

## Understanding the emigration of the second generation: patterns and explanations

### Abstract

Prior research frequently addressed the social mobility of the children of immigrants. However, we know much less about the *geographical mobility* of this so-called 'second generation', that is, their international migration patterns. In the absence of reliable data on actual migration behavior, previous research mainly relied on survey data capturing the intention of the second generation to 'return' to the country of origin of their parents. From these analyses, it remains unclear to what extent 'return' intentions of the second generation translate into actual behavior, whether their moves are permanent, and which selection processes shape the composition of these migration flows. Furthermore, we lack information on the destination of second generation-emigrants. To address these knowledge gaps, this study introduces unique, full population data from the Dutch population registers to investigate which individuals are selected into emigration among the Turkish, Moroccan and German second generation born in the Netherlands between 1980 and 1999. By means of a repeated event history analysis, we investigate which factors predict initial emigration from the Netherlands, as well as the likelihood that an individual returns to the Netherlands. In these analyses, we include mobility patterns of the second generation to their parents' country of birth as well as moves to other destinations.

## Introduction

In contemporary European societies, immigration and emigration are the main drivers of population change. Furthermore, by settling and starting a family in the country of destination, immigrants have an additional influence on the composition of the population. In effect, the children of immigrants – often referred to as the ‘second generation’ – entered political and societal debates, as well as sociological and demographic research. However, while prior research frequently addressed the social mobility of the second generation, that is, their developments in the educational system or on the labour market (e.g., Hammarstedt, 2009; Hermansen, 2016), so far, we know little about the mobility of the second generation in geographical terms, that is, their international migration behavior.

Having immigrant parents often fosters transnational behaviour, because the second generation is raised and socialized in a context where relatives in the parents’ country of origin typically play an important role (Groenewold & De Valk, 2017). Through their transnational ties, immigrant parents may pass a sense of belonging to their country of origin on to their children. Although some scholars expect that this sense of belonging will eventually decrease for subsequent generations (Alba & Nee, 2003), others argue that experiences of discrimination, xenophobia or cumulative disadvantage may intensify self-identification with the ancestral home country. A recent study addressing the ‘return’ intentions of the second generation, i.e., the intention to migrate to their parents’ country of origin, even found higher return intentions among the second generation than among first-generation immigrants (Tezcan, 2019).

More studies have addressed the determinants of return intentions of the second generation across Europe, particularly those of Turkish decent (Bettin, Cela, & Fokkema, 2018; Fokkema, 2011; İçduygu & Sert, 2016). However, because opportunities for tracking individuals across national borders are limited, quantitative studies on the migration patterns of the second generation are virtually absent (Reagan and Olsen, 2000). An important question therefore remains to what extent ‘return’ intentions translate into actual migration behaviour (Tezcan, 2019). Furthermore, and while return migration is typically defined as the movement of migrants back to their country of origin to

permanently resettle (Gmelch, 1980), we lack information on whether international moves of the second generation are permanent. Finally, while the transnational practices of first-generation immigrants mainly involve the country of residence and the country of origin, such practices may be more complex for the second generation (Barwick, 2018). Born in a European country, the children of immigrants can – like other Europeans – benefit from freedom of movement within the European Union. Thus, the second generation may select other destinations when they move across borders than solely the country of origin of their parents.

To address these knowledge gaps, this study introduces unique data from the Dutch population registers to investigate which individuals are selected into emigration among the Turkish, Moroccan and German second generation born in the Netherlands between 1980 and 1999. By means of a repeated event history analysis, we investigate which factors predict initial emigration from the Netherlands, as well as the likelihood that an individual returns to the Netherlands. In these analyses, we include mobility patterns of the second generation to their parents' country of birth as well as moves to other destinations.

## Data and Methods

In this study, we use longitudinal, full population register data from the System of Social Statistical Datasets (SSD), compiled by Statistics Netherlands. The SSD consists of several registers that have been linked to the Dutch municipal population registers (Bakker, Van Rooijen, & Van Toor, 2014). For every official inhabitant of the Netherlands, the SSD covers a broad range of demographic and socio-economic subjects, including age, labour force participation, household composition and migration. In line with the official Dutch statistics, we define the second generation as individuals born in the Netherlands from at least one foreign-born parent. In case both parents are born outside the Netherlands, but in different countries, the country of the mother is decisive. Our research population consists of all individuals born in the Netherlands between 1980 and 1999 who have at least one parent born in Turkey (N=115.625), Morocco (N=100.947) or Germany (N=33.729). As the data allow

us to follow their migration behaviour from 1995 until 2018, they are between 18 and 37 years old at the end of our observation period.

## Variables

As an indicator of *transnational ties*, we include a variable measuring whether an individual emigrated before turning eighteen (1) or not (0). The variable *level of education* measures the highest level of completed education either at the end of our observation period, or in the year of migration. We distinguish between four categories: (1) primary education, first grades of higher secondary education, and completed pre-vocation secondary education; (2) vocational secondary education and completed higher secondary education; (3) higher professional education; (4) university. To capture an individual's *main occupation*, we include a time-varying variable which indicates for each year whether an individual was: (1) mainly enrolled in education; (2) employed; (3) unemployed; (4) inactive. To capture the household composition, the time-varying variables *marriage* and *children* indicate for each year whether an individual is married and has children (1) or not (0). Finally, to control for cohort and differences between men and women, we include dummy variables for *year of birth* and *gender*.

## Preliminary findings

Figure 1 describes the incidence of emigration for the population under study. Of the Turkish second generation, 85 percent never emigrated over the observed time span. This percentage was slightly higher among the Moroccan second generation (85,6 percent) and somewhat lower among the German second generation (83 percent). For each group, most emigrants of the second generation emigrated only once during our observational period.

Figure 2 portrays the number of emigrants among the Turkish, Moroccan and German second generation, while distinguishing between individuals who only emigrated from the Netherlands at ages below 18, those who emigrated as adult as well as during childhood, and those who only emigrated at age 18 or higher. The number of emigrants is highest among the Turkish second

generation, which is also the largest group within our study population. Among the Turkish and Moroccan second generation-emigrants, the number of adults is clearly much higher than the number of children. Among the German second generation, the number of adults and children are much closer to each other. For each group, a small share of the emigrants emigrated from the Netherlands both as child and adult.

Figure 3 presents the life stage at the last observed emigration, as well as the share of emigrants that lived in the Netherlands again at the end of our observational period. Roughly a third of the Turkish (36 percent) and Moroccan (30 percent) left the Netherlands as a child. Among the German second generation, nearly half of the emigrants left the Netherlands during childhood. Of those who emigrated at ages above eighteen, the share that returned to the Netherlands is clearly the largest among the Moroccan second generation. The share of emigrants that still lived abroad at the end of our observed period is the largest for the Turkish second generation.

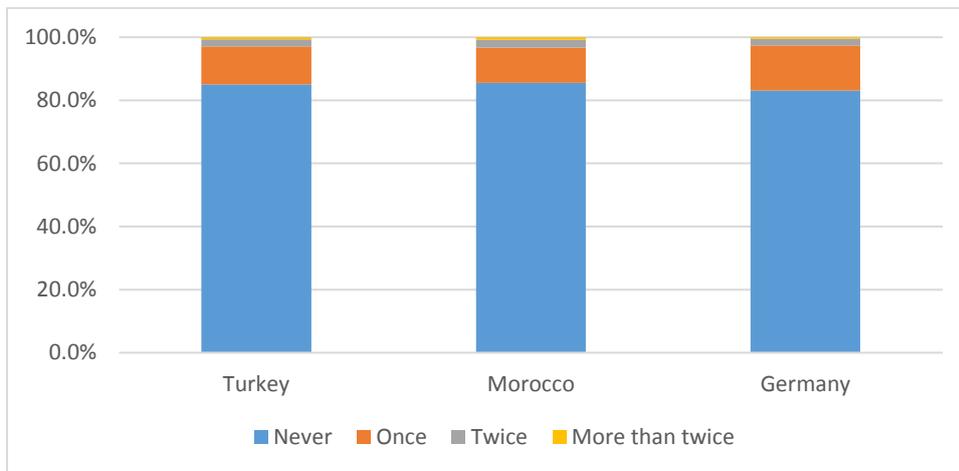


Figure 1 Incidence of emigration among the second generation between 1995 and 2018, grouped by migration background

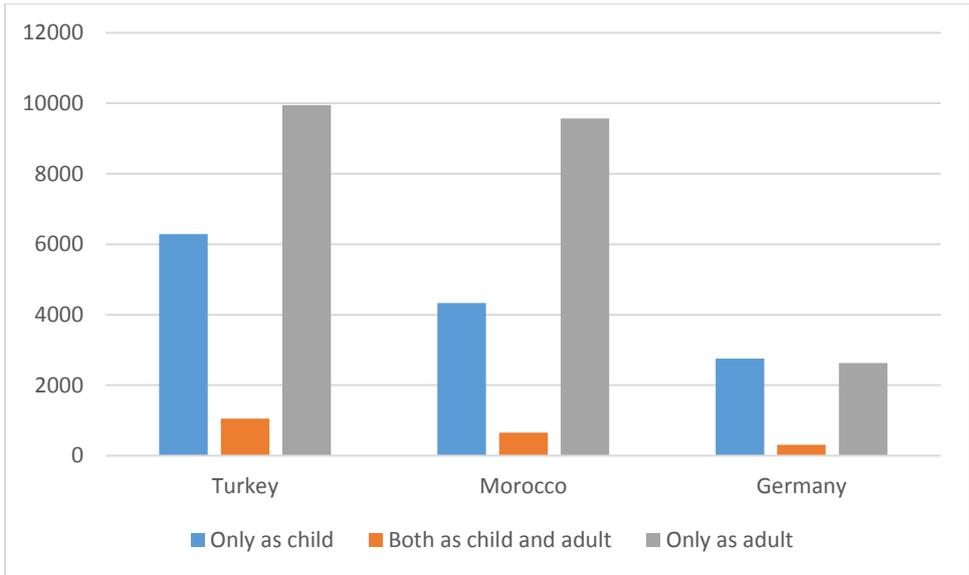


Figure 2 Emigrants of the second generation between 1995 and 2018 in absolute numbers, grouped by migration background and life stage

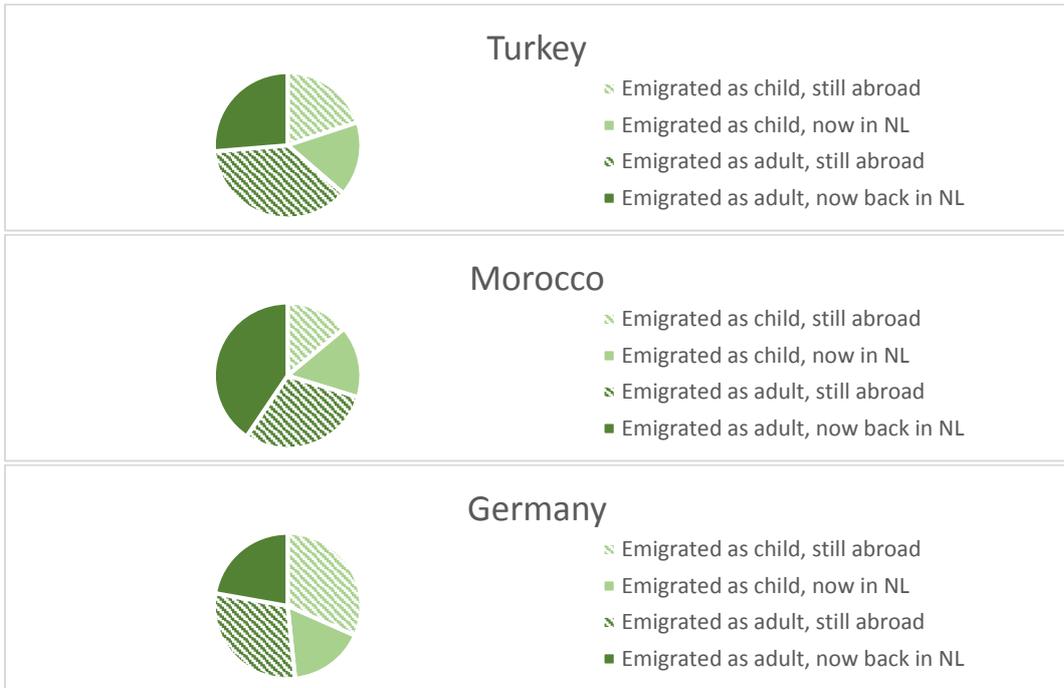


Figure 3 Life stage and temporality of the last observed emigration among the second generation between 1995 and 2018, grouped by migration background

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