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Return migration

Return migration rates of recent immigrants compared to flows in the previous century

Note by Statistics Netherlands

Summary

In the first decennium of the 21st century, a substantial proportion of immigrants to the Netherlands came from Eastern-European countries, mainly Poland. What can be expected for the near and further future, in terms of return migration and family migration? To answer this question, migration behaviour and composition of recent migration groups were compared to that of the major groups in the previous century. Based on analyses of Polish immigrants who came to the Netherlands between 2000 and 2009, about 60% will have returned to their country of origin within ten years. This proportion is substantially higher than among Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in the third quarter of the twentieth century, but comparable to that of Southern Europeans in that period. The demographic composition of the recent groups is different. As yet, the recent labour migration is not expected to be followed by substantial family migration as was seen in the previous century.

1. Introduction

1. In this paper, the immigration to the Netherlands from Mediterranean countries Turkey, Morocco, Italy and Spain in the nineteen sixties and seventies, is compared to the immigration from Poland in the past decennium. This comparison will give a (preliminary) answer to the much asked question: is the migration behaviour of the recent labour migrants from Poland comparable to that of Turks and Moroccans, or more to that of Italians and Spaniards? The first group generally stayed in the Netherlands and had their families come over, while the majority of the last group emigrated. In other words, how likely is it that the new labour migrants will generate a new phase of family migration?

2. It must be noted that all data in this paper refer to migrants who registered themselves in the municipal population registers. Short-term (labour) migrants, who have the intention to stay for less than four months in the Netherlands, do not have to register and are therefore not taken into account.

II. History

3. The starting off of the family reunification process is reflected in the growing share of women in the immigration from Turkey and Morocco in the late sixties, as well as in the low return migration rates of Turks and Moroccans. The share of women increased from almost zero to just over half (Figure 1). Ten years after their arrival between 1964 and 1973, 30 to 40% of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants had left the Netherlands (Figure 2).

Figure 1.

Share of women in the immigration from Mediterranean countries to the Netherlands

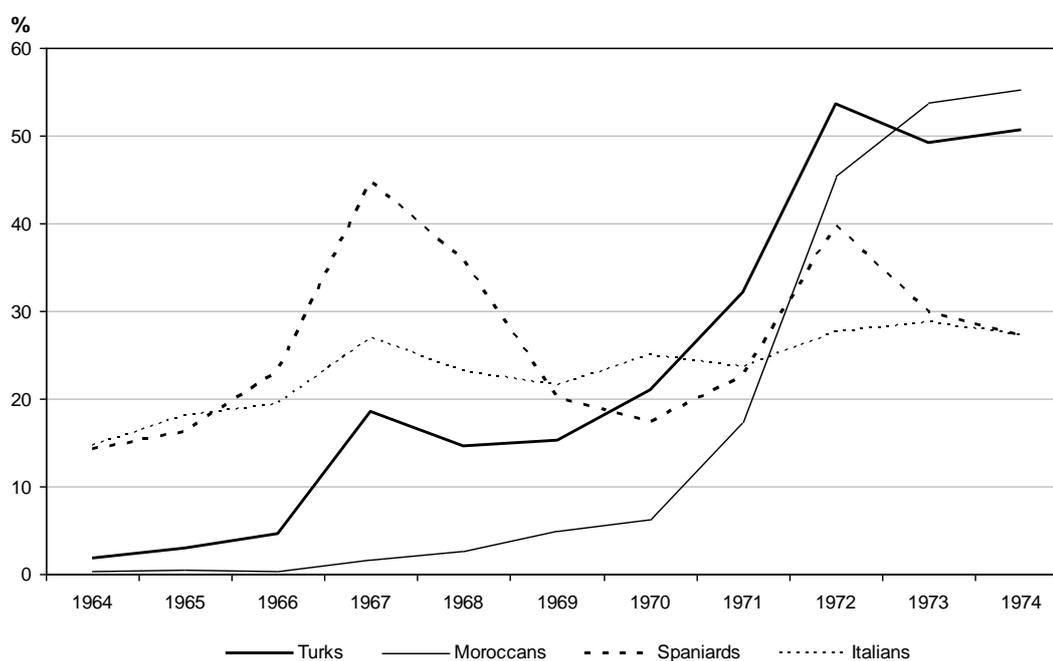
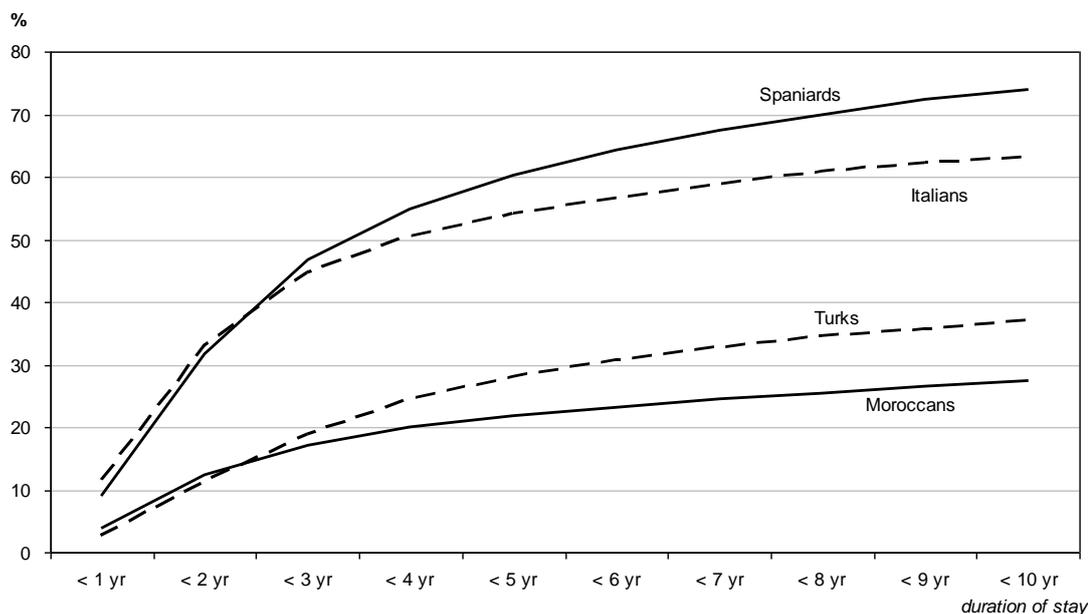


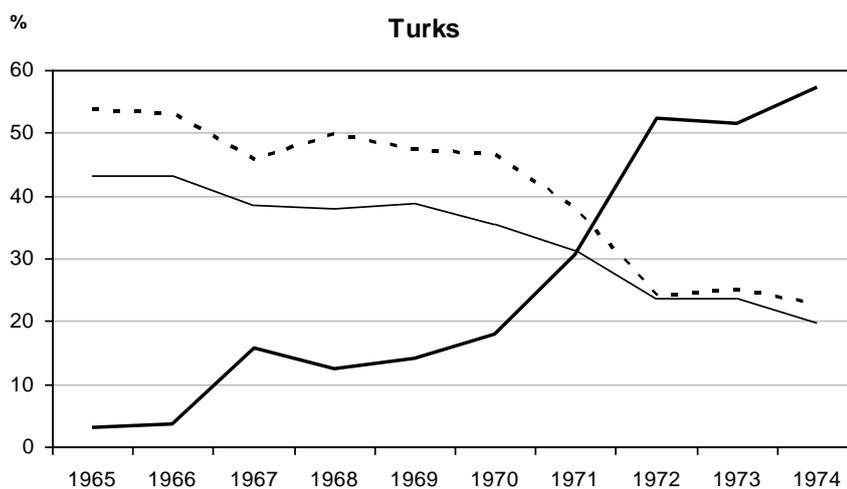
Figure 2.
Return migration of migrants¹ from Mediterranean countries by duration of stay in the Netherlands (cumulated)

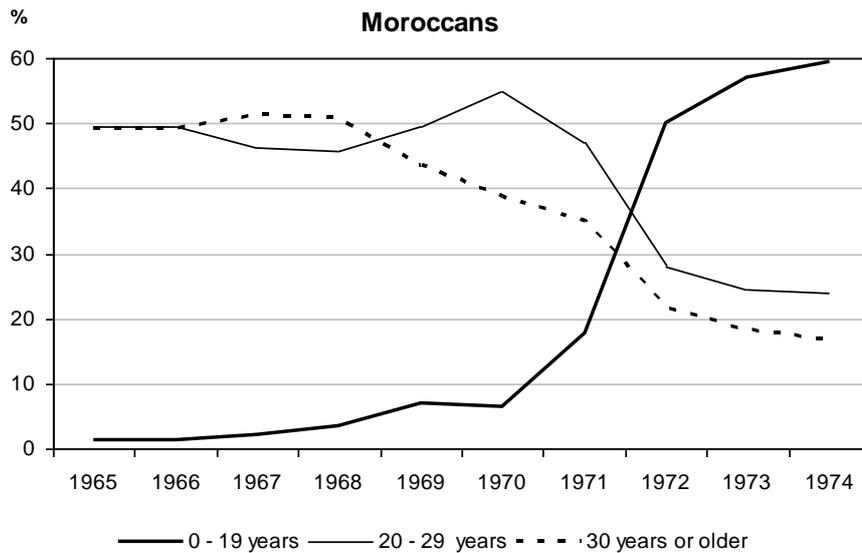


¹ Immigrated between 1964 and 1973

4. The transition from labour migration to family migration can also be demonstrated with the age distribution of immigrants. In the second half of the sixties, 80 to 90% of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants were in their twenties or thirties, while the share of children in the immigration was around 10%. Since the early seventies, the share of children showed a sharp increase which indicates – in combination with a rising share of women – family reunification (Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Share by age group of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants

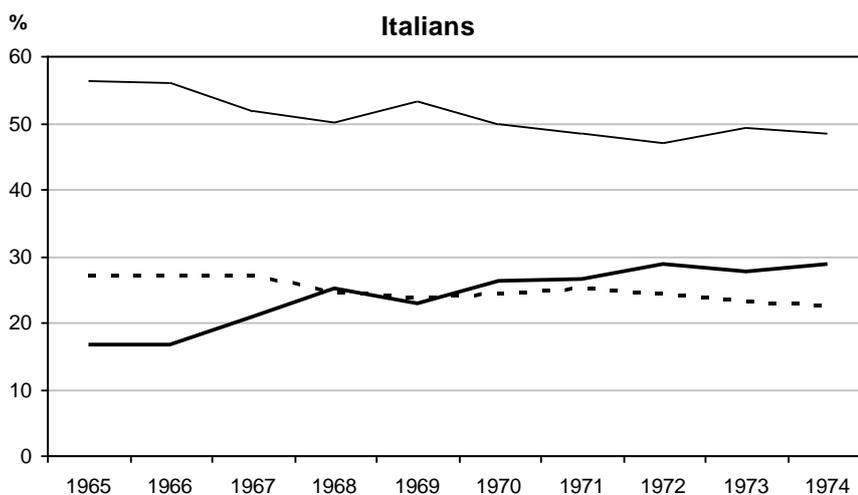


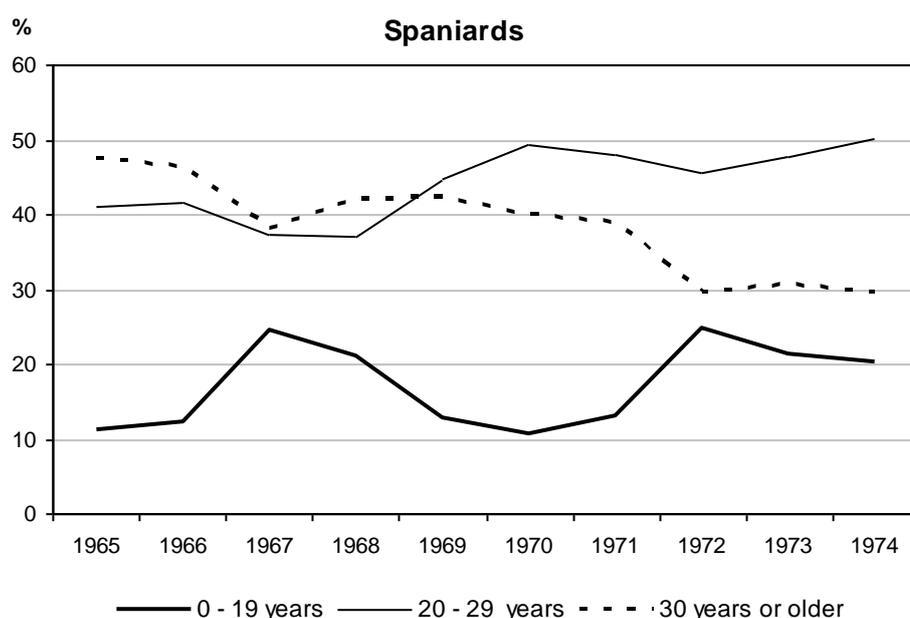


5. The migration patterns of Spaniards and Italians in all aspects (sex, age and return migration) showed a completely different picture than that of Turks and Moroccans. The good economic situations in Spain and Italy in the early seventies lead to a decreasing number of migrants to the Netherlands, followed by substantial return migration. Ten years after their arrival in the Netherlands between 1964 and 1973, 75% had left the country. This share is twice as high as among Turks and Moroccans (Figure 2).

6. Family reunification has been less important in the migration of Spaniards and Italians, as compared to Turks and Moroccans. The share of women in the immigration from Spain and Italy increased somewhat, but remained relatively low (Figure 1). Moreover, the share of children in the total immigration from Italy fluctuated around 15%, and never exceeded 30% for Spaniards, which is much lower than among Turks and Moroccans (Figure 4).

Figure 4.
Share by age group of Italian and Spanish immigrants





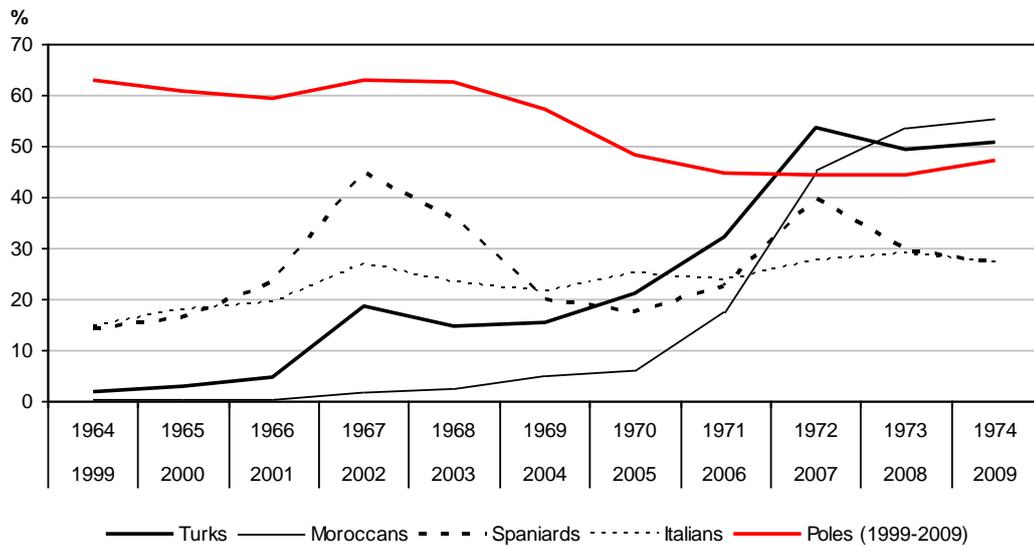
III. Migration from Poland: labour migration precursor of family reunification?

7. The number of Polish immigrants and their descendants in the Netherlands has grown substantially over the past years, to 80 thousand at 1 January 2010, twice as high as in 2004. Poland's EU-membership in May 2004 has been an important factor in this. Between 1995 and 2003, the yearly average number of Polish immigrants was 1.5 thousand. Starting in 2004, this rose considerably: from 5 thousand in 2004 to nearly 19 thousand in 2011.

8. The question posed in the introduction (is the migration behaviour of the recent labour migrants from Poland comparable to that of the Turks and Moroccans, or more to that of Italians and Spaniards in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century?) is not easy to answer. It may be too soon to make a firm statement about this. Based on the composition of the present group of Polish immigrants, as well as their return migration behaviour, an indication can be given.

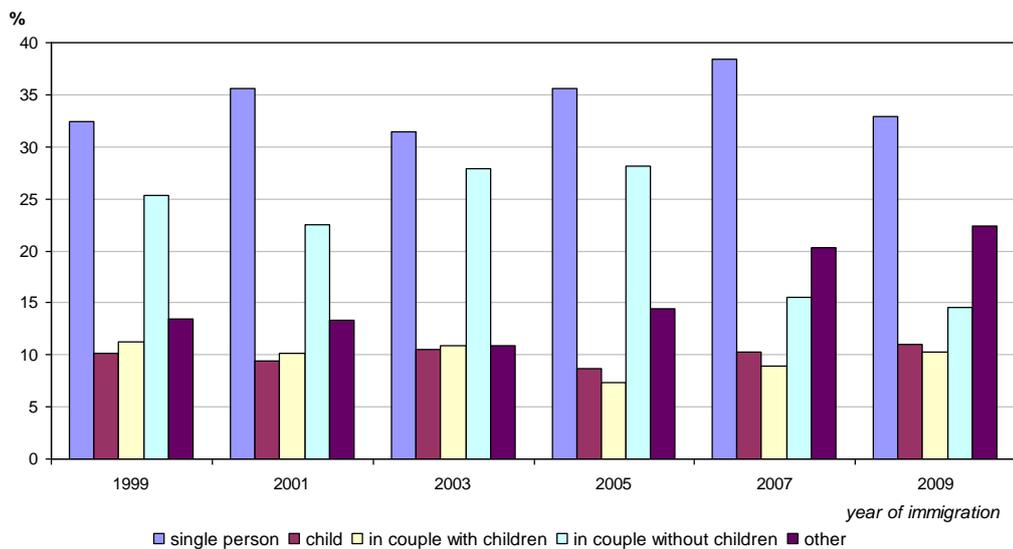
9. The Poles, who came to the Netherlands in the first decennium of the 21st century, are different from the groups discussed above (Turks/Moroccans, Italians/Spaniards). Before the EU membership at 1 May 2004, the share of women in Polish migration was 60 to 65% (Figure 5). For a large part, these women came as 'Polish brides', for family formation. After the EU-accession, the share of women started to drop and more male labour migrants came to the Netherlands. Since 2005, a small majority of Polish immigrants is male.

Figure 5.
Share of women in immigration from Mediterranean countries (1964-1974) and Poland (1999-2009)



10. The composition of the group of Polish immigrants by household position has been rather constant between 1999 and 2004. Each year, about 30% came as a single person to the Netherlands, one quarter was part of a couple without children, 10% of a couple with children and another 10% belonged to the group ‘other’ (mainly siblings of the immigrant). After accession to the EU, this composition changed somewhat: the number of single persons increased, but moreover relatively fewer couples without children, and more ‘others’ (Figure 6).

Figure 6.
Polish immigrants by household position at 1 January of the year after immigration ¹

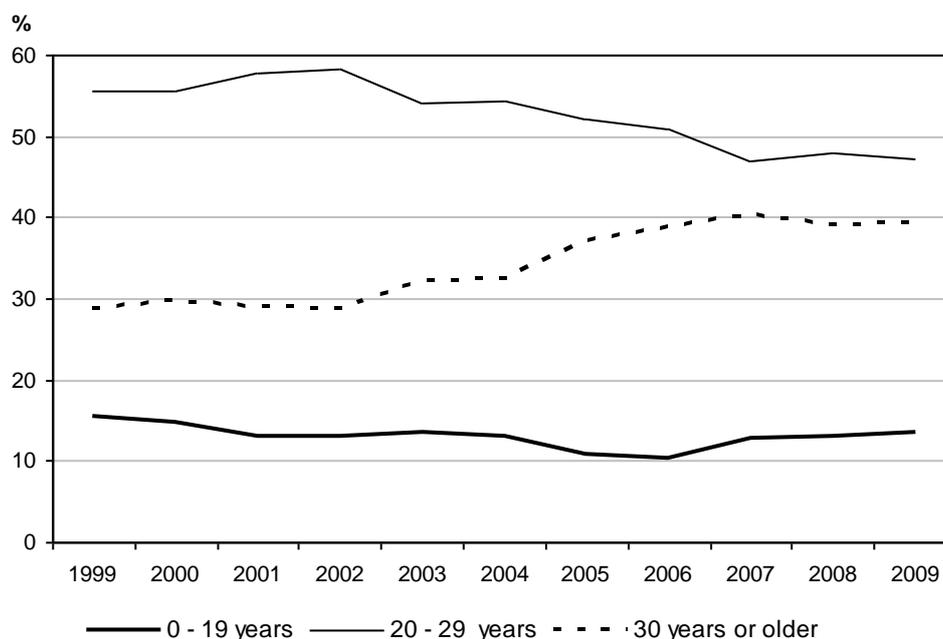


¹ Excluding migrants who immigrated in the same year

11. The age composition of Polish immigrant clearly differs from that of the Turks and Moroccans at the time. While the immigration of Turkish and Moroccan children started to grow strongly in the mid-sixties (Figure 3), the number of Polish children slightly diminished in the past decade (Figure 7).

Figure 7.

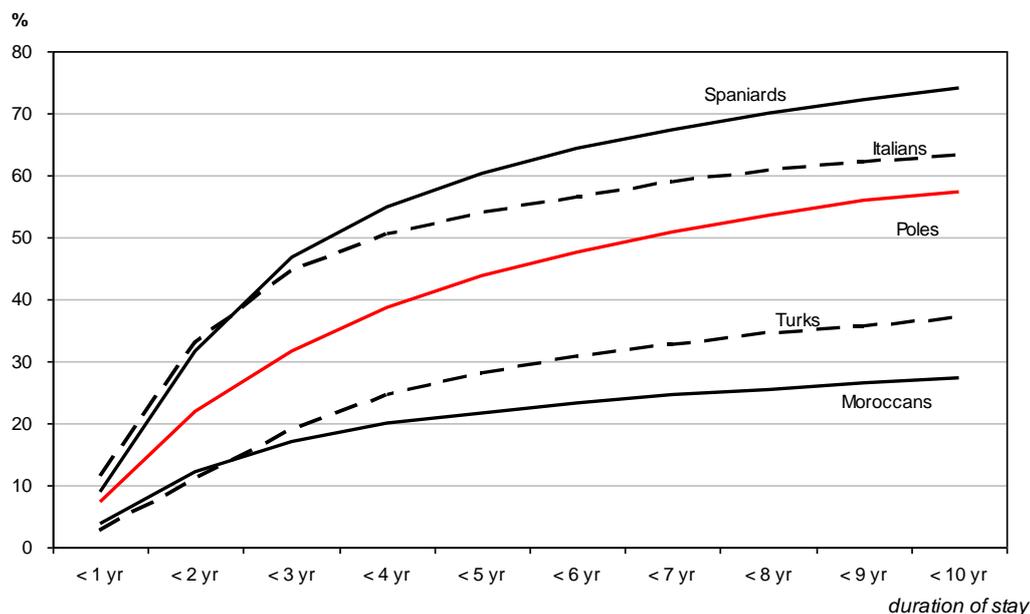
Share by age group of Polish immigrants



12. With regard to sex, age and household composition, Polish immigrants are very different from Turkish and Moroccan immigrants: the share of Polish women decreases and the share of children is stable. This indicates that, so far, there is no indication of large-scale family reunification among Polish (labour) migrants. The return migration behaviour does not indicate this either. So far, the return opportunities for Eastern-European labour migrants seem to be better than for the Turks and Moroccans in the nineteen sixties and seventies. The economic situation in Poland is better than in Turkey and Morocco at the time and the outlook is good. The Polish EU-membership also plays an important role, which makes it easier to travel between countries without losing the right to live and work.

13. It can be expected that many new labour migrant will stay in the Netherlands temporarily and will return after some time, just as the Spaniards and Italians did. The first data indicate in this direction. Based on the average return percentages by duration of stay in this group, nearly 60 per cent of Polish immigrants, who arrived between 2000 and 2009, will return within ten years. This share is somewhat lower than that of Spanish and Italian migrants with comparable lengths of stay in the Netherlands, but considerably higher compared to Turks and Moroccans (Figure 8). Note that these figures describe the return migration of registered immigrants only. Besides this group, there are many short-term labour migrants who stay for less than 4 months and therefore do not have to register as an immigrant. Including this group would lead to higher return migration.

Figure 8.
Return migration of migrants¹ from Mediterranean countries and Poland² by duration of stay in the Netherlands (cumulated)



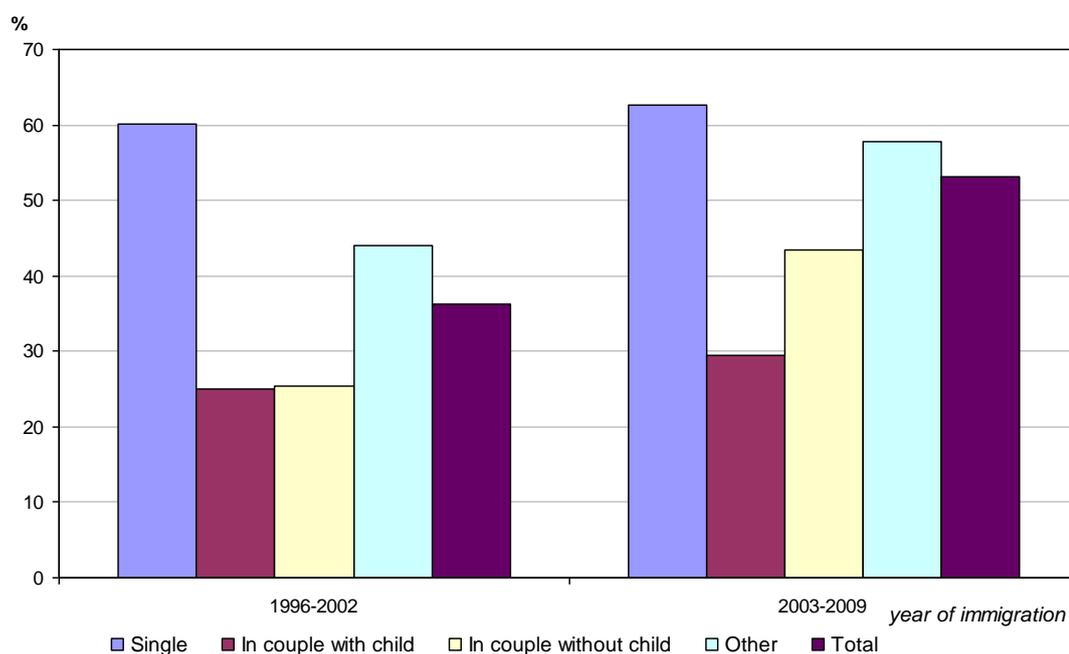
¹ Immigrated between 1964 and 1973

² Immigrated between 2000 and 2009

14. The return migration behaviour of Poles clearly differs by arrival time and household position. Figure 9 shows the return migration for two cohorts of immigrants (1996-2002 and 2003-2009), by household position at 1 January of the year following the year of migration. Immigrants of the more recent cohort are much more likely to return than the immigrants who came to the Netherlands between 1996 and 2002. Of the 2003-2009 cohort, over half will have returned to Poland within 7 years after arrival. In the 1996-2002 cohort, this was 35%. This difference may be related to the relatively good economic situation in the Netherlands in 1996-2002, that made staying and working attractive to the immigrants. The EU-membership of Poland since May 2004 also plays a role: the right of free movement and residence makes it easier for Poles to travel between both countries.

Figure 9.

Return migration of Poles within 7 years after immigration, by household position at 1 January of the year after immigration



15. Figure 9 also shows that single persons and ‘others’ are much more likely to return than couples, especially with children. In both cohorts, 60% of single migrants and just 30% of couples with children had returned within 7 years.

IV. Summary and conclusions

16. An overview was given of the immigration and return migration of labour migrants from Mediterranean countries who came to the Netherlands in the nineteen sixties and – seventies on the one hand, and that of recent labour migrants from Poland in the first decennium of the present century. A summary of the findings:

- The age, sex and household composition of both migrant groups are clearly different;
- The workers from Turkey and Morocco generated a different group of migrants, the family migrants. This is visible in the increasing shares of woman and children in the immigration flows. As yet, this pattern is not seen for Poles;
- The return migration rates of the Poles are much higher than of the Turks and Moroccans at the time, and are more like that of the Italians and Spaniards – of whom a majority returned to their countries of birth;
- The highest return migration rates are found among the largest groups of migrants: those who came as singles or ‘other household members’;

17. This leads to the following conclusion:

- There are no signs of family reunification of Poles, as yet;
- Based on the high return migration rates, especially among singles and ‘others’, the recent high immigration from EU-countries will lead to high emigration in time.

V. References

Nicolaas, H., 2011, Majority of Polish immigrants to the Netherlands is leaving again. *Population Trends* 59(1), pp. 32–36 (in Dutch).
