

Why do people migrate ?

About the project

Background

International migration flows have increased in magnitude and complexity over the past decades. As a result, migration and potential migration to, for instance, the European Union are receiving ever more attention at policy level. Within this context, the Commission of the European Communities entrusted Eurostat, and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) with a project to study the push and pull factors determining international migration flows. The objective of the project is to improve understanding of the direct and indirect causes and mechanisms of international migration to the European Union, from an internationally comparative perspective. The results are intended to serve as a basis for the development of policy instruments and to provide tools for estimating future migration. The project started in 1994 with a feasibility study. Based on the results of this preparatory stage, surveys were set up in a number of countries, both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries. The results are presented in a comparative report "Push and pull factors of international migration" (ISBN 92-828-9721-4) and in a series of eight country reports, published by Eurostat during 2000.

Scope

The focus of the project is on recent migration (migration in the past ten years) from the Mediterranean region and from Sub-Saharan Africa to the European Union. Within these regions a number of countries have been selected for primary data collection on migration. The five predominantly migrant-sending countries participating in the project are Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Senegal, and Ghana. With respect to primary data collection in predominantly migrant-receiving countries, Italy and Spain were selected. In Spain, migrants from Morocco and Senegal were interviewed, in Italy migrants from Ghana and Egypt.



Methods

For an explanation of the process of migration (rather than for the measurement of migration flows), specialised migration surveys are the most appropriate method of data collection. As from a theoretical point of view, the aim was to capture individual, household, and contextual factors that influence people's decisions to move or stay. The project includes both a single-round *micro-level survey* (household and individual data for migrants and non-migrants) and a *macro-level survey* (contextual data at the national, regional, and local or community levels). The incorporation of non-migrants is an essential and self-evident necessity in order to explain the determinants of migration, and to enhance our understanding of why the majority of people do not migrate. In the sending countries, the number of households interviewed was between 1,550 and 1,950, while in the receiving countries 500-670 households were interviewed per immigrant group.

Statistics in focus

POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 1/2001

Contents

About the project.....	1
Results.....	2
Information/networks.....	5



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(i) Who

How many people are international migrants, at some point in their lives? Are most households in the migrant-sending countries affected by migration of one or more of the household members? Or is, despite the increased importance of migration, an overwhelming majority of a country's population living in their country of birth all their lives? From the surveys carried out in relatively high-mobility regions in the five migration-sending countries, we can clearly conclude that international migration affects a sizeable percentage of households in those regions. In 16 of the 19 regions studied in five countries, at least one in five households has a household member who migrated abroad within the past ten years.

Nevertheless, households without any international migrant in their midst, whether in the past ten years or longer ago, form a clear majority (60 per cent or more) in most regions. But in Tiznit and Nador (Morocco), rural upper and rural Lower Egypt, and Touba (Senegal), migration has affected one in two households, or more.

Irrespective of their country of origin, international migrants have a number of characteristics in common: most are men who migrated when they were in their twenties or thirties. Only in Ghana is there a relatively large representation of female migrants.

Furthermore, connected with the young age structure of migration, migrants are more often single than non-migrants are, and more often migrate from their parent's home, especially in Morocco, Egypt and Senegal. Only in Ghana is living alone a common alternative, but this is a rare and socially not fully accepted household arrangement in the four other, Muslim, countries included in the study.

(ii) Why and where

Female migrants are more likely to be married at migration than men, influenced by the fact that women's migration is frequently related to family reunification. Migration of unaccompanied or single women is unusual in the four Muslim countries.

Family reunification has occurred especially in the cases of Turkish and Moroccan migration because of their long migration history. However, this does not show up very prominently in the surveys given the fact that family reunification tends to result in the complete disappearance of the household from the country of origin. Migration of complete households is less important in Senegal and Egypt. The traditional countries of destination of Egyptian migrants generally have more restrictive policies on family reunification than the European countries do, and this explains at least partly why wives and children stay behind. The same applies to the migration of Senegalese in so far as it is migration to new destinations; furthermore, the polygamous family structure has probably both facilitated and necessitated arrangements where wives and children stay in the home country.

In each of the five countries, the majority of migrant and non-migrant men worked prior to migration or five years prior to the survey, respectively; it is definitely not only the unemployed who are looking across borders for improvement of their situation (Table 1). Nevertheless, unemployment seems to be a factor influencing migration: in all countries migrants reported consistently higher levels of unemployment before migration (compared with non-migrants five years prior to the survey). In Morocco a large number of mostly young men (non-students) were not working but were not looking for work either. Apart from the limited opportunities for finding work, perhaps the pervasive 'culture of migration' plays a role, in which young people prefer to look for opportunities to migrate, as so many of their friends and relatives have done, rather than to try to build their future in Morocco.

Another way of linking economic conditions to reasons for migration was to ask households to evaluate their past financial situation: was it sufficient to supply the basic needs for the household? The results point to poverty as an incentive for migration. Although migrants did have work, it was not sufficient to meet their needs.

Table 1 Economic activity or employment status: pre-migration or five years before survey, per sending country (%)

	Work		Not employed		Other non-work		Numbers		Missing	
	non-migrants five years ago	migrants pre-migration	non-migrants five years ago	migrants pre-migration	non-migrants five years ago	migrants pre-migration	non-migrants five years ago	migrants pre-migration	non-migrants five years ago	migrants pre-migration
Turkey	62	73	4	19	34	8	685	520	46	10
Morocco	87	45	1	13	12	42	437	878	44	10
Egypt	52	80	2	9	46	12	590	897	24	2
Ghana	81	71	3	7	16	22	737	663	57	24
Senegal	79	80	3	5	18	15	561	645	6	6

The five sending countries show many similarities both with regard to the motives for leaving the country of origin and with regard to the motives for choosing a particular country of destination. However, important differences exist in the distribution pattern of the emigration flows of the respective countries, including the degree of orientation towards destinations in the European Union. Previous colonial bonds continue to have an impact on migration flows long after formal colonisation has ended. Of course, a common language and well-established networks contribute to this, also where colonial ties are lacking.

Furthermore, historical events such as the mass recruitment of Turkish and Moroccan workers at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, still have a strong influence on the continuation of migration flows. In addition, the role of (changing) admission policies and the perception of these policies by (potential) migrants may affect their choice of a specific country of destination. For example, frequent campaigns to regularise residence of specific categories of undocumented migrants, (as in Italy and Spain) could encourage undocumented migration to these countries. Last but not least the geographical situation and distance to other countries should be mentioned as a relevant factor in choosing a country of destination, whether or not in combination with other factors.

The general emigration pattern of sending countries - individual migration, primarily involving men looking for a job or education, or escaping from persecution, followed gradually over time by family reunification migration and family formation migration, primarily involving women - is reflected clearly in the research results from the five sending countries. For male migrants economic motives dominate while for female migrants family-related reasons are more important.

The relevance of other reasons is often limited; for a small group of migrants educational opportunities abroad are the reason for migrating. An exception to the rule that most female migrants leave for family-related motives can be observed in Ghana: economic motives appear to be more important for Ghanaian women. Probably, the minor role of Islam in Ghana compared with the other surveyed countries, and the importance attached to economic independence of women in West African societies, contributes to this.

The strong male-female contrast in motives for leaving the country of origin (except for Ghanaians), is confirmed by the Egyptian migrants who were interviewed in Italy and by the Moroccan and Senegalese migrants who were interviewed in Spain (Figure 1).

Emigration from Turkey and Morocco is strongly EU-oriented. However, this does not mean that Turkish and Moroccan migrants opt for the same EU countries (Figure 2). When looking at the top five destination countries for recent migrants, Turkey and Morocco have only France and the Netherlands in common. Germany (number one destination for Turks) and Austria (number two) do not attract Moroccans, whereas Italy (number two destination for Moroccans) and Spain (number three) do not attract Turks.

There are clear differences in motivation for choosing EU countries and for choosing other countries among Turkish migrants: family motives determine two out of every three moves to the EU against one out of every four moves to other countries. Economic reasons appear to be more important in opting for non-EU countries, whereas other reasons for moving to the EU are hardly mentioned. Other reasons for moving to destinations outside the EU often relate to educational opportunities and easy admission.

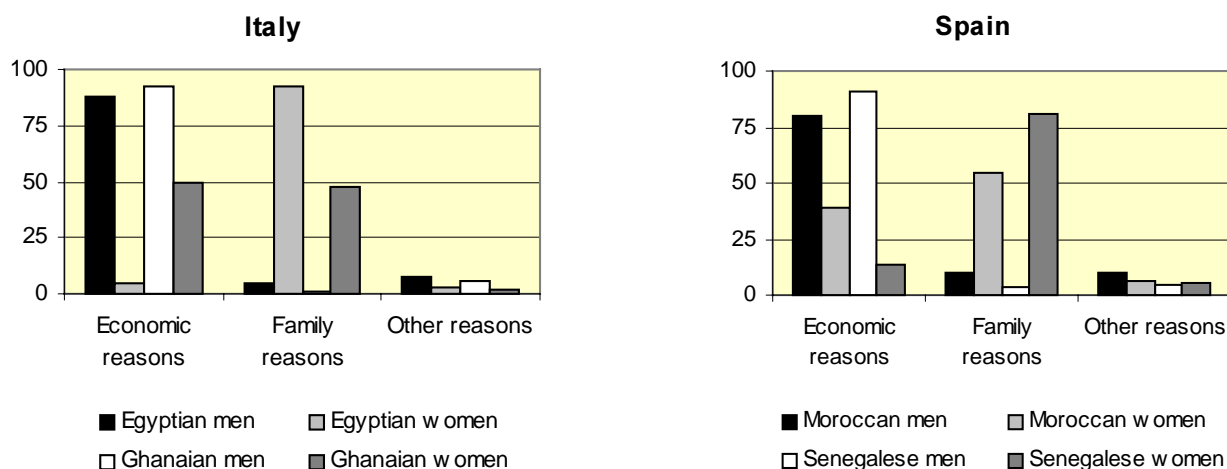


Figure 1 Main reason for last emigration by sex, per receiving country and migrant group (%)

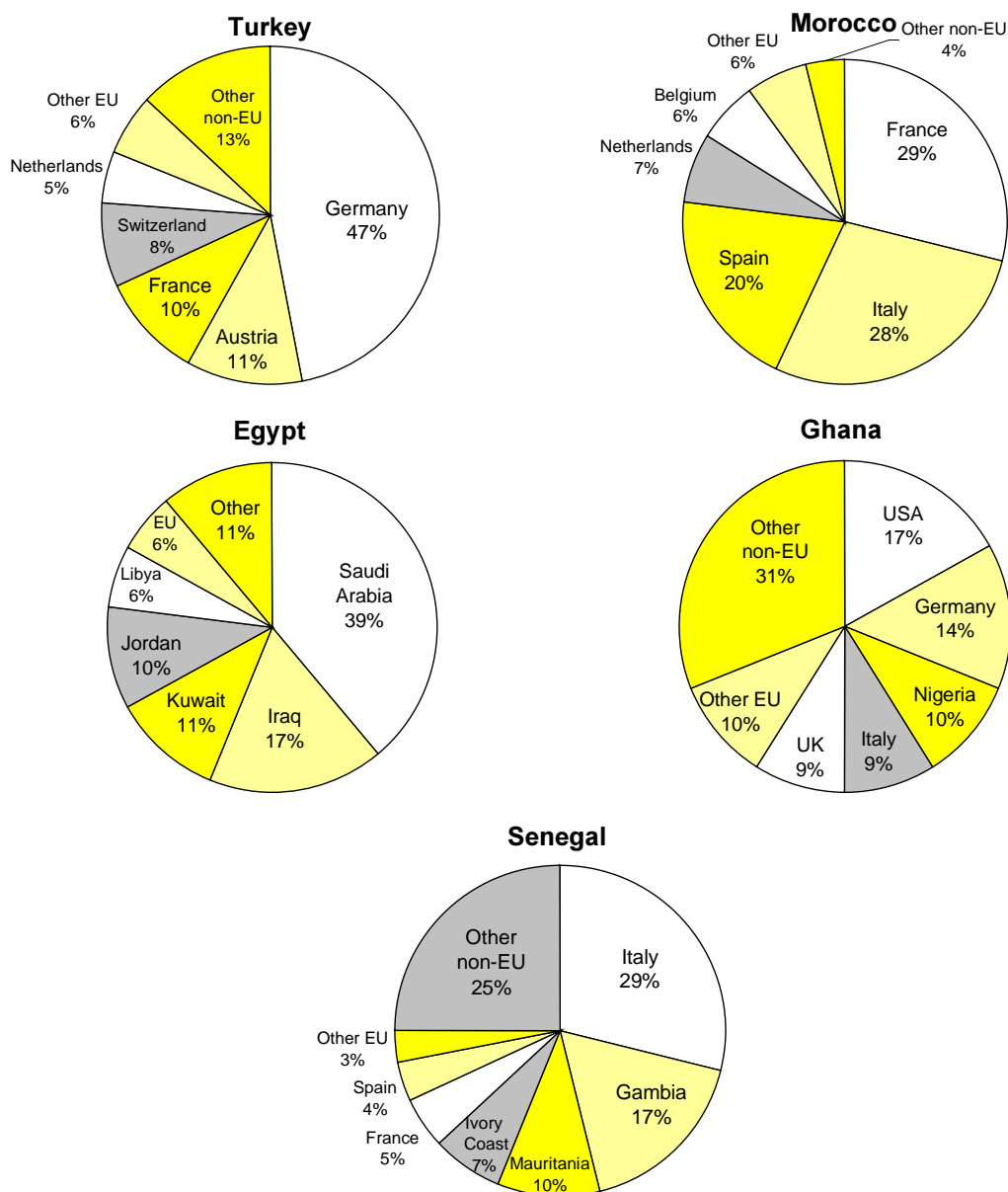


Figure 2 Main countries of destination, per sending country (%)

This conclusion mirrors the history of Turkish migration to the EU against the background of changed admission policies, starting with labour migration towards the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, and followed by family reunification and family formation in the years since. Although a similar conclusion would be expected with regard to Moroccan migration towards the EU, the survey yields diverging results in the sense that economic reasons remain predominant among recent migrants who chose to migrate to a particular EU country in the past ten years. This might indicate that given their perception of the socio-economic situation in the country of origin, Moroccan recent migrants, much more often than Turkish ones, primarily motivate their choice on economic grounds, even when they have actually entered a country on family grounds. The

less favourable economic conditions in Morocco compared with Turkey may have contributed to this.

Only a minority of Ghanaian and Senegalese recent emigrants are heading for EU countries. The emigration pattern of Ghanaians is clearly mixed, with the USA, Germany, Italy and Nigeria as the top four. This is less true for Senegal: apart from a strong orientation on Italy, Senegalese emigrants tend to move to other African countries (Gambia, Mauritania and Ivory Coast). In addition, France and Spain play modest roles as destinations for recent migrants from the Dakar and Touba regions. Emigration to EU countries is hardly important among Egyptians; they mainly migrate to Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Jordan).

Information/networks

The majority of recent migrants who moved as the first person in a household in the past ten years, have some sort of information on the country of destination before they migrate (see Table 2 for sending countries). The topics the respondents from distinct migrant groups had information on differ clearly. In general, most is known on economic topics, especially among male migrants. Surprisingly few migrants professed to know anything on admission regulations. Because of the changes in the admission rules in the EU countries (in general becoming more strict) and because of the long migration histories of some migrant groups, one would expect migrants to know more on the admission regulations. Perhaps it is not knowledge of the regulations themselves that is important but knowledge on how to gain access regardless of the rules.

Although in general women are less informed prior to migration, they do more often have a (generally

smaller) network of family, other relatives and/or friends in the country of destination. These results are not surprising and are clearly linked with the different migration motives for men and women. Women tend to migrate predominantly in order to join parents or (future) partners whereas men mainly have economic reasons.

Family (and to a somewhat lesser extent friends) are of major importance as a source of information for migrants (see Table 3 for receiving countries). Agencies in the countries of origin and destination are hardly mentioned as a source from which migrants get information about their prospective destinations. Obviously, personal information is much more preferred than information transmitted by agencies. The limited use of agencies may also have been affected by their actual presence or absence in a country and, if present, by the type of information these agencies are able to provide.

Table 2 Migrants who had information on the country of destination, per topic and sending country (%)*

	Turkey	Morocco	Egypt	Ghana	Senegal
Topics					
level of wages	36	63	64	54	42
opportunities to find work	46	64	62	68	64
cost of living	26	28	50	55	35
unemployment/disability benefits	17	14	7	18	3
child allowance	20	12	4	22	4
health care system	28	13	14	25	10
admission regulations for foreigners	25	24	26	35	36
school system	15	10	12	31	12
attitude towards foreigners	23	12	15	33	26
taxes	7	8	5	17	4
No information at all	40	28	24	20	22
N	514	854	901	643	581
Missing	18	34	-	44	70

* Percentages do not add up to 100 because more than one topic could be mentioned.

Table 3 Sources of information about the country of destination, per receiving country (%)*

	Italy		Spain	
	Egyptians	Ghanaians	Moroccans	Senegalese
Have been there before	6	8	10	11
Family at destination	55	50	69	59
Family at origin	44	42	43	24
Television/radio	18	14	33	5
Newspapers, etc.	20	22	13	5
School	5	10	9	3
Agencies at origin	5	7	4	2
Agencies at destination	0	0	1	1
Tourists	0	-	12	11
Other sources	1	3	6	14
N	344	456	502	200
Missing	-	-	-	1

* Percentages do not add up to 100 because more than one source could be mentioned.

Undocumented migration

Both migrants with and migrants without all required papers seem to head for the same countries of destination. For example, the destinations of undocumented Moroccans and Turks, just like the legal migrants from these countries, are mainly the EU countries. It is also evident that undocumented migrants have networks just as often as documented migrants do.

The frequency with which migrants resort to undocumented entry or stay differs significantly between the migrant groups.

The surveys carried out in the sending countries indicate that Turks most often admit that they have ever tried to enter a country illegally or that they have overstayed their visas (more than one in five; Table 4).

Figures for Moroccans and Ghanaians are lower (one in ten), unless refusals to answer are included. In that case, they reach levels comparable to the Turkish figures.

For almost all migrants their last country of destination is the same country as the one they mentioned having

entered or stayed in without the required documents. The surveys in Italy and Spain show higher proportions of migrants who ever tried to enter or overstay without the proper papers: between 22 and 32 per cent in Italy and between 37 and 51 per cent in Spain, not counting those who refused to answer (Table 4).

These relatively high percentages are somewhat surprising given the fact that undocumented migration is such a sensitive topic to discuss, and that respondents had been expected to be reluctant to answer, or give safe or socially desirable answers.

Among those who report illegal entry or overstay, the proportion reporting to have been successful in their attempts is high, two thirds or more. Obviously, success rates are highest among those in the receiving countries (as those caught and sent back are not surveyed).

Besides, the high percentages of successful undocumented migration by migrants in Italy and Spain may be due to the geographical position of both countries and their relatively flexible admission policies with frequent regularisations of illegal migrants.

Table 4 Migrants who ever tried to enter a country undocumented or overstayed a visa/permit, per sending country, and per receiving country and migrant group (%)

	Never tried complied with rules	Ever tried entered undocumented	Ever tried overstayed visa/permit	Refused/ don't know	Numbers	Missing
Sending country						
Turkey	72	12	10	6	524	6
Morocco	66	8	2	25	888	-
Egypt	93	2	4	1	899	-
Ghana	66	4	6	24	668	19
Receiving country						
Italy						
Egyptians	58	17	15	10	508	-
Ghanaians	60	7	15	18	666	-
Spain						
Moroccans	55	17	20	8	591	7
Senegalese	34	15	36	15	504	10

Migration intentions and potential

Most people in the migrant-sending countries do not intend to migrate abroad at any time in the future. In so far as their intentions to stay at home are motivated by economic reasons, they fall into two opposite categories: either they have no economic need to migrate or, for a smaller group, they lack the financial means to go abroad. In that sense, the general idea is confirmed that a certain threshold of wealth is required for migration to take place. In addition, and not surprisingly, non-mobility is strongly motivated by family ties and, for older people, by their advanced age. Nevertheless, in some of the sending countries, especially Ghana and Senegal, migration intentions of non-migrants and return migrants are quite pronounced. Egyptians seem least inclined to migrate. Men more than women and those with migration experience more than those without, express their intention to migrate. And, as among actual migrants, those intending to migrate tend to be young and single. The intention to migrate is overwhelmingly motivated by economic reasons. As a main motive, family-related reasons or other reasons, such as pursuing an education, are mentioned much less frequently.

Although the intention to migrate is strong in some countries, intentions appear to be difficult to realise. While general migration intentions vary between 14 and 42 per cent, in fact far fewer people consider that they will actually migrate within the next two years (Figure 3). The percentage who intends to do so is generally below 5 per cent, with the exception of Ghana. Asked whether they have actually taken any steps to prepare for migration, the percentages drop even further. And rarely do such preparations include the application and/or acquisition of visas and or residence/work permits.

In general, it can be said that the ultimate preferred country of destination for non-migrants and return migrants intending to migrate resembles the actual country of destination of recent migrants. However, there are some remarkable exceptions to this rule. Especially the wish of many Senegalese and Ghanaians to move to the USA is not reflected in current patterns. In particular for the non-migrants among them, the USA seems to be the country of their dreams. Furthermore, the attractiveness of Germany to Turks is worth mentioning. Despite the relatively strong representation of Germany in the distribution of actual Turkish emigration, there is room for a considerable increase in the event that the migration intentions of Turkish non-migrants and return migrants would come true. Finally, there is a notable difference among Egyptians in their preference for Saudi Arabia: while almost half of the interviewed Egyptian non-migrants with migration intentions would like to leave for Saudi Arabia, only a quarter of the return migrants wish to do so.

Most people prefer to move to a certain country for economic reasons but when it comes to the actual move, family-related reasons determine the choice of country. Undoubtedly, admission policies, which generally provide more scope for family migration than for economic migration, contribute to this. However, given the expected shortages of (young) workers within the EU, it is not quite impossible that more economic migrants will be allowed in the near future.

This report has been prepared by Liesbeth Hearing and Rob van der Erf, NIDI.

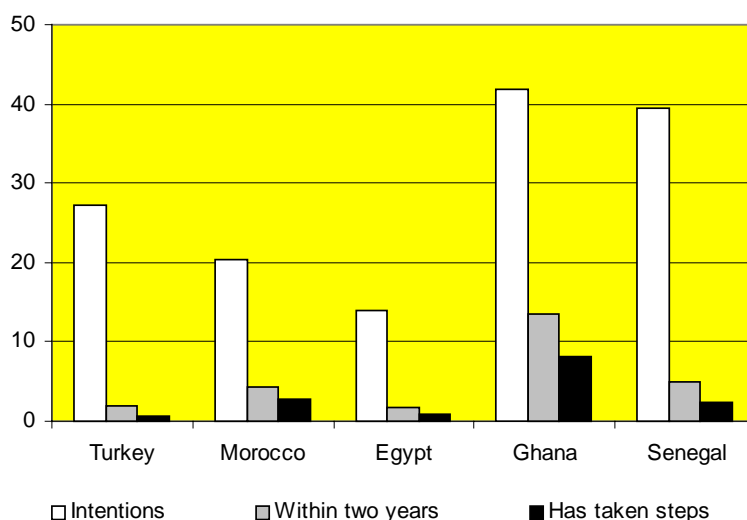


Figure 3 Non-migrants and return migrants intending to migrate, within two years and having taken steps to realise intentions (%)

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➤ Reference publications

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