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Classification of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands

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CLASSIFICATION OF THE POPULATION WITH A FOREIGN BACKGROUND IN THE NETHERLANDS

Summary: This paper describes the classification of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands. The classification is based on a conceptual definition which distinguishes a first and a second generation. The first generation consists of persons who are born abroad and have at least one parent who is also born abroad. The second generation consists of persons who are born in the Netherlands and have at least one parent belonging to the first generation. Moreover a distinction is made between persons with a western and non-western background. The main advantage of this classification over a classification based on citizenship is that it is not affected by changes in policies with respect to naturalisation. In recent years the number of non-nationals who obtained Dutch citizenship increased significantly, due to changes in Dutch legislation. As a result the number of non-nationals decreased. Data on the population by citizenship tends to underestimate the size of the population with a foreign background. Data on the population by country of birth shows that the number of persons with a foreign background continues to increase.

Keywords: classification, ethnic minorities, country of birth, foreign background, citizenship

1. Introduction

An increasing proportion of the population of the Netherlands has a foreign background. This increase has generated a growing demand for statistical information on the demographic, social, cultural and economic developments of this population group. Examples are the developments with respect to migration, family planning, education, housing and the labour market. There is a need for a classification that is consistent and easy to implement, in order to enable a proper and consistent statistical description of the population with a foreign background. The classification should be applicable to both registers and surveys.

The main purpose of this paper is to describe the methodology used by Statistics Netherlands for the classification and to explain the choices that are made. The paper does not deal with the reasons for classifying the population with a foreign background, nor with the social and cultural background of this population in the Netherlands (see paper by Van Amersfoort, 2001).

As from August 1999 Statistics Netherlands employs a standard definition for the classification of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands. The aim

was to devise a classification that meets a wide range of user needs, while allowing practical data collection. Section 2 of this paper gives the formal description of the definition of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands. This definition is the end product of a long and intensive discussion in the Netherlands and is now widely used in this country. The remainder of this paper discusses the backgrounds of the classification and illustrates the classification by describing recent demographic developments.

This paper deals with the classification of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands. The Dutch terminology used to indicate this population group cannot be literally translated into English (the Dutch word 'allochtoon' is derived from ancient Greek and means something like 'originating from elsewhere'). In the appendix a provisional conclusion of a discussion with international experts on the subject of the terminology is given. Based on this conclusion this paper will use the description 'population with a foreign background'. This population group is broader than the one usually associated with ethnic minorities. For example, Belgian persons living in the Netherlands have a foreign background but are normally not considered to be ethnic minorities. For this reason the description 'ethnic minorities' will not be used in this paper.

2. Classification

Since August 1999 Statistics Netherlands employs a standard definition for the classification of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands (Keij, 2000). The 'standard definition' replaced the two definitions that were in practice at the time. These previous definitions included a narrow and a broad classification. The standard definition is a mixture of the previous definitions and is now widely used in the Netherlands by ministries, local government and the media.

The definition is described in detail below. First a so-called conceptual definition is given. Because the application of the conceptual definition would require data that cannot always be retrieved from the registers, a small modification is made to it in order to establish an operational definition.

2.1 Conceptual definition

The population with a foreign background is defined by Statistics Netherlands in two steps by specifying a first generation and a second generation. The *first generation* consists of persons who are born abroad and have at least one parent who is also born abroad. The *second generation* consists of persons who are born in the Netherlands and have at least one parent who belongs to the first generation. The remaining persons are classified as native.

The definition of the first generation implies that persons born abroad of parents who are both born in the Netherlands are not classified as persons with a foreign background.

Consequently, foreign-born children of Dutch migrants who left the Netherlands for e.g. work or holiday and subsequently returned to the Netherlands, are not included in the first generation.

Persons with a foreign background are classified as western or non-western, according to their country of birth. If they are born in the Netherlands (the second generation), the classification is based on the mother's country of birth. If she is also born in the Netherlands, the background is determined by the father's country of birth. The category 'non-western' includes persons with a Turkish, African, Asian and Latin-American background. Persons with a Japanese and Indonesian background are classified as western on the basis of their social and economic position in Dutch society. The group of persons with an Indonesian background consists mainly of persons (with parent(s)) originating from the former Dutch East Indies. Persons with a Japanese background are mostly employees of Japanese companies and their families.

The category 'western' consists of persons from Europe (excluding the Netherlands and Turkey), North America, Oceania, Japan and Indonesia (including the former Dutch East Indies).

2.2 Implementing the classification by means of the Dutch population registers¹

Demographic data on the population with a foreign background are obtained from the Dutch population registers. The Dutch population statistics as compiled by Statistics Netherlands are based on automated municipal population registers. This system is known as the GBA, which stands for 'Gemeentelijke basisadministratie persoonsgegevens' (municipal basic registration of population data). The GBA was introduced on 1 October 1994². It is a fully decentralised, comprehensive and cohesive population registration system. Due to legal provisions there is no centralised population register. Every municipality in the Netherlands has its own population register, containing information on all inhabitants of that municipality. This information is listed per inhabitant in a so-called personal file. In the registration system each inhabitant is given a unique personal identification number (pin) which enables the municipalities to link the inhabitant's information to those on the spouse, parents and children. For this reason the personal files do not only contain the inhabitant's pin, but also those of the parents, spouse and children. However, the latter is done only if the parents and the children are or were included in the population register of that municipality at any moment since 1 October 1994.

The personal files of inhabitants contain several categories, such as personal data and data on the parents, children, citizenship and marital status. Data on parents, spouse and children are restricted to pin, date of birth and place of birth. These are invariable data that do not require updating. All data on these relatives that may be subject to updating,

¹ This section is largely based on Prins (2000).

² Up to October 1994 the population registers consisted of a paper card system.

such as marital status and citizenship, are stored on the relative's own personal file only. These data may be found by linking the personal files through mutual pins.

The country of birth of a person is always entered on the personal file. However, the country of birth of one or both parents is not always included, in particular in the case of immigrants. In the population statistics an imputation technique is used to estimate the missing information. If the country of birth of the father is unknown it is assumed to be the same as the country of birth of the mother (and vice versa). If the countries of birth of both father and mother are unknown, the country of birth of the person in question is used.

It is obvious that the first generation can be determined directly from the population statistics, since for every person his or her country of birth is known, as well as those of the parents. Unfortunately this is not the case for the second generation. To determine whether at least one parent belongs to the first generation, information is required on the grandparents. The latter information is not stored on the personal file of the person in question.

2.3 Operational definition

As indicated above, the conceptual definition of the second generation implies that information is required on the country of birth of the grandparents of the person in question. His or her parents only belong to the first generation if at least one of the grandparents is born abroad. The country of birth of the grandparents is not stored on the personal file of the person and can therefore only be retrieved through the parents' pins. However, if the parents themselves are not included in the registration – for example because they are dead – it is not possible to link the (country of birth of the) grandparents to the person in question. Because there are no easy ways to fill this gap completely, Statistics Netherlands uses an operational definition which is an accurate approximation of the conceptual definition. The operational definition is a modification of the conceptual definition of the second generation. The operational definition of the second generation is: persons who are born in the Netherlands and have at least one parent who is born abroad (instead of 'at least one parent belonging to the first generation'). The remaining persons, i.e. those who have parents who are both born in the Netherlands, are considered to be native. Note that the operational definition can be summarised as follows: a person has a foreign background if at least one of his or her parents is born abroad. *Table 1* describes the operational definition as a set of decision rules.

This operational definition yields a slightly higher estimate of the second generation than the conceptual one. One disadvantage of the operational definition is that it is not entirely consistent. It is possible that a child born in the Netherlands to native parents may be classified as second generation according to the operational definition (if the parents are born abroad and the grandparents are born in the Netherlands). The major advantage of the operational definition is that it is easy to implement and more efficient. In addition, the differences in numbers are probably small, since cases like those in the example are not likely to occur frequently.

Table 1. Classification of population with a foreign background in the Netherlands according to the operational definition

Country of birth of:			Classification
Person	Mother	Father	
abroad	abroad	abroad	first generation ¹⁾
abroad	abroad	the Netherlands	first generation ¹⁾
abroad	the Netherlands	abroad	first generation ¹⁾
abroad	the Netherlands	the Netherlands	native
the Netherlands	abroad	abroad	second generation ²⁾
the Netherlands	abroad	the Netherlands	second generation ²⁾
the Netherlands	the Netherlands	abroad	second generation ³⁾
the Netherlands	the Netherlands	the Netherlands	native

¹⁾ Classification based on country of birth of person

²⁾ Classification based on country of birth of mother

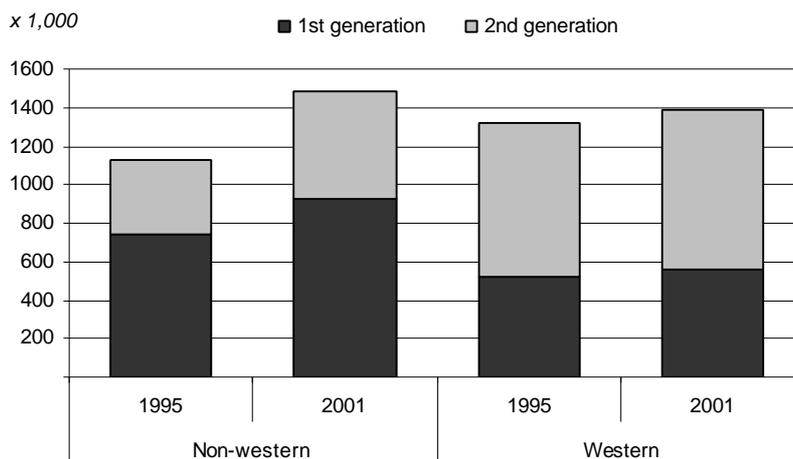
³⁾ Classification based on country of birth of father

3. Making statistics

The use of a register-based count of the population allows a detailed statistical description of the population with a foreign background. Data can be distinguished by sex, single years of age, municipality, postal code, year of immigration (if applicable), and so on. Moreover, in addition to the distinction between western and non-western, each specific country of origin can be identified. Persons originating from over two hundred countries are currently living in the Netherlands. Since the classification is register-based, it is possible to link the population statistics with other registers on an individual level. For example, by combining the population statistics with the household statistics (which is again largely based on the population statistics) the population with a foreign background can be distinguished by household position. Another important example is the combination of the population statistics with registers containing information on the use of social benefits. Consequently, persons drawing benefits can be distinguished by their foreign backgrounds.

To illustrate the classification, a few graphs on the population size and structure will be shown in this section. *Figure 1* shows the numbers of western and non-western persons distinguished by generation. The non-western population in particular has increased in recent years up to 1.5 million on 1 January 2001. This amounts to 9.3 percent of the total population. The western population has shown a much slower growth. The non-western population consists to a large extent – about three quarters - of persons originating from Morocco, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, Suriname and Turkey (*figure 2*). Other large, though significantly smaller groups, consist of persons from Iraq, China and Somalia.

Figure 1. Population with a foreign background in the Netherlands, 1 January



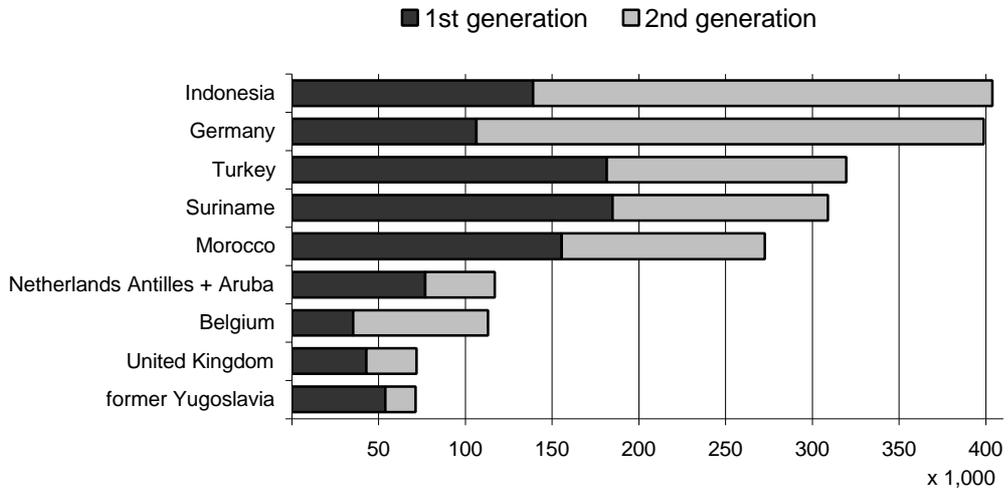
The two largest groups are western ones: Indonesia (mainly persons from the former Dutch East Indies) and Germany. The second generations of both groups are especially large, due to the long history of these populations in the Netherlands. This is in sharp contrast with groups that have a rather short history, like persons from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. In recent years many asylum seekers came from these countries.

The non-western population is very young (*figure 3*). The majority of the first generation is aged between 20 and 40. This is the age bracket to which most immigrants belong. Few persons are older than 40, let alone 65 or above. The proportion 65 or above is about 3 percent, against 14 percent for the total population. The second generation is even younger: most of them are younger than 20. The fact that most of these persons have two parents who are born abroad, and relatively few one parent born abroad and one parent born in the Netherlands, is remarkable. Turks and Moroccans of the second generation, in particular, usually have parents who are both born in Turkey or Morocco. The age structure of the western population is very different. The western population is much older and is, in this respect, more or less comparable to the total population. In particular the largest subgroups, Germans and Indonesians, are relatively old. A sharp contrast with the non-western population is the composition of the second generation. The majority of persons of the second generation have one parent born abroad and one parent born in the Netherlands.

Statistics Netherlands prepares the Dutch population forecasts. In addition it compiles forecasts of the population with a foreign background (Alders, 2001). According to the recent forecasts, the total population size of the Netherlands is expected to grow from 16 million now to 18 million around 2040 (*figure 4*). This population growth is to a large extent caused by the growth of the non-western population, which will double in the next thirty years. The main reasons for this growth are positive net migration and the higher than average fertility of non-western women. The western population shows a modest increase, while the native population is expected to decrease in size after about ten years.

Figure 2. Population with a foreign background in the Netherlands by country of origin, 1 January 2001

50 thousand persons or more



More than 10 thousand and less than 50 thousand persons

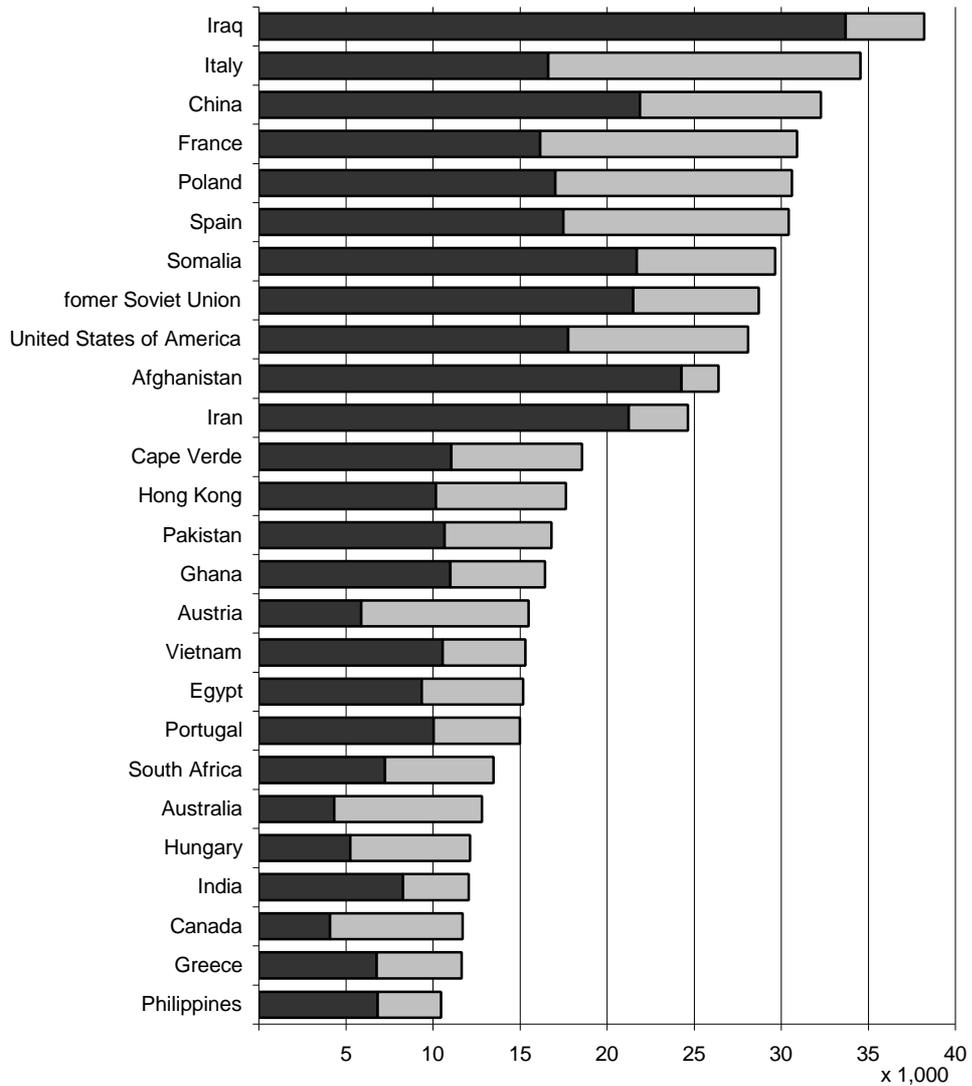


Figure 3. Population with a foreign background in the Netherlands by sex and age, 1 January 2001

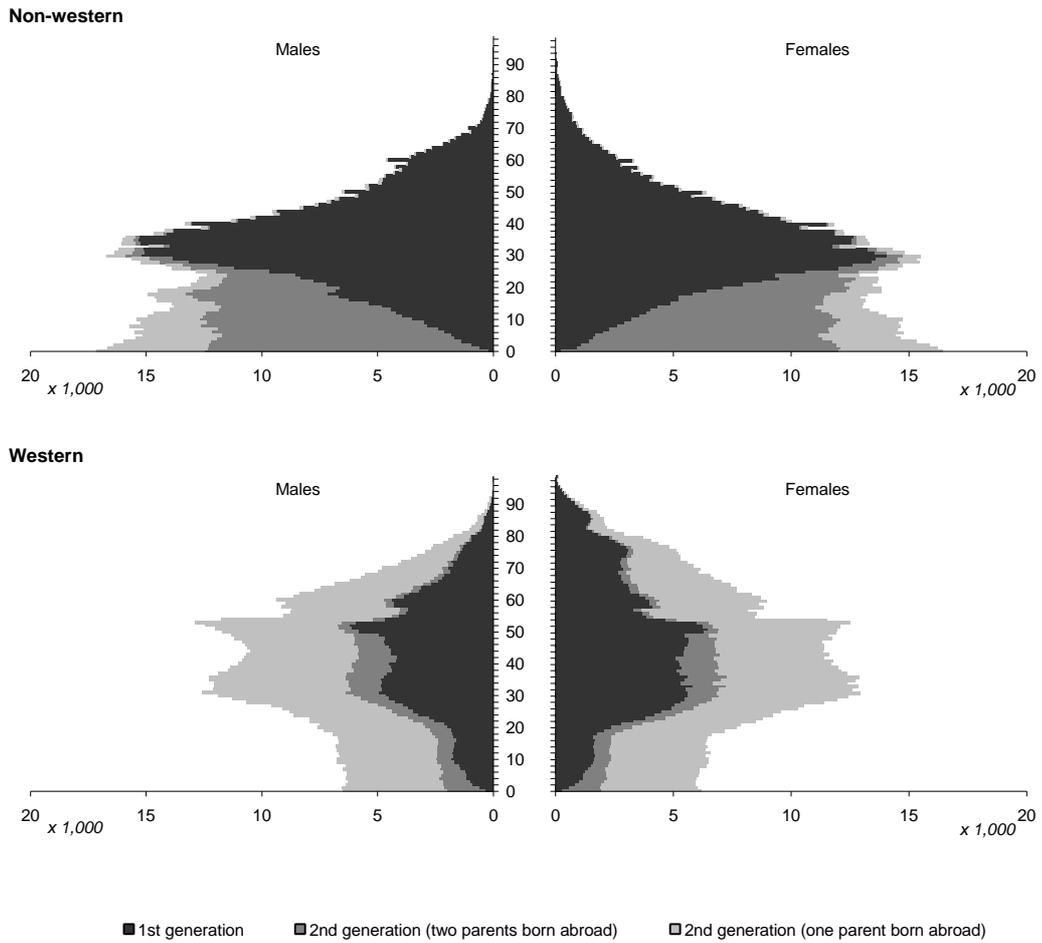
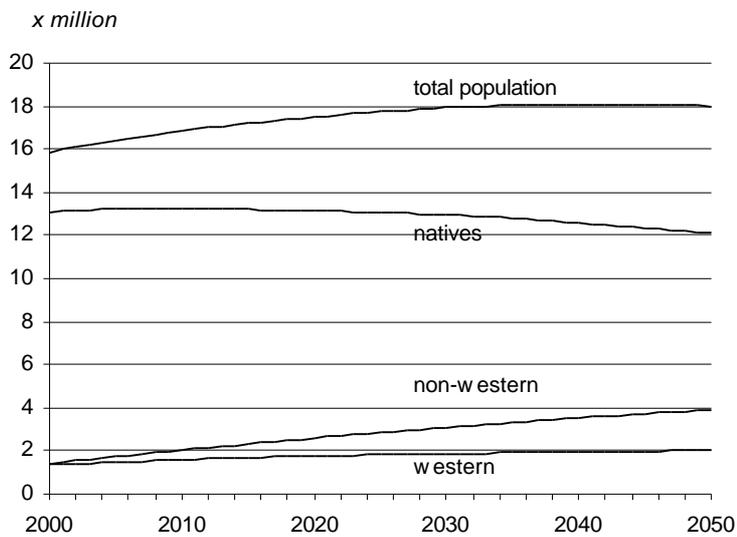


Figure 4. Forecasts of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands, 1 January



4. Country of birth versus citizenship

The classification of the population with a foreign background is based on a distinction by country of birth. In many other countries citizenship is used as the classification variable. For example, Eurostat only publishes data on nationality (Eurostat, 2000). In the case of the Netherlands, at least, a distinction by citizenship would provide inadequate information. This is primarily due to (Dutch) legislation with regard to naturalisation. This section compares data based on country of birth with data based on citizenship.

In the Netherlands there are several ways to obtain Dutch citizenship (other than by birth; children born in the Netherlands obtain Dutch nationality if at least one of the parents has the Dutch nationality). In short, the following possibilities exist to obtain Dutch citizenship:

- *naturalisation by royal decree* There are two types of naturalisation, viz ‘on individual application’ and ‘concurrent’. The first type applies to non-Dutch adults who have legally stayed in the Netherlands for at least five years and whose knowledge of the Dutch language has reached a sufficient level. ‘Concurrent’ naturalisation is granted to non-Dutch minors whose parent(s) obtain(s) Dutch citizenship by naturalisation on individual application.
- *adoption* Adopted non-Dutch children obtain Dutch citizenship if at least one of the adoptive parents is a Dutch national.
- *option* Under specific conditions Dutch citizenship can be opted for, for example by persons born in the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles or Aruba, who have lived there uninterruptedly and who are older than 17 and younger than 25.
- *recognition* Minor non-Dutch children obtain Dutch citizenship if they are recognised by a Dutch father or legitimated by his marriage to the mother.

About 90 percent of all changes of nationality concern naturalisations by royal decree.

On 1 January 1992 Dutch legislation created the opportunity to obtain Dutch citizenship by naturalisation while retaining the original nationality. Until 1992 persons had, in principle, to give up their original nationality unless this was prohibited by legislation in the country of origin (e.g. Morocco). As from 1 October 1997, Dutch legislation was changed again. The original nationality should, in principle, be given up when obtaining Dutch citizenship. However, exceptions are made for thirteen categories, for instance for those persons who cannot renounce the original nationality by law or for spouses of Dutch citizens.

Because of the changes in legislation, the number of persons who became Dutch citizens has risen strongly during the second half of the 1990s. As a consequence the non-Dutch population in the Netherlands has decreased in number, from 780 thousand in 1994 to 668 thousand in 2001 (*figure 5*). This decrease is in sharp contrast with the increasing population with a foreign background (*figure 1*). The number of persons with a Turkish nationality, in particular, has dropped in the past few years, from more than 200 thousand in the beginning of the 1990s to just above 100 thousand at present (*figure 6*). The numbers according to citizenship show other developments than those according to the

definition of the population with a foreign background. Apart from the levels, the direction of change in recent years is different, since the number of Turks, according to the definition, continued to increase.

In 2000 almost 750 thousand persons in the Netherlands had more than one nationality. It should be noted that persons with both a Dutch nationality and any other nationality are classified in the statistics as Dutch citizens. In the period 1995-1997 about 80 percent of all persons who obtained Dutch citizenship retained their original nationality (Tas, 2000). Of the more than 100 thousand persons with a Turkish nationality who obtained Dutch citizenship in the second half of the 1990s only 60 (!) gave up their Turkish nationality. Currently almost 60 percent of the first generation Turks has the Dutch nationality, of the second generation even more than 80 percent.

Figure 5. Non-nationals in the Netherlands, 1 January

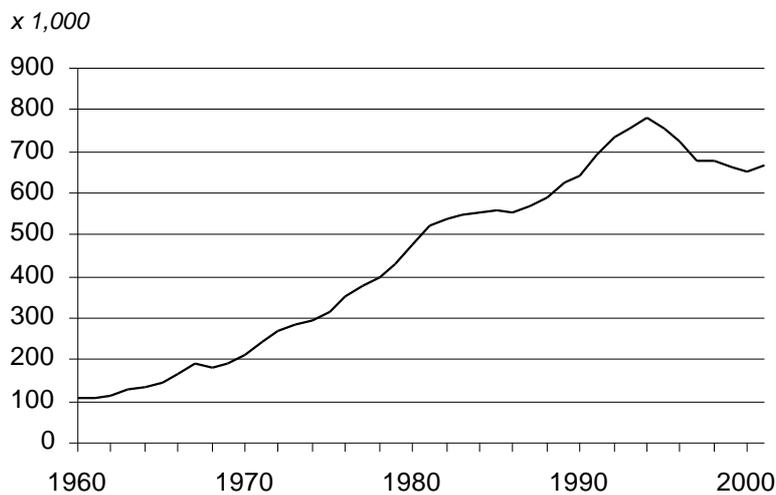
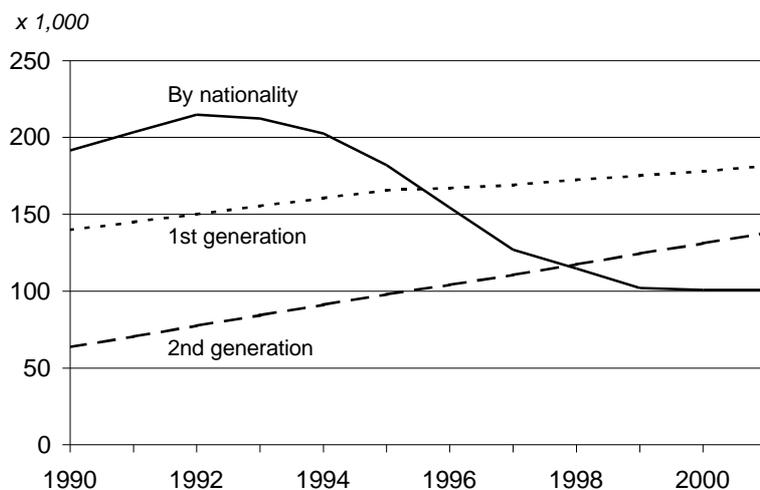


Figure 6. Number of Turks in the Netherlands by definition¹⁾ and nationality, 1 January



¹⁾ Figures of 1st and 2nd generation for 1991-1994 are interpolated

5. Extending the definition: third generation?

The definition used by Statistics Netherlands does not include third and following generations. Recently research was carried out to explore the possibilities of estimating the size of the third generation (Alders and Keij, 2001). The third generation concerns persons who are born in the Netherlands with parents born in the Netherlands as well. This implies that information is needed on the country of birth of the grandparents of the person in question. As explained in section 2.2 it is not always possible to retrieve information on the grandparents. It is not possible to determine the grandparents' country of birth if the parents are not included in the GBA (for instance if they are dead). In such cases the grandparents' country of birth remains unknown. The number of these cases can be estimated by using the (grandparents of the) second generation as a reference group. This number can be used to determine an upper limit of the size of the third generation. The lower limit is determined by those cases in which the country of birth of the grandparents is known.

Only if the research is restricted to persons with non-western grandparents, useful estimates can be derived. The reason is that the non-western second generation (they are the parents of the third generation) is a young population group and will therefore almost always be included in the current population registers. The western third generation can be estimated much less accurately, since the western second generation is a relatively old population group. Of course this leaves out the question whether the western third generation would be considered important for policy makers.

It was estimated that on 1 January 2000 between 24 thousand and 26 thousand persons lived in the Netherlands with at least one non-western grandparent. The number of persons with at least two non-western grandparents is considerably lower: between 5 and 9 thousand. The numbers of persons with three or four non-western grandparents are even lower. About half of them are persons with grandparents born in Suriname. The number of persons with one or more Moroccan or Turkish grandparents is very low. There are several explanations why these numbers may seem low. First of all, the second generation (the parents of the third generation) is very young. Many of them have not yet reached childbearing ages. Secondly, many persons from the second generation – in particular Turks and Moroccans – marry persons from the country of origin. Children of these couples are categorised as second generation, since they have a foreign-born parent. The second generation therefore includes a so-called in-between generation, since one of their parents is born abroad and the other in the Netherlands. For this reason Statistics Netherlands often publishes two numbers for the second generation: those with two and those with one foreign-born parent.

The research has not led to an extension of the current definition of foreigners yet. When thinking of a definition it should be kept in mind that the choice of the criteria concerning the number of grandparents born abroad greatly affects the numbers.

6. Discussion

The classification of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands contains three important aspects:

- distinction by country of birth
- distinction of the first and second generation
- distinction into western and non-western background

In section 4 the classification based on country of birth was compared to a classification based on citizenship. The classification by citizenship has several disadvantages. The major disadvantage is that it is affected by (changes in) legislation. Citizenship is therefore not a very stable variable over time. Changes have little to do with ongoing integration, changing migration flows and so on. Moreover, it appears that the legal position and the possibility to travel freely through Western Europe are important motives to obtain Dutch citizenship (Van den Bedem, 1993).

Another disadvantage of citizenship is that persons from former Dutch colonies, like the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, and to a less extent Suriname, are Dutch citizens. Therefore they are not recognisable in statistics on nationality. Of course this problem can be overcome by distinguishing the native population by country of birth. However, this does not provide any information on their descendants born in the Netherlands. Note that the developments of these population groups are considered very important by Dutch policy makers.

One of the advantages of statistics by nationality is that longer time series are available. Information on the number of non-nationals is available from 1900 onwards. The number of persons with a foreign background is not available before 1990.

An important distinction in the definition as used by Statistics Netherlands is that by generation. By using the country of birth of both the person as well as his or her parents, it is possible to distinguish migrants (the first generation) from their descendants (the second generation). In the Netherlands statistical information with respect to 'foreign background groups' is considered very important, because of policies aiming at the improvement of the situation of persons with a disadvantaged background, for example in the field of the labour market and education. Therefore, from the point of view of integration, comparisons between the first generation, the second generation and Dutch persons are considered to be very important.

Another important aspect in the definition is the distinction between western and non-western. Most policy makers focus on the non-western population in the Netherlands, which is in their opinion comparable to 'ethnic minorities'. The western population consists to a large extent of labour migrants and persons from neighbouring countries (Belgium and Germany).

The classification does not take into account the duration of stay in the Netherlands. Some persons argued that it is questionable whether persons who moved to the Netherlands at a very young age should be classified as first generation, since they are

likely to resemble the second generation in many respects. An alternative definition could be that the second generation not only consists of persons who are born in the Netherlands, but also of persons who were younger than six, for example, when they arrived in the Netherlands. Apart from the fact that any age limit would be arbitrary to some extent, it would further complicate the classification. Moreover, for more in-depth research this disadvantage of the standard definition can be overcome by distinguishing the first generation by age at arrival.

The classification of the population with a foreign background is based on the population registers. However, not every person living in the Netherlands is registered. This does not necessarily imply that their stay in the Netherlands is illegal. For example, persons with a diplomatic status are not included in the population register. Another example is that of asylum seekers. The number of individual requests for asylum is registered by the Ministry of Justice. Not every asylum seeker is registered in a municipal population register. Those who are accommodated in a centre for asylum seekers will only be registered if they have obtained a residence permit or have lived in a centre for asylum seekers for six months or more. Those who have accommodation outside a centre for asylum seekers are registered if their stay in the Netherlands is legal. On 1 January 2000 almost 65 thousand asylum seekers stayed in the Netherlands. It is estimated that between 25 and 35 percent of these asylum seekers were registered in a municipal population register (Nicolaas and Sprangers, 2001). In addition to the persons mentioned above, persons who stay in the Netherlands illegally are not entered in the population registers. Research is currently carried out by Statistics Netherlands to estimate the size of the illegal population.

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Appendix

Terminology: from Dutch to English

The Dutch description of the population with a foreign background (‘allochtoon’) cannot be translated by using a single English word. English words like ‘foreigners’ refer to citizenship and can therefore not be used to describe a population that is distinguished by country of birth. The terminology ‘ethnic minorities’ is not used either, since Dutch policy documents have defined ‘ethnic minorities’ in a different way. Moreover, the population with a foreign background is a broader group than that associated with ethnic minorities. For instance, Belgian persons living in the Netherlands are not considered to belong to an ethnic minority.

To find a proper English terminology for the Dutch classification several international experts were asked for their opinions. With respect to the inventory of expressions, the following comments were made:

non-native population This term refers solely to the foreign-born population and excludes the second generation.

foreigners This term refers solely to the person's current citizenship and excludes e.g. naturalised citizens.

persons with a foreign background / foreign origin These expressions are preferred by the majority as the only terms that cover both the first and the second generation in an appropriate way. In a few countries the term 'persons with an immigrant background' is used.

allochthonous population Unknown; too much inspired by the Dutch language.

immigrant population Applies to persons who have immigrated themselves, and therefore excludes the second generation.

aliens This term has negative connotations and refers to creatures from outer space.

On the basis of these reactions it was decided to apply the expression 'persons with a foreign background'.