

# Success against the Odds

## Educational pathways of disadvantaged second-generation Turks in France and the Netherlands

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### Abstract

By drawing on comparative analyses of successful second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands, this article examines pathways and mechanisms that lead to educational success against the backdrop of structural and familial disadvantages. We foreground the experiences and practices of successful second-generation Turks in both countries and demonstrate the importance of institutional arrangements and their interactions with individual resources to account for their success. We use data from the “The Integration of the European Second Generation” (TIES) survey to reconstruct school careers and to inventory opportunities and constraints presented to them in the most important selection processes. We illustrate our findings with life stories drawn from qualitative interviews with TIES respondents in both settings. Combining the results of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis allows us to unravel the mechanisms of the educational success of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Keywords:* second-generation Turks, success, TIES, France, the Netherlands

### Introduction

Numerous studies in the past two decades have drawn attention to the prospects of second-generation immigrants in North-western Europe (e.g. Crul & Vermeulen, 2003; Penn & Lambert, 2009). Social science researchers have consistently reported significant interethnic differences in school outcomes among youth of immigrant backgrounds. Ethnic groups that perform at below-average levels have received particular attention, especially the children of labour migrants from Turkey in North-western Europe which represent one of those risk groups. Previous studies have reported on high drop-out rates of Turkish youth, parallel to a higher tendency to repeat grades and generally lower levels of access to higher education (Dustmann, Frattini & Lanza, 2012; Heath, Rethon & Kilpi, 2008). Nonetheless, a small but visible number of Turkish origin youths from disadvantaged family backgrounds have managed to

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beat the odds and achieve remarkable success. They have made it to the top, earning a university degree and moving into a profession. While they may be exceptional, there are simply too many of these cases to ignore.

Yet despite the growing number of successful cases, researchers and policy-makers have focused on the causes of failure rather than the mechanisms of success (for exceptions, see Crul et al., 2012b; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008a, 2008b; Zhou et al., 2008). Our aim is to shift the focus over to these anomalous cases to identify the pathways and mechanisms that lead to success against the odds, drawing on comparative analyses of successful second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands. Immigrants from Turkey and their descendants are among the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands and France. In the Netherlands, they account for the largest (non-western) ethnic minority group with close to 400,000 people (Beets, ter Bekke & Schoorl, 2008) and the majority of them are concentrated in bigger cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam. In France, immigrants from Turkey and their descendants make up around 350,000 people in total. They have settled in the capital and in the Alsace-Lorraine and Rhone-Alpes regions and become highly concentrated in urban settings (Danis & Irtis, 2008) such as Paris and Strasbourg.

The research strategy behind this comparative approach is to identify similarities and differences in the way second-generation Turks achieve educational success in the two contexts against the backdrop of structural and familial disadvantage. We foreground the experiences and practices of successful second-generation Turks in both countries and demonstrate the importance of institutional arrangements and their interactions with individual resources to account for their success. Crucial to this effort are the detailed reconstruction of school careers and the inventory of opportunities and constraints presented to them in the educational selection process (Crul 2000; Schnell 2012; Zhou et al. 2008). We analyse both quantitative and qualitative data collected in France and the Netherlands to explain what enables some Turkish youths of disadvantaged family backgrounds to succeed, how they have tapped into extra resources in their quest to get ahead, and which institutional and social settings have helped promote their success.

### **Determinants of educational success: Preliminary evidence**

A large number of studies have analysed the determinants of school success for children of immigrants. We will describe the individual and institutional level factors and determinants that lead to (exceptional) educational outcomes among second-generation youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, we review literature on the role of the resources of specific agents (parents, siblings, teachers or peers) and country-specific institutional arrangements within school systems. We will argue that they provide the situational contexts that influence patterns of achievement.

### ***Family of origin***

When explaining the educational success of the children of immigrants, most research attention has been on family background characteristics. The educational level of the parents, in particular, is considered the most important background characteristic. However, for children from disadvantaged social backgrounds educational success necessarily depends on other than formal educational resources available in their families or beyond.

Parental involvement could be one of such factors by showing children that education is valued and important for the family, which may ultimately translate into a greater appreciation of education on the part of the children themselves. Moreover, parental involvement may also provide parents with more possibilities of control. They will be more aware of what their children should do for school, control the time their children spend on homework and get to know other parents and teachers with whom they can discuss their children's performances. Parent-school involvement and inter-generational closeness have been found to be positively related to the educational outcomes of children of immigrants (Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Sun, 1998).

Most research, however, frames family influence in a narrow way. Especially in immigrant families, it is often the older siblings who provide their younger brothers and sisters with information and support, making them as effective as parents. Older siblings can act as intermediaries between younger children and their schools and can play a crucial role as a role model (in both positive and negative ways) for younger siblings. Qualitative research has shown the effect of older siblings in a number of areas (Crul, 2000). Older siblings provide practical help with homework, give advice on study choices, attend teacher contact evenings together or without the parents, control homework and often provide emotional support at crucial moments in the school career. Quantitative research has also shown the significant effect of the practical help and school involvement of older siblings (Schnell, 2012). Support is especially effective when older siblings are highly educated themselves and becomes important when parents are incapable of supporting their children practically with homework or due to language limitations.

### ***Peers and teachers***

Previous studies of the second generation in the United States have revealed that outside-family networks can also provide important additional resources (Gándara, O'Hara & Gutiérrez, 2004; Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Kao, 2001). Specifically, close friends and teachers have been recognised as significant agents in supporting the upward mobility of children of immigrants with disadvantaged backgrounds (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008b; Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 2004).

Beginning with the former, research into the role of peers has long demonstrated that age-mates and close friends play a crucial role in influencing adolescents'

behaviour and cognitive processes, such as academic engagement and achievement (Campbell, 1980; Duncan, Boisjoly & Harris, 2001). They meet their closest friends at school or during their leisure time to exchange information about common experiences in daily life and peers are commonly seen as almost as important for adolescents as their nuclear families (Raley, 2004). The significant impact of social interaction with peers in the educational attainment process has been intensively shown in qualitative studies of Mexican descendants in the USA (Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Raley, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). Close friends are important for immigrant youth from disadvantaged family backgrounds because they give them access to alternative resources and information that foster educational attainment. Compared to native-born students, second-generation immigrants have to rely more on peer contact in the educational achievement process because of a lack of pro-scholastic networks and embedded resources in their own families. But peer influence on educational behaviour might also vary in terms of intensity and direction. Peers can act as supportive relationships, or they can be a major source of distraction. A prime example of the negative impact of friends' educational behaviour is the share of peers who drop out or leave school without any diploma at all. Growing up in a peer group with a large number of school drop-outs has a strong negative impact on a young person's view of the value of education, as well as on the motivation of the person in question.

Turning to the role of teachers, student-teacher relationships play a crucial role in daily interpersonal social relations and can be seen as the second key dimension of outside-family ties (Croesnoe, Johnson-Krikpatrick & Elder, 2004). Their significant impact has been demonstrated in a number of studies and their role can be described on two levels: Firstly, teachers generally serve as mentors, feedback and advice givers and can provide moral support for almost all students in the classroom. Previous studies have shown that strong student-teacher relationships are especially important for migrant youth to overcome alienation or feelings of disconnection through intense relationships with their teachers, which in turn had a positive effect on their educational careers (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Secondly, apart from motivation and direct pay-offs, teachers play a central role as a result of their ability to place young people in resource-rich social networks. They have the capacity to negotiate (directly or indirectly) institutional resources and opportunities, such as information about school programmes, academic tutoring, admissions, and career decision-making (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Further, social ties with teachers are also important for the children of immigrants from disadvantaged backgrounds because of their often structurally disadvantaged position (Schnell, 2012).

### ***Institutional arrangements in education systems***

Over the past two decades, some scholars have argued that differences in national and local contexts may contribute to the explanation of the diverse outcomes of children of immigrants across Europe, given the very different institutional arrangements.

European countries are geographically close to each other, but are often structured very differently. Crul, along with various colleagues (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul & Vermeulen, 2003), recently argued that this institutional approach might be of substantial value in explaining variations in the position of second-generation immigrants in different European countries. They concentrate on how the institutional arrangements of education systems shape and create different opportunities for the children of immigrants. They argue that the outcomes across countries are the result of the interaction between these institutional arrangements and the agency of individuals and groups. Analysing differences in school trajectories across a number of selected European countries by applying this “comparative integration context theory”, Crul and colleagues (2012a) documented that early selection and tracking negatively affect children of a lower-class background and that inequalities become magnified for second-generation Turks. Moreover, they identified four more factors influencing differentiation: the starting age in school (attending pre-school or not), the number of school contact hours in primary school, the permeability of the school systems, and the way the transition to higher education is organised.

In a detailed analysis of the educational mobility of second-generation Turks in Sweden, France and Austria, Schnell (2012) examined how these institutional arrangements interact with family and non-family agents and their resources. He argues that, in order to explain differences in educational outcomes by second-generation Turks, it is important to consider the combinations of institutional arrangements within each education system, which together form country-specific institutional constellations. These give rise to various interactions with individual-level factors and resources, determine their magnitude and direction, and set the point in time at which educational resources become relevant. For example, the Austrian institutional constellation makes the start of the school career an important period in which the level of interaction with family resources is particularly high. While family resources are especially important in the early phase of schooling, outside-family agents and related resources become more important later. In order to climb to the top of the educational ladder, access to the resources provided by non-immigrant peer networks, as well as to the support offered by teachers, is becoming crucial for the children of Turkish immigrants in Austria.

## **Methodology**

The empirical results for this article are drawn from the “The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES)” (2007–2008) survey (Crul, Schneider & Lelie, 2012; Groenewold & Lessard-Phillips, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. The TIES survey is the first systematic collection of data about children of immigrants from Turkey (as well as from former Yugoslavia and Morocco) in 15 European cities in eight countries. The participating countries are Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Within this study, we use data from the TIES survey for second-genera-

tion Turks in the Netherlands (Rotterdam and Amsterdam) and France (Strasbourg and Paris). The term “second generation” refers to children of immigrants who have at least one parent born in Turkey, and who were themselves born in the survey country and have had their entire education there. At the time of the interviews, the respondents were between 18 to 35 years old. The total sample size was  $N=500$  for second-generation Turks within each country ( $N=250$  per city).

We restrict our sample to children from disadvantaged educational backgrounds by only considering respondents if their parents completed a lower secondary educational level at the most. In the majority of cases, however, parents only finished primary school. The restrictive definition of disadvantage pertains to 384 cases (76.8%) of the Dutch and 338 cases (67.6%) of the French sample<sup>2</sup>.

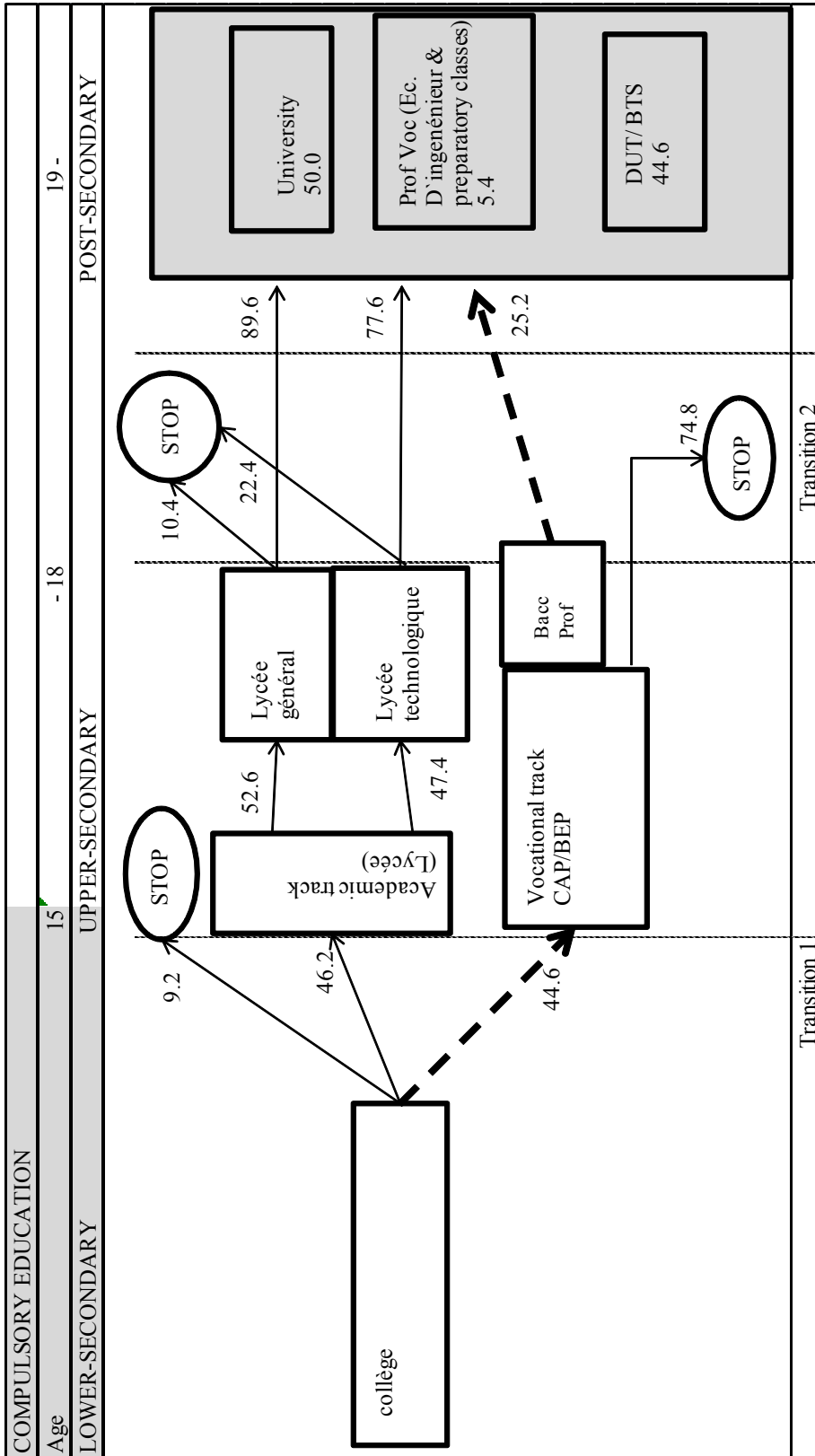
Our empirical analysis begins by focusing on the educational pathways of second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds. We describe how they make choices in favour of certain educational options in the two education systems, and how these decisions are pre-determined by given opportunities which, in turn, are defined by structural configurations and institutional arrangements. Afterwards, we pay particular attention to the first transition point in both education systems. We conduct multivariate regression analysis to explore the role of within and outside family members and their resources in this transition process.

The second part of our results section turns to second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds who have been streamed into the lower ability tracks at the first transition point but travelled through ‘indirect routes’ towards higher education. We descriptively examine the resources that are relevant to move upwards in these indirect routes. We illustrate our findings with life histories of second-generation Turks drawn from qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with TIES respondents in France (Strasbourg) and the Netherlands (Amsterdam) during 2008–2009 by Elif Keskiner<sup>3</sup>. The qualitative information amplifies our quantitative findings and unravels the mechanisms of educational mobility among second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds.

## **Navigating the education system**

In order to identify similarities and differences in the way second-generation Turks reach educational success in the two contexts against the backdrop of structural disadvantage, detailed reconstructions of their school careers are crucial. The results are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. Each figure shows outflow rates from one educational track into the following one at the next level, conditionally on having successfully completed the previous track.

We begin by describing the educational pathways in France. After leaving primary school at the age of 10, pupils in France move on to the second stage of compulsory education, called *collège*. Students follow this comprehensive track for six years until the age of 15/16. The most important decision point takes place at the end of *collège*.



Source: TIES (2007-2008). Notes: The dashed line denotes the 'indirect route'. Outflow rates are calculated as the ratio of students who entered point 2 over all students who successfully left point 1, and so on. N=338.

**Figure 1:** Educational pathways in France (Paris and Strasbourg), in %

It links compulsory and non-compulsory education and is called the “orientation process”. Schools give their recommendations as to which students are assigned to academic or vocational lycées at the next education level. Turning to the results for France (Figure 1), we find that 46.2% of the Turkish second generation continue into the academically oriented Lycées after compulsory education, while almost the same proportion enters the less prestigious vocational track CAP/BEP (44.6%). Only less than 10% of the Turkish second generation from disadvantaged backgrounds does not continue in education after compulsory schooling and subsequently drops out of school.

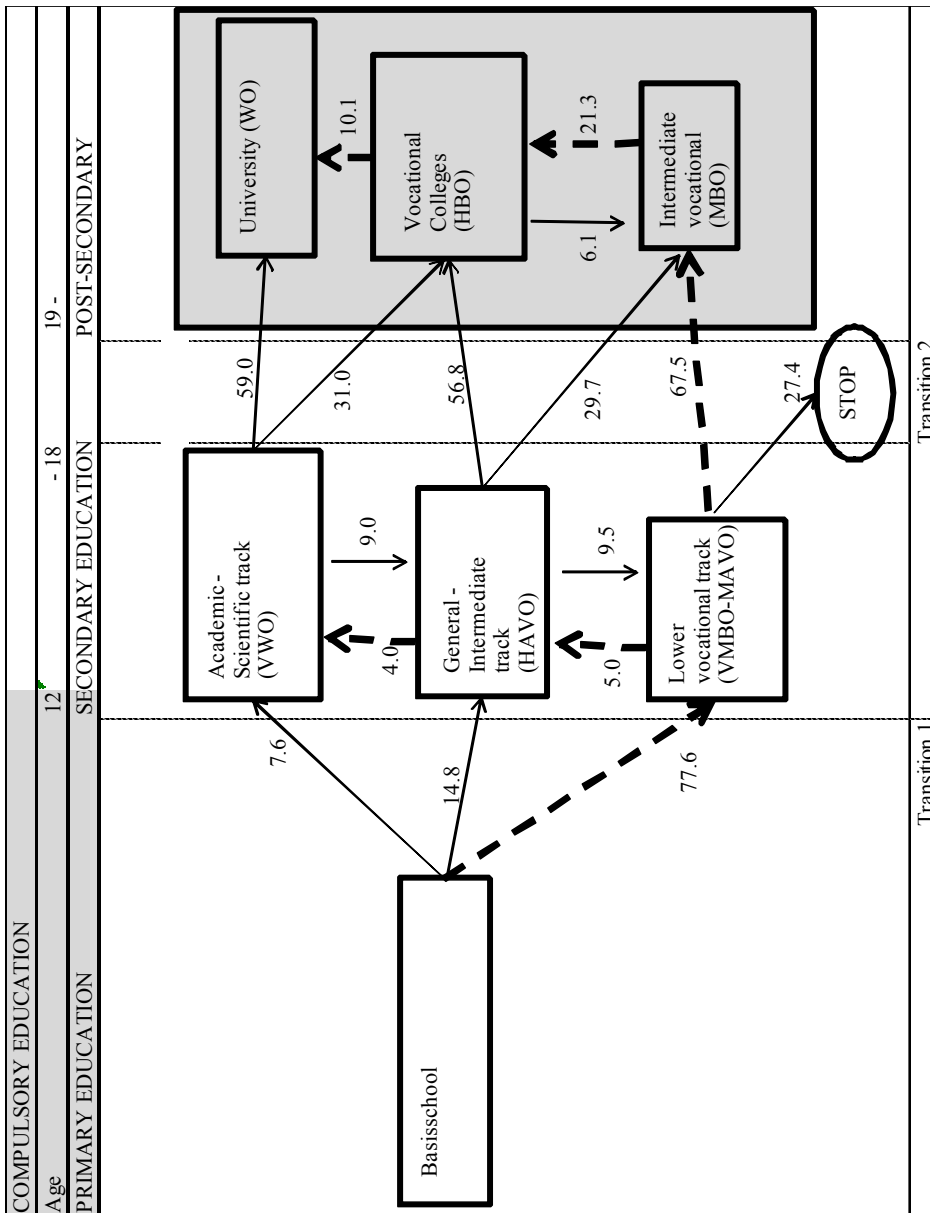
Those students who make it into the academically oriented Lycée have chosen either the general or technical type of Lycée after the first year in upper secondary education which both leads to the baccalauréat certificate. This diploma allows students in France to enter higher education. The French education system has moved to a mass system of higher education during the past three decades. It is thus not surprising that roughly more than two-thirds of the Turkish-origin student population continues in some sort of higher education after successfully completing the Lycée. The numbers are slightly higher for students from the general over the technically oriented Lycée.

Second-generation Turks who did not get advice regarding the Lycée at the age of 15/16 and follow the vocational track (CAP/BEP) overwhelmingly stop their educational career and enter the labour market after two years of training. It is worth noting, however, that a substantial number of second-generation Turks attend an additional two-year course to obtain the professional baccalauréat which allows them to enter higher education as well.

Figure 2 shows the results for the Netherlands. At the end of primary school, all children have to take a national examination that is crucial for their further school career in secondary school. On the basis of this test result and the recommendation of their teacher, they will be assigned to different tracks in the secondary school system. Children with the least advice enter the prevocational secondary education (VMBO - *praktijk* or *kader*) which are the lowest and least attractive streams of secondary education. Children with more advice usually go to schools that offer three streams: Lower General Secondary Education (VMBO - *theoretisch*), and two streams preparing children for tertiary education: Senior General Secondary Education (HAVO) or pre-university Education (VWO). Figure 2 shows that the majority of second-generation Turks with disadvantaged backgrounds in the TIES survey (almost 78%) is streamed into the lower vocational tracks in upper secondary education (VMBO tracks). Only 22.4% obtain the relevant advice regarding an academically-oriented track in the Dutch education system. More precisely, among those following the academically oriented tracks, 14,8% enter the general intermediate track (HAVO) while only around 8% continue directly in the academic-scientific track (VWO).

Pupils with a HAVO diploma can continue on to a higher vocational educational school, while pupils with a VWO diploma go on to university. Out of the 14.8% of





Source: TIES (2007-2008). Notes: The dashed line denotes the 'indirect route'. Outflow rates are calculated as the ratio of students who entered point 2 over all students who successfully left point 1, and so on. N=384.

**Figure 2:** Educational pathways in the Netherlands (Amsterdam and Rotterdam), in %

students who started in the general intermediate track (HAVO), roughly 57% continue their education in post-secondary vocational colleges while the remaining proportion steps down to less prestigious vocational schools. The majority of the small group of Turkish-origin students which entered VWO continues directly into higher education afterwards (59%). These educational trajectories represent the direct route to higher education.

Another characteristic of the Dutch school system is that pupils can move from one stream to another in secondary education (Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). In principle, one can start at the bottom in lower vocational education and move up step by step via middle vocational education to the highest stream of vocational education, taking what we call the 'long route' through the education system. The educational trajectories depicted in Figure 2 show that some second-generation Turks take advantage of this 'stepping stone system' (see the dashed lines). Compared to the direct route to higher education, this indirect path takes between 1 and 3 years longer. Previous studies have shown that many children of immigrants in the Netherlands have moved up the educational ladder in this way (Crul et al., 2009) and our results for second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds confirm this finding.

Taken together, the results displayed in Figures 1 and 2 highlight two major commonalities in both education systems: the first transition point is a crucial moment which sorts students into subsequent educational tracks which largely determine their later educational trajectories. Those who make it into the academic stream overwhelmingly continue in higher education. At the same time, both systems offer indirect routes through vocationally oriented tracks and additional qualifications which allow students to enter higher education on an indirect path. Although it takes students longer, these indirect routes provide 'second chances' for students who have been streamed downwards earlier in their educational career. But our descriptive results indicate one major difference between the two education systems: the timing of the first selection into different ability tracks appears at different points in time which seems to have consequences for the chances to enter the academically oriented (and direct) tracks. In the Netherlands, this first transition point appears when students are aged 12. As shown above, only around 22.4% of the Turkish second generation with a disadvantaged family background continue into academically oriented tracks. In France, this first selection moment appears three years later when students are aged 15. Here, 46.2% of the Turkish second generation with similar family backgrounds enters the academically oriented track (lycée).

### **Passing the first transition**

The examination of educational pathways revealed that the first transition point in the Dutch and French education systems is crucial. Once they successfully pass to the academically oriented tracks, they are most likely to continue on the direct routes into higher education. However, the chances to access this direct route for second-gen-

eration Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds are low. Particularly in the Netherlands, they are overwhelmingly streamed into the lower ability tracks. Let us now see which factors and resources are associated with successfully managing this transition towards the direct path. Table 1 presents the results of a logistic regression analysis of entering the academically oriented track at the first transition point, conducted separately in the two countries. Track placement is a dummy variable set equal to 1 when the final decision is the academic option (VWO and HAVO in the Netherlands; general and technical lycée in France) and 0 otherwise (vocational track(s) and dropping out of school<sup>4</sup>).

The figures displayed in Table 1 (left side) underscore the association of parental characteristics and entering the academic track in secondary education in the Dutch school system. The chances of entering the academically oriented track for those second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds but whose parents both read and write Dutch very well are almost two times higher than for those Turkish-origin students whose parents are illiterate in Dutch. A positive significant effect is also found for the constructive engagement of parents with the school-related activities of their children (parental educational support), which includes the time the parents spent on their children's homework, how often they helped them with their homework or talked with them about their studies and how often they met with or talked to their teachers<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, a medium level of support from parents in the school activities of their children increases the odds of entering the academic track.

We do not find any significant influence of support and educationally relevant aspects by older siblings at this first transition point, holding all other variables constant<sup>6</sup>. Instead, what seems to be extraordinarily important for making this transition are peers and their characteristics as well as teachers. In particular, the stronger the bonds between teachers and second-generation Turks, the higher the odds of successfully passing this first transition. We also include five additional control variables in the multivariate analysis (age, gender, above-average family size, school segregation<sup>7</sup> and living in the capital city). Two results are worth highlighting. First, holding all independent variables constant, girls are half as likely to enter the academically oriented track. This finding is in line with previous studies showing that female second-generation Turks are frequently under-advised by teachers at the most important transition points (Pásztor, 2010). Secondly, second-generation Turks in highly segregated schools show greater likelihoods to be streamed into vocationally oriented tracks at the age of 12. Their odds of accessing the academic track (rather than vocational orientated tracks) are only one-third of those of their peers in less segregated primary schools.

Turning to the results for second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France, we do not find significant associations between parental characteristics, such as their language abilities in French or levels of educational support.

**Table 1**

Logit: Entering the academically oriented track at the first transition point  
(0= vocational track/drop out; 1= academic track), odds ratio

	The Netherlands		France	
	Exp [B]	(s.e.)	Exp [B]	(s.e.)
<b>Parents</b>				
<i>Survey country language abilities</i>				
Both parents cannot read and write	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
One parent reads and writes	1.28	(0.49)	1.38	(0.60)
Both parents read and write	<b>1.96+</b>	<b>(0.75)</b>	1.21	(0.56)
<i>Parental educational support</i>				
low	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
medium	<b>2.81+</b>	<b>(1.64)</b>	1.70	(0.69)
high	2.05	(1.34)	1.35	(0.63)
<b>Siblings</b>				
<i>Has older siblings</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	1.63	(0.73)	<b>2.30*</b>	<b>(0.96)</b>
<i>Has older siblings without a diploma</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	0.67	(0.25)	<b>0.50+</b>	<b>(0.18)</b>
<i>Siblings' educational support</i>				
low	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
medium	0.79	(0.33)	0.86	(0.35)
high	0.75	(0.35)	0.8	(0.34)
<b>Peers</b>				
<i>Peers were highly important in supporting studies</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	<b>1.68+</b>	<b>(0.47)</b>	<b>0.56+</b>	<b>(0.18)</b>
<i>Has closest peers who dropped out of school</i>				
No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Yes	<b>0.61+</b>	<b>(0.17)</b>	1.39	(0.37)
<b>Teachers</b>				
<i>Most teachers really listened to me</i>				
Disagree	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>3.99*</b>	<b>(2.53)</b>	1.42	(0.68)
Agree	<b>3.84*</b>	<b>(2.39)</b>	<b>2.91*</b>	<b>(1.30)</b>

**Table 1** continued*Received extra help from teachers when needed*

	Disagree	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Neither agree nor disagree	1.40	(0.91)	1.38	(0.60)
	Agree	0.66	(0.40)	1.40	(0.64)
<b>Control Variables</b>					
<i>Age group</i>					
	18-26	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	27-35	0.75	(0.23)	<b>0.48*</b>	<b>(0.14)</b>
<i>Gender</i>					
	Male	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Female	<b>0.47**</b>	<b>(0.14)</b>	1.17	(0.30)
<i>Family size</i>					
	below or equal group average	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	above group average	0.78	(0.23)	1.05	(0.28)
<i>City</i>					
	Second survey city (Rotterdam/Strasbourg)	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Capital city (Amsterdam/Paris)	0.96	(0.27)	<b>3.38***</b>	<b>(0.91)</b>
<i>Attended a school with more than 50% immigrants in the student population</i>					
	No	<i>Ref.</i>		<i>Ref.</i>	
	Yes	<b>0.34***</b>	<b>(0.10)</b>	<b>0.47*</b>	<b>(0.14)</b>
<hr/>					
	Constant	0.08**	(0.07)	0.08**	(0.06)
	McFadden R2	0.13		0.14	
	Nagelkerke's R2	0.20		0.23	
	N	384		331	

Source: TIES (2007-2008).

Notes: Significant results are indicated in bold. Significance levels: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Standard errors in brackets. Values above one indicate a positive while values below one a negative effect.

This non-significant association might be explained by the later timing of selection and the integrated track system before this transition point. Since students in France follow one common integrated track with full-day teaching until the end of compulsory education, the relevance of parental support at home might be minor because they receive the necessary support within schools (Schnell, 2012).

Interestingly, second-generation Turks who have older siblings who completed school with a diploma show higher odds of entering the academic track at this first transition point. They benefit from the knowledge of their older siblings and receive relevant information and support regarding school activities. Focusing on outside family members who may make a difference for second-generation Turks with a disadvantaged family background, we find – similarly to the Dutch school context –

positive student-teacher relationships significantly increasing the likelihood to enter the academically oriented Lycée.

A second similarity with the analysis for the Dutch school system can be found with respect to our control variable ethnic school segregation. When the ethnic segregation in their compulsory schools was above average, their odds for accessing the academic track at the next level were only half of those from less segregated schools. The last point to take away from the results presented in Table 1 is that the chances of not continuing in the vocational path are much higher for second-generation Turks in Strasbourg than in Paris. Even after holding all other variables constant, the odds for second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds continuing in the academically oriented Lycée were three times higher than for their counterparts in Strasbourg.

The qualitative interviews from Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and Strasbourg (France) also underlined the importance of teachers as gatekeepers in both education systems. Firstly, teachers' advice is an important institutional selection mechanism that operates in both settings and influences the educational destinies of the students. Secondly, the absence of instrumental parental assistance in homework and courses renders teachers' help crucial for second-generation students. Below we will provide one profile from Strasbourg. However, also in Amsterdam students who benefited from such instrumental aid of teachers highlighted similar mechanisms.

Deniz was born and raised in Strasbourg. Her father was a labour migrant who worked as a house painter on construction sites. Her mother was a homemaker and has never worked. The family lived in social housing situated in one of the ethnically segregated neighbourhoods of Strasbourg. Both parents were very supportive of their children's education but their help fell short of homework aid and advice on educational decisions. In primary school, Deniz had to repeat a class in the second year. She recalled how her teacher in primary school had humiliated her in front of the other classmates, saying it was only Deniz who would repeat that year because she had not studied hard enough. This event had a positive effect on Deniz's educational career as she became very ambitious and hard-working so as to 'prove' that her teacher was wrong. Her perseverance and dedication not only earned her good grades but were also spotted by her teachers later in College. She established very good communication with her history teacher who helped her but also provided critical advice on educational pathways. She inculcated in Deniz that she should pursue the academic track and go to a prestigious lyceum. However, Deniz was advised to follow the vocational track despite her high grades. The school board argued that Deniz could only achieve these grades with very hard work so she would not be able to cope with the harder courses in the academic lyceum. At that point, the history teacher objected to the decision of the school board and made sure she received a positive advice for a prestigious lyceum, which later Deniz successfully pursued and graduated into vocational tertiary education.

## **Accessing higher education through the indirect route: What makes the difference?**

Students who successfully manage to enter the academically oriented tracks follow this direct route and frequently continue in higher education<sup>8</sup>. But the analysis of educational pathways presented in Figures 1 and 2 indicates that a small number of second-generation Turks who have been channelled into the less academically oriented tracks at the first transition enter higher education through an indirect route. Which resources are relevant to them on these indirect routes? Table 2 provides some insights into this question. It divides second-generation Turks in vocational tracks into those who finally enter higher education through the indirect route and those who left school at the end of secondary education. Given that this analysis is focusing on a relatively small subsample consisting only of second-generation Turks in vocational orientated schools, we refrain from presenting a multivariate regression analysis and therefore do not test causal relationships. Instead, we provide descriptive evidence on the relevance of certain resources and add results from qualitative research to support our descriptive findings.

Second-generation Turks in the Dutch indirect route who finally entered higher education received more educationally relevant support from their parents at home compared to students of Turkish origin who left school before. Moreover, they more often originate from families in which at least one of their parents speaks and writes the Dutch language well. Both parental characteristics are related since strong language skills have been found to be an important aspect for Turkish parents to be able to support their children in school-related matters and help their children with homework (Schnell, 2012). Turning to the significant role played by older siblings, at the descriptive level we hardly find differences between the two compared groups. Roughly 50% of the Turkish second generation reports medium to high support from their older siblings. However, support from older siblings seems to be quite a common pattern in Turkish families but does not tip the scale to move up to the highest level of the educational spectrum. Clear dissimilarities are observable with respect to peer group characteristics. In particular, the lower the share of drop-out peers in the closest circle of friends, the higher the proportion that continues with education at the post-secondary/tertiary level. Finally, when turning to the role played by teachers in supporting second-generation Turks to stay on the indirect route until higher education, we do not find significant effects of teachers in the Dutch school system. Indeed, teachers are overwhelmingly evaluated as important and supportive.

Turning to the results of second-generation Turks in France (the right side of Table 2), we find that both internal and external family factors matter when it comes to staying on the indirect route to higher education. To begin with the former, second-generation Turks originating less often from illiterate parents show higher

**Table 2**

Students in the 'indirect (vocational) route' entering higher education (or not), in %

	The Netherlands		France	
	Did not enter higher education	Entered higher education	Did not enter higher education	Entered higher education
<b>Parents</b>				
<i>Parents can read and write in survey language</i>				
None of the parents can read and write	30.9	19.5	21.1	11.1
One or both parents can read and write	69.1	80.5	78.9	88.9
<i>Parental educational support</i>				
low	19.7	8.7	17.8	14.0
medium/high	80.3	91.3	82.2	86.0
<b>Siblings</b>				
<i>Has older siblings without a diploma</i>				
No	74.1	69.6	64.1	77.8
Yes	25.9	30.4	35.9	22.2
<i>Siblings' educational support</i>				
low	48.2	43.5	55.5	40.0
medium/high	51.8	56.5	44.5	60.0
<b>Peers</b>				
<i>Perceived importance of peers</i>				
Not important	57.3	60.8	82.2	77.7
Important	42.7	39.2	17.8	22.3
<i>Having peers without a diploma</i>				
No	38.4	47.8	32.2	55.6
Yes	61.6	52.2	67.8	44.4
<b>Teachers</b>				
<i>Most teachers really listened to me</i>				
Disagree	14.5	13.1	20.0	11.1
Agree	85.5	86.9	80.0	88.9
<i>Received extra help from teachers when needed</i>				
Disagree/Neither agree nor disagree	8.6	8.7	33.3	18.9
Agree	91.4	91.3	66.7	81.1

Source: TIES (2007-2008)

Notes: Some categories of our independent variables presented in Table 1 have been merged in order to avoid small case numbers. Control variables are not included.



shares of those entering higher education through the indirect route. In contrast to the findings from the Netherlands, older siblings seem to matter in France. In particular, having siblings who did not drop out of school but instead gained knowledge on the workings of the French education system and support their younger brothers and sisters in school-related activities is more frequently related to access to higher education through the indirect route. Besides these internal family factors, having few drop-out peers and supportive teachers in schools is related to the educational success of children of Turkish immigrants on these vocational paths.

In order to gain a further insight into the ‘indirect route experience’, we provide more detailed information from two profiles from the qualitative interviews about the mechanisms involved. The first profile is from the Netherlands.

Volkan is a second-generation Turkish student studying Business Economics in higher vocational education. Volkan’s mother arrived in the Netherlands in her early twenties and gained a good command of Dutch by undertaking vocational education. Together with Volkan’s father, the couple started their own company and achieved considerable success in their business. As a working mother, Volkan’s mother has frequent access to Dutch society and was actively involved in Volkan’s school activities. Both parents supported their children’s education not only financially, but they also helped them pursue their objectives in life. In the beginning Volkan was not very motivated to study. His grades were average at the end of primary school, and he was advised to go into the lowest track in secondary school (lower vocational education). He attended physical education and sports in a vocational track since his dream was to become a professional soccer player and his mother supported his passion for sports. Volkan’s ambition of becoming a professional soccer player was hampered after an injury. Following this incident, he decided that betting on soccer as his only career choice was too risky. After he finished his middle vocational training (MBO) in physical education, he changed his occupational orientation drastically and enrolled himself in a four-year higher vocational (HBO) education school. Since almost all his friends and some of his cousins were studying economics at that time, and considering the prospects of expanding the family business, Volkan decided that business economics would be a good choice. His family supported his decision. He signed up for the most prestigious Business Economics School in Amsterdam. As is the case with many students who take the long route into higher education in the Netherlands, Volkan had difficulty with some of the course work that presumes secondary school academic preparation. Since his friends and cousins were also studying economics, he was able to turn to them for help with his schoolwork, and his parents helped by providing extra assistance through a paid tutor. Once he finished his tertiary vocational training, Volkan aspired to follow the university preparatory track (*HBO propedeuse*) and continued towards a university business degree.

We see that Volkan’s experience highlights most of our descriptive findings: he received strong family support as well as peer and external help in prolonging his ed-

education career. We should also underline the fact that Volkan was not under financial constraints which could have forced him to enter the labour market.

Among the qualitative interviews conducted in Strasbourg (France) some respondents had also extended their studies into higher education through the indirect route. These interviewees exemplified similar patterns as those observed in our descriptive analysis. Teachers and their support were emphasised in particular. As they reported, it was mainly through the advice and encouragement of their teachers that these students mustered the courage to access higher education. The life story of Sebnem, whose parents arrived in France as guest workers with meagre educational attainment and experiences, illustrates these findings.

Sebnem was born and raised in Strasbourg as the eldest child of the family. Thus, she was the first family member to travel through the French education system. At the end of lower secondary education (collège), she had average grades but she was willing to attend the vocational education track since she wanted to gain a trade and enter the labour market as soon as possible. Further, she did not see herself as the 'studying type', meaning she did not believe she could succeed in the academic track.

While at vocational school (BEP) she achieved relatively good grades and her teachers advised her to continue her studies into a professional lycée to achieve the 'bacc prof' diploma. Together with her best friend, with whom she had been studying together since lower secondary education, she entered the professional lycée. Afterwards, and again with the support of her teacher, she and her best friend decided to enrol in a (non-selective) university track. She wanted to pursue sociology since she thought this was the least demanding major and its broad array of topics would provide her with enough flexibility to choose between different professions afterwards.

Sebnem's educational trajectory exemplifies both the importance of teachers and closest peers (her best friend) which encouraged her to pursue further education. In addition to these vital agents and their resources, Sebnem's risk-averse behaviour, by making sure that she guaranteed each degree on her pathway in case she failed to complete the next step, was another significant aspect of her success.

## **Conclusion**

We investigated the experiences and practices of successful second-generation Turks by analysing quantitative and qualitative data. Our results highlight commonalities and differences between the two countries in the explanation of what enables some Turkish youth with disadvantaged family backgrounds to achieve educational success against the odds.

To begin with the similarities, our findings underline the important role of teachers in the successful educational pathways of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds in France and the Netherlands. Interpersonal social relations between students and teachers increase the chances to successfully manage the first transition point in both countries and that teachers are significant agents

for second-generation Turks with disadvantaged backgrounds when successfully navigating through the indirect routes of these systems.

Since the parents possess relatively few means to instrumentally support their children's education, teachers play a very vital role in their school careers. They serve as motivators reinforcing the aspirations of second-generation Turks. The qualitative data further showed that this role is not only in the form of providing advice or motivating, but also involves them acting as gatekeepers in advising to pursue more prestigious tracks.

A second commonality between the Dutch and French cases is that children who were unable to directly access more selective and academically oriented institutions have found alternative routes. Vocational pathways in the Netherlands and France offer alternative routes to higher education. In both countries, these indirect routes are less often studied because education is still considered a linear development, from compulsory to upper secondary schools to higher education. Our descriptive findings were amplified by the qualitative material showing that the support of peers also proves to be critical in both countries while travelling along the indirect (vocational) route towards higher education. In particular, best friends with similar educational levels play a crucial role in influencing the academic engagement by helping with homework and with career decision-making. However, future research should further investigate the interplay between travelling the 'long route' and relevant resources in order to establish causal relationships with access to higher education in both countries.

Besides these similarities, the pathways and mechanisms that contribute to success vary in the two different contexts. These variations come to the fore when examining the interplay between the institutional arrangements of the education systems and the different individual- and group-related resources that are relevant in terms of successfully navigating through these systems. In the Dutch case, students are streamed into different ability tracks at the age of 12 and passing this important transition point towards the more prestigious track relies heavily on the parents' ability to assist their children with homework and their ability to speak and write the Dutch language well. When parents are unable to fulfil this role, their children suffer the consequences since they are underprepared and more often streamed into the less prestigious tracks. In France, where selection into tracks is postponed, it seems that students are able to compensate for their disadvantaged starting position. Second-generation Turks with disadvantaged family backgrounds enter the academically oriented tracks in higher numbers. Our findings also indicate that passing this branching point does not significantly interact with characteristics and support from the parents. Instead, what matters is the information and support provided by older siblings and peers.

This comparative study demonstrates that exceptional student-teacher relationships, support from parents and siblings, the influence of the peer and school context, and access to alternative routes are critical to the successful educational pathways of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds. The examination

of educational pathways in a comparative perspective provides a glimpse into why second-generation Turks pursue certain pathways in the face of limited opportunities and structural constraints, and how they navigate the myriad of choices in their quest to get ahead. In both countries, educational success cannot be limited to a single set of factors. Instead, it is the interaction of the individual- and institutional-level factors that determines successful educational pathways. But, as shown in the comparative analysis, in terms of their institutional arrangements and the way they determine the relevance of individual-level factors, education systems matter more for successful educational pathways. Those systems that provide more favourable institutional arrangements make the upward mobility process of second-generation Turks from disadvantaged family backgrounds less dependent on individual-level factors and resources, thus leading to higher numbers of second-generation Turks who beat the odds. Future studies investigating these aspects further would benefit greatly by shedding light on additional patterns and mechanisms that might have been beyond the scope of our study and empirical material.

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## Notes

- 1 Please consult [www.tiesproject.eu](http://www.tiesproject.eu) for further details.
- 2 The restriction of our sample to children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' is equally distributed across the four survey cities and across gender.
- 3 Keskiner's study included 55 interviews with children of Turkish immigrants from diverse backgrounds in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. However, in this paper we concentrate on cases that are illustrative of our quantitative findings. Keskiner is responsible for any questions and inquiries.
- 4 We replicated the analysis using ordered logit models to differentiate between the categories dropped out and vocational track (available upon request). These additional analyses yielded very similar results to those presented in the article. For the sake of simplicity, we decided to show the results of the logit regression analyses.
- 5 All four survey items were combined into an additive index capturing parental support during secondary school ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ). This index was then reduced to three categories: no support, medium support, high support.
- 6 We measure older siblings' support by summing up survey information on the constructive engagement of older siblings with the school-related activities of the respondents. We combined the survey items "older siblings help them with their homework" and "older siblings talk with them about school or studies" when they were in secondary school into one summarising index ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ). This index was reduced to three categories ranging from "no support", "medium support", to "high support". Those respondents who did not have older siblings available to support them were put in the "no support" category. To partially check for biases, we replicated the regression models without respondents who have no older siblings available to support them. These additional analyses did not yield substantially different results from those presented in this article (available upon request), justifying the applied approach.
- 7 School segregation is a dummy variable coded as over 50% immigrants at the school (1) or below (0). The threshold of 50% was estimated by taking the overall mean on this segregation scale (ranging from 0 to 100), separately for each country and city. The relatively high mean value (of 50%) is not surprising given that we focus on second-generation Turks from disadvantaged backgrounds and that, on average, ethnic segregation in local schools is highly collinear with low parental socio-economic status in European neighbourhoods.
- 8 This result was confirmed in additional multivariate analysis in which we estimated the likelihood of entering higher education controlled for prior track placement and the set of independent variables presented in Table 1. Following the academic track in secondary education clearly determines the chances of entering post-secondary/tertiary education while most of the remaining independent variables were insignificant (the results are available upon request).

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