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## **MIGRATION MOTIVES OF NON-DUTCH IMMIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS**

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## ***Abstract***

*There is much demand for information on migration motives, not only for the purpose of government policies, but also for statistical purposes, such as population forecasting. However, information on the purpose of migration is lacking in many countries. In the Netherlands, migration statistics are based on information from the municipal population registers, but motives of immigrants are not recorded in these registers. Therefore, additional data on migration motives from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals of the Ministry of Justice has been used. The data from this Central Register of non-Dutch nationals has, at the individual level, been linked with data from the local population registers. The combination of data from the two sources offered a better perception of the relation between asylum migration and subsequent family reunion. The size of family reunion migration caused by asylum migrants is still relatively modest. It appears that family reunion often takes place one year after the asylum seeker has been registered in a municipal population register. It is estimated that for every four asylum migrants one person immigrated for the purpose of family reunion or family formation.*

## **1. Introduction**

Since 1995, the number of immigrants coming to the Netherlands has increased strongly, reaching a record level of 133 thousand persons in 2000, including 91 thousand non-Dutch nationals. The previous record was established in 1998, when 122 thousand persons immigrated to the Netherlands, including 82 thousand non-Dutch nationals.

Statistics Netherlands obtains more detailed information on immigration since 1 October 1994, when a new computerized population registration system was introduced. However, statistics on international migration in the Netherlands still do not distinguish reasons for migration, such as asylum, labour, family reunion, marriage or study. In recent years, in view of the demand for this kind of information, Statistics Netherlands made several estimates of asylum migrants, labour migrants, family reunionists and family forming migrants. These estimates were based on different data sources, such as the Population Registers, the Central Reception of Asylum Seekers and the National Employment Services (Croes, 1995; Nicolaas, 1999; Sprangers, 1995). Recently, detailed information on migration motives became available from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals of the Ministry of Justice.

This article starts with a brief description of the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals (the main source for this analysis) and an outline of the migration categories that are distinguished in this register. This is followed by a short description of the method used to derive information on migration purposes. In the next section the main results are given, with special attention to labour migration, asylum migration and family reunion / family formation migration of asylum migrants in the Netherlands. The article ends with some conclusions and suggestions for further research.

## **2. Migration motives and the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals**

The Central Register of non-Dutch nationals is a registration containing data on all non-Dutch nationals legally residing in the Netherlands. The information in this register is derived from registrations of the Aliens Police and the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Dutch Ministry of Justice. In the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals, migration motives of all non-Dutch nationals living in the Netherlands are registered. From the information of this Central Register and additional information from the Population Registers, data has been deduced on (among others) asylum migrants, labour migrants, family reunionists and family forming migrants.

### *2.1. Asylum migrants*

Not every asylum seeker will be allowed entry into the Netherlands and will be registered as an immigrant in a municipal population register. Those who are allowed to stay in the Netherlands and can be considered as asylum migrants, will only be recorded in a municipal population register in the course of time.

Asylum seekers are usually registered in a municipal population register once they depart from a centre for asylum seekers to a private dwelling. Asylum seekers who reside in a centre for more than one year (since 1 June 2000: more than half a year) can be registered as well, but it is estimated that no more than one quarter to one third of the asylum seekers in the centres for asylum seekers are in fact registered as immigrants (Nicolaas and Sprangers, 2001, pp. 4-7).

In this article, the following categories of immigrants are considered to be *asylum migrants*, at least insofar as they have been registered in a municipal population register:

- asylum seekers (applicants for asylum who have not yet been granted any official status);
- former asylum seekers granted any residence permit, i.e.:
  - persons with the refugee status ('A-status');
  - persons with a temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds ('VTV-humanitair');
  - persons with a conditional residence permit ('Voorwaardelijke Vergunning tot Verblijf, VVTV');
- unaccompanied minors ('Alleenstaande Minderjarige Asielzoekers, AMA's');
- invited refugees.

Part of the immigrants with a residence permit on humanitarian grounds may have come to the Netherlands for other reasons than asylum. Because of the fact that it concerns small numbers (less than one thousand in 1998), all of these persons have been counted as asylum migrants.

In 2001 the asylum procedure in the Netherlands has changed considerably. According to revised legislation (Vreemdelingenwet), there will be just one (temporary) refugee status. This status will, after a period of three years, change into a permanent status.

## 2.2. *Labour migrants*

Labour migration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) is restricted and a work permit is necessary. For persons from other countries of the EEA no work permit is needed. The organisation that is responsible for issuing work permits is the National Employment Services. Work permits can be issued only in case recruitment from within the European Union is impossible.

As a consequence, the data from the National Employment Services refers only to non-Dutch nationals from non-EEA countries. It must be taken into account that in many situations work permits are issued, although the persons involved cannot be considered as labour migrants. For example, seasonal workers and trainees do not stay long enough to be considered as immigrants, as the criterion for registration as an immigrant in the Netherlands is four months. To be more precise: every person intending to stay in the Netherlands for at least two thirds of the forthcoming six months, should notify the municipal population register immediately after arrival in the Netherlands. Furthermore, several other groups that cannot be considered as labour immigrants need a work permit, such as artists on tour and asylum seekers working temporarily in agriculture. The information on migration motives including labour migration in this article is primarily based on the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals. Furthermore, as far as labour migration is concerned, additional information on work permits from the National Employment Services has been used.

### *2.3. Family reunionists*

The term *family reunion migration* is used for the immigration of family members joining their family members who came to the Netherlands in previous years, including children who arrive after their father and/or mother. If family members (for example of a labour migrant) immigrate in the *same year* as the labour migrant, these family members are considered to be *accompanying family members*. Family reunion is often preceded by labour migration (family reunion of Turks and Moroccans is a well-known example in the Netherlands), or by asylum migration. In general, asylum migrants with a residence permit have the right to bring their partner and/or children to the Netherlands.

In 1993, the rules for family reunion were tightened. As from that year family reunion for migrants is only possible within three years of arrival in the Netherlands. Furthermore, conditions with regard to income and accommodation have to be fulfilled.

#### *2.4. Family forming migrants*

*Family formation migration* occurs when someone settles in the Netherlands for the purpose of marriage or cohabitation with a partner already living in the Netherlands. Often, the latter partner is a migrant him- or herself. For migrants, family formation is allowed only in case one has resided legally in the Netherlands for at least three years and if one disposes of a sufficient income and appropriate accommodation.

#### *2.5. Other categories*

Apart from these four groups the following categories of legal immigrants are distinguished:

- students;
- au pairs / trainees;
- pensioners;
- people who come to the Netherlands for medical treatment.

### 3. Method

In order to extend the files derived from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals with such variables as the year of most recent arrival of immigrants, the data from this register has – at the individual level – been linked with data obtained from the municipal population registers. In the next step, adjustments were made in order to comply with Statistics Netherlands' definitions regarding migration motives. Furthermore, imputations for missing data were carried out. Finally, the data on migration motives from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals was made consistent with the statistics on international migration. These steps are described in more detail below.

#### *3.1 Adjustments carried out for data from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals*

##### *3.1.1 Adjustments concerning asylum migrants and family reunionists*

With a view to getting information about the year of most recent arrival of immigrants and their possible family members, population register data on 1 January 1999 has, at the individual level, been linked with data from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals. In the local population registers, data is available on (among others) variables like age, sex, country of birth, year of most recent arrival in the Netherlands, year of most recent change of marital status and position in the family.

In some cases, the migration motive according to the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals has been adjusted on the basis of additional information about the year of arrival of the family members involved according to the population registers. It appears that family members of asylum seekers come to the Netherlands after the asylum seeker and start an asylum procedure as well. In the



Central Register of non-Dutch nationals, these persons are – according to legislation – also registered as asylum seekers. If, however, both husband and wife in a married couple are registered as asylum seekers, whereas they are registered in the population registers as immigrants in different years, the person who was the last to arrive has not been considered an asylum migrant but a family reunionist. Similar adjustments are made for family reuniting children who are registered as asylum seekers in the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals (*table 1*).

### *3.1.2 Adjustments concerning simultaneously immigrating family members*

In the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals, family reunionists are distinguished from *family forming migrants*, but *family reunionists* cannot be distinguished from *simultaneously immigrating family members*. Family migration of Turks and Moroccans consists for the larger part of family reunion and family formation. With regard to the immigration from Western countries, such as the European Union, the United States of America and Japan, it is, considering the size of these groups, more relevant to distinguish *simultaneously (in the same year) immigrating family members* on the one hand and *family reunionists* on the other hand. With a view to this distinction, additional information from population stock data has been used in the same sense as described above in the case of asylum migrants and family reunionists.

Table 1 shows the adjustments made to the information in the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals.

#### *Table 1*

#### *Adjustments carried out for the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals*

Table 1  
 Corrections with respect to certain migration motives according to the Dutch Central Register of non-Dutch nationals (CRN)

Migration motive according to Central Register of non-Dutch nationals	Migration motive partner according to Central Register of non-Dutch nationals	Position in the family according to Population Registers	Year of most recent migration of spouse/partner according to Population Registers	Year of most recent migration of the father according to Population Registers	Year of most recent migration of the mother according to Population Registers	Migration motive after correction
asylum 1)	asylum 1) 2)	spouse	before			family reunion
asylum 1)	asylum 1) 2)	spouse	same year/late			asylum
asylum 1)	asylum 1) 2)	cohabiting person 3)	before			family reunion
asylum 1)	asylum 1) 2)	cohabiting person 3)	same year/late			asylum
asylum 1)		child 4)		before		family reunion
asylum 1)		child 4)		other 5)	before	family reunion
asylum 1)		child 4)		other 5)	other 5)	asylum
family reunion		spouse	before			family reunion
family reunion		spouse	same year			accompanying family member
family reunion		cohabiting person 3)	before			family reunion
family reunion		cohabiting person 3)	same year			accompanying family member
family reunion		child 4)		before		family reunion
family reunion		child 4)		other 5)	before	family reunion
family reunion		child 4)		other 5)	other 5)	accompanying family member

1) Persons with a refugee-status (permanent residence status), a 'VTV' (residence permit) or a 'VTVV' (conditional residence permit).  
 2) Corrections are only made if the partner is registered in the CRN as an asylum seeker as well.  
 3) Only cohabiting couples with common children living at the same address.  
 4) Position in the family, irrespective of the age of the child.  
 5) Same year/late/not applicable.

### 3.2 Imputations for missing data

Especially for the most recent years, information from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals includes many 'unknown migration motives' (about 15 percent). For recent years, these unknown migration motives are often related to running procedures concerning residence permits. Therefore, the distribution of the recorded migration motives has, at the individual level, been applied to the 'unknown' migration motives. Variables that are strongly connected with the migration motive (sex, age, marital status, year of most recent arrival and country of birth) have been used as auxiliary variables for the imputation of these 'unknown' migration motives.

### 3.3 Consistency with international migration statistics

The estimates were carried out for the period 1990-1998. The data that has been used to make these estimates was for the major part derived from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals and refers to the stock on 1 January 1999. Making the calculations, it had to be taken into account that,

especially with reference to naturalizations and departures, it is not obvious to what extent information on non-Dutch immigrants – who immigrated in an earlier year and who are still living in the Netherlands – is representative for the original migration inflow in that particular year. There is, after all, a relation between the migration motive and the duration of stay in the Netherlands. Labour migrants from Western countries and students, for example, will often stay only temporarily in the Netherlands, whereas family forming immigrants often stay for a longer period. In 1997, for example, about one third of all immigrants from the United States of America came to the Netherlands for the purpose of labour. For 1992, the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals shows a share of only 18 percent for labour migrants from this country. The fact that the latter percentage is that much lower is probably related to returning immigrants who came to the Netherlands temporarily for the purpose of labour. So, the available information provides a picture of migration motives of immigrants in a certain year, insofar as these immigrants have not left the Netherlands, have died or have been naturalized by then. Therefore, the distribution of numbers of immigrants by migration motives on the basis of stock data on 1 January 1999 will, for previous years, not always represent the composition of the actual migration inflow. For this reason, the data on labour migration in this article are restricted to the period 1996-1998.

Since it is reasonable to assume that most of the asylum migrants have stayed in the Netherlands, it is likely that no strong misrepresentation as described above will occur with respect to this group of immigrants. In this article, estimates of numbers of asylum migrants will therefore be presented for the entire period 1990-1998. A plausibility check, based on a comparison with previous, calculated numbers of asylum migrants on the basis of the enumeration of population registers for the period 1990-1996 (Nicolaas, 1999), supports the assumption that no serious bias occurs for earlier years.

In order to achieve consistency with the total numbers of immigrants according to the international migration statistics with respect to year of most recent arrival by sex, by age group and by country of birth, the estimates are adjusted in such a way that they equal these immigration totals.

#### 4. The reasons why immigrants settle in the Netherlands

Table 2.

##### Migration motives of non-Dutch immigrants, 1998

Table 2  
Migration motives of non-Dutch immigrants, 1998

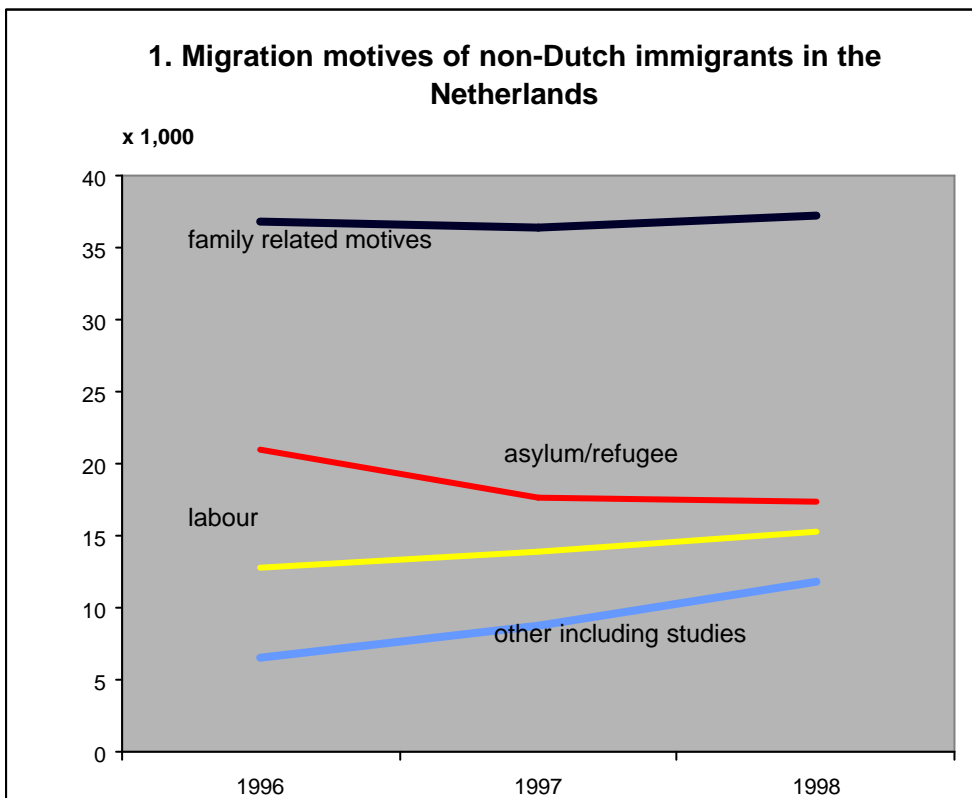
Country of birth	Total	Family reunion	Accompanying family member	Family formation	Asylum	Labour	Study	Other	
	x 1,000								
European Union	18.0	1.9	2.0	1.3	0.0	9.7	2.1	2.2	
of which:									
Belgium	1.8	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.8	0.1	0.4	
Germany	4.7	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.0	1.5	0.6	1.1	
United Kingdom	4.1	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.0	2.5	0.1	0.2	
Other EU countries	7.5	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.0	3.9	1.2	0.4	
Turkey	5.1	1.6	0.1	2.7	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	
Morocco	5.3	1.6	0.0	2.8	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.1	
Suriname	3.2	0.7	0.2	1.8	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	
Afghanistan	3.9	0.6	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Iraq	7.4	1.6	0.0	0.0	5.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	
United States	3.1	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.0	1.1	0.2	0.3	
Former Soviet Union	2.6	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.1	
Other countries	32.8	5.1	2.1	8.4	6.8	4.6	3.3	2.5	
Total	81.6	14.0	5.2	18.0	17.3	15.3	6.4	5.4	

The most numerous groups of foreign immigrants in the Netherlands arrive for the purpose of asylum, for the purpose of labour, as family reunionists or as family forming migrants. In 1998, some 18 thousand immigrants arrived because of marriage or cohabitation. The number of family reunionists amounted to 14 thousand (*table 2*). Family reunion is often preceded by labour migration (for example the family reunion of Turkish or Moroccan guest workers), or by asylum migration. Over 17 thousand immigrants were seeking refuge in the Netherlands, whereas 15 thousand persons came for the purpose of work. Just over 6 thousand immigrants came to the Netherlands because of studies. The remaining (mixed) group counted over 5 thousand immigrants, including pensioners, trainees and au pairs.

Figure 1 shows the migration motives of non-Dutch immigrants for the period 1996-1998. Because of the uncertainty regarding the representativeness of data for earlier years, this figure is restricted to the period 1996-1998.

Figure 1

Migration motives of non-Dutch immigrants, 1996-1998



### Asylum migration

The number of asylum migrants increased strongly in the first half of the 1990s. After 1994, the number decreased slightly. The past few years, many asylum seekers came from Iraq (5.7 thousand in 1998) and Afghanistan (3.3 thousand in 1998). Not all asylum seekers who are registered in a municipal population register are allowed to stay in the Netherlands. Only a small part of the

asylum seekers is registered after a one-year stay in a centre for asylum seekers (half a year since 1 June 2000).

### *Labour migration*

Because of a shortage of manpower in the Netherlands in the 1960s and early 1970s, foreign labourers were recruited from Mediterranean countries, such as Algeria, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and Yugoslavia. It was assumed at the time that these workers would stay only temporarily. Many Spaniards and Italians indeed stayed only for some time, after which they returned home. For most Turks and Moroccans the stay was longer.

In the 1990s, most labour migrants came from more prosperous Western European and other economically developed countries, such as the United States of America. Comparatively large numbers of labour migrants came from the United Kingdom (2.5 thousand in 1998). The labour migration from countries of the European Union has increased by seven percent between 1996 and 1998, whereas the immigration of workers from non-EU countries has increased even more in this period (by 40 percent).

Most data on labour migration in this article is derived from the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals. As this data refers to the stock on 1 January 1999, flow data by year of arrival is retrospective by nature. As indicated before, in connection with naturalizations, emigration and deaths, it is not known to what extent data regarding immigrants who arrived in earlier years and who are still living in the Netherlands on 1 January 1999, is typical of the total number of immigrants in those previous years. Therefore, as a check on plausibility, additional estimates based on numbers of work permits were used (*figure 2*). It should be taken into account that in many cases in which a work permit is provided, the persons involved cannot be considered as migrants for the purpose of labour. Therefore, not all persons who were granted a work permit have been counted as labour immigrants. For example, asylum seekers who are allowed to work temporarily in

agriculture, trainees and artists on tour were not taken into account. The alternative estimates of the number of labour migrants based on work permit data show a somewhat stronger increase (almost 75 percent) than according to the estimate on the basis of the Central Register of non-Dutch nationals.

In the 1990s, contrary to the 1960s, many foreign workers migrating to the Netherlands were highly educated. Data from the National Employment Services show that from the United States of America comparatively many technical experts, managers and informaticians migrated to the Netherlands (Nicolaas and Sprangers, 2000, pp. 9-12).

*Figure 2*

*Labour migration into the Netherlands from outside the European Union*



### *Family reunion*

In recent years, family formation as a motive to immigrate has been more important than family reunion. This is partly a consequence of the strong decrease in family reunion migration from Turkey and Morocco, whereas relatively large numbers of Turks and Moroccans came over for the purpose of marriage. Nevertheless, there are still comparatively large numbers of Turks and Moroccans who reunite with family members already living in the Netherlands (both more than 1.6 thousand in 1998).

The number of family reunionists joining asylum migrants has increased in the 1990s. In 1998, the number of family reunionists from Iraq nearly equalled the numbers from Turkey or Morocco (1.6 thousand). This number is high compared with the numbers of family reunionists from neighbouring countries. In 1998, some 500 German and British family reunionists settled in the Netherlands. The number of Belgians reuniting with family members in the Netherlands hardly exceeded 200.



### *Family formation*

Turks and Moroccans are also the major groups as far as family formation is concerned. In 1998, 2.7 thousand Turks and 2.8 thousand Moroccans settled in the Netherlands for the purpose of family formation. More than half of the immigrating Turks and Moroccans arrived as family formers. Furthermore, comparatively many Surinamese family formers have migrated to the Netherlands.

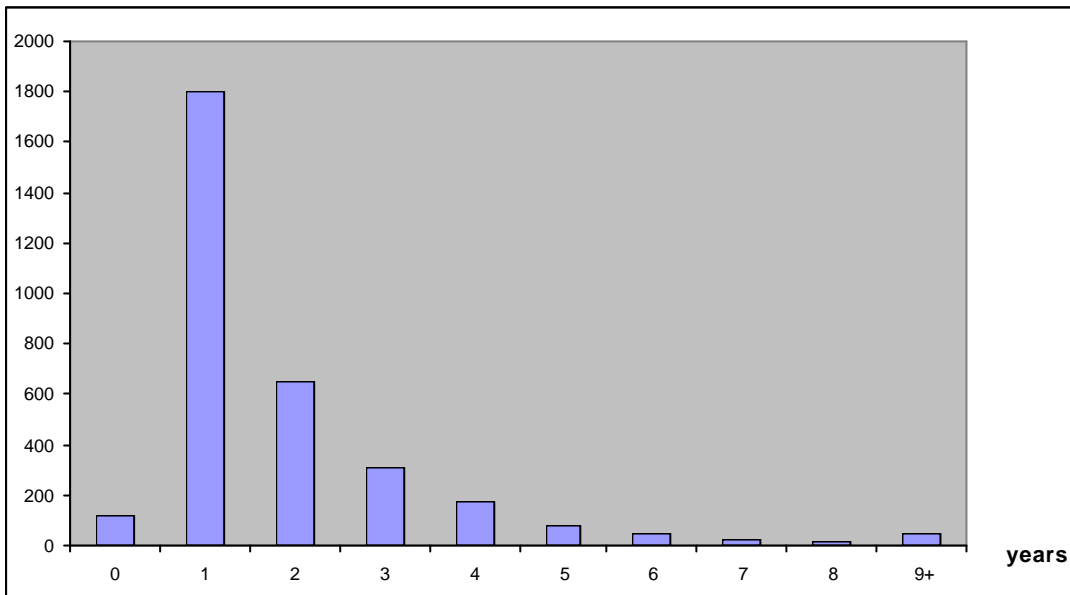
### *Asylum seekers: subsequent family reunion often takes place in the following year*

In this analysis, the year of most recent arrival of asylum migrants has, at the individual level, been compared with the year of most recent arrival of the family reunionists. Therefore, the period of time between the registration of an asylum migrant and the family reunionist could be determined.

From *figure 3*, it turns out that the majority of the family reunionists join the asylum migrant one year after the registration of the asylum migrant. On average, the difference in calendar years between the year of most recent arrival of the family reunionist and the asylum migrant is two years.

### *Figure 3*

*Difference in years between the arrival of the family reunionist and the asylum migrant*



Since the *peak* in family reunion migration is situated one year after the registration of the asylum migrant, the numbers of family reunionists and family forming migrants in the period 1991-1998 have been related to the numbers of asylum migrants in the period 1990-1997. In this way, the ratio between numbers of family reunionists / family forming migrants and numbers of asylum migrants has been calculated per country of birth. The ratios are presented in *table 3*.

For the total number of asylum migrants it is estimated that for every four asylum migrants one person has immigrated for the purpose of family reunion or family formation. This estimated ratio hardly changes if the *average* period of time (of two years) between the registration of an asylum migrant and the family reunionist / family forming migrant is used. In that case, for every four to five asylum migrants one person turns out to have immigrated for the purpose of family reunion or family formation.

This ratio differs considerably by country of origin, which might be related to the family-context in which immigrants from the different countries come to the Netherlands. If, for example, immigration from a certain country comprises for the larger part families (Iran for example), the

number of family reunionists and family forming migrants from this country, as a consequence, will be low (*table 3*).

*Table 3*

*Family reunion and family formation migration 1991-1998 in relation to asylum migration 1990-1997, by country of birth*

Country of birth	Asylum migration 1990-1997	Family reunion and family formation migration 1991-1998	Number of family reunionists and family forming migrants per 1,000 asylum migrants
Eastern Europe	37201	6964	187
of which:			
(Former) Yugoslavia	31543	6400	203
Asia (excl. Turkey, Japan and Indonesia)	54668	15897	291
of which:			
Afghanistan	9600	1381	144
Iran	13484	2030	151
Iraq	16817	4882	290
Sri Lanka	3334	1489	447
Vietnam	2116	1222	578
Afrika (excl. Morocco)	40107	9094	227
of which:			
Angola	2132	342	160
Ethiopia	3696	608	165
Somalia	20656	1743	84
Zaire / Dem. Rep. of Congo	3409	580	170
Other countries of origin	30419	6827	224
Total of all countries	162396	38782	239
Total of ten countries of origin of asylum seekers	106787	20677	194

## 5. Conclusions, expectations and further research

In the period 1995-2000 the number of immigrants coming to the Netherlands has strongly increased. In 2000, immigration into the Netherlands reached a record level of 133 thousand persons. The most numerous groups of foreign immigrants to the Netherlands arrive for the purpose of asylum, for the purpose of labour or for family reunion or family formation. Each of these four groups accounts for about 20 percent of the total immigration of non-Dutch nationals. The remaining 20 percent consist of students, pensioners, persons who came to the Netherlands for a medical treatment, trainees and au pairs.

Many family reunionists are family members of labour migrants who arrived in earlier years.

Although the recent labour shortages in the Netherlands are highly connected with the economic boom in the past few years, the question is raised to what extent we may (in the long run) expect a more structural increase in the migration of workers, due to the process of ageing. In the case of future structural labour shortages in the Netherlands, more labour migrants will come to the Netherlands, and so will their possible family members.

The number of family reunionists and family forming migrants caused by asylum migrants is still small, but growing. Estimating future numbers of asylum migrants and their family reuniting and family forming migrants however, is difficult. Asylum migration depends on several factors such as the political situation in the countries of origin and the asylum policies in the Netherlands in relation to asylum policies in other European countries.

Despite the uncertainties involved, it can be expected that in the short run the number of family-reuniting and family forming migrants from countries that have recently generated large flows of asylum seekers, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, will increase. In fact, the number of family reunionists and family forming migrants from these two countries has already increased in the past few years.

On the other hand, the number of family-reuniting and family forming migrants will become negligible for countries with low numbers of asylum requests in recent years. Examples are Angola, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

The migration of asylum seekers has become an important part of the total immigration into the Netherlands. It is therefore recommended to monitor this migration category in several respects. Firstly, further investigation of the share of asylum seekers that are eventually registered in a local population register as asylum migrants is necessary. Secondly, further study of the relation

between migrants for asylum and family reunionists is important, in order to get a better insight into the whole process of the registration of asylum seekers and their possible family members.

Two examples for further investigation are given below:

- For future research it is recommended to include the migration motives of the mother and/or the father of immigrating children. In this way, relating asylum migration to family reunion can be improved and family reunion caused by asylum migrants can be distinguished more precisely from family reunionists following labour migrants;
- In addition to the analysis of the migration motives of *immigrants*, the *outflow* of migrants by migration motive should be analysed in order to get a better understanding of the dynamics in migration flows. In this way, for example, estimates of the chances of migrants to deregister from the municipal registers by original migration motive can be made in the long term.

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