

Everything you always wanted to know about migrant families

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Migration is one of the major factors causing population change in Europe today. Understanding these changes requires insight in the life courses and family dynamics of migrants. A NIDI team of researchers working on the ERC funded project *Families of migrant origin: a life course perspective (FaMiLife)* project has investigated the role of international migration on the lives of migrants and their families, both in origin and destination countries. Here are some of the key findings.

Migrants are often exclusively studied in their countries of destination, but to better capture life courses and study changes in demographic behaviour we also need to pay attention to the country of origin. An important comparison gets overlooked when assessing levels of adaptation or integration if one only uses the majority group in the country of destination as measure of comparison. Countries of origin are not static and demographic behaviour is changing there as well. By focusing on the country of destination we may overlook the importance of these processes and thus wrongly ascribe changes in migrant behaviour to adaptation processes in the destination country. In the FaMiLife project we therefore study countries of destination *and* origin.

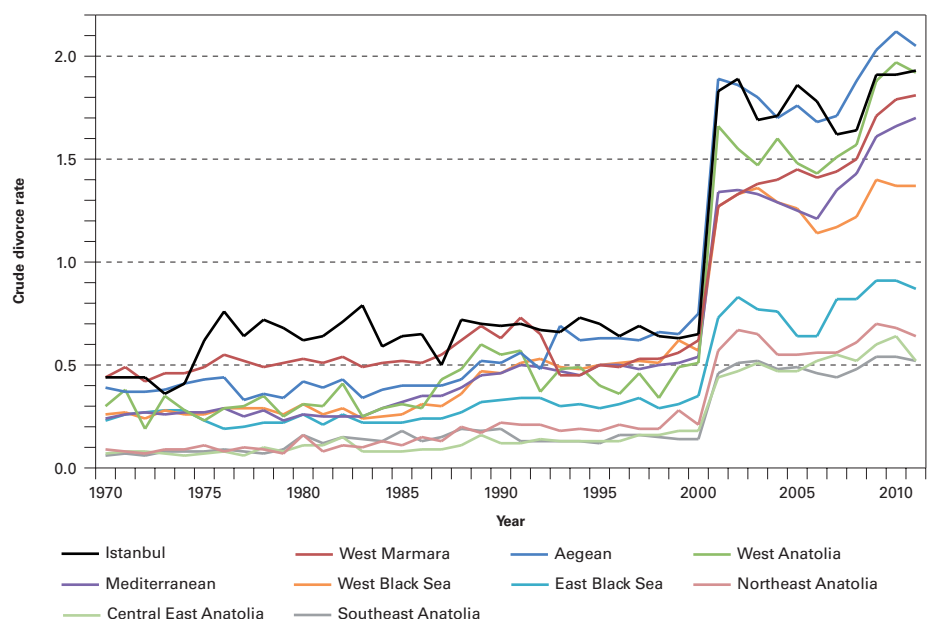


Photo: Roel Wijnants/Flickr

An example is the diffusion of divorce patterns in Turkey. We used Demographic and Health Surveys for Turkey complemented with data on economic development to study patterns and determinants of divorce. Our study showed that divorce in Turkey has become much more common in the past decade, especially after the changes in the divorce law in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, the levels of divorce still vary substantially by region (see Figure 1 for 10 selected regions). Important factors in this changing demographic behaviour are the exposure to changed norms and values about relationships. In our study we looked at the regional context and the likelihood of divorce. We found that women who live in a region where divorce is more common are more likely to divorce themselves. But women's (international) migration experience also has an impact: those who have been away are more likely to separate from their partner later in life. Although economic development and opportunities were important, the diffusion of norms was clearly more important for the observed increase in divorce rates in the Turkish context.

residing in these countries. Thus, a Turkish born person in Germany resembles a German born person more than a Turkish person living in the Netherlands. A similar pattern is found for the labour market participation of second generation migrant women before and after childbearing. The substantial differences in

Figure 1. Crude divorce rates* for ten selected regions, Turkey, 1971-2011



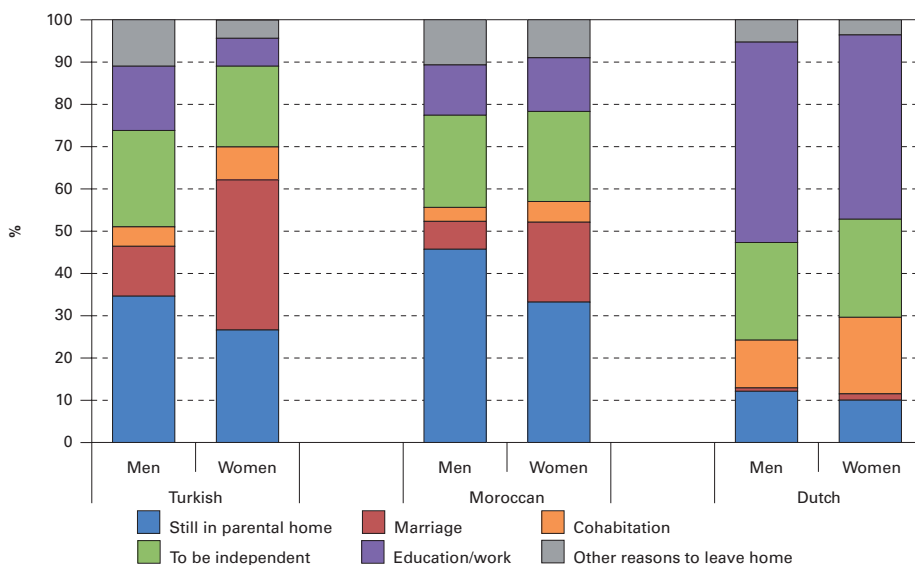
* The number of divorces per 1,000 of the average population by province in a year.

Source: Caarls & De Valk (2015).

Intergenerational ties

For intergenerational ties and work-family balance, however, the country of destination is more important than the country of origin. The exchange of support between adult children and their parents varies substantially across Europe. This gradient in support, which runs from the Nordic to the southern European countries, is not only found for the majority population but is equally reflected among the migrant populations

Figure 2. Share living in parental home and reason for leaving home for those who don't live with their parents, by origin group and gender, the Netherlands



Source: Kleinepier & De Valk (2014); TIES (2007/08), the Netherlands.

female participation across Europe are similar for the children of immigrants. Overall, women in Sweden, for example, participate more while German women participate less, with France and the Netherlands taking an intermediate position. We see that especially after childbearing, societies with strong normative ideas on mothers' labour market attachment (with a focus on full-time work in Sweden versus on motherhood in Germany) result in behavior among migrant women that is more comparable to the native majority group. This is especially the case for the children of immigrants who are born and raised in Europe and for whom we thus find a clear adaptation to the destination country.

Variation in migrant life courses

Studies have suggested that for many of the north western European countries, the standard biography no longer exists due to both individualization as well as increased freedom of choice. At the same time, it is often assumed that children of (non-western) immigrant origin would follow traditional family life courses in which family influence prevails. Our research, however, shows that in young adulthood (up to age 30) there is more diversity in the family life course of women of second generation Turkish, Moroccan, Antillean and Surinamese descent. In addition to a group of young women that do follow a more traditional path we also find a substantial share of migrant women who are for example extending education, sometimes live alone for a period of time, and postpone family commitments (Figure 2). Dutch young adults at the same time show little variety: they are mainly postponing union and family formation until their late twenties. Our data do suggest that among migrant groups there is an increased dichotomy in lives between those who follow a more traditional path with early marriage and childbearing and those who don't. This seems to be mainly related to differences in education. Our findings suggest that future research should pay much more attention to how diversity in migrant groups influences (demographic) life choices –

rather than treating migrants as homogenous groups.

The influence of parents and peers

It is often thought that parents in migrant families have a strong influence on the choices their children make. In our study on home leaving behaviour we analysed the degree of conflict among young adults of migrant and non-migrant origin in the Netherlands. Conflicts with parents are found to only partially influence home leaving behaviour and are equally important irrespective of migrant origin. It seems that the influence of peers in this phase in life is still underestimated. We found for instance that second generation Turkish and Moroccan youth with more Dutch friends on average leave home earlier and more often live alone for a period of time. The latter is rather common in the Netherlands where the average age of leaving the parental home is 22 years for women and 23 for men, and where many young adults live independently for a while before entering a cohabiting union.

We also find some striking similarities and differences between people of migrant and non-migrant origin later in life. Population register data seem to reveal that Turkish and Moroccan women divorce less than Dutch women. This difference, however, is mainly related to differences in socio-economic and demographic background. Furthermore, women who are born in the Netherlands but are of Turkish or Moroccan origin are more likely to divorce than those who migrated from these countries to the Netherlands. With respect to divorces, we see that women of migrant origin leave the joint house less often than men. This is contrary to the Dutch case where men by and large stay in the joint house and women move out. We cannot explain these patterns with socio-economic or demographic characteristics. Future studies should shed light on the different roles that social networks in the neighborhood may play in these moving choices between ex-partners of different origins.

The key findings of the FaMiLife project presented here obviously only give a snapshot of the many dimensions studied in the project. More information as well as short animations about migrants, their families and life courses can be found on www.familifeproject.com.

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