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Photo: Pixabay

State Commission advises 'moderate population growth' for the Netherlands

HELGA DE VALK & HARRY VAN DALEN

The Netherlands State Commission on Demographic Developments was installed by Dutch Parliament to give insight into the most probable demographic future developments and how this will affect the economy and society at large. The Commission published its report in January 2024. Its main advice is to strive for moderate population growth through a mix of direct (migration restrictions) and especially indirect measures: focusing on defining the type of society and economy that the Netherlands wants to strive for, thereby indirectly steering the composition of future immigration flows accordingly.

The State Commission published its report (407 pages) on January 15. The commission of 13 eminent members from policy, politics and science offered a response to the government's questions as to how demographic developments will affect numerous domains in society, and what should be done about it. As in other countries, population ageing and immigration are the focus of attention in the public debates. In numerous countries, the rising levels of immigration have led to upheaval. Such voices of discontent have also become stronger in the Netherlands and finding a middle way in the making of policy has also become more difficult. To gather insight into the interaction between population dynamics and society, in 2021 the Dutch parliament requested that the government establish a special State Commission on demographic developments. Its main tasks were to give a perspective on the most probable demographic developments and offer policy options that are suited to deal with the prospect of an ageing, more diverse and (potentially) growing population. The commission examined in particular the economic implications of population ageing and migration and how these two forces affect the use of space, the economy at large, and various public domains, like social security, health care and education.

The Commission assessed that the growth of the Dutch population is primarily driven by migration (see figure on page 2 for a historical overview), and will most likely remain so in light of low fertility levels among the residing population. Without migra-

For those unfamiliar with Dutch state craft, a State Commission (Staatscommissie) is an independent body of experts including scientists, (former) politicians and representatives of national associations. The commission carries out research and gives policy advice on issues that are of crucial importance to the public interest. The current State Commission was established in August 2022 and the first meeting took place in October 2022. Often State Commissions lead to a change in laws or a change in attitudes towards issues of public interest. In the case of the current State Commission, the most prominent issues have concerned the impact that demographic developments of immigration and population ageing have on Dutch society. In the past there has only been one previous State Commission focusing on population issues, namely in the years 1972-1976. Prominent members, like the economist Jan Tinbergen and its scientific secretary demographer Dirk van de Kaa, offered their advice on the future of the Dutch population and the estimated impact of the population size on the well-being of citizens. NIDI hosted the secretariat of the current Commission and provided useful input to both Commissions, a half-century apart.

should aim to facilitate innovation to increase (labour) productivity, decrease inequalities in life expectancy, increase healthy life expectancy and increase work force potential. Investing in education throughout the life course, working longer and/or increasing the number of hours worked should all be considered according to the Commission. Part-time work is the norm in the Netherlands (in particular among women), and the annual number of work hours per capita remains low. Public sectors like healthcare and education already face labour shortages, which make it difficult to offer quality services to every citizen; these shortages will probably remain in force in the coming decades if nothing is done.

The main reason for the Commission to plea for a moderate population growth rate is also a pragmatic one. Both rapid population growth as well as population decline were considered to be unsustainable. Moderate growth is considered the best course of action, also given the fact that population decline would result in even more drastic population ageing and related questions on sustainability of social services, including healthcare demands. The prospect of high levels of population growth were also evaluated to be undesirable in a country where the housing market is already overheated, offering for example little opportunity for young people to find suitable and affordable housing, and where shortages in public services are rife. The State Commission emphasises that in the long run, the Dutch government and society in general should reflect on and make choices about which type of society and economy it wants to strive for. This can imply that there should be less focus on sectors that can only exist by virtue of cheap labour and exploitation of migrants, and more focus on sectors that add real and lasting value and which make the most of the potential and skills belonging to a well-educated population.

Note: Helga de Valk is vice chair of the State Commission (SDO 2050), Harry van Dalen is scientific secretary of the State Commission.

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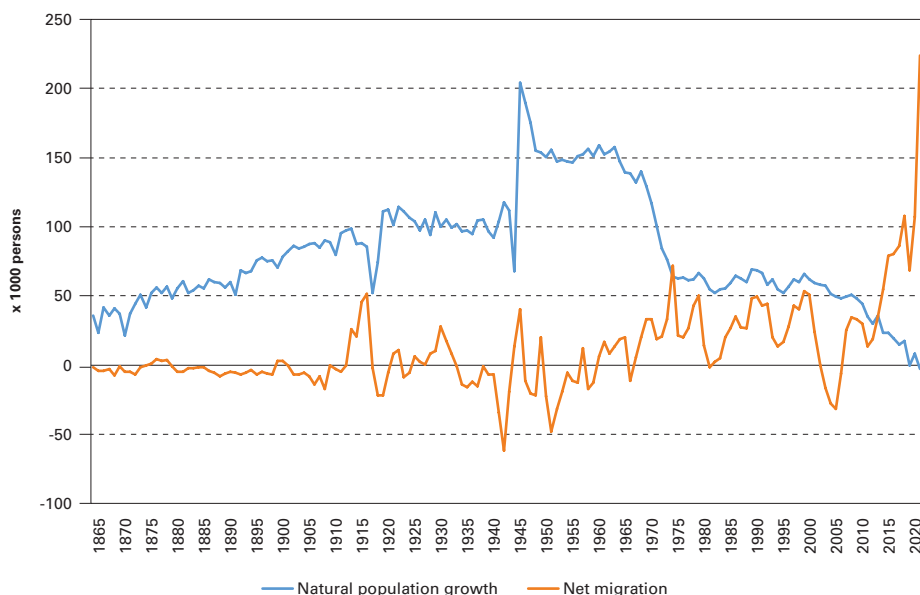
- Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkelingen 2050 (2024), *Gematigde groei, Rapport van de Staatscommissie demografische ontwikkelingen 2050*, The Hague.

tion, the Dutch population would be in decline. Current immigration levels are driven by forces of globalisation and labour demand – triggering labour migration – and geopolitical tensions leading to recurrent peaks in refugee and asylum migration. It was also acknowledged that parts of these migration flows are more difficult to steer than others. Indirect policy measures that would, for instance, change the economic structure of the Netherlands and thereby the labour demand for migrants, may be just as important as direct migration measures that affect legal entry into the country. The Commission highlighted that the fact that economic forces and migration developments are tightly related should be recognised in policy design. In addition, not all migration policies fall under the mandate of the national government, such as free mobility within the EU or international agreements on asylum and refugees. Given this complexity, the Commission advised that it is crucial to capitalise on the available skills among those who arrive in the Netherlands, irrespective of their motive, including those who are simply granted asylum.

With respect to addressing the economic and social consequences of population ageing, the Commission recommends that economic policy

Noot voor abonnees/lezers: dit is een eenmalige uitgave van Demos in het Engels. Volgende nummers zullen gewoon in het Nederlands verschijnen.
Note for readers: this is a one-time issue in English. Subsequent issues of Demos will be published in Dutch.

Long-term development in natural population growth and net migration, the Netherlands (1865-2022)



Note: Natural population growth = number of births minus number of deaths; net migration = immigration minus emigration.

Source: Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkelingen 2050 (2024, p. 49).

Which world population projection should we trust?

LEO VAN WISSEN

World population forecasts can differ considerably. Why do they differ? The latest population projection models use more non-demographic variables, making the models more realistic but also more uncertain.

Recently, a new forecast of the world's population, commissioned by the Club of Rome, was published by a group of scientists called Earth4All. The Club of Rome is well known for its report 'The Limits to Growth', published in 1972, which warned that humanity was heading for catastrophe if the consumption and use of resources were not drastically reduced. Earth4All made the news because their two scenarios are much lower than the other global population projections, made by the United Nations (UN), the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Human Capital (WCDE) and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). How should we evaluate these different projections? The methodology of the four projections is different. They can be ranked according to increased complexity. The UN model, although statistically sophisticated, is purely demographic, and relies on the universal shape of the demographic transition. The WCDE and IHME projections take educational expansion of the population into account as a key driver of demographic behaviour. In addition, the IHME projections use uptake of contraceptives as a driver of fertility change. These projection models produce various scenarios, which are based on different assumptions regarding these drivers. The Club of Rome projection model is the most complex, with important feedback effects between population, economy and ecology.

plausible than the higher UN forecast. The Club of Rome scenarios rely heavily on income, not education, as a key driver, which, together with the feedback relationships lead to even lower outcomes. However, predicting economic development is even more uncertain than predicting population development!

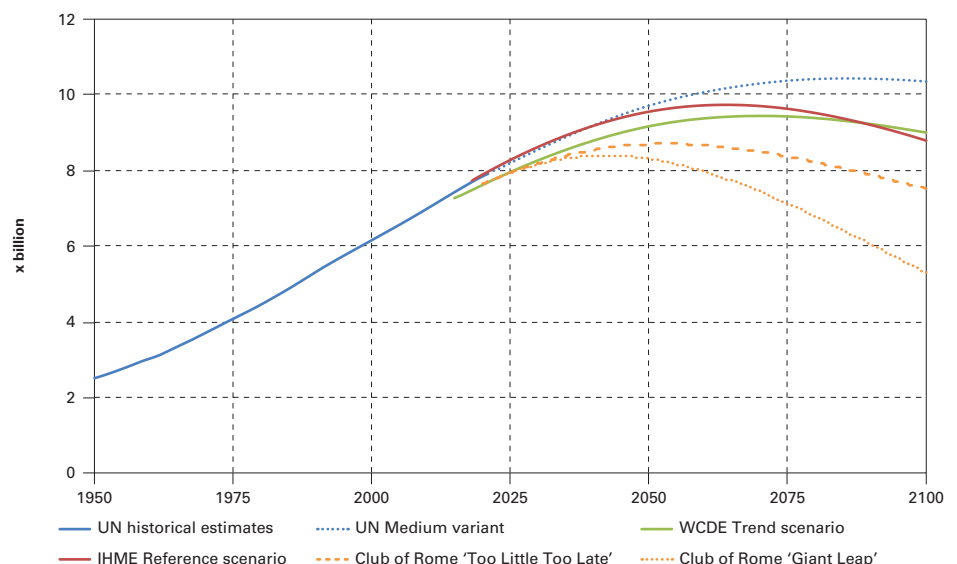
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Despite these differences in approaches, the forecasters agree on a number of things. Clearly, the world population will decline before the end of the century, although the exact timing of the population peak is different (see figure). There is also reasonable agreement among three of the four forecasters about the world population size in 2050: between 9.4 and 9.7 billion. However, the differences are also large. The predicted population sizes at the end of this century range from 7.3 (Club of Rome) to 10.3 billion (UN). Hence, the further away in time, the greater the uncertainty and the differences between the forecasts. The comparison of the forecasts shows that the use of additional variables and more complexity in the forecast has a clear downward effect on the level of the forecast. Most demographers recognise the added value of educational attainment as an explanatory and predictive factor of demographic developments. It is therefore no coincidence that the two forecasts that take this into account in their approach arrive at approximately the same result that is lower than the UN forecast. Therefore their results are probably more

Comparison of world population forecasts until the year 2100



Note: It concerns the outcomes of the 'Too Little Too Late' and the 'Giant Leap' scenario of the Club of Rome and the most likely scenarios of the UN (medium variant), the Wittgenstein Centre (trend scenario), and the IHME (reference scenario).
Source: UN (2022), Lutz et al. (2018), Vollset et al. (2023), Callegari and Stoknes (2023).

Europeans are united on climate change

MARIA EISMANN, DANIEL VAN WIJK & AART LIEFBROER

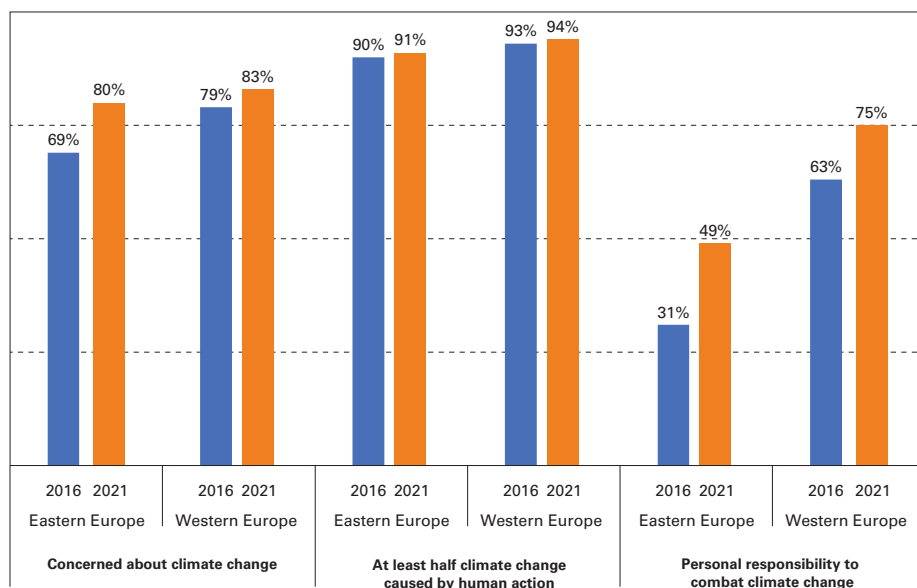
Climate change poses a serious threat to the natural, social and economic order and is one of the most pressing global challenges. How do Europeans think about climate change? Have their views changed in recent years? And if so, have the views converged or diverged across Europe?

Meeting the challenges of climate change requires far-reaching policies and regulations that are only feasible with broad public support. Europe plays a major role in this. Not only are European countries major contributors to climate problems, many measures will also have to be taken in a European context. How does the European population think about climate and how have these views changed in recent years? The European Social Survey (see box) provides answers to these questions.

Looking at the figure below, the first thing to notice is that in 2021, a large part of the European population in the countries surveyed is somewhat

to extremely concerned about the climate. There is also broad agreement in Europe that at least half of climate change is caused by human activity. When asked how responsible people feel when it comes to combatting climate change the figure shows clear differences between Eastern and Western Europe. While in Switzerland (83%), France (83%) and the UK (80%) a particularly high proportion of the population feels to some extent or more personally responsible to try to reduce climate change, this is true for a, comparatively, small proportion of the Hungarian (56%), Estonian (53%) and Czech (36%) populations. The figure also shows that between 2016 and 2021, there have been changes in European views on climate change. On average, 78 per cent of the European population in the countries surveyed were concerned about climate change in 2016; by 2021, this had increased to 83 per cent. The belief that at least half of climate change is caused by humans has changed only slightly: from 93 per cent in 2016 to 94 per cent five years later. The biggest change is seen in the sense of responsibility to reduce climate change. In 2016, 60 per cent of Europeans felt personally responsible; by 2021, this had risen to 73 per cent. All in all, Europeans thus consider climate change increasingly important. In particular, awareness of the role the individual plays in this has grown. Remarkably, differences between European regions on all three questions have become either smaller or stayed constant over time. So, not only is climate change being taken more and more seriously, there also seems to be a growing shared European view on climate change.

Europeans' views on climate change (in percentages) in 2016 and 2021 by region



Notes: Eastern Europe = Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Slovenia; Western Europe = Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, and Switzerland.
 Concerned = % somewhat, very or extremely concerned; human cause = % at least half climate change caused by human activity; personal responsible = % feels personal responsibility to reduce climate change to some/to a great extent.
 Source: ESS (2016, 2021).

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EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY

The European Social Survey (ESS) collects representative and internationally comparable data on the beliefs, values, perceptions and behavioural patterns of the European population on topics such as health, security, democracy, migration and work every two years since 2002 in most European countries. Questions on climate change were added for the first time in 2016 and were repeated in 2021. In this article, we look at three questions asked in both 2016 and 2021. All countries that participated in the ESS in 2016 and 2021, and where fieldwork took place face-to-face, were included. All results in this article are weighted by sample design and population as well as by gender, age, level of education and region.

Retirement dreams of baby boomers

ORLAITH TUNNEY & HANNA VAN SOLINGE

The so-called baby boomers have now reached retirement age, which has led to widespread speculation about how this generation will approach retired life. Popular media suggests that baby boomers are expected to volunteer, play sports, travel, or even start second careers in retirement. This popular perception does not match with the views of baby boomer themselves.

The baby boom generation was born between 1945 and 1955. Following their early years spent in the shadow of the Second World War, they came of age during the 1960s and 1970s. This era ushered in profound social change, witnessing a revolution in attitudes and cultural norms in terms of music, sexuality, drugs, clothing, and politics. These changes were driven by countercultural movements of the time, such as the hippie movement and second wave feminism, amongst others. Having grown up during these revolutionary times the baby boomers themselves are widely viewed as having revolutionised the life course in the Netherlands. Baby boomers are therefore expected to continue this trend and take a different, more active, approach to retirement than preceding generations. But does this reflect reality as they see it?

Data from the NIDI Pension Panel show that about half of the older workers who have not yet retired (born between 1950 and 1955) indicated that, for them, retirement means 'enjoying the fact that you are no longer working'. For approximately one fifth (21%), retirement is seen as a new beginning, where you 'finally have time to develop yourself and learn new things'. One in eight (13%) viewed retirement as a time to continue working, but at a slower pace. For the rest, retirement was still unknown territory (10%), or something they preferred not to think about (4%). These results are in line with international research, where greater freedom and no longer having to worry about work are seen as the key advantages of retirement.

However, researchers are increasingly paying attention to the idea that social and cultural socialisation in youth continues to influence us even in later life. And we also put this idea to the test. Of the older workers in our study, about a quarter identified with the hippie culture of the 1960s and 1970s, 20 per cent identified with the protest movements, while only five per cent identified with the drug culture of that time. Those who identified with these countercultures of the 60s and 70s indeed had a different – more active – view of retirement. As shown in the figure, identification with countercultures (displayed on the horizontal axis from left to right) was associated with retirement views. Those who strongly identified with this counterculture as a young adult are much more likely to see their retirement as a new beginning (orange bar) than those who did not identify with these movements at all. Conversely, those who did not identify

with countercultural movements in their youth were more likely to view retirement as a period of well-deserved rest after working life (blue bar), than those who identified strongly with countercultures in their youth.

Our results show that baby boomers cannot all be tarred with the same brush and there is significant diversity in the way Dutch older workers view retirement. However, all in all, those who broke with tradition in their youth seem less inclined to slow down, put their feet up, and follow more traditional views on retirement.

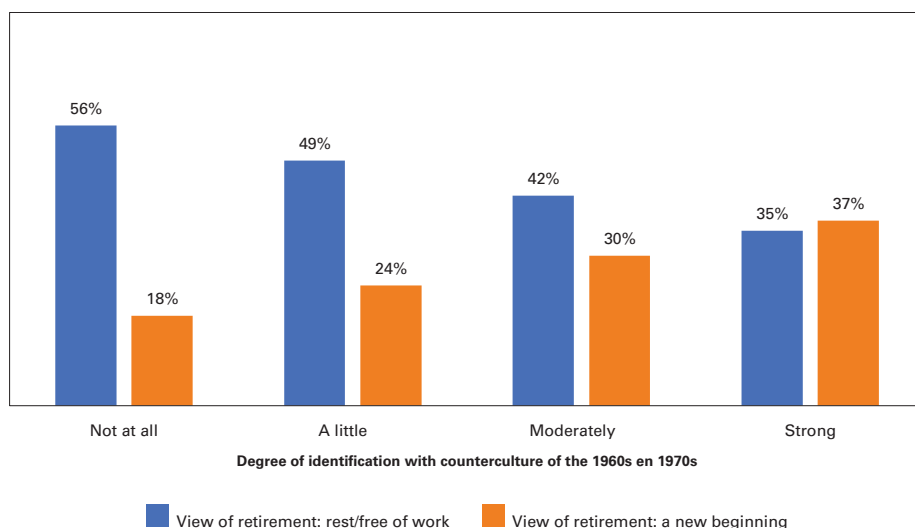
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Retirement views of older Dutch workers of the baby boom generation, not yet retired, distinguished by their identification with counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s



Source: NIDI Pension Panel Study (2015), N=6,024. Figures are controlled for: health, gender, education, health, assets, and a number of work characteristics amongst other controls (Tunney et al., 2022).

The risks and rewards of international retirement migration

ESMA BETÜL SAVAŞ & JUUL SPAAN

Increased life expectancy, better health and more wealth have contributed to the emergence of Dutch pensioners retiring abroad. International retirement migrants approach retirement as a new phase in life and make the most of what the country of destination has to offer, but pay the price of having less frequent contact with family in the country of origin.

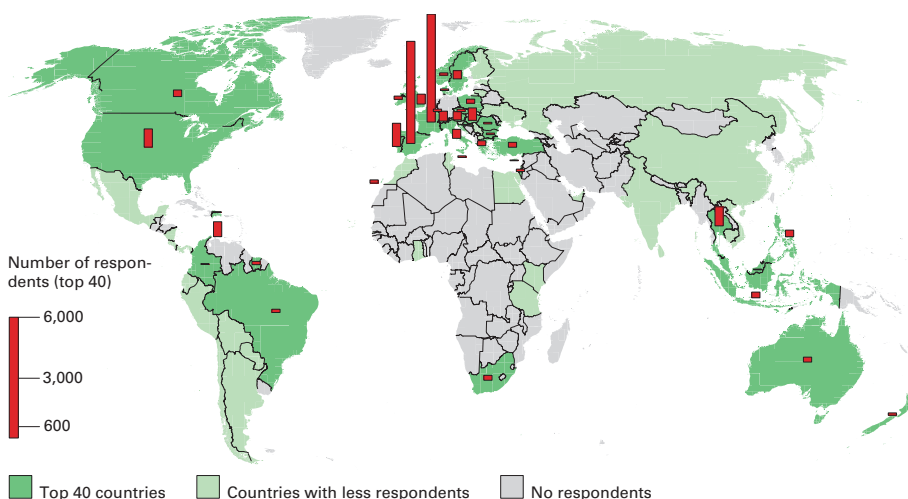
Migration is a life-changing event that comes with many potential rewards, such as engaging in novel experiences. However, migrating at an older age also entails risks, because people age in a foreign country away from their support network. A rough estimate shows that there are about 24,000 Dutch individuals who migrated around the retirement age to a new country. These retirement migrants are not only located in well-known destinations in Southern Europe, but in countries all around the world (see figure below). In 2021, NIDI conducted research on a nationally representative sample of Dutch retirement migrants. Of the roughly 14,000 retirement migrants who were approached, 6,110 individuals participated in the survey of Dutch Retirement Migrants Abroad. The survey focused on retirement migrants in the forty most popular destinations.

Most retirement migrants moved when they were relatively young – between the ages of 65 and 70 – and in good health. Compared to retirees in the Netherlands who did not migrate, retirement migrants more often had a partner but had weaker ties to their family and community in the country of origin. There was much diversity in people's motives for migration in late life, extending beyond 'amenities' in the destination. The most important motives were the climate, tranquility and the culture in the country of destination. Lesser-known drivers of migration, such as economic reasons, health concerns, or dissatis-

faction with the home country, were not uncommon. Different motives were related to the types of people who migrate. For example, people with a lower socioeconomic status were more likely to migrate for economic reasons and dissatisfaction with the Netherlands and less likely to migrate for tranquility.

Retirement migrants move away from their social network in a life stage that is characterised by more exchanges of support, such as receiving help in day-to-day living and providing grandparental support. We examined retirement migrants' social integration in the destination and their transnational ties with the Netherlands. The stereotype is that retirement migrants form communities with fellow migrants rather than integrating with the locals. This pattern was evident in destinations like Spain and Bonaire, where migrants had more Dutch friends than local friends. In other countries, retirement migrants socialized both with locals and fellow Dutch migrants, and less so with non-Dutch migrants. Technological advances and ease of mobility have made it easier to keep in touch over long distances. However, retirement migrants had less digital contact and face-to-face contact with their children than retirees who did not migrate. The majority was still emotionally close to their children, although emotional support alone may not be sufficient when in need of practical support. For many retirement migrants, the advantages of retirement migration seem to outweigh its disadvantages. However, a substantial minority experiences disadvantages, such as the distance from their family. The unfortunate consequences of living abroad, such as loneliness, warrant further research.

Geographical spread of the population of Dutch retirement migrants in top 75 destinations in 2021



Note: The population of Dutch retirement migrants reflects persons aged 66–90 with Dutch nationality who receive their public pension abroad and who accumulated at least 70% of the public pension scheme. Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao were combined into a single bar for readability. Source: Own calculations based on Henkens, K. et al. (2022), A Survey of Dutch Retirement Migrants Abroad: Codebook Version 1.0, The Hague: NIDI/KNAW.

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Who decides on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights?

SIYANG KONG, LIN ROUVROYE & ANNE GAUTHIER

One of the key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is gender equality. Of particular importance is women's autonomy regarding sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. The Generations and Gender Survey provides valuable insight into these issues. Recently collected data shows for various developed regions that decisions on women's own reproductive health are often a joint decision with a (male) partner.

In its 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the United Nations identified 'achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls' as a key goal for the future. One of the targets in this ambition focuses on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. This is measured by the proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care (SDG 5.6.1). A recent UNFPA report looked at data from 57 developing countries, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa. As it turns out, only half of the married or in-union women aged 15 to 49 can make their own decisions regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights. How does this finding compare to the current situation in economically (more) developed countries? And how large is the variation between developed countries across the world?

The general picture across the countries shows that women have autonomy in their decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care. However, with respect to contraceptive use, the majority of joint decisions seems to point to more variation in the degree of (full) autonomy.

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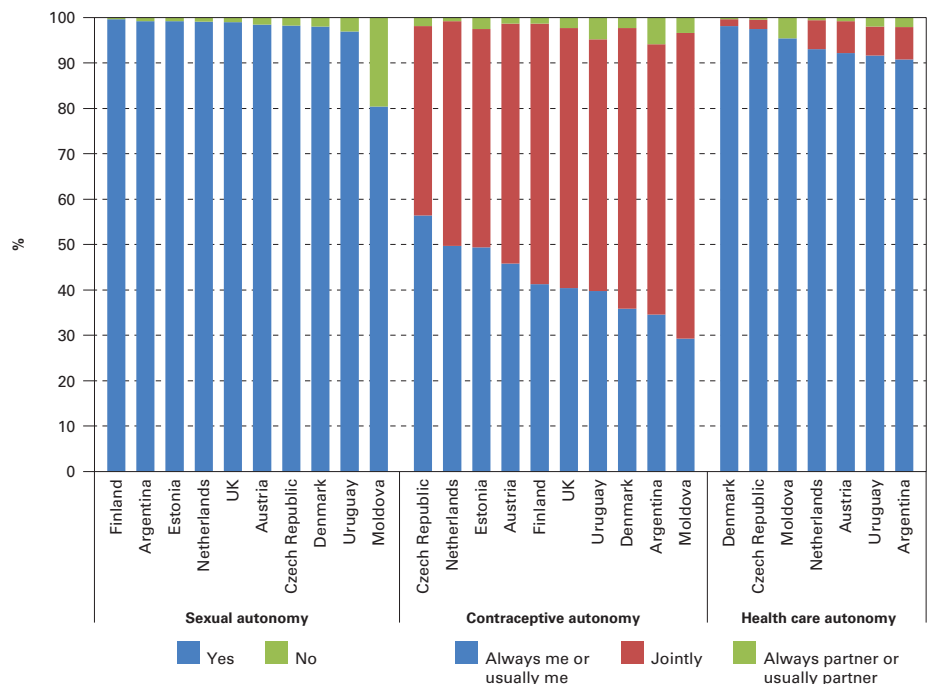
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The second round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-II) provides an unique opportunity to investigate and monitor women's autonomy regarding sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Because of the wide geographical coverage, these data allow for comparisons among an economically and culturally diverse set of countries and regions. The baseline questionnaire includes three items that measure the SDG 5.6.1: women's autonomy in decisions regarding sexual relations, the use of contraception and health care. We present findings for ten countries that fielded a full wave of GGS-II and for which data have been released, or will soon be released (in the case of the Netherlands).

Overall, almost all women can decide on sexual relations, except for Moldova where 20 per cent of the women answered "no" to the question on sexual autonomy (see the figure). Compared to the indicators on sexual relations and health, women's answers on decisions on contraceptive use stand out. In almost all of the countries, a large share of women report to make these decisions 'jointly' with their partner, ranging from 42 per cent in Czech Republic to 67 per cent in Moldova. In the Netherlands, almost 50 per cent of the women report making their own decision while the other half report making joint decisions. When it comes to health autonomy, the majority of women report making their own decisions in all regions, ranging from 90 per cent in Argentina (Buenos Aires) to 98 per cent in Denmark.

Distribution of the answers on indicators for autonomy regarding reproductive health and rights among married or in-union women aged 18 to 49 years in ten countries, 2020-2023



Source: Generations and Gender Survey Round II 2020-2023.

Notes: 1. Exact wording survey questions on indicators for SDG 5.6.1 - Sexual autonomy - "Can you say no to your partner if you do not want to have sexual intercourse?" [answer options "Yes" or "No"]; and Contraceptive autonomy - "Who usually decides on using contraception?" [answer options "Always me", "Usually me", "Joint", "Usually partner", or "Always partner"]; Healthcare autonomy - "Who usually makes decisions about health care for yourself?" [answer options "Always me", "Usually me", "Joint", "Usually partner", or "Always partner"]. 2. Finland, UK and Estonia did not include the question on health care autonomy.

Getting a grip on immigration: the citizens' view

HARRY VAN DALEN

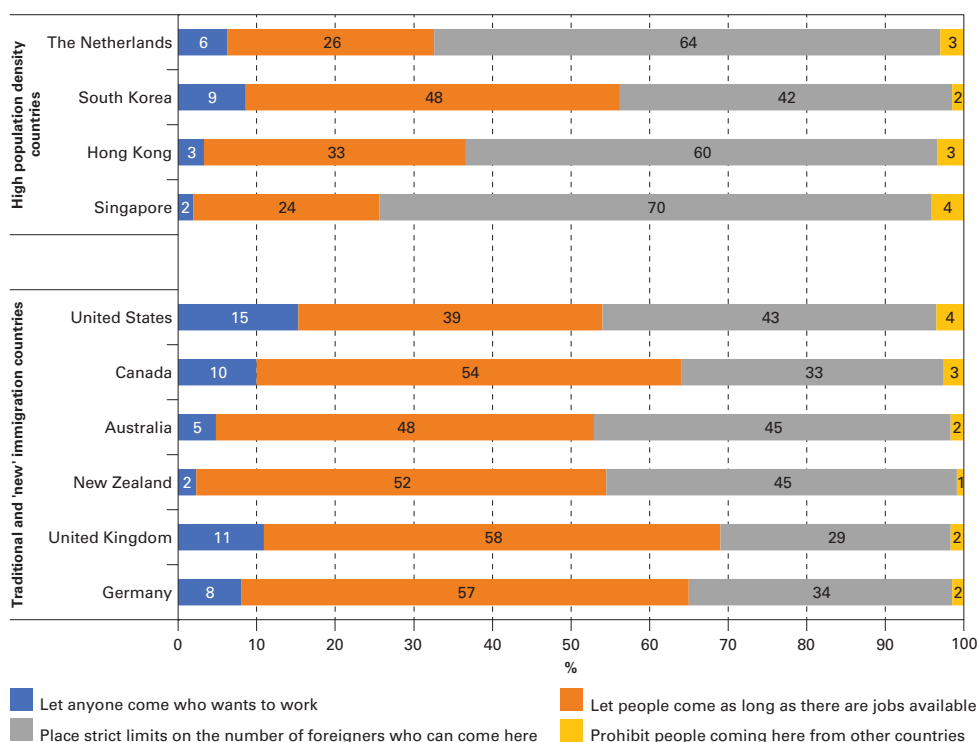
What is the citizens' view on immigration policy? Should labour migration be given priority no matter what or should governments be more restrictive? The World Values Survey shows that countries with a very high population density are far more restrictive than moderate or low-density countries. Citizens in traditional or new immigration countries show a markedly different attitude.

Migration policy is a hotly debated issue in many developed countries. Some right-wing politicians view it as a boon, and some liberal politicians consider it a bane and the more nuanced politicians take the middle ground. Far-right politicians in particular often state that the borders should be closed. But what do citizens have to say on the topic? Are they likely to support such strong statements? And do the demographic circumstances of the country in question matter? Countries or city states with a high population density are likely to be more selective regarding who should cross their border than countries that are sparsely populated. High-density countries like the Netherlands or Singapore are likely to encounter more congestion problems in, for instance, housing, infrastructure, and land use, compared to low-density countries like Canada and the U.S.

How do citizens look upon the contribution of immigrants to their country and what is their stance on immigration policy, The World Values Survey offers some light on how coun-

try settings but also the attitudes of citizens may matter in welcoming or restricting immigrants. The figure below shows in a nutshell how citizens living in countries with a high population density differ from traditional and 'new' immigration countries. In high-density countries, a majority of citizens wants strict limits on the number of foreigners entering their country. South Korean citizens differ markedly from the other three countries, but this might very well be because due to having the world's lowest fertility rate of 0.7, the threats associated with population ageing loom large in South Korea's future. The citizens in new and traditional immigration countries are far more focused on the labour market potential of immigrants and not on setting strict limits. They often do not face the complicating factors of a densely populated country. Canada, for example, with its current population of 40 million inhabitants (4 per km²) is striving for the goal of 100 million citizens in 2100. Canadian policy makers explained this goal in their 'Century Initiative': "Our population growth is tied to our quality of

Opinions of citizens on how their government should carry out immigration policy, 2017-2022



Note on data: US refers to 2017, Australia, Hong Kong, Germany and South Korea to 2018, Canada, New Zealand and Singapore to 2020 and the Netherlands and UK to 2022. Source: World Values Survey.

DEMOS is published ten times a year, normally in Dutch, with the aim of promoting knowledge and awareness of population issues. Inquiries about manuscripts for DEMOS can be addressed to the editorial board.



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life. If we have more people, we have a larger workforce and we create more economic activity." What is perhaps even more striking is the attitude in European countries, like Germany and the UK, where citizens show themselves to be very open to the labour market potential of immigrants. Population ageing and expected labour market shortages can apparently cause a change of heart. The Dutch viewpoint is markedly different: 67 per cent of the Dutch want strict limits and this is in strong contrast to the UK or Germany with respectively 31 and 36 per cent who want strict limits. Right now the Dutch, in particular the older citizens, feel that immigration numbers are 'out of control' and see it as high priority to regain control.

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