

# Migration as a theme of the electoral campaign in The Netherlands. A snapshot of the foreign population

by Livia Elisa Ortensi

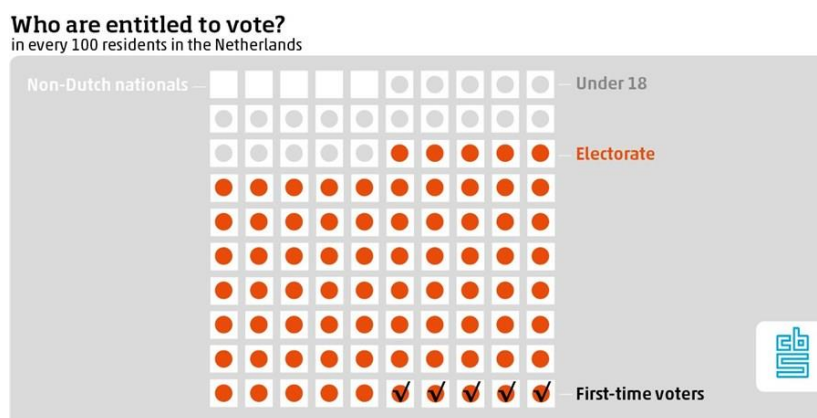


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## Migration as a theme of the electoral campaign in the Netherlands. A snapshot of the foreign population

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On March, the 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 12,9 million of Dutch voters are called to the polls; 850 thousand of them are youngster to vote for the first time. Migration has been at the centre of the political debate in the Netherlands for some time but the weight of voters with a migration background shall have its importance, too (Aanzi, 2017).



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS) <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2017/07/nearly-13-million-eligible-voters-on-15-march>

### Key message

- In 2017, 22,1% of the population in the Netherlands, one in five inhabitants, have a migration background, about one in eight has origins in a “non western country”.
- Amongst non-European countries of origin, we find Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia and Surinam.
- Despite a low migratory pressure at the moment in the Netherlands compared to Italy or Germany, the population with foreign origins is growing, notably due to the second generations.
- Amongst the growing influxes, movements to the Netherlands comprise migration for humanitarian purposes and flows of EU citizens, particularly from southern European countries and new EU countries (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria).

## 1. Introduction

The management of influxes to the Netherlands is a hot topic since the 1990s' in Dutch politics (van Selm, 2005). The perception of a country invaded by a "mass of desperate people in search of better life conditions" and of a significant failure of integration policies is commonplace (Lucassen and Lucassen, 2011 citato in Bal, 2012). In a similar fashion, the anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric is not bounded to far-right parties but pervades other parties' discourse (Bal, 2012). In November 2004, the assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Dutch citizen of Moroccan origin boosted the perception of the failure of integration policies (van Selm, 2005). This paper provides a snapshot of the situation with respect to migration in the Netherlands in order to provide the reader with instruments to evaluate the match between political discourse and reality.

## 2. The Netherlands, country of immigration

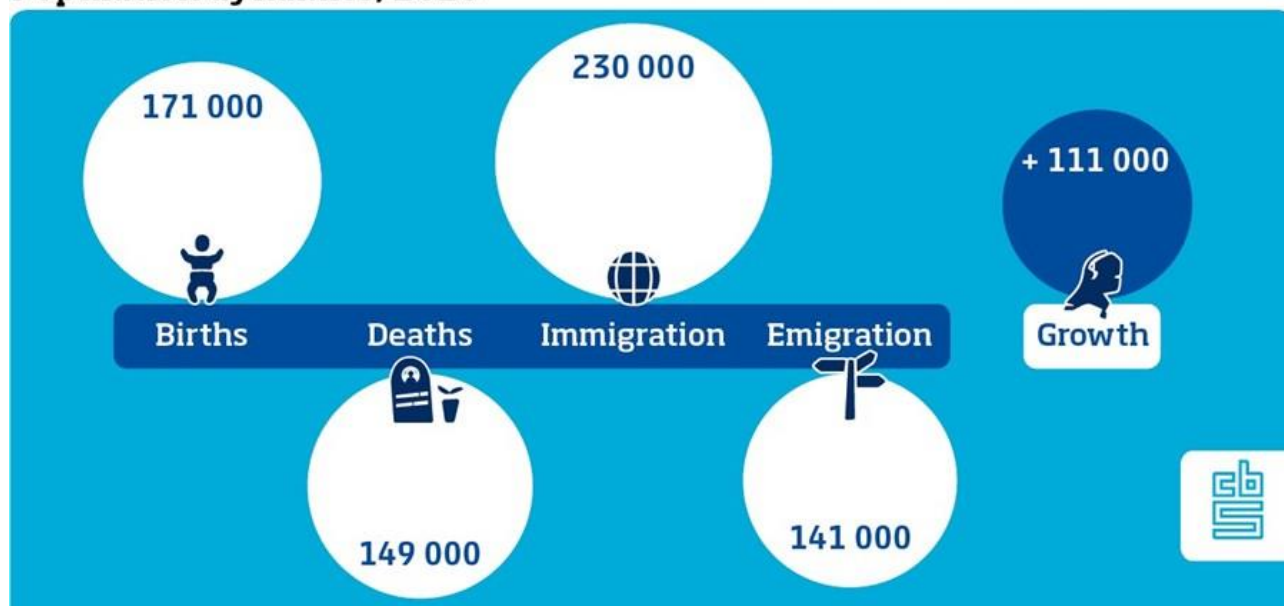
The composition of the Dutch population has significantly changed in the course of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in cities and in the western part of the country. After WWII, international migrations to the Netherlands came in three distinct waves. The first one is that consisted of low qualified workers, so-called *guest workers*, or *gastarbeiders*, from southern Europe (Italy and Spain), Yugoslavia, Morocco and Turkey (van Selm, 2005). The oil crisis of 1973 brought this wave to an end; many of them returned to their country. Nevertheless, a large number of Moroccan and Turkish workers, deterred by the economic situation in their country, remained in the Netherlands and gave rise to the second wave of immigration, that of family reunion (Lucassen and Lucassen, 2011 citato in Bal, 2012). As for the third wave, it came as a consequence of the process of decolonization and the independence of Indonesia (1949) and Surinam (1975). In the early 1970s', about 160.000 people were classified as "non-western immigrants" out of a population of about 13 million people. They were mainly from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and Dutch Antilles. It was a residual fraction of the total number of migrants, mostly Europeans. The current first and second generations of migrants are still strongly characterized by these origin countries (Bal, 2012).

## 3. The Netherlands today

The Dutch population counts 17,1 million souls as of January the 1st, 2017, a growing population if we consider either the rate of natural increase (the balance between births and deaths is positive; +22 thousand units) or influxes. The balance between immigrants and emigrants is greater than the rate of natural increase and amounts to +88 thousand units (Figure 1; CBS Nederland, 2017).

**Figure 1. Dutch population dynamics, year 2016**

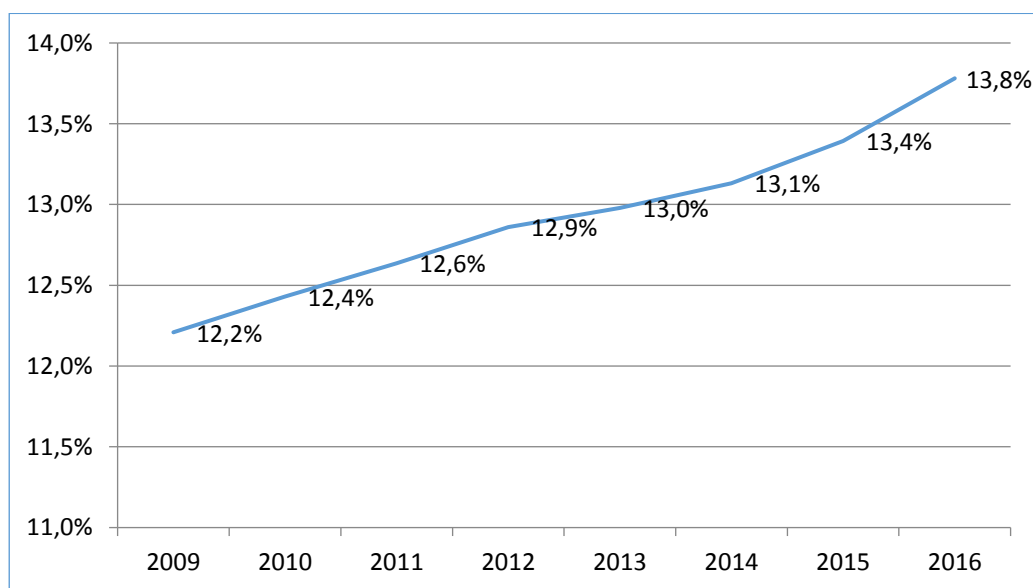
**Population dynamics, 2016**



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS) <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2017/05/relatively-high-population-growth-due-to-migration>

The number of those born abroad (approximating that of first generation migrants) amounts to about two million, that is 13,8% of the population. Over the last five years, the number of foreign-born has constantly grown between 1% and 2% per year (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Proportion of foreign-born compared to total population.  
The Netherlands 2009-2016**



Source: Elaborations ISMU on Eurostat data

When compared to that of other EU countries, the ratio foreigners – total population, the Netherlands appear at first glance as one of the countries where the relative weight of the foreign population is the least (4,9%), below average (7,5%). However, when looking at those born abroad, the situation is different (12,1% whilst the European mean stands at 11%; see Table 1).

**Table 1. Foreigners and foreign-born. Europe, 2016**

Country	Number of foreigners	% of foreigners on total pop.	Country	Number of foreign-born	% of foreign-born on total pop.
Luxembourg	269.175	46,7	Luxembourg	269.175	46,7
Liechtenstein	12.775	34,0	Liechtenstein	12.775	34,0
Switzerland	2.047.200	24,6	Switzerland	2.047.200	24,6
Cyprus	139.606	16,5	Cyprus	139.606	16,5
Estonia	197.638	15,0	Estonia	197.638	15,0
Latvia	288.946	14,7	Latvia	288.946	14,7
Austria	1.249.424	14,4	Austria	1.249.424	14,4
Ireland	586.826	12,4	Ireland	586.826	12,4
Belgium	1.327.421	11,7	Belgium	1.327.421	11,7
Germany	8.651.958	10,5	Germany	8.651.958	10,5
Norway	534.310	10,3	Norway	534.310	10,3
Spain	4.418.158	9,5	Spain	4.418.158	9,5
UK	5.640.674	8,6	UK	5.640.674	8,6
Italy	5.026.153	8,3	Italy	5.026.153	8,3
Denmark	463.088	8,1	Denmark	463.088	8,1
Island	26.485	8,0	Island	26.485	8,0
Sweden	773.232	7,8	Sweden	773.232	7,8
Greece	798.357	7,4	Greece	798.357	7,4
Malta	30.923	7,1	Malta	30.923	7,1
France	4.408.563	6,6	France	4.408.563	6,6
Slovenia	107.766	5,2	Slovenia	107.766	5,2
The Netherl.	834.786	4,9	The Netherlands	834.786	4,9
Czech Rep.	476.345	4,5	Czech Rep.	476.345	4,5
Finland	228.224	4,2	Finland	228.224	4,2
Portugal	388.731	3,8	Portugal	388.731	3,8
Hungary	156.366	1,6	Hungary	156.366	1,6
Slovakia	65.840	1,2	Slovakia	65.840	1,2
Bulgaria	73.822	1,0	Bulgaria	73.822	1,0
Croatia	40.926	1,0	Croatia	40.926	1,0
Lithuania	18.682	0,6	Lithuania	18.682	0,6
Romania	107.187	0,5	Romania	107.187	0,5
Poland	149.586	0,4	Poland	149.586	0,4
Total		7,5	Total		11

Source: Elaborations ISMU on Eurostat data

Such data, however, provide a partial and insufficient image of the situation if we aim at evaluate the weight of the population of foreign origin, even if holding Dutch citizenship. If we include second generations, the population foreign or of foreign origin in the Netherlands reaches 3,8 million people, 22,1% of the population. Today, one person in five in the

Netherlands has a foreign background; one in eight has origins from non-western countries whilst one in ten has origins in a western country (Statistics Netherlands, 2016). The Dutch case displays migratory features that form the 1970s' has changed not so much, or not only, with regard to countries of origin, but first and foremost with respect to the relative weight of non-western countries of origin compared to that of western countries, previously prevalent. The main group amongst those classified as non-western by Dutch statistics is the Turkish one (397 thousand people), followed by Surinamese (349 thousands) and Antilleans (151 thousands). In coherence with the Netherlands' history, this group grew mostly because of the rate of natural increase (births) rather than because of the influxes. The first generations pertaining to these groups actually recently decreased and emigration is now greater than immigration (Figure 3).

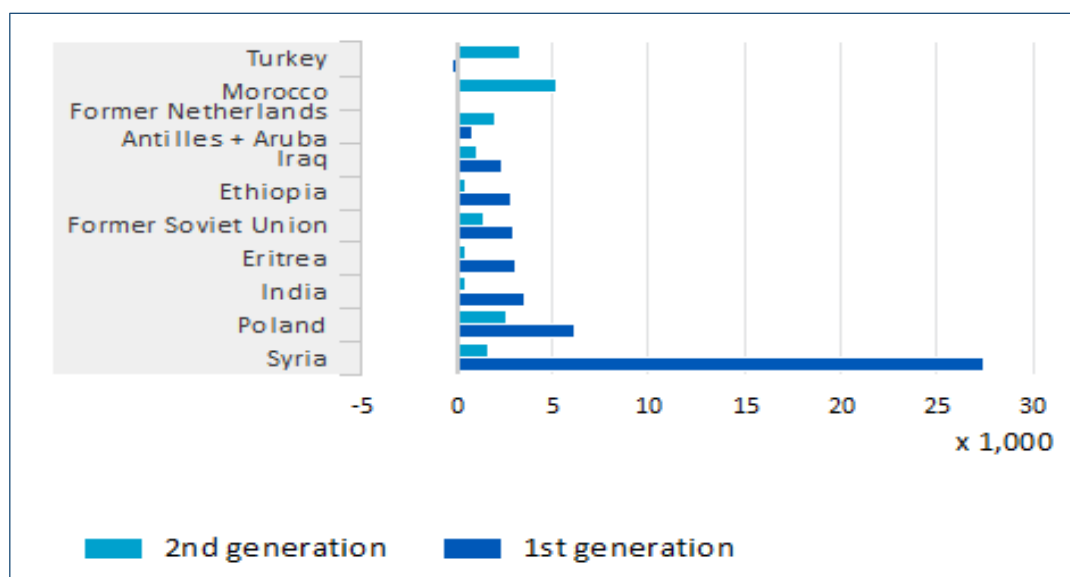
If immigration from countries that historically fed the influxes to the Netherlands are shrinking, the Dutch net migration rate has remained positive due to the movement of EU citizens, in particular Poles, Romanians, and Bulgarians mostly employed in the agricultural sector and, consequently, residing out of urban centres, where a large share of non-EU citizens are (Statistic Netherlands, 2016). Poles currently constitute the biggest foreign group with more than 110 thousand of them. Arrivals from ex-USSR countries are also on the rise (Table 2; Figure 4).

**Figure 3. Main populations, per migratory background, the Netherlands 2016**



Source: Statistics Nedelands, 2016

**Figure 4. First 10 communities by population increase in 2016**



Source: CBS Nederland, 2017

**Table 2. First 30 groups by foreign citizenship, the Netherlands 2016**

Country	Number of residing foreign citizens
Poland	110.860
Turkey	75.423
Germany	72.283
United Kingdom	44.224
Morocco	42.322
Belgium	30.560
China (including Hong Kong)	29.746
Italy	29.492
Spain	26.773
Syria	25.443
Bulgaria	21.941
France	20.913
Portugal	19.384
United States	17.193
India	17.113
Eastern Africa	16.406
Greece	14.058
Romania	13.659
Hungary	12.256
Indonesia	12.012
Eritrea	9.077
Stateless	8.337
Russia	7.794
Brazil	6.948
Iraq	5.634
Japan	5.461
Ireland	5.338
Lithuania	5.301

Suriname	5.290
Thailand	5.026
Others	214.813

Source: Elaborations ISMU on Eurostat data

## 4. Humanitarian migration to the Netherlands

So close to Germany, asylum seekers' "promised land" over the past few years, the Netherlands has also witnessed a growing number of arrivals for humanitarian purposes, notably from Syria. As of January the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, 44 thousand Syrians and 8 thousand Ethiopians were present in the Netherlands. The largest group, however, remains that of Iraqis that counts about 56 thousand people (Table 3). Among these groups, for those that have already been staying for some time, a trend to family reunion and, consequently, to a growth of second generations, is forming (Statistics Nedelands, 2016, CBS Nederland, 2017).

**Table 3. Main communities migrating for humanitarian motives**

Country	Population (thousand)	% on total pop.	Increase from January 2005	Proportion of 2nd generation	Age average	
					1st generation	2nd generation
Afghanistan	44	0.3	7	26	36	8
Iraq	56	0.3	13	27	39	9
Iran	38	0.2	10	23	42	12
Somalia	39	0.2	18	32	30	8
Eritrea	8	0.0	7	9	24	5
Syria	44	0.3	35	12	28	10

Source: Statistics Nedelands, 2016

## 5. Conclusions

Like most EU and more generally European countries, the Netherlands is undergoing an increasing migratory pressure in the form of growing numbers of asylum claims. In a different manner, flows from other EU countries notably southern, and central and eastern European countries are also significant, Poland being the biggest sender. Such influxes, as the Brexit taught us, are particularly at risk of being instrumentalised on the part of anti-Europe parties that qualifies them as uncontrollable given the freedom of movement and right of establishment guaranteed to EU citizens. The main challenge with respect to integration in the Netherlands appears to be not so much that of migrations but rather that of the rate of natural increase. In the communities established for the longest period of time (Turkish, Antillean, Indonesian), population growth is henceforth almost exclusively due to second generations. This explains the saliency of themes linked to integration. In order to appraise the migratory pressure as it is perceived as well as the message sent by Dutch media, it is necessary to look at the proportion of foreigners or foreign-born but, above all, it is of the utmost importance to look at second generations. The successful integration of



second generations therefore appears as fundamental in the current migration debate in the Netherlands.

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