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Multicultural diversity in mobility

The travel behaviour of migrants and children
of migrants in the Netherlands

KiM | Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis

Anne Durand, Bingyuan (Amelia) Huang, Toon Zijlstra, María Alonso González

Summary

People with a migration background (migrants and their children) are less mobile than people without a migration background. At the same time, the distance that migrants and their children travel between home and their place of work is longer than for other working people. What's clear is that migrants and their children cycle less, but use public transport and walk more. The differences between groups of migrants are large, meaning that it is difficult to generalise when discussing the travel behaviour of people with a migration background.

There are currently 4.5 million people with a migration background in the Netherlands. The proportion of people with a migration background is expected to rise in the years ahead. First-generation individuals are less mobile, are less likely to have a driving licence and cycle less often than people without a migration background. The differences between the groups are sometimes considerable. In the case of second-generation individuals — the children of migrants — the differences are less pronounced: many aspects of their travel behaviour is closer to the travel behaviour of people without a migration background. This study confirms that the travel behaviour of migrants and their children is relevant for policymaking given that mobility policies change as the composition of the population changes.





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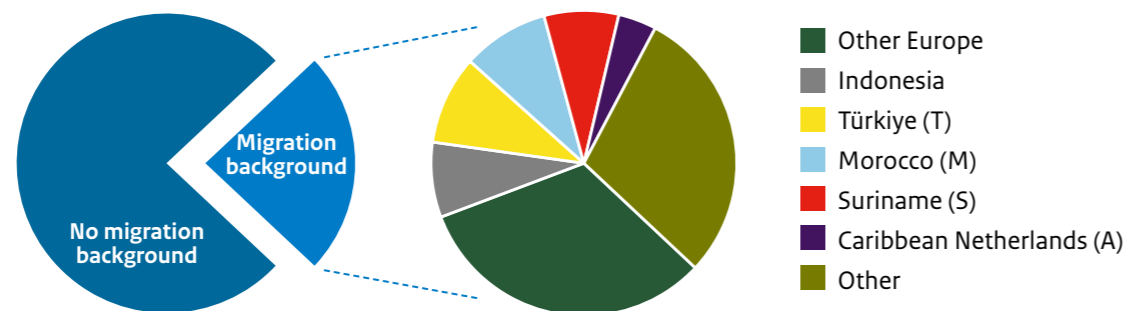
Introduction

Starting point

Around 1 in 4 residents of the Netherlands has a migration background. In 2021, the country had 2.5 million migrants and 2 million children of migrants. The 4.5 million people with a migration background are unevenly spread across the Netherlands. The largest concentrations are in the major cities, with fewer living in rural areas. Around 50% of the TMSA group (see the 'Definitions' below) live in the 10 largest cities compared to 16% of the population without a migration background.

The proportion of people with a migration background is expected to rise further in the years ahead. In this study, we show that this will have an impact on the mobility situation in the Netherlands.

Migration backgrounds in the Netherlands.



Definitions

- **First generation or migrant:** born outside the Netherlands.
- **Second generation or child of migrant:** born in the Netherlands but one or both parents were born outside the Netherlands.
- Migration background: first or second generation.
- **Western¹:** A person with a migration background in one of the countries of Europe (excluding Türkiye), North America, Oceania, Indonesia or Japan.
- **Non-Western:** originating from a country outside the Western countries.
- **TMSA:** Originating from Türkiye (T), Morocco (M), Suriname (S) or the Caribbean Netherlands (A).
- **Other non-Western:** non-Western excluding TMSA.

The quotations in this brochure are from people with a migration background.

¹ Use of the terms Western and non-Western is on the decline. This distinction was still made in the data we used for this study, and we are dependent on this in the quantitative part of the study.



2 Lower mobility

Migrants travel less

Many people with a migration background are less mobile than people without a migration background. Reduced mobility means, for instance, that they go out less for a walk or to travel somewhere. And when people with a migration background do go out, they make a lower number of journeys and travel a lower overall distance than people without a migration background.

These conclusions hold especially true for the first generation. They are less mobile than the second generation or people without a migration background. The groups of Turkish and Moroccan Dutch are particularly interesting because people of both the first and second generations stay in on a given day considerably more frequently compared to other groups. People without a migration background and people with a Western background go out relatively often. People with a Dutch Caribbean or a Surinamese background are between the two groups.

For instance, on any given day, 6% of individuals with an average socioeconomic situation and without a migration background do not leave the house to travel somewhere. Among Turkish migrants with the same characteristics, the group that stays at home is twice as large at over 14%. And if a Turkish migrant does leave the house, he or she will make on average 20% fewer trips than a comparable person without a migration background.

In our analyses, we correct for all other factors that can affect the mobility of people to ensure the comparison is fair. This concerns differences in the living environment, such as urban density and the availability of public space, differences in temporal situation, such as day of the week or month of the year, and differences between people, such as age, education and income.



Explanations

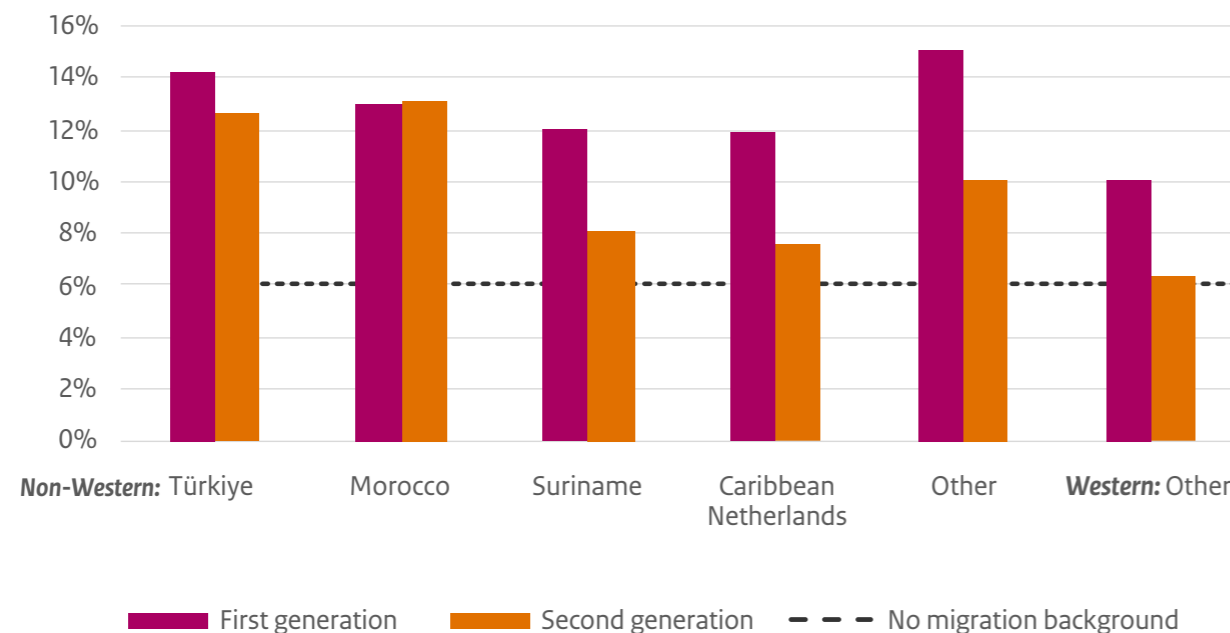
Possible explanations for the reduced mobility of people with a migration background can be found in the other insights emerging from this study, as set out in the following chapters. [The longer travel time between home and the place of work](#) reduces the opportunity to engage in other activities. And the [lack of a driving licence precludes the use of a car](#) (as the driver). Additional explanations which we have not quantitatively investigated in this study include a smaller social network, poorer health and cultural differences. Social exclusion, discrimination and poverty may also be relevant in explaining the differences. For instance, half of all people living in poverty in the Netherlands have a migration background².

“Walking is the only means of transport I have. I would like to go further, into town for example, but it's too far to walk for me. So I stick to my own neighbourhood for shopping or the mosque.”

Language barriers also play a role in the fact that people with a migration background are less mobile. Language barriers can be a limiting factor in passing a driving test or using public transport, especially among migrants.

“In the 1990s, there was plenty of work in the flower industry in Aalsmeer, and I was asked to go and work there. But I didn't feel up to it because it would mean travelling by public transport. If you can't read Dutch and can't communicate, it's a real problem. [...] These days, I tend to stay in my own neighbourhood in Oost, and only use the bus. I don't go any further because I don't know Amsterdam, and I'll end up lost because I can't read the signs.”

Staying at home on a given day



² We took into account income levels in our analyses. However, we do not have information on wealth, debts or financial obligations.

3 Longer commutes

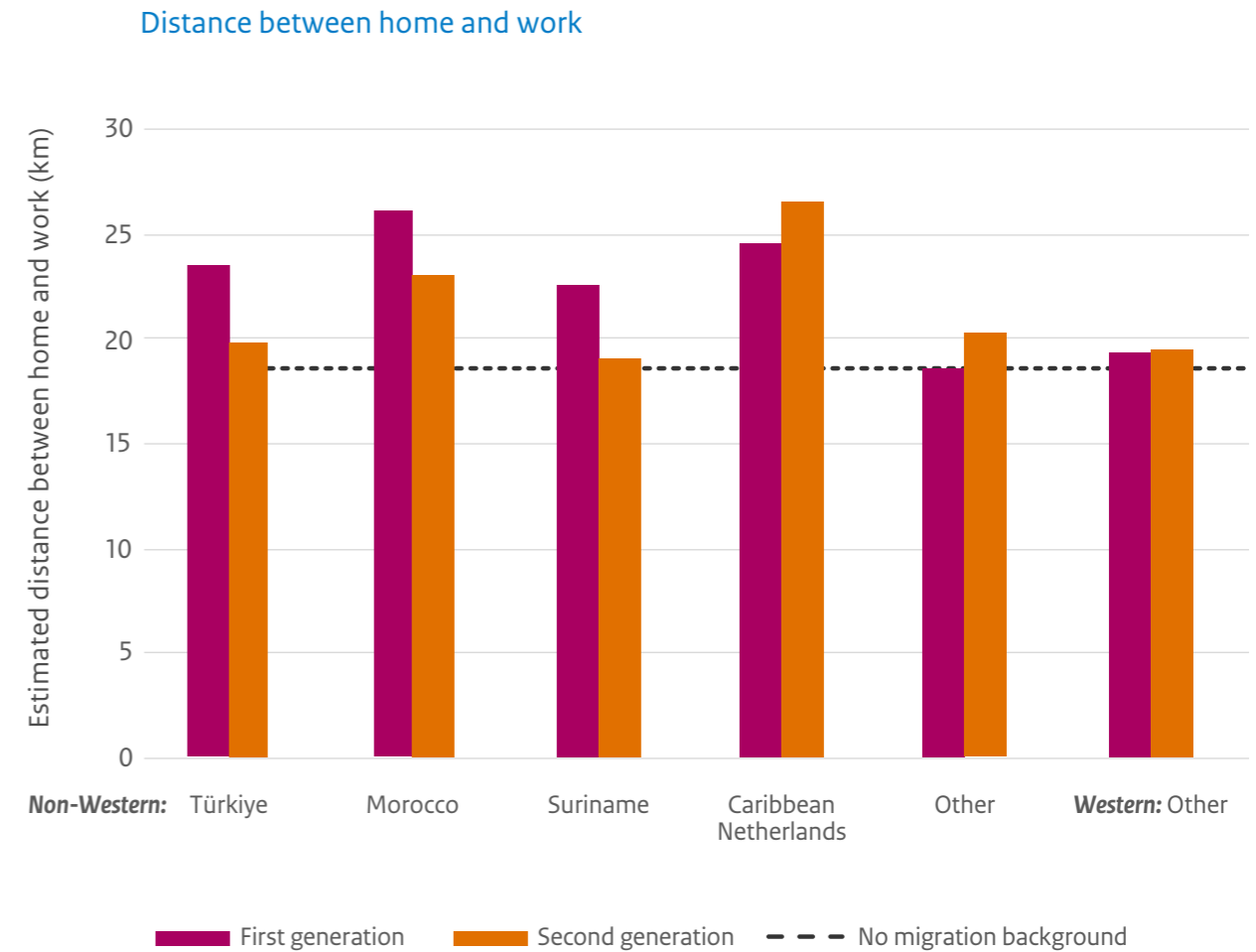
Relatively long commutes

Many groups of people with a migration background travel relatively long distances between their home and their place of work. This is measured in terms of the distance travelled from the home to the place of work (single journey) without any stops on the way.

Once again, migrants — the first generation — tend to travel the furthest. More specifically, this applies to first-generation people from the Caribbean Netherlands and Morocco. The differences between the groups of other non-Western individuals and Western individuals, and people without a migration background, are limited.

For instance, people with an average socioeconomic situation travel on average 18.5 kilometres between home and work, first-generation Moroccan Dutch individual, all other things being equal, travels on average 26.0 kilometres.

In the analysis, we control for the most common explanations for the commuting distance. In total, there are 16 control variables, such as living environment (province, density, distance from city centre), age group, educational level, income, family composition and labour participation (full-time or part-time). And we only take into account people who actually have a job to travel to.





Commuting time is also longer

People with a migration background do not just travel greater distances, the time they travel between their home and place of work is also longer. Travel times can be 2–22% longer depending on the sub-group. Here too, we also control for the most common potential other explanations.

Possible additional explanations here include disadvantaged positions in the labour market or housing market. Numerous studies show that people with a migration background are at a disadvantage, but whether this also explains longer commuting distances will require further research.

“ It takes me almost 90 minutes by public transport. The journey would be quicker by car, but then I wouldn't receive an allowance.”

Less mobile but still longer journeys

The observation of longer distances and longer travel times between home and work would seem to be at odds with the earlier conclusion that [many groups with a migration background are less mobile](#). Some of the differences here can be explained by the fact that we could only determine the commuting distances for people who are active in the labour market *and* who also travelled to work on the day of the study. Despite this, there are signs that this specific group is less mobile. Everyone who travels from their home to work obviously leaves their home. But many people with a migration background also make fewer other trips on a given working day than people without a migration background. The differences, however, are smaller than in the analysis of the entire sample.

Longer travel times for other travel purposes

People with a migration background do not just have relatively long travel times between home and work, but the same applies equally for their travel times for shopping and leisure purposes. [This could be related to their mode of travel](#).

4 Less cycling, more public transport use



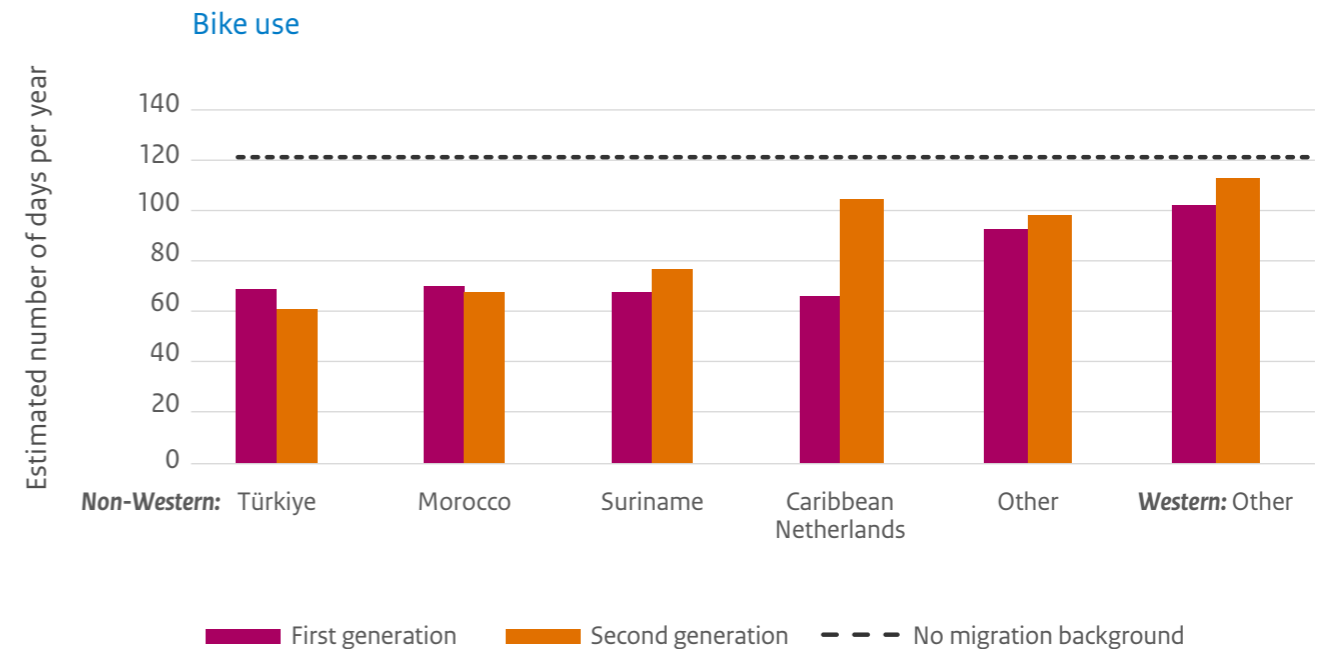
A lot less cycling

People with a migration background cycle less than people without a migration background. This pertains to the frequency with which people cycle, as self-reported.

The first generation has a particularly lower bike use, while for the second generation the gap is not particularly large or, for some groups, is non-existent. However, both generations cycle significantly less than people without a migration background. For people with a Turkish or Moroccan background, the difference compared to people without a migration background can be as much as a factor of two. The difference with people without a migration background is smallest for those with a Western migration background.

For example, a fictitious person without a migration background takes the bike 200 days of the year, while a Turkish migrant or the child of a Turkish migrant, all other things being equal, would only cycle 144 and 132 days a year, respectively.

“ All the white Dutch kids cycled to school, while I took the bus. I don't really know why I didn't cycle, it would have been cheaper, but it was my culture. I think it might have been because in Curaçao it wasn't possible to go by bus, while it is here, so you just use it.”



Cycling not really on the radar

People with a migration background did not seem to have a particular aversion to cycling. In fact, in our focus groups, there seemed to be a consensus between migrants and the adult children of migrants about the importance of the bike and of cycling in the Netherlands. Firstly, because of all the practical aspects in a country like the Netherlands where cycling is second nature, and secondly because of its symbolic value: the bicycle is part of Dutch culture.

“ You need to learn to ride a bike, just like you need to learn to swim. Imagine you don't have a car, or you can't afford one, you will always have the option of a bike.”

People with a migration background see the bike as a worthwhile fallback option rather than as a daily mode of transport. They also make a clear link with the stage of life: for a child, it is a convenient and fun way to get around, but in adult life, they have a preference for other modes of transport.

“ Cycling is part of your childhood, but it's not something you carry on doing as an adult.”

There is no discernible difference in bicycle use between first and second generation Turkish and Moroccan Dutch individuals. The frequency of bike use is relatively low in both groups. However, children of migrants from the Caribbean Netherlands cycle more frequently than their parents.

Why do they cycle less?

People with a migration background appear to be more sensitive to a sub-optimal cycling infrastructure, for instance, when cycle paths or cycle crossings are missing. They characterise these situations as being dangerous more easily than people without a migration background. We have not studied the extent to which perceived safety in the immediate living environment is subjective or objective though.

Furthermore, people with a migration background are relatively sensitive to adverse weather conditions. Rain and wind seems to be more likely to deter them from cycling than people without a migration background.

“ You see the difference, white Dutch people cycling in all weathers with a child with them. I'd never do that. [...] No, we'd never do that. I'd cycle if the weather was good, I can't ever remember cycling as a child in autumn or winter.”

Based on our study, bicycle theft also seems to be a factor in the relatively lower cycling frequency among migrants and children of migrants. Especially in urban areas, bicycle theft is an everyday crime. It does not help if you live in certain inner-city neighbourhoods where cycle storage facilities are poor and social control at cycle storage locations is sub-optimal.

“ Bicycles are stored on the street. It's no surprise then that they get stolen, but more important, they rust and won't stay good for long. It would have been nice to store my bike in a locker.”

“ My bike was stolen four times, so I'm now done with cycling. I sometimes miss cycling.”

Furthermore, literature shows that people from the TMSA groups are more likely to have poorer health than those without a migration background. This may also play a role in the fact that they cycle less frequently.

Finally, the lack of role models in their environment, especially among women, may also hold people back from cycling.

“ I never saw my aunts or grandmothers on a bike.”



Walking is more popular

The relatively modest use of the bicycle is primarily compensated by a greater number of walking trips. Furthermore, people with a migration background are more likely to use public transport. Not everything is compensated, however. We previously observed that people with a migration background are less mobile: [they make fewer trips](#).

“ I like walking more than cycling. Maybe if I had a bike. No one in my neighbourhood cycles, it looks odd.”

For some people, walking is the norm. Sometimes, there aren't many other options.

“ In the past there was nothing else, I think the older generation of Moroccans does a lot of walking. My kids don't walk that much unless it's really close by.”

Public transport more popular

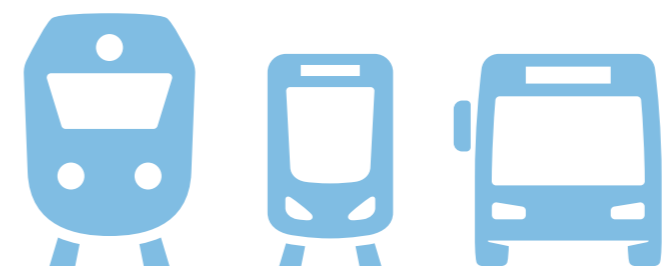
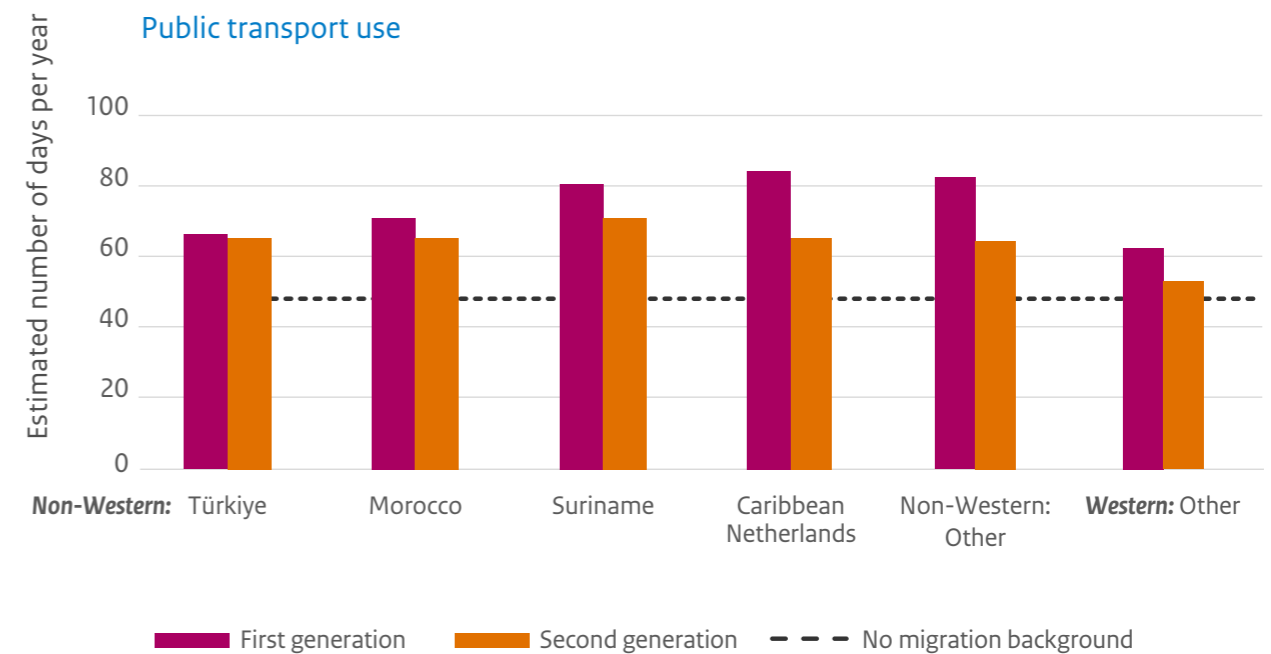
People with a migration background use public transport more often than people without a migration background. The differences are less pronounced here than for bike use. This is also in line with expectations, given the previously mentioned insight that [many migrants are less mobile](#), and in view of the trade-off with walking and [access to a car](#).

It is primarily the first-generation groups that travel relatively frequently by public transport. In fact, all second-generation groups do this less frequently. People without a migration background make the least use of public transport. Dutch people with a Surinamese or Dutch-Caribbean background use public transport relatively often.

For example, a fictitious person without a migration background uses the bus, tram, metro or train 100 days a year, while a migrant from Suriname and or the child of a Surinamese migrant, are estimated to do so 146 and 133 days per year, respectively.

Although the frequency of public transport use is relatively high, most of the individuals with a migration background we interviewed are not wholeheartedly enthusiastic about it. The cost of public transport and the decreasing levels of service are repeatedly cited as reasons to stop using public transport.

Public transport seems more attractive than cycling or walking, especially for distances of more than 2 to 3 kilometres. During the interviews and focus groups, we found that many did not entertain the prospect of cycling long distances. What's more, most migrants and adult children of migrants we spoke to do not own an e-bike.





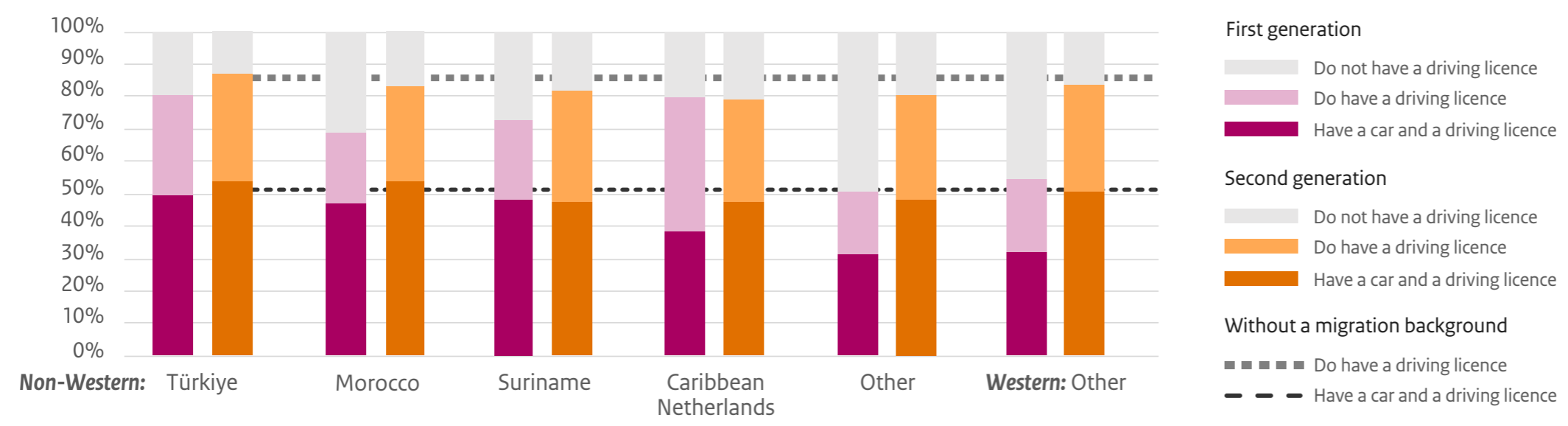
5 Less access to a car

Less likely to have a driving licence

People with a migration background are much less likely to have a driving licence than people without a migration background. This refers to possession of a driving licence by adults, as registered by Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

It is primarily the first generation of people with a migration background who are less likely to have a driving licence. Among the groups of Western and other non-Western Dutch individuals, the proportion without a driving licence is relatively high, with a difference of a factor of 3 compared to people without a migration background. The differences between the second generation and people without a migration background are small.

Driving licence and car use (18+)





For example, in a group of adults without a migration background, 14% do not have a driving licence, while in a group of non-Western migrants, all other characteristics being the same, this is expected to be 50%. In other words, half do not have a driving licence.

Significant differences in access to a car

Our analysis of car ownership shows only modest differences between groups with and without a migration background. However, we only studied adults who had a driving licence. Car ownership here means that they have a car registered in their name or their employer has provided them with a car.

Many of the differences between people with a driving licence are too minor to be characterised as significant. At an aggregated level, there are hardly any differences between migrants, children of migrants and non-migrants. Licensed individuals with a Dutch Caribbean background were slightly less likely to own a car, while first-generation Moroccan Dutch people with a driving licence were more likely to own a car.

For example: 6 out of 10 licensed adults without a migration background have their own car. About 5 out of 10 licensed people of Caribbean-Dutch origin had their own car, compared to 2 out of 3 licensed people with a Moroccan background. In this comparison, all other characteristics are kept the same.

If we take into account the existing differences in driving licence possession, the picture changes somewhat. The strong differences in driving licence possession then start to reflect the differences in car ownership. For instance, there are more people without a migration background with a car than there are non-Western migrants with a driving license.

Car as a symbol of success

“ Having a car is a luxury. Registering a car in your name is a matter of pride. Buying and driving something like that will make your parents proud too.”

Car ownership is certainly more than just convenient. In a society where the car plays an important role in reaching jobs and activities, it has become a symbol of success and modernity. For many people we interviewed to, the car or a specific car is a status symbol. Children of migrants are encouraged to pass their driving test.

“ Having a car is a sign that you are complete, that you've made it.”

“ Passing your driving test is something you definitely have to do.”

Frequent car use

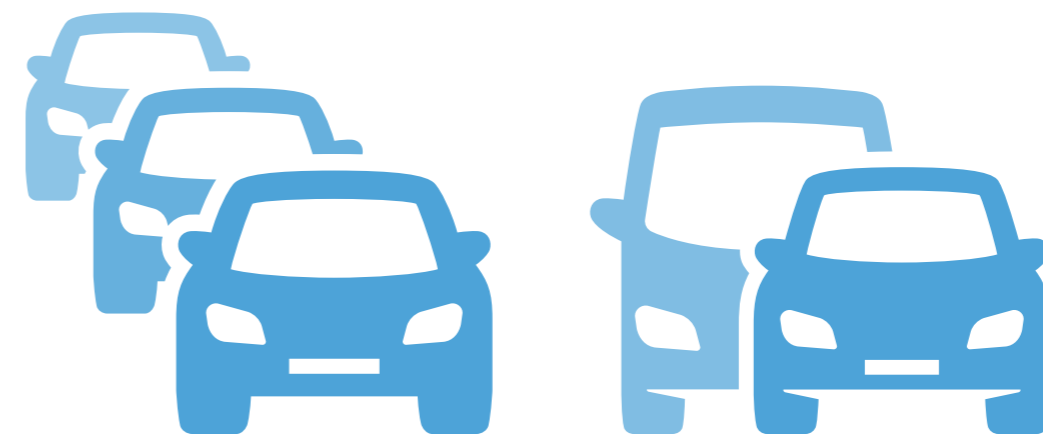
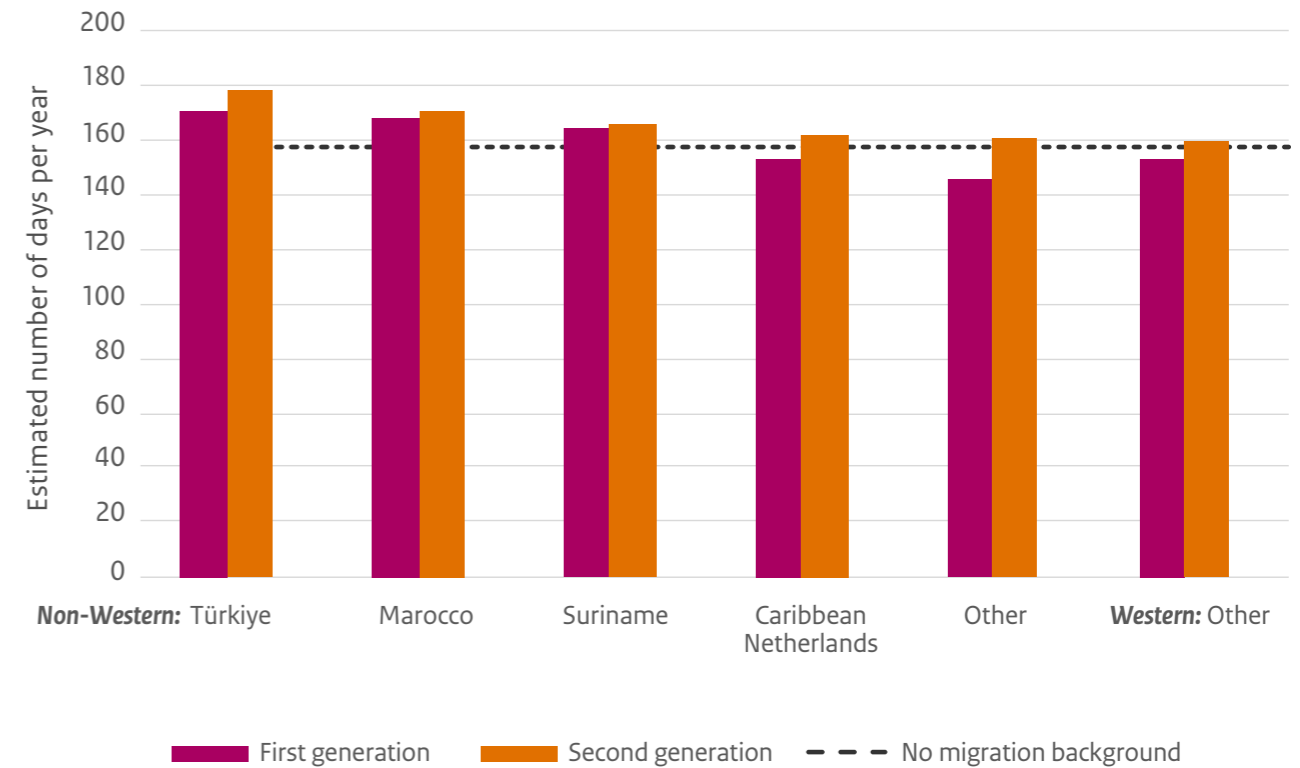
For Dutch car owners, including those with and without a migration background, the frequency of car use is high compared to the use of other modes of transport. The car use is quite similar. Car use here means the frequency of car use as a driver or as a passenger, as self-reported. The frequency of car use is highest among the group of children of migrants. They use the car more frequently than first-generation people or people without a migration background. However, the differences are small. Turkish and Moroccan Dutch people, of both the first and second generation, use the car relatively frequently.

For example, we can compare a second-generation Turkish Dutch individual with (other) first-generation non-Western Dutch individuals to shed light on the extremes: he estimated use of the car is 178 days per year for the first group, against 146 days for the second group.

In order to exclude alternative explanations, we have already controlled for other aspects related to car use. These include characteristics relating to the living environment, such as province, urban density, distance to an intercity train station, household composition, age, income, level of education and **availability of a car within the household**.

In the comparison above, both groups have a car available within the household. As already mentioned, there are significant differences in car availability and, as a result, the differences in car use in practice are greater than the presented results suggest.

Car use among car owners



6 Overarching insights

Rich diversity

The great diversity of Dutch society is reflected in the diversity of travel behaviours. Talking about 'the travel behaviour of individuals with a migration background' does not do any justice to such a diversity. This does not always make it easy to give concise or straightforward conclusions.

The quantitative analyses of our research often reveal similar patterns in the travel behaviour of Dutch people with Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds. Patterns in the travel behaviour of people with a Surinamese or Caribbean-Dutch background also reveal certain similarities. But there are also contrasts between people with a Western and a non-Western migration background.

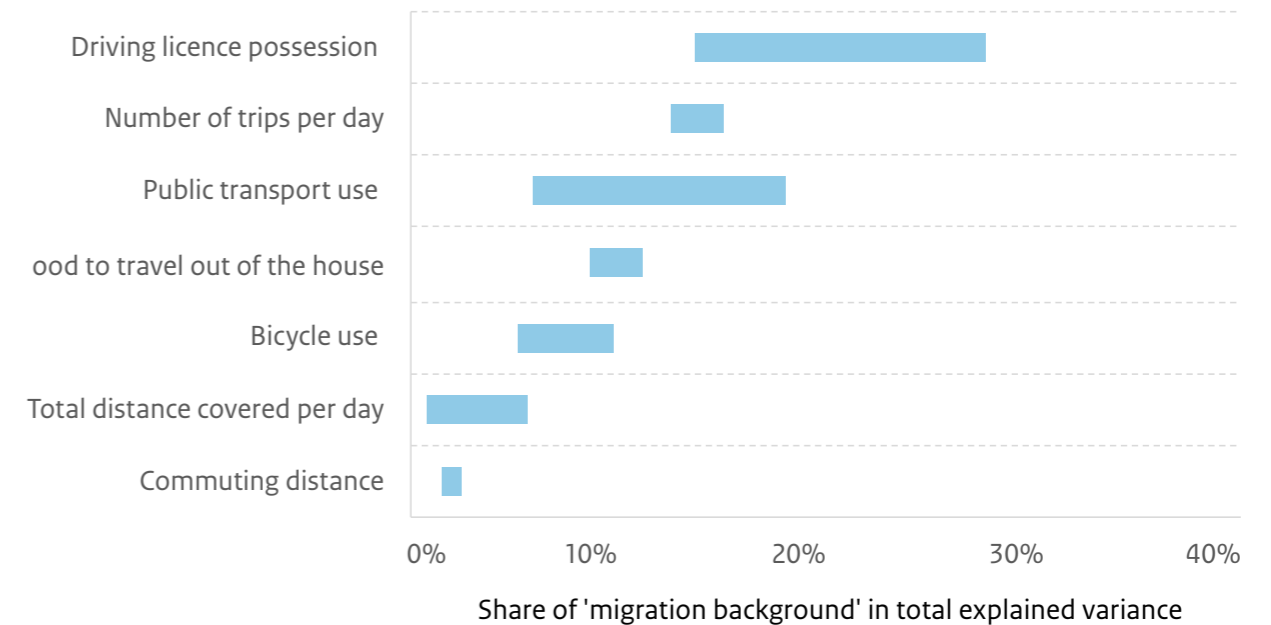
Cultural assimilation

In many aspects of travel behaviour, it is primarily the people from the first generation who are clearly different from those without a migration background. The travel behaviour of second-generation Dutch individuals - the children of migrants - falls in-between that of people without a migration background and that of the first generation. The difference between the first and second generation is often also greater than the difference between the second generation and people without a migration background. This pattern suggests that successive generations gradually move towards the travel behaviour of Dutch people without a migration background. The frequency of bike use is the exception to the rule.

Relevance of migration background to mobility

This study confirms that migration background is an important factor in many aspects of travel behaviour. Migration background regularly emerges in our statistical analyses as one of the key explanatory factors. In particular with regard to the possession of a driving licence and the frequencies of use of certain modes of transport, migration background adds significant value in explaining the observed differences.

Relative relevance of migration background



Need to look beyond the label

Our study clearly describes the relevance of migration background in travel behaviour. However, migration background is a label that includes a collection of possible underlying explanations, as may be clear from the previous chapters. Thanks to our focus groups, interviews and additional quantitative analyses, we have shed more light on some of these aspects.

When it comes to travel behaviour, there are differences between men and women. This applies to the entire population but to people with a migration background in particular. Typical examples here are the possession of a driving licence and bicycle use. Within the group of people with a migration background, the differences are much more distinct than outside of this group. Cultural norms directly maintained by the parents and their social networks also play an important role here. Examples include the [role of the bicycle](#) and [the car](#).

Policy implications

As the composition of the Dutch population changes, so do travel patterns. This is the primary reason why the results of this study are important for mobility policy.

Currently, traffic and transport models do not take into account the migration background of people living in the Netherlands. The results of this study give just cause to reconsider this. The population forecasts would then be translated into traffic and transport forecasts differently. In 2023, about 1 in 4 Dutch people have a migration background. According to the latest forecasts, this is expected to reach as many as 1 in 3 people between 2040 and 2045.

We identified obstacles to the use of certain modes of transport during our focus groups and interviews. These barriers do not seem to be specific to people with a migration background, but rather have a generic character. The cost and quality of public transport has been spontaneously mentioned several times as a barrier to choosing this mode of transport. Bicycle theft and a lack of storage facilities were also regularly mentioned in the focus groups.

Specific policies for people with a migration background can focus on areas where clear goals have been established on the one hand, and clear benefits can be achieved on the other. Cycling lessons for migrants could be a worthwhile instrument. After all, there are targets in place to get more people on bicycles, and there are potential gains yet to be realised in this area among second- and especially first-generation Dutch individuals.



Methods and data

Qualitative and quantitative components

The qualitative components of this study consisted of eight focus groups and ten individual interviews. The focus groups were held in the Dutch language, while the individual interviews were held in the interviewee's native language. In the qualitative research, the population studied was limited to the largest groups of individuals with a migration background in the Netherlands: people whose country of origin (or that of their parents) is Türkiye, Morocco, Suriname or the Caribbean Netherlands.

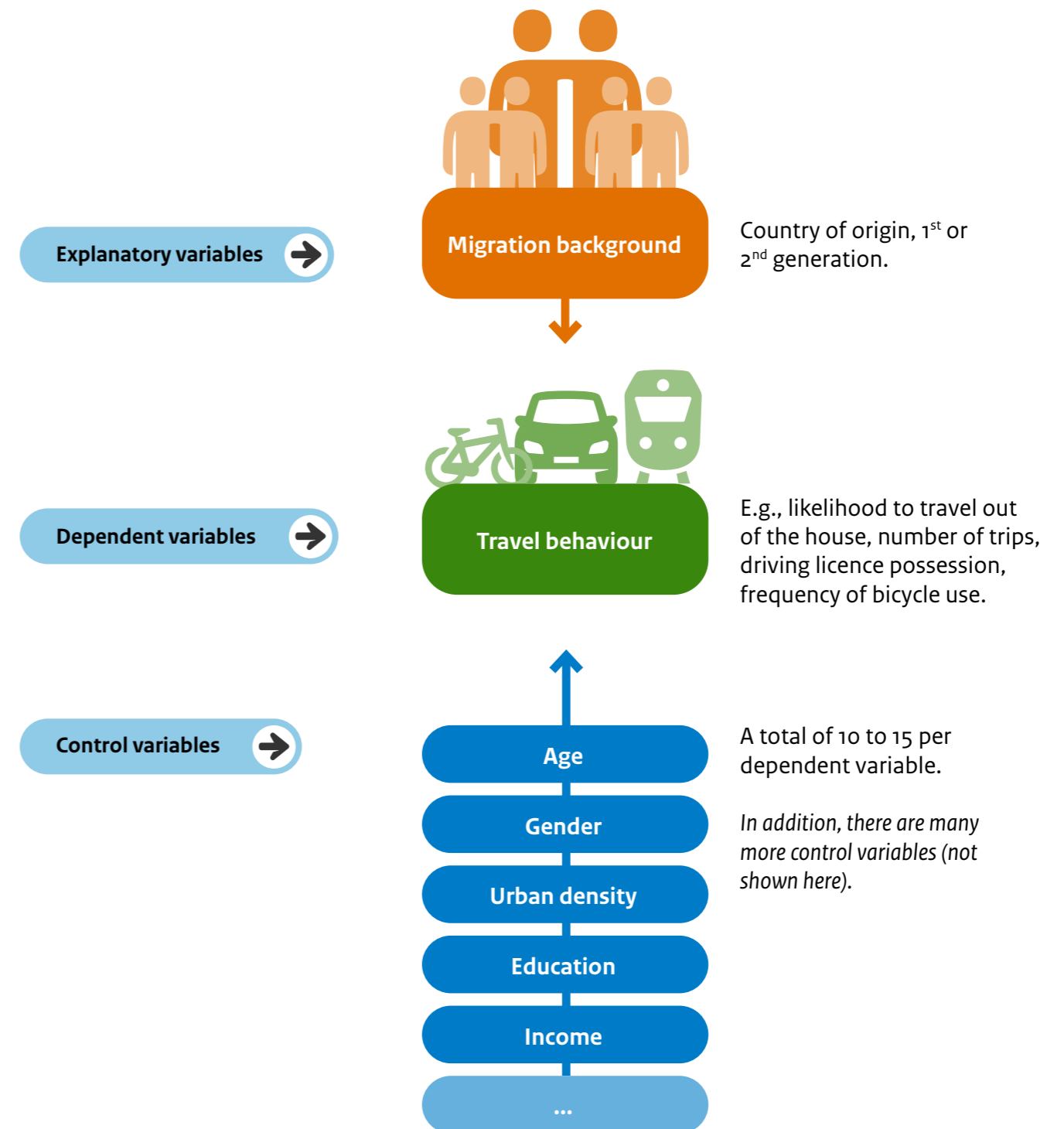
For the quantitative part, we linked information on people's migration background to the 2018 and 2019 Dutch National Travel Survey (n≈110,000). Once again, we paid special attention to the TMSA groups, but did not exclude other groups. All models have been corrected for the known factors that influence travel behaviour, in order to isolate the effect of the migration background (see figure).

Background report

For more information about the method and results, please refer to the background report, which can be downloaded from the website www.kimnet.nl:

Durand, A., Huang, B., Zijlstra, T, Alonso Gonzales, M. (2023). *Multicultural diversity in mobility. The travel behaviour of migrants and children of migrants in the Netherlands.*

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info@kimnet.nl

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Authors:

Anne Durand
Bingyuan (Amelia)
Huang Toon Zijlstra
María Alonso González

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