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Food for Thought

SERVICES OVER CASH

To reconcile work and family is to improve gender and socioeconomic equality. This means the type of intervention will be just as important as its generosity.

Take cash benefits for care services. Intended to provide families with flexibility, evidence suggests they subtly incentivise families to fall back on traditional divisions of household labour. Given cash, families, especially poorer families, tend to engage in more home care for their children. In Norway, in line with traditional gender roles, this led to women taking longer leave to care for their young children or working fewer hours—perpetuating their labour market disadvantage.

Services, however, offer no such temptation. High-quality, publicly funded child-care services—whether day care or home help—equally free both mothers' and fathers' hands for paid work. So-called "meals on wheels" services do the same for caregiving sons and daughters of frail, elderly parents. In the end, what is temporarily lost in flexibility is more than returned in enduring parity.

Work-family reconciliation is about equality. So let's talk about "how" first. Then we can talk about "how much".

Pearl Dykstra, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands, and Member of the EU Commission's High Level Group of Scientific Advisors

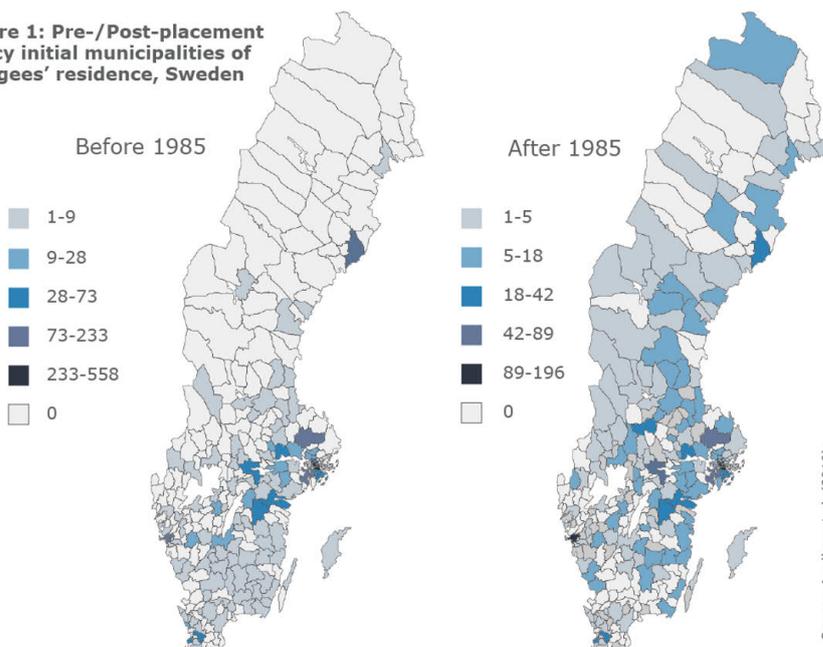
Contact: dykstra@fsw.eur.nl

Figures in Focus

SETTLING DOWN

Refugees' settlement preferences are key to asylum policies

Figure 1: Pre-/Post-placement policy initial municipalities of refugees' residence, Sweden



Refugees' post-migration choices about where to call home have stumped many a policymaker. In 2015, it was refugees' "irregular secondary movement" that rendered Europe's Dublin system obsolete. Yet it is refugees' voluntary relocation away from ethnic enclaves that signals successful integration. A closer look at a Swedish policy exposes motivations behind them and how even light interventions can affect outcomes. In 1985, refugee settlement was changed from open to assigned to promote integration by mitigating the growth of established ethnic enclaves. The result is a much less concentrated pattern of initial settlement (Figure 1). What is important is how the change affected secondary residence decisions. Before the intervention, having neighbours from one's home country had no effect on later decisions to relocate. Afterwards, for every 110 co-national neighbours, the probability of relocating increased by 22 percentage points. Why wasn't this detected before? We had to distinguish between neighbours from refugees' home country and their home region [1]. The former may reflect some common experience, but the latter better captures cultural affinities. Imagine Kurds from Turkey or Iran who thanks to home-country conflicts prefer to live alongside other Kurds but not Turks or Persians. Thus, ethnic conflicts in the sending country may manifest themselves in immigrants' residential choices in the host country. Whether or not to encourage relocation, the drivers of post-migration residence decisions are key to good asylum policies. Otherwise, carefully crafted common asylum systems could be swiftly undermined.

Kirk Scott, Lund University, Sweden

Contact: kirk.scott@ekh.lu.se

[1] Aradhya, Siddhartha, Hedefalk, Finn, Helgertz, Jonas and Scott, Kirk 2016 (forthcoming). Region of Origin: Settlement Decisions of Turkish and Iranian Immigrants in Sweden, 1968 – 2001. Population, Space and Place.

DEMOGRAPHY & POLICY

Educated women aren't realising their fertility intentions

This gap is space for policy reform

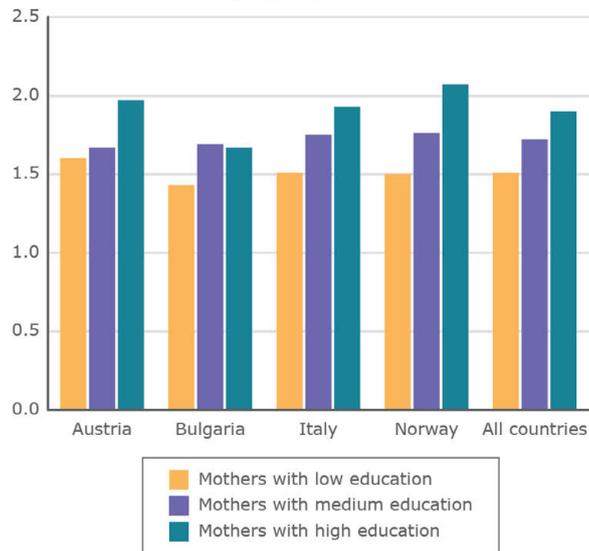
Population ageing will continue to be one of Europe's biggest long-term policy challenges in coming decades. Older populations have many advantages, but they also have very concrete costs—most notably on pensions, one of the foundations of modern-day welfare states. Longer lives, the result of better health and nutrition, is certainly part of the equation, but this can hardly be qualified as a problem. No, Europe is ageing, and—despite our intentions—low fertility is the reason.

Low fertility is also the result of positive developments. Women's ever-increasing participation in the workforce has improved women's autonomy and gender equality in European societies. It has simply taken a toll on overall fertility rates at different times. The reasons are complex. Researchers point out that the cost of childbearing on women is increased when they work, especially for those women who many not be inclined to have children in the first place. Others have shown that many women, understandably focused on their career and private lives, have delayed childbearing until it was too late, or at least too late to have the number of children they would have liked.

What role has policy played? There is evidence that fertility has stayed low where work-life reconciliation policies have failed to keep up. Accessible childcare or meaningful paternity leave, for example, help reduce the conflict between childrearing and mothers' careers (and, naturally, a family's income). This is especially true for highly educated women, who have the highest opportunity costs but also the most capacity to plan their future.

What are not holding back fertility rates are intentions [1]. According to the 2011

Figure 1: Fertility intentions of childless daughters, age group 18-49



Eurobarometer, the two-child family was the most preferred family size for the majority of women at all education levels. Highly educated Italian women intended to have 2.2 children; however, they had an average of 1.1, giving them a fertility gap of 0.9 children. Educated Bulgarian women, who had 1.0 kids, ultimately intended to have 1.8, a gap of 0.8. Meanwhile, the fertility gap of their less educated counterparts was 0.8 and 0.5, respectively. This pattern—higher gaps for higher than lower educated women—is reproduced in nearly all EU countries.

These fertility gaps should be seen for the policy opportunity that they are. Even with the disparities, fertility intentions are one of the strongest predictors of actual behaviour. For policymakers concerned about rapid population ageing, that educated women intend to have more children than they're having is good news.

NO SURPRISES

To understand the obstacles to intended family size, the drivers of their intentions must be understood, too. Compared to their

actual family sizes, why do educated women seem to have such unexpectedly high fertility intentions? The short answer: planning. Evidence [2] suggests that childless women with highly educated mothers are more likely to intend to have more children through a mother-daughter transmission of resources (and preferences) that facilitates childbearing planning (Figure 1). Ultimately, a mother's education does not replace a daughter's when it comes to intended family size. A mother's education complements it, and strengthens the argument that fertility intentions are in good measure a function of one's ability to plan.

INVEST IN EQUALITY

If we want to close the fertility gap in society, first we should see it for what it is: policy space. Admittedly, there is little indication that family policies alone can boost overall fertility. Whether it is wise to intervene directly in this area is also open to debate. Regardless, we should be encouraged to further invest in education and the services that help women plan their lives. At the very least, these interventions immediately improve gender equality and quality of life. But evidence suggests they could yield returns for generations.

Maria Rita Testa, Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital (VID/OEAW, IIASA, WU), Austria
 Contact: maria.rita.testa@wu.ac.at

[1] Testa, Maria Rita (2014). On the positive correlation between education and fertility intentions in Europe: Individual- and country-level evidence. *Advances in Life Course Research*. 21: 28 – 42.

[2] Testa, Maria Rita, Valeria Bordone, Beata Osiewalska and Vegard Skirbekk (2016). Are daughters' childbearing intentions related to their mothers' socio-economic status? *Demographic Research*. 35 (21): 581 – 616.

Further information: ReCap project, <http://recap.wu.ac.at>

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Editors: Andreas Edel (V.i.S.d.P.), Harald Wilkoszewski
Contact: Population Europe, Markgrafenstraße 37, 10117 Berlin, Germany
Distributed by: Population Europe Brussels Office, c/o Max Planck Society, Rue Royale 225-227, 1210 Brussels, Belgium

Phone: +32 (0)2 250 1419 | **Fax:** + 32 2 250 1420
Email: press@population-europe.eu | **Web:** www.population-europe.eu
Twitter: @PopulationEU | **Facebook:** /PopulationEurope
In cooperation with: Patrick I. Dick, Brussels, Belgium
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