no, that is not good enough. I feel sorry. Because they want to find a job. Even if it is unpaid.”*

Before COVID-19, an interviewed status-holder couple worked for approximately three months as volunteers in a nearby nursing home, while they were still residing in an AZC (interview 6). They served coffee, played games, and listened and danced to music with elderly people. The status holders indicated that this job was highly relevant to their proficiency in Dutch. However, during COVID-19 this job was

stopped. The status holders were very eager to learn and practice Dutch so they found another volunteer job, and worked as volunteers at a swimming pool, where they cleaned dressing rooms and toilets.

“We schoonmaken. Maar, maar, onze eerste doel is natuurlijk taal. Ja contact maken. En daar twee medewerkers. We hebben koffie en thee en we praten met elkaar. Als het niet druk was, dan konden we praten.” (interview 6, para.149, 151, 152)

Translated: *“We clean. But, our first goal is the language of course. Yes, making contact. And there were two employees. We have coffee and tea and we talk with each other. If it was not too busy, we could talk.”*

Another status holder argued that his volunteer job was important, especially during COVID-19 (interview 3). He volunteered for a societal organisation, where he performed translation services between status holders and professionals. In the course of the pandemic, he tried to work from home but, in his experience, providing translation services during phone calls was problematic due to the lack of eye contact and body language. This appears similar to the challenges some other status holders experienced during online communication with institutions and organisations (social links). At some point, the respective status holder was allowed to return to the societal organisation’s office. As he felt an urge to leave his house, feel useful again, and work on his (diminished) language proficiency, the resumption meant a great deal to him.

“Ik heb gezegd, ik zie mijn taal stappen terug naar achter. Hij [supervisor] zei, ja geen probleem, kan jij hier bakje koffie drinken als jij nodig hebt. Dat is ook een voorbeeld van die, thuis zitten is niet goed.” (interview 2, para.247)

Translated: *“I have said, my language is taking steps back. He [supervisor] said, yes no problem, you can come to drink coffee whenever you want to. That shows being at home is not good.”*

Moreover, the respective status holder even identified his life’s purpose through the volunteer work performed. He discovered that becoming a licensed translator would help other status holders and professionals, to communicate more easily (interview 2). The experience of this status holder showed how important volunteer work can be for status holders. It served different purposes, such as feeling useful, practising the language, having contact with others and becoming self-sufficient.

Two other status holders had volunteer jobs as part of their BBL-education. They worked two or three days a week as a volunteer, supporting other status holders or elderly people (interview 8, 9). Their volunteer jobs did not stop during COVID-19. One of them indicated that her volunteer job continued to be in person during COVID-19 (interview 9), while the other status holder explained that he was disappointed by the switch to online communication due to COVID-19 since he preferred to be around other people (interview 8). The latter status holder was looking for another volunteer job at the time of the interview because he wanted to further develop his skills and experiences (interview 8).

“Ja ik wil verder ontwikkelen. Met begeleiden. Ook meer ervaring bij andere organisatie. Misschien ik kan andere taken daar doen. Ik heb veel geleerd van [stageplek], ik vind het heel erg mooi om daar te werken. Ja. Dat misschien in de toekomst. Maar nu, ik probeer mijn leven op te bouwen. Ik wil meer dingen zien.” (interview 8, para.70)

Translated: *“Yes I want to develop further. With guiding [other people]. Also, I want to gain experience with another organisation. Maybe I can perform other tasks there. I learned a lot from [internship organisation], and I enjoy working there. Yes. Maybe that is my future. But for now, I try to build a life. I want to see more organisations.”*

Two professionals, of which one works for the municipality (interview 14), stated that volunteer work is an opportunity to get in touch with Dutch people, practice the Dutch language and build social networks (interview 13). Most of these opportunities were suspended during COVID-19 (interview 16).

One professional observed that many status holders had volunteer jobs in elderly care, however, due to the vulnerability of the elderly these jobs were stopped during COVID-19 (interview 13). Some status holders suddenly had no volunteer work anymore and had to remain at home, while most seemed motivated to gain work experience.

4.3.3. Conclusion

Status holders' work experiences relate to both paid work and volunteer work. Overall, the interviewed status holders were more engaged in volunteer jobs, than paid jobs. One status holder had a paid job when COVID-19 started, however, she lost her job at a department store because fewer people visited the shop as a consequence of COVID-19. Subsequently, she experienced the time at home as difficult, but relatively quickly managed to find another job. Professionals estimated that status holders losing their jobs was a common occurrence during COVID-19, as status holders frequently work in sectors (e.g. hospitality) that had to (temporarily) close due to government measures. Another status holder was looking for a job during COVID-19 suiting his highly-educated level of knowledge and experience, which simultaneously offered the possibility to practice Dutch with colleagues. However, these jobs were mostly performed remotely during COVID-19.

More than half of the interviewed status holders performed volunteer work before and during COVID-19. Before COVID-19, one status holder couple worked as volunteers in a nursing home but were dismissed when COVID-19 arrived due to the relatively fragile health condition of elderly people. Still, they were eager to find another volunteer job to practice Dutch, which they managed to find as cleaners at a swimming pool. Another status holder indicated that his volunteer job as a translator was important during COVID-19, to practise the Dutch language and feel useful. For a long time, he was not allowed to work at the office due to imposed COVID-19 restrictions. He argued that providing translation services by phone was too difficult, which seemed comparable to the experiences of other status holders during their online communication with institutions (social links). After a while, he was allowed to come back to the office and felt grateful to feel useful and practice his Dutch again. Two other status holders volunteered as part of their (BBL-) education during COVID-19, supporting other status holders and elderly people.

4.4. Additional results

This section does not provide answers to the SQs but contains additional insights based on experiences that status holders and professionals shared during the interviews.

The three SQs of my research focus on status holders' experiences of formal language classes, social bonds, bridges and links, and work during COVID-19. Hence, these topics were the basis of the interview guide. However, during the interviews with status holders, I did not strictly follow the interview guide as it felt important to be flexible and open-minded to new interesting topics and themes that emerged during the interview process. This flexibility facilitated conversations in which status holders shared experiences – related to COVID-19 – despite my not directly asking for these respective experiences. Besides, my research aims to give voice to the experiences of status holders themselves and by letting go of strictly following my interview guide – which based on previous research that often lacked the voice of status holders themselves – I might have created space for other and relevant experiences as status holders shared the experiences on their own initiative. Some of these topics were mentioned by several status holders, asserting their relevance and the need to be elaborated on, even though they lacked relevance for answering the predetermined RQ.

The most frequently mentioned additional results relate to the status holders' experiences around their arrival to the Netherlands during COVID-19, status holders' infection and vaccination against COVID-19, decreased language proficiency during COVID-19, well-being during COVID-19, and the current

situation of status holders at the time of the interviews in May and June 2022 (when COVID-19 restrictions were largely lifted).

4.4.1. Arrival in the Netherlands during COVID-19

Four interviewed status holders arrived in the Netherlands during COVID-19 and were accommodated during COVID-19 (interview 4, 5, 6, 10). Based on their experiences, the arrival and first period in the Netherlands during COVID-19 were challenging for different reasons, which this paragraph discusses.

After arrival to the Netherlands, one of the interviewed status holders was sent to an asylum centre which to him felt like a prison due to COVID-19 restrictions (interview 4).

“Ik kwam direct uit mijn land en ik moest in, wat is dat, gevangenis? Maar niet, detection centre, centrum in Schiphol. Ja en, dat was heel lastig voor mij. Want dat is, dat is echt een gevangenis. Ik moest bijna één maand blijven. ... Maar dat was Corona tijd, dus we konden niet bijvoorbeeld buiten gaan. Alleen één uur. En ja, er waren strikte regels in gevangenis vanwege Corona”. (interview 4, para.44)

Translated: *“I came right away from my country and I had to go to, what is that, prison? But not, the detection centre, the centre in Schiphol. Yes, that was hard for me. Because that is, that is really like a prison. I had to stay there for one month. ... But it was Corona time, so we could not go outside for example. Just one hour. And yes, there were strict rules in the prison because of Corona.”*

Once this status holder received permission to stay in the Netherlands, he was transferred to an AZC somewhere else in the Netherlands (interview 4). After arrival, he experienced difficult circumstances again, involving the lack of adherence to COVID-19 rules among other residents in the AZC making him feel prone to health-related COVID-19 threats. This status holder was not an exception in his unsafe perception of life in the AZCs during COVID-19, since two other status holders have expressed similar feelings (interview 7, 10).

“Dan ik ging naar AZC Harderwijk. Ja en dit is niet, dat was echt niet gezond. Dat was heel druk. En andere mensen hebben geen aandacht gegeven voor Corona [maatregelen]. Dus ja, ik voelde me niet veilig. Veilig om, gezondheid. Ja. Ik woonde acht maanden in AZC Harderwijk”. (interview 4, para.56)

Translated: *“Then I went to AZC Harderwijk. And that it, that was truly unhealthy. It was really busy. Other people did not pay attention to Corona [measures]. So yes, I did not feel safe. Safe, regarding my health. Yes. I lived in AZC Harderwijk for eight months.”*

Once the four status holders were accommodated during COVID-19, several other challenges emerged – e.g. building social bridges and bonds and communicating over the phone in Dutch – which was already elaborated upon in the other sections of this chapter (interview 4, 5, 6, 10).

One of the interviewed status holders, who arrived in the Netherlands seven years ago, explained how hard the first period in the Netherlands was without the extra challenges of COVID-19 (interview 2).

“Toen ik in het begin in Rotterdam, was echt moeilijk. Echt moeilijk. Ik moest alles weten. Met gemeente was ook moeilijk. Wat is mijn belang voor toekomst? Wat ga ik doen?”. (interview 2, para.7)

Translated: *“During the first period in Rotterdam, it was hard. I had to know many things. With the municipality, that was also hard. What is my future? What will I do?”.*

He was not the only status holder indicating the difficulties of the first few years in the Netherlands already before COVID-19. Other status holders, also currently living in the Netherlands for more than five years, argued that their period after accommodation was extremely difficult mainly due to the unfamiliar Dutch legislation and language (interview 3, 8). Considering that these status holders experienced these difficulties without COVID-19, presumably status holders who arrived during

COVID-19 had an even harder time due to COVID-19 restrictions limiting their linguistic, social and economic integration.

4.4.2. COVID-19 infection and vaccination

Several status holders shared that they and their families were infected by COVID-19 once, or in some cases multiple times and explained how they experienced the infection (interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 9). Some were sick and scared, while others were not. Moreover, most status holders freely shared that they were vaccinated against COVID-19.

4.4.3. Language proficiency

Subchapter 4.1. explained status holders' experiences with online formal language lessons during COVID-19. However, status holders not only practised and learned Dutch inside the classroom of formal language lessons but also outside the classroom.

Although this finding might be biased, as status holders are probably reluctant to tell me (i.e., a Dutch citizen/researcher) otherwise, all status holders emphasised that learning Dutch is their most important goal (interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). They indicated being extremely motivated and provided examples of efforts undertaken to improve their Dutch proficiency, such as visiting the library for extra language classes (interview 2), practising Dutch with volunteers in the AZC (interview 6), or volunteering at the swimming pool in close proximity to the AZC (interview 6).

Two status holders indicated that they visited the library before COVID-19, to practice Dutch with volunteers or through free language courses offered at the library (interview 2, 6). According to virtually every status holder, these interactions were essential for increasing their Dutch proficiency, but unfortunately, this was not possible during COVID-19.

“In AZC, we hebben, daar komen vrijwilligers. Bijvoorbeeld om met ons Nederlands spreken, maar ze kwamen niet mee. En ja. We hadden een apart ruimte om elke dag, elke dag mensen komen daar zitten, wij gaan spreken. Dit moest ook stoppen [door COVID-19]. We moesten thuisblijven. Toen ik voelde mijn taalniveau steeds lager worden.” (interview 7, para.67)

Translated: *“In AZC, we have, volunteers come. For example to speak Dutch with us, but they did not come anymore. And yes. We had a separate room to go to every day, everyday people will sit there, and we start talking. This also had to stop [because of COVID-19]. We had to stay at home. Then I felt my language proficiency getting lower and lower.”*

“Onze eerste doel was, is, taal te leren. Dus ja, we proberen te leren deze taal en we gingen naar bibliotheek in Ter Apel. En wanneer deze pandemie begon, dan alles stopt. We, elke week, één keer per week, we gingen naar bibliotheek maar na de pandemie kunnen niet meer.” (interview 6, para.4)

Translated: *“Our first goal was, is, to learn the language. So yes, we tried to learn this language and went to the library in Ter Apel. And when this pandemic started, everything stopped. We, every week, once a week, went to the library but after the pandemic, we cannot go anymore.”*

Due to the decreased quality of language lessons and fewer opportunities to practice Dutch inside and outside of the language classes (see 4.1.2.), eight out of ten status holders experienced a (perceived) decrease in their Dutch language proficiency during COVID-19 (interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9).

“Drie jaar geleden had ik A2 [examen] gehaald en nu onder A2.” (interview 7, para.69)

Translated: *“Three years ago I had passed A2 [exam] and I am now under A2.”*

“Ik wilde veilig blijven. Door dit situatie, ben ik met taal stappen terug. Geen contact. Ik ga die drie jaar, gaat het helemaal vergeten.” (interview 2, para.235)

Translated: *“I wanted to stay safe. In this situation, my language took steps back. No contact. These three years, everything I forget.”*

Two status holders took preventive measures to prevent a further decrease in their proficiency. One status holder started watching Dutch movies and series, to hear the Dutch language daily (interview 9). Another status holder started asking questions about the Dutch language to Dutch people he met while being outdoors (interview 2).

“Ik ben doorgegaan [met leren]. Maar ik ga zelf oefening doen. Ik ben niet beschaamd. Misschien ken jij... Als jij op straat bent en jij toevallig naast mij loopt: “Mag ik vragen, wat is dit?”. Soms, “Wat, wat?”. Schrikken ze. “Wat betekent dit, wat is synoniem van dit woord?”. “Wat kan ik hier beste zeggen?””. (interview 2, para. 79, 185)

Translated: *“I continued [with learning]. But I do practiced myself. I am not ashamed. Maybe you know... If you are on the street and coincidentally walk next to me: “May I ask, what is that?”. Sometimes, “What, what?”, they are scared. “What does this mean? What is the synonym of this word? What is the best way to put this?””.*

A professional, who worked for the municipality, argued that status holders ideally have to practice their Dutch speaking with Dutch people every day to increase their proficiency (interview 14). However, for most status holders this was already difficult before COVID-19 and arguably impossible during COVID-19, especially during strict lockdown periods when social interaction was discouraged. Another professional added that language levels might also have deteriorated because of stress among status holders (interview 13). She argued that it was much harder to learn a new language and remember what had been taught about the respective new language when status holders experienced stress regarding their situation.

“Het is niet alleen de taal. Je [statushouders] kan ook mentaal, stress ervaren onder andere door Corona of door de eigen leefsituatie want ze hebben al een bepaalde kwetsbare achtergrond. Ja en dan, dit komt er nog bij, dus dan heb je extra stress. En stress zorgt natuurlijk ook voor dat je dan sneller vergeet. Weet je, al die bijwerkingen van stress. Dat zorgt natuurlijk ook voor dat je dan weer de taal niet.... [leert].” (interview 13, para.83)

Translated: *“It is not just the language. You [status holders] can also mentally experience stress for example because of Corona or because of their living situation because they already have a vulnerable background. Yes and then, this [COVID-19] is double, so you have extra stress. And stress is making you forget easily. You know, all these side effects of stress. That ensures that you cannot learn the language.”*

4.4.4. Wellbeing

The interviewed status holders expressed a lot of worries during the interviews, regarding different topics such as the education of their children (interview 1, 6), their own or family’s health condition (interview 4, 7, 10), feeling isolated (interview 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10) or being scared for a potential next COVID-19 wave (interview 3, 4, 5, 7, 10). In the analysis of status holders’ social bridges during COVID-19, it already appeared that status holders were reserved to having contact in person, to prevent infection with COVID-19, which hurt the maintenance of and building of social bridges.

Since status holders had to stay home all the time due to COVID-19 restrictions, their appointments and language lessons were all online, and several felt isolated, unmotivated, or even depressed. Two status holders felt less motivated to improve their language proficiency during COVID-19 because they could not do anything but sit at home (interview 2, 7). The nature of the online (formal) language classes, together with the decreased number of opportunities to practice Dutch outside class has demotivated a lot of status holders. Not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom status holders had limited opportunities to practice Dutch. During periods with strict COVID-19 measures in place, the supermarket was the only place where status holders could meet Dutch people and practice their language skills. However, one status holder indicated that this was not the right place to increase her vocabulary and improve her language proficiency (interview 1).

“Ja het was, het eerste jaar met Corona blijft thuis. Alleen eten. Ik ben een paar kilo uitgekomen. Een paar kilo, ja. Alleen tv kijken. Geen zin om iets te doen. Ik heb zorg: wat is de virus? Dat is echt gevaarlijk. Ik maak hier zorgen. Dan ben ik, ik heb geen interesse meer om te leren. Misschien ga ik ziekenhuis, waarom ga ik leren? Snap je.” (interview 2, para.231)

Translated: *“Yes it was, the first year of Corona just at home. Just eating. I gained a few pounds. A few pounds, yes. Just watching tv. Not feeling like doing anything. I am worried: what is the virus? That is dangerous. I am worried about it. Then I am, I do not have an interest in learning anymore. Maybe I go to the hospital, why should I learn? Do you understand?”*

Besides, existing mental health issues, such as feeling depressed or isolated, were amplified. One status holder explained that she was depressed already before COVID-19, while her depression worsened during COVID-19 (interview 7). In line with this result, professionals also perceived the existence of such problems among status holders (interview 14).

“Ik begon een behandeling met psychologische problemen, voor depressie. Toen met Corona, allemaal wordt erger. Ook ik gebruik medicijnen en afspraken wordt online. Mijn problemen wordt tien keer erger.” (interview 7, para.93)

Translated: *“I started treatment for psychological issues, for depression. Then with Corona, everything got worse. I used medicines and appointments were online. My problems got ten times worse.”*

Another status holder experienced psychological issues during COVID-19 mainly caused by the death of his father in Syria at the beginning of COVID-19, the challenge of studying during COVID-19, and his perseverance with study and work that lacked boundaries to guard his limits (interview 8). Eventually, he had a burn-out, a few weeks after enrolling in his study.

“In het begin van mijn studie, alles was nieuw voor mij. Ik wil graag veel dingen doen en leren. Ik ben iemand die niet tevreden van 80 procent. Dus ik wil altijd echt, misschien 120 procent. Misschien heb jij ook. Dus ik had veel druk en veel stress. ... En thuissituatie was ook niet makkelijk in Syrië. Mijn vader is overleden in begin van Corona, in maart. Dat ook, was echt vreselijk. ... Dan ook niet genoeg tijd heb voor mijzelf, voor het rouwproces. Ik was bezig met alles te regelen. Ik had weinig tijd, van april, mei tot september. Toen moest alles klaar. Anders kon ik niet beginnen met mijn opleiding. Dus ik had, voor mijzelf geen tijd. Dus ik heb dat niet uitgewerkt. Later, drie, vier maanden bij opleiding, ik ben echt kleine burn-out gehad. Ik had veel stress. Ik kon niet meer. Dat, je kan niet met andere mensen gaan, mist het contact, maar ik zorg niet voor mijzelf. Opeens ben ik helemaal kapot. Ik had geen zin meer. Snap je. Maar gelukkig, mijn taalmaatje was bij mij, mijn begeleider, vrienden. Ik heb twee, drie weken niks gedaan. ... Rust hebben. Opladen zeg maar. Maar het is ook dat ik van andere cultuur kom. In onze cultuur zeg je niet nee. Ik kon niet mijn grens bewaken. Voor met werk en studie. Maar geleerd, nu ik probeer ik dat beter mijn grens te beschermen. Vrije tijd is vrije tijd. Studie is studie. Werk is werk. Minder stress. Het blijft altijd, maar minder. ... Ik had ook contact met een psycholoog. Paar keer toen ook geweest. Nee online. Maar zij heeft mij ook heel veel geholpen, om dingen ook in orde te maken. Neem tijd voor jezelf.” (interview 8, para.132, 134, 138, 140, 159).

Translated: *“At the start of my study, everything was new to me. I wanted to learn and do many things. I am not someone that is content at 80 percent. So I always wanted to do things, at like 120 percent. Maybe you have that too. So I experienced a lot of pressure and stress. And the situation in my home country, Syria, was not easy. My father died at the start of Corona, in March. That was also, that was awful. ... Back then, I did not have enough time for myself, to mourn. I was busy arranging everything. I had little time, from April, May until September. Then everything needed to be finished. Otherwise, I could not start studying. So I had no time to myself. I had a lot of stress. I could not keep going anymore. You cannot go with other people, missing the contact, but not taking good care of yourself. Suddenly I was broken. I did not feel like doing anything anymore. Do you understand? But luckily, my language buddy was with me, as my supervisor and friend. I did not do anything for two, or three weeks. Taking rest. To charge up. But it is also because I come from another culture. In our culture, you do not say no. I could not protect my*

boundaries. With work and study. However, I learned, and now I try to protect my boundaries. Free time is free time. Study is study. Work is work. Less stress. It stays, always, but less. ... I also had contact with a psychologist. I went there a few times. No online. But she helped me a lot, to make things clear. Take time for myself."

Another status holder also experienced feelings of depression, when she stayed in an AZC during COVID-19 (interview 10). She mentioned how other people in the AZC, such as her roommates, did not seem concerned about COVID-19 measures and social distance. She was scared and extremely careful as a result of her poor health condition, combined with being a single mother of a relatively young child.

"I feel depressed. I am not, ik heb geen zin van alles. Soms, als mijn dochter slapen, I will crying alleen. I cry." (interview 10, para.44)

Translated: *"I felt depressed. I do not feel like doing anything. Sometimes, when my daughter was asleep, I just cried. I cry."*

After a while, she was accommodated, and immediately felt relieved from all her worries and fears. Still, she remained careful up until she received COVID-19 vaccines, "attempting to safeguard her poor health and to protect her daughter as there was no one else to take care of her daughter".

One professional, who specialised in the health situation of status holders, explained her view on the well-being of status holders during COVID-19 (interview 11). She believed that good health and well-being were a condition for the proper conduct of the linguistic, social and economic integration of status holders.

"Dus als je je slecht voelt en niet gezond bent, dan is het heel moeilijk om de taal te leren. Mensen met psychische klachten kunnen zich natuurlijk niet concentreren en moeilijk leren, hebben weinig energie om nieuwe dingen te doen of aan het werk te gaan en eigen geld te verdienen. Dus je hebt die gezondheid nodig om goed te kunnen integreren en participeren." (interview 11, para.48)

Translated: *"So if you feel bad and you are not healthy, it is really hard to learn the language. People with psychological issues cannot concentrate and learn, and have limited energy to try new things or find work to become financially self-sufficient. So you need to be healthy, to integrate and participate."*

4.4.5. Current situation

When the interviews were conducted in May and June 2022, status holders reflected on how they currently felt about their life. Many indicated that they felt relieved because COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. They were happy to venture outside again for shopping and social activities (interview 1, 2, 4, 5, 6). One status holder showed the importance of social activities because according to him status holders need to meet each other to share experiences and support other people in the same situation (i.e. other status holders) (interview 6).

"Ja, [de huidige situatie is] beter gelukkig. We kunnen ontmoeten. Bijvoorbeeld de laatste feest, Suikerfeest. Ramadan. Ja er is een grote meer hier. We hebben daar ontmoet met Turkse vrienden, ook Nederlandse taalcoach samen. Allemaal samen. Kinderen speelden. Dat was heel mooi. ... We hebben contact en mensen delen hun ervaring. Dat is heel belangrijk. Sommige mensen komen één jaar eerder dan ons. Ze hebben heel veel ervaring." (interview 6, para.171-173, 178, 179).

Translated: *"Yes, [the current situation is] much better. We can meet again. For example the last time, Sugar Feast. Ramadan. Yes, there is a big lake here. We met with Turkish friends and a Dutch language coach. All together. Children playing. That was truly beautiful. ... We have contact and people have a lot of experience. That is important. Some people came one year earlier than us. They have a lot of experience to share."*

At the time of the interviews, status holders who had been in the Netherlands only during COVID-19 in times of stricter COVID-19-related measures were getting used to everyday life in the Netherlands (interview 4, 5). Nevertheless, two status holders still feared that COVID-19 restrictions would return implying a return to life taking place mostly indoors and with that online (interview 5, 7).

“Now it is so much better. I hope it will stay forever like that. Because we want to have a good life, without any disease, without any crisis. But sometimes, something comes into our head and we cannot move it away. This is life, in the end, we have to adapt to it. This is my opinion.” (interview 5, para.119).

4.4.6. Conclusion

The additional results showed that, in addition to the predetermined interview questions, status holders wanted to share experiences related to their arrival in the Netherlands, their COVID-19 infection and vaccination, their well-being and the current situation of their lives when the interviews were conducted. For some status holders, their arrival to the Netherlands was difficult because they felt unsafe in AZCs and the start of their integration process was challenging due to COVID-19 measures restricting access to support from other status holders. Several status holders shared experiences concerning their COVID-19 infection and vaccination. Most status holders indicated that their Dutch language proficiency decreased during COVID-19, because of limited opportunities to practice Dutch outside the formal language classroom. Moreover, the personal well-being of some status holders deteriorated during COVID-19 due to concerns about their children or other family members, feeling depressed or isolated, and scared about a potential next COVID-19 surge which would likely imply a pivot towards life taking place indoors and online once more. At the time of the interviews, many status holders were relieved that COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and felt like they were able to continue with their lives and integration process.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This chapter explains the meaning, relevance and limitations of my research. It concludes how the results answer the RQ and SQs, how they relate to earlier research and what their limitations are.

This research aims to provide insights into status holders' experiences during COVID-19, from the perspective of status holders themselves, which is one of my research's key innovations and contributions to prior literature. To investigate the experiences of status holders during COVID-19, I use Barkers' (2021) integration framework combined with preliminary research of the Dutch government about the challenges of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19 (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021), which highlights status holders' linguistic, social and economic experiences during COVID-19.

My research investigates the following central RQ: *How were the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands in the context of COVID-19?* To answer this question, in-depth interviews with thirteen status holders and six professionals from societal organisations working for status holders were conducted. The results provide insights regarding the personal experiences of status holders and the perspective of professionals on status holders' linguistic, social and economic experiences during COVID-19.

First, I will outline the key take-aways from my results, structured per SQ, and also relate my findings to earlier studies, to establish the consistent elements with prior literature and to provide new insights. Second, I present the implications of my results. Third, I explain the limitations of my research. Fourth and last, I present recommendations for future research.

5.1. Interpretation

The following paragraph outlines what my results mean in relation to prior research, and how my results relate to the central RQ. First, I describe the key implications of my research for each SQ. Second, an interpretation follows of the results in the context of the RQ.

Linguistic experiences

SQ 1. How did status holders in the Netherlands experience formal language lessons during COVID-19?

In line with earlier research, the transition from offline to online formal language lessons posed a challenge in different ways for status holders in the Netherlands. I present four main findings regarding status holders' experiences with online formal language lessons during COVID-19.

First, to participate in online formal language classes, digital access and digital skills and knowledge of status holders were required to a certain extent. Regarding digital access, my research shows that status holders all had access to a computer. The ones without a laptop were provided with one by their language school or social initiatives.

Basic digital skills and knowledge of how to use phones or televisions⁴ were present among all interviewed status holders. This is in line with earlier research, arguing that since the 2010s many refugees and asylum seekers already had access to the Internet through networks and devices and therefore had at least a basic understanding of digital skills and knowledge in their country of origin (Jauhiainen et al., 2022). The interviewed status holders seemed to either possess sufficient (or even excellent) digital knowledge and skills to participate in online formal language classes or were able to

⁴ I contacted status holders through WhatsApp to make appointments for the interview, and they mostly answered quick and clear. Also, I noticed that status holders possessed big televisions, during the interviews at their homes.

acquire sufficient digital skills and knowledge soon enough to participate in online formal language classes. On the contrary, interviewed professionals suggested that my status holder interviewees were more the exception than the rule as the professionals observed many other status holders struggling with the acquisition of the necessary digital skills and knowledge for participation in formal online language classes; especially the status holders that possessed other demographic indicators of vulnerability such as being older or lower-educated (Rocca, Carlsen & Deygers, 2020).

The observations of interviewed professionals are in line with prior research – which was often not directly based on the experiences of status holders themselves – about the linguistic experiences of refugees and asylum seekers during COVID-19; this prior research shows that many refugees and asylum seekers lack digital knowledge and skills and therefore experience difficulties with participating in online language classes during COVID-19 (Barker, 2021; Potocky, 2021; Verdi, 2020).

Second of my findings regarding online formal language lessons, my research shows that some status holders experienced limited learning progress during online formal language classes. Status holders provided different explanations for the disruption of their learning process in an online environment during the interviews: the lower quality of lessons, less attention for individual students from the teacher, distracting behaviour of fellow students and status holders themselves, and fewer opportunities to practice Dutch with teachers and students during online compared to offline lessons. Consistent with the interviewed status holders' experiences, research by Ying, Siang & Mohamad (2021) also emphasises the limited two-way communication between students and teachers in an online classroom. The other explanations extend prior studies which barely elaborate on explanations of status holders' limited learning progress during online formal language classes during COVID-19 (Badran et al., 2021). Moreover, my findings oppose VluchtelingenWerk (2020), which posits that some status holders paused their formal language classes because they were afraid to fail exams due to the slower pace of online formal language classes. Among the interviewed status holders in my research, two status holders decided to wait for offline formal language lessons to continue, not because they were afraid to fail the exams or lacked digital access and skills to participate in online formal language classes, but because they wanted to participate in offline formal language classes to learn the Dutch language with less disruption.

Third of my findings regarding online formal language classes, in contrast to an earlier study, my research shows that social connections between students of formal language lessons do provide emotional support as Primdahl et al. (2020) suggested. Social connections between students seem more important for economic opportunities such as finding work and existing on a functional, rather than a personal level.

Fourth and last of my findings regarding online formal language classes, earlier research primarily emphasises the negative consequences of online formal language classes (Barker, 2021; Primdahl et al., 2020; Badran et al., 2021). However, interviewed status holders and professionals also mentioned the advantages of online language lessons. Two interviewed status holders indicated that the benefits of limited travel time and costs to attend online formal language lessons outweighed the costs of online classes. On the contrary, some interviewed professionals stated that such status holders are part of a small group while the respective professionals observed most status holders preferred offline formal language classes.

Social experiences

SQ 2. How did status holders in the Netherlands experience social bonds, bridges and links during COVID-19?

In the analysis of status holders' social experiences during COVID-19, I use three central concepts: social bonds, social bridges and social links. Combined, these three concepts form the social capital of status holders. As earlier research suggests, the more diverse connections status holders can establish, the more useful their network is (Dahinden, 2013). However, my research confirms earlier research by Babuç (2021), which posits that it was challenging for status holders to maintain and build social connections during COVID-19, on all three social levels. I present my results regarding status holders' experiences related to social bonds, social bridges and social links during COVID-19.

Regarding the first social level, my research provides more extensive insights into experiences regarding social bonds between status holders during COVID-19. Prior research argues that bonds between family members living in the same house strengthened or weakened (Babuç, 2021). Extending these statements, my results show that social bonds are impacted on three different levels. First of all, social bonds with family, still living in status holders' country of origin did not change substantially, as online communication was already used frequently before COVID-19 and is still possible. Second of all, social bonds with family living in the Netherlands were not impacted noticeably if the family lived in the same city, aside from one status holder indicating more cautious behaviour from her side to protect her mother's poor health condition. However, family members staying in places further away, such as other provinces of the Netherlands or (right) across the border with Germany were visited/visiting less frequently or not at all. The status holders not seeing their family during COVID-19 indicated missing their family, yet online contact via WhatsApp was considered sufficient for the time being. Third of all, social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national groups seemed to be missed the most by the interviewed status holders. They indicated that contact with other status holders (with a shared culture/history) was very important, to share experiences and help each other out. To status holders without family (nearby) in the Netherlands, social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious or co-national status holders appeared even more important. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions status holders were not able to meet other status holders for a long time. Subsequently, some status holders experienced isolation and loneliness as they had to spend important religious days alone or were unable to share lived experiences with other status holders, confirming earlier research (Ager & Strang, 2008; Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019) suggesting that social bonds provide the possibility to exchange practical and emotional support and to share cultural and social activities.

Regarding the second social level, in line with prior research (Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic made it harder for status holders to build social bridges. The experiences of status holders indicated that they – already before COVID-19 – had limited contact with diverse/Dutch people (such as neighbours or volunteers) in the society. Although two status holders indicated not being interested in having contact with their neighbours, others missed contact with their neighbours because they lacked opportunities to practice the Dutch language and expand their social network. My results confirmed previous research (Ager & Strang, 2008), arguing that social bridges with diverse community members, such as Dutch people, are important for status holders, as they provide an opportunity to practice the Dutch language and to be more involved in the host country's society. Moreover, my findings are in line with Alencar & Tsagkroni (2021), which conclude that even outside the context of COVID-19 it is hard for status holders to establish social bridges. There was only one status holder indicating to have enjoyable and frequent contact with her neighbours, but only after she was vaccinated against COVID-19. My research provides two main explanations for the limited contact between status holders and diverse members of Dutch society during COVID-19. First, some status holders indicated they were extra careful during social interactions to prevent COVID-19 infection, and professionals observed that Dutch people (volunteers/buddies) were extra careful and sometimes even stopped volunteering as they were often of old age (i.e., more vulnerable to COVID-19). In addition, for status holders desiring to establish social bridges during COVID-19, the opportunities were limited because

language classes or activities organised by social institutions were suspended due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Regarding the third social level, in line with expectations from prior research (Barker, 2021; Oostveen & Razenberg, 2021), status holders maintain social links with institutions (such as the municipality) and societal organisations, to receive personal support and access supporting information and tools. For the majority of the time during COVID-19 and the moment my interviews took place, status holders were only able to access such support online. My research adds new insights into the consequences of limited access to social links, during COVID-19. In some cases, status holders were reluctant to call institutions because they experienced language barriers while speaking Dutch over the phone, resulting in situations where the status holder did request help anymore, receiving for instance warrants after failing to pay bills before the due date. In other cases, status holders who were recently accommodated slept on the floor for months without any furniture in their allocated homes because shops were closed; professionals observed that for some status holders making digital appointments to schedule a timeslot for a shop was simply too difficult. Besides, my results suggest that institutions are not merely important for personal support, but also for organising activities where status holders can meet each other and develop new skills or knowledge. These activities were disrupted by COVID-19 and several status holders indicated missing such activities.

Thus, maintaining and building social capital was difficult for status holders, during COVID-19. On the one hand, relations with family inside and outside the Netherlands were maintained well. On the other hand, it was challenging to maintain and build connections with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national groups, with diverse community members such as Dutch people, and with (social) institutions. My research adds status holders' personal experiences during COVID-19 to previous research.

Work experiences

SQ 3. How did status holders in the Netherlands experience work during COVID-19?

The work experiences of status holders during COVID-19 related to either paid work, or volunteer work. However, only one status holder had paid (part-time) work when COVID-19 started, confirming literature (CBS, 2022; SER, 2019; Dagevos & Odé, 2016) arguing that it is challenging for status holders to find paid work during their first years in the Netherlands. On the other hand, several status holders were engaged in volunteer work, during COVID-19.

The status holder with a paid job before COVID-19 lost her job at the department store during COVID-19 due to reduced business. Professionals estimated that she was not the only status holder losing her job during COVID-19. This observation from professionals is in line with prior studies (Divosa, 2021; Universiteit voor Humanistiek, 2022), arguing that many status holders lost (part of) their work during COVID-19. After the interviewed status holder was fired, she had no idea what to do with her time at home. She indicated experiencing boredom and isolation.

During COVID-19, two status holders were looking for a job. One of them, the one that was fired from her job at the department store, managed to find a new job relatively soon. The other did not manage to find a job as he desired a job fitting his highly-educated profile and skills, however, he indicated that such jobs were often remote instead of in person during COVID-19. The (perceived) absence of jobs providing the opportunity of contact in person, failed to fulfil his prerequisite of a job during which he could physically practice the Dutch language with colleagues.

Earlier research about the work experiences of refugees and asylum seekers paid attention to the precarious working conditions of certain jobs that they often perform (Fasani & Mazza, 2020a).

However, my research does not add much new information in the context of the consequence of COVID-19 for status holders with precarious or ‘key’ jobs, since just one of the status holders had a paid job and the other interviewed status holders were not (yet) performing paid work.

Several status holders volunteered during COVID-19 and indicated that their volunteer job was important to them providing them with purpose. Status holders mentioned different motivations to be engaged in volunteer work, such as learning and practising Dutch, feeling useful, being active outside the house, or as part of their study. However, some status holders and professionals indicated that during COVID-19 certain volunteer jobs (for instance in elderly care) were stopped.

Additional experiences

During the interviews with status holders and professionals, some (frequently) mentioned topics were beyond the scope of my SQs. These topics related to status holders’ decreased language proficiency during COVID-19, arrival in the Netherlands during COVID-19, COVID-19 infection or vaccination, well-being during COVID-19 and the current situation of their lives (at the time the interviews took place, in May and June 2022).

The interviewed status holders appeared upset about their decreased Dutch language proficiency as a result of COVID-19, due to (more) limited opportunities to practice Dutch outside the classroom. Besides, interviewed status holders indicated that their arrival in the Netherlands during COVID-19, both in the AZC and afterwards in their accommodation, was challenging. Confirming earlier research (Kox & Van Liempt, 2020a; Kox & Van Liempt, 2020b), several interviewed status holders were afraid to be infected with COVID-19 during their stay in AZCs, because other residents did not adhere to social distancing measures. Overall, the well-being and mental health of status holders appeared to be in critical condition during COVID-19. Moreover, several interviewed status holders were worried about their children or other family members, felt isolated or even depressed, and feared a potential next wave of COVID-19. The well-being of refugees and asylum seekers, or status holders, during COVID-19, is researched in the Netherlands and other countries, and confirm the experiences of the interviewed status holders (Van Liempt & Kox, 2020b; Pinzón-Espinosa, Valdés-Flórido, Riboldi, Baysak, Vieta, 2020; Ceccon & Moscardino, 2022). These earlier studies find that, even before COVID-19, significant amounts of refugees, asylum seekers, and status holders experienced mental disorders such as depression and stress disorders and argue that the psychological distress of asylum seekers significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interpreting the answer to the RQ

***RQ.** How were the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands in the context of COVID-19?*

My results provided insight into the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders in the Netherlands during COVID-19. In this section, I provide answers to the RQ and show the interconnectedness of the three dimensions.

The linguistic experiences of status holders during COVID-19 were related to the switch from offline to online formal language classes, disrupting the linguistic learning progress and limited opportunities to build social networks with other students. Besides, status holders experienced limited opportunities to practice Dutch outside the classroom due to social restrictions and more careful behaviour regarding social interaction, to prevent COVID-19 infection. Considering my results, my research might add a different perspective on digital access, and digital skills and knowledge, in the context of status holders’ experiences with online formal language classes. Digital access does not seem to be a barrier to

participating in online formal language classes, according to both interviewed status holders and (the perspective of) interviewed professionals. However, digital skills and knowledge seemed to be lacking – in the first place – for some status holders in the context of online formal language lessons during COVID-19. Additionally, digital skills and knowledge possessed by status holders sometimes appeared insufficient when status holders had to speak Dutch over the phone (with institutions or organisations), instead of in real life during COVID-19. Moreover, digital skills and knowledge seemed to lack when status holders had to schedule online appointments during COVID-19, which some experienced difficulties with. On the other hand, my results show that the required digital skills and knowledge for situations such as using phones to maintain social connections with family or friends during COVID-19 were present, or to answer (in Dutch or English) my WhatsApp message (in Dutch) about scheduling an interview.

Additionally, status holders experienced limited opportunities to build social networks during COVID-19. Maintaining and building social connections in terms of social bonds, bridges and links were challenging. Social bonds with family were often easily maintained, but social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national groups were more difficult to maintain and establish due to COVID-19 restrictions and the complete switch to an online integration process. However, the latter relation type seemed to be of high importance to status holders, since many did not have their family in close proximity, and social bonds with co-ethnic, co-religious and co-national groups enabled them to share support and experiences. During COVID-19, status holders missed the opportunity to physically meet other status holders and friends, while they seemed to experience even more challenges in their integration process. Status holders were also less able to communicate with Dutch people (social bridges) or supporting institutions (social links) because they had trouble reaching them online. Some status holders experienced barriers preventing them from making phone calls in Dutch, due to insecurity about their language proficiency. Based on observations of professionals, status holders became more reluctant to request help in such situations. Additionally, some status holders lost their paid- or volunteer job during COVID-19. Status holders indicated that their job, whether it was paid or not, was appreciated by them as it created the opportunity to practice Dutch and to feel part of a shared practice or goal.

Overall, based on the results it seems that status holders who arrived in the Netherlands just before or during COVID-19 struggled the most during their time in AZCs and their new homes. Based on the experiences of status holders and professionals, it seemed that on the one hand, existing problems such as limited access to the labour market, limited social bonds, and mental health issues worsened during COVID-19. On the other hand, additional problems such as limited opportunities to share experiences with other status holders and decreased language proficiency were added to the list of challenges that most status holders must deal with during their integration.

5.2. Implications

The results of my research have both theoretical and practical implications. Concerning the theoretical implications of my research, this research adds to the personal experiences and perspectives on the consequences of COVID-19 for the daily lives of status holders in the Netherlands. However, the used framework based on Barkers' (2021) integration framework and research of the Dutch government (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021) does not seem to cover all of the important experiences of status holders during COVID-19. Considering that the interviewed status holders were all integrating into Dutch society, my results show that the linguistic, social and economic aspects of integration are not the only relevant aspects of integration for status holders. The previous section (5.1. Interpretations) explained in more detail what new insights were gained during my research, for instance regarding the well-being of status holders, or experiences related to their arrival in the Netherlands. These insights can serve as a foundation for future research, not only to extend on the research objectives

and questions of my research but also more fundamentally; I conclude that the perceived challenges status holders experience during their integration process in the Netherlands needs to be reconsidered, as the challenges most prevalent in prior research were not observed/experienced by the interviewed status holders as frequently as would be expected from such prior research (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021); moreover, I advise to reconsider which of these aspects should receive increased attention during the integration process to have status holders integrate into a pleasurable fashion in the Netherlands.

Although my research is an exploration of the interviewed status holders' experiences, it may be the case that some experiences and perspectives of status holders were not mentioned due to the scope of this research. However, this research provides insights relevant to institutions and policymakers on how this group has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. They can use the insights to improve policy and regulations, during the integration process of status holders in general because my research exposes some challenges from before COVID-19, as well as in times of crisis. I conclude that existing problems were amplified by the pandemic and additional problems have emerged providing reasons for existing policies to be reconsidered.

5.3. Limitations

This paragraph explains some limitations of my research. When I initiated my research project, Russian forces invaded Ukraine (at the end of February 2022). As a consequence of the war in Ukraine, millions of Ukrainians had to flee the country. Therefore, societal organisations working for refugees, asylum seekers and status holders were extremely busy organising emergency accommodation for Ukrainians that fled to the Netherlands. This is one of the reasons why most of the social organisations that were approached for this research –to get in touch with status holders themselves – did not have time to contribute to this research.

In the end, two organisations (based in Rotterdam and Alphen aan den Rijn) were willing to participate in this research. Thus, status holders from two different municipalities were represented in this research. However, since the Dutch municipalities are responsible for the integration process of status holders, it might be the case that the perspectives of status holders in other municipalities are different.

Since the number of organisations willing to participate and connect me to status holders was limited, it was challenging to be very strict about the demographic characteristics of status holders. To represent the larger group of status holders in the Netherlands, it would be most interesting if the demographics of the participants were in accordance with the demographic profile of status holders in the Netherlands (even though the exploratory character of this study does not mandate it). It is difficult to firmly conclude whether the interviewed status holders are a solid representation of status holders in the Netherlands as the experiences of interviewed status holders are personal and the demographic characteristics of status holders in the Netherlands are diverse.

Besides, the scope of this research did not allow for to use of a translator for the interviews with status holders. Therefore, only status holders with sufficient Dutch proficiency were interviewed. These were either status holders living in the Netherlands for several years already, higher educated or younger status holders – who generally tend to learn Dutch much quicker (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2021). Therefore, I missed the perspective of status holders who arrived in the Netherlands more recently, and the perspective of status holders who are in the Netherlands for a longer period yet experience problems learning Dutch, among others due to illiteracy or limited prior education. Besides, although the interviewees had sufficient language proficiency for the interview to take place in either Dutch or English, I noticed that interviewees occasionally struggled to explain in detail why they

experienced something. If there would have been a translator enabling the interviewees to express themselves in their native language, results may have provided further insights.

Regarding the data collection, the interviews with status holders and professionals were meant to be semi-structured interviews. However, during the interview process, I discovered that sticking to the interview guide and questions in strict fashion did not stimulate the interviewees to express themselves more freely. Therefore, I did not discuss every research topic in the same order, or to the same extent. Once I let the conversation flow more freely and according to what status holders were sharing, the interviewees were more open and eager to share topics important to them. However, this approach poses a limitation regarding the methodology since it decreased the internal validity of the findings. Besides, due to the retrospective character of this study, there is a possibility that interviewees' experiences were biased by their state of mind at the moment the interview took place, which could be different on another day and time. In the end, every interview-based research has to account for the implicit or explicit choice of interviewees to (not) share (extensive detail) about certain events.

5.4. Recommendations

This chapter presents three recommendations. The recommendations are based on the most important findings and are to be considered while keeping the previously mentioned limitations in mind.

The first recommendation follows the results of this research. While my research focused on the linguistic, social and economic experiences of status holders, the interview conversations frequently highlighted other experiences during COVID-19 as well. These findings were mentioned as Additional experiences (see 4.4.). Besides, status holders had plenty of experiences to share regarding different aspects of linguistic and social experiences during COVID-19. However, they were able to talk less about work experiences during COVID-19, especially paid work, because most were not participating in the labour market yet. Future research could consider involving insights from the additional results, such as the well-being of status holders, or the experiences regarding their arrival in the Netherlands while giving less attention to work experiences, as working experience appeared limited among my interviewees.

The second recommendation relates to the retrospective character of my research. The results provided insights into what status holders experienced during COVID-19. Some existing problems were exacerbated due to COVID-19, while new challenges occurred. For future research seeking to extend my findings, I provide a suggestion. It would be interesting to research the experiences of status holders in the longer term, to provide insights about the extent to which COVID-19 had a lasting effect on the integration in the Netherlands. Research following my suggestions can provide insights relevant to societal and municipal institutions, and policymakers to improve the current situation of status holders.

The third recommendation follows the methodological approach and choice of interviewees for my research. To gain even more comprehensive insights about the experiences of status holders, future research could consider two options, namely hiring a translator if the respective researcher does not speak the native language of the interviewees or expanding beyond the interview-only approach with for example participant observations. Regarding my first suggestion, status holders may be able to elaborate more on their experiences if they can share their experiences in their native language. In light of my second suggestion, status holders might be able to elaborate more on their experiences when a relationship of trust exists between them, and the researcher. Besides, another recommendation is to involve status holders who do not speak the Dutch language yet (because they arrived in the Netherlands very recently, are illiterate, or have limited educational background). Their perspective, as (presumably) even more vulnerable and affected status holders would be an interesting addition to my research.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Interview guide for interviews with status holders

English version

Introduction

I am Julia. I am 25 years old and I live in Rotterdam for several years. Thank you for your time and interest. I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences during COVID-19, related to learning the Dutch language, and social and economic life. We have planned about 45 to 60 minutes for this conversation. Is that still possible for you? I would like to meet that agreement. You may answer my questions extensively, but you are never obliged to answer. If you feel uncomfortable with certain questions, we will skip them.

Before we start, I would like you to read the informed consent. In there I explain how I will use the information from our conversation. Can I record the conversation please? Your answers are anonymous. I will transcribe and analyse the recording of the interview. The information will only be used for this research. Do you accept?

Demographic questions

Can you please tell something about yourself?

- What is your name?
- What is your gender?
- What is your age?
- Where were you born? / What is your nationality?
- When did you arrive in the Netherlands?
- With whom did you come to the Netherlands?
 - o Did more family come to the Netherlands through family reunification?
 - o Or did you come through family reunification to the Netherlands yourself?
- Since when do you have a temporary residence permit/are you status holder?
- What is your living arrangement?
- What is your marital status?
- What is your employment?

Content questions

Linguistic experiences

- Do you follow Dutch language lessons?
 - o Yes, how long have you been following Dutch language lessons? Why do you?
 - o No, why do you not follow Dutch language lessons?
 - o Did you get extension for you language exams because of COVID-19?
- For which language level do you study?
- What happened with your language lessons during COVID-19?
 - o Stop or continue? Why?
 - o Continue: online? How did you experience online language lesson? Positive/negative?
- *In case of online lessons*: To attend online language lessons, you need internet and a phone or laptop. Did you have that?
 - o No? How did you deal with that?

- Yes? Did you already have experience with online lessons? How did it go? Did you have enough knowledge of digital/online communication and programs?
- *In case of online lessons:* How did you experience seeing your fellow students and language teacher online instead of in real life?
 - Are in general they important for social and emotional support? How did you experience this during COVID-19 and online lessons?
 - Are they important for understanding the COVID-19 situation?
- What was it like to live in a country where you do not speak the language fluently yet, during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - Challenges: understanding measures, asking for (medical) help, building social networks

Social experiences

- What social contacts do you have in the Netherlands?
 - What contacts do you have with family, or other status holders who have the same country of origin?
 - How do you contact them? (e.g. online/at physical meetings?)
 - How important are these contacts for you?
 - How did you experience this contact during COVID-19? (e.g. more important/less important, harder/easier, way of contact)
 - Did this experience influence other parts of your life?
 - What contacts do you have with other foreigners or Dutch people?
 - How do you contact them? (e.g. online/at physical meetings?)
 - How important are these contacts for you?
 - How did you experience this contact during COVID-19? (e.g. more important/less important, harder/easier, way of contact)
 - Did this experience influence other parts of your life?
 - What contacts do you have with NGOs, the municipality, the government, companies in the Netherlands?
 - How do you contact them? (e.g. online/at physical meetings?)
 - How important are these contacts for you?
 - How did you experience this contact during COVID-19? (e.g. more important/less important, harder/easier, way of contact)
 - Did this experience influence other parts of your life?
- What contact do you have with family of relatives in your country of origin?
 - How important are these contacts for you?
 - How did you experience this contact during COVID-19? (e.g. more important/less important, harder/easier, way of contact)
- How did you experience creating new social contacts during COVID-19?
 - Hard/easy? Why (e.g. social distance, lockdown, online lessons)
- Did changes in your social contact with others influence your integration process in the Netherlands?

Work experiences

- Do you have work experience in the Netherlands?
- Did you have work during COVID-19?
 - Yes

- What kind of work? (sector/working conditions?)
 - Did you had to continue working physically or did you work online?
 - Did the kind of work change during COVID-19? (sector/working conditions?)
- How did you get to this work?
- What kind of contract do you have? (temporary, flexible?)
 - Did the kind of contract change during COVID-19?
- How did you experience your work during COVID-19?
 - Did you risk contamination with COVID-19 during work?
- How did this experience influence other parts of your life?
- No
 - Did you have work before COVID-19? (kind of work/contract?)
 - Did you look for work during COVID-19?
 - How did you experience this?
 - How did you experience being unemployed during COVID-19?
 - How did this experience influence other parts of your life?
- What kind of work would you like to do? Is that possible?
- Did you have a social assistance benefit during COVID-19?
 - Yes, did you already have a benefit before COVID-19?
 - Hoe did you experience this during COVID-19?
- Did you work in your country of origin?
 - Yes, what kind of work did you do?
 - No, why not?

Extra questions (if needed)

- How did you experience the COVID-pandemic? What is you first thought?
- What positive experiences did you have during COVID-19?
- What negative experiences did you have during COVID-19?

Closing questions

- Do you still want to share something with me, something we have not discussed?
- Do you have questions for me?

Dutch version

Introductie

Ik ben Julia. Ik ben 25 jaar oud en ik woon al een aantal jaar in Rotterdam. Bedankt voor jouw tijd en interesse. Ik wil je graag een paar vragen willen stellen over jouw ervaringen tijdens COVID-19, op het gebied van de Nederlandse taal leren, sociaal en economisch leven. We hebben 45 à 60 minuten ingepland voor dit gesprek. Is dat nog steeds mogelijk voor jou? Ik wil de afspraak graag nakomen. Je mag mijn vragen uitgebreid beantwoorden, maar je bent nooit verplicht om een antwoord te geven. Als je liever geen antwoord wilt geven op een bepaalde vraag, slaan we die vraag over.

Voordat we beginnen wil ik je graag het informed consent laten lezen, daarin staat waar ik de informatie van het gesprek voor ga gebruiken. Is het goed als ik een opname maak? Jouw antwoorden zijn anoniem. De opname ga ik uittypen en analyseren. De informatie wordt alleen voor dit onderzoek. Stemt u hiermee in?

Demografische vragen

Kan je iets over jezelf vertellen?

- Wat is jouw naam?
- Wat is jouw geslacht?
- Wat is jouw leeftijd?
- Waar ben je geboren? / Wat is je nationaliteit?
- Hoe lang ben je in Nederland?
- Met wie ben jij naar Nederland gekomen?
 - o Zijn er nog familieleden nagereisd?
 - o Of ben jij zelf een familielid nagereisd?
- Sinds wanneer heb jij een tijdelijke verblijfsvergunning/ben jij statushouder?
- Wat is jouw woonsituatie?
- Wat is jouw gezinssituatie?
- Wat is jouw werkgelegenheid?

Inhoudsvragen

Taal ervaringen

- Volg je Nederlandse taalles?
 - o Ja, hoe lang volg je al Nederlandse taalles? Waarom?
 - o Nee, waarom volg je geen Nederlandse taalles?
 - o Heb je verlenging van de deadline van het taal examen door COVID-19?
- Voor welk taalniveau studeer je?
- Wat gebeurde er met jouw taallessen tijdens COVID-19?
 - o Doorgaan of stoppen? Waarom?
 - o Doorgaan: online? Hoe heb je online taallessen ervaren? Positief/negatief?
- *In het geval van online lessen:* Om de online lessen te volgen had je internet en een computer of telefoon nodig. Had jij die?
 - o Nee? Hoe ben je daarmee omgegaan?
 - o Ja? Had jij al ervaring met online lessen? Hoe ging dat? Had je genoeg kennis van digitale/online communicatie en programma's? ?
- *In het geval van online lessen:* Hoe vond je het om de medestudenten en jouw Nederlands docent alleen nog maar online te zien?
 - o Zijn zij over het algemeen belangrijk voor sociale en emotionele support? Hoe heb je dat ervaren tijdens COVID-19 en online lessen?
 - o Zijn zij belangrijk voor het begrijpen van de COVID-19 situatie?
- Hoe was het om tijdens COVID-19 in een land te leven waarvan je de taal nog niet vloeiend spreekt?
 - o Moeilijkheden: maatregelen begrijpen, (medische) hulp vragen, sociale netwerken opbouwen
- Hebben de veranderingen in de taallessen tijdens COVID-19 invloed gehad op jouw integratie in Nederland?

Sociale ervaringen

- Wat voor sociale contacten heb je in Nederland?
 - o Wat voor contacten heb je met familie, of andere statushouders uit jouw land van herkomst?

- Op wat voor manier heb jij contact met hen? (bijv. online/bijeenkomsten?)
- Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor jou?
- Zijn deze contacten tijdens COVID-19 veranderd? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van jouw leven?
- Wat voor contacten heb je met mensen die uit een ander land komen of Nederlands zijn?
 - Op wat voor manier heb jij contact met hen? (bijv. online/bijeenkomsten?)
 - Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor jou?
 - Zijn deze contacten tijdens COVID-19 veranderd? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van jouw leven?
- Wat voor contacten heb je met NGO's, de gemeente of overheid of met bedrijven hier in Nederland?
 - Op wat voor manier heb jij contact met hen? (bijv. online/bijeenkomsten?)
 - Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor jou?
 - Zijn deze contacten tijdens COVID-19 veranderd? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van jouw leven?
- Wat voor contacten heb je met familie of vrienden in je land van herkomst?
 - Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor jou?
 - Hoe heb je dat tijdens COVID-19 ervaren? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
- Hoe heb je het aangaan van nieuwe sociale contacten tijdens COVID-19 ervaren?
 - Moeilijk/makkelijk? Waarom (bijv. lockdown, afstand houden, online lessen)?
- Hebben de veranderingen in het maken van sociaal contact tijdens COVID-19 invloed gehad op jouw integratie proces in Nederland?

Economische ervaringen

- Heb je al gewerkt in Nederland?
- Had je werk tijdens COVID-19?
 - Ja
 - Wat voor werk? (sector/werkomstandigheden?)
 - Moest je tijdens COVID-19 fysiek doorwerken of kon je online werken?
 - Is dit veranderd tijdens COVID-19? Sector/werkomstandigheden?
 - Hoe ben je aan dit werk gekomen?
 - Wat voor contract? (tijdelijk/flexibel?)
 - Is dit veranderd tijdens COVID-19?
 - Hoe heb je dit werk ervaren tijdens COVID-19?
 - Liep je risico tot het besmetting met COVID-19?
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van jouw leven?
 - Nee
 - Had je wel werk voor COVID-19? (soort werk/contract?)
 - Heb je gezocht naar werk tijdens COVID-19?
 - Hoe heb je dat ervaren?
 - Hoe heb je het ervaren om geen werk te hebben tijdens COVID-19?

- Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van jouw leven?
- Wat voor werk zou je willen doen? Is dat mogelijk?
- Had je een uitkering tijdens COVID-19?
 - Ja, had je ook al een uitkering voor COVID-19?
 - Hoe heb je dat ervaren tijdens COVID-19?
- Werkte je in jouw land van herkomst?
 - Ja, wat voor werk deed je daar?
 - Nee, waarom niet?

Extra vragen (indien nodig)

- Hoe heb je de COVID-19 crisis ervaren? Wat is het eerste dat in je opkomt?
- Wat heb je positief ervaren tijdens COVID-19?
- Wat heb je negatief ervaren tijdens COVID-19?

Afsluitende vragen

- Wil jij nog iets met mij delen, wat we niet hebben besproken?
- Heb jij nog vragen aan mij?

Informed consent (toestemming) (Dutch version)

Fijn dat u mee wilt werken aan dit onderzoek. Dit onderzoek is onderdeel van mijn Master Internationale Ontwikkelingsstudies aan Wageningen University. Ik onderzoek de ervaringen van statushouders tijdens de COVID-19 pandemie. Ik ben met name benieuwd naar de taal-, sociale- en economische ervaringen, maar andere ervaringen mogen ook worden gedeeld.

Het gesprek duurt 45 tot 60 minuten. Voor het verwerken van de informatie is het handig als het gesprek kan worden opgenomen. Uw naam blijft natuurlijk anoniem en de informatie wordt veilig opgeslagen. Het gesprek wordt aan de hand van de opname uitgetypt en geanalyseerd. De informatie wordt alleen voor dit onderzoek gebruikt.

Door mondeling of schriftelijk akkoord kan u instemmen met het informed consent.

Hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Julia Teeuwen

Informed consent (English version)

Thank you for participating in this research. I am doing this research as part of my Masters in International Development Studies at Wageningen University. I research the experiences of status holders during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am curious to hear more about your experiences relating to language classes, social and economic life, but other experiences may also be shared.

The conversation will last for 45 to 60 minutes. For processing the information, it would be very useful to record the conversation. Your name will stay anonymous and the information will be safely saved. The conversation will be transcribed and analysed, by using the recording. The information will only be used for this research.

Through verbal or written agreement you can accept the informed consent.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Kind regards,

Julia Teeuwen

7.2. Interview guide for interviews with professionals

Dutch version

Introductie

Ik ben Julia. Ik ben 25 jaar oud en ik studeer International Development Studies aan Wageningen University.

Bedankt voor jouw tijd en interesse voor dit interview. Ik doe onderzoek naar de ervaringen van statushouders tijdens COVID-19, op het gebied van de Nederlandse taal leren, en hun sociale en economisch leven. Voor het onderzoek interview ik zowel statushouders als organisaties die met statushouders werken of onderzoek doen naar hun situatie.

We hebben 45 à 60 minuten ingepland voor dit gesprek. Is dat nog steeds mogelijk? Ik wil de afspraak graag nakomen. U mag mijn vragen uitgebreid beantwoorden, maar u bent nooit verplicht om een antwoord te geven. Als u liever geen antwoord wilt geven op een bepaalde vraag, slaan we die vraag over.

Voordat we beginnen wil ik u graag het *informed consent* laten lezen, daarin staat waar ik de informatie van het gesprek voor ga gebruiken. Is het goed als ik een opname maak? Uw antwoorden zijn anoniem. De opname ga ik uittypen en analyseren. De informatie wordt alleen voor dit onderzoek. Stemt u hiermee in?

Demografische vragen

Kan u iets over uzelf vertellen?

- Wat is uw rol binnen de organisatie [...]?
- Hoe staat u (persoonlijk) in contact met statushouders?
- Hoe verkrijgt u informatie over de situatie van statushouders?
- Als u in dit interview spreekt over statushouders, betreft dit dan een specifiek subgroep van statushouders?

Inhoudsvragen

Inleidende vragen

Ik zou graag eerst een aantal algemenere inleidende vragen willen stellen, voordat we inzoomen op de drie specifieke onderwerpen van mijn onderzoek.

- Hoe hebben statushouders de COVID-19 crisis ervaren?
 - o Gebied van integratie/participatie
- Wat hebben statushouders positief ervaren tijdens COVID-19?
- Wat hebben statushouders negatief ervaren tijdens COVID-19?
 - o Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?

Taal ervaringen

Veel statushouders volgen Nederlandse taallessen als onderdeel van hun inburgering. Tijdens COVID-19 werden veel taallessen online. U kunt deze vragen in het algemeen beantwoorden, maar als er verschillen zijn tussen geslacht, leeftijd, landen van herkomst of opleidingsniveau van statushouder is dat ook zeker interessant om te weten.

- Hoe hebben statushouders online taallessen tijdens COVID-19 ervaren?

- Hadden statushouders voldoende toegang tot internet, kennis van digitale communicatie en programma's en digitale apparaten?
 - o Toegang tot internet
 - o Kennis van digitale communicatie en programma's
 - o Toegang tot voldoende digitale apparaten
 - Zo niet, hoe gingen zij daarmee om?
- *Heeft de COVID-19 crisis invloed gehad op de ontwikkeling van taalvaardigheden van statushouders?*
 - o *Statushouders gaven eerder aan dat hun beheersing van de Nederlandse taal achteruit ging tijdens COVID-19, omdat zij veel minder Nederlands spraken.*
- Hoe was het voor statushouders om hun medestudenten en Nederlands docent alleen nog maar online te zien?
 - o Zijn zij over het algemeen belangrijk voor sociale en emotionele support? Hoe hebben zij dat ervaren tijdens COVID-19 en online onderwijs?
 - *Of hulp ergens anders ontvangen?*
 - o Zijn zij belangrijk voor het begrijpen van de COVID-19 situatie?
- Hoe was het voor statushouders om tijdens COVID-19 in een land te leven waarvan ze de taal nog niet vloeiend spreken?
 - o Moeilijkheden kunnen zijn: maatregelen begrijpen, (medische) hulp vragen, sociale netwerken opbouwen
- Hebben de veranderingen in de taallessen tijdens COVID-19 invloed gehad op de integratie van statushouders in Nederland?
 - o Sociale integratie
 - o Economische integratie
 - o Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?

Sociale ervaringen

De sociale netwerken van statushouders kunnen worden ingedeeld op drie niveaus: social bonds, social bridges en social links. Deze zal ik toelichten en een aantal vragen over stellen in de context van COVID-19. U kunt deze vragen in het algemeen beantwoorden, maar als er verschillen zijn tussen geslacht, leeftijd, landen van herkomst of opleidingsniveau van statushouder is dat ook zeker interessant om te weten.

- Wat voor sociale contacten hebben statushouders Nederland?
 - o Wat voor contacten hebben statushouders met familie, of andere statushouders uit hun land van herkomst?
 - Op wat voor manier hebben zij contact met statushouders? (bijv. online/bijeenkomsten?)
 - Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor statushouders?
 - Zijn deze contacten tijdens COVID-19 veranderd? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van het leven van statushouders? (bijv. taal/werk)
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
 - o Wat voor contacten hebben statushouders met mensen die uit een ander land komen of de Nederlandse nationaliteit hebben?
 - Op wat voor manier hebben statushouders contact met hen? (bijv. online/bijeenkomsten?)

- Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor statushouders?
 - Zijn deze contacten tijdens COVID-19 veranderd? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van het leven van statushouders? (bijv. taal/werk)
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
- Wat voor contacten hebben statushouders met NGO's, de gemeente of overheid of met bedrijven hier in Nederland?
 - Op wat voor manier hebben statushouders contact met hen? (bijv. online/bijeenkomsten?)
 - Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor statushouders?
 - Zijn deze contacten tijdens COVID-19 veranderd? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van het leven van statushouders? (bijv. taal/werk)
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
- Wat voor contacten hebben statushouders met familie of vrienden in hun land van herkomst?
 - Hoe belangrijk zijn deze contacten voor statushouders?
 - Hoe hebben statushouders dat tijdens COVID-19 ervaren? (belangrijker/minder belangrijk, moeilijker/makkelijker of de manier van contact hebben?)
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
- Hoe hebben statushouders het aangaan van nieuwe sociale contacten tijdens COVID-19 ervaren?
 - Moeilijk/makkelijk? Waarom (bijv. lockdown, afstand houden, online lessen)?
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
- Hebben de veranderingen in het maken van sociaal contact tijdens COVID-19 invloed gehad op het integratie proces van statushouders in Nederland? (bijv. taal/werk)
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?

Economische ervaringen

De economische ervaringen van statushouders gaan vooral over hun werksituatie voor en tijdens COVID-19. U kunt deze vragen in het algemeen beantwoorden, maar als er verschillen zijn tussen geslacht, leeftijd, landen van herkomst of opleidingsniveau van statushouder is dat ook zeker interessant om te weten.

- Hebben statushouders vaak werkervaring voordat zij naar Nederland komen?
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
- Hebben statushouders vaak werk in Nederland?
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
 - Ja, over statushouders met werk:
 - Wat voor werk doen zij veelal? (sector/werkomstandigheden?)
 - Moesten statushouders tijdens COVID-19 fysiek doorwerken of konden zij online werken?
 - Is dit veranderd tijdens COVID-19? (sector/werkomstandigheden?)
 - Hoe komen statushouders aan hun werk?
 - Wat voor contract hebben statushouders? (tijdelijk/flexibel?)
 - Is dit veranderd tijdens COVID-19?
 - Hoe hebben statushouders werk tijdens COVID-19 ervaren?

- Liepen statushouders risico op besmetting met COVID-19?
 - Heeft deze werkervaring invloed gehad op de rest van het leven van statushouders (bijv. taal/sociaal)?
 - Nee, over statushouders zonder werk:
 - Hadden statushouders meer werk voor COVID-19? (soort werk/contract?)
 - Hebben statushouders gezocht naar werk tijdens COVID-19?
 - Hoe hebben zij dat ervaren?
 - Hoe heb statushouders het ervaren om geen werk te hebben tijdens COVID-19?
 - Heeft deze ervaring invloed gehad op de rest van het leven van statushouders (bijv. taal/sociaal)?
- Hebben statushouders een uitkering?
 - Is dit veranderd tijdens COVID-19?
 - Hoe hebben statushouders dat ervaren tijdens COVID-19?
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?
- Hebben de veranderingen op economisch of werkgebied tijdens COVID-19 invloed gehad op het integratie proces van statushouders in Nederland? (bijv. taal/werk)
 - Verschillen in geslacht, leeftijd, land van herkomst, opleidingsniveau?

Afsluitende vragen

- Wil jij nog iets met mij delen, wat we niet hebben besproken?
- Heb jij nog vragen aan mij?

7.3. Coding frame

Code name	Code description
Additional experiences	
Additional experiences: education children	Experiences of respondents indicating difficulties around the education of their children during COVID-19
Additional experiences: stay at home	Experiences of respondents indicating difficulties regarding staying at home during COVID-19
Additional experiences: COVID-19 infection	Experiences of respondents indicating their experiences with COVID-19 infection
Additional experiences: comparison with country of origin	Experiences of respondents indicating the comparison their own situation of COVID-19 with their the situation in their country of origin
Additional experiences: digital access/computer	Experiences of respondents indicating digital access and possession of computer
Additional experiences: current situation	Experiences of respondents indicating their current situation, with COVID-19 restrictions removed
Additional experiences: vaccin	Experiences of respondent indicating the COVID-19 vaccins
Additional experiences: arrival in AZC/NL	Experiences of respondents indicating their arrival in and introduction with the Netherlands and/or AZC, in general and during COVID-19
Additional experiences: appointments during COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating their vision on scheduling meetings/appointments during COVID-19
Additional experiences: demotivated	Experiences of respondents indicating demotivated in general, during COVID-19
Additional experiences: misinformation	Experiences of respondents indicating misinformation COVID-19
Additional experiences: positive mindset	Experiences of respondents indicating a positive mindset, regarding their situation
Additional experiences: motivation participation research	Experiences of respondents indicating why they were motivated to participate in this research
Additional experiences: opinion COVID-19 measures	Experiences of respondents indicating their opinion about the government measures regarding COVID-19
Additional experiences: scared next virus/wave	Experiences of respondents indicating that they are scared of a next COVID-19 wave
Additional experiences: discrimination	Experience of respondents indicating they were discrimated and mistreated during COVID-19
Additional experiences: wellbeing	Experience of respondents indicating change of mental wellbeing during COVID-19
Additional experiences: importance exercising	Experience of respondents indicating that exercising is important
Additional experiences: health important	Experience of respondents indicating that their health is most important
Additional experiences: isolation	Experience of respondents indicating they were isolated during COVID-19
Additional experiences: more extreme	Experience of respondents indicating that the situation/problems/challenges of status holders and others were more extreme during COVID-19
Additional experiences: gender difference	Experience of respondents indicating a gender difference in the integration of men and women
Additional experiences: experiences are personal	Experience of respondents indicating that experiences of COVID-19 are very personal
Social experiences	
Social experiences: only online contact	Experiences of respondents indicating having only online contact with others during COVID-19
Social experiences: careful for COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating being scared or careful for COVID-19 in contact with others, for themselves or others
Social experiences: contact with family/friends country of origin	Experiences of respondents indicating having contact with family or friends from their country of origin, in general
Social experiences: contact with neighbours	Experiences of respondents indicating contact with neighbours, in general
Social experiences: expanding network	Experiences of respondents indicating expanding their social network during COVID-19
Social experiences: language classes important for social contacts	Experiences of respondents indicating attendence to language classes is important for building social contacts
Social experiences: contact with family/friends in NL	Experiences of respondents indicating their contact with family or friends in the Netherlands, during COVID-19
Social experiences: physical contact better than online contact	Experiences of respondents indicating they prefer physical contact or meetings over online contact
Social experiences: contact with Dutch people	Experiences of respondents indicating their contact with Dutch people
Social experiences: contact with institutions	Experiences of respondents indicating their contact with institutions
Social experiences: activities before COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating their social activities before COVID-19
Linguistic experiences	
Linguistic experiences: understanding measures	Experiences of respondents indicating understanding the government measures regarding COVID-19
Linguistic experiences: work important for learning Dutch	Experiences of respondents indicating having/finding work being important for learning the Dutch language, in general
Linguistic experiences: social contacts important for learning Dutch	Experiences of respondents indicating the importance of having social contacts with others for learning Dutch, in general/during COVID-19
Linguistic experiences: insecure about Dutch proficiency	Experiences of respondents indicating their insecurity about Dutch proficiency, in general
Linguistic experiences: online lessons during COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating online language lessons during COVID-19
Linguistic experiences: demotivated to learn by COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating being demotivated to learn because of COVID-19 (measures)
Linguistic experiences: learning Dutch is hard	Experiences of respondents indicating the first phase of learning Dutch is hard, in general
Linguistic experiences: decreased language level during COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating their Dutch language level or opportunities to learn Dutch decreased during COVID-19
Linguistic experiences: motivated to increase proficiency Dutch	Experiences of respondents indicating they are motivated to increase their proficiency in Dutch
Linguistic experiences: advantage of speaking English	Experiences of respondents indicating speaking English is an advantage while learning Dutch
Linguistic experiences: organisational difficulties	Experiences of respondents indicating that language schools had organisational difficulties at the start of COVID-19
Economic experiences	
Economic experiences: ambition to work	Experiences of respondents indicating having the ambition to find work in the future, in general
Economic experiences: general work experience	Experiences of respondents indicating work experiences in general, not related to COVID-19
Economic experiences: loss of work	Experiences of respondents indicating loss of work during COVID-19
Economic experiences: more expensive after COVID-19	Experiences of respondents indicating groceries and others being more expensive after COVID-19
Economic experiences: education required to find work	Experiences of respondents indicating educational diplomas being required to find work
Economic experiences: study	Experiences of respondents indicating their study situation
Economic experiences: finding work	Experiences of respondents indicating how and in what ways they were looking for a job
Economic experiences: social benefit	Experiences of respondents indicating they are receiving social benefit
Economic experiences: not able to work	Experiences of respondents indicating they are not able or allowed to work

Explanation of the merging and dividing codes during the coding process

During the coding process, several codes were merged or moved to another section. Hereby a short description of this process:

- Code “Isolation” and code “Feeling imprisoned” were merged to code “Isolation”.
- Code “Study” was moved from additional experiences to work experiences.
- Code “Mistreated” and code “Discrimination” were merged to code “Discrimination”.
- Code “Difficult” of additional experiences was subdivided among other codes in the group.
- Code “Arrival in the Netherlanders” and code “Getting to know the Netherlands” were merged to code “Arrival in NL”. Later, this code was also merged with code “AZC” to code “Arrival in NL/AZC”.

- Code “General” and code “Difficult” of social experiences were subdivided among other codes in the group.
- Code “Hard time for everyone” and code “More extreme” were merged to code “More extreme”.
- Code “Small network” and code “Expanding network” were merged to code “Expanding network”.

