

Citizenship in context

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The main objective of this thesis is to investigate the interplay between immigrants' citizenship acquisition and immigrants' residential context in the Netherlands. With that aim, I develop an empirical strategy, using register data from Statistics Netherlands, that allows me to measure how citizenship and residential context relate to one another and also to investigate the mechanisms driving this relationship. I find that these two concepts are intrinsically connected. In Chapter 2, I observe that social network availability at the neighbourhood level is positively associated with immigrants' decision to naturalise. Thus, immigrants living in a neighbourhood with a dense migrant network are less likely to become Dutch citizens, a relation that may be driven by fewer inter-group contacts. Conversely, I find that having regular contacts with immigrants who have completed the naturalisation procedure may facilitate access to valuable information about the naturalisation process and may be viewed as a signal of an inclusive society which, altogether, can positively affect immigrants' likelihood to naturalise. Taking a different perspective, I conclude in Chapters 3 and 4 that becoming a Dutch citizen facilitates immigrants' mobility to predominantly native and higher-income neighbourhoods. This suggests that naturalisation acts as a positive signal for various housing market actors, thereby reducing the risk of nationality-based discrimination in the renting and homeownership market. In Chapter 5, I examine whether naturalisation can be considered a confounding factor of the relation between neighbourhood's deprivation and immigrants' health. Findings from this chapter show that, although naturalisation does not act as a confounding factor, it is associated with a lower risk of mortality. This demonstrates the relevance of citizenship status as an important predictor of health, which is a crucial aspect of personal well-being.

Immigrants' naturalisation has mostly been studied through the lens of individual-level factors. As a consequence, little is known about the interplay between naturalisation and the residential context in which immigrants live. This thesis aims at bridging this gap by studying how neighbourhood's context may condition immigrants' decision to become citizens but also how naturalisation may shape the residential context in which immigrants live. First, Chapter 2

contributes to the literature on the determinants of citizenship acquisition by showing that the decision to naturalise is not a phenomenon that is solely determined by individual-level predictors. Rather, immigrants who aspire to become citizens are influenced by their residential environment and the individuals they regularly engage with. Second, results from Chapters 3 and 4 provide evidence of nationality-based discrimination in the Dutch housing market and highlight the relevance of citizenship acquisition for immigrants' residential mobility, a factor that has often been neglected in the literature. Moreover, these findings are in line with those of previous studies that have observed the signalling potential of citizenship acquisition in the labour market and among mortgage lenders. Finally, Chapter 5 engages with the literature on neighbourhoods' factors and health. It also relates to previous studies that have demonstrated the detrimental health effects of legal precariousness.

Findings from this research have important societal relevance. First, they emphasise the importance of neighbourhoods' characteristics for immigrants' integration. At a time when the Netherlands actively engages in urban social mixing policies, often based on the assumption that living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of immigrants will impede immigrants' integration trajectory, these findings offer a more nuanced perspective which is of great interest to policymakers. Second, these findings show that citizenship acquisition is an important element of immigrants' settlement process. Because naturalised immigrants may not be confronted to the same extent with nationality-based discrimination, they are also less likely to be impeded in their spatial assimilation trajectory. This contrasts sharply with the view that considers citizenship acquisition the final stage of the integration process. Moreover, it casts doubts on the appropriateness of the last reforms of the Dutch nationality act that have aimed at increasing the eligibility requirements for naturalisation. By making access to citizenship more restrictive, such reforms may substantially delay the naturalisation procedure and slow down immigrants' integration process. Third, findings from Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that actors in the Dutch housing market may use Dutch citizenship as a source of discrimination. This echoes with existing studies that have found evidence of

discrimination against minority groups in European housing markets and sheds light on a specific form of discrimination that is often neglected in public discourse, namely nationality-based discrimination. This highlights the need for public policy aiming at tackling this issue, and more specifically targeting private renters and mortgage lenders.

These research findings are not only relevant for other researchers working in the field of migration studies but are also important for policy makers and advocacy groups interested in issues related to immigration. They offer an interesting view on the questions of immigrants' integration and citizenship acquisition and shed light on key societal issues that will need to be addressed in the future. They also portray how immigrants' post-settlement trajectory can be influenced by neighbourhoods' resources. This stresses the need for public policies that are not only designed to improve individual-level outcomes but that also take into consideration the broader context in which immigrants reside.

In order to attain these different target groups, I disseminate the results on different types of platforms. First, these empirical findings are compiled in four different papers that have been published in (Chapters 3 and 4), or are under review (Chapters 2 and 5), at reputed international journals in full open-access. This strategy is primarily addressed at academics but may also reach other interest groups. To ensure that the results from this dissertation are also shared with a wider audience, they are publicised through the website of the larger project of which my dissertations is a part (www.milifestatus.com), my individual Twitter account (@Chris_Lec1), as well as the Twitter account of the MiLifeStatus project (@MiLifeStatus). This is all done with the aim of increasing the visibility of the research and reaching out to a wider audience.