

**EDUCATION DROP-OUT BY NON-EUROPEAN MIGRANTS  
IN THE NETHERLANDS**

**Problems and solutions**

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## **Introduction**

Time and time again ministries in the Netherlands are investigating the amount of drop-out of the youth from the so called 'not-western ethnic minorities', especially youngsters from Morocco and Turkey. It becomes clear that the number of drop-outs from these groups is twice as high as a comparable group of Dutch youngsters (Ministry of OCW, 2007). Reasons that are provided in several studies and articles are the 'Culture-clash' (Ministry of OCW, 2006), a poor participation in the Dutch culture (Migrants studies 1996), the low provision of advices on higher education (Crul, 2000), or parents having a different view on education (Migrants studies, 2004). Questions asked by the Dutch government, society and the academic world are; where do the problems start and on which side; is it poor integration/ participation or is the Dutch society not providing the right opportunities? In which way could the Netherlands deal with this drop-out?

This paper is called: Education drop-out by non-European migrants in the Netherlands, problems and solutions. It was the basis for the presentation I gave in Dubrovnik for the course: *Inclusion and Exclusion; Challenges of a new Europe*. In the paper I will describe; a short history of Dutch migration history, the need for participating in education, the drop-out case: definition, statistics and the actual problem, consequences for the pupil and society, existing programs and ideas and the task for Europe on this terrain.

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# **1 Background information**

## **1.1 History**

The first generation immigrants arrived in the Netherlands during the first three decades of rapid economic expansion after the Second World War, from nearby countries and the colonial areas overseas. Some of them were ‘temporary’ guest workers to perform jobs that had the native born were not ready to take, the majority of workers came from the Mediterranean. Their work tended to be dirty, dangerous, as well as low-waged. Others, were colonial migrants a result of the independence of these areas. Immigrants that came to the Netherlands were for instance from Indonesia, the Molucan Islands, Surinam and Aruba (Mollenkopf, 2005).

The second ‘wave’ was when the government began recruiting workers from further abroad. In the years from 1967 to 1973, the Netherlands recruited particularly in Morocco and Turkey. The majority not only stayed in the Netherlands, but had their families join them (especially Moroccans and Turks) (Svoboda, 2006). A temporary stay was as first considered by both themselves and the Dutch government. But over the years they settled down, formed families and had and raised children. The oldest of these children are now entering adolescence (Mollenkopf, 2005).

More recently, family reunification, from the Balkans conflicts, and the demise of the Soviet Union have generated additional flows of migration (Mollenkopf, 2005). In the Dutch case, many perceive these immigrants as “foreigners with a Dutch passport” (Sharpe, 2005). “Due to the growth of the second-generation population, today, about 15% of the pupils in primary schools have a non-Dutch ethnic background. The largest groups come from Turkey, Surinam, Morocco, the Dutch Antilles, and Aruba” (Luciak, 2004).

## **1.2 Participation in education**

With the decision to stay in the Netherlands, the immigrants and their children participated in the Dutch society and got access to all forms of social security and other arrangements. One of the most important things is their participation in education. Education is an instrument to equip youngsters well for the future; with all the chances it offers (Eimers, 2006). It can offer for instance a good income, a job and with that social contacts and inclusion. Acquiring basic competences is also essential for all citizens in order to participate in society.

Besides the chances that participating in education offers for the individual. A highly qualified workforce is important for each EU- member to play an important role in the global knowledge-based economy (Commission of the European communities, 2006).

## 2 The drop-out case

### 2.1 Definition of drop-out

The standard definition from the European Union of a drop-out is: *a person aged 18 to 24 leaving his/her education with less than lower secondary school and not participating in any form of education and training* (Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2005).

### 2.2 Youth education attainment level in the Netherlands

The EU-benchmark for 2010 is to reach: 85% of the population (aged 18 to 24) having completed upper secondary education (Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2008). As you can see in figure 1, the level of youth education attainment in the Netherlands is between the 69,3% and 77,4% (precisely: 74,7%) (Eurostat, 2006). So, we can say that the number of pupils with an upper secondary education in the Netherlands is smaller compared to for instance in the Scandinavian countries. One can conclude that the 85% benchmark for 2010 is not really close yet. In addition, there can be concluded that the youth education attainment is in the Netherlands, not specified to ethnic groups already lower than the EU-average (77,9%) (Eurostat, 2006).

In total there are, rounded, 946000 pupils in secondary school in the Netherlands. Secondary vocational education tracks (VMBO) has a total of 465900 pupils (2006, min. OCW, 2007). This track is not designed as terminal education but is intended to lay the basis for further education. The majority of pupils with VMBO qualifications go on a higher vocational education (Min OCW, 2007). Some of them quit after getting there diploma for this track and in that way do not succeed to get further education. Pupils who quit after getting a diploma for the lowest (level 1, see figure 3) type of vocational track are considered to be a drop-out, because their education is not considered to be sufficient (Min. OCW, 2007)

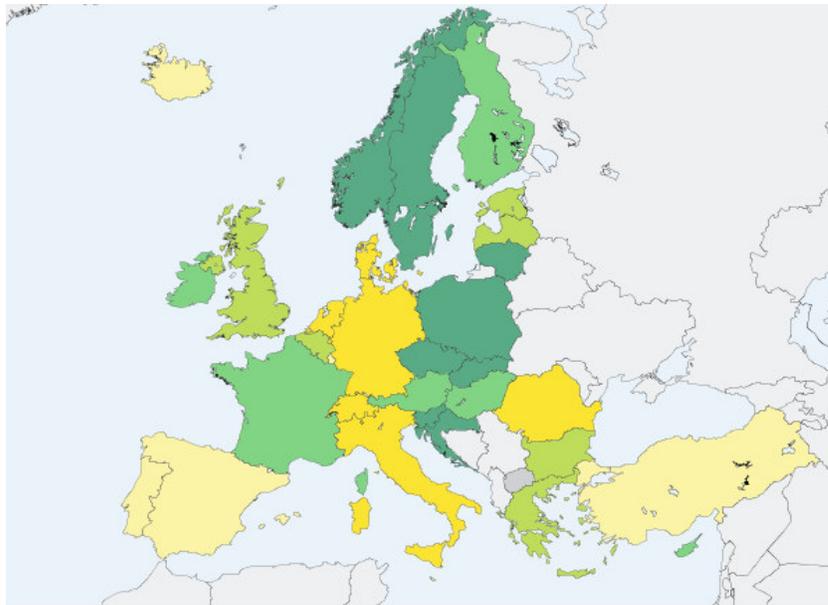
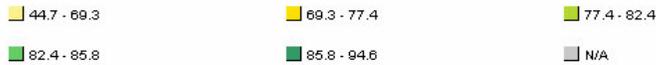


Figure 1: Source: Eurostat, 2006. Youth education attainment level. Percentage of the population aged 20 to 24 having completed at least upper secondary education

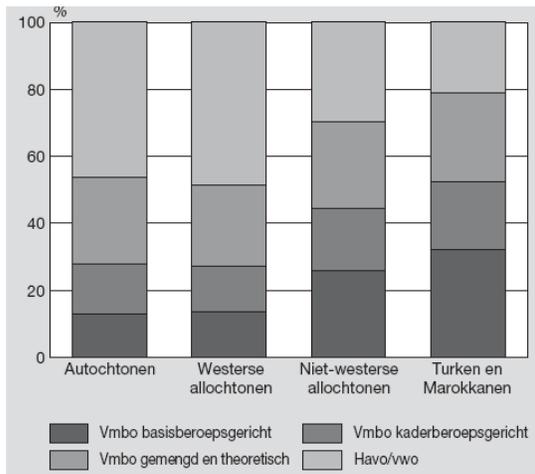
Legend (Data 2006)



### 2.3 Specified numbers for specific groups in the Netherlands

The percentages of youth education attainment in the Netherlands are compared to other European countries and the European Union benchmark quite low as shown in the paragraph 2.2. To get an insight in the specific groups of drop-outs we need more specific information.

As you can see in figure 2, pupils from non-western ethnic minorities are overrepresented in vocational tracks VMBO, especially Turks and Moroccans. Native Dutch pupils are better (re)presented in the higher grades of secondary school.



Translation of the text

*Vmbo basisberoepsgericht*: vocational track focused on craftwork.

*Vmbo gemengd en theoretisch*: track focused on theory.

*Vmbo kaderberoepsgericht*: guided craftwork track.

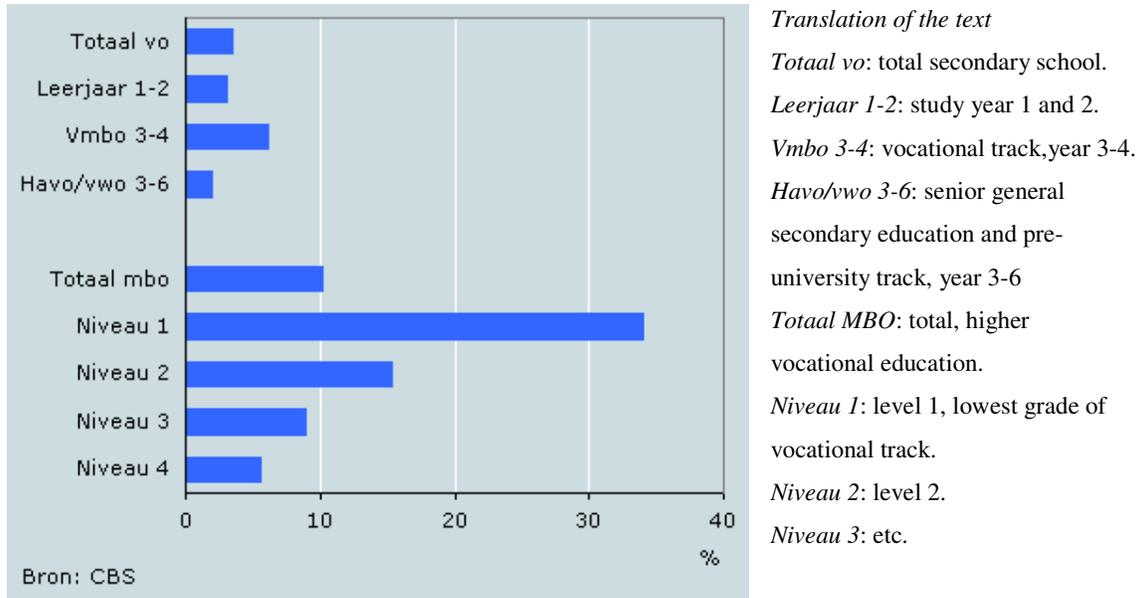
*Havo/vwo*: senior general secondary education and pre-university track

*Autochtonen*: native Dutch pupils

*(niet-)westerse allochtonen*: (non-)western migrants

*Turken en Marokkanen*: Turks and Moroccans

Figure 2: Source (CBS, 2007) Division among school types of pupils in the third year of secondary school, 2006-2007



*Translation of the text*  
*Totaal vo*: total secondary school.  
*Leerjaar 1-2*: study year 1 and 2.  
*Vmbo 3-4*: vocational track, year 3-4.  
*Havo/vwo 3-6*: senior general secondary education and pre-university track, year 3-6  
*Totaal MBO*: total, higher vocational education.  
*Niveau 1*: level 1, lowest grade of vocational track.  
*Niveau 2*: level 2.  
*Niveau 3*: etc.

Figure 3: Drop-outs in secondary school and higher vocational education (Hartgers, M. CBS, 2007)

The drop-out numbers in vocational school, as well secondary schools as higher vocational schools, are much higher than in senior general secondary or pre-university tracks. As you can see for instance, the number of drop-out in level 1 of MBO is enormously. Leaving this education without any other education makes you a drop-out and... leaving this level with a diploma also makes you a drop-out. As I explained before the level 1 of MBO is not considered to be sufficient. So, although you can have a diploma on higher education you still can be considered a drop-out!

In figure 4, the percentages of drop-outs are specified in different characteristics: sex, generation and origin. These numbers show that the number of drop-out is higher and can be found more within groups of not-western ethnic minorities than among native Dutch students.

**Drop-outs in secondary school specified in sex, generation and origin, 2004**

	Male (%)	Female	Total	(Abs.)
<b>Autochthonous</b>	2,5	2,2	2,4	16.060
<b>Not-western allochthonous</b>	5,1	3,9	4,5	5.680
<b>First generation</b>	8,5	6,6	7,6	2.840
<b>Second generation</b>	3,6	2,8	3,2	2.840
<b>Turks</b>	4,0	3,3	3,7	1.000
<b>Moroccans</b>	3,9	2,6	3,3	780
<b>Surinams</b>	4,5	3,4	4,0	950
<b>Netherlands Antilles/Aruba</b>	5,7	4,2	5,0	460
<b>remaining not-western</b>	6,7	5,4	6,1	2.500

Figure 4: Source: (IB-group, 2006 in Jennissen, 2007). The number of drop-outs is percentaged to the total amount of pupils in secondary school in the schoolyear 2003/2004.

*Absolute figures of drop-outs are rounded to the nearest tenth. Including a small amount of drop-outs from the age-group 24 and older.*

In this paragraph we saw data about drop-out and ethnic minority groups within different school types. It can give an insight in the drop-out case, the factors that are playing a role and the situation of the youngsters of the non-European ethnic minorities. In the next paragraph I will investigate and interpret the data a little bit further.

## **2.4 What's the problem? Interpreting the data.**

In spite of the money and the attention given to decrease the number of migrants and minorities drop-out, for the most part, their educational achievements lag behind that of the majority group(s). In particular, migrants from non-EU countries and some national autochthonous minority groups are faced with high rates of underachievement, which in many ways limits their future employment opportunities and negatively impacts their livelihood (Luciak, 2004).

Pupils with Non-Dutch ethnic background are much more likely to attend pre-vocational secondary schools (proportion of 10,9% in 2001) than senior general secondary (4,6%) or pre-university tracks (2,8%) (Luciak, 2004). Maybe, as Luciak (2004) explains the higher drop-out percentages among pupils of non-European ethnic groups combines with the fact that drop-out is more common among the vocational (secondary) schools. Relatively high numbers/percentage of non-western migrants follow vocational education, this type of education has the highest percentage of drop outs. So apart from their specific ethnic backgrounds, the type of education is an important factor in migrant youth drop-out.

Although the level of drop outs from non-western minority groups is alarmingly high, this group is closing the education gap with their native Dutch peers fast. There are statistics that the non-European ethnic minorities are almost compensating this difference within one generation, in about 25 years (SCP, 2006) (see also the table, Jennissen, 2007). As you can see for instance among the non-western male pupils, within the first generation the percentage is 8,5% and the percentage within the second generation is 3,6% (Jennissen, 2007). But still the proportion of non-western pupils is higher also in the pre-vocational schools (CBS, 2007). There should be another factor that can also explain the higher drop-out rates situation partially.

What is necessary to prevent are the problems that are occurring in the first generation and that the disadvantages of the youngsters is passed on to the next generation, their children. Participating in education makes that people are less vulnerable and more involved in society.

## **2.5 Consequences for pupil and society**

Lower achievement in education and high drop-out numbers can lead to a two-folded scenario; with difficulties both on the individual and on societal-level.

### *Individual*

Ongoing exclusion within the educational system leads to a lot of negative consequences. Young people who leave education without recognized qualifications are disadvantaged in the labor market, they don't get easy access to the jobs which require higher qualifications. Their personal and social development is curtailed because they don't get the opportunities and the challenges that a higher qualified job offers. And of course, because finding a job without a diploma a job is not so easy, the drop-outs have an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. (Commission of the European communities, 2006).

### *Society*

A huge problem is the extra cost for employment-finding, social security and unemployment-benefits. The lack of education or the lower achievements makes it more difficult to find a suitable job. And because the jobs will be not that challenging the young drop-outs can get bored easily what leads to under-performance in their jobs.

Overrepresentation of pupils of non-European ethnic minorities in vocational tracks and the drop-out of these groups can lead to a negative stigma of the group. The higher qualified indigenous pupils tend to see themselves as 'smarter' people. This can lead to racism.

Exercising any significant political power by the non-European minorities would be very difficult because of their lack of diplomas, lower success ratings and drop-out. In that way the group will be given a 'smaller' voice and representation in society.

### *Existing programs and ideas*

The problems I named in the text above are only a few of the problems where drop-out can lead to. Of course as I said before there has been given a lot of effort, money and attention to decrease the number of drop-outs of migrants and minorities. And it seems to pay off, the 'problem' is almost solved in one generation. Of course you can debate about if the improvement is because of the specific policy or other factor. In addition to all the effort the improvement can be explained by a lot of other factors, such as better understanding of the local language, more integration, etc.

By 1984 the Dutch government made an official statement, with the Primary Education Act, that education in primary school should be based on an intercultural foundation. How this is done, and the exact form of implementation, may be the choice of the study institute itself. The impression exists that teachers are inadequately prepared when it comes to their future pupil population and they may lack knowledge of their pupils' cultural backgrounds.

Since 2002 the Education Council made regulations about how schools should deal with disadvantaged pupils. One of these regulation includes a course for Dutch as a second Language (Nederlands als Taal 2), that should follow a continuous line from primary to secondary school

(Zeelen, 2007). On 8 March 2006 the NT2 framework became law. This framework is the Dutch version of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF) which was drafted by the Council of Europe to provide a common basis for the development of language courses and guidelines for curriculum development and examinations in Europe (standards for fluency levels) (Min OCW, 2007).

A whole range of initiatives have been developed to battle youth drop out in the Dutch educational system. For example;

The National Bureau against Racial Discrimination (Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie, LBR) and other organizations are developing teaching material for schools on prejudice and discrimination (Luciak, 2004)

The *School Adoption Plan* is a police project in which 'neighbourhood based' police officers 'adopt' a primary school and visit this school several times a year in order to teach lessons on several subjects to children from 10 to 14 years of age. One of the subjects is discrimination (Luciak, 2004).

Pre-school tracks are brought to live in order to tackle language disadvantages of young kids at an early stage. The present cabinet in the Netherlands, Balkenende IV is paying attention to early childhood education. These educational programs are mainly aimed at decreasing language disadvantages among children for whom Dutch is not their first language. Besides paying attention to the language skills, there is also a focus on the social and emotional development of the children (Min OCW, 2008).

# 3 A task for Europe for Europe

## 3.1 Comparative research

Inclusion, exclusion within society and education, but also drop-out seems to be a topic of debate in a lot of nations. Regarding all the research that is done already on a national scale in different EU-countries it would be interesting to put this knowledge together and share knowledge and experiences on the drop-out case.

There is not much international comparative research on the migrants in Europe (Crul, 2003). EU member states tend to use other definitions of groups during the collection of data. For example some groups are divided on citizenship, ethnicity, residence but no citizenship, the youngsters' native language. But it also not includes naturalized migrants. Furthermore it leaves out specific ethnic groups, those without an own state, the Kurds and the Roma's. What also complicate the comparative research are the different systems of schooling throughout Europe.

Also it's hard to compare because the situation of the young non- Europe migrants varies a lot in Europe, so it is very complicated to give a good view. In the discussion on the topic of integration seems to leave the national context of the youngsters out of account. (Crul, 2003) Trying to compare exclusion of minority groups in education across countries raises difficulties. Questions remain about how to place and to describe the concept and the specific problems within an international context. (Micklewright, 2004) One aspect which causes in a certain country a problem maybe doesn't result in a problem in another country.

The challenge for Europe within this problem would be to facilitate a social research knowledge-sharing possibly within social research over the whole of Europe. Keeping in mind the minority cultural identity, such as expressions and the religious identity but also the national context. This could lead to a cross-European exchange of visions between countries. And maybe lead to a shared vision on effective ways to tackle youth education drop out.

### 3.2 Best practice international

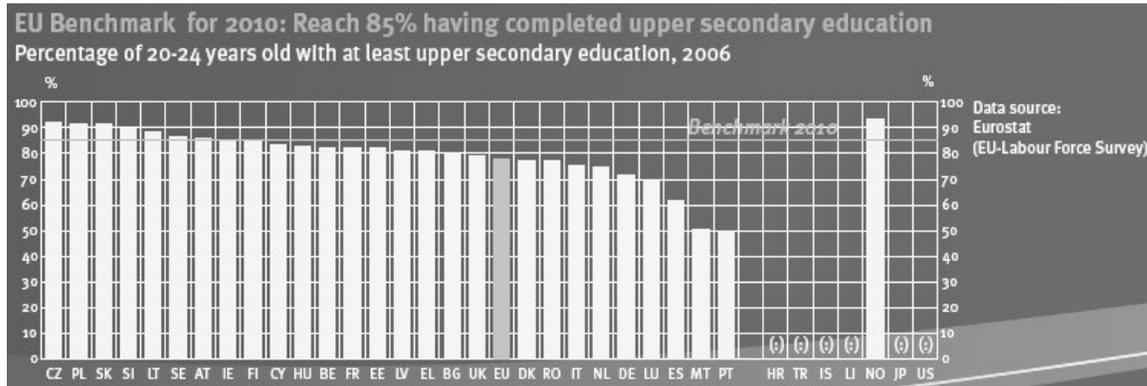


Figure 3: Source: Eurostat, 2006.

Another solution could be to implement a best practice from another country as an experiment in the Netherlands (or another European country). Some Member States of the EU have already shares of drop-outs that are less than the benchmark of 10%, for instance Slovenia, Poland and Finland (see figure 3) (Eurostat, 2006). These good practices can give some insights to how to tackle the high drop-out rates.

It will create an opportunity to solve parts of the situation and it leads to more knowledge of the drop-out phenomenon. In addition it can be really usable to share the knowledge of the Dutch drop-out case with the other European countries. There is such a large amount of information and research that the other nations could use to their advantage.

## **Conclusion and Summary**

There can be concluded that, as almost a social research cases and problems; you don't solve them overnight. We need a lot of information, join forces, help each other and maybe the most important of all; we don't need to draw our conclusions too soon. As I explained in the paper, most of the issues can't be determined by only one factor, but are a complex puzzle of a lot of factors.

The first generation immigrants arrived in the Netherlands during the first three decades of rapid economic expansion after the Second World War. Guest workers came from nearby countries to do jobs that tended to be dirty but also immigrants from the colonial areas overseas. Both sides considered their stay temporarily at first, but they stayed and formed families. With their decision to stay they took part in the 'normal' Dutch life. They searched for a permanent houses, got social security, children attended school etc. They became Dutch citizens.

In this paper the main point was the importance of a good education. Education is a good instrument to equip youngsters well for the future. Drop-out is decreasing chances on social inclusion, a good income etc.

Data showed that youngsters of non-European origin are more likely to drop-out school than native Dutch pupils do. In addition the data shows that the youngsters are overrepresented in vocational track, were drop-out rates are much higher then on for instance pre-university tracks. We can conclude that it's not necessarily the ethnicity of the youngsters that is explaining the problem, but also the high number of these youngsters in vocational education.

As well for the pupils as for the society, the drop-out brings along a lot of problems. Young people who leave education without recognized qualifications are disadvantaged in the labor market, Their personal and social development is curtailed because they don't have a lot of opportunities. The deficiency of a job can lead to poverty and social exclusion. For society drop-out is huge problem because of the extra cost for employment-finding, social security and unemployment-benefits. Drop-out can lead to a negative stigma of the group and to racism because of 'them being stupid'.

A whole lot of initiatives have been taken to prevent pupils to drop-out of school. These Initiatives already start in early child education with for instance language lessons. In primary school the school adoption plan is implemented so that children who are at risk of dropping-out can be observed.

Drop-out is a point of debate in a lot of countries in the European Union. Maybe, giving attention to improve the way to compare social research and thinking about possibilities to share information about drop-out cases can be a key to the solution. Implementing a best practice from a well-performing country, for instance Finland, can maybe lead to insights on the case. Also spreading the information and research that we in the Netherlands gained and done all these year can lead to more insight. Perhaps, then drop-out will be no issue anymore and a pupils will have the same opportunities.

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