

## **Population Trends and Family Policies in the Netherlands**

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### **1 Introduction**

The welfare states of today are being confronted with the outcome of major shifts in their core demographic processes of fertility, mortality and migration. Some of these shifts are relatively recent developments (the impact of international migration, for example), while others (such as fertility decline and, more particularly, mortality decline) have a longer history. The combined effect of these shifts suggests a common demographic future for modern Western society which is characterised by slow and decreasing population growth and imminent population decline, population ageing, changes in household composition and, in most countries, changes in the ethnic composition of their population as well. The underlying demographic determinants of these changes are structural and can be summarised as: sustained low and late fertility, increasing life expectancy, changing family formation patterns and the growing impact of international migration. Social processes such as internationalisation, a rise in educational attainment and an increase in female labour force participation are directly related to these demographic processes and are accompanied by socio-cultural changes in attitudes, norms and values which are part and parcel of the ongoing process of modernisation.

These demographic shifts are challenging the way societies are organised today and more particularly how they should be organised in the future, and governments will need to respond with policies that accommodate these shifts. The structural nature of these demographic changes and the many ways they are linked to broader socio-structural and socio-cultural processes, coupled with public opinions and attitudes towards population issues, preclude “interventionist” or traditional population policies aimed at redirecting or reversing the underlying demographic trends. From the point of view of the major demographic trends in fertility and mortality, these policies are neither feasible (fertility) nor desirable (mortality). Low fertility and low mortality are here to stay, or so it would seem, at least for the foreseeable future, and population ageing is the inevitable outcome. International migration is a different matter and potentially more susceptible to direct policy intervention, although it has only a minor impact on population ageing.

Set against this backdrop, this paper will briefly describe the demographic profile and recent fertility trends in the Netherlands, examine Dutch public opinion and attitudes towards combining work and childcare, and discuss family policy initiatives. We will begin with a brief discussion of the general demographic setting of the Netherlands.

## 2. Setting the stage: a demographic profile of the Netherlands

### *Population growth*

The Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with 385 inhabitants per square kilometer. Its current population of 16.1 million is projected to grow to a maximum of 18.1 million around the year 2040, followed by population decline.

The present rate of population growth is 0.8 per cent, which is among the highest in Europe, surpassed only by Luxembourg (1.3) and Iceland (1.5) in western Europe, and Turkey (1.5) in southern Europe. Average population growth for Europe as a whole is 0.1 per cent (Council of Europe, 2002).

*Figure 1* summarises the trends in the Dutch population growth rate, by natural growth (births minus deaths) and migration (immigration minus emigration). Both natural growth and migration are expected to decline, thereby causing a decrease in population size in the long term, in common with most other developed countries.

### *Population ageing*

The relatively young age structure of the population of the Netherlands, which is the result of a relatively late decline in fertility and an impressive baby boom in the decades immediately following the Second World War, is one of the main causes of ongoing population growth. Although still young from a European perspective, the population of the Netherlands will age rapidly in the near future due to sustained low fertility and increasing life expectancy.

The current life expectancy at birth in the Netherlands is 75 years for men and 80 years for women. The comparable figures at the beginning of the 20th century were 50 and 52 years respectively, indicating an increase in lifespan of some 25 to 30 years mainly due to the successful battle against infectious diseases and the decline in infant and child mortality. During the course of this process, differences in male and female mortality initially increased sharply, with women benefiting more from the mortality decline than men. The leading causes of death today are coronary diseases, and chronic diseases such as cancer. *Figure 2* charts developments in life expectancy over a period of 150 years.

The ageing process in the Netherlands may be lagging behind the pattern in the rest of Europe, but it won't be long before it catches up. From 2010 onwards, when the large post-war baby boom generations reach retirement age, the proportion of older adults (65 and over) will increase from its current level of roughly 14 per cent to a projected peak of almost 23 per cent around 2025. Italy currently has the highest proportion of older adults in Europe (18 per cent).

The proportion of elderly people (80 plus) within the population of older adults will also increase; this process is generally referred to as "double ageing". The current proportion of elderly people —about 3 per cent— will increase to roughly 8 per cent around the year 2050. At present, almost a quarter of older adults are more than 80 years old; around 2025, this will have increased to a third. *Figure 3* summarises the shifts in the age structure of the Netherlands over a time span of a century (1950-2050).

It should be noted that population ageing also occurs below the traditional benchmark age of 65. The ageing of the economically active or working-age population and its imminent decline is particularly relevant from a policy perspective and is linked to family policies, as will be shown below.

The dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio of non-active to economically active people, provides a summary guide to population ageing. It is only a rough indicator for various reasons: the denominator only gives the potentially active population and not those actually in work; the cut-off points are also increasingly questionable, both in terms of young adults (most of whom will not have entered the labour force at age 16) and in terms of older adults (some of whom will have retired before the age of 65, while others will continue to be economically active after the age of 65). Taking this into account, the dependency ratio summarises the dual processes of population ageing, i.e. “dejuvenation” (the declining proportion of younger adults) and “greying” (the growing proportion of older adults). It can also be regarded as an indicator of “demographic pressure”. In the Netherlands, the young age dependency ratio has gradually declined over the past decades and is now relatively stable at a level of about 27 under-15s per 100 people of working age 15-65. This suggests that the dejuvenation of the population has more or less run its course. The old age dependency ratio, however, which is currently 20 people aged 65 and over per 100 people of working age, is only just beginning to increase. The combined dependency ratio of 47 is in the mid range for Europe (Council of Europe, 2002).

#### *Living arrangements*

The process of modernisation has been accompanied by changes in the formation and dissolution of relationships. Marriage has declined from an almost universal standard arrangement to merely one of the options available to partners, albeit still a dominant one. Until the 1970s, over 90 per cent of people married, and the age at first marriage was low (23 for women and 25 for men). By the 1990s, the first marriage rate had decreased to about 70 per cent, and the age at first marriage had increased to 28 for women and 30 for men (Prins and Verhoef, 2000). Divorce rates have increased to a fairly stable level with some 30 per cent of marriages ending in divorce and this rate is expected to remain stable. The most recent household projection (De Jong, 2001) predicts that the number of households will increase over the coming decades from the current level of 6.8 million to 8.3 million in the year 2035, and then level off. The major determinant of the growth in the number of households is the sharp increase in one-person households from 2.3 million today to 3.4 million in 2035. The number of couples (both married and cohabiting) will increase from the current level of 4.1 million to 4.5 million, which suggests that this living arrangement will remain dominant. There will, however, be a further decline in the proportion of married couples, from the current 3.5 million to 3 million in the year 2050. This downward trend will not be triggered by a further decrease in (first) marriage rates—which are projected to remain relatively stable, thereby indicating the continuing popularity of marriage—but will primarily be caused by increasing mortality due to ageing. The decline in the number of married couples will be more than offset by an

increase in unmarried cohabitation. Unmarried cohabitation has increased spectacularly, but has not replaced formal marriage. Most couples still opt for a marriage certificate when they seriously consider having children. The number of single parent families, predominantly female headed, will remain relatively stable at a level of around 400,000. The population in so-called institutional households will slowly decline in the short term, reflecting older adults' need for independence, but will increase in the longer term due to population ageing. *Figure 4* summarises the future trends in household composition in the Netherlands.

### *Ethnicity*

One of the main features of recent population development in the Netherlands has been the change in the ethnic composition of the population caused by international migration. Although the latter process has always played a part in the demographic development of the country, its impact has increased substantially over the past decades. Bearing in mind the decline in natural population growth, the impact of international migration (the inflow) and the subsequent growth of the resident migrant population will remain an important factor in Dutch demography. The current population of foreign descent<sup>1</sup> numbers 2.7 million, some 17 per cent of the total population. About half of this group are migrants of so-called non-western origin, with Turkey (300,000), Surinam (297,000) and Morocco (252,000) being the major countries of origin. The largest proportion of Western migrants originates from the European Union (736,000) and Indonesia, a former Dutch colony. The migration of non-western migrants shifted from labour migration in the 1960s to family reunion and family formation migration in later decades. Asylum migration has been the main source of inflow in recent years. These trends have led to a vast increase in the diversity of countries of origin of migrants.

*Figure 5* summarises the projected size and ethnic composition of the foreign population in the Netherlands.

The projections indicate that the non-western migrant population in particular will increase from its current level of 1.3 million to 2.3 million in the year 2015 (Van Wissen and De Beer, 2000).

### *Late fertility*

Fertility rates in Europe after the Second World War were still above what is known as replacement level (2.1 children per woman). In the Netherlands, the fertility rate remained high until the 1960s as a result of the baby boom generation, but since then began to decline dramatically. The number of large families fell sharply, and two children became the ideal family size. The Netherlands is not one of those countries which has extremely low below-replacement fertility, unlike, for example, various southern and eastern European countries. The

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Netherlands defines the migrant population of the Netherlands as inhabitants who have at least one parent who was born outside the Netherlands. Migrants who were born abroad themselves are so-called *first generation* migrants; those born in the Netherlands are *second generation* migrants.

average family size in Eastern Europe is currently 1.2 children and, in southern Europe, 1.3 children. The figure for Western Europe is currently 1.5. In recent years, the (period) total fertility rate has increased marginally in the Netherlands again (from 1.5 to 1.6 in the 1980s and early 1990s to the current level of 1.7), although the (cohort) total fertility rate shows that women are having an average of almost 1.8 children. The fact that the period figures are lower than the cohort figures indicates that people are postponing having children. The number of childless families is also on the increase triggered by rising levels of education with a greater likelihood to remain childless among the higher educated. According to data of Statistics Netherlands, the percentage of women in the Netherlands who remained childless notwithstanding their attempts to get pregnant increased from 3 to 4,4 per cent for the birth cohorts 1945-1969. The percentage of these birth cohorts who stayed voluntary childless, increased from 9 to 18 per cent (Steenhof and De Jong, 2000).

The timing of the first child is the result of a highly complex decision-making process in which the labour force participation of the woman, the decreased importance of parenthood, and the desire not to commit until one has sufficient economic security (a job, an income, a home) all play a part. Education has also been found to be a key reason why people postpone having children. The higher the level of education, the longer parenthood is postponed. Having children late is therefore not simply due to the availability, acceptance and proper use of effective contraception, but more particularly due to a number of changes in people's life-courses. More and more women are pursuing further education and are not entering the labour force until the age of twenty or later. They want to work for a few years before starting a family. All these factors have contributed to 29 being the average age at which women in the Netherlands currently have their first child. That age has increased considerably over the past few decades. Around 1970, it was five years lower, and nine out of ten first children were born before the mother was 30 years old. Soon this will occur in less than half of all cases. Nowadays, almost 11 per cent of women delay motherhood until age 35 or later. In 1970, this was true for only two per cent of women.

### *Summing up*

In summary, we may conclude that the demographic situation of the Netherlands is not that different from the rest of Europe, although its population growth rate and the stage it is at in the ageing process differ somewhat from the overall European pattern. In terms of the other demographic dimensions, the Netherlands is quite in keeping with the north-west region of Europe of which it is a part.

As regards fertility, the increasing labour force participation of women confronts more couples with the obstacles to combine employment and family care, inter alia resulting in delayed and low fertility. Family policies have a role to play in this regard. Before addressing this issue, public opinion and attitudes regarding family policy options will be discussed.

### **3. Opinions and attitudes regarding family policy: the micro perspective<sup>2</sup>**

#### *Perceived obstacles to family formation*

Having children is a decision, which often has a profound effect on people's life-courses, and a major impact on the way they lead their lives. Many people, and in particular women, tailor other spheres of life, such as their careers, to family formation. So the choices people make affect not just their own lives, but also society as a whole. This is why it is important that policymakers have an understanding of the obstacles people encounter and the preferences they have in terms of their own life-courses. In the MOAB (Opinions and Attitudes on Aspects of Population Issues) survey carried out by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) in 2000, the perceived pro's and con's of having (additional) children were asked. The responses suggested that the advantages of having (more) children revolved primarily around 'emotional' aspects of life, such as giving someone a sense of security, being appreciated and respected by people other than one's family, and fulfilling one's potential. The disadvantages were perceived primarily in terms of time and money (see *Table 1*). The general view was that when you have children, you end up sacrificing time which could otherwise have been spent on yourself, your interests and on your friends and acquaintances. Having sufficient financial resources was also seen as one of the problems associated with having a child. Many people realise that it is still difficult to combine parenthood with the economic independence of both partners: two-thirds of the respondents (aged 16-44) of this nationally representative survey believe that having children makes it more difficult for both parents to earn an income. Men and women, older and younger generations and people with different levels of education on the whole have the same views, except that men are more concerned (than women) about the financial consequences of having a child. For many women, forming or extending a family in particular conflicts with their own scope for personal development.

Having time for oneself is regarded as a bigger problem by the more highly educated who, in particular, believe that, once a child is born, there will be less time for their own interests and their social contacts. This is perceived as less of a problem by those with a low level of education. This is probably because, in practice, it is more common for highly educated women (than for less educated women) to remain in employment after the birth of a child and they would therefore have less time over and above their family responsibilities to meet friends or pursue other interests.

#### *General views on combining work and family responsibilities*

Over the past twenty years, the Netherlands has been confronted with a spectacular growth in the number of women combining paid work with motherhood. This increasing female labour force participation has, to a limited extent, gone hand in hand with increased male participation in household activities and childrearing, although there is as yet little evidence of men and women modifying their working week to enable an equal division of work and

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<sup>2</sup> This section is largely based on Schippers, 2002.

childcare. Despite the government's efforts to promote the so-called 'combination model' for the equal division of work and childrearing between partners, this appears—in its present format at least—to be a proposition that appeals to only a minority of people in the Netherlands. This is evident from people's views on working parents in general as well as from attitudes towards how they would prefer to share responsibility for work and childrearing within their own households. General views on the division of labour considered desirable for men and women are shown in *Table 2*.

Combining a full-time job with fatherhood was found to be the option most preferred by men. Combining fatherhood with a part-time job came in a good second. Men's and women's views on the male's input in the division of labour were not that dissimilar, but they did differ. On the whole, both men and women, but women even more so, felt that combining a full-time job with childrearing was the best option for men. And, last not but not least, a small percentage felt that men should stop working temporarily or stop working altogether when they have children.

Attitudes towards the female division of labour were different. Although the majority of the respondents felt that women should also combine work and parenthood, most preferred the idea of women combining motherhood with a part-time job. Few were in favour of women combining motherhood with a full-time job. The general preference was for women to stop working temporarily while the children were small. A small group of respondents favoured the idea of women ceasing work altogether when they had children. As far as the female division of labour was concerned, men were more inclined than women to take the view that it was desirable for women to combine a part-time job with their childrearing responsibilities. Some of the women agreed with this, but generally speaking, women were much more inclined than men to think that women should stop working temporarily or permanently when they have children. This suggests that men favour shared financial responsibility or on the whole attach more importance to financial values and less to childrearing, whereas women seem to actually give a higher priority to childrearing or are more inclined to see childrearing as their responsibility and financial responsibility as that of the man.

A higher level of education, results in a greater inclination to favour men combining part-time work with childrearing (*Table 3*). Those with a low level of education also had a considerably more traditional attitude towards the female division of labour: 46 per cent of them considered it desirable for women to stop working (temporarily) when they had children, compared to less than 20 per cent of those with at least Higher Vocational Training (HBO). The option for women to stop working permanently as soon as they have children seems to remain feasible only to those with a low level of education. Combining a full-time job with having children is generally considered undesirable for women.

In short most respondents feel that it is desirable for men and women to continue working during the phase in their life-course where there are children to be cared for. But how would they like to share responsibility for these tasks within their relationship? If we look at the answers given by men and women, three arrangements emerge as being roughly equally popular. Twenty-six per cent of

respondents preferred a combination of having children and both partners working part-time. A quarter of the respondents preferred a situation where the woman stopped working temporarily while the children were small. Twenty-one per cent of respondents preferred a situation where the man remained in full-time employment and the woman combined childrearing with a part-time job. The idea of both partners combining childrearing with a full-time job was much less popular; only five per cent of respondents were in favour of this. Nine per cent of respondents preferred the woman to stop working permanently when she had children, and nine per cent of respondents didn't want children at all. What the above outcomes show first and foremost is that only a tiny minority of people today take the view that a woman should stop working completely and concentrate on motherhood. A situation where the woman stops working temporarily while the children are small is generally considered a better option, although the majority of people feel that, in that situation, both partners should continue working. Interestingly enough, a relatively large proportion of respondents regarded a part-time job for both partners as being desirable, which contrasts sharply with the reality in which the overwhelming majority of men have a full-time job. *Figures 6a and 6b* show the answers given by men and women separately. What stands out immediately is that men had a slightly stronger preference for their partner to remain in employment than the women did: 56 per cent of men preferred a situation where both partners continued working when there were children, compared to 48 per cent of women.

Women, on the other hand, were considerably keener than men to stop working temporarily when they had small children (31 versus 18 per cent). This suggests that men have more emancipated ideas than women do. A more feasible explanation, however, is that women are more realistic when assessing the burden of combining work and motherhood and therefore more often choose to temporarily interrupt their careers when their children are small, which decision is influenced by the fact that in general men earn a higher income than women.

#### *Working, parental childcare and third-party childcare*

The decision to have children leads to all sorts of compromises as far as finances and ideas about childrearing and children are concerned. The MOAB survey examined the dilemmas that working parents find themselves confronted with within the children-work-finances triangle. What stands out clearly is the conflict between the time available for childrearing and work (*Table 4*). This 'time constraint' is clearly experienced by men as well as women. A third of men said it would actually be better for their families if the parents worked fewer hours, and four out of ten were even willing to work fewer hours if caring for their children became more time-consuming. Once again, men showed themselves willing to work fewer hours, but in reality, this rarely occurs.

Women tailor their working week predominantly to their parenting responsibilities and men tailor the length of their working week to their financial needs. Half the men said they would like to work fewer hours as soon as it was financially feasible, which raises the question of whether the financial obligations people take on are such that they have virtually eliminated any freedom of choice,



or whether there is a tendency to use financial arguments as an excuse. Women were much less inclined to raise finances as an argument and were particularly keen to work fewer hours as soon as childrearing became more time-consuming. Parenting responsibilities were another important consideration for women who were keen to work longer hours. Almost half the working mothers said they would like to work longer hours, but not until childrearing was less time-consuming.

Those with a high level of education were the most convinced that their families would benefit from the parents working fewer hours. The actual work situation of the partners would have a bearing on this. It is relatively common for highly educated parents to both have jobs and few of them were keen to work longer hours as soon as childrearing was less time-consuming. Those with low and intermediate levels of education were actually more inclined to agree with this view, which is probably due to their current work situation as well. It is relatively common for this group of women to either not work or to have small part-time jobs. And last but not least, young adults (aged 25-34) were more inclined than 35 to 44-year-olds to work fewer hours if childrearing became more time-consuming, finances permitting.

If both partners continue working after the birth of their child, then some form of childcare, whether formal or informal, is virtually always essential. Deciding on the level of third-party childcare, and who it is entrusted to, is a difficult dilemma for many families. Far and away the majority of parents believe that the best carer a child can have is one of its parents: about 80 per cent of respondents, irrespective of sex, age or level of education, took this view. Although this obviously doesn't stop people using childcare facilities, it does mean that, for many people, childcare provided by someone other than a family member has to remain limited to a few days a week. A third of Dutch people aged 16 to 44 believe that children who spend all week in a day nursery are more likely to develop problems in later life (see *Table 5*).

Even though third-party childcare is becoming more of an accepted and common practice, Dutch parents, to a large extent, still prefer looking after their own children, particularly when they are young.

As *Table 6* shows, there is a marked difference between the extent to which people with high and low levels of education avail themselves of third-party childcare in situations where both partners work. This is partly the result of differences in levels of employment. At present, 44 per cent of people with a low level of education do not use any form of childcare facility, compared to 16 per cent of people with a high level of education. The type of childcare facilities they use also differs. Highly educated people are more inclined to use paid forms of childcare, such as day nurseries, company crèches, paid childminders who come to their home, or a so-called 'guest family'. When it comes to making use of day nurseries, the differences are particularly marked. Almost 40 per cent of highly educated people had made use of them (compared to 13 and 6 per cent of people with intermediate and low levels of education respectively). Highly educated people were also far more likely to make use of paid childminders who come to their home.

People with a low level of education rely much more heavily on unpaid

childminding provided by relatives, which, to an extent, is due to a lack of affordable alternatives. But it is interesting to note that their expressed preference for unpaid childminding by relatives is lower than their actual use of this facility. It is also much more common for people with a higher level of education to combine formal and informal childcare. In no fewer than 90 per cent of cases, people with a low level of education used only one form of childcare facility, and in almost half of these cases it was childminding provided by a relative. The majority of highly educated people combine various forms of childcare.

Remery *et al* (2000) showed that the most common form of informal childcare is provided by grandparents. If the government's policy to promote labour force participation continues to be successful, then eventually it will be not just mothers, but increasingly grandmothers as well who remain economically active. There could well be a sharp fall in the future supply of informal childcare, most of which is currently provided by women who are either not in paid employment or who have only part-time jobs. The anticipated demographic developments show that there are few young adults to replace the older generations as providers of informal childcare. Although a pool of informal carers is available as a 'last resort' option, they don't offer any real prospects for structural changes in childcare practices. Given the selective use made of different types of childcare facilities, this is a situation which could put the rapidly growing group of less educated women who are combining work and motherhood in a particularly vulnerable (economic) position (Esveldt and Henkens, 2001).

#### *Differential needs and preferences*

As will have become clear, not all Dutch people need the same childcare facilities. It is therefore useful to examine the needs of men and women who find themselves in different work and childrearing situations.

Table 7 shows that childless women who work full-time anticipate the problems they would face if they were to combine motherhood with a full-time job. Their first priority, regarding policies, would be to have flexible working hours and scope for working part-time. But also, childcare facilities are extremely important to this group as well, more important than to, say, mothers who work part-time. This is obviously because some of the mothers in part-time employment would already have made satisfactory childcare arrangements.

Needless to say, the group of non-working mothers presents an entirely different picture. Their priorities revolve more around financial arrangements (in particular, carer's allowance schemes). They have no need for childcare facilities, although some of them would like to see the government reduce the cost of childcare. It is possible that the costs associated with childcare prevent them from taking on (small) part-time jobs. The fact that these women are interested in working is evident from their interest in work-related schemes, particularly opportunities for part-time work. As we saw earlier, some of the non-working mothers would welcome the chance of working part-time.

Mothers with part-time jobs indicated that their needs revolve around both finances and work leave arrangements. Since they are already in part-time employment, they are primarily interested in measures that provide additional

support in their existing situation, such as short-term carer's leave if their children become ill and a more extended period of leave for fathers when their children are born. It is interesting to note that mothers with part-time jobs are almost as interested in financial arrangements as non-working mothers are. This is, amongst other things, due to the fact that these are primarily women who have small part-time jobs. Three-quarters of the women with part-time jobs work fewer than 20 hours a week and especially they are more interested in financial arrangements than women with bigger part-time jobs. Many mothers in part-time employment are in favour of a carer's allowance scheme as well as an increase in child benefit. Their preference is understandable when one considers that a large proportion of mothers in part-time employment would prefer to stop working (temporarily) to raise their children. The most obvious reason why they do not do this is because it would be financially detrimental (or impossible). This partly explains their interest in a carer's allowance scheme, which would make it easier for them to decide to look after their children full-time.

Most men work full-time whether they have children or not. The category of childless men had more or less the same policy priorities as childless women in full-time work and they would therefore also appear to anticipate the situation of future parenthood. Although they too considered leave arrangements to be most important, the share (51 per cent) was clearly lower than amongst women (65 per cent). Working fathers regarded financial arrangements as the most important and childcare facilities as the least important. In this respect, they were no different from their partners, non-working women with children or women with children in part-time work. But they were more in favour of a parent-friendly tax regime than women were, and were less interested in a carer's allowance scheme.

A person's preference as regards provisions and facilities is determined primarily by whether or not they have children, and by the division of labour between partners. The financial aspects of parenthood don't seem to become apparent until one actually has children, and this is true for both men and women. Parents are more inclined to favour financial arrangements. This is particularly true in the case of non-working mothers and for the category their partners are mostly likely to occupy: fathers who work full-time and who are the sole wage-earners. But mothers with part-time jobs also show a strong preference for financial arrangements. This is because their jobs usually involve them working less than 20 hours a week. Mothers who work longer hours are slightly less interested in financial arrangements. People without children regard financial measures as a relatively low priority. They are more concerned with the practical problems they will face when they eventually decide to combine work and family, and they are particularly interested in work-related arrangements and increased childcare facilities. The latter is particularly true in the case of highly educated women. Single-income households have much less need for improved childcare facilities: after all, they opted for full-time motherhood.

#### **4. Family policy: shifting perspectives**

The Netherlands does not pursue an explicit population policy i.e. a

balanced set of policy measures which are aimed at direct intervention in demographic processes in order to achieve demographic targets. Indeed there is a widely shared reluctance regarding state intervention in the private domain. This being said, it is evident that hosts of policy measures have been introduced in the past which (may) have a bearing on demographic trends and individual demographic behaviour. As a rule these policies were introduced for and motivated by reasons which are external to demography, notably for health, wellbeing and economical purposes.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, these policies may have an impact on demographic behaviour. Although an explicit, interventionist population policy is not being pursued nor in place, it is widely recognised that policies are needed which address population-related social issues, and indeed a policy-mix of measures which may or should accommodate demographically induced social changes has developed in the past decades, which are generally labelled as "population-related policies".

In the following we will focus on family policies as a specific example of population-related policy. Fertility and family formation are key elements which shape the lives of individuals. Most people and in particular women, tailor other spheres of their life to these demographic elements. The decision whether or not to have children, as well as the timing of parenthood is a private matter for individual households, but having a family and children is an important factor which inter alia influences labour force participation (cf. Schippers, 2002; Beets, 1997; Groot and Maassen van den Brink, 1997 and Steenhof, 2000). These notions inspired the introduction of so-called "enabling" or "facilitating" policies in the 1970's and 1980's, meant to better facilitate parents to combine work and family care. These policies originated in the framework of equal opportunities policy, since particularly women were confronted with obstacles stemming from the combination of work and family life. Since the mid-1980's the policy perspective gradually shifted to promote economic independence and hence to increase labour force participation, notably of women (cf. Van Nimwegen *et al.*, 2002).

The policy perspective was not wholly consistent and reflected the continuing dilemma of economic independence on the one hand, and family care (both for children and increasingly also for the elderly) on the other. To understand the work-care dilemma in the Netherlands, one should recognise that an important feature of Dutch society is that couples have a strong tradition in taking care of their children themselves. The bourgeois-type family model with a working father and a caring mother has long been the traditional norm with a subsequent reluctance to opt for childcare facilities, which were to a large degree also lacking in our country until rather recently. In the 1990's new policies regarding parental leave and maternity leave were introduced, expanding the possibilities for parents to combine work and family. Increasing female labour force participation resulted in a rising need for childcare facilities, which were

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<sup>3</sup> A case in point in the field of family policy was the introduction of financial support to families: the child benefit system. This policy was and still is only motivated as a means to alleviate the financial burden of families with children and not to promote specific fertility behaviour (cf. Esveldt and Van Nimwegen, 1992).

considerably extended since the mid 1980's. Until that time, childcare was perceived to be the responsibility of parents, and childcare facilities were predominantly meant as "emergency" provisions. From the 1980's onwards, government started to perceive childcare as a shared responsibility of the state, the social partners (employers and trade unions) and the parents. From 1996 childcare policy was decentralised to local government. Also the costs of childcare facilities are increasingly shared by all parties involved, which resulted in a rather complex set of arrangements (cf. Van Nimwegen *et al.*, 2002). As of 2004 a new law on childcare will become effective, which gives parents more freedom of choice and direct access to government subsidies for childcare. Also childcare facilities, which almost doubled in the past 4 years, will be further increased under the new law.

In the 1990's the so-called "combination scenario" became a leading policy perspective, implying that both parents should have the opportunity to work and the care. In practise, this scenario implies that mothers should participate more on the labour market while fathers should work less (and intensify care). New laws came into force to promote the combination scenario, inter alia to further expand childcare facilities. A new balance between employment, family care and economic independence involving both parents, is aimed at. In this context it is important to note a growing policy concern for so-called late fertility. Compared with other countries women in the Netherlands have their children late. This late fertility gives rise to concern since a high age at first childbirth results in higher numbers of premature births and new-borns with low birth weight and congenital defects. Also the decline of early infant mortality has stagnated recently. Until gynaecologists started to point out its adverse medical implications, delayed parenthood was generally regarded as one of the positive outcomes of equal opportunities and labour market policies. After all, people without children have fewer restrictions to achieve personal development and economic independence while postponing childbirth provides couples with more options to prepare for parenthood (cf. Beets *et al.*, 2000).

#### *The life course perspective in family policy*

The combination-scenario focuses at an equal division of work and care between the partners in a couple. As such it is a typical example of what has been labelled as "quantitative individualism" i.e. a policy perspective which is aimed at *equality* of all citizens (cf. Schnabel, 2001).

More recently the policy perspective is changing into the general direction of so-called "qualitative individualism" stressing the needs for *freedom* of decision making by citizens to shape their lives. The latter is reflected in a life course approach to family policy which is more individually targeted and customised.

From a life course perspective a "standard biography" of learning — working/caring/ retirement— was predominant until the 1950's and 1960's. These three phases in the life course were well defined, clearly delineated and had a clear-cut gender distinction. During the first phase children were reared and educated, boys different from girls; in the second phase men exclusively focused

on paid work and women on unpaid care; dual earners/carers were scarce; and in the third phase men retired from work while women continued with care.

During the last quarter of the past century the destandardisation of the life course set in, due to ongoing individualisation, rising labour force participation of women, rising education and other socio-cultural and structural changes. In the course of this process the standard biography gave way to the "choice biography", with increased individual freedom and the wish to take one's life in one's own hand and make individual choices regarding life priorities such as a family and a career. Also the increased possibilities to implement the individually motivated choices led to a destandardisation of the life course, which is characterised by a combination of activities in each phase instead of a concentration on one single activity. This is most evident in the middle phase of the life course in which people are combining work, care and education. This phase is also referred to as the "rush hour" phase in the life course.

What are the implications of a destandardisation of the life course for family policy? In general, citizens have an increasing need for policy measures which:

- offer freedom of choice in implementing individual preferences in the life course, and
- which support the combination of activities throughout the life course, as well as
- which allow for flexibility and transitions.

As regards measures which support individual preferences, a retreat from uniform regulations is most feasible. Life course oriented policies should then enable a balance between individual and collective interests, such as higher labour force participation throughout the entire life course (also needed in view of population ageing), more possibility for unpaid care, especially during the rush hour phase in the life course, improved use of human capital in the broadest sense and a larger span of control for all citizens. Increased freedom of choice, implies more customised and individually targeted policies (a "cafeteria-system") where policies are demand-driven instead of supply-driven.

As regards the combination of activities, policies which enable a more even distribution of needed resources (time and financial) throughout the entire life course are called for. Childcare and parental leave facilities and more flexible work schedules are already in place but need to be harmonised and integrated. In addition to the care for children, facilities to care for the elderly, involving both professional care as well as informal care should be expanded. Both short-term and long-term leave schemes for carers are needed; a voucher system for care leave to be used throughout the lifecourse is being developed.

Policies which enable smoother transitions between work, education and care throughout the life course include life long learning also for those outside the labour market, re-entry on the labour market and higher labour force participation of the elderly (SZW, 2002).

It is important to note that the life course perspective on (family) policy is currently adhered to by the government of the Netherlands, and it is to be

expected that this will remain a dominant feature of Dutch policy.

## **5. Conclusion and discussion**

Demographic developments are part and parcel of social change. From a policy point of view the close interrelations of population and social dynamics imply that policy intervention is not an easy undertaking.

In highly developed open societies, direct intervention in population processes through population policies in the strict sense which are aimed at demographic targets, are neither feasible nor desirable. But policies which take demographic trends and demographically induced social issues into account and which are aimed to accommodate the impacts of demographic changes, are both feasible and desirable. Family policy is a case in point of this so-called population-related policy, as is illustrated in this paper.

As regards the emerging concerns in some countries, such as Japan, about sustained (extremely) low fertility, and the inclination of politicians and policymakers to introduce pro-natalist policies to increase fertility, several issues need to be taken into account. The first is that in modern society low fertility usually is the outcome of a rational decision of individuals and couples, which should be respected. Trying to influence these individual decisions, solely for macro-economic or demographic reasons, will not convince couples to change their behaviour. However, if low fertility is the result of limitations experienced by individuals or couples to realise their private fertility intentions, there is scope for a more family friendly policy, attuned to the needs of the population. The outcome of these policies MAY be that fertility will increase; in our view, this should however NOT be the main motivation or goal of these policies. The second issue is that low fertility as such may eventually lead to a declining population (leaving aside migration and mortality). A declining and ageing population will of course create an enormous challenge to society, but this challenge can and should be addressed, and will have to be addressed since even with truly family friendly policies which may offset fertility decline to some extent, a full recovery of fertility to, say, replacement level, is neither realistic nor even to be hoped for in our view, given the current and projected world population trends.

With respect to fertility and the family several interrelated trends stand out in the Netherlands, including low and late fertility, an increasing variety in living arrangements, rising female labour force participation rates and rising educational levels. These trends have resulted in major changes in the life course of individuals and couples where the post-war "standard" biography gradually eroded and gave way to more variation and the event of the "choice" biography reflecting more individual freedom.

To be effective and sustainable, family policies should accommodate these shifts and should be tailored to an increasing extent to the individual needs and preferences of citizens. This emerging shift from standardised policy to more individually targeted and customised policies which address the full range of the lifecycle and which are not restricted to the family formation phase alone, was

described in the paper. Microlevel data on opinions and attitudes regarding fertility and family issues taken from a national representative survey in the Netherlands, indicate a support for these new family policies. In the broader context of an ageing society with sustained low fertility and increasing variation in living arrangements, the key issue which should be addressed by lifecourse-proof family policy is the care-work-education jigsaw puzzle which confronts the citizens of today. This puzzle is not a new one. However, the individual pieces are different from yesterday and will continue to change.



**Table 1. Percentage of people (aged 16-44) who believe certain issues would become easier or more difficult if they had (more) children, 2000 (%)**

N=752	easier	No difference	more difficult
Having time for yourself and your interests	2	16	82
Living harmoniously with your partner	10	68	22
Giving someone a sense of security	33	62	5
Being appreciated and respected by people other than your family	15	79	7
Being able to spend enough time with friends and acquaintances	2	22	76
Having enough money	2	27	71
Achieving your own potential	6	73	21
The husband and wife both being able to earn their own independent incomes	2	32	66

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

**Table 2. Attitudes of men and women aged 16-44 towards division of labour and childrearing tasks for men and for women, 2000 (%)**

	<i>Preferred division of labour for men</i>			<i>Preferred division of labour for women</i>		
	Opinion of:			Opinion of:		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Employed, no children	15	9	12	12	8	10
Full-time job with child(ren)	46	56	51	11	5	8
Part-time job with child(ren)	29	31	30	51	45	48
Temporarily non-working, with child	7	3	5	18	31	25
Non-working, with child	2	1	2	8	10	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	378	374	752	378	374	752

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

**Table 3. Attitudes of the Dutch (aged 16-44) towards division of labour and childrearing tasks for men and women, by level of education, 2000 (%)**

	Preferred division of labour for men:				Preferred division of labour for women:			
	Low	Inter-mediate	High	Total	Low	Inter-mediate	High	Total
Non-working, with child	3	3	0	2	21	7	4	9
Temporarily non-working, with child	6	4	5	5	25	28	15	25
Part-time job with child(ren)	19	30	42	30	37	50	55	48
Full-time job with child(ren)	62	53	37	51	8	8	10	8
Employed, no children	11	11	16	12	11	8	16	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	126	407	178	711	126	407	178	711
Missing				41				41

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

**Table 4. Percentage of working parents aged 16-44, by sex, age and level of education, who agree with the following statements, 2000 (%)**

	Man	Woman	25-34	35-44	Low	Inter-mediate	High	Total
	It would actually be better for our family if we worked fewer hours	33	22	26	29	25	25	42
As soon as it is financially feasible, I would like to work fewer hours outside the home	49	17	34	34	27	32	46	34
As soon as raising the children becomes more time-consuming, I would like to work fewer hours outside the home	42	49	43	42	37	46	44	44
As soon as raising the children becomes less time-consuming, I would like to work more hours outside the home	18	46	32	31	33	36	16	31
N	193	156	74	271	57	204	69	349

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

**Table 5. Percentage of men and women aged 16 to 44 who agree or disagree with the following statements, 2000 (%)**

	Agree		Disagree	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Children who spend all week in a day nursery are more likely to develop problems in later life	36	33	20	25
The best carers a child can have are its own parents	81	76	4	6

N=752

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

**Table 6. Percentage<sup>a</sup> of parents who use, or have ever used, some form of childcare facility, 2000 (%)**

	Low (N=51)	Level of education		Total (N=254)
		Inter- mediate (N=151)	High (N=52)	
- day nursery	6	13	39	16
- company crèche	1	1	3	1
- paid childminder who comes to the home	5	8	24	10
- 'guest families'/'guest parents'/paid childminders	11	18	26	18
- taking turns looking after other people's children	5	8	11	8
- unpaid childminding done by a family member	29	39	39	37
- other <sup>b</sup>	10	9	9	9
- do not use/have not used	44	33	16	32

<sup>a</sup> The total percentage is greater than 100 because respondents were allowed to mention more than one type of childcare facility.

<sup>b</sup> After-school and holiday childcare centres, one's own partner, other types of childcare facilities.

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

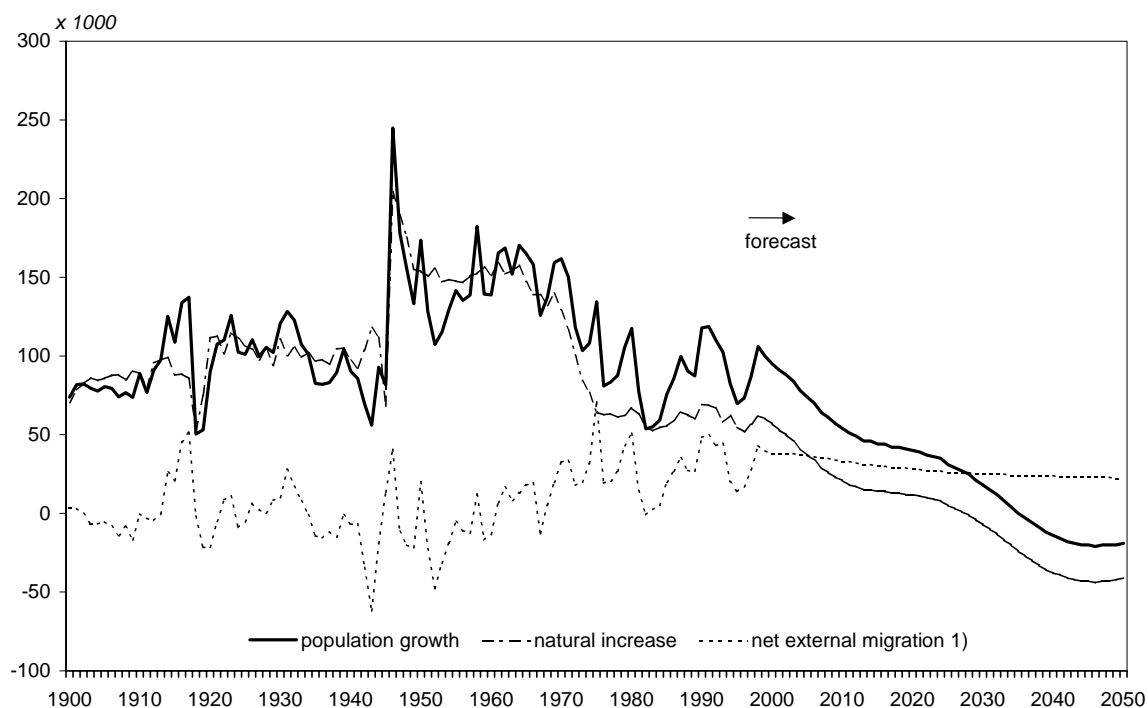
**Table 7. Preferences of men and women aged 16-44 with regard to a new enabling policy for parents as compared with the current work and family situation, 2000 (%)<sup>a</sup>**

	Men		Women	
	Full-time; No children	Full-time; With children	Non-working; No children	Part-time; With children
Measures relating to terms of employment:				
- Better parental leave for working mothers than is currently available	10	8	22	12
- More opportunities for parents to work part-time	24	16	27	13
- Flexi-time facilities for working parents with school-age children	21	17	24	12
- Ten days' paid leave for fathers when their child is born, instead of the current two days	22	13	33	16
- A short period of career's leave if children become ill	11	12	14	22
- An extended period of career's leave if children become ill	1	13	3	14
Total Work	51	52	56	62
Measures relating to childcare facilities:				
- More childcare facilities for children aged 0-4	27	6	9	6
- Cheaper childcare facilities for children aged 0-4	15	6	10	9
- More childcare facilities for children before and after school hours, and during school holidays (After-school and holiday childcare centres)	5	6	8	4
- Cheaper childcare facilities for children before and after school hours, and during school holidays (After-school and holiday childcare centres)	1	5	6	6
Total Childcare	29	17	22	19
Measures relating to the financial costs of having children:				
- Lower income tax for people with children	14	23	18	13
- Increasing the Child Allowance by NLG 150 per child per month (ie. almost doubling it)	6	29	7	29
- A considerable lowering of the cost of education	23	21	18	17
- A 'career's allowance' of NLG 600 per month for parents who look after their children full-time	15	24	1	27
Total Money	36	62	26	56

<sup>a</sup> The table only includes the most important ways of combining work and childbearing. The following categories have been omitted for women: full-time with children; part-time, no children; and non-working, no children. The following categories have been omitted for men: part-time with children and part-time, no children; and non-working, with children.

Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

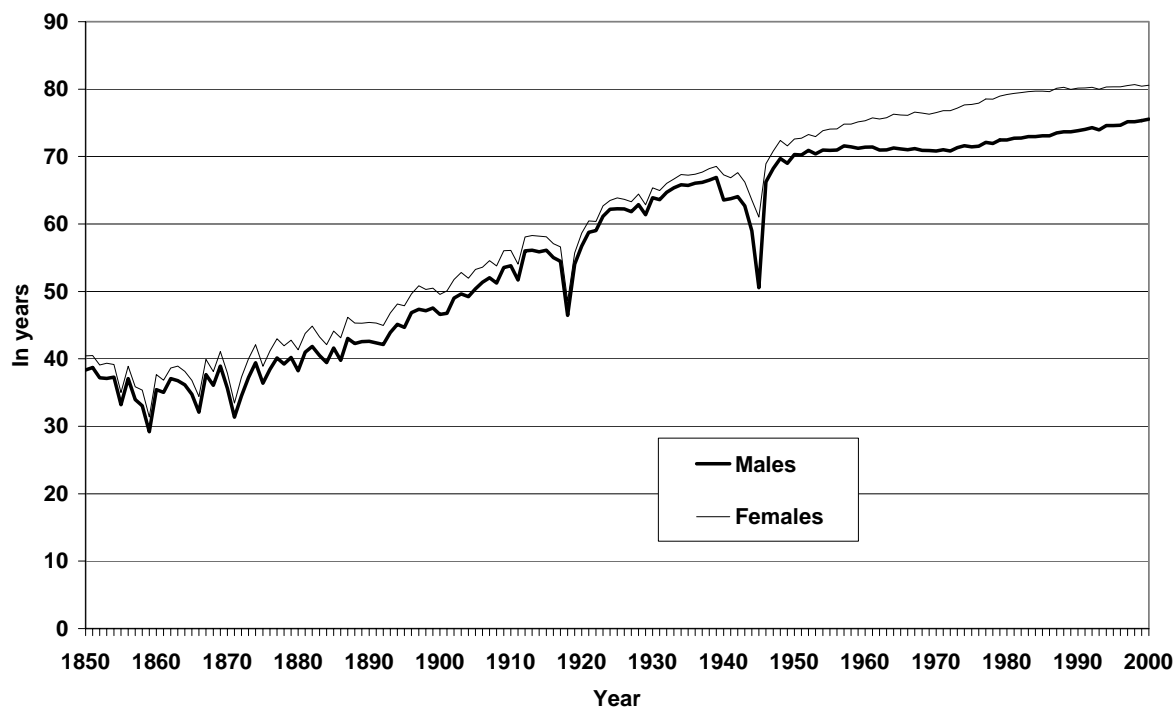
**Figure 1. Population growth in the Netherlands by natural increase and migration, 1900-2050**



1) Including net administrative corrections.

Source: Van Nimwegen and Beets, 2000.

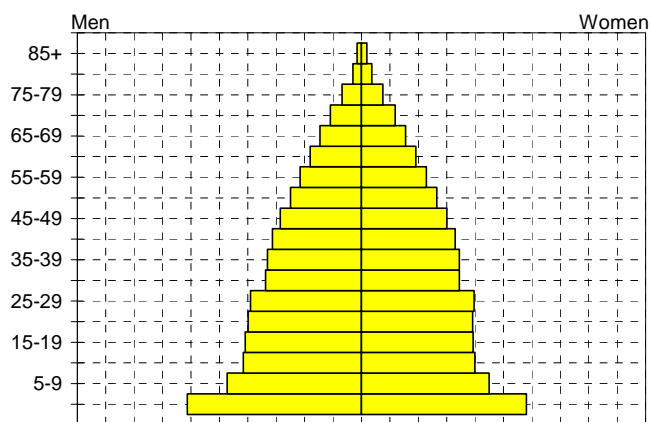
**Figure 2. Expectation of life at birth, 1850-2000**



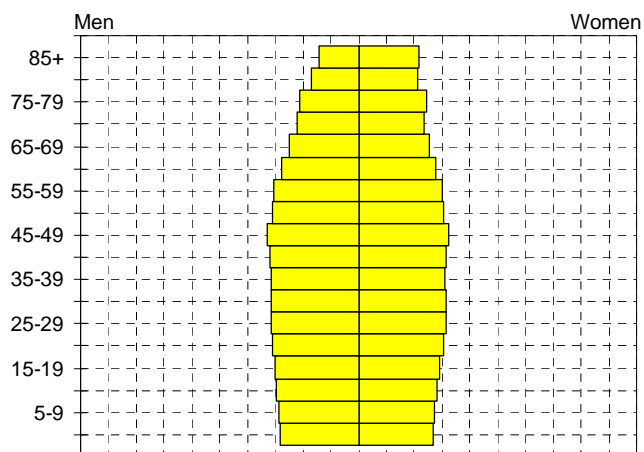
Source: Van Poppel and Ekamper, 1999.

**Figure 3. Population of the Netherlands by age and sex**

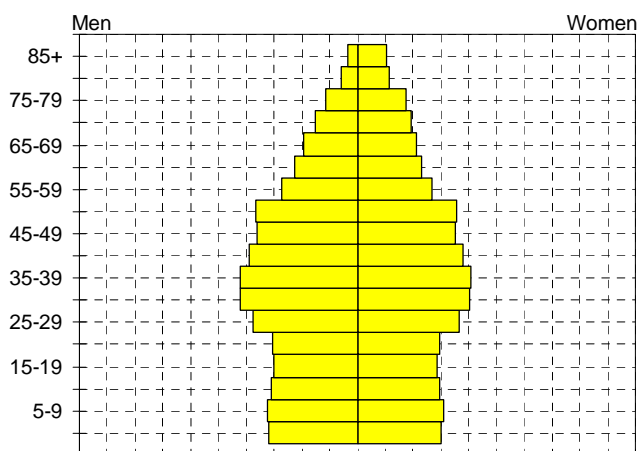
Netherlands 1950



Netherlands 2000

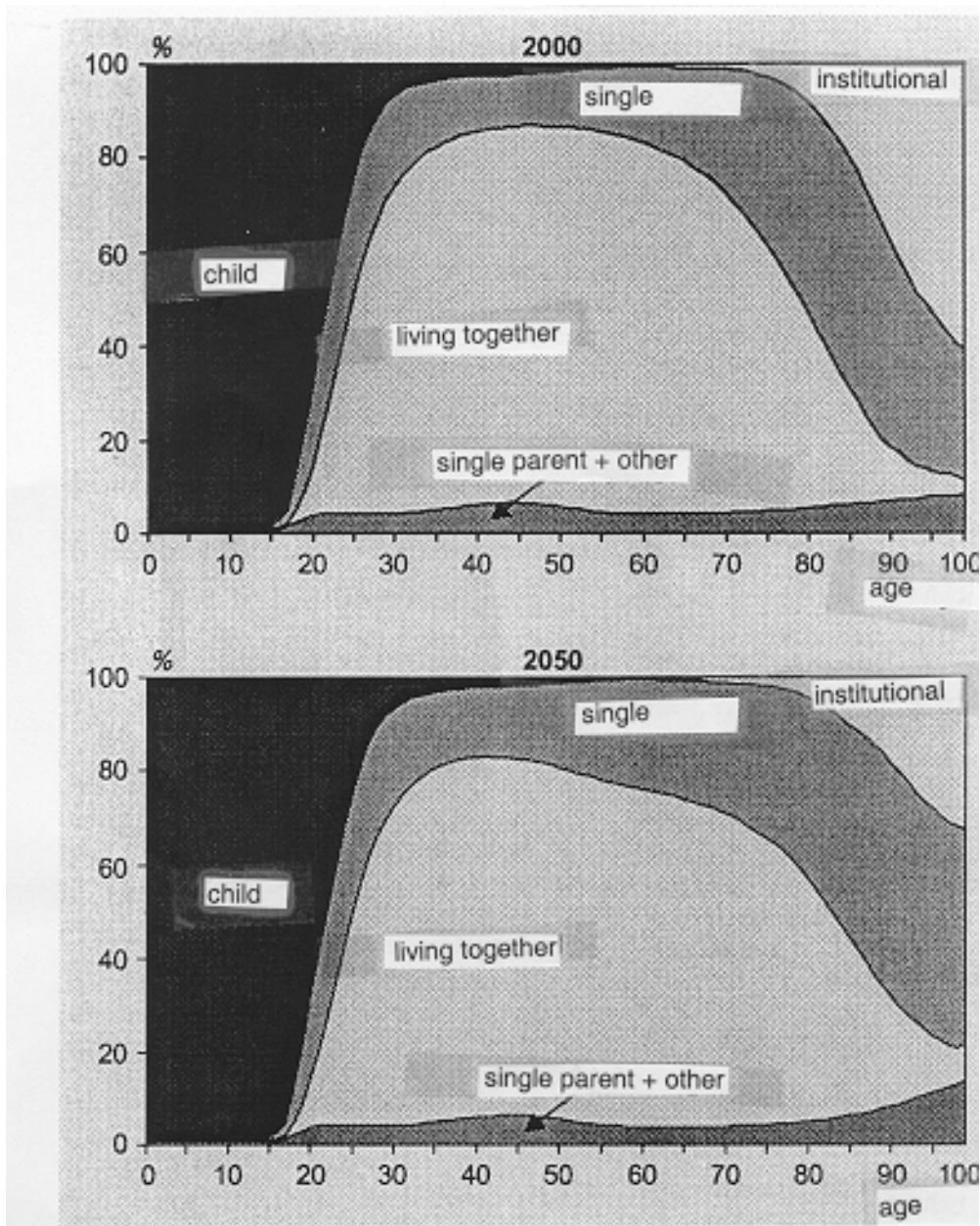


Netherlands 2050



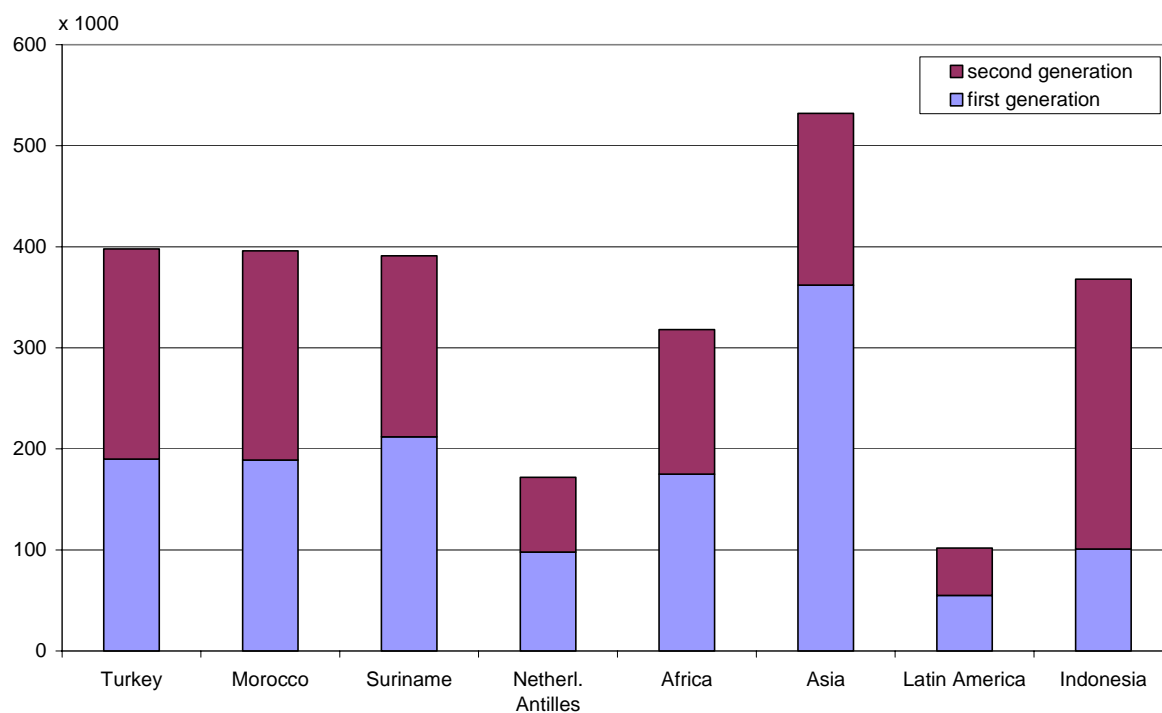
Source: NCBS.

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of the population by household position



Source: De Jong, 2001.

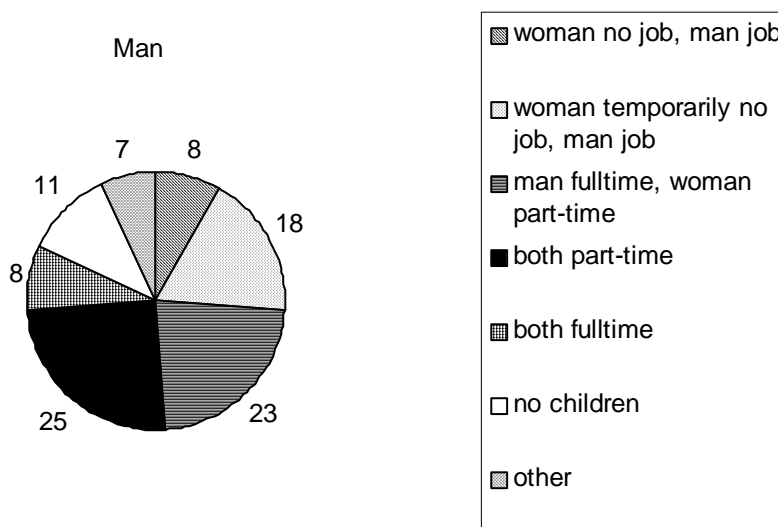
**Figure 5. Number of foreigners in 2015**



Source: Van Wissen and De Beer, 2000.

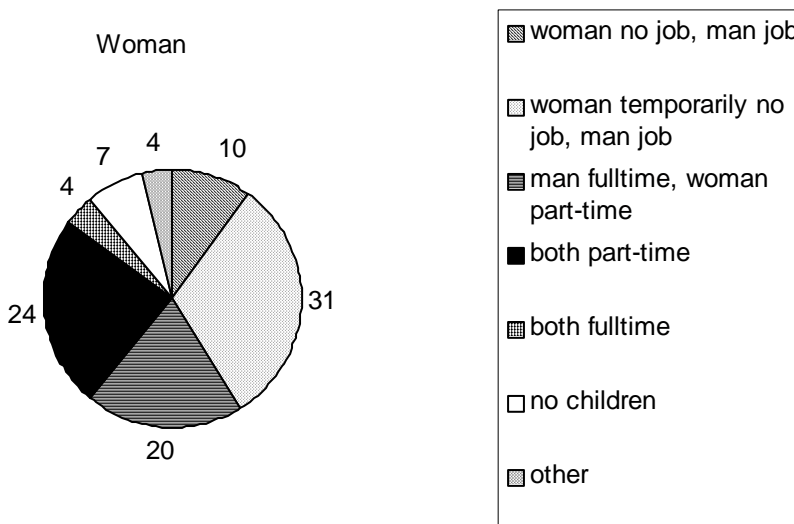


**Figure 6a. Male attitudes towards the way partners aged 16-44 should share responsibility for paid work and childcare, 2000 (%)**



Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

**Figure 6b. Female attitudes towards the way partners aged 16-44 should share responsibility for paid work and childcare, 2000 (%)**



Source: NIDI-MOAB 2000.

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