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Back for good? Return aspirations of immigrants in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Return migration is a complex process increasingly discussed in academic and policy circles. This study calls on complementary concepts and theories of migration, such as transnationalism, integration and family ties, to explore the return migration aspirations of first-generation immigrants in the Netherlands. It aims to examine to what extent an immigrant's contacts with their origin country, proximity to the host country and family location influence their return migration aspirations. We use the Survey of Integration of Migrants and the Survey of Integration of New Groups collected by Statistics Netherlands, which count amongst the rare surveys that capture these concepts. Our results show that, whilst return aspirations vary by country of origin, probably reflecting the conditions of the initial migration, having a family in origin and being active in transnational activities are positively related to return aspirations. Additionally, those more integrated into the host country are less likely to report aspirations to return. These results confirm the expectations that the ties to the origin and host countries matter in return aspirations.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding migration aspirations, intentions and planning is vital not only for predicting future migration but also to gain insights into migration dynamics. Carling (2002) argues that migration stems from aspiration and the ability to migrate which requires separate analysis. For instance, an individual with low income might intend to migrate but not be able to. Additionally, migration intentions and aspirations can impact behaviour and well-being beyond migration, as individuals planning to leave may invest less in local livelihoods or relationships (Carling & Schewel, 2018). Therefore, studying migration intentions and aspirations rather than just actual migration can better apprehend the individual's sentiments towards both their country of residence and their country of origin. Additionally, the observed migration behaviour might not be preceded by a desire to migrate and the factors that influence intentions and actual behaviour might differ (Waldorf, 1995 as cited in de Haas et al., 2015).

Research shows large variations in the predictive capacity of migration intentions and aspirations for actual behaviour, which notably originate from both the questions used to measure intentions and aspirations and the groups studied. The shorter the time frame and the more concrete the question, the better the match with actual behaviour. For instance, in a short timeframe of 2 years for newly arrived migrants in Switzerland, the proportion of people intending to return who realised this intention reached 71%, against only 34% for emigration intentions with no time constraints for Dutch immigrants (van Dalen & Henkens, 2013; Wanner, 2021). Despite the varying degrees of predictive power, intentions and aspirations provide valuable insights into the immigrant experience (de Haas et al., 2015).

Previous research on the determinants of migration intentions and aspirations covered a range of variables. A study on 'return' migration intentions of second-generation Turks in Europe showed that having lower levels of socio-cultural integration with maintained transnational ties substantially increased the return intention (Fokkema, 2011). Another study of immigrants in Spain and Italy, investigating the conflicting hypotheses of integration and transnationalism, found a negative effect of indicators of sociocultural integration such as language fluency, degree of informal contact with the native population and ethnic identification (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). Aspects of economic integration and transnationalism yielded more ambiguous results (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). A study focusing on immigrants in Italy found that factors such as feeling good in Italy, better perceived health and maintenance of transnational ties are all positively associated with positive return intentions (Bonifazi & Paparusso, 2019). These findings reveal how complex return intentions and aspirations are as they are shaped by factors that can have conflicting effects and are not straightforward to measure (Bonifazi & Paparussi, 2019; de Haas et al., 2015; Fokkema, 2011).

In this contribution, we examine the connections between return aspirations and their micro-level determinants amongst nine immigrant groups in the Netherlands. This context is particularly interesting due to the Netherlands' diverse immigrant population, where differences in background characteristics and migration history, including linguistic abilities and arrival circumstances, influence various aspects of the migration experience (Statistics Netherlands, 2022). Notably, individuals from refugee backgrounds have the least favourable socio-economic indicators specifically for housing, income and education in the Netherlands. Whilst we benefit from previous literature to increase our understanding of migration aspirations, our study contributes to the growing body of literature by focusing on origin country-specific effects and later looking at determinants by looking at refugees and immigrants separately with a rich dataset with various variables for a diverse group of immigrants. Both of these approaches are new to the understanding of permanent return aspirations in the Netherlands. We explore the factors influencing return migration aspirations amongst immigrants, emphasising the role of social ties in both their origin and host countries. Our research focuses on permanent return aspirations, based on the survey questions of whether individuals would like to 'return for good' with no specific time-bound plans. In other words, the question is about whether migrants eventually want to live in their origin country. This question was not asked to predict actual aspirations to return but rather as a broader attempt to assess migrants' perspectives on life in the Netherlands. By examining a diverse immigrant population and integrating data from various sources,

including surveys and registers conducted by Statistics Netherlands, we aim to understand how these social ties relate to immigrants' aspirations to return permanently.

DETERMINANTS OF RETURN ASPIRATIONS

To inform our analyses, we rely on four groups of factors: family ties, transnationalism, integration and economic considerations. The complex nature of these concepts introduces limitations to the accurate assessment of the effects we measure. The operationalisation of variables related to transnationalism and integration has been primarily influenced by earlier research and the data we had available. There is a possibility that the variables utilised to assess transnationalism or integration may not truly capture it adequately. For example, the variable perceived discrimination may not capture actual discrimination; however, for our model, where we are interested in the experiences of immigrants through their individual-level perceptions, it serves as a valid variable. Additionally, we aim to test specific measures of said frameworks and not test these theories comprehensively as we have incomplete measures. That said, we have a more elaborate set of measures in the analysis than in previous studies, thereby benefiting from the rich questionnaires used in the migration surveys that we analyse.

Family ties

Understanding migration requires examining families' roles, often depicted as nuclear units in migration literature, overlooking cross-border family ties (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Immigrant families can span origin and destination countries and have ties that are transnational, influencing migration choices. Despite widespread online communication, face-to-face contact remains significant due to emotional and instrumental support (Hünteler & Mulder, 2020; Mulder, 2018). Having a family in the origin country increases social capital by providing practical knowledge and support for a return (Reynolds, 2010). Therefore, social capital provided by family ties can influence the decision to return to the origin country compared to another country. In addition, family plays a crucial role in an individual's social network and support system, particularly in immigrant groups with more emphasis on solidarity within the family (Mulder & Meer, 2009; Zorlu, 2009).

Previous research on Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom showed that a sense of duty towards family members influenced their considerations for future return migration decisions (Ryan et al., 2009). In another study, separation from family was the most common reason for return amongst immigrants from the Philippines (Parreñas, 2005). Moreover, a study in Germany looking at return intentions and life stages showed that having a German partner and young children increased the desire for a more extended stay (Bettin et al., 2018). A study focusing on guest workers' intended durations in Germany showed that having young children was positively related to intending to stay in the host country whilst having children in the country of origin had a negative impact (Steiner & Velling, 1994).

Considering the previous findings on Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom, a group we also study, and findings on 'labour' migrants in Germany, we consider two family ties, specifically children and partners. As mentioned the locational preference to be closer to the family members, we look at the locations of these immediate family members. Parents, as suggested in the study focusing on Polish migrants, could be helpful as well, especially for care responsibilities, however, we do not have information on parents' locations. Overall, partnership and marriage can contribute to health and well-being through the acquisition of qualities such as communication skills, flexibility and responsiveness, increasing consensus and trust and metaphorically supporting the production of social capital (Furstenberg & Kaplan, 2007) and aiding migration and post-migration settlement by transmitting knowledge (Reynolds, 2010). Therefore, we hypothesise that people with a partner and children in the destination have a weaker preference to return to the origin country.

Aspects of transnationalism

Transnationalism involves sustained social, economic and political connections transcending nation-state boundaries (Glick Schiller, 1992). It entails continuous cross-border movement of people, ideas, practices and resources, linking individuals, families and communities across borders (Engbersen et al., 2014; Schiller et al., 1995). Immigrants maintain such connections through visits, calls or remittances, enhancing the accumulation of knowledge, resources and intangible assets like solidarity and cultural preservation (Molina et al., 2015).

Transnational ties are believed to increase the preference to eventually return to the origin country. At the same time, some counterarguments suggest that specific transnational activities may in fact decrease the preference to return. Some transnational ties may result in turning the ties undesirable due to the differences between the value systems in the countries such as the 2nd generation British-Caribbean women's clashing expectations on gender roles in Jamaica, reducing their desire to return (Reynolds, 2010). Additionally, higher engagement in transnational visits and kin relationships can reduce preferences to return, as better communication and travel options may reduce the longing for family (Mason, 2004). A study on Afghan Americans showed that return visits to Afghanistan resulted in feelings of distanciation from the country of origin and highlighted ties to the host country (Oeppen, 2013). Overall, transnational connections in the country of origin may impact return intentions and aspirations, although discrepancies in lifestyles and values could lead to a revised perception of return outcomes. Hence, we hypothesise that those who are more active in transnational experiences are more likely to aspire to return to their origin country someday.

Due to the cross-sectional data limitations, we cannot determine the direction of causality between transnationalism and return aspirations. The preference to return is a dynamic process shaped by transnationalism but also influences transnational behaviour. Whilst panel data could provide more insights, they are scarce. Nonetheless, identifying significant associations is an important first step in understanding the process (de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2014).

Aspects of integration

Integration has multiple dimensions, including spatial, economic, political, legal, cultural and psychological (Kuhlman, 1991). Whilst economic integration has received attention, aspects like political participation and acquiring nationality are also crucial (Castles et al., 2014). In the European context, integration encompasses structural and sociocultural dimensions (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Labour market participation and education access indicate structural integration, whilst religiosity, religion, language skills and values are sociocultural integration factors (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2018). These dimensions contribute to the 'us' and 'them' dynamics (Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017). Recent reports have shown an increase in experiences of discrimination in all domains of life in the Netherlands, including the labour market, housing, education, sports and social media (CVRM, 2021). Therefore, it is important to consider conceptualising integration as a two-way process in which perceived discrimination can have adverse effects on individuals' well-being, happiness and social participation (Andriessen et al., 2014).

Prior research on return migration intentions amongst Moroccan immigrants in Europe found that labour market participation and occupational status had no significant impact on return intentions. Instead, watching origin television channels, positive attitudes towards mixed marriage and frequent contact with non-migrants, negatively influenced return intentions (de Haas et al., 2015). In a study of four African immigrant groups in Spain and Italy, language proficiency, social networks with locals and egalitarian gender attitudes correlated with lower return intentions, but structural integration measures, namely labour force participation and occupational status, yielded inconsistent results (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). In contrast, a study on Moroccans in Italy found that

return intentions were positively related to education and sociocultural integration measured with legal status, other documents and home ownership (Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017).

Transnationalism and integration are mutually related (Carling & Pettersen, 2014; Schiller et al., 1995; Tamaki, 2011). For instance, low income may limit immigrants' ability to afford transnational practices like visits to their origin country. Additionally, legal status, citizenship and homeownership can indicate an immigrant's level of integration and contribute to endogeneity in return migration research as it is not possible to disentangle the direction of the causality. For instance, individuals who aspire to remain may pursue citizenship or acquire a home.

Aligning with findings from previous studies and considering the complex ways transnationalism and integration can interact with each other when it comes to shaping return aspirations, we hypothesise that people who participate in more sociocultural integration such as more frequent contact with the native population and structural integration such as labour market participation activities will have weaker preferences to return, after controlling for our indicators of transnational activities.

Economic considerations

The neoclassical economic and new economics of labour migration theories explain immigrants' mobility determinants (Sjaastad, 1970; Todaro, 1969). Economic theory suggests locational preferences for consumption in the origin country, whilst labour theory assumes no such preference. High income allows savings for return but may not indicate a specific consumption preference (Sjaastad, 1970; Todaro, 1969). Consequently, income's effect on return intentions or actual return can yield contradictory findings. For example, in a study of Moroccans living in Europe, the results supported neither NE nor NELM fully as return intentions were found to be positively associated with investments so providing partial support for the NELM by showing that return can be the result of successful economic integration whilst labour market integration did not have any significant correlation (de Haas et al., 2015).

Origin group differences

Previous research shows that immigrant groups can have different types and levels of integration, transnationalism and aspirations. The argument is that differences in the historical backgrounds of origin groups, such as variations in migration patterns, religious origins, within-group homogeneity and the conditions in their origin, may result in divergent aspirations. Previous research has demonstrated that variations in historical backgrounds, including migration patterns and factors like religiosity and religious affiliations, can influence the levels and forms of transnationalism (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003; Zorlu, 2009). For example, a study on return migration found that Chilean refugees were more responsive to political liberalisation than Polish immigrants due to more favourable economic conditions (Klinthäll, 2007). Another study looking at integration differences across generations and origin groups shows that some immigrant groups from economically disadvantaged regions, particularly the Middle East and Africa, faced greater challenges in social and cultural integration. Exposure to the host country reduced disparities in language proficiency and host country identification but had a limited impact on attitudes, religiosity or inter-ethnic friendships, influenced by structural factors like socialisation and segregation (Jonsson et al., 2018). In the context of refugees acquiring citizenship in the Netherlands, naturalisation was associated with the settlement, but not universally; refugees with weaker passports and those receiving welfare benefits exhibited greater international mobility (Hoon et al., 2020). Given the complex interactions, our primary aim is descriptive, highlighting differences in return aspirations amongst diverse groups in one destination country, considering various dimensions and individual correlates.

DATA

We utilised the Survey of Integration of Migrants (SIM) and the Survey of Integration of New Groups (SING) from Statistics Netherlands, alongside register dataSIM targeted individuals aged 15 and above with Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean, Polish or Somali migration backgrounds in 2006, 2011 and 2015. SIM 2006 sampled 11,520 persons with a response rate of approximately 45%–60%, and SING followed up on newly arrived immigrant and refugee groups, with a sample size of 12,958 and 53% successful interviews. We harmonised and pooled data across waves to ensure consistency, accounting for changes with wave indicator variables. Household income was assessed via register data, and missing values ($n=80$) were excluded from the dependent variable. The questions were translated from Dutch to English for this study. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) (SCP, 2015), and (SCP, 2009) respectively for the data sources).

Dependent variable

To measure return aspirations, the dependent variable is derived from the question: 'Would you like to live in the country of origin for good?' with the possible answers 'Yes', 'No' and 'I do not know'. The country of origin was preloaded in the questionnaire based on a previous question on the country of birth of the respondent. Table 1 presents descriptive information on aspirations to return by origin group. Amongst all the respondents, 28% said they would like to return eventually, 57% responded no and 14% did not know. Hence, only a minority of the immigrants in the study have permanent return aspirations.

We study people's migration aspirations, whilst some people might have a clear idea about these, others might not have made up their minds yet, which justifies the presence of the third option, 'do not know', offered in the questionnaire. We keep this response as a meaningful outcome of the dependent variable, leading to the presence of three categories in the response variable, which motivates us to estimate multinomial logistic regressions that allow us to estimate the effect of each variable on the aspiration of the immigrants to leave and to be uncertain. The reference category in the model does not aspire to return.

TABLE 1 Frequency table for return aspirations by origin groups (in %).

	Return aspirations		
Origin	**Yes**	**No**	**Do not know**
Turkey	39.99	50.00	10.01
Morocco	21.65	66.41	11.94
Antilles	37.07	46.41	16.52
Surinam	27.94	58.36	13.70
Afghanistan	21.56	72.49	5.95
Iraq	19.07	74.76	6.17
Iran	19.00	72.66	8.34
Somalia	35.74	48.73	15.53
Poland	21.65	50.53	27.82
China and Hong Kong	17.90	61.84	20.25
Total	28.02	57.53	14.45

Source: SIM 2006, 2011, 2015 and SING 2009.

Independent variables

We operationalise the concept of family ties by the presence of geographical proximity of the respondents' partners and children. Two successive questions were used for the location of these family members. Respondents were initially asked whether they had a partner or children, followed by a question about their location. We created dummies for each answer: have partner in the country of origin, have partner in the Netherlands, have all the children in the country of origin, have all the children in the Netherlands and have some of the children in the Netherlands and some of the children in the country of origin.

To measure immigrants' transnational activities, we employ three variables: visits to their country of origin within the last 12 months, the frequency of contact with family members in the origin country and the frequency of watching the origin country's TV. Whilst visits are vital for building social capital in the origin country, they may not always be feasible for everyone due to associated costs. Mobility rights for refugees and asylum seekers vary depending on host country regulations and their status application progress, with these restrictions lifted upon attaining citizenship. About 10% of refugees in our sample visited their origin country in the past year. We also consider the frequency of contact and watching the origin's country TV, as non-costly transnational activities. Visits capture ties to the origin country, facilitating knowledge and social capital exchange even when visiting family members. The frequency of contact with family measures the strength of ties to the origin country. Watching origin TV helps immigrants stay informed about developments in their origin country and maintain cultural connections. We measure visits by combining two questions about recent visits and their duration. Frequency questions about contact with family and watching origin TV were treated as continuous variables in our models.

Our data allows us to look at three indicators of the degree of integration in the host society: frequency of contact with the Dutch, watching Dutch television and unemployment. The frequency of contact with the Dutch is a classic indicator of social integration (de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2014). To capture the cultural ties to the country of destination, we add the variable on watching Dutch television. A previous study using watching TV without having access to antenne (to watch the country of origin TV) to asses Dutch language proficiency showed that those who did not have origin TV content were more likely to be more fluent in Dutch and consequently more 'integrated'. Therefore, with this variable, we can assess the integration on a cultural level and capture some of the language proficiency (Zorlu & Hartog, 2018). This variable is on the same scale as the watching origin TV. Unemployment, finally, is an important aspect of the economic dimension of integration (i.e., participation in the labour market).

A related but somewhat different aspect that plays a role in immigrant's degree of integration is perceived discrimination. We employed a self-reported discrimination variable measured on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating an increased perception of discrimination. The perceptions of discrimination can create a closer bond to the national identity of the origin country and weaken the sense of belonging in the host country (Çelik, 2015).

We measure individuals' country of origin using self-reported ethnic group affiliation, although this approach is constrained by nation-state-defined categories. Therefore, we have opted to designate this measure as 'origin groups', with individuals from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, Dutch Antilles, Iraq, Poland, Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and China (including Hong Kong). The duration in the country is also important from the perspective of return preferences (Cwerner, 2001). We measure the time in the country of destination linearly by subtracting the survey year from the arrival time. We categorise duration as less than 5 years, 5–10 years and over 10 years, with the five-year threshold influenced by naturalisation regulations. Empirical findings showed that long-term residence permits influenced return migration decisions (Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017). Furthermore, duration effects are biased by return behaviour: the longer the duration, the more the remaining immigrants will consist of people who do not want to return (Table 2).

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics.

Variable name	Range	Frequency/mean	Standard error
Age	15–96	40.45	14.06
Gender (ref = male)	0–1	0.48	0.49
Origin Country			
Turkey		1438	
Morocco		1441	
Antilles		1810	
Surinam		1657	
Afghanistan		756	
Iraq		729	
Iran		779	
Somalia		1217	
Poland		1506	
China and Hong Kong		553	
Education (ISLED level)	(1–7)	3.95	1.95
Standardised household income (percentile)	(0–100)	31.81	27.73
Partner's location			
No partner		4424	
Partner in the NL		6734	
Partner in the country of origin		214	
Partner in another country		114	
Children's location			
No children		3779	
All children in the NL		5708	
All children in the origin		247	
Children in both countries		338	
Some in the NL or/and some in another country		351	
Visits duration in the last 12 months	(0–3)	0.53	0.75
Frequency of contact with the family in origin (ordinal)	(1–4)	3.19	0.85
Frequency of watching origin TV (ordinal)	(1–5)	2.99	1.79
Time since migration			
Less than 5 years		1436	
5–10 years		1814	
More than 10 years		8636	
Unemployed		1468	
Perceived discrimination (ordinal)	(1–5)	2.11	1.08
Frequency of contact with local (ordinal)	(1–5)	3.48	1.32
Frequency of watching Dutch TV (ordinal)	(1–5)	2.59	2.01

Source: SIM 2006, 2011, 2015 and SING 2009.

RESULTS

Table 3 shows the results of four nested multinomial logistic regression models predicting return aspirations and uncertainty against the aspiration to remain in the Netherlands. Each explanatory variable's effect is considered independently and is expressed as a change in the log odds of aspiring to return. We begin with discussing the effects of the control variables.

Age displays a non-linear relation to return aspirations, as shown by the positive sign of the main effect and the negative sign of the quadratic effect, resulting in an increase in aspirations up to age 43 followed by a decrease in return aspirations after that age. This inversion of the age pattern could be due to selection effects since, as time passes, immigrants progressively realise their aspirations, and those who want to retire in their country of origin account for a decreasing proportion of the remaining cohort. Therefore, some of the age effects we observe could stem from retirement and sickness/disability. Consistent with prior research, women report lower return aspirations, with coefficients ranging from −0.19 to −0.23 (depending on the model). The time spent in the host country has a monotonous negative relationship with the aspiration to return as expected. The odds of aspiring to return to the country of origin for immigrants who have lived in the host country for 5–10 years and more than 10 years are respectively 22.2% (exp(−0.251) = 0.778) and 26% (exp(−0.301) = 0.740) lower than for those who have lived in the host country for less than 5 years.

Family ties

After considering the sociodemographic variables, we include variables for the partners' and children's locations in the first model. Firstly, people with a partner have weaker preferences to return than people without a partner, with coefficients ranging from −0.08 to −0.18 in models 2–4. The magnitude of the effect of having a partner in the Netherlands increased as the other variables of interest were added to the model. In model 4, those with a partner in the Netherlands have approximately 21% lower odds of aspiration to return than those without a partner. Having a partner in the country of origin – not a common experience – is positive and statistically significant in all three models, with a coefficient of 0.57 indicating that individuals whose partners are in the origin country are 1.78 times more inclined to aspire to return. However, the effect size decreases as more variables are added to the model.

Immigrants with all their children in the Netherlands have lower aspirations and are less likely to be uncertain than immigrants without children, providing evidence that children tie people to their destination. Regarding the children's location, individuals with all their children in their country of origin – again, not a common experience – are more likely to aspire to return for good. Surprisingly, individuals with some of their children in the origin country and some in the Netherlands are more likely to aspire to return than those who do not have any children. The results of children's and partners' locations align with the theory and previous research findings that family ties influence migration preferences, as individuals often move towards family (Mulder, 2018). Adding family ties variables did not affect the magnitude or direction of the sociodemographic variables.

Transnationalism

Next, we introduce aspects of transnational activities to our analysis, proving highly significant at the 1% level for both outcomes. The positive effect of visiting the country in the last 12 months may not be entirely due to persistent ties with the origin society but partly due to endogeneity. Also, maintaining close ties with family members in the origin country can provide emotional and social support, making returning more appealing. Furthermore,

TABLE 3 Multinomial logistic regression predicting return aspirations results.

Outcome = yes, would like to return (ref. No)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	0.087***	0.089***	0.093***	0.091***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age square	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Woman	−0.195***	−0.185***	−0.262***	−0.217***
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.046)	(0.047)
Origin (ref = Turkey)				
Morocco	−0.911***	−0.914***	−0.875***	−0.837***
	(0.085)	(0.086)	(0.088)	(0.089)
Antilles	0.117	0.071	0.257**	0.236**
	(0.077)	(0.079)	(0.084)	(0.085)
Suriname	−0.419***	−0.439***	−0.084	−0.099
	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.088)	(0.091)
Afghanistan	−0.969***	−0.970***	−0.511**	−0.874***
	(0.149)	(0.151)	(0.158)	(0.169)
Iraq	−1.187***	−1.187***	−0.915***	−0.839***
	(0.153)	(0.153)	(0.161)	(0.166)
Iran	−1.157***	−1.165***	−0.929***	−0.971***
	(0.154)	(0.155)	(0.162)	(0.169)
Somalia	−0.026	−0.089	0.521***	0.618***
	(0.114)	(0.116)	(0.124)	(0.132)
Poland	−0.457***	−0.553***	−0.867***	−1.112***
	(0.107)	(0.109)	(0.112)	(0.127)
China and Hong Kong	−0.983***	−0.976***	−0.905***	−1.043***
	(0.162)	(0.163)	(0.168)	(0.177)
Education (ISLED level)	−0.007	−0.001	−0.015	−0.015
	(0.012)	(0.001)	(0.013)	(0.135)
Standardised household income percentile	−0.002**	−0.002*	−0.002*	−0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Family ties				
Partner's location (ref = no partner)				
Partner in NL		−0.085*	−0.184***	−0.183***
		(0.049)	(0.051)	(0.051)
Partner in the origin		0.861***	0.582***	0.578***
		(0.162)	(0.166)	(0.168)
Children's location (ref = no children)				
All children in the NL		−0.005	−0.039*	−0.007
		(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.059)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Outcome = yes, would like to return (ref. No)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
All children in the origin		0.239	0.024	0.017
		(0.153)	(0.157)	(0.161)
Children in both		0.504***	0.301**	0.341*
		(0.131)	(0.134)	(0.141)
Transnationalism				
Visit			0.331***	0.334***
			(0.033)	(0.034)
Frequency of contact with family origin			0.587***	0.599***
			(0.031)	(0.031)
Frequency of watching origin TV			0.079***	0.074***
			(0.012)	(0.013)
Integration				
Time since migration (ref = less than 5 years)				
Between 5 and 10 years				−0.232*
				(0.098)
More than 10 years				−0.278**
				(0.089)
Unemployed				0.087
				(0.071)
Perceived discrimination				0.257***
				(0.021)
Frequency of contact with locals				0.098***
				(0.017)
Frequency of watching Dutch TV				−0.062***
				(0.017)
Constant	−1.867***	−1.891***	−4.328***	−4.702***
	(0.195)	(0.196)	(0.228)	(0.276)
Outcome = do not know (ref. No)	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Age	0.042***	0.049***	0.051***	0.061***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Age square	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Woman	−0.161***	−0.166***	−0.207***	−0.186***
	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.058)
Origin (ref = Turkey)				
Morocco	−0.101***	−0.112	−0.087	−0.109
	(0.121)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.122)

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Outcome = do not know (ref. No)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Antilles	0.547***	0.498***	0.642***	0.601***
	(0.115)	(0.115)	(0.119)	(0.122)
Suriname	0.140	0.111	0.355**	0.333**
	(0.118)	(0.121)	(0.125)	(0.127)
Afghanistan	−0.734**	−0.741**	−0.491*	−0.297
	(0.215)	(0.215)	(0.219)	(0.227)
Iraq	−0.730**	−0.746***	−0.594***	−0.452*
	(0.215)	(0.215)	(0.218)	(0.224)
Iran	−0.547***	−0.573**	−0.422***	−0.225
	(0.208)	(0.209)	(0.212)	(0.216)
Somalia	−0.307*	−0.258	0.615***	0.738***
	(0.141)	(0.142)	(0.149)	(0.158)
Poland	0.664***	0.616***	0.434**	0.352**
	(0.123)	(0.124)	(0.126)	(0.147)
China and Hong Kong	0.699***	0.699***	0.752***	0.809***
	(0.179)	(0.179)	(0.182)	(0.191)
Education (ISCED level)	0.034*	0.032*	−0.028	0.024
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Household income	−0.001	−0.002	−0.002	−0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Family ties				
Partner's location (ref = no partner)				
Partner in the NL		−0.140*	−0.197*	−0.171*
		(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.064)
Partner in the origin		0.065	0.101	0.117
		(0.227)	(0.228)	(0.229)
Children's location (ref = no children)				
All children in the NL		−0.194*	−0.212*	−0.219*
		(0.086)	(0.087)	(0.075)
All children in the origin		0.071	0.006	0.001
		(0.111)	(0.191)	(0.197)
Children in both		0.255	0.137	0.097
		(0.175)	(0.176)	(0.181)
Transnationalism				
Visit			0.215***	0.195***
			(0.044)	(0.044)
Contact with family origin			0.268***	0.281***
			(0.035)	(0.036)
Origin TV			0.067***	0.058***
			(0.016)	(0.017)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Outcome = do not know (ref. No)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Integration				
Time since migration (ref = less than 5 years)				
Between 5 and 10 years				−0.291**
				(0.106)
More than 10 years				−0.207**
				(0.099)
Unemployed				−0.037
				(0.089)
Perceived discrimination				0.169***
				(0.026)
Contact with locals				0.003
				(0.021)
Frequency of watching Dutch TV (ordinal)				0.038
				(0.331)
Constant	−2.577***	−2.644***	−3.848***	−4.072***
	(0.257)	(0.251)	(0.289)	(0.276)
AIC	21541.1	21494.7	20847.2	20292.4
BIC	21806.9	21849.1	21245.9	20763.7

Note: $N = 12{,}026$. Standard errors are given in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

regular contact with family in origin may help maintain a sense of cultural identity and attachment to the origin country, which can increase the desire to return.

Our third variable, the frequency of watching TV from the origin country, leads to higher aspirations to return and more uncertainty against staying, even though the effect size is smaller than visits and frequency of contact with family. Watching TV from one's country of origin may provide a sense of connection and familiarity with the origin culture, increasing the desire to return to that country. Additionally, watching TV from the origin country may provide information and news about the country that can affect the decision-making process related to return aspirations.

Overall, the results indicate that immigrants with more transnational activities are more likely to aspire to return to their country of origin, and they are also more likely to be uncertain compared to saying no.

Integration

We finally add aspects of integration to the model and observe no significant changes in the previously added variables. Being unemployed is only weakly associated with the aspiration to return to the country of origin.

The frequency of contact with the Dutch positively correlates with the aspiration to stay. Frequent contact with locals can mean having more local networks and knowing the intricacies of different cultures, resulting in higher levels of integration. Watching Dutch TV, an aspect of the cultural dimension of integration, is also negatively correlated with return aspirations. Perceived discrimination intensifies return aspirations and uncertainty,

with immigrants perceiving discrimination having odds 28.7% higher than those who do not. It might create a sense of alienation and exclusion, leading to homesickness and psychological distress.

Economic considerations

For the economic consideration, the negative coefficients indicate a negative relationship between education and return aspiration, but this relationship is not statistically significant at the 5% level. Standardised household income has a significant adverse effect on the aspirations to return in models 1 and 2. Still, this relationship fades when the group of variables associated with integration are added to the model. This could mean that variables measuring family ties, transnationalism and integration are essential mediators or confounders in the relationship between household income and return aspirations. There is also a correlation between household income and other variables, such as integration factors.

Origin groups

Figure 1 illustrates return and uncertainty margins by origin group, both before and after controlling for the effects of all the independent variables in the model. Looking at the adjusted results, the immigrant groups tend to display higher return aspirations than refugees (ca. 30–40% vs. 15–20%), which is expected due to the insecurity in their origin country. However, this effect does not apply to all cases. For instance, people from China, Poland and Morocco display return aspirations slightly below those of refugees from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. This paradox is partially explained by the fact that people from the former origin countries are more often uncertain, meaning that amongst those who have a clear aspiration, return is more common than it seems in these origin groups. A second exception to the rule is people from Somalia who appear to have the highest aspiration to return.

Adjusting these margins at the means of the independent variables does not significantly alter the ordering between groups but does reveal some interesting patterns for specific groups. Still, several changes were observed after adjusting for the effects of the independent variables in the model. Adjusted at the means of independent variables, both those from Turkey and Poland show lower aspirations to return than in the empty model (Model 1).

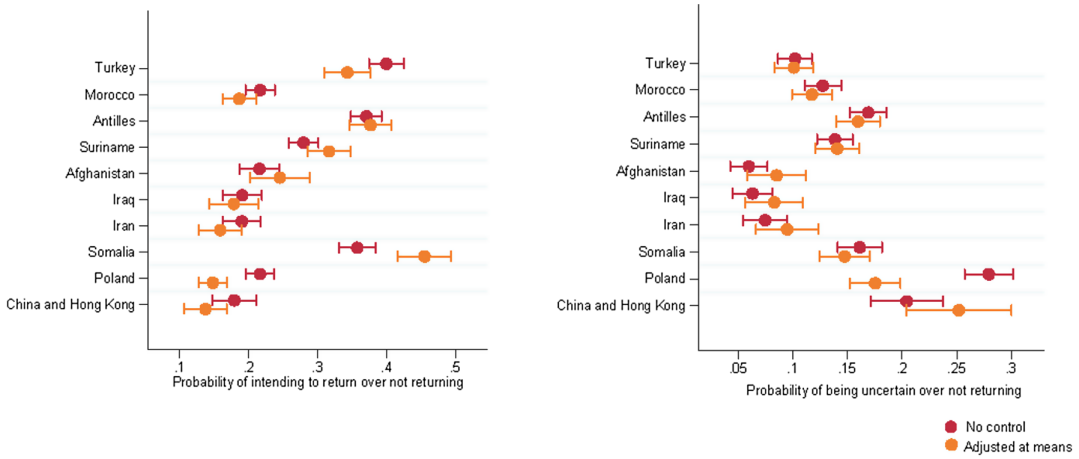

FIGURE 1 Predictive margins with 95% CIs for origin variable in empty and full models. Authors' elaboration on SIM and SING Survey data 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2015'.

TABLE 4 Multinomial logistic regression results for different groups.

Outcome = yes, would like to return (ref. No)	Immigrants	Refugees
Age	0.081***	0.112***
	(0.011)	(0.021)
Age sq.	−0.001***	−0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Woman	−0.253***	−0.102
	(0.055)	(0.095)
Education (ISCED level)	−0.052**	−0.049
	(0.016)	(0.024)
Household income	−0.001	−0.001
	(0.001)	(0.002)
Origin (ref = Turkey)		
Morocco	−0.837***	
	(0.091)	
Antilles	0.231**	
	(0.088)	
Suriname	−0.062	
	(0.092)	
Poland	−1.237***	
	(0.142)	
China and Hong Kong	−1.151***	
	(0.211)	
Origin (ref = Afghanistan)		
Iraq		−0.421**
		(0.141)
Iran		−0.461**
		(0.150)
Somalia		1.233***
		(0.144)
Family Ties		
Partner's location		
Partner in the NL	−0.214***	−0.086
	(0.062)	(0.106)
Partner in the origin	0.823**	−0.323
	(0.224)	(0.286)
Children's location		
All children in the NL	0.021	−0.101
	(0.074)	(0.122)
All children in the origin	−0.064	0.248
	(0.191)	(0.341)

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Outcome = yes, would like to return (ref. No)	Immigrants	Refugees
Some in the NL and in the origin	0.319*	0.621
	(0.152)	(0.453)
Transnationalism		
Visit	0.347***	0.233*
	(0.036)	(0.099)
Contact with family origin	0.628***	0.516***
	(0.038)	(0.056)
Origin TV	0.041***	0.169***
	(0.015)	(0.027)
Integration		
Time since migration (ref = less than 5 years)		
Between 5 and 10 years	−0.243**	−0.063
	(0.125)	(0.174)
More than 10 years	−0.382***	−0.017
	(0.112)	(0.163)
Unemployed	0.164	−0.042
	(0.089)	(0.117)
Perceived discrimination	0.296***	0.158***
	(0.025)	(0.042)
Contact with locals	−0.113***	−0.047
	(0.021)	(0.035)
Frequency of watching Dutch TV (ordinal)	−0.735***	−0.041
	(0.019)	(0.038)
Cons	−4.326***	−5.912***
	(0.328)	(0.497)
N	8693	3333
Log-likelihood	−2479.3	−2507.8
Pseudo R^2	0.093	0.105

Note: Standard errors are given in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

This signals that these groups consist of people with characteristics associated with a higher aspiration to return, such as having family members in the country of origin, more transnational activities and lower scores on our integration variables. For immigrants from Somalia, their strong aspiration to return home is suppressed by their characteristics since the aspiration to return is significantly lower when controlling for background variables and levels of engagement in transnational activities, as well as our integration measures.

Origin-specific models

Given the difference between refugee and immigrant-origin groups in the predictive margins, we examine the variations in return aspirations and their factors for these two groups. Table 4 shows the results for the subgroups.

The 'don't know' outcome is calculated in the model but not shown in the table. As the sample size varies between the groups, we refrain from comparing the magnitude of coefficients and concentrate on their sign. The effect of age is similar across origins and in line with the general results. Gender, however, negatively affects the aspiration to return for those who belong to the immigrant group but does not affect the refugee group. Contrary to the general results, education has a significant negative association with the aspiration to return for immigrants but not refugees. Higher educated immigrants might position themselves better in the labour market and see fewer opportunities in their origin country compared to the Netherlands. Additionally, higher or lower income might not impact their perceptions of the origin country's level of safety after fleeing.

Looking at family ties, the variable for the partner's location seems to have similar results with the combined model for the immigrants. However, there are no significant relationships for refugees other than children's location. Whilst the partner's location plays a role in the aspirations of return for immigrants, there is no effect on children. For refugees, having some children in origin and some in the Netherlands, as opposed to having no children, increases their aspiration to return.

As expected from previous research and the general results, contact with family in the origin and watching origin TV are positively associated with the aspiration to return for the two groups. Furthermore, visits to the origin country are positively associated with return aspiration. Even though only a small portion of the refugees in the sample (9.6%) visited their country of origin in the last 12 months, the effect is still significant and positive. This positive association for refugees contradicts previous research suggesting that visits can highlight the difficulty in the origin and decrease the desire to return (Oeppen, 2013).

Amongst the integration variables, with the exception of unemployment, a structural integration factor, all other indicators are significant and consistent with the theory for the immigrant group. Refugees show a positive association with perceived discrimination, whilst contact with locals appears more relevant to immigrants, potentially due to limited opportunities for refugees to interact outside centres, hindering their ties to the Netherlands.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We examined return migration aspirations in the Netherlands for various immigrant groups, focusing on a broad set of micro-level variables. Whilst economic migration theories have played a role, our study highlights the significance of social ties, including transnationalism, integration and family connections. Our results corroborate the findings on family ties to country of origin through a strong positive relationship within the nested models for the presence of a partner. However, similarly to previous findings, even though having children in the origin stays positively correlated after including more variables, the results are not significant. Unlike in this previous research, our results also show a significant negative relationship between the aspiration to return and having a partner in the Netherlands. In their work on return migration as failure or success, De Haas et al. (2015) concluded that having family members (children and partner) in the destination country did not affect the likelihood of intending to return whilst having a partner or children in Morocco did. Another study on four immigrant groups in Spain and Italy that captured social ties to the country of origin and destination with the presence of children, partners and siblings, argued that social ties in the destination had a negative impact whilst social ties in the origin had a positive one with no statistical significance (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011).

Our findings regarding transnationalism corroborate previous research. The different ways people can stay connected with their origin country by being physically present abroad, having close relations to the family in the origin, or watching origin TV all generate higher aspirations to return. Previous research on transnationalism and return intentions shows an overall positive relationship. The effect of visits on maintaining ties with the country of origin can result in higher return intentions (Bonifazi & Paparusso, 2019; de Haas et al., 2015; Fokkema, 2011; Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017). Additionally, keeping stronger social ties with the country of origin through

sustained contact with family can create a sense of belonging but also increase the social capital for future return possibilities. Watching origin TV can also be a sign of keeping cultural ties to the country of origin and result in higher intentions to return (Fokkema, 2011).

For our research, we focus on one key indicator of economic and structural integration, unemployment. We found that unemployment is only weakly associated with a positive aspiration to return whilst this effect diminishes for the refugee group model. Integration does not stop at economic aspects and can be broadened to the interplay between the host society and the immigrants. Therefore, we focus on three indicators of sociocultural integration that capture the two-way nature of the integration process (Carling & Pettersen, 2014), as well as its social and cultural aspects. These indicators are perceived discrimination, social contact with people who do not have a migrant background and watching Dutch TV. Aligned with previous studies and our hypothesis, we observed that as perceived discrimination increases, the likelihood of aspiring to return also increases. Feelings of alienation and not belonging can create homesickness and psychological distress in the current environment. In contrast, having social contact with Dutch people and watching Dutch TV could increase an immigrant's understanding of local values, culture and lifestyle, decreasing re-migration aspirations. We found that the leisure contacts with the locals have a significant negative relation with aspiring to return, confirming that more robust social integration is associated with lower odds of aspiring to return. Our findings are relatively new since few previous studies were able to include these aspects of integration. Overall, our results show that having lower levels of the integration variables, controlling for transnational engagement, family ties and background variables, results in higher levels of return aspirations. The transnationalism and integration matrix by Carling and Pettersen (2014) demonstrates that integration and transnationalism can shape each other by the relative strength of each other, people with the highest likelihood of return intentions are the ones with weak integration and strong transnationalism. Previous research on economic integration and return intentions shows varying results. Whilst Fokkema (2011) identified no significant effect of educational attainment, labour force participation, occupational attainment and difficulties with income for the second generation in Europe, the results for first-generation Moroccans in Italy show a rather unexpected results as higher educated immigrants had a higher intention to return, suggesting a possible effect of mismatch of education with the job (Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017).

Gender differences, although not theoretically discussed, were also found. Women appeared to have lower aspirations to return than men. This could be due to multiple reasons. Women may adapt to the social surroundings in the host country more quickly than men, for whom the new settings can mean a loss of privilege and status; therefore, whilst men can benefit from returning by regaining their privileged status, for women, this might mean a loss of independence and equality (Carling & Erdal, 2014; Dronkers & Vink, 2012). Moreover, more women than men arrive as migrants with family reunification visas. Previous research has shown that migration motivation can affect return intentions, as those who came for family reasons were more likely to intend to return (Carling & Pettersen, 2014). This could explain some of the variance in the observed gender effect. Additionally, age seems to be an essential factor for immigrants and refugees as it could be fuelled by many dimensions, such as the return home to die phenomenon. Notably, household income and education do not significantly relate to return aspirations when accounting for other factors.

For origin groups, we found that the country of origin played a significant role for most of the groups. Specifically, we found that people from Turkey, Antilles and Somalia have much higher return aspirations than those from Poland, China (including Hong Kong), Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. This relationship could be a result of within-group similarities but also of the factors that shape countries as a preferable destination. Similar results have been found by Carling and Pettersen (2014), who concluded that the relationship between origin countries and return intentions persists, after controlling for other variables such as transnationalism and integration levels. Within refugee origin groups, Somalia had a different pattern than the rest, with much higher aspirations to return. All in all, refugees having different migration motives and histories than other immigrants (Phillimore, 2011) might influence their return aspirations and the factors that impact the aspiration creation. Group differences were also observed between refugees and immigrants. Whilst integration and family ties

factors lost their explanatory power in the refugee model, transnationalism still played an essential role in the aspiration to return. Only discrimination from the integration indicators was still a strong predictor for higher return aspiration. Moreover, education had a significant association with return aspirations for immigrants but not for refugees. Since education can be crucial in integrating into the labour market, the importance for immigrants over refugees is expected as refugees in the Netherlands have social welfare benefits as safety nets.

Overall, the analysis showed that, in the Netherlands, stronger ties to the country of origin through higher levels of transnationalism and the presence of family members lead to significantly higher aspiration to return. In contrast, stronger ties to the host country through a partner and children and social integration have the opposite effect. These effects even trump those generated by economic integration and human capital accumulation. Naturally, return migration studies face limitations on the available data sources. One of the limitations of this study is the cross-sectional design of the surveys it uses, which prevents us from drawing causal inferences. This limitation makes our analyses sensitive to selection biases, as the study group is composed only of the immigrants currently residing in the host country, and many of those who planned to leave quickly did so before being interviewed. To mitigate this bias, we stratified analyses by duration of stay but found no substantial differences in results.

Overall, systemic reviews on return migration have shown that whilst the subject has received increased attention since the 2000s, there are still gaps in understanding the role of family ties, transnationalism and integration (Fortunato & Iacobucci, 2022). Our study contributes to the growing body of research on return migration by highlighting the nuanced and multifaceted nature of return migration aspirations. We comprehensively analyse the variations in aspirations amongst various immigrant and refugee groups and examine a range of micro-level factors, such as family ties, transnationalism and integration. Our study thus offers detailed insights into the complexities underlying individuals' aspirations to return to their country of origin. Our research focused on individuals' aspirations to return to their country of origin rather than their actual behaviour. In future research, we will explore the relationship between aspirations and behaviour by examining to what extent aspirations can predict behaviour. In future research, an avenue can be to investigate the temporal dynamics of return migration aspirations. Additionally, research exploring the role of macro-level factors, such as policy and political climate, could examine the effect of societal contexts on immigrants' perceptions of their future in the host country and their inclination to return home.

PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at https://www.webofscience.com/api/gateway/wos/peer-review/10.1111/imig.13307.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Results based on calculations by the authors using non-public microdata from Statistics Netherlands.Under certain conditions, these microdata are accessible for statistical and scientific research. For further information: microdata@cbs.nl.

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