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SPECIAL ISSUE



Photo: Pierre Amerlynck

Dementia

The flipside of a long life

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For many people dementia is one of the most frightening prospects of growing older. As the chance of dementia increases strongly with age, and as our population is ageing rapidly, more and more people are set to suffer from this disease. A demographic epidemiological study has examined the expected years of life lived with dementia among different groups of people.

Dementia is a disease that generally occurs at old age. And as the average life expectancy is increasing, more and more people will suffer from some kind of dementia at some point in their lives. Little is known about the direct cause of cognitive decline in old age, and medication to combat the decline in cognitive ability still leaves much to be desired. A number of epidemiological studies have, however, studied the effect of risk factors on dementia, but their results vary. The most important risk factors for physical and mental health are smoking, overweight or obesity, and level of education. A measure often used in demography is life expectancy. This article compares different groups of people in terms of the expected years of life lived with, or without, dementia.

The data and risk factors

The Health and Retirement Survey (HRS), an American survey which started in 1992, follows the state of health of a representative group of Americans once every two years. The research on dementia used HRS data about white American men and women aged 55 years and over. The sample included 17,342 people (7,763 men and 9,579 women) who had taken part in the HRS at least twice between 1992 and 2004. The answers given by respondents during their first interview were used to analyse the effect of risk factors. Overweight and obesity were measured using the Body Mass Index ($BMI = kg/m^2$), which identifies five classes, from low normal weight to severe obesity. With respect to smoking, respondents were categorised as people



Photo: www.neuroprotectivelifestyle.com

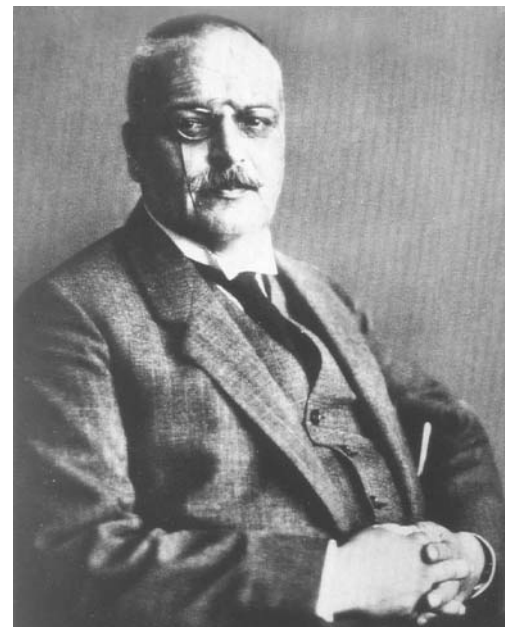


Photo: www.helpdirect.org

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW for COGNITIVE STATUS (TICS)

The Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status (TICS) is commonly used to measure cognitive ability. During the interview, respondents are asked 35 questions to test such things as the ability to remember words, to repeatedly subtract by the number 7, to count backwards from 20 to 0 and to name the day of the week and the date. People who scored at most eight correct answers are considered to be severely cognitively impaired, which we here referred to as dementia.

Some respondents are not willing, or not able to answer the questions themselves. In these cases, a proxy is interviewed. If the proxy respondent says the person in question suffers from memory loss, this person is classified as having dementia.

who had never smoked, those who had stopped smoking and current smokers. Education was divided into three categories: low, medium and high level of education.

Dementia

Dementia is a generic term for conditions with a variety of causes. The term refers to an impairment of cognitive brain functions. All illnesses, traumas, cases of poisoning or nutritional deficiencies that affect the brain can result in dementia. Dementia is often used to refer to senility or senile dementia, the main cause of which is old age, and it is precisely because of the ageing process that senile dementia takes on many forms and has many causes – it is hard to identify a clear, single cause. Genetic and cardiovascular risk factors heighten the risk of premature dementia.

People are diagnosed as suffering from dementia if a loss of cognitive brain function is measured. The measure used here is based on 35 questions asked to test people's memory, known as the Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status, (TICS for short; see Box). This measure is commonly used in the literature on dementia and is based on mini-mental state examination, MMSE. TICS is a sensitive screening test rather than a clinical-diagnostic

test. People who gave eight correct answers, or less, were defined as being cognitively impaired, which we will here refer to as having dementia.

Likelihood of dementia

The chance of becoming demented in middle age is very small. An average man aged 55, for example, will have an annual 0.2 percent chance of becoming demented at that age. This probability does, however, increase exponentially every year. An 80-year-old man will therefore have a 1.5 percent probability, and a 95-year-old man a 4.4 percent probability of becoming demented. The annual probability of becoming demented is more or less the same for men and women, yet more women suffer from dementia than men as they live longer, on average. For 55-year-old women, the odds of ever becoming demented is 36 percent, compared to 23 percent for men aged 55.

Risk factors

The table demonstrates how the probability of becoming demented for men and women differ by risk factors. The results show that overweight and obesity do not affect the chance of dementia. Smoking slightly raises the probability of becoming demented, but the effect is not significant among men. Level of education has a very strong influence. Highly educated men have a 65 percent smaller chance of becoming demented than men with a low level of education; women have a 48 percent smaller chance. Another interesting result are the differences in mortality among people with dementia. Highly educated people with dementia are more likely to die than demented people with a low level of education.

Expected years of life lived with dementia

In order to calculate the expected years of life with dementia, we need information about the chances of dementia as well as mortality figures for both healthy and demented people. All these transitions are summarised in a so-called multistate model, which is used to calculate duration of life in healthy condition and in a

Relative risks of becoming demented and of dying by risk factor, compared with the reference category (Ref.)

	Relative risk of dementia		Relative risk of dying having dementia	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Low normal weight	1.17	1.05	1.08	0.93
Normal weight (Ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Overweight	0.84	0.91	0.84	0.84
Mildly obese	0.98	0.98	0.94	1.16
Severely obese	0.84	1.03	0.99	1.07
Never smoked (Ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Stopped smoking	0.97	0.99	1.32	1.31
Currently smoking	1.26	1.28	1.39	1.39
Low education (Ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Medium education	0.50	0.70	1.12	1.26
High education	0.35	0.52	1.35	1.24

Values in bold are significant at p<0.05

demented state. According to the multistate model, 55-year-old men live an average of 1.7 years with dementia and women an average of 2.7 years. Figure 1 presents the expected number of years lived with dementia for men and women per risk factor. The figures clearly show the opposite effects of smoking and education. Smokers and ex-smokers live somewhat shorter with dementia than non-smokers (0.7 years for men; 0.9 years for women), simply because their total life expectancy is considerably shorter. The opposite was found for level of education: among both men and women a high level of education shortens the number of years of life lived with dementia while at the same time lengthening their total life expectancy by 1.9 years.

Cognitive reserve

The results presented here show that a higher level of education shortens both the absolute and the relative life expectancy with dementia. This outcome confirms the cognitive reserve theory, which states that the better educated become demented at a more advanced age, but that they die sooner once demented. The idea behind the theory is that more highly educated people have more cognitive reserves and are therefore better able to delay apparent cognitive impairment and memory loss. As soon as dementia is detected for these people, the stage of cognitive impairment is more advanced and they are likely to die earlier.

To conclude

As dementia is generally a disease of old age and as the average life expectancy is increasing, more and more people will suffer from dementia at some point in their lives. The prevalence of dementia in the Netherlands is expected to increase by 45 percent in the coming 20 years, primarily as a result of population ageing. To this day, the causes of a loss of memory when people grow older are little understood and the development of medication to prevent or fight dementia is still in its infancy. The relationship between a healthy lifestyle and dementia can be paradoxical as factors that extend life can at the same time raise the chance of ever becoming demented. The odds that women will suffer from dementia at some point in their lives are considerably higher than for men simply because women live longer. Conversely, on average smokers live fewer years of life with dementia because they die of smoking at a younger age. Most interesting is the effect of education. The results presented here confirm the cognitive reserve theory, which states that the better educated become demented at a more advanced age, but that once they have dementia, they die earlier. They therefore live fewer years of life with dementia. In a rapidly ageing society in which dementia is becoming more and more prevalent, the fact that the average level of education is rising could offer some solace.

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Figure 1. Expected years of life with and without dementia for men aged 55, by risk factor

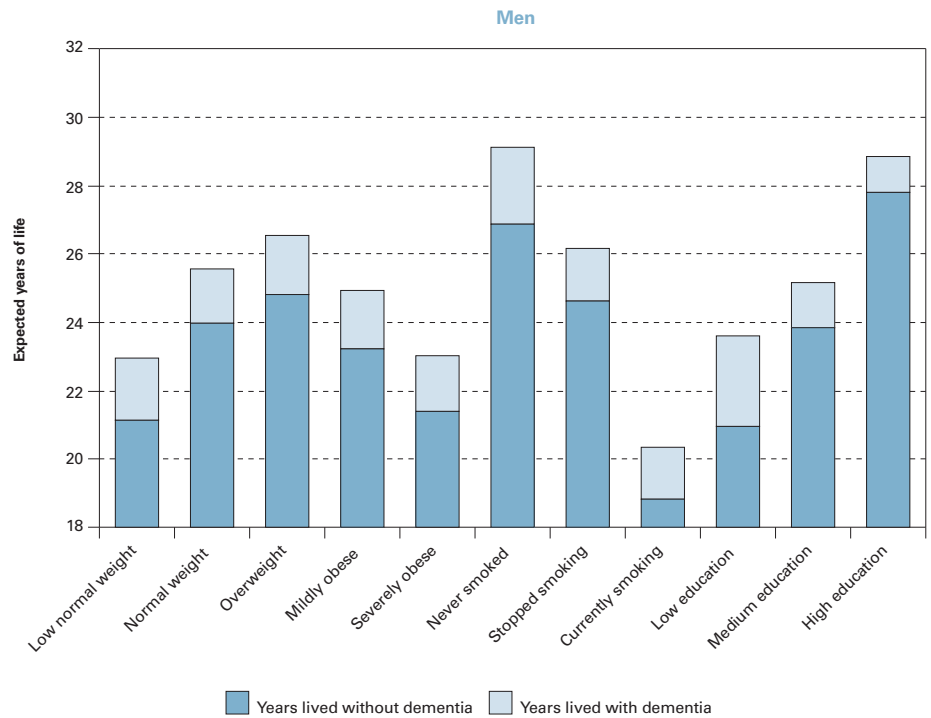
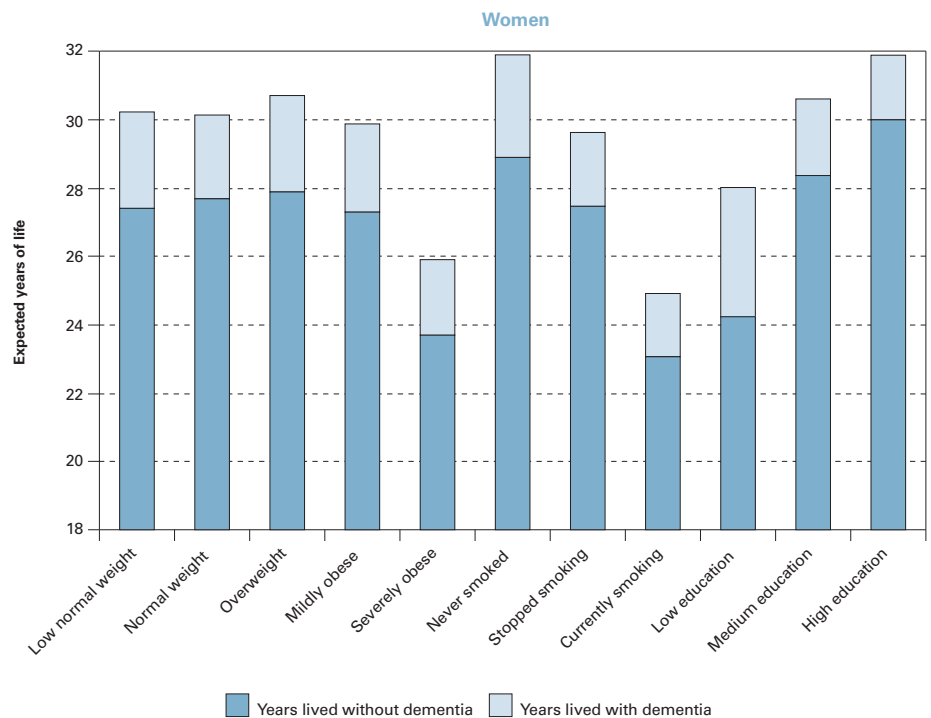


Figure 2. Expected years of life with and without dementia for women aged 55, by risk factor



This article was first published in Dutch in *Demos* 24(10), pp. 1-3, titled 'Dementie: keerzijde van een lang leven'.

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NETHERLANDS INTERDISCIPLINARY DEMOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE

NIDI is the national demographic institute of the Netherlands. Founded in 1970, NIDI became affiliated to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in 2003 and is the only social science institute of the Academy. Firmly rooted in science and society NIDI draws inspiration from the interplay of demographic and social issues and strives for scientific excellence.

On being Dutch *and* Muslim

Descendants of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants speak out about identity and religion

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It's quite possible for descendants of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants (i.e. the Second Generation) to combine strong feelings of belonging to different social groups, such as feeling 'Amsterdammer', 'Rotterdammer', 'Dutch' and Muslim. A fair percentage of the Second Generation does not practise their religion by praying and are of the opinion that religion should play no role, or only a minor one, in today's society and in politics. Many find the use of religious symbols in schools acceptable, but only a minority say that Muslim women should wear a head scarf outside the home.



Photo: www.swc.hu

the Melting Pot' by Glazer and Moynihan (1963). Differences in identity and orientations continue to exist, and the Netherlands is no exception. This may, however, be accompanied by occasional clashes and by a shift in socio-economic and political relations. Group formation is part and parcel of any society, but in the future, group membership may be determined less by ethnicity because of integration, assimilation and mixed marriages. Individuals make choices during the course of their lives, influenced by the context and groups in which they live. These choices could result in them crossing physical, social and psychological group boundaries and indentifying with other existing groups. They could, alternatively, give rise to 'new social groups' where people's Turkish or Moroccan roots play less of a role. In order to understand group processes and interactions (including the integration of immigrants), individual decision-making needs to be studied over the life course, including the reasons why and how changes take place. The philosophical perspective that propagates this life course view is known as 'Methodological Individualism' (Coleman).

Muslim and Dutchman?

The process of acculturation has not yet reached a stage where we can expect newspaper stories in the near future reporting that during a soccer match between Ajax (Amsterdam) and Feyenoord (Rotterdam), Ajax supporters of Turkish descent got into a scuffle with Feyenoord supporters of Turkish descent. We cannot rule out, however, that such a situation could arise in the future. A study carried out in Amsterdam and Rotterdam (TIES) has shown that many second-generation Turks and Moroccans have a strong affinity with other identities than their Moroccan or Turkish descent or their Muslim identity (see Box).

Table 1 shows that almost 80 percent of the second generation have a strong sense of identity with other Turks or Moroccans. Among second-generation Turks, 14 percent identify themselves with Kurds and 55 percent of respondents of Moroccan descent identify themselves with Berbers (data not shown). The latter reflect descent-group membership of their parents in the country of origin. About 20 percent of the Turkish population is Kurd and about 40 percent of the population of Morocco

IDENTITY

In the TIES (The Integration of the Second Generation in Europe) project, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they identified with various social groups in their immediate and wider environment. They were able to choose from six degrees of identification (none at all, very weak, weak, average, strong, very strong). Table 1 summarises the findings based on no more than three degrees – the category 'weak' includes respondents who felt no affinity whatsoever with a particular identity. In a similar way the response is summarised on questions pertaining to the data in tables 2 and 4. The data in the tables have not been broken down by sex as the differences between men and women were negligible.

This article addresses the degree to which 18 to 35 year old second-generation Turks and Moroccans, born in the Netherlands, identify with their parent's descent group, with other groups in the Dutch society, and with religion. Data come from a multi-country survey project on the integration of the Second Generation in Europe (TIES). In the period 2006-2008, 1,000 to 1,500 respondents were interviewed in two main cities in eight European countries.

In recent decades Europe has become ever more diverse in terms of language, socio-political history, culture, religious affiliation, norms and values as immigrants, in particular those from Turkey and Morocco, brought with them their socio-cultural heritage. And from this heritage, people derive their identity as members of a social group. In the case of Turks and Moroccans, Islam-based rules form part of their heritage. The growing share of Muslims in the populations of most European countries is a new phenomenon in the history of Europe. As a rule, contact between the native inhabitants of a country and newcomers tends to result, with time, in a rapprochement of the cultural orientations and values of both parties. This acculturation process does not mean that differences between groups in society disappear altogether. The contrary could even be said to be true, as shown in the classic work 'Beyond

are Berbers. A similarly high percentage (80 percent) of Native Dutch people, the comparison group, says they have a strong sense of affiliation with the feeling of being a Dutch. This comparison group are persons in the same age range (18-35 years old) and comprise of descendants of Dutch ancestry as well as third-generation descendants of immigrants from various other countries, including former Dutch colonies.

More than two thirds of the Second Generation identify strongly with their home town – be it Amsterdam or Rotterdam. Much depends on how the figures are interpreted and where the emphasis is placed, because one in five respondents among second-generation Turks and Moroccans felt no, or only a weak sense of being Dutch. At the same time, almost half of the second-generation Moroccans say they also identify strongly with others based on their Dutch nationality. This is less so among second-generation Turks. It is commonly believed that the less familiar something is, the less involved people feel. Not surprisingly, a strong identification with feelings of being a ‘European’ occurs less often. About one third of the Second Generation strongly identifies with being ‘European’, somewhat less often than among the Native Dutch.

Second-generation Turks and Moroccans differ most from the Native Dutch in terms of their affiliation with religion. About 80 percent of the second generation identify strongly with Islam compared with no more than 21 percent of the Native Dutch who have a similar identification with Christianity. Overall, Table 1 shows that having ‘multiple identities’ is the rule rather than the exception.

The figures in Table 2, panel A, show that the majority of the Second Generation combines a strong sense of identification with Islam with a strong sense of identification with their home town. For instance, three in four second-generation Moroccans (77.8 percent) said they felt both a strong connection with Islam as well as a strong connection with their home town. The figures in panel B present a somewhat different picture. For instance, only about one third (44.8 percent) of the second-generation Moroccans combine a strong identification with Islam with strong feelings of being a Dutchman. Overall, Table 2 shows that a strong identification with Islam is frequently combined with a strong identification with the home town, but much less with (strong) feelings of being Dutch.

Religion: yes, but...

About 90 percent of the Second Generation in the Netherlands are Muslims; this percentage is somewhat lower among Turks. Table 3 shows that more than 80 percent of second-generation Turks and Moroccans felt a strong identification with Islam both during their childhood and at the time of the interview. The table also shows that their identification with Islam barely weakens during the life-course; among second-generation Turks this is no more than five percent. Among one of the groups, affiliation with Islam only developed somewhat later in

Table 1. Weak and strong sense of identity with various social groups, by study group, in percentages (n=1,505)

		Second Generation		
		Turks	Moroccans	Native Dutch
Being Turk/Moroccan	Weak	4.3	5.7	
	Average	18.3	12.2	
	Strong	77.4	82.0	
	Total	100.0	100.0	
Being Muslim/ Christian	Weak	8.2	6.0	65.3
	Average	12.0	9.5	13.3
	Strong	79.8	84.6	21.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Being ‘Amsterdammer’/ ‘Rotterdammer’	Weak	10.9	7.3	14.4
	Average	23.6	18.6	24.1
	Strong	65.5	74.1	61.5
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Being a Dutchman	Weak	23.4	19.8	4.5
	Average	37.6	35.0	15.5
	Strong	38.9	45.1	80.0
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Being a European	Weak	29.1	34.2	20.7
	Average	34.6	29.8	33.5
	Strong	36.3	36.0	45.8
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2. Identification of second-generation Turks and Moroccans with Islam and with home town (Panel A), and identification with Islam and with the Dutch (Panel B), by study group, in percentages (n=1,505)

Panel A		Identification with Islam			
		Weak	Average	Strong	Total
Second-generation Turks	Weak	18.1	17.6	9.3	11.0
	Average	27.4	29.4	22.2	23.5
	Strong	54.5	52.9	68.5	65.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage distribution study group		9.2	11.5	79.3	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	Weak	0.0	15.4	6.8	7.2
	Average	12.5	38.5	15.4	17.4
	Strong	87.5	46.2	77.8	75.4
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage distribution study group		6.3	11.3	82.5	100.0
Panel B		Identification with Islam			
		Weak	Average	Strong	Total
Second-generation Turks	Weak	18.2	23.5	24.8	24.1
	Average	27.3	41.2	37.6	37.2
	Strong	54.5	35.3	37.6	38.7
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage distribution study group		8.0	12.4	79.6	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	Weak	11.1	15.4	21.6	20.3
	Average	22.2	53.8	33.6	34.8
	Strong	66.7	30.8	44.8	44.9
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage distribution study group		6.5	9.4	84.1	100.0

life. As expected, the percentage distribution among Native Dutch is different. About 56 percent had no affiliation with religion, neither during their childhood nor at the time of the survey. And whereas more than a quarter (27.9 percent) had a religious upbringing, they no longer affiliated with their religion at the time of the survey.

But does this mean that there are comparable differences in terms of their religiosity and about the role of religion in society? Half of the second generation never or only rarely visit a mosque and about 40 percent of second-generation Turks and 25 percent of second-genera-

Table 3. Religious affiliation during childhood and at the time of the interview, by study group, in percentages (n=1,505)

Childhood	Currently	Second-generation		
		Turks	Moroccans	Native Dutch
no	no	7.3	6.3	55.7
yes	yes	83.3	86.7	15.7
yes	no	4.9	4.9	27.9
no	yes	4.6	2.1	0.7
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0



Photo: Wim de Jonge

tion Moroccans – both men and women – say they never pray. These percentages are surprising as Muslims as a rule give socially desirable answers to questions about praying, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. And so it remains to be seen whether imams in the Netherlands will better succeed in the future in inspiring their followers than priests, vicars and rabbis.

Table 4 presents the views of the Second Generation about the role of religion in society. It shows that, overall, the views of second-

generation Turks and Moroccans, and Native Dutch do not differ substantially. However, Native Dutch respondents were found to express more often marked opinions (e.g. totally agree, totally disagree). The table does not make a distinction between men and women as these differences were negligible. All three groups tend to see religion as a relationship between the individual and God. In view of the ongoing secularisation among Christians, it will not come as a surprise that most native Dutch respondents felt that religion should not be represented in politics and in public life; opinions on this matter among second-generation Turks and Moroccans were divided. Many found it difficult to take a stand or did not wish to make their views known. The respondents were more outspoken when asked to what extent religion should be a part of political decision making, with a majority in all groups saying religion should not play a part in politics. That said, about one third of second-generation Turks and Moroccans were unable to, or did not want to voice their opinions on this matter. Most respondents in all three groups agreed that there should be no ban on religious symbols at school. Among the Second Generation there was disagreement, however, about the prescription that Muslim women should wear head scarves outside the home. Second-generation Moroccans (30.1 percent) in particular subscribed to this opinion. A higher than expected percentage of Native Dutch respondents (17.7 percent), sampled and interviewed in the same neighbourhood as the Second Generation, shared the opinion that Muslim women should indeed wear a headscarf outside the home. Furthermore, almost one quarter (22.2 percent) of Native Dutch respondents are indifferent about whether Muslim women should wear or not wear a headscarf outside the home.

This article was first published in Dutch in *Demos* 24(8), pp. 7-9, titled 'Mokumer en Moslim – Amsterdammers en Rotterdammers van Marokkaanse of Turkse afkomst over identiteit en godsdienst'.

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Table 4. Opinions about the role of religion and use of religious symbols, by study group, in percentages (N=1,505)

a. Religion ought to be a private matter between an individual and God				
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Second-generation Turks	79.5	13.2	7.3	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	75.4	15.1	9.5	100.0
Native Dutch	76.7	14.1	9.2	100.0
b. Religion should be represented in politics and society, along with other religious or political viewpoints				
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Second-generation Turks	25.2	34.4	40.4	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	28.7	36.3	35.0	100.0
Native Dutch	16.6	23.0	60.4	100.0
c. Religion should be the only and ultimate political authority				
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Second-generation Turks	12.5	31.1	56.4	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	11.6	30.1	58.3	100.0
Native Dutch	1.0	6.1	92.9	100.0
d. All religious symbols should be banned at schools				
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Second-generation Turks	15.2	23.0	61.8	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	9.6	17.1	73.3	100.0
Native Dutch	12.1	18.5	69.4	100.0
e. Outside the home, Muslim women should wear head scarves or cover their heads				
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Second-generation Turks	20.8	35.6	43.6	100.0
Second-generation Moroccans	30.1	36.3	33.6	100.0
Native Dutch	17.7	22.2	60.1	100.0

Do retirement plans come true?

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The Dutch workforce is ageing rapidly. And so voices from various quarters are calling on people to extend their working lives. The underlying idea is that this would stimulate labour supply and at the same time broaden the tax and premium base of pension and social security systems. The public benefits of extending working careers have been set forth in numerous government policy proposals, but in practice achieving this has proven to be difficult. Recent NIDI research has shown that two thirds of all employees retire earlier than planned.

In the past decade the government has sought to put an end to the culture of early retirement that characterised the 1980s and 1990s. The labour force participation rate of older workers in the past few years suggests that recent government policies are paying off. There is evidence that the trend towards ending one's working life at an ever younger age has been reversed. The labour force participation of older workers has risen steadily since it reached a low in the 1990s (Table 1). This may, however, be explained by a number of developments. One such development is that dropping out of the workforce long before reaching early retirement or prepension age has become considerably less common since the tightened eligibility for disability benefits. Compared with the 1990s, a growing number of workers are now still employed when they reach prepension age, which may be attributed in part to the rising level of education. At the same time, prepension schemes themselves have been retrenched, with generally lower benefits and a later eligibility age than in former early retirement plans. That said, labour force participation among the 60 to 64-year age group is still no more than a fraction of the percentage of workers aged 55-59. Growing participation among women is mainly a reflection of the ongoing emancipation of older women in the labour market. Recent generations of older women have returned to work following childbirth in far greater numbers than earlier generations and many now continue working after the age of fifty. The above shows that there is no straightforward answer to the question whether employees continue working beyond retirement age based on labour force participation rates alone. The fact that labour force participation rates are rising does not necessarily mean that employees are delaying retirement.

Research into the retirement behaviour of older workers

A panel survey among older workers conducted by NIDI some years ago provides detailed insight into the retirement process. It presents a picture of retirement behaviour among employees aged 50-plus in 2001 and the factors that were at play. The research was based on the experiences of 1,700 employees working for four multinationals in the Netherlands and the labour market choices they made between 2001



Photo: stock.xchng/Cieleke

and 2007. Given the panel structure of the study, we were able to compare the employees' retirement intentions with their actual behaviour. This enabled us to determine the extent to which older workers act in accordance with their plans and whether there are signs that they have been more inclined in recent years to continue working longer than they had initially planned.

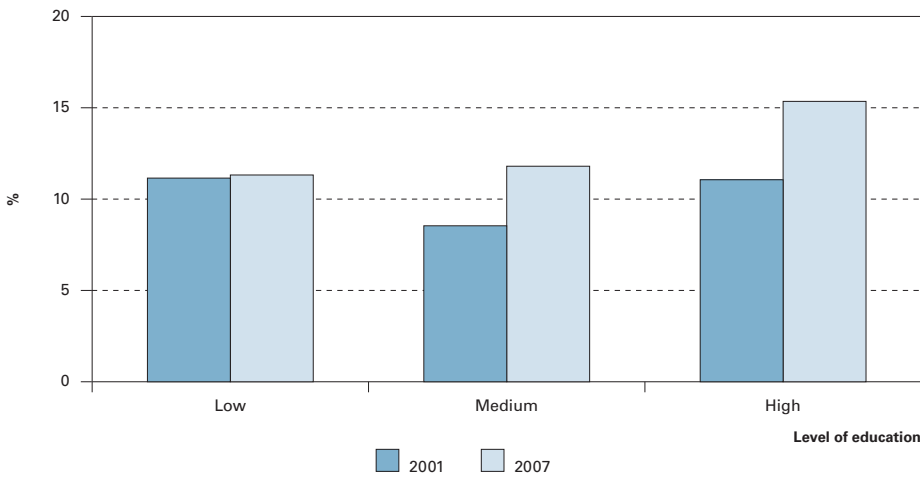
Table 1. Labour force participation rate (%) in the Netherlands by age and sex, 1971-2007

Sex	Age	1971	1975	1981	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007
Male	50-54	93	89	85	83	85	86	88	91	91
	55-59	87	80	72	68	66	60	70	78	83
	60-64	74	65	43	30	23	20	27	34	42
Female	50-54	21	23	26	29	39	48	58	70	74
	55-59	18	18	18	19	25	29	39	50	56
	60-64	12	11	8	7	9	8	11	18	23

Labour force participation rate is here defined as the number of people who are employed for at least 12 hours a week, or who are actively looking for a job for at least 12 hours a week in relation to the working-age population.

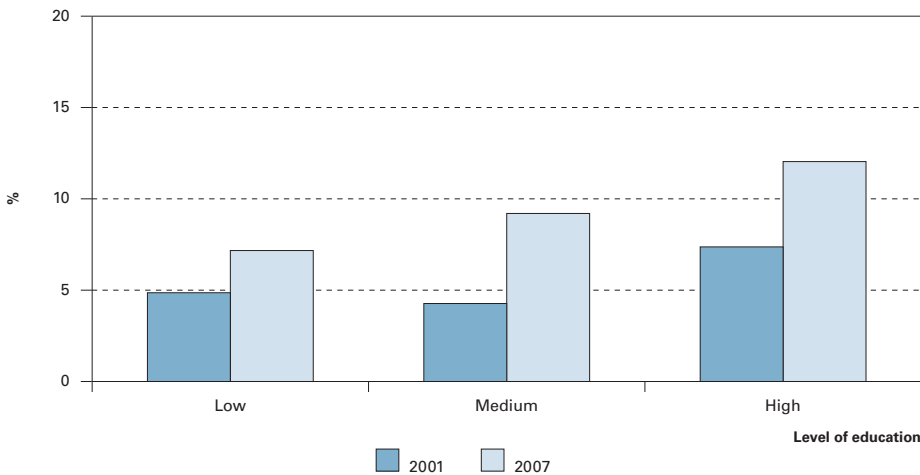
Source: Ekamper (2006), based on data provided by Statistics Netherlands (1971-1981) and Eurostat (1985-2007).

Figure 1. Interest in continuing to work **until** age 65 in 2001 and 2007 by level of education



Note: Figure refers to employees who were employed in 2001 and in 2007.

Figure 2. Interest in continuing to work **beyond** age 65 in 2001 and 2007 by level of education



Note: Figure refers to employees who were employed in 2001 and in 2007.

do so. This was no more than 21 percent among those with a lower level of education. On average, lesser educated employees intended to retire earlier than the better educated. The differences between the two were relatively small, however: the ideal retirement age was 60 years among the lower educated and just over 60.6 years among the better educated.

Retirement practice

The study examined whether there are signs that employees are generally inclined to continue working beyond the age they had initially planned to retire.

Two trends can be discerned:

- *Earlier than planned*

Six out of ten older workers retired between 2001 and 2007. Two-thirds of them left the labour force earlier than initially planned. They retired almost two years earlier, on average, at an average age of 58.2 years. In the Netherlands, this is two to three years before prepension age and no fewer than seven years before official retirement age.

- *Preparing for a longer working life*

Employees who were still employed in 2001 and in 2007 expect they will exit the labour force later than initially planned. Despite the fact that workers are still little inclined to continue working until or beyond age 65, things appear to be changing in this respect. The percentage of people who said they would like to extend their working life beyond age 65 doubled between 2001 and 2007. This shift was apparent mainly among employees with a medium or higher level of education and less so among the lower educated (Figures 1 and 2).

This shows that there tends to be a discrepancy between older workers' retirement intentions and what they actually do. A large percentage stopped working only a year earlier, but many retired much earlier than planned. This clear finding suggests that things happen at the end of people's careers that make them change their minds and consequently adjust their plans – most notably in favour of retiring earlier.

What is it that thwarts retirement plans?

People may revise their plans as a result of changed priorities, such as entering into a new relationship or the loss of a loved one. That said, employees often simply have no control over the time and conditions of retirement because their plans are thwarted by external circumstances or pressures. More insight into the role of external pressures on employees' decisions to terminate employment earlier than planned could answer the question whether their decision to retire was a voluntary one. More than 28 percent of the older workers who left the labour force between 2001 and 2007 said the decision had not, or not entirely, been a voluntary one. This percentage is in line with the results of international studies, which show that the percentage of older workers who experience their own retirement as involuntary fluctuated between 20 and 30 percent. Table 2 provides some insight into the reasons



NIDI: MISSION

NIDI's Mission is to build and maintain a knowledge infrastructure for population issues to address the challenges that demographic developments pose to individuals and society. Population growth and decline, mobility and population distribution, population ageing and population diversity, life course dynamics, intergenerational relations, and health and longevity are but a few of the dimensions of the ever-changing landscape of population issues which make up the population challenge. Demographic research is needed to address this challenge and to study population trends and their impacts on economic development, the environment, social networks, social cohesion, health and care systems, retirement and social security issues, family life and wellbeing.

NIDI RESEARCH

- is driven by societal issues, scientific curiosity and a demand for knowledge
- is interdisciplinary and international
- integrates basic and applied studies
- stresses the micro-foundations of population change
- has a clear focus that captures the ultimate cause of population change: 'Lives in Contexts'

Retirement intentions

Before looking into the extent to which employee's pension plans have been fulfilled, it is worth examining how they initially felt about ending their careers. The retirement intentions of the employees first interviewed in 2001 are in line with general retirement practice in the late 1990s, when most workers called it a day when they were about sixty years old. Only a small minority continued working until the official retirement age of 65. In this light it is hardly surprising that about 80 percent of the employees interviewed in 2001 said they did not want to continue working until they were 65. And working beyond that age was an attractive option for no more than five percent. The answers to the question whether they were inclined to work beyond the age of 61 were more varied: whereas over 60 percent of older workers aged 50-59 said they did not intend to do so, 20 percent said they did. The retirement attitudes of younger workers did not differ very much from those of workers who were approaching retirement age: 50-year-olds, too, said they would like to withdraw from the labour force (long) before reaching the official retirement age of 65.

Differences were found by level of education. The better educated were more interested in continuing to work beyond the age of 60: 29 percent said they would probably, or certainly

underlying involuntary early retirement. For more than three quarters of the employees, pressures from their employer or colleagues, or a reorganisation had been the main reason for their involuntary retirement. The second most important reason was their own health, followed in third place by the fact that they had reached retirement age.

'Voluntary' is a broad notion

Given that two thirds of the employees ended up exiting the labour force earlier, or even much earlier than planned, it is surprising that no more than 28 percent experienced their retirement as involuntary. Older workers may, of course, have revised their plans at their own initiative, encouraged by attractive retirement schemes. Another possibility is that employees do not experience their retirement as involuntary even if the circumstances leave them no choice but to retire. A clear example is the situation of a 56-year-old civil servant who was confronted with the situation that his department was closed down when he was 55. In 2001 he had indicated that he wanted to continue working until he was sixty. In 2007 he said: *"When I was 55 I retired under an early retirement scheme when our department was closed down. I would have liked to have continued working until I was 60, or maybe even 65."* Even though this employee had no choice but to call it a day, he did not experience the decision to retire as an involuntary one. This suggests that attractive retirement arrangements make good other less attractive aspects of having to retire. One could also question how voluntary certain 'voluntary' retirement schemes are. A 57-year-old operator, for example, who had wanted to continue working until he was 60 but actually retired at 56, said his decision to retire had been voluntary, but he added: *"I was pressed to take 'voluntary early retirement' and I had no option of staying on one or two years longer."* One may also wonder to what extent retirement can be said to be voluntary if people are offered a once-only opportunity to withdraw from the labour force. An early retirement arrangement in 2004/05, for example, which offered civil servants the opportunity to retire from age 57, was seen by many as an offer they couldn't refuse. Attractive offers may play a decisive role in the decision-making process, or may even force a decision. A 63-year-old project leader working for government said his decision to retire at 60 was influenced by the financially attractive conditions offered him: *"If I had not been offered this possibility, I would certainly have continued working with great enjoyment."* These statements suggest that people's 'voluntary' decisions to retire earlier than planned may not have been as voluntary as they may seem. Clearly, sufficiently attractive redundancy packages can remove the feeling of being forced to do something.

The results are particularly interesting in light of the ongoing debate about removing formal obstacles to working beyond the age of 65. This research has shown that some workers who



Photo: stock.xchng/Ginae

wish to remain in the workforce experience this age limit as an obstacle. However, what this study makes overly clear is that there are many more invisible obstacles to extending one's working life long before employees reach official retirement age. Many of the employees who retired early would probably have had no problem continuing working a little longer if they had not been offered the opportunity of prematurely exiting the workforce.

Extending one's working life: the future

Decisions about work and retirement are taken in a fast-changing demographic and economic landscape. Whereas the credit crunch brings home the notion that pension entitlements may be at risk and that working beyond the age of 65 may be a necessity, we also see that the need for companies and organisations to restructure may seriously reduce the labour market opportunities of older workers. The outlook for the near future is bleak, with rapidly increasing unemployment and economic decline. It is difficult to say how this will affect the position of older workers, but there is little cause to be optimistic in this respect. And so employers and trade unions are again speaking out in favour of new early retirement schemes. It remains to be seen whether the ingrained culture of downsizing by offering early retirement will be a thing of the past.

This article was first published in Dutch in *Demos* 25(3), pp. 1-4, titled 'Langer doorwerken - Gemakkelijker gezegd dan gedaan'.

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Table 2. Reasons for involuntariness of retirement mentioned by people who felt their retirement was entirely or partially involuntary (N=263)

Reason why the decision to retire was partially or entirely involuntary:*	%	Number
Pressure from employer/colleagues/ reorganisation	77	204
Own health	27	71
Reached official retirement age/age-related dismissal	13	34
Partner's health	5	14
Pressure from partner	5	12
Total number of reasons mentioned		335

* Several answers possible.

Second round in a second nest

Research slashes stereotypes

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Contrary to popular belief, it is more common for women to have children from different partners than for men. As a rule, children of different fathers live with their mother, in which case the fathers have a 'second nest'. Research has shown that the ties fathers have with their children from a first relationship tend to be strained. Another finding is that the stereotype of an older man going off with a younger woman and founding another family does not correspond with reality.



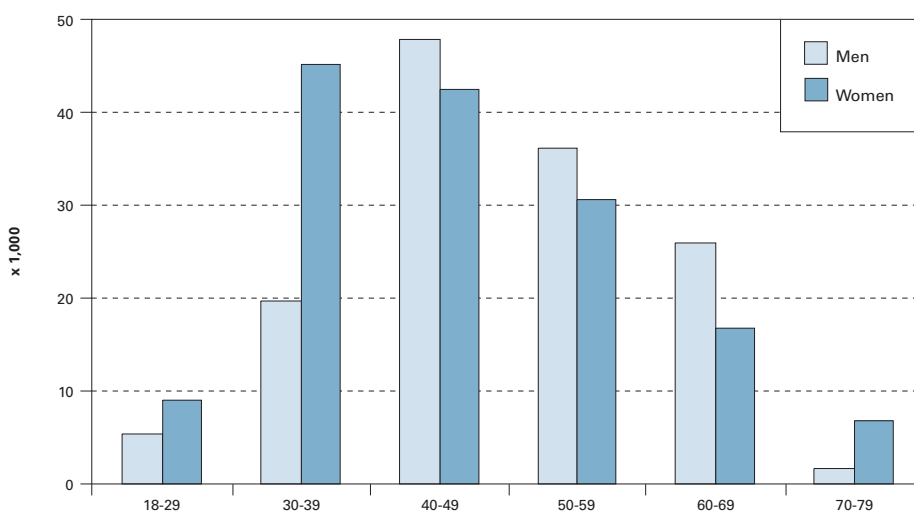
Photo: Marcel Minnée

A study that is currently being conducted in a large number of European countries, the Generation and Gender Survey (GGS), looks into a variety of issues, including the 'second nest' phenomenon or serial parenthood. The GGS is the first international study into the phenomenon that parents have two or more children from different partners. The results are already known for a few countries. The data for the Netherlands are based on the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS).

As things stand now, an estimated 270,000 people in the Netherlands have biological

children from at least two different partners: 142,000 women and 128,000 men. Most of the younger (under 40 years) parents are women and most of the older ones (40-plus) are men (Figure 1). In each age group, men and women with children from different partners constitute no more than three to four percent. Another finding is that a large majority of men and women who start a family with a second partner do so fairly shortly after divorce. And so the stereotype of an older man going off with a younger woman and founding another family does not correspond with reality

Figure 1. Number (x 1,000) of men and women with biological children from at least two different partners (second round), by age group, the Netherlands (estimate based on NKPS data)



Second round in a second nest

If women have children from a second partner, all their children – those from the first and those from the second round – usually live with her ('in her nest') if they have not yet left the parental home. Men who have children from a second partner usually have a 'second nest': because children tend to stay with their mothers following divorce, fathers are the only ones who end up having a second nest. This is probably the reason why we tend to think of men when we speak of a second nest. For the sake of clarity: the term second nest is used to refer to the state of having biological children of one's own from at least two different partners. In other words, the children concerned have a half-brother and/or half-sister. Second nest does not refer to families where men and women have step-children from a new relationship, except if they also have biological

children from the new partner, in which case the new family will consist of both step-brothers and/or sisters and half-brothers and/or sisters.

Strained ties between father and oldest child

Biological parents in a second nest have known their children from birth. The lifelong blood ties parents have with one or more children who leave the home at some point and who have one or more half-siblings, tend to be much closer than the ties parents build with their step-children.

In the past, parents with a second nest were usually widowed men and women who had children from a new relationship. As the children in this situation continued to live with the only surviving biological parent, ties between parents and children were generally close. The first GGS results show that this is still a common situation in countries such as Georgia.

In the Netherlands, 'second nest' generally refers to a situation where partners in a first relationship from which children are born split up and enter into a new relationship which again brings forth children. Both biological parents are usually still alive and the age difference between children from both relationships tends to be small.

Studies among eldest children over 18 years of age who have left the parental home show that in the case of a second nest, the ties between the oldest biological child and its father tends to be more strained than the relationship with the mother (Figure 2). The difference is statistically significant, suggesting that fathers find it much more difficult to maintain good contact with their oldest child than mothers. The most logical explanation is that the child in question has lived with the mother for most of its life and that the father has not been able to raise his child(ren) from a previous relationship in the same way as those in his second nest. The fact that the oldest child shuttles back and forth between its biological mother and step-mother is not conducive to a clear and consistent education. It would appear that fathers are not able to show the same level of solidarity with all their children. If this results, later in life, in half-brothers and half-sisters having conflicts not only with their father (parents) but also with each other, this could make it extra difficult for them to maintain stable relationships themselves and to decide to have children. Their own parents, after all, did not set a good example.

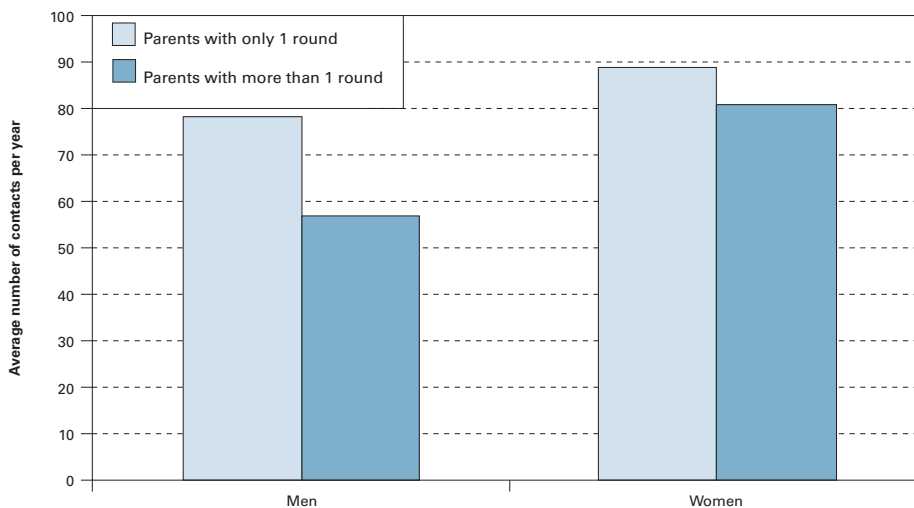
To conclude

The findings of the GGS have so far not been used to examine which partners go on to build a second nest and which do not after having had children from a first relationship. Whereas there is ample demographic literature about divorce and separation, about starting anew and raising children from a broken marriage, literature about the second nest phenomenon is sadly lacking. The literature suggests that women only go on to have children from a second relationship if their desire to have children has not yet been fully met. The reason

The data for this article relate to a small number of European countries for which data from the Generation and Gender Survey (GGS) have recently become available. This survey, coordinated by the Economic Commission for Europe (United Nations, Geneva) is being held in a much larger number of countries but it will take some time for the data from the first panel wave to be released for all these countries. Data relating to the Netherlands were provided by a similar survey, the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS).

During a conference held in Geneva in May 2008, entitled 'How generations and gender shape demographic change', more than 20 presentations were given about a wide range of GGS topics, targeted primarily at policy makers. The session 'Realities of parenthood and childbearing' included a presentation about the 'second nest', which has been documented in this article.

Figure 2. Average number of contacts per year with the oldest biological child (18+, non-resident), parents with 1 versus parents with more than 1 round (Bulgaria, Germany, France, Georgia, Russia)



why men do so is probably different: they tend to have children in a second relationship if their new partner does not have children but has a clear desire to have children. If both partners have children from a previous relationship, they only rarely decide to have children together to seal their new relationship. There is evidence suggesting that those who do, have progressive views on relationships and having children. More research on this is forthcoming.

This article was first published in Dutch in *Demos* 24(6), pp. 4/5, titled 'Tweede leg in een tweede nest'.

Photo: Marcel Minnée



Ageing EU looks into future labour market

PETER EKAMPER

More part-time jobs will affect employment

Population ageing will affect the future labour market in the European Union. The size of the workforce is set to decline in the long term, even if labour force participation rises.



Photo: Wim de Jonge

The European Union projects that the number of people aged 65-plus in the EU-27 will increase from 81 million in 2005, approximately 17 percent of the total population, to 112 million around 2025 (23 percent of total population) and 141 million in 2050 (30 percent). A relatively large number of older workers will reach retirement age in the future and will withdraw from the labour force. At the same time, the number of (young) people entering the labour market will decline substantially as a result of the expected fertility decline.

Labour force scenarios

In 2005 the European Commission initiated the development of long-term labour force scenarios for all member states of the then EU-25 for the period 2005-2050. The so-called base sce-

nario assumes no policy changes other than the pension reforms that are already being implemented or planned. The scenarios did take account of generation differences, such as the fact that younger generations of women participate more actively in the labour force than older generations of women did at their age.

The base scenario projects that the labour supply and employment will show only limited growth in the next 15 years, after which they will dip despite an expected increase in labour force participation and declining unemployment. This may be attributed primarily to the shrinking and ageing working-age population (15-64 years). Old people are less active in the workforce than young people are. In the EU-25, the labour force participation of the 15-64 age group was projected to increase from 70.3 percent in 2005 to 74.9 percent in 2025 and to 75.5 percent in 2050. The number of employed is expected to grow by 20 million until around 2018, after which it is set to drop by almost 30 million in the period until 2050. The percentage of the 55-64 age group in the total employed workforce will climb from 11 percent in 2005 to around 18 percent in 2050.

Part-timers

The total level of employment in full-time equivalents is determined by the number of people with a job and the number of hours worked per person. In 2005, women in the 27 current member states of the EU worked an average of 7.5 hours less per week than men. The percentage of female part-timers is higher than that of men: in 2005 this was 30.7 and 6.7 percent respectively. Marked differences exist between the various EU member states. In the Netherlands, more than 70 percent of women and over 20 percent of men work part-time. In the other EU countries, working part-time is mainly the realm of women. In Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, the United Kingdom and Sweden about 40 percent of all working women have a part-time job. In Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic this is less than ten percent.

The percentage of part-timers has risen among men and women of all age groups in the past ten years, with the exception of women aged 55-64. We also see that the percentage of part-timers is highest among the lesser educated, yet it has risen among all levels of education.

Fluctuating number of hours worked

The rising percentage of part-timers in the European labour market has a negative effect on the number of hours worked, but this is

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

This article explores the possible impact on the future labour supply of policies designed to increase labour force participation. Particular attention is paid to the effect of part-time employment. The study draws on the labour force scenarios developed by the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission (DG ECFIN) for a study into the future of public expenditure.

The article is based on a Research Note written for the European Observatory on Demography and the Social Situation, commissioned by the European Commission: Ekamper, P. (2007), *Qualitative scenario study of the European labour force*. Research Note - European Observatory on Demography and the Social Situation - Demography Network. Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

compensated by cohort effects as women and the elderly born to younger birth cohorts are expected to be more active in the labour market in the future. This process set in several decades ago among women and much more recently among older workers as a result of government policy that encourages people to retire later. This policy is in response to the expected financial and other consequences of an ageing population for society at large. If the current percentage of part-timers in the labour market does not show any further increase, total employment expressed in full-time equivalents will, under the base scenario, be about seven percent higher in 2025 than in 2005. And whereas the number of people of working age will be somewhat lower in 2025 than in 2005, labour force participation will be higher as a result of the cohort effects referred to. In 2025 the biggest cohorts will be between 40 and 54 years old, the most economically active age group. In 2050, however, these cohorts will no longer be of working age, and so the base scenario predicts that the working-age population will be about 18 percent smaller in 2050 than in 2005. The higher labour force participation will no longer be able to compensate the population decline, and the total number of hours worked will be about eight percent lower than in 2005 as a result.

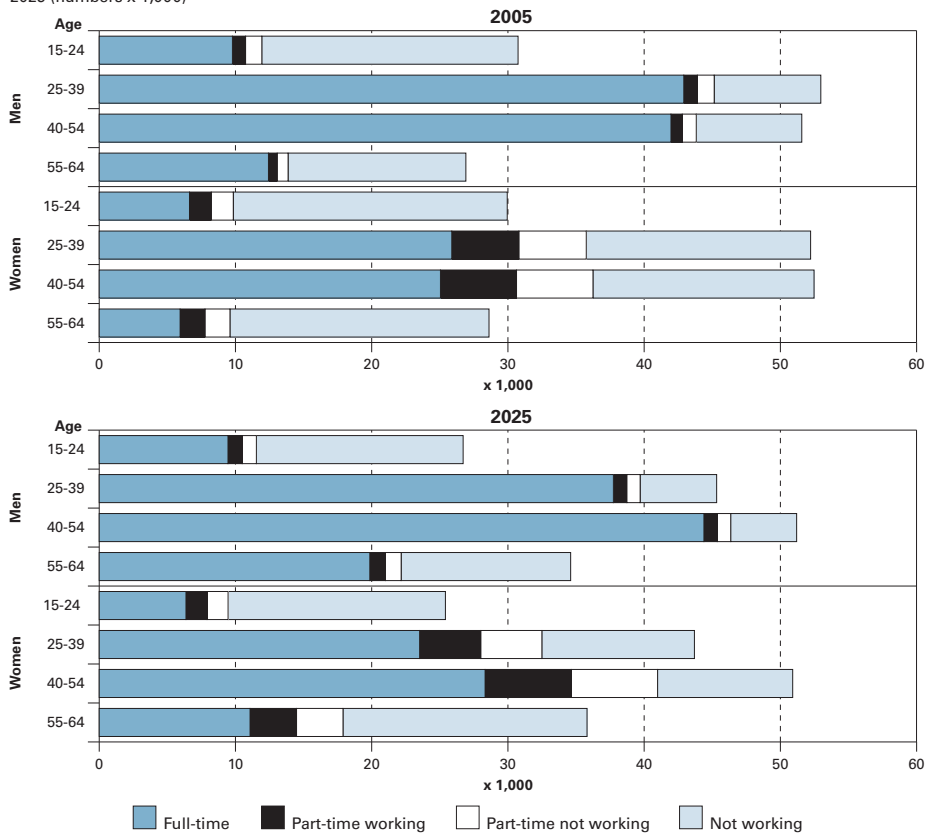
The figure presents the population of working age, broken down by full-time and part-time jobs in 2005 and 2025 based on the same percentage of part-timers per age group and sex. The figure shows that under the base scenario, labour force participation is lowest, in relative terms, among the young, the elderly and women, indicating that this is where most potential lies.

Policy

In accordance with the Lisbon targets, EU policy is aimed at turning the EU into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. This will require raising the level of education, professional skills, labour force participation and labour productivity in the future. For the young in particular, investments in boosting participation in education and the level of education will conflict with efforts to raise their labour force participation. That is why young people are not the primary target group in such efforts. Policy that focuses on (further) increasing the labour force participation of older workers would appear to be more effective. In the base scenario the labour force participation of people aged 55-64 years will remain relatively low, despite the pension reforms implemented. In order to substantially boost the participation of older people in the workforce, more far-reaching policy reforms aimed, among other things, at delaying retirement will have to be put in place.

Encouraging part-time work has both a positive and a negative effect on the number of hours worked. Facilitating access to part-time jobs could increase the labour force participation of people who have never worked, or no longer

Population in full-time units by sex, age group and type of (working) hours in the European Union (EU 27) in 2005 and 2025 (numbers x 1,000)



Note: Part-time workers refers to the number of part-time workers expressed in full-time working units; part-time not working refers to the number of part-time workers expressed in full-time not-working units.

Source: NIDI calculations based on Eurostat and Carone (2005).

work. In the EU the labour force participation of women is lower than that of men. The participation of women who are not, or no longer active in the workforce could be increased in terms of both jobs and volume by offering work on a part-time basis. Assuming that facilitating part-time work would bring the participation of women up to the same level as that of men – in which case there would be more women in part-time jobs than men – would in

Percentage change in employment rates and number of hours worked in the European Union (EU-27) in 2025 and 2050 compared with 2005 according to the DG ECFIN base scenario and three alternative scenarios

	2025			2050		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
% change in participation rates						
Base scenario (DG ECFIN)	12	8	17	13	8	18
Participation older workers	22	16	29	22	16	29
Participation women	21	8	37	21	8	37
Part-time Netherlands	12	8	17	13	8	18
% change in number of hours worked						
Base scenario (DG ECFIN)	7	5	10	-8	-10	-6
Participation older workers	12	9	17	-4	-6	-1
Participation women	11	5	21	-5	-10	3
Part-time Netherlands	-10	-3	-19	-22	-16	-31

Note: The scenario *participation older workers* assumes an increase in the employment rates of older workers (aged 55-64 years) bringing them up to the employment rates of the 40-54 age group, effectuated in part-time jobs only; the scenario for the *participation of women* assumes an increase in the employment rates of women bringing them up to the employment rates of men, effectuated in part-time jobs only; the scenario *part-time Netherlands* assumes that the percentage of part-timers in the EU is identical to that in the Netherlands.

Source: NIDI calculations based on Eurostat and Carone (2005).



Photo: Wim de Jonge

N I D I

NIDI RESEARCH: LIVES IN CONTEXTS

Populations change because people change. Demographic trends at the macro level are the results of behaviour at the micro level. To explain why populations change we need to understand why individuals change and thus how 'contexts' affect lives. Relevant contexts include family or household, the generation, and the many institutions in the broader social, cultural and economic settings. 'Lives in contexts' is NIDI's overarching research theme.

the long term boost rather than decrease the total number of hours worked by women (see table). Older people are also less active in the labour force. Among men, this may be attributed largely to early retirement. In the case of women, in particular older generations of women, this can usually be explained by the fact that they have never taken part in the workforce or, alternatively, because they stopped working to raise children. Labour force participation could be stimulated by discouraging people to retire early or to exit the labour market, and by encouraging people to extend their working lives, either full-time or part-time. This, too, could boost workforce participation in terms of both jobs and volume. If we assume that offering opportunities for part-time work would increase the participation of older people in the labour force, the decline in the total number of hours

worked could be cut by half in the long term (see table). That said, greater access to part-time work could also attract people who now have full-time jobs. The total labour force participation of this group would then remain stable in terms of number of jobs, but decline in terms of hours worked (volume). If working on a part-time basis were to become just as common in other EU member states as it is in the Netherlands through a shift from full-time to part-time employment, the number of hours worked would drop almost threefold (see table).

To conclude

In the long term, the working-age population in the EU is expected to be much smaller than it is now. The positive effects of an increase in full-time and part-time labour force participation on the number of hours worked will most likely not be sufficient to compensate for the declining number of hours worked as a result of the shrinking working-age population. Labour force participation could also be raised by increasing the number of hours worked per person. This would, however, require a major reversal of the current trend of an ever-growing percentage of part-time workers.

This article was first published in Dutch in *Demos* 24(9), pp. 11/12, titled 'Vergrijzende EU onderzoekt toekomstige arbeidsmarkt'.

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National borders determine mortality rate

Differences between Flanders and the Netherlands

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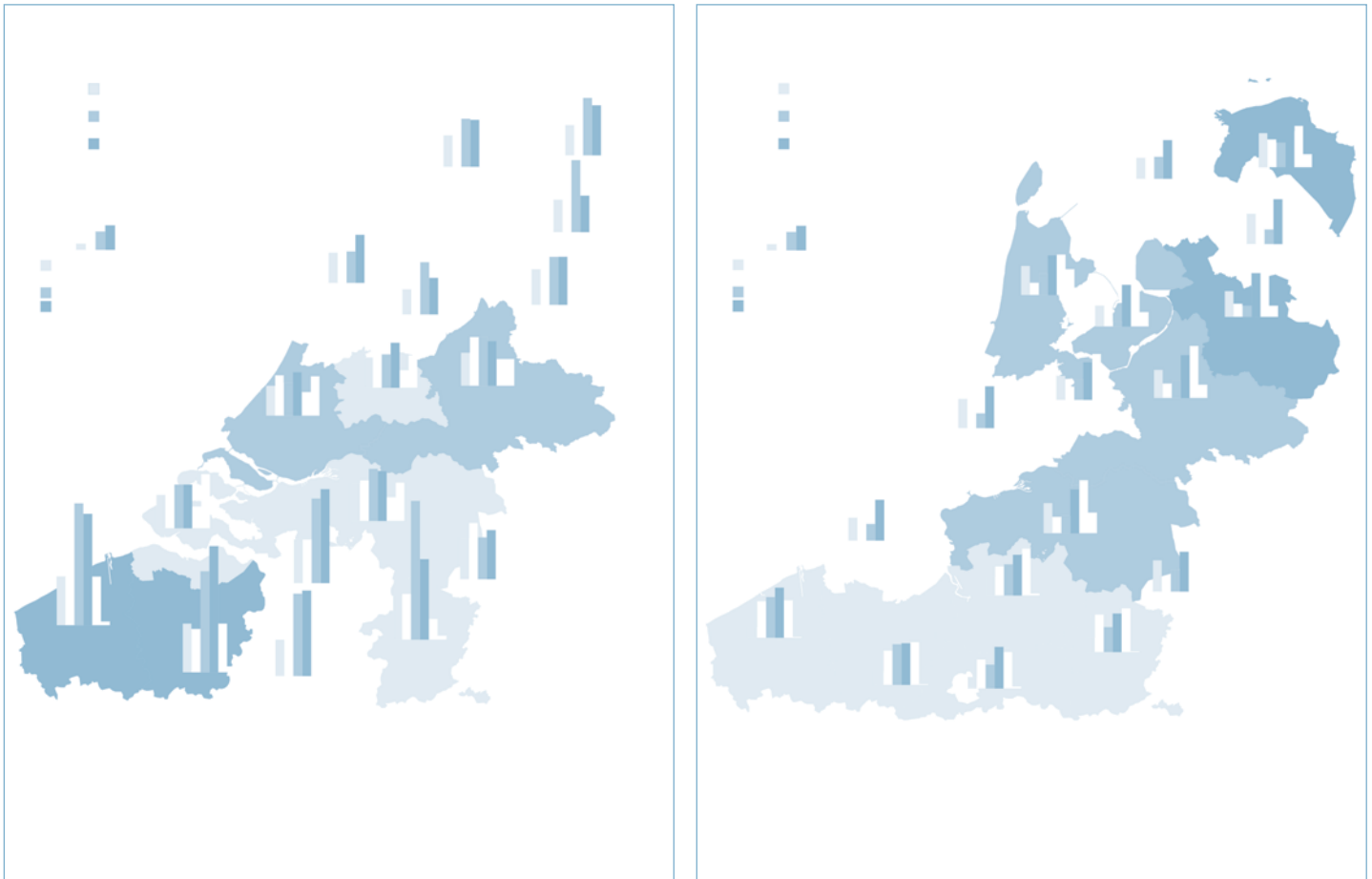
NIDI recently compiled a mortality atlas of 272 regions in the European Union and the EFTA countries. For each region, the atlas describes mortality by age, sex and cause of death. National borders proved to be important predictors of mortality. We found marked differences in cause specific mortality between the historically closely linked Flanders and the Netherlands. Flanders suffered most from suicide and road traffic accidents among men, the Netherlands most from smoking related mortality among women.

Potential years of life lost broken down by the five leading causes of death in the Netherlands and Flanders (also indicated: other and unknown causes of death)

Position		PYLL				
		Men		Women		
		Flanders	Netherlands	Flanders	Netherlands	
1	Suicide	6.1	2.8	Breast cancer	2.5	2.5
2	Traffic accidents	6.1	2.5	Lung cancer	0.8	1.7
3	Lung cancer	2.7	2.0	Suicide	2.0	1.1
4	Ischaemic heart disease	2.7	2.5	Traffic accidents	2.0	0.8
5	Alcohol-related	2.3	1.4	Stroke	0.8	0.9
	Other	14.5	22.2	Other	10.0	16.4
	Recorded as unknown	0.4	2.4	Recorded as unknown	0.1	1.4
	Total	34.8	35.8	Total	18.2	24.8

We were able to compare mortality in the Flemish and Dutch provinces (NUTS-2 regions in EU jargon), who are culturally, ethnically and linguistically closely linked. Flanders is the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. Male life expectancy in the Netherlands is similar to that in Flanders, but Flemish women live 14 months longer than Dutch women. Potential Years of Life Lost (PYLL) is a measure of the loss of productive life years before age 65 (see box page 16). Again among men, differences were small, but 1,000 Dutch women lost 6.6 more productive years than women born south of the Dutch-Belgian border (see table).

Mortality up to age 65 in the 15 provinces of the Netherlands and Flanders. The darker the colour, the higher the mortality rate. The bars in each province give the top five causes of death, the sixth bar being the category 'unknown'.



The table shows the main reasons of loss of life by premature death. In Flanders, suicide and traffic accidents top the list of causes of death among men. Lung cancer (smoking) comes in third, followed by ischaemic heart diseases and, in fifth place, alcohol-related mortality. The latter is no more than a rough proxy of death from alcohol, based on reported deaths from alcohol consumption and chronic liver disease. Flemish men lose 6.9 years of life more than Dutch men through suicide and traffic accidents. In the Netherlands, suicide also tops the list, followed by traffic accidents and ischaemic heart disease. Lung cancer and alcohol-related mortality occupies the fourth and fifth place. Among women breast cancer accounts for most deaths. Dutch women lose almost a year of life more to lung cancer than do Flemish women. Whereas suicide and traffic accidents account for twice as many years of life lost among women in Flanders than among Dutch women, this is still much less than among Flemish men. The large cause-of-death category 'unknown' makes interpretation difficult, as in the Netherlands this is very large. The category 'unknown' would rank fourth among Dutch men, close to ischaemic heart disease, and third among Dutch women. The seemingly lower mortality from ischaemic heart disease in the Netherlands, may likely be attributed to misclassified causes of death.

death. Among men, suicide rates and traffic accidents are very high in Flanders, especially in the two Western provinces touching to France. Female suicide is high too in these provinces. In the Netherlands, suicide rates are much lower and vary less. There is a clear-cut dividing line between Flanders and the Netherlands, straight through the old dukedoms that straddle the border.

Photo: www.lh6.ggpht.com / Dirk



Geographic differences

The maps show geographic differences in mortality broken down by the five causes of



Photo: www.blogimages.bloggen.be / willysegers

Death from breast cancer is high in all regions of Flanders and the Netherlands. Whereas differences in death from traffic accidents and suicide between Flanders and the Netherlands are less marked among women than among men, they do exist. Flemish and Dutch women differ most in terms of mortality from lung cancer. If these figures are extrapolated to other smoking-related causes of death, thousand Dutch women lose over four years of their productive lives to smoking, the double of Flemish women.

Mortality differences are culturally/socially determined

A comparison of Flanders and the Netherlands shows the importance of society and culture in explaining mortality differences. Breast cancer among young women is a tragedy, but similar mortality from breast cancer between the Netherlands and Flanders suggest that there is little we can do about it yet. Conversely, large differences between Flanders and the Netherlands suggest that suicide and traffic accidents can be prevented.

Suicide is usually an act of desperation. But where does this desperation come from in Flanders, one of the most prosperous regions of the world? Compared to other EU member states, suicide rates in the Netherlands are low while in Flanders being high. 'Something' in Dutch culture seems to offer relative protection against suicide, an opposite 'something' in Flemish culture gives rise to desperation and suicide.

Measures to prevent traffic accidents include safe roads, strict police controls and traffic education. Flanders didn't know a distinction between through roads and residential streets, police controls were not very popular among the electorate and traffic education was seen as a regrettable necessity. That said, Flanders is now making great progress, but the historical burden remains considerable.

Women's liberation is one of the greatest achievements of the 1960s. But Dutch women became pioneers in tobacco consumption. With a historically strong tobacco industry,

employment and income from excise duties were more important than public health. The Netherlands was one of the worst pupils in the European classes, learning slowly how to curtail the health impact of smoking...

To conclude

Flanders and the Netherlands are close neighbours, yet their mortality rates differ markedly. Whereas Flanders is improving its track record in traffic accidents, it is still in many ways groping in the dark when it comes to suicide. In the Netherlands, a tighter control of tobacco consumption and more quitting programmes targeted to women is needed. More attention should be paid to the large number of unknown causes of death in the Netherlands, as these may have an etiology and potential for prevention, too. That said, there is every reason to be optimistic. Premature mortality became very low. While combating breast cancer at a young age will remain a big challenge for science, premature mortality is dominated by suicide, traffic accidents, tobacco and alcohol abuse. These are not health problems that we should reconcile ourselves with. If these problems were to be reduced by half, the number of years of life lost before the age of 65 would be cut by a quarter. This is not a mission impossible. It's always someone's child, often someone's parent... and it's a commendable goal to strive for.

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PYLL

The mortality and population data relating to the Netherlands and Flanders were provided by Eurostat as part of an international comparative study. Eurostat receives the data from the national statistical offices. Potential Years of Life Lost (PYLL) is an older measure that describes the number of productive years of life lost through death before the age of 65. It's a simple arithmetic: someone who dies at the age of 20 loses $65-20 = 45$ years of life. Someone who dies at the age of 60 loses $65-60 = 5$ years of life. PYLL only take into account premature mortality: people who die when they are 65 or older are not counted.