Irregular Migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands
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5 Investment, Settlement and Legalisation Aspirations

5.1 Three types of aspirations

This chapter examines my respondents' aspirations during their stay in Belgium or the Netherlands. From this analysis, it appears that three types of aspirations can be distinguished. The first type of aspiration concerns working and making money in the destination country and returning with it to the country of origin. Thus, respondents with this type of aspiration hoped to achieve future upward mobility in their country of origin. They were usually 'target earners'; that is, they saved for very specific projects, ranging from starting their own business to financing a future wedding in the country of origin (Massey et al. 1987). Musa from Turkey, for example, says 'I am here with only one goal and that is to save money and return to get married and start my own business.' Mbark says, 'When I have earned enough money, I will go back to Morocco to start a business there.' During their stay in Belgium or the Netherlands, these migrants try to acquire financial means for future investment in their home country. The following fragment illustrates how their stay serves a planned future in the country of origin:

I have big plans in Bulgaria. For starters, I will marry my girlfriend when I return to Burgas ... Furthermore, I intend to start my own business. At the least, I do not want to deprive my children of the education that I did not have ... My only aim is to get back to Burgas as fast as I can. However, to be able to achieve this, I need a considerable amount of euros. So that is what I try to achieve here in Ghent (Dimitar, Bulgaria).

These migrants intend to stay in the destination country only temporarily until their project has succeeded. They regard their stay as an intermediary period in which they work for upward social mobility in the future in their country of origin. Göksel, for example, says, 'This is a step that I take in order to realise my dream. I earn enough money here to make the savings I need before I go back to Turkey.' I denote such aspirations as investment aspirations. As irregular migrants with investment aspirations aim for a temporary stay – for a more or less pre-fixed amount of time – they do not aspire to settle down or become legalised. As Ilian says, 'My uncle will
probably get a residence permit at the end of this year, but I am not looking for a residence permit. I want to go back to Bulgaria in two years and start a family there.’ When I asked Sofia from Bolivia if she was trying to get legalised, she replied, ‘No, I am not trying anything.’ When I subsequently asked her why she was not trying she said, ‘You know I want to have papers but I don’t know ... that is just to live you know and to not have this problem of fear of the police. But it is not for staying here indefinitely. No that is not my intention.’ This illustrates that migrants with investment aspirations regard legalisation as a mere convenience and not as a necessity. In other words, it is something they would not refuse if it was offered to them, but it is not something they currently strive for.

Unlike the temporary ambitions of migrants with investment aspirations, the second category of aspirations is oriented towards residing in Belgium or the Netherlands on a long-term basis. These migrants, with what I have termed *settlement aspirations*, aim to start a new life in the destination country and do not intend to return:

The employment situation is bad in Morocco ... Belgium and the rest of Western Europe on the contrary have much more employment possibilities and more industry to offer people jobs ... That is why I, like many other illegals by the way, have come to Belgium to build a new life here (Badr, Morocco).

Badr, and others like him, clearly believe that having a job is important to achieve the life he desires in Belgium. In such cases, the desire for long-term stay is inspired by a dream of economic prosperity:

In Holland so much work exists, not officially, but they need workers, not for € 20 but for € 5. You need to start one month for five, later you work for seven, and in three months you work for ten. Later you have twelve or fifteen but believe me with € 15, cash, ah € 15, this is my price with what I have lived [during the] last three years. Masja, € 15 per hour is enough. Masja, € 120, € 150 every day, is not enough for life? No taxes or other things. It is perfect, perfect life (Andrei, Moldova).

Some migrants’ settlement aspirations do not derive from their personal economic desires, but from family needs that span national boundaries. Arda, for example, says, ‘I don't have any choice. I stay here to send money to my family. I can work all year round here, in Turkey I only work a few months a year.’ Furthermore, focusing on settling in the new society does
not mean that migrants give up on the option of ever returning to their country of origin. Migrants with settlement aspirations regularly visit their home country – if they can – and many plan to return upon retirement, as living costs are usually much lower there.

Migrants with this type of aspiration would like to have their stay legalised, but they do not regard it a necessity. They are primarily occupied with living a life that they regard as better or that they hope will become better than the life they left behind. Jean, for example, when asked whether he wants to legalise his stay, says that he ‘does not feel like getting into that whole affair’. He indicates that he would be happy if he were legalised, but that he is not taking any action in that direction himself. He says, ‘in my own way, I have arranged for a pleasant stay in Belgium’. Jean believes that the life he is living in Belgium is much better than the life he would lead in Congo. Like Jean, migrants with settlement aspirations seem to be content with the idea of living without papers, because in their opinion they lead a better life now than they would in their home country. Valentina from Cuba, for example, says, ‘[H]onestly with all I have here, I don’t have papers, but at least I work a little and with that I can buy things that I can’t buy in my country.’ They are convinced that they do not necessarily need papers to have a good life in the destination country. As Chavdar from Bulgaria says, ‘I lead a better life than people with a residence permit. I even make more money than they do.’

Settlement aspirations are not always only about economic prosperity in the destination country. Some people, for example, want to stay because their right to urgent medical care gives them access to medical assistance they would not be able to afford in their home country (see Rosenthal 2007). Kees, a social worker in Antwerp, explains, ‘[W]e have been talking about voluntary return for five months now but this man has the entire medical dictionary, he has all kinds of illnesses. It is much better for him to stay here. This man costs the OCMW, I think he is their best customer in terms of costs. What he has here [in Belgium] he is never going to get there [in South America], and he won’t have the money either.’ Medical services provided in the destination country can thus constitute a reason why migrants aspire to settle down:

My sister has a tumour in her head … [she] is undergoing hard treatment, and very long, it will practically be forever. And to this country we are so thankful because they help her so much. These examinations

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1 The OCMW are the Belgian social services responsible for the provision of medical care to irregular migrants.
could not be done in my country. Firstly because they don’t have them there, they don’t know how to do them, and secondly because we could never have afforded it economically... [T]he beautiful thing about Belgium is... that when someone is illegal, there is medical assistance for this person... regardless of... whether the medical problem you have is this big, the government accepts the expenses and they help you (Constanza, Bolivia).

Even though irregular migrants have only limited rights in Belgium and the Netherlands, the few rights they can claim might be reason for them to aspire to stay here, as many do not enjoy similar rights in their country of origin.

Educational opportunities available to respondents’ children fuelled settlement aspirations too (see Fozdar & Torezani 2008). When I asked Antonia if she had the chance to do it over, would she again make the same decision to come to Belgium and settle down illegally, she replied, ‘Yes, because my children have learned Dutch, another language. They speak English, they speak French, and they know many things. They know many things that you don’t have there [in Ecuador], intellectual things, everything. Here is the best future for them.’ When I asked Benjamin from Ecuador if he was satisfied with his life in Belgium, he said, ‘My children go to music school here, school for painting, dancing, karate, so that is something very nice for them. We are satisfied because we are complying with our obligation as parents to give a good education to your children. We hope that they will take advantage of it and have a better future later.’

It is usually not just one of these underlying factors that shapes settlement aspirations, but a combination of several factors, as Javiera explains, ‘We have grown away from our country so we feel better here, because we are better off here economically, and I can give my children the education that I would like to give them, and health too. And I can give that to my sister and my mother [who lived in her house] as well. I wanted to do all that in Ecuador but I could not.’

Settlement aspirations stem not only from economic conditions, but are inspired by many other factors as well, for example, the freedom from parental or community control that the migrant has come to enjoy. These types of structural factors – often in combination with one another – foster aspirations to build a more or less permanent life in the destination country, though not necessarily including legalisation. This does not mean that migrants with settlement aspirations would not seize the opportunity if legalisation were offered to them, but in their everyday life they do not focus on it.
Irregular migrants who have *legalisation aspirations* do aspire to acquire a legal residence status. For them, leading a better life is inextricably bound up with obtaining a legal status. They feel that they can only be comfortable by this means. Kamel, for example, says he can only start to live well if he acquires legal residence:

You simply don't have any rights if you don't have your papers ... So my only hope is to get a legal status ... Only then can I start to feel good and try to actively participate in this society (Kamel, Morocco).

Mehdi, also from Morocco, answers the question of why he chooses to remain in Belgium by saying, ‘Because I plan to build a future here ... I will do anything to get a residence permit. I know that it is going to take much effort; nevertheless, I will do anything to become a full citizen of Belgium.’ Jamal says that he ‘[can’t] go back to Morocco without first having arranged for papers. All the effort and money would have been futile then.’ For migrants with legalisation aspirations, obtaining legal residence represents a new beginning. This is unlike settlement migrants, who can start to build a new life without papers. Legalisation migrants feel that they can make such a new start only after obtaining papers. Illiass, from Morocco, for example, explains, ‘I hope I meet someone who I can marry so that I can reside legally, because only then can I start to work on my future.’ Tolga from Turkey also emphasises how legalisation represents a new beginning: ‘My life here has yet to begin. I am going to marry my girlfriend and then I will start a restaurant with my brother-in-law.’ For legalisation migrants, their life seems to stand still while they live in illegality. Tarek from Algeria explains, ‘if I become legalised I can map out a route, make a plan, organise my life, and I cannot do that without papers ... It is very unfortunate that I am losing time like this.’ Efunsegun, from Nigeria, says that he feels time is ticking away: ‘[I]t is because of my future that I stay here. I know that if I get the paper, I know that my future will be much brighter than it is now. So that is why you know I want to have permission to live here, nothing else, because I know that if I ever decide to go back to Africa I have to start again from where I stopped.’

Legalisation migrants consider legalisation a precondition for a good life. In many cases, they say that if they knew for certain that they would never get legalised, they would consider returning to their homeland or trying their luck somewhere else:

There [in Africa], you know that you are in a shit situation. But here it is not a shit situation, but it does not result in anything either. No, for
me, without papers I go back. Without papers there is no reason to live here. I go back then. I didn’t go to Europe and stop here to do illegal work, that is no use (Dnari, Sierra Leone).

Dnari is clear about the fact that he did not come to Europe to do ‘illegal work’. Legalisation migrants see their migration as part of a social mobility project in terms of advancement in life. They see legalisation as a necessary stepping stone towards achieving that upward social mobility. Migrants like Illiass, Medhi and Efusengun talk about their need for papers for their ‘future’. However, for some legalisation migrants, having papers represents more than just a stepping stone for the advancement of their personal careers:

I don’t just want to earn € 2,000 or € 1,500 working in this and to only be with people who are also in this environment [illegal employment]. I want to do other things as well and move around in freedom. I want to be in the environment in which I want to be ... if I knew for sure that I would have to be in this situation for two or three years or more, I think I would return then (Fernando, Chile).

Together with his wife, Fernando is earning a monthly income that would likely satisfy most settlement and investment migrants. Yet he says making this amount does not suffice for him. As for many legalisation migrants, this has to do with his educational background. He mentions his university degree when I ask why he does not want to stay in Belgium without papers: ‘because I have graduated from university, I have a title and all that, and now I am here painting and doing work with my hands’. Several legalisation migrants expressed the wish to take up their studies after legalisation (see Menjivar 2008). Or they hoped that legalisation would enable them to find employment in a job using their education.

My analysis revealed three different types of aspirations of irregular migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands: investment, settlement and legalisation aspirations. Migrants with investment aspirations want to return and invest in a better future in their country of origin. Migrants with settlement aspirations aspire to build a new life in the destination country, regardless of whether they ever obtain a legal residence status, and migrants with legalisation aspirations hope to obtain legal residence. While other scholars have made comparisons based on two migration motives or two types of aspirations, the analytical distinction of the three categories presented here is new. Leman, for example, (1997) distinguishes
between those who migrate primarily to work – usually temporarily – and make money (employment illegality) and migrants who come to reside and legalise their status (residence illegality); and Chavez (1998) distinguishes between sojourners and settlers. Although my analysis broadly supports this distinction in individual aspirations, it reveals three categories of aspirations instead of two. Contrary to Leman’s findings, I found a group of irregular migrants who do want to settle down but do not necessarily aspire to obtain legal residence. Contrary to the findings of Chavez I found a category of irregular migrants for whom settlement aspirations necessarily involve legalisation. It is important to distinguish three categories, and not just two, because these categories encompass very different definitions of success. Whereas settlement migrants describe their life in illegal employment as a ‘perfect life’, legalisation migrants say they are not here ‘to do illegal work’ and they are ‘losing time’. To achieve their aspirations, those in the different categories need to employ very different strategies, and these different strategies are likely to require specific resources and to shape specific patterns of incorporation. Distinguishing between investment, settlement and legalisation aspirations therefore provides more insight into the lives of irregular migrants than can be offered by analytical distinctions with only two categories.

5.2 Where do they come from?

As explained in chapter 2, aspirations are not only fed by wants and desires; they are also influenced by structural factors. Some structural factors stem from characteristics of both the countries of origin and destination, while others have to do with the personal background characteristics and the personal social networks that respondents are embedded in. Chapter 4 described the main characteristics of the two receiving societies under study. These different contexts are likely to create an overrepresentation of specific categories of aspirations in each country. For example, the possibilities of achieving individual regularisation are perceived to be greater in Belgium than in the Netherlands, judging by the numbers of applications. It is therefore likely that migrants with legalisation aspirations will be a relatively larger category in Belgium. However, no conclusive statements can be made about distributions over the categories because of the qualitative nature of this study. All that can be done is to indicate that the aspirations described in the previous subsections were shaped in these structural contexts, and that other structural contexts may shape different distributions
and perhaps additional aspirations as well. Furthermore, this study can analyse how specific changes in migrants’ perceptions of the structural context may foster changes in their aspirations or actions. In other words, it can indicate how irregular migrants react to the perceived policy context in which they find themselves. How do they adjust their aspirations and actions to the structural context in which they are embedded? This means that I can report mechanisms that shape patterns. These mechanisms are discussed later in this book.

This section analyses how specific structural conditions in the different countries of origin lead to an overrepresentation of migrants from certain countries within specific categories of aspirations. Furthermore, it discusses certain personal background characteristics that underlie specific categories of aspirations. As such, it becomes clear that the irregular migrants interviewed developed a ‘migratory disposition’ (Kalir 2005b), and their aspirations were shaped by the conditions in their country of origin and their own personal background.

Migrants with investment aspirations usually come from countries where there is some investment potential. Tümer, for example, says that it makes sense to invest in Turkey: ‘Turkey’s economy is doing well now, so I go back and start my own shop there.’ For people from war-struck countries in Africa, it makes little sense to go back and invest there. Oudry, from Congo, explains, ‘Everybody knows what the situation in my country is like. How can I return when it is like this? With all these mass killings? … There is no future there.’ Migrants with investment aspirations usually migrate without their partner and children, to keep the costs down. Furthermore, they generally originate from countries nearby, so the costs of transport are relatively low. In addition to proximity, the investment costs are a lot lower for migrants who do not need a visa than for those who do. Migrants with investment aspirations therefore tend to come from countries without visa obligations, such as Bulgaria (see Düvell 2006c).

The literature on ‘regular’ migration usually stresses that migrants who settle down often start out as temporary migrants (Piore 1979). In the same vein, irregular migrants are seldom found to aim for settlement from the start (Massey et al. 1987). Although I encountered migrants who initially had temporary aspirations that turned into settlement aspirations, I also found some who aspired to settle down from the start. Lucas, from Chile, answered my question about whether he had always intended to stay with a firm ‘yes’, later adding, ‘We knew that we were not going back.’ Recent research points out that, as immigration control has tightened for migrants who need a visa, these people tend to stay as long as possible once they have
successfully entered the country of destination (Düvell 2006c). This seems to indicate that migrants who have settlement aspirations from the outset are no longer the exceptions.

Even though initial settlement aspirations are becoming more common, many of my respondents who currently had settlement aspirations initially came to Europe with the desire to make money and then return home. Mustafa, who initially came with the intention of saving money for his wedding and returning home, said, ‘I have work here, when I have saved enough money I go back to Bulgaria to get married. After that, I come back here with my wife. I lead a better life here.’ Sometimes these are success stories, as in Mustafa’s case. But many investment migrants turn into settlement migrants because they fail to get together the amount of money they need to return. They need more time than they planned to get the necessary savings together. For example, when I asked Martina, from Bolivia, if it had always been her intention to settle down, she answered as follows:

No this was not my intention. It was covering what I owed, making a little money and going back to Bolivia. That was my original goal. My goal was to go back after a year. But after six months without work, and then after eight months of work I still did not have the same amount of money that I arrived with. So [I stayed] a year more, and then another year more.

For migrants who had high travel expenses, it can be especially difficult to meet investment aspirations. In these cases, paying back travel costs can constitute such a financial burden that migrants are unable to save any money for long periods of time. This more or less forces them to settle down. Gzifa, who migrated from Ghana with the help of a migration broker, ran away from the broker once she realised that the wages in Belgium were not as he had promised them to be. While she initially planned to work for a few years to save money, she realised that she could never save money with the enormous travel debt she had. Going back to Ghana was not an option because the migration broker’s people would easily find her there. She therefore decided to leave Brussels and settle in Antwerp, hoping he would not find her there (he had not in the past six years).

Migrants with settlement aspirations usually come from countries where there are high levels of unemployment, corruption and economic problems, as in South America or North Africa (see Jokisch & Pribilsky 2002). The
economic crisis in Ecuador inspired Isidora to migrate to Belgium with her husband and four children:

We had many problems in our country, a new government had come and all the business went down ... My husband and I had a pharmacy in Ecuador ... because of the change of government, Colombian competitors came and they sold all the medicine very cheap and we could not compete with this ... so we sold the pharmacy and we also had a car that we sold and for the little that we were lacking for the trip we took out credit ... So all the money that we got from selling the pharmacy we invested in the six airline tickets (Isidora, Ecuador).

Migrants with settlement aspirations usually feel that the economic and political situation in their country leaves them little chance to improve their situation in the future. Moreover, they do not believe that the situation will change any time soon. That is why they migrate to Europe, where they hope to have a chance for some future upward social mobility, as clearly expressed by Kamel and Younes:

Morocco did not have and still does not have anything to offer me. In Morocco, being an uneducated boy, you don't have a chance to build up a life like you can here in Europe. If you don't have a job or you don't know anyone who can help you get one, you will continue to live in the same poverty you always have lived in. So, economically speaking it makes no sense to stay in Morocco and to think that there will be better times because everything will remain the same. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer (Kamel, Morocco).

Morocco is a corrupt country with huge differences between rich and poor. I do not believe that this will ever change or that there will be an end to corruption in Morocco. I was not living well in Morocco. It was not like we did not have anything to eat at my house, but there was never any improvement in our financial situation. It stayed like it always was and that had to change. That is why I have taken the step to go abroad like many young people my age do. I wanted to do something to make my life better economically speaking (Younes, Morocco).

Countries that foster settlement aspirations are those that offer little in terms of social security. Respondents often also worked in the informal
labour market there, and medical insurance and pension plans were usually out of their reach. This means that many of the conditions they face in their country of origin are the same as those in the destination country. But at least in Belgium or the Netherlands they have partial access to medical care and good education for their children.

Like migrants with settlement aspirations, migrants with legalisation aspirations escape poor and corrupt countries. In addition, countries that have been struck by war or where other serious political conflicts are part of daily life foster legalisation aspirations. Many migrants with legalisation aspirations therefore apply for asylum. In this respect, it is important to realise that many of these migrants were not well-informed in advance about conditions in the country of destination. Many complained about the false image that prior migrants had portrayed of Europe. After hearing the stories of seemingly endless economic opportunities and political freedoms, they thought European streets were paved with gold (see Staring 1999), and that people could do whatever they wanted. Many migrants leave their homes without basic information or with a completely wrong image of what to expect. Some of my respondents, for example, thought they could easily start working once they arrived and did not even know that papers are required in order to work or reside in Europe:

You know that you need papers to leave Africa ... but you do not know that people apply for asylum here. You don't know that if you don't have papers you have a problem. You don't know that (Albert, Congo).

Many migrants with legalisation aspirations had been smuggled into the country – sometimes without knowing which country they were being taken to (see Black et al. 2005; Jordan & Düvell 2002) – without having the slightest clue of the conditions they would face. They were simply told by the smugglers to apply for asylum, which they did, and they were provided with details on how best to do this (see also Van Wijk 2007). However, sometimes they were dropped off at the Aliens Office without further instructions:

When I was there in 2000 there were a lot of people, from Kosovo, Chechnya, Burundi, Rwanda, Congo ... And I asked: What is this place here? And they said this is where people ask for asylum. Asylum, what is that? Because I did not know, I knew nothing. Asylum what is that? It is asylum; asylum is like when you ask for an identity card. And that is here in Belgium. Oh ok, and I went to the office like that (Tuyishime, Rwanda).
Many migrants with legalisation aspirations have consequently just rolled into asylum procedures. Many fled their countries in search of protection without knowing anything about asylum laws; they just thought they could work in Europe. After each negative decision they file another appeal or try another procedure. There is always another procedure to try or an appeal to file – especially in Belgium. Lawyers there assist migrants striving for legalisation, continuously offering them the hope that the next procedure will have a chance of success, especially since there are no strict criteria for these procedures. As a consequence, there is always some hope of achieving legalisation. Even the slightest glimmer of hope can make some continue along this path for a long period of time. Furthermore, some social workers encourage them to file for regularisation procedures, as they believe that the circumstances in the home country are too bad to go back to. When I interviewed social worker Debbie and the irregular migrant she was assisting (Dnari), they told me that Debbie encouraged Dnari not to go back to Sierra Leone:

Debbie: ‘He wanted to return.’
Dnari: ‘Yes that is the truth.’
Debbie: ‘So I said where do you want to go?’
Dnari: ‘I said to Sierra Leone.’
Debbie: ‘What do you want to do there?’
Dnari: ‘I don’t know.’
Debbie: ‘How are you going to? You can’t, I said. I said sorry but you are just not going to do that. Because you don’t know what will happen to you there. At least here you have … it is not easy … but we are trying to find you a place to stay. So yes you don’t have a place to stay now but at least you do have some work and an income, and I am trying to arrange papers for you.’

Apart from the respondents who have legalisation aspirations because they come from countries with political problems and have been socialised into the world of legal procedures, there is a group for which personal background characteristics underlie their legalisation aspirations. The first type of characteristic has already been mentioned and has to do with education. The second relates to social status. Some migrants with legalisation aspirations have a high social status in their country of origin. These respondents look down on illegal employment and often lie to their family and friends about the conditions they experience in order to protect their social status. Obviously they cannot keep this up forever, so they need legal status so they
can start to live the life they are expected to be living. A third characteristic is age. Irregular migrants with legalisation aspirations are either relatively old or relatively young compared to those with settlement and investment aspirations. While the latter two categories are usually roughly between 25 and 45 years of age, and hence at a good age to work and form a family, some legalisation migrants are older than 50, which makes them less suitable for heavy physical labour and consequently more likely to aspire to legalisation. The younger migrants with legalisation aspirations have just left school and have no job experience; they have come to Belgium or the Netherlands in search of a better future. As they are at a good age to get married, this is usually what they are after. Their families have sent them to Europe to live with other family members for a while. This especially applies to migrants from Turkey and Morocco whose family members are former labour migrants who acquired a legal status in the 1970s or 1980s. Finding the newly arrived family member a marriage partner becomes an issue for the whole family to deal with.

Specific social backgrounds and structural conditions in the home country make certain migrants more likely to have certain kinds of aspirations. Moreover, specific personal background characteristics underlie specific types of aspirations. Categories of aspirations may overlap with countries of origin. Thus, people studying Poles and Albanians, for example, find that the former are mainly temporary migrants, while the latter prefer to settle down permanently (Triandafyllidou & Kosic 2006). Certain conditions in the home countries make migrants more likely to aspire to one thing than to another simply because it makes more sense in the context they live within. However, there are always many exceptions. There are always Poles who do settle down or try to become legalised. We already saw that nationality categories can be diverse in terms of aspirations. Moreover, people’s aspirations do not always remain steady during their entire migrant career. If conditions in the country of origin change, aspirations may change with these. A migrant who wanted to open a shop in the home country, for example, is likely to refrain from doing so if the home economy collapses. Irregular migrants can also change their aspirations due to events in the destination country.

5.3 Changing aspirations

I took aspirations at different points in the lives of irregular migrants as a starting point for my analysis. For the respondents interviewed by research assistants in semi-structured interviews, I could assess only one point in
IRREGULAR MIGRANTS IN BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

their lives: the moment the interview took place. During my own fieldwork, however, I was usually able to distinguish a sequence of aspirations throughout the migrant careers of respondents.

From this point forward, I use the terms investment migrants, legalisation migrants and settlement migrants instead of the longer ‘migrants with investment aspirations’, ‘migrants with settlement aspirations’ and ‘migrants with legalisation aspirations’. This is for reasons of readability, though the reader should also bear in mind that my aim is to construct a typology of aspirations, not of migrants. In other words, my analysis is at the level of aspirations and not at the level of agents. The concepts investment migrants, legalisation migrants and settlement migrants refer to irregular migrants who have these specific aspirations at a certain point in time, but the core analytical categories are aspirations.

According to Van Nieuwenhuyze (2007), a typical trajectory usually takes place. The Senegambian irregular migrants she studied virtually all initially intended to return, but shifted their focus to obtaining a legal status after a while. However, research by Kosic and Triandafyllidou (2004) indicates that not all irregular migrants are interested in the possibility of regularising their work and stay. My own analysis also points in this latter direction. There neither seems to be a hierarchy in aspirations, nor does a fixed trajectory exist. My respondents did not always consider legalisation important. Jean, for example, initially tried to legalise his situation, but purposely stopped all his attempts after he received a second rejection. I found the typical trajectory from investment to settlement to legalisation aspirations was surely not uncommon, but I encountered a variety of other trajectories as well. The only trajectories I did not come across were those in which settlement or legalisation aspirations turned into investment aspirations. This does not mean, however, that these trajectories do not exist. Perhaps migrants who followed them had already returned and were consequently difficult to encounter in the destination country.

The question arises as to what prompts irregular migrants to change their aspirations. Individuals’ aspirations are certainly mediated by what society can offer, and this inextricably connects aspirations to assessments of available opportunities and possible constraints. However, these assessments do not necessarily represent real-life opportunities and constraints, but rather perceptions of these. Changes in aspirations can therefore be the result of a real opportunity opening up or of increasing constraints, but they can also stem from false perceptions or from changes in desires and wants. In addition, as said before, aspirations are partially connected to migrants’ stage of life. As a result, aspirations may change as migrants get
older, when they have children or when they become grandparents. In other words, many things can prompt migrants to change their aspirations. It is difficult to isolate the effects of specific possibilities or constraints. I can only analyse how irregular migrants adjust their aspirations to perceptions of these possibilities or constraints. I therefore did not systematically study factors inspiring changes in aspirations themselves. The following chapters instead examine contextual factors that I found to have actually inspired my respondents to change their aspirations and that are relevant for answering my research questions. It is important to emphasise at this point that if migrants switch to another category of aspirations, the required strategies for realising their aspirations also change (Van Nieuwenhuyze 2009), and their incorporation and transnational activities are likely to change as well.

5.4 Aspirations and strategies

In order to get what they aspire to, irregular migrants pursue strategies. The strategies pursued by investment migrants and settlement migrants show limited internal diversity. Investment migrants try to make as much money as they can in the shortest period of time possible. This means they try to work as much as possible while economising on other things. Settlement migrants aspire to build a life, and this requires more long-term stability than such short-term investment strategies can provide. They therefore try to find regular and steady jobs, and they put effort into building a social network of people who can supply them with information and assistance (Van Meeteren, Engbersen & Van San 2007a; Van Meeteren, Engbersen & Van San 2009).

The strategies pursued by legalisation migrants can be divided into two distinct types, corresponding to the possibilities for legalisation in the destination countries. The first type of strategy is to try to marry a native or a regular migrant with permanent residence rights. While some aim to find someone they love, others engage in a bogus marriage. In some cases the marriage is bought, and the partner knows that it is a bogus marriage, yet I also encountered migrants who aimed to find a partner they could deceive and leave once they had obtained legal residence. The second type of strategy is the use of legal procedures to become legalised, the most important procedure being regularisation. How exactly they pursue these strategies on a daily basis is discussed in the next chapters dealing with incorporation, transnational engagements and success. The same applies to the daily practices of investment and settlement migrants.
5.5 **From aspirations to incorporation**

Whereas other scholars have made distinctions using only two categories based on migration motives or aspirations, my analysis revealed three types of aspirations: investment, settlement and legalisation. As these categories of aspirations are accompanied by distinct visions of what constitutes success, this distinction provides more insight than prevailing categorisations of two groups can offer. Certain personal background characteristics as well as structural factors in the countries of origin also underlie specific aspirations. Changes in these characteristics are likely to inspire changing aspirations as well. Furthermore, migrants use certain strategies to realise their aspirations. Two distinct types of strategies can be distinguished among legalisation migrants. The next two chapters link aspirations to specific patterns of incorporation.