

## Summary and conclusions

### Parenting in non-Western migrant families: A review and exploration

This exploratory study looks at the parenting of children in non-Western migrant families. In the main, it does this from the perspective of the parents themselves, but also includes the children's perspective. There is a dearth of large-scale research offering a representative picture of the raising of children in migrant families. As well as looking back at earlier – mainly qualitative – research, this report therefore also explores the opportunities for using existing quantitative research data as a basis for creating a more general picture of parenting in migrant families. Before looking at this in section S.2, in section S.1 we first briefly describe these groups of parents and their families based on demographic data and information about their circumstances. In section S.3 we summarise the findings of the report, discuss the limitations and take a look ahead.

#### S.1 Demography and background

One in seven parents with young children in the Netherlands have a non-Western background. That means that either the child itself was born in a non-Western country (first generation) or at least one of his or her parents was (second generation). Parents with a Turkish background are the biggest group, followed in order by parents with a Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean background. It is these four groups that are the main focus of this report.

#### Wide diversity in family life

More than eight out of ten migrant parents have one or two children living at home, which means that most migrant families are no bigger than native Dutch families. There is also wide diversity between the different origin groups in the way their family life is structured. For example, roughly one in seven parents with a Turkish or Moroccan background are single parents. That is not the case for parents with a Surinamese or Antillean background, of whom around one in three have no partner. Another difference is the frequency of unmarried cohabitation in the Surinamese and Antillean groups – more than a third of couples with children are not married – whereas this is unusual in the Turkish and Moroccan groups, where fewer than one in ten parental couples are unmarried.

Relationships with a native Dutch partner are also uncommon in the Turkish and Moroccan groups: fewer than 10% of married and unmarried couples with children include a native Dutch partner. Migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin often choose a partner from their own origin group, though usually someone who has grown up in the Netherlands. This is another point of difference with the Surinamese and Antillean groups, where a relationship with a Dutch native is not unusual: in four out of ten families with a Surinamese back-

ground and six out of ten of those with an Antillean background, there is a Dutch native partner.

Teenage motherhood is not common in the Netherlands, including among women of Turkish or Moroccan background. Teenage births are more common in the Surinamese and Antillean group, with just under 2% and 3% of girls with a Surinamese and Antillean background, respectively, having a child at a young or very young age.

### Second generation closer to Dutch natives in terms of family formation

More than four out of five migrant parents are members of the first generation, and just under one in five are members of the second generation. The second generation are relatively young, especially in the Turkish and Moroccan groups. The share of second-generation parents is likely to increase further in the coming years. Second-generation parents generally have young children.

As regards family formation, second-generation parents resemble Dutch natives more than the first generation. The differences are sometimes small; for example, non-Western women in the second generation are not much younger than Dutch native women on average when they have their first child, at around 29 years compared with just under 30 years for native Dutch women. By way of comparison, first-generation women with a Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese background are around 26 years old on the birth of their first child, while women with an Antillean background are a year younger on average.

### Adverse living conditions for many migrant families

The conditions in which migrant families live are much less favourable than those of native Dutch families. Children with a non-Western background grow up in a poor family roughly three and a half times as often as native Dutch children. Roughly a third of children with a Moroccan background grow up in poverty, as do around a quarter of children with a Turkish background. The percentages for Antillean and Surinamese children are lower (23% and 15%, respectively), but are still higher than for children with a native Dutch background (8%).

The differences between migrant children and native Dutch children have increased in recent years due to the economic crisis. The high proportion of children in poverty reflects the unfavourable labour market position of non-Western migrants: they are less well educated than Dutch natives, less often in paid work and more often dependent on social assistance benefit.

## S.2 Exploratory study of parenting

There are no large-scale quantitative studies focusing specifically on parenting in migrant families, and it is therefore not possible to present a representative picture. Notwithstanding this limitation, as well as looking back at earlier – mainly qualitative – research, this report explores the scope for forming a more general picture of the raising of children in

migrant families, based on data drawn from earlier research among parents and children which included some questions about parenting.

### Parenting shows characteristics of different traditions

Earlier qualitative research shows that migrant parents are in contact with the parenting traditions of the Netherlands as well as those from their country of origin. This appears to be supported by the quantitative findings in this report. Just like native Dutch parents, for example, many migrant parents say they explain rules and punishments to their children and that they rarely apply physical punishment. Similarly, like Dutch native children, most migrant children say they feel supported by their parents.

At the same time, the migrant parents in our study place different emphases in bringing up their children, which can sometimes be traced to traditions in the countries of origin. For example, there is less emphasis on children's autonomy. Many migrant parents feel that other aspects of parenting are also important, such as good school achievement and religion. In addition, children from some origin groups find it less natural than their Dutch native peers to communicate openly with parents.

### Supervision and knowledge

The perception that many migrant parents do not properly supervise their children outside the home does not appear to correspond with the perceptions of the parents in our study. Between eight and nine out of ten parents with a Turkish, Moroccan and Antillean background report that they often ask their children where they have been on their return home. A contributory factor here may be that parents regard the new setting as less safe for their children or as culturally different. As our study is based on self-report, the possibility cannot be ruled out that parents presented the situation in a better light than the reality.

Most migrant children (especially those of Turkish origin) also feel that their parents exercise strong supervision. Apart from the fact that parents often ask where their children are going or have been, children often have to seek their parents' permission to go out for the evening. At the same time, they feel less often than their native Dutch peers that their parents are aware of all their activities.

### Most help from parents and parents-in-law

Migrant parents regard their own parents or parents-in-law as the most important source of advice on bringing up their children: roughly one in two migrant parents receive advice from them, and in this respect they are no different from native Dutch parents. Migrant parents seek help from neighbours and friends less often than native Dutch parents: fewer than a third do so. Second-generation migrant parents receive advice from parents, neighbours and friends more often than first-generation migrant parents. This is partly because members of the second generation have younger children and probably therefore also need more help.

The role and function of network contacts can vary, as became clear from interviews with first-generation mothers of Moroccan background. Members of the same generation and background who also live in the Netherlands can be of particular importance, because they share the same background and identity and can therefore be a key source of knowledge about how to bring up children in Dutch society as a parent with a migration background. Parents/parents-in-law who live in the Netherlands can often provide practical support, such as babysitting, whereas parents/parents-in-law in Morocco play more of a background role, advising on normative and identity issues.

### Support and structure are associated with more favourable outcomes for children

Broadly speaking, parenting by Dutch native and migrant parents appears to be associated in a similar way with the behaviour and health of their children. Parenting in which parents offer their children support and lay down clear rules is associated with the most favourable developmental outcomes for children. Children in such an environment have fewer emotional and behavioural problems and display more social and less antisocial behaviour. Physical punishment is by contrast associated with more problems. It also seems to be important that parents have confidence in their ability to bring up children. There is probably some mutual influence at work here: not only does the way parents bring up their children affect their children's behaviour and development, but children can also elicit certain behaviour on the part of their parents.

### Migrant children have more problems in some areas

There is ample evidence from earlier research that young people in their teens and twenties with a migration background have more problems than their native Dutch counterparts. They more frequently drop out of school or leave school prematurely, more often display criminal behaviour, and youth employment is high. The findings in this report suggest that young migrant children also do less well in a number of areas, according to both their own reports and their parents. Compared with native Dutch children, for example, they more often have problems with behaviour and interaction with peers and they less often feel healthy. This does however need to be seen in perspective: the vast majority of migrant children are doing well.

### Differences in problems partly explained by differences in socio-economic circumstances

The finding that migrant children do less well than Dutch native children in some areas is partly due to the less favourable circumstances in which they grow up. In many families, the household income is low. There are various reasons why a low income can pose a threat to children's welfare. Parents may experience stress because of the difficulty in making ends meet, and that stress can be transferred to the children. This stress can also affect children indirectly, because parents are less likely to spot and react to signals given off by their child. There is also less money available to provide for the family well and to facilitate participation.

Parenting can also play a role in explaining differences in problems. The fact that young migrants more often report behavioural problems is partly related to the fact that they less often feel than their native Dutch peers that their parents are aware of their activities and provide them with support. This study devoted only limited attention to the role of more cultural factors such as the degree to which young people or their parents are integrated into Dutch society; this question consequently warrants further attention.

### Parenting not necessarily more demanding, but there are certain specific tasks

Despite the less favourable circumstances, most migrant parents do not find bringing up their children more demanding than native Dutch parents. Like their native counterparts, roughly four out of ten parents of Moroccan origin say they often find bringing up their children very difficult, and the same applies for roughly one in three parents with a Surinamese or Antillean background. Parents with a Turkish background more often find bringing up children difficult, with almost six out of ten saying they often find it very difficult. It may be that the relatively strong social control within the Turkish community means these parents experience greater pressure to 'get it right'.

Earlier (mainly qualitative) research shows that migrant parents experience more uncertainties in some areas than native Dutch parents. They may for example feel more uncertain about the religious upbringing of their children in an environment where religion is not an embedded part of life. Faith plays an important role for parents with a Turkish or Moroccan background, in particular; parents of Moroccan origin consider it important that their child should be or become a religious person, and this also applies to a lesser extent for parents of Turkish origin. The negative social climate surrounding Islam can also impose an additional task on these parents: how can they make their children resilient to stigmatisation and exclusion because of their religion?

The migrant parents in our study attached substantially more importance to good school achievement than native Dutch parents. This is the most important goal of parenting for almost all origin groups. This may be connected to the unfavourable living conditions of many migrant parents, perhaps reflecting the wish and hope that their children will be in a better position materially in later life than they themselves are.

The emphasis on school achievement may also reflect parents' concerns in this regard, because despite clear improvements, the educational achievement of non-Western migrant children still lags behind that of their native Dutch peers. The educational support within the family and the involvement of parents with the school may play a role for the latter group, as earlier (mainly qualitative) research has suggested.

In families with a Turkish and Moroccan background, the emphasis in bringing up girls is on preparing them for a future role as a wife and mother. The amount of freedom for girls and women appears to be increasing in the younger generations, as borne out by the sharp rise in the number of women from these groups in higher education and the fact that these women also more often continue working after the birth of their first child.

In families with a Surinamese or Antillean background, attention in bringing up girls is focused on preventing motherhood at a young age, reflecting the relative frequency of

teenage and single motherhood in these groups. There is also an emphasis on financial and emotional independence in girls' upbringing.

### Different parental reactions to delinquent behaviour

How do parents react when their children have strayed from the straight and narrow, for example if they become involved in criminality? This was studied among a group of families who were in very vulnerable circumstances: low household income, low-educated parents and living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty and crime. The reactions were varied and did not appear to depend on the origin of the parents; similar reactions were also found among native Dutch parents.

There are parents who are unsure what to do for the best and who feel somewhat powerless. Parents sometimes have little or no awareness of what their children are up to. Sometimes parents are aware but accept it, deny their children's behaviour or try not to get too worked up about it. Other parents openly disapprove of their children's behaviour and try to keep them out of trouble despite the violence and criminality in the neighbourhood. However, there are also parents who play down the criminal behaviour of their children or who tacitly permit it.

## S.3 Evaluation and look ahead

### Limitations

One of the objectives of this report was to evaluate what our exploratory study has produced and to summarise the questions that remain unanswered. To obtain a representative picture of how migrant parents bring up their children, one would ideally carry out a survey among a large, representative sample of parents, using surveyors/interviewers with the same migration background as the respondents. Such a large-scale survey that meets these conditions has not been carried out to date, and was also not possible within the scope of this report. In order to be able to present a more general picture of parenting in migrant families, we therefore sought recourse to existing data collected in earlier research among migrant groups that was not specifically aimed at parenting or migrant parents. Using these data carries a number of limitations, and caution therefore needs to be exercised when drawing conclusions. For example, we cannot say for certain how accurately the migrant parents in this study represent the total population of migrant parents in the Netherlands. Additionally, much of the study was based on self-report by parents (and children), who may have presented a more positive picture than the reality. Finally, it was not possible with the available material to give a complete picture of parenting; we were only able to look at a few aspects.

### What we do not yet know

In addition to obtaining a general picture, it is also important for the future to gain an insight into specific groups or specific issues. The proportion of parents with a migrant background who were born and raised in the Netherlands – the second generation – will

increase in the years ahead. It is important to continue monitoring this new generation of parents in the coming years: do they trend more towards the parenting practices that have become customary in Dutch society, or do they hold on to the traditions of their country of origin?

To update and deepen the research on which this report is based, focus groups were organised in 2015 with a number of migrant parents and with professionals working in education, the care sector or at local authorities and who in that capacity have frequent contact with migrant parents or their children. Broadly speaking, the same picture of parenting in migrant families emerged from the focus group discussions as in this report. The discussions covered the concerns and challenges facing migrant parents in 2015, and accordingly also shed light on the gaps in our knowledge.

The interviewed parents were mainly concerned about the teenage and subsequent years. In particular they were worried that their children would not complete their education or would not find work and that they would go off the rails by coming into contact with the ‘wrong sort’ of friends and with drugs or crime. The professionals broadly shared these concerns. They also observed that the parents they encounter in their work have difficulty in striking a balance between their own traditions and their new situation. They believe that the concerns about radicalisation among parents (particularly those of Turkish and Moroccan origin) have increased since the attacks in Paris in January 2015, but there is also a great sense of powerlessness in this regard.

Another thing to emerge from the focus groups was parent’s distrust towards support organisations. If they have questions or problems, parents are inclined to resolve them themselves or in their own circle. It therefore seems important to identify how agencies could reach parents and their children more effectively.