

This issue is in collaboration with the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, Interface Demography and the ESRC Centre for Population Change.

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Food for Thought

DOOMED TO COMPARE

Population science is a fortunate discipline, methodologically speaking. As demographers, we enjoy a wealth of available data and our subjects—birth, partnership, death, movement—are fairly clear cut. They are also easily subjected to international comparisons, which offer insight into general and country-specific trends.

For example, while the prevalence of below-replacement fertility in Europe is undeniable, comparisons show the extent of decline can vary considerably from country to country. We find that no single institutional measure but the whole institutional package—i.e. family policies, childcare institutions, labour market regimes, and a society's values—drives differences.

This conclusion may not be immediately helpful in a practical sense. So why bother with comparisons?

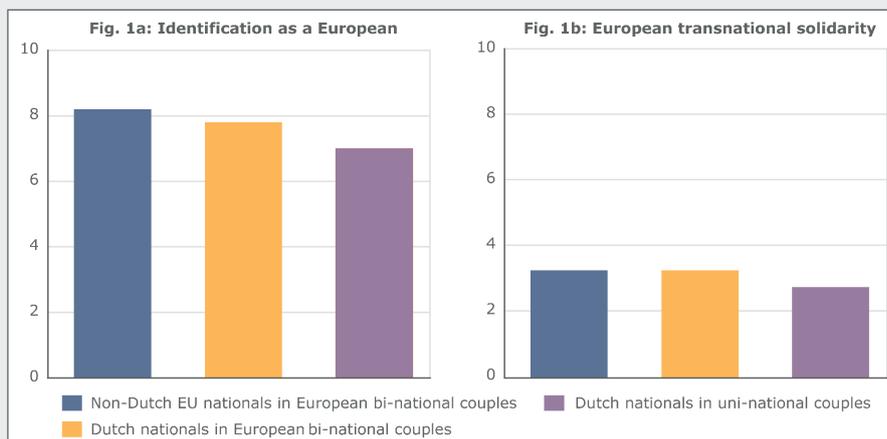
Comparative studies are indispensable, because they help us avoid developmental fatalism and ascribing all demographic accomplishments to policymaking. Europe is delightfully diverse. Institutions, traditions, and policies all affect each other, creating, when we're lucky, natural experiments. Demography therefore stands to benefit from standardised life events data. But because of that very diversity, we are perhaps doomed to compare.

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Figures in Focus

LOVE, IDENTITY, AND SOLIDARITY IN EUROPE



Source: Van Mol/De Valk/Van Wissen (2015) / EUMARR Survey

Relationships are thought to be an important indication of integration. Since the beginning of the European project, political scientists have in fact suggested that the development of a European identity could be strengthened by marriages between two people from different European countries. It's tricky to measure, though, so we've had only anecdotes until now. Our study offers figures [1]. We surveyed bi-national couples in the Netherlands – couples consisting of one Dutch national and one non-Dutch EU national – to determine to what extent they identified as European compared to their “uni-national” counterparts.

It turns out that bi-national relationships are indeed related to a stronger European identity. Figure 1a shows that on a scale of 0 to 10, non-Dutch EU nationals in bi-national relationships feel more European by 1.2 points (17.1%) as compared to Dutch individuals in a uni-national couple. This finding holds also when we control for possibly confounding factors, such as education: an OLS regression analysis shows that the relationship type alone explains over one full point of the identity difference. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the enhanced sense of Europeanness does not translate into a strong difference in individuals' sense of transnational solidarity – the feeling that makes people willing to help other countries in the event of a natural disaster, for instance. Not only were scores much lower, there was also little difference between bi- and uni-national couples (Figure 1b). And in contrast to identity scores, little of the difference was explained by the relationship.

For the moment, we can conclude that while love enhances the development of a European identity, it does not necessarily drive people to act on it. Not yet at least.

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[1] Van Mol, Christof, Helga AG de Valk and Leo van Wissen (2015). Falling in love with(in) Europe: European bi-national love relationships, European identification and transnational solidarity. European Union Politics 16(4): 469-489.

DEMOGRAPHY & POLICY

The European Refugee Crisis

Where There's a Will...

Forced migration caused by armed conflict or persecution is unpredictable [1]. The Syrian crisis, which by October 2015 saw over four million refugees already registered outside Syria, certainly seemed to catch Europe off guard. The vast majority of Syria's refugees stay in the region—Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon have each taken on more refugees than the entire EU, despite having far less capacity than Europe to deal with massive humanitarian disasters. Still, the crisis is testing the very principles upon which European integration has rested at a time when the security threats propagating from Syria to Europe—threats like the November 13 attacks in Paris—become very direct and real.

ROAD BLOCKS

Within Europe, an important obstacle to resolving the crisis is the EU's Dublin Regulation. Adopted to prevent "asylum shopping," it has led to the incongruous situation in which border countries like Italy, Hungary or Greece first receive a disproportionate number of asylum seekers, half of whom ultimately end up registered in Germany and Sweden. As such, the Dublin system has proven itself poorly suited to the task. It should be replaced by another framework, one coordinated at the European level. Policies to alleviate the pressure on individual member states need to involve greater solidarity across Europe. Yet the political will required for such solidarity is lacking in much of the EU, often due to electorates increasingly unwelcoming toward immigration. The

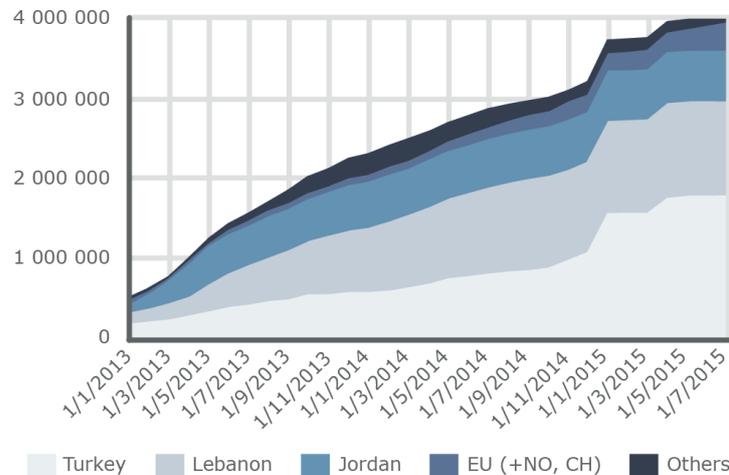
result in many cases, such as in Calais or at Hungary's border with Serbia, has been selective border enforcement. But this is not a solution—human smugglers will find other, riskier routes at higher economic and, sadly, humanitarian costs.

In the short term, the provision of large-scale humanitarian assistance, aid and education is crucial. In the long term, the UNHCR aims to offer refugees one of the three "durable solutions": repatriation, resettlement in a third country, or integration into host societies. While resettlement and integration remain politically problematic, temporary solutions—such as refugee camps—prevail. Naturally, as the conflict in Syria endures, mass repatriation is not feasible either. Any true long term solutions would need to address the conflict first—a diplomatic as well as a military challenge.

THERE'S A WAY

For Europe, there are options in the mean-

Refugees from Syria
by the main regions of asylum



Note: EU aggregated with Norway and Switzerland; the dates are approximate
Source: UNHCR

time. In particular, the crisis has demonstrated an acute need for multiple layers of risk management, contingency and crisis plans [1]. One encouraging example is Japan, where excellent crisis management plans are in place for earthquakes, which—like refugee crises—cannot be predicted with any reasonable foresight. Another example is the capital buffer requirements for banks put in place in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Indeed, coordination between countries, political and milit-

ary alliances, international and non-governmental organisations needs to improve and special reserve capacity, specialised assets that remain mostly idle between crises, would need to be created. A public mandate for such capacity will require an open, possibly difficult public debate on the merits, and price, of keeping such reserves and capabilities. The price is not only economic: in this debate, the difficult questions of trade-offs between liberty and security are also unavoidable. But—like with earthquake preparedness or financial regulation—where there's a will, there's a way.

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[1] Disney G, Wiśniowski A, Forster JJ, Smith PWF and Bijak J (2015) Evaluation of existing migration forecasting methods and models. Report for the Migration Advisory Committee. Southampton: ESRC Centre for Population Change. <http://ow.ly/TK03U>

This issue is in memoriam of Valeria Solesin, PhD-student at Population Europe's Partner Institute INED, who lost her life during the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015.

Imprint

Publisher: Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science on behalf of the collaborative network "Population Europe"

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In cooperation with: Patrick I. Dick, Brussels, Belgium

Layout: The Brettinghams GmbH, Berlin, Germany; Emily Lines and Aimie Bouju

Print: www.flyerpunk.de, Marienburger Straße 16, 10405 Berlin, Germany

This issue of Population Insights has been published with financial support from the Progress programme of the European Union in the framework of the project "Supporting a Partnership for Enhancing Europe's Capacity to Tackle Demographic and Societal Change".