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STATISTICS OF THE POPULATION WITH A FOREIGN BACKGROUND,  
BASED ON POPULATION REGISTER DATA

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1. A short description of the GBA system

The Dutch population statistics, which are compiled by Statistics Netherlands (StatNeth), are based on automated municipal population registers. This registration system is known as the GBA system. GBA stands for *Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie persoonsgegevens*, the municipal basic registration of population data. 'Basic' refers to the fact that the GBA serves as the basic register within a system of municipal registers. Among these registers are the municipal tax register and the regional registers kept by the police departments that are concerned with the non-Dutch population in the municipality.

The GBA system is a decentralised population registration system. This means that every municipality in the Netherlands has a population register which contains information about all inhabitants of that municipality. This information is listed per individual inhabitant in a personal file. Each inhabitant has a unique identification number which enables the municipal authorities to link his or her data with those about spouse, parents and children.

An inhabitant is registered in the municipality where he or she lives. When a person dies or emigrates the data are kept by the municipality of last residence. In his or her personal file an indication of mortality or emigration is added. No data are erased from the system. Persons who are with certainty deceased or emigrated are no longer actual inhabitants of the Netherlands. This is why in the subsequent sections these persons are referred to as having been removed from the system.

With regard to the maintenance of the system strict rules have been imposed by the Ministry for the Interior.

Due to legal provisions there is no central population register in the Netherlands. Vital and migration statistics data are on a daily basis forwarded by the Dutch municipalities to StatNeth. Once a year the municipalities send a selection of data for all inhabitants to StatNeth. This selection is the source for establishing the population size and structure per 1 January.

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Further information about the GBA-system and the relation between the GBA-system and population statistics can be found in section 4 of this paper and in Imbens and Verhoef (1995) and Verhoef (1995).

*Graph 1* gives an overview of the data stored per inhabitant. The personal file has a number of sections, containing different type of data. In section 1 data about the inhabitant him- or herself is stored (identification number, name, date of birth, and so on). Sections 2 and 3 show data about the parents. Section 4 contains data about the person's nationality. This section is lacking for stateless persons.

Section 5 contains data about marriage or partnership. This section is lacking for those who are unmarried or who have a non-formal partner. Section 6 shows data about mortality. It has only data in case the person has died.

Historic data are part of the system. For example, if a person moves house the new address is added to the information already available. The old address is kept as well, but in the historic part of the personal file.

Some data can occur more than once. Examples are nationality (section 4), for those who have more than one nationality, and children (section 9). Historical data about marriages and addresses can occur more than once.

## 2. Rules for new entrances and removals

As a rule everybody who arrives in the Netherlands and who intends to stay over two third of the next six months is registered in the GBA system. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Some categories, such as diplomats and military personnel of other NATO countries, are not registered in the system. Asylum seekers are another category that is initially excluded from registration in the GBA system. Only those who have an official permission to stay in the country and those who arrived in the country over a year ago are registered in the GBA system.

All persons who are registered in the GBA system and who intend to leave the country for a period exceeding two third of the next twelve months, are registered as emigrants. Note that this period is longer than the period of intended stay needed to be registered as an immigrant. A growing number of people who leave for another country do not notify the local authorities of their departure. Sooner or later these individuals are registered in the system as emigrants to a country qualified as 'unknown'. Statistically they are referred to as administrative removals. This is done because the true reason for removal from the GBA system is not known. Sometimes it is not even known whether the person has left the country. Those who subsequently re-enter the GBA system are categorised as administrative entrances.

From the foregoing it follows that the intended duration of stay determines the number of immigrants and emigrants. It is acknowledged that intentions are not always realised in practice. The distribution by realised duration of stay in or outside the country is established from the immigration and emigration statistics. The municipal basic administrations are the source for these statistics, too. This information is produced by linking actual and previous international migration data.

It is clear that the definition of immigrants and emigrants given here do not fit the definitions of short-term and long-term immigrants (emigrants) as recommended by the United Nations. On the other hand, a distinction between short-term and long-term migrants can be made on the basis of the realised duration of stay. By necessity these statistics become available with a certain delay.

### 3. The population with a foreign background; the current definition

According to the present recommendations of the United Nations the immigrant stock is defined as consisting of all inhabitants who were born abroad and who have been living in the country for more than one year. This concept is closely related to the definition of long-term migrants. They are defined as persons who move to a country other than their usual residence for a period of at least 12 months, so that the country of destination effectively becomes their new country of usual residence (Eurostat, 1994; 1997).

This concept of immigrant stock is felt to be not fully appropriate when describing the population with a foreign background in the country. Two important groups would seem to be missing when describing the population with a foreign background, viz. the immigrants' children and those who have only recently arrived in the country. On the other hand, persons who were born abroad from two native parents should not be categorised among the population with a foreign background. The same applies to the offspring from mixed native/non-native relations. This is why at StatNeth a different concept of the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands has been adopted. This concept is as follows:

*The population with a foreign background is defined as all inhabitants who were born abroad and who have at least one parent who was born abroad (=the first generation), plus those who were born in the Netherlands and whose parents were both born abroad (=the second generation). This definition is known as the narrow definition (De Beer, 1995).*

At StatNeth the so-called wide definition of the population with a foreign background is also used. According to the latter definition this population consists of all inhabitants who were born abroad (=the first generation) plus those who were born in the Netherlands and who have at least one parent who was born abroad (=the second generation). The first generation defined in this manner is much more similar to the immigrant stock according to the UN-definition. Since the wide definition includes children born abroad from two Dutch native parents and children born in the Netherlands from mixed relationships, it has the same drawbacks in describing the population with a foreign background. This is why for most applications StatNeth prefers the narrow definition to the wide one.

There is another reason why the narrow definition is preferred. According to the narrow definition the non-native element is given more weight than the native one: of the three variables 'person's country of birth, mother's country of birth and father's country of birth' at least two are not the Netherlands. In the wide definition a number of those for whom two of these three are the Netherlands are also categorised among the population with a foreign background. This classification often seems inappropriate in view of the socio-cultural position of the persons concerned.

#### 4. Population statistics based on register data

At StatNeth annual data are produced about the state of the population on 1 January. For this purpose every municipality in the Netherlands sends a selection of data to StatNeth concerning all inhabitants of that municipality during the first weeks of the year. Data about deceased persons and emigrants are of course excluded from selection.

In practice it is impossible for all municipalities to make this selection at the same moment. As a result a number of inhabitants are selected by more than one municipality, whereas others are not selected at all. In order to ensure full coverage of the population and to prevent records from occurring more than once, StatNeth reconstructs the situation on the first day of the year. This is done with respect to the birth, death and migration data.

Data about demographic events such as births, deaths, migration, marriages, divorces and so on are forwarded to StatNeth on a continuous basis. This implies that StatNeth receives information about these events as soon as the municipalities enter the relevant data into the GBA system. These data are sent in an electronic form. They enable StatNeth to compile statistics about births, deaths, changes of address, marriages etcetera. Since the personal files are fully individual, with references to the files of the parents, spouse and children, data about demographic events are usually contained in several data messages.

An example about a birth may clarify this. Once a birth is declared the municipality prepares a personal file for the child. As soon as this personal file is made an electronic message about the child is forwarded to StatNeth. The data also contain information about the parents' identification numbers. The municipality records the child's identification number in the parents' personal files as well. The electronic messages about the parents are sent separately to StatNeth. In these messages the child's identification number is also mentioned. The identification numbers of child, mother and father (provided there is any) enable StatNeth to combine the data and to get a complete data set about the birth.

The data about demographic events could in theory be combined with the stock data per 1 January. In this way an up-to-date register could be obtained with containing actual data about all inhabitants of the Netherlands. Since Parliament wondered if in view of confidentiality rules it would be acceptable for StatNeth to have such a live register, this is not done in practice. However, since the stock data also serve as a frame of sampling units, ten percent of the population stock is updated during the year. Every year a new ten percent sample is selected in order to avoid people from being interviewed by StatNeth too often.

#### 5. The population with a foreign background in the Netherlands

According to the narrow definition of the population with a foreign background the Turks are the largest population category with a foreign background in the Netherlands (*table 1*). The majority of them (169 thousand) were born abroad, mainly in Turkey; 102 thousand were born in the Netherlands. They are the only category of which the second generation exceeds 100 thousand. The Surinamese are the second group (254 thousand), the Moroccans the third group (225 thousand).

According to the wide definition the first generation is slightly larger than according to the narrow definition. The choice of definition has a big effect on the size of the second generation. According to the wide definition their number is 3.5 times bigger than according to the narrow definition. Over one million inhabitants of the Netherlands were born in this country with the one parent also born here and the other born abroad.

In the first generation of the population with a foreign background the age-group 30-39 is the largest (315 thousand). Almost half of the second generation is younger than 10 years of age (*graph 2*).

One in seven persons in the native population is over 65 years of age. In the first generation of the population with a foreign background this is one in twelve. It should, however, not be forgotten that the latter population is far from homogeneous as far as the age structures of subgroups are concerned. The Moroccan, Surinamese and Turkish populations in the Netherlands are much younger than those with a German or a Dutch Indian background.

The age structures of many non-native groups in the Netherlands still reflect their migration histories. In this section the most important groups are discussed.

In the early 1960s many Turks and Moroccans were contracted as unskilled workers. At the time it was assumed that their stay in the Netherlands would be limited to a few years and that they would return to their countries after their labour contracts had expired. However, many Turkish and Moroccan workers preferred to prolong their stay in the Netherlands and to have their families reunited with them. The major part of this so-called family reunification immigration took place in the 1970s. When their children marry someone from the country of origin of the parent(s) this often leads to so-called family formation immigration. This type of immigration frequently occurred during the 1980s. De Beer et. al. (1993) give a method by which family reunification and formation immigration was estimated.

The immigration of Surinamese has a completely different history. Until Suriname gained their independence in 1975 it belonged to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Since many Surinamese were concerned of the political and economic perspectives in their native country they decided to emigrate to the Netherlands. This led to migration peaks in 1974, 1975 and 1980. The usual type of immigration was that of complete households, so that subsequent family reunification immigration was small in this group. The high immigration figures during the past ten years are probably related to the poor economic circumstances in Suriname.

In the years following World War II the Dutch authorities tried to re-establish authority in the former Dutch East-Indies. However, many people in this former Dutch colony were in favour of a sovereign Republic of Indonesia. Most of the Dutch who lived there decided to return to the Netherlands, accompanied by many Indonesian former civil servants and military personnel. This immigration was concentrated in the 1950s. The last big group immigrated in 1962, when former Dutch New-Guinea became a part of Indonesia.

During about the last ten years the number of asylum seekers from non-western countries has grown strongly (*graph 3*). In 1994 their number was highest (53 thousand). After a dip in 1995 and 1996 their number increased again in 1997. Many of the asylum seekers fled because of political repression, armed struggle or poor socio-economic circumstances in their home countries. They usually migrate without their families. A number of them will probably have their families reunited with them in the years to come. Others will marry someone from their country of origin. According to the forecasts of the foreign population 1996-2015 compiled by

StatNeth the population group from non-western countries will show the strongest growth. In 1997 this group numbered 385 thousand. One in three came from an Asian country, over a quarter from Africa, a quarter from Eastern Europe and 10% from Latin America.

The migration histories of the non-native groups are reflected in the duration of stay distribution (*table 2*). Four in five persons who were born in Indonesia or the former Dutch East-Indies have lived in the Netherlands for more than 25 years. For those who were born in Belgium, Germany or another EU member state this proportion is about 30%. Less than 10% of the remaining population with a foreign background has lived in the Netherlands for more than 25 years.

Half of the 322 thousand persons who were born in a non-western country have lived less than five years in the Netherlands. Among them are many former asylum seekers. As was mentioned before this category will grow fastest according to the forecasts of the foreign population 1996-2015.

The population forecasts are compiled by StatNeth using the usual cohort component model. In the forecasts of the foreign population the first and the second generation and seven country categories are distinguished. These categories are: former Dutch East Indies, Morocco, Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, Surinam, Turkey, (rich) OECD countries, other (poor) countries. Forecasts have been made according to the narrow and the wide definition of the population with a foreign background.

In order to reflect the uncertainties inherent in forecasting a low, a medium and a high variant are made. The development in future population size and structure according to the medium variant is felt to be the most probable one. In the low variant the assumptions with respect to fertility, mortality, international migration and mixed marriage are combined in such a way that they result in a relatively low population growth. In the high variant the opposite is the case.

## 6. Limitations

1. Not all inhabitants of the Netherlands are registered in the GBA register. All foreign persons entitled to diplomatic immunity, aliens in diplomatic service and foreign armed forces stationed in the Netherlands (NATO military personnel, alien civilian staff employed by these forces and their non-Dutch wives and children) are excluded from registration. The same holds for asylum seekers who have been staying in the Netherlands for less than twelve months and who do not yet have a permit to stay in this country.

Apart from these categories the Netherlands has an unknown number of undocumented inhabitants. A number of these persons entered the country illegally. Others came as visitors and did not leave the country within three months. Another category are former asylum seekers who at some stage of the procedure were refused a permit to stay, and who decided not to leave but prolong their stay in the country.

None of the categories mentioned here are included in Dutch population statistics. Some studies have been carried out on methods to include these groups. These studies, however, have shown that reliable and generally acceptable estimates are still an elusive goal.

2. The definitions applied in Dutch population statistics are based on the possibilities which the GBA system offers. As mentioned in section 2, the register data do not allow to make a distinction between short-term and long-term immigrants.
3. The registered addresses are a basic element for family statistics, since individuals can be in one nuclear family only if they live at the same address. It is acknowledged that in some cases this might lead to situations which do not reflect the facts. On the other hand, not all discrepancies can be attributed to indifference or carelessness on the part of the public. To give an example of the latter, the number of children living with their parents might be slightly overestimated. This is caused by the fact that leaving the parental home often takes place over a period of time instead of at a fixed moment in time. Most people tend to inform the municipal authorities at the end of this period, not at the beginning of it.
4. Live births by rank are also somewhat affected by the rules for maintaining and up-dating the registers. This is caused by the fact that section 9 of the personal file (graph 1) contains no data about children who were stillborn or children who were born abroad and who never lived in the Netherlands. Since the rank of a new-born child is one larger than the number of children already present on the mother's personal file, this rank is in some cases underestimated.
5. It was mentioned in section 5 that StatNeth produces three variants of forecasts in order to emphasize the inherent uncertainty of forecast data. The medium variant is felt to reflect the most probable future developments given the insights at the time of producing the forecasts, whereas the other two may be interpreted as margins around the medium variant. The uncertainty about the forecasts of future international migration is particularly high. It is assumed that international migration is determined by push and pull factors. The effect of these factors on international migration are hard to predict. The economic and political circumstances in the countries of origin are the push factors, those in the host countries the pull factors. On the other hand, in view of socio-economic restrictions to immigration host countries often put up political barriers against high or undesired immigrant flows. Such actions make the resulting number of internationals migrants even harder to predict. It is important to keep these uncertainties in mind, since the contribution of international migration to population growth and population development has grown over the years and may still further increase.

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