

Growing up in an immigrant family: the position of children of immigrants in Italy and the Netherlands

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Abstract

In this paper we study children in immigrant families growing up in the Netherlands and Italy. We question what the main socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant families from different origins are and we compare the family position of children of immigrants in the two countries of settlement. This is done by both comparing the situation of the total group of children of immigrants as well as by focusing on a selection of similar countries of origin in both settlement countries. Finally, we study whether immigrant groups can be gathered in broader categories that are useful to describe the situation in both countries.

The analysis is based on Italian census data and the Dutch population registers, including for both countries all children aged 0-17 years. By applying cluster analyses, we will also assess differences and similarities between the different immigrant origins in the two countries of settlements.

Introduction

The family takes central stage in the lives of youth. Studies have related a host of outcomes in the development of children and adolescents to characteristics of the parents and the parental home (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Barber, 2001; Evans et al., 2001; Trent & South, 1992). Despite the fact that more attention has been on children of immigrants in recent studies, still relatively little is known about the circumstances these children grow up in (Blee & Tickamyer, 1995; Fusell and Furstenberg, 2005; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985). As many of the children of immigrants are of the second generation one might expect that they might encounter a different culture at home than in school for example (Nauck, 2002; Wakil et al., 1981). This might have several implications for their development and future prospects. Given the fact that a substantial share of the population is of immigrant origin it is of main importance to have more insight in the conditions these young persons face.

The position children of immigrants grow up in may vary depending on their country of origin but also on the country of settlement. Many studies that have been conducted often either focus on one or a limited number of immigrant origins only. Other studies lump together a wide variety of immigrant groups under one geographical origin. The first approach does not allow broad generalizations to other groups whereas the latter leaves insufficient room for the possible diversity between immigrants coming from one often very broadly defined geographical place. Our research adds to the knowledge of children of immigrants by including a very wide range of origins. What is the family situation these young people face? Secondly, our study includes an ‘older’ and new country of immigration *viz.* the Netherlands and Italy. This allows us to make an overall comparison on the position of children of immigrants in two different countries of

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settlement. In addition, we are able to contrast children from the same country of origin who have settled down in different countries. Finally, we question whether one can group the wide variety of immigrant origins into a few overall regions of origin as has been suggested in the literature. We will assess the usefulness of categorizing different immigrant groups into few groups of origin for the two countries of settlement.

Data

Data come from the project “Children in immigrant families in rich countries” conducted for the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (Florence). Within this project information is gathered on different socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant families in different receiving countries.

The current paper is based on the data from the 2001 census in Italy and the population registers in the Netherlands (data refer to the situation on 1 January 2006). The data thus refer to the total population of children of native and immigrant origin in both countries. Based on the country of birth of the person and his/her parents, different immigrant groups are distinguished. A further distinction between first (those born abroad themselves) and second generation (those born at the destination country with at least one foreign born parent) is made. We include all those who were between 0 and 17 years of age at the moment of data collection.

Method

Extensive analyses on each of the two countries have been performed within the “Children in immigrant families in rich countries” project. For the paper, we start with a descriptive analysis on the family position of children of immigrants in the two countries. Information on for example the family composition, housing situation and parental education and job will be included here. Beside the general description of the actual situation in which children of immigrants in both countries grow up, selected groups will be compared. These descriptions were used to examine the extent to which children from different immigrant origins differed from one another and from the native population in terms of their family characteristics.

We subsequently will study the extent to which these different family characteristics are interrelated, and whether clusters of immigrant groups can be identified. For this purpose we start by implementing a principal component analysis. The results of this first stage analysis will provide a score of the main factors for each of the immigrant groups. Subsequently, cluster analyses will be used in order to identify groups of immigrant origin.

Descriptive findings

The population of the Netherlands includes almost 3.6 million children aged 0-17 year, whereas in Italy (at Census time) they were more than 9.6 million. Around 22 per cent of them have at least one foreign born parent in the Netherlands and less than 10% in Italy.. Table 1 provides an overview of the composition of the 0-17 year old children of immigrants by country of origin. The situation is quite different in the two countries: in the Netherlands the four largest groups of origin are children with a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean background, but the first 10 nationalities represent almost 15% of the total children, whereas in Italy the first 10 nationalities are only 5% of children.

The greater part of the children in immigrant families is of the second generation: 84% in the Netherlands and 71% in Italy.

Table 1 Overview of children (aged 0-17) from the ten most common countries of origin, absolute numbers and percentage, 2006

THE NETHERLANDS			ITALY		
Country of origin	Absolute	% (ranking) in the total 0-17 year population	Country of origin	Absolute	% (ranking) in the total 0-17 year population
Turkey	124,966	3.50 (1)	Switzerland	119,370	1.24 (1)
Morocco	123,338	3.45 (2)	Germany	104,714	1.09 (2)
Suriname	89,560	2.51 (3)	France	63,048	0.65 (3)
Netherlands Antilles / Aruba	40,781	1.14 (4)	Morocco	59,300	0.61 (4)
Germany	39,320	1.10 (5)	Albania	49,956	0.52 (5)
Indonesia	30,970	0.87 (6)	United Kingdom	28,682	0.30 (6)
(former) Yugoslavia	20,519	0.57 (7)	Belgium	26,196	0.27 (7)
Belgium	20,202	0.57 (8)	Romania	24,897	0.26 (8)
United Kingdom	19,073	0.53 (9)	Venezuela	25,087	0.26 (9)
Iraq	15,241	0.43 (10)	Brazil	22,628	0.23 (10)
Total in top-10	523,970	14.7		523,878	5.4
Total 0-17 year old population	3,570,366	100			9,642,496
Total 0-17 in immigrant families	785,480	-			927,211

The majority of children and particularly those of the second generation grew up with both parents, both in the Netherlands and in Italy. At the same time we find a clear variety in single parenthood (most often mothers). It is most common for children (in both countries) from the Caribbean and some (Western) African countries to live with their mothers only. Regarding the parental position in the labour market it is clear that the “older” immigrant groups, such as the Turks (in the Netherlands) and Moroccans (in both countries), despite their longer period of residence, are experiencing an unfavourable position. The same is also true for a range of immigrant parents who came to the Netherlands as refugees from African and Asian countries. Overall we find clearly higher levels of unemployment among parents of children of the first- than among those of the second generation.

Very substantial shares of the studied children of immigrants experienced at least one move in the past five years. For first generation children the move most likely relates to settling in the host country but may include a move within the country as well. Nevertheless, also for the second generation for example those from the former Soviet Union, Sudan and the Dominican Republic we find that more than half of them have moved in the past five years. The effects of moving (also within the country of settlement) on the lives and well-being of immigrant children may be considerable.

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