

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT PREPARED FOR EPC 1-4 SEPTEMBER 2010, VIENNA**  
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**Title**

*Family reunion and family formation after immigration to the Netherlands*

**Introduction**

Since 1996 more than 1.3 million first generation immigrants have settled in the Netherlands. Not every immigrant stayed for a long period of time. Six years after immigration 35 to 45 per cent had left the Netherlands. One quarter of the immigrants who came to the Netherlands in 1996 as a single person lived together six years later. For immigrants coming to the Netherlands as a single person in 2002 this percentage dropped to a sixth. From those who came to the Netherlands in 1996 or 2002 living in a childless couple one third was living in a couple with children six years later. Considerable differences exist between the groups of origin when looking at living together and getting children.

Immigrants migrate for several reasons. In the Netherlands, work, and to a lesser degree family reunion and family formation, are important motives for western immigrants to settle. Non-western immigrants enter the Netherlands especially for family related motives (family reunion and family formation), and to a lesser degree for study (Nicolaas, 2009). Register based data can help to get a clear picture on how these processes work.

In this paper we analyse the process of family reunion and family formation after immigration for the largest non-western and western groups of origin. We analyse two processes of family reunion and family formation:

- Immigrants entering the Netherlands as a single person: when do they live together?
- Immigrants entering the Netherlands as part of a couple (married or unmarried): when do they get children?

**Data and method**

We use data for the period 1996–2008 from the Dutch municipal population register. The number of immigrants in year  $t$  is derived from the population at 1 January in year  $t+1$  as all the persons who immigrated in year  $t$ . We restricted our analysis to first generation immigrants coming to the Netherlands: immigrating Dutch natives and second generation immigrants have lived in the Netherlands for a certain period and are therefore not included in our analysis.

When analysing the family situation of the immigrants coming to the Netherlands, we encounter a problem. Only the family situation *at the time* of immigration is registered in the Dutch population register, not the family situation *after* entering the Netherlands. For example, two persons in a couple entering the Netherlands at two different moments in time are registered as two single persons, not as a couple. For this reason we use the household position of the immigrant in our research. The household position of a person is determined once a year at January 1st. The household position presented in this article is the position on January 1st in the year after immigration.

Eight groups of origin are studied. These immigrants originate from the following countries:

- Turkey
- Morocco
- Surinam

- Netherlands Antilles and Aruba
- China
- Iraq
- Poland
- Former Soviet Union.

Immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba make up the four largest non-western groups of origin in the Netherlands. This is caused by labour migration from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s and consecutive family reunion and family formation and because of colonial ties of Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba with the Netherlands. In the second half of the 1990s, substantial numbers of asylum seekers from China and especially Iraq – the two remaining non-western groups of origin analysed in this paper - came to the Netherlands. Poland and the former Soviet Union are considered to be western countries. Immigration from Poland to the Netherlands has risen sharply since May 2004, when Poland became a Member State of the European Union.

The eight groups of origin have been followed in two immigration cohorts: those immigrating to the Netherlands in 1996 and those immigrating in 2002. Both cohorts have been analysed for a period of six years.

To get insight in the process of living together, persons who entered the Netherlands as single persons in 1996 and who were still living in the Netherlands on 1 January 1997 are followed for a period of six years. The same applies to immigrants who came to the Netherlands as single persons in 2002 and who were still living in the Netherlands on 1 January 2003. For these immigrants the transition from living alone to living in a couple has been analysed. The persons in these couples can either be married or unmarried and may or may not have children.

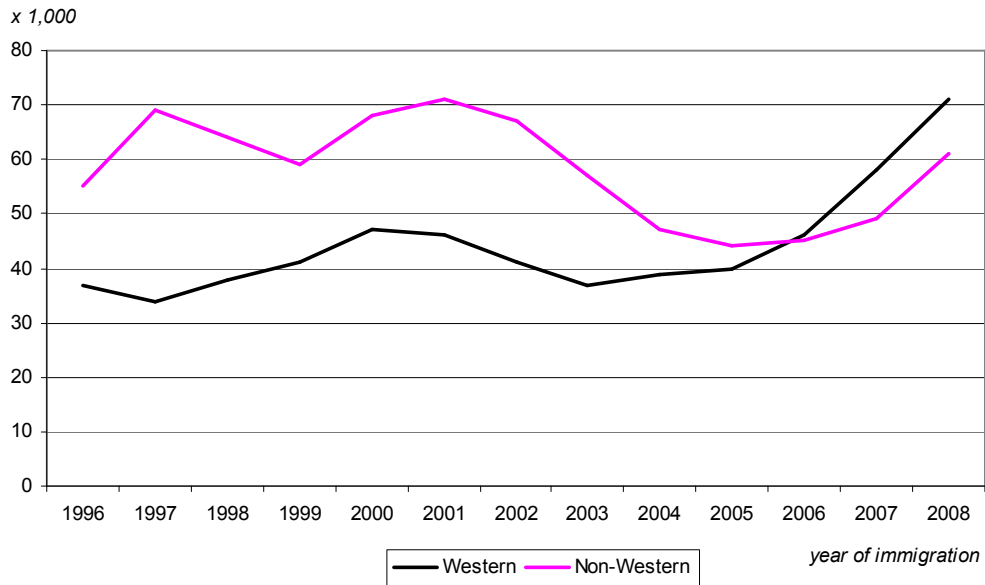
To provide insight in the process of getting children, all immigrants entering the Netherlands in 1996 as a person in a couple without children who were still living in the Netherlands on 1 January 1997 were followed for a period of six years. The same has been done to persons entering the Netherlands in 2002 as a person in a couple without children. For these immigrants the transition from living as a person in a couple without children to living as a person in a couple with children has been analysed. Again, the persons in these couples can either be married or unmarried.

## **Results**

Between 1996 and 2008, almost 1.8 million immigrants have settled in the Netherlands. Some 1.3 million persons were first generation immigrants. In 2008 the number of first generation immigrants coming to the Netherlands peaked at a level of 132 thousand, almost 15 thousand more than during the economic high time in 2000-2001 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

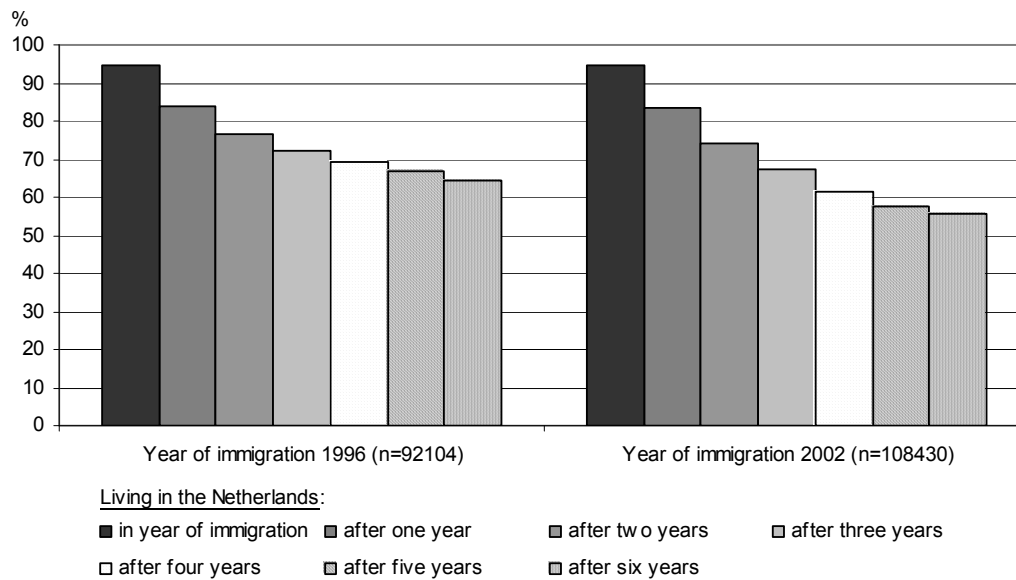
Immigration of first generation western and non-western foreign born people to the Netherlands, 1996-2008



Almost 65 per cent of the immigrants who came to the Netherlands in 1996 still lived in the Netherlands after a period of six years. For the immigrants entering in 2002, this was 55 per cent (Figure 2). This might be linked to the fact that immigrants in 2002 faced a less positive economic period in the Netherlands during the years 2004-2005. This might have led to leaving the Netherlands sooner than immigrants from cohort 1996.

**Figure 2**

Share of immigrants living in the Netherlands after a maximum period of six years, immigration cohorts 1996 and 2002

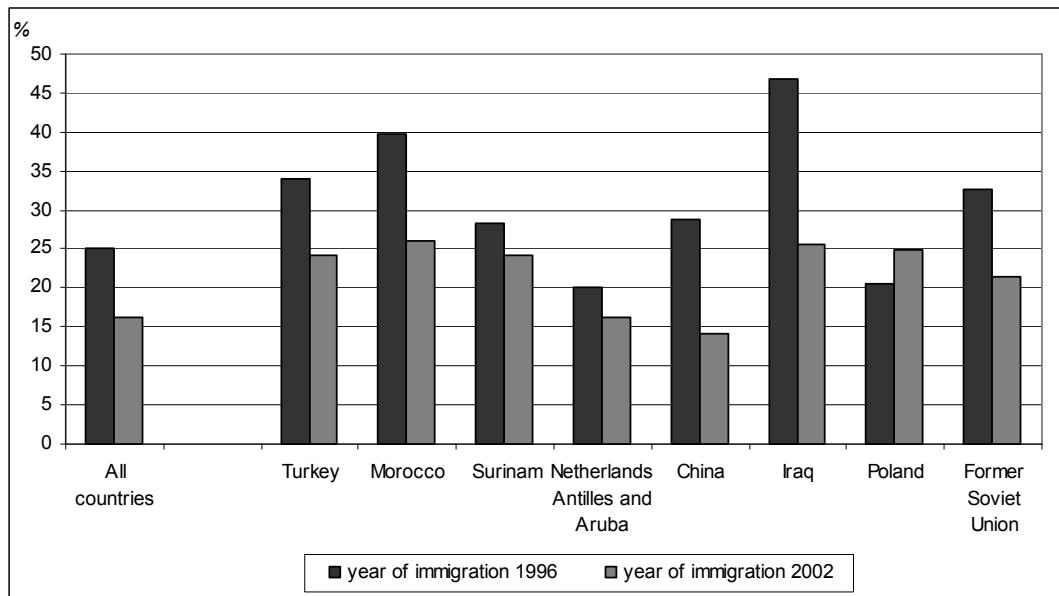


Since 2005, immigration of the four 'classic' groups of origin (Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba) is rather stable and fluctuates between 3 to 4 thousand for Morocco and 5 to 6 thousand for the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Immigration of the other two non-western groups studied here, China and Iraq, is on the rise. Students make up the bigger part of Chinese immigrants coming to the Netherlands, while many Iraqi immigrants came for asylum in 2007 and 2008.

Almost all western immigrants originate from Europe. Within this group the Polish immigrants play an important role. In 2008 Polish immigrants accounted for almost 30 percent of the total immigration from the European Union. The composition of the group of immigrants from the former Soviet Union changed considerably during the years 1996-2008. In the early years, many immigrants from this country came to the Netherlands for family related motives, while in the period 2000-2004 many asylum seekers from the former Soviet Union applied for asylum in the Netherlands. During the entire period 1996-2008 the number of students from the former Soviet Union rose steadily each year.

One quarter of the 27 thousand immigrants who came to the Netherlands as a single person in 1996 lived in a couple six years later (Figure 3). For immigration cohort 2002, with 36 thousand single persons immigrating, this share dropped to a sixth. Considerable differences can be found between the groups of origin and the years of immigration as well. For both immigration cohorts 1996 and 2002, single Iraqi and Moroccan immigrants were most likely to live in a couple after six years. In 1996, single Antillean and Aruban immigrants were the least likely to live together with a partner after six years whereas in 2002 single Chinese immigrants were least likely to live together.

**Figure 3**  
Share of single immigrating persons who live together after six years, by group of origin, immigration cohorts 1996 and 2002

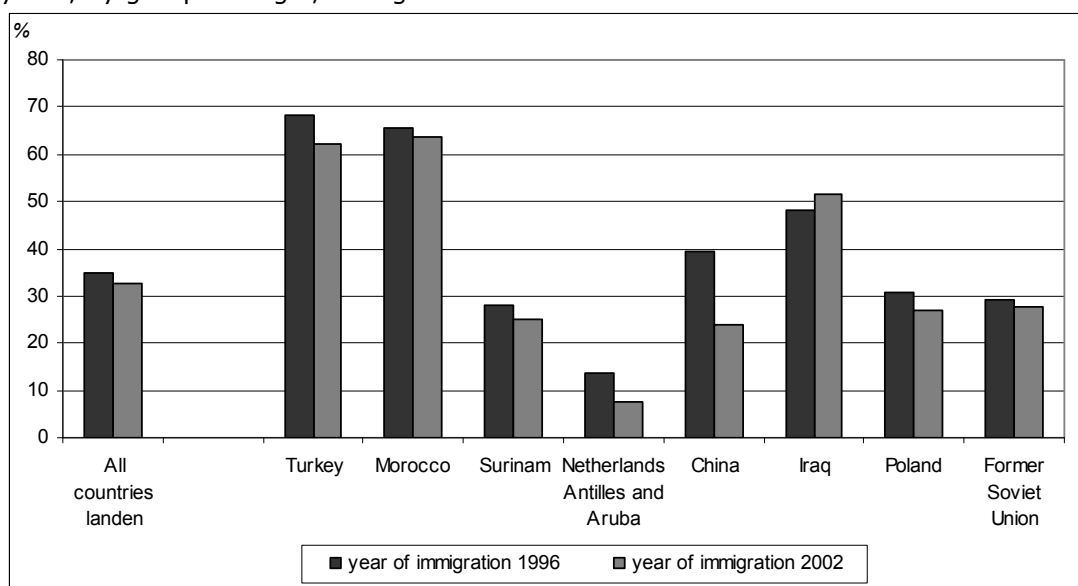


In 1996, 17.5 thousand persons entered the Netherlands as part of a couple without children. This number increased to more than 22 thousand persons in 2002. One third of the married and unmarried immigrants who came to the Netherlands as a couple without children had one or more children six years after immigration. There are hardly any differences between immigration cohorts 1996 and 2002 in this respect.

Both in 1996 and in 2002 Turkish and Moroccan couples without children got children most rapidly. For Moroccan couples no differences can be found between immigration cohorts 1996 and 2002. Differences do exist, however, for Turkish couples. Almost 40 per cent of Turkish couples without children who came to the Netherlands in 1996 had one or more children after one year. For Turkish couples without children who immigrated in 2002 this was only one quarter. The 2002 cohort of Turkish couples make up for their arrears, which causes the difference after six years to be only six per cent. Just like single immigrating persons who start living together, immigrants in a couple without children from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba were the least willing to get children. With 14 per cent this percentage was low in 1996 already, but it even dropped to 8 per cent in 2002 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

Share of immigrating couples without children who have one or more children after six years, by group of origin, immigration cohorts 1996 and 2002



## Conclusion

For most non-western groups of origin analysed in this paper, family reunion and family formation is the most important reason to immigrate to the Netherlands. This is particularly the case for Iraqi, Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Besides, when coming to the Netherlands, Turkish and Moroccan couples without children get children most rapidly and most often. For the two western groups of origin presented here, Polish immigrants and immigrants from the former Soviet Union, family related motives to come to the Netherlands are less important. This applies the most for the Polish immigrants who entered the Netherlands in recent years. They often come to the Netherlands as single labour migrants and do not show a strong tendency to live together and to get children.

For all eight groups of origin presented here, except for the Polish, single persons who came to the Netherlands in 2002 are far less often living together after six years than those who immigrated six years earlier. This may be caused by the tightened rules on family formation put into force at the end of 2004, which made it more difficult for immigrants of cohort 2002 to marry or to live together with a partner from their home country. Differences between the groups of origin may be linked to different reasons for

migration. Students and labour migrants, for example, will be less inclined to live together than immigrants who come to the Netherlands for family reunification and family formation.

For several groups of origin the share of couples without children having children after a certain period of time stabilizes after 2005. Many couples may have decided to postpone getting children because of the less positive economic situation these years. As a result, the percentage of couples without children having children after a maximum period of six years after immigration is lower for immigration cohort 2002 than it is for immigration cohort 1996. This applies for all groups of origin, except for Iraqis.

### **Further research**

Further research can shed more light on whom the immigrant is starting to live together with: a Dutch native, a first generation immigrant or a second generation immigrant? This might give insight into the degree on which immigrants enter into mixed relationships and may answer the question to which extend first generation immigrants get their partners from their home countries. Besides, with additional information from the Dutch municipal population register, like year of living together for the first time and year of immigration of the partner who comes to the Netherlands, we can present the separate processes of family reunion and family formation in more detail. Furthermore, the analysis can be extended to other groups of origin like immigrants from the two neighbouring countries of the Netherlands (Belgium and Germany), former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia. Finally, the processes of couples splitting up and children leaving home can be added to the analysis in order to get a more complete picture of the demographic life course of immigrants.

### **References**

Nicolaas, H., 2009, Population forecast 2008–2050: assumptions on immigration, *Population Trends* 57(1), pp. 23-33 (in Dutch).