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Descriptive Findings

**The Netherlands:
paradigm or exception in Western
Europe's demography?**

David Coleman

Joop Garssen

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Descriptive findings

The Netherlands: paradigm or exception in Western Europe's demography?

David Coleman¹

Joop Garssen²

Abstract

This article reviews the position of the population of the Netherlands in the context of the demographic characteristics of the other seventeen major Western European countries. It attempts to show the ways in which the population of the Netherlands is part of the European mainstream and where it diverges in various interesting ways. Where possible, a (partial) explanation for this divergence will be given

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1. Demographic variety in Europe and its future

Differences in the average demographic characteristics of countries reflect important contrasts in the way that their inhabitants live. Willekens (1999) comments: 'Demographic events are milestones in the lives of people. Most events that occur between birth and death that have a notable effect upon a person's life are demographic events. [...] They mark transitions between stages or episodes of life and are the basic components of a 'life structure'. Demographic events [...] constitute the skeleton of human life.' European integration and convergence, both socio-economic and political, is one of the major issues of the 21st century. International differences in the aspects that are studied by demographers, reflect and contribute to those patterns of similarity or divergence. Some countries are regarded, or regard themselves, as being somewhat different from other European societies in respect of their demographic and other behaviour. In some cases distinctive behaviour is interpreted as social malaise, for example the high level of teenage birth in Great Britain (Coleman and Chandola, 1999). Other distinctive characteristics, for example the diversity of family forms best developed in some Scandinavian countries, are regarded more as a universal model for the future, with divergent countries simply being at an earlier stage of development (Roussel, 1994).

Underlying much of this discussion is an assumption of future demographic convergence, which is welcomed as an indicator of the minimization of differences between European populations. Empirical evidence, however, does not always support such assumptions (Bosveld, 1996; Kuijsten, 1996). The Netherlands is a very interesting example in this European context. It is one of the more prosperous countries of Europe, usually moderate in its politics and its attitudes, internationally oriented and apparently lacking salient pathological demographic features. Nonetheless in some demographic characteristics it is quite exceptional and has been so for decades. Might the Dutch pattern of 'moderate exceptionalism' be a model for Western Europe's future rather than the 'progressive' patterns of Scandinavia, or is it just a transient inheritance from a more diverse European past? This article, which builds upon some preliminary work published in Dutch (Coleman 2001, tr. Garssen), reviews the position of the population of the Netherlands in comparison with the demographic characteristics of the other seventeen major Western European countries. It attempts to show the ways in which the population of the Netherlands is part of the European mainstream and where it diverges in various interesting ways, and offers some comments on possible future developments.

2. The context of Dutch population trends

To an outsider, the demographic characteristics of the Dutch population reflect the status of the Netherlands in general, that is to say, a country inhabited by people relatively free of exceptional problems, living a comfortable life. The Netherlands enjoys a high standard of living and relatively low levels of inequality. Although recently jolted out of its belief that political violence would be ‘un-Dutch’, it remains on the whole happy with its constitution and at ease with its history, with no territorial disputes with its neighbours. Neither is it threatened by breakaway movements from dissident provinces or minorities. The ancient religious division into Protestant and Catholic, which once defined economic, social and private life to a remarkable degree, has lost much of its force with new attitudes to religion. A secular Samson has brought down the old pillars of Dutch society.

Religious divisions apart, in its lack of enduring ancient ethnic divisions the Netherlands is unique among the larger countries of Europe, showing a degree of homogeneity only seen elsewhere in a few smaller countries, such as Denmark. This tends to make for tranquil demography. Like all other major countries, however, it has acquired post-war immigrant minorities from the third world, with all the problems associated with coping with new cultural and demographic diversity.

3. Demographic indicators

Let us first see how the Netherlands compares with the Western European average with a number of demographic indicators, and how its position has changed in the second half of the twentieth century (Table 1). Wherever possible the comparisons are made with the average of 18 Western European countries (EUR-18; ‘Western’ in the broad Cold War sense, including the Netherlands itself) and also with the averages of the seven countries of Northern Europe, the seven countries of Western Europe proper and the four Southern European countries. ‘Eastern’ Europe is excluded; its populations, like its economies in a state of transition, cannot yet offer meaningful comparisons. As we are interested in the comparison of populations, not of the average European person, the unweighted averages are employed. Comparisons will not usually go beyond 1998, to ensure a full complement of European countries.

Table 1: Selected demographic indicators: Netherlands and European averages 1950 and 1998

	Northern Europe (1)		Western Europe (2)		Southern Europe (3)		EUR-18		Netherlands		Rank (4) (out of)				
	1950	1998	1950	1998	1950	1998	1950	1998	1950	1998	1950	1998			
TFR	2.84	1.78	2.42	1.55	2.64	1.26	2.63	1.57	3.06	1.63	5	18	9	18	
ASFR 15-19	38.4	15.7	19.7	9.6	15.9	11.5	25.6	12.4	12.4	6.2	14	14	17	18	
% births age 30+	39.4	45.2	38.7	42.7	41.4	47.4	39.6	44.8	49.9	53.4	1	13	4	18	
e0 males	68.0	75.1	64.7	74.7	60.8	74.5	64.5	74.8	70.4	75.2	3	15	7	18	
e0 females	71.5	80.4	69.2	81.1	65.4	80.9	68.8	80.8	72.9	80.6	3	15	11	18	
IMR	32.5	4.4	47.1	5.1	65.6	5.7	45.5	4.9	25.2	5.2	16	18	9	18	
% births non-marital	8.9	45.1	6.6	22.4	8.5	11.5	7.8	28.8	1.5	20.8	16	16	10	18	
Age at first marriage		28.5		27.1		26.5		27.5		25.6		27.6		8	18
Age at first birth		27.3		28.0		28.1		27.8		28.7				3	18
Total first marriage rate		0.57		0.55		0.66		0.58		0.58				10	18
Total divorce rate		0.44		0.4		0.15		0.35		0.36				11	17
Potential support ratio	7.15	4.74	6.78	4.44	9.05	4.19	7.43	4.50	8.14	5.08	6	18	3	18	
Population per km ² (5)	56	68	160	225	90	115	104	139	309	462	1	18	1	18	

Sources: Council of Europe; Eurostat; national demographic yearbooks

Note: data on divorce and mean ages at first marriage and first birth not generally available for 1950

(1) Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, United Kingdom and Sweden

(2) Belgium, Germany, France, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland

(3) Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain

(4) Countries are ranked in descending order of the value of the variable, i.e. a low value gives a low rank

(5) Total area, including inland waters

4. Population density

One demographic fact that everyone knows is that the Netherlands is exceptionally crowded, even more so than neighbouring Belgium. Only Malta and San Marino have a larger number of inhabitants per square kilometer. Population density in the Netherlands is more than three times the European average. The disparity between the Netherlands and the European average has been increasing since the end of World War II, as the Dutch population has grown faster than that of the rest of Europe. This fast rate of population increase explains why the Netherlands presently holds first position by a large margin, but had a lower ranking at the beginning of the twentieth century. The population tripled in one century, and the consequent increase in population pressure

was only to a minor extent offset by land reclamation. At the end of the century the land area was 2090 square kilometers larger than at the beginning, an increase of 6.5 percent. During the first seventy years of the century a high birth rate played the largest role in sustaining population growth. Since then, the direct and indirect effects of immigration have become the main determinants.

The differences between the Netherlands and Belgium in this respect are particularly interesting. A century ago, there were seven million Belgians, compared with five million Dutch. In a hundred years, the number of Belgians increased by only three million, whereas the Netherlands added eleven million people. The Belgian birth rates were, at all times, lower than those of the Netherlands, whereas the death rates were usually higher.

The Dutch population density is now about four times that of France, which partly explains the seasonal mass migration of Dutch cars, caravans and tents that is so conspicuous on the roads south in summer. Population pressure, it may be assumed, has inclined Dutch demographic research to be unusually pre-occupied with planning and its demographic aspects in a tightly packed environment. What exquisite politeness and self-control is to Japan, planning is to the Netherlands.

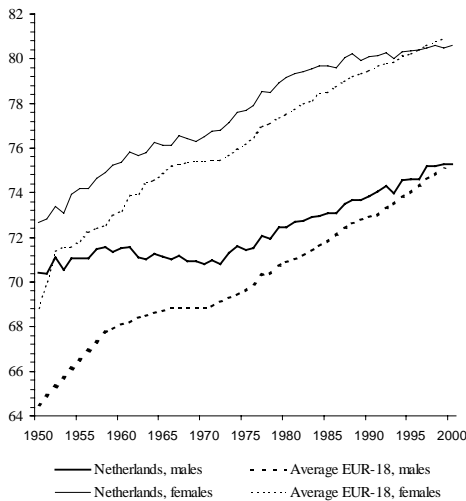
5. Mortality

Life expectancy in 1998, 75.2 for men and 80.6 for women, ranks seventh and eleventh respectively in Europe; just about the average, as is infant mortality at 5.2 infant deaths per thousand births per year. This is hardly an adverse comparison, as the Dutch level approaches that of about 4, which - also in view of recent reversals - may be a minimum where to descend below would involve disproportionate and socially unacceptable investments. The Dutch infant mortality rate is, moreover, pushed slightly upwards by the high average age at childbirth and relatively large share in the population of women of non-western origin (Van der Wilk et al., 2001). As their infants are exposed to an about 30% increased risk of mortality, and as only about a third of this excess mortality can be attributed to their generally disadvantaged economic position (Van Duin, 2002), it would be hardly realistic to expect significant mortality reductions in the short term.

Mortality, however, is one of the few areas where the Netherlands has lost ground compared with other countries. In 1950, the Netherlands stood out third in Europe in expectation of life - six years above the European average (over a standard deviation higher) for both sexes. Infant mortality was one of the lowest anywhere. This pre-eminent position has given way to one of relative statistical mediocrity (Figure 1). The increase in life expectancy from 1960-1996 was, after Denmark, the lowest in Europe.

In 1975, age-specific mortality rates of men aged 45-74 years were even higher than they had been in 1950. Although this position had improved by the end of the century, the Netherlands does not display the impressive and unexpected decline in mortality (in both sexes) among the old and oldest-old, aged 85 years and over, which is characteristic of most other European countries since the 1980s (Van Hoorn and Garssen, 1999).

Figure 1: *Trend in expectation of life at birth, males and females, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1950-2000*



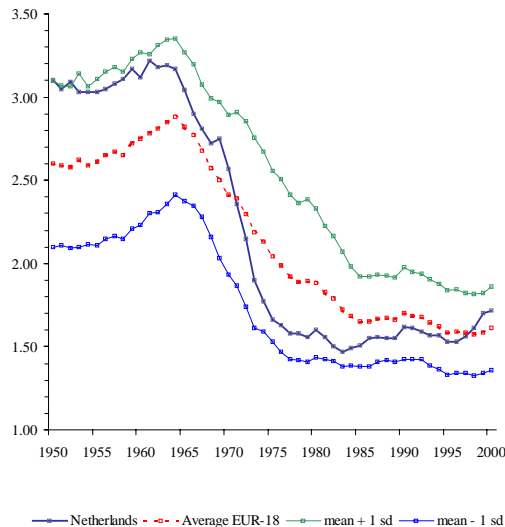
Regional differences in mortality in the Netherlands are modest compared with its Belgian and German neighbours (Van der Veen, 1994). However, the socio-economic differentials in urban mortality in the Netherlands are not, contrary to expectation, much smaller than those observed in the UK and some other Anglo-Saxon populations (Kunst and Mackenbach, 1996). The class difference with respect to health are, furthermore, even more striking than those with respect to mortality: Dutchmen with a high socio-economic status live, on average, twelve years longer in good health than their compatriots with a low status (Van de Water et al., 1996). The NWO Priorities Research Programme (Kunst et al., 1999) has highlighted the effects of religion in retarding decline in infant mortality in the past, including some surprisingly un-Dutch low levels of hygiene, and resistance to breast feeding in some sections of the community. More recently, as elsewhere, smoking habits, even more than diet, have been retarding factors. The gap in expectation of life between the sexes is narrowing,

partly because the later adoption of smoking by women is now making its effects felt. Within the European Union, Danish and Dutch women are the heaviest smokers (Van der Wilk et al., 2001).

6. Fertility

Until the late 1960s, fertility in the Netherlands was conspicuously higher than the European average (3.06 compared with 2.63; the fifth highest in Europe for most of that time and about one standard deviation above the average). For a while, until the end of the 1980s, the pattern was reversed when Dutch fertility fell below the EUR-18 average, although remaining similar to the level in its near neighbours in Western Europe. Today, the Dutch TFR is again somewhat above the EUR-18 average (EUR-18 average 1.61 in 2000; the Netherlands 1.72; Figure 2). As in most of the European countries, there has been no real trend, up or down, for the past quarter of a century. Women who have completed their families, now in their late forties, have had 1.8 children on average.

Figure 2: *Trend of TFR, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1950-2000*



The high post-war fertility in the Netherlands was perhaps surprising in view of the high density of population, the perception, officially recognised, of over-population and, despite official encouragement, the absence of a major recent emigration tradition. Such a tradition sustained the high Irish birth rate up to the middle of the twentieth century, although in very different circumstances. The relatively high post-war fertility in the Netherlands is usually accounted for as a symptom of the competition, demographic and otherwise, which then existed in the 'pillarised' Dutch society between the Catholic and various Protestant denominations (Bagley, 1973; Engelen and Hillebrand, 1986). This does not explain, however, why fertility levels in the Catholic enclaves in the northern part of the Netherlands were rather similar to those in their Protestant surroundings (Hofstee, 1981).

The rapid descent from high fertility after the 1960s was a symptom of a radical restructuring of Dutch society at that time. In a re-appraisal of their relationship with the Divinity, and in particular His injunctions on fruitfulness, multiplication and marriage within the faith, the pillars which had formerly held up the separateness of Dutch society and possibly encouraged demographic competition between segregated communities, crumbled rapidly away to stumps of their former selves. At the same time as the birth rate declined, marriages between Protestants and Catholics, formerly rare, became frequent (Van Heer, 1966; De Hoog, 1979), in parallel with similar changes elsewhere in Europe (Coleman, 1992).

These ancient indigenous cultural differences have not vanished, but they no longer dominate the Dutch demographic scene as they used to. The Netherlands is now a relatively homogeneous society compared with others in Western Europe in respect of social and geographical variation in economic and demographic characteristics. Religion apart, it is happily devoid of the ancient ethnic divisions which are assuming greater political significance elsewhere, in for example Belgium, Spain, Italy, the UK and even France. The new ethnic divisions arising from immigration are, of course, something else.

One aspect of this homogeneity is illustrated by variation in the TFR between provinces, as expressed by the coefficient of variation between provinces in each country. In this respect, at least, it shows the Netherlands to be in the middle of the range of European provincial variability in fertility, more varied than the UK and Sweden, at about the same level as France and Germany, but much less varied than Spain (Table 2). The main contributors to this variety are the persistent modest differences in fertility between the predominantly rural and predominantly urban provinces, as well as the exceptional position of Flevoland. This young province, consisting of reclaimed land, has a particularly high fertility rate. It is particularly attractive to those who wish to start a family and who are looking for an affordable home and garden in a neighbourhood that is safe for children. In general, however, the

restricted size and geographical variety of the Netherlands compared with other European countries means that it has no really remote or inaccessible rural areas where unusual demographic characteristics could persist.

Table 2: *Standard deviations in TFR at provincial level, selected countries, most recent years*

Country (1)	Year	Population (thousand)	Number of provinces (2)	Average population per province	Unweighted average TFR	S.D. TFR per province
Sweden	1998	8847.6	8	1105.95	1.49	0.030
UK (3)	1998	52271.4	33	1583.98	1.70	0.073
Austria	1998	8057.4	9	895.27	1.33	0.115
Belgium	1995	10130.6	11	920.96	1.55	0.118
France	1997	58493.1	22	2658.78	1.70	0.119
Netherlands	1998	15654.2	12	1304.52	1.61	0.137
Portugal	1998	9957.3	7	1422.47	1.46	0.154
Italy	1996	57366.8	20	2868.34	1.17	0.156
Finland	1998	5147.3	6	857.88	1.68	0.158
Greece	1998	10511	13	808.54	1.29	0.165
Spain	1998	39347.9	18	2185.99	1.17	0.247

(1) Ranked in ascending order of standard deviation per country

(2) NUTS-2 level, including NUTS-1 areas where not subdivided into NUTS-2 areas

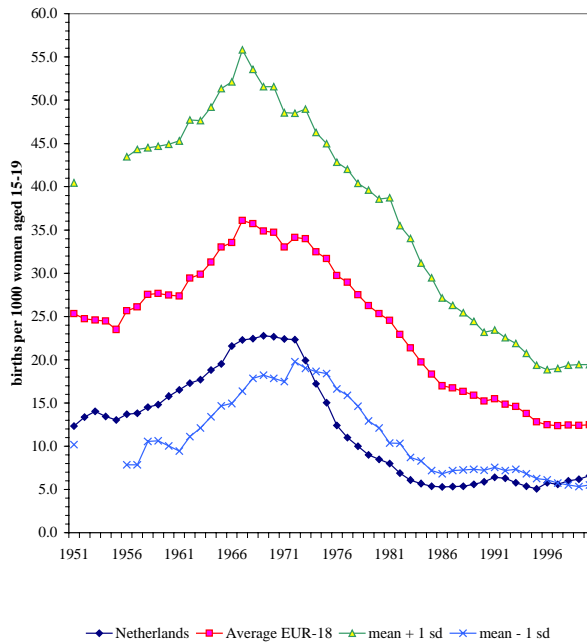
(3) England and Wales only, excluding Scotland and Northern Ireland

In the Netherlands fertility continues little affected by its marital or non-marital context. Marital fertility in the Netherlands actually remains rather high by European standards. The marital share in the TFR stands at about 1.3, higher than the overall fertility in Southern Europe. As the NWO report comments, ‘welfare benefits allow family formation even if the individual economic future looks grim’ (Van Wissen and Dykstra, 1999). Fertility outside marriage remains relatively low, in spite of a doubling of the rate since the mid-1990s. Only a quarter of all births were illegitimate in 2000, a share that is well below the European average. As most of this non-marital fertility concerns desired children of cohabiting parents, the recent increase is not reflected in a similar increase in the number of one-parent families. At present, one in nine children in the Netherlands is living with only one parent (Garssen and Sprangers, 2001).

6.1 Teenage fertility and conception

The Netherlands population is not much burdened with the problems of unwanted fertility which afflict other countries. In particular it has one of the lowest rates of teenage fertility in the world. Teenage childbearing in the Netherlands (about 6 per thousand teenagers per year) is half the average for the 18 European countries (itself low) and considerably below the levels of its neighbours in Western Europe. The only country with a similarly low rate is Switzerland, a country that shares a number of prudential characteristics with the Netherlands. Not surprisingly in the land of perfect family planning, abortion levels are low as well (about 110 abortions per thousand live births per year), again about half the European average. Only Belgium and the Republic of Ireland are lower, although not by much, at least as far as official statistics are concerned (abortion remains illegal in the Republic of Ireland but many Irish women obtain abortions in England).

Figure 3: *Trend in age-specific fertility rates, ages 15-19, the Netherlands and EUR-18 average, 1950-2000*



This restraint from teenage childbearing is a long-standing Dutch characteristic, maintained consistently for the last half century. In 1950 the fertility rate for girls aged 15-19 (12.4/1000) was already the lowest of the countries compared, and almost one standard deviation below the European average. Since 1970 it has been consistently over one standard deviation below the average (Figure 3). In the last few years, however, this exceptional Dutch position has been eroded by a small upward trend in teenage fertility. This is primarily due to the growing contribution by teenagers of non-western origin, making up a seventh of all teenagers but contributing almost half of all teenage births. The number of Antillean teenage mothers per thousand girls of the same age, for example, is more than ten times as high as that among native Dutch teenagers.

A further consequence of very low teenage fertility and a generally very controlled pattern of fertility at all ages is the symmetrical and smooth distribution of age-specific fertility rates at single years of age. Some European populations display distortions, apparently excess fertility at younger ages. Notable examples are the UK and the Republic of Ireland. By contrast, the Netherlands has a more symmetrical distribution, which might be regarded as an ideal or typical advanced European pattern (Figure 4). Populations with distorted fertility profiles can be modelled as if they comprised two separate populations with different age-schedules of fertility, for example by the Hadwiger mixture model. The parameter c of the Hadwiger mixture model (which determines the relative size of the two sub-populations) has been shown, in the populations concerned, to correspond approximately to the proportions of births inside and outside marriage. Because the age-structure of fertility of births outside marriage in the Netherlands is not much different from that of legitimate births (Figure 5), no such complex modelling is needed in the Dutch case in the 1990s (Chandola, Coleman and Hiorns, 1999), although such a bulge was apparent in the 1970s.

6.2 Late childbearing

Dutch (first-time) mothers are amongst the oldest in the world (mean age at first birth 28.7 in 1998), together with mothers in Greece and Spain (both 28.9). Mothers in France and Italy are close behind. Because second births are still common, mean age at motherhood in general is over 30 (30.2 in 1998), only slightly below the mean ages in Ireland (where TFR is higher) and Spain. Like many transitions in this account, this peculiarity first became evident in the 1970s. Before that time, as we have seen, the Netherlands was more distinguished, if anything, for its higher fertility at all ages. By the end of the 1980s, mean age at first birth was already 1.5 years (one standard deviation) higher than the European average. It has remained in this relative position ever since (Figure 6). The proportion of all births occurring to older mothers (aged 30

Figure 4: ASFR, single years of age, the Netherlands and other countries, 1999

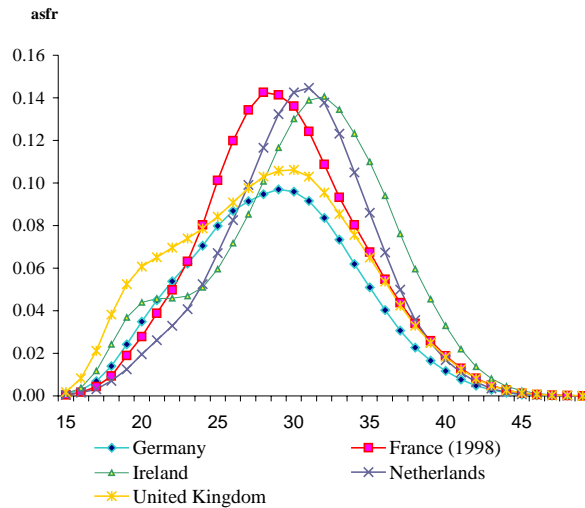
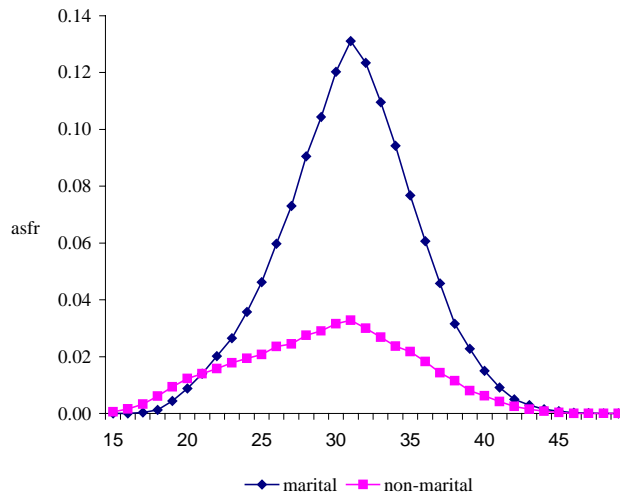


Figure 5: ASFR of marital and non-marital births, the Netherlands 2000.



years or over) has continued to increase further, as overall Dutch fertility has not fallen to the same extent as elsewhere. Even in 1950 the Netherlands was first in Europe (data for 13 countries only), with 49.9% of births to older mothers. In the early 1990s the Netherlands became the first low-fertility post-war population where over half of all births were to older mothers. Its proportion is now 54%, about two standard deviations over the EUR-18 average (Figure 7), although it no longer ranks first in Europe: Spain, Italy and Ireland presently show proportions that are about two percentage points higher.

This late beginning of childbearing is only about a few years below that age - from the late thirties - when concerns begin about rising risks of secondary or primary sterility (Beets, 1996). Such late motherhood may risk moving childbearing beyond its optimum mean age from the viewpoint of the health of the child if not yet that of the mother (Macfarlane and Mugford, 2000; Gustafsson, 2001). The 'optimum' age is that at which mothers are likely to be most mature in a social and emotional sense, while obstetric risks and the chance of infant mortality and birth defects are still relatively low. With mortality so low, adverse effects on the mother's health are perhaps not a realistic concern. But the issue of age-related infecundity may be, and is attracting increasing attention from demographers. Up to a point, the timing of births and the eventual number of births are independent, in the sense that it is possible to start late (but not too late) and have a large family by modern standards, and vice-versa. In the Netherlands second and even third and higher parity births are still relatively common, unlike (e.g.) in Italy where third and higher parity births are less common and where variance in family size is accordingly less.

As childbearing is delayed, we expect the conventional period measure of fertility, the TFR, to become temporarily depressed. In fact this effect is quite short-lived. In the Netherlands, as in most other countries, there has been no halt to the continued advance of first age at birth, although the decline in the TFR ended some years ago. For the past thirty years first births have comprised about 44% of all births (46% in 2000). Continuing delay of first birth now has no effect on the TFR, which is sustained by rising birth rates among women in their thirties, especially second births (steady for the past thirty years at about 35% of all births). Even fourth births have not declined since the mid-1970s, although that might be a consequence in part of immigration. Births to women aged 35-39, supposedly in terminal decline in the 1970s (20.3 per thousand in 1980) have almost tripled to 57.0 in 2000, more than 50% higher than the rate for women aged 20-24.

It is generally expected that the birth rate in most European countries will recover somewhat, as births postponed when women are in their twenties finally arrive when those women are in their thirties. Various attempts have been made to estimate the degree of this future recuperation of the birth rate by inspection of the family building

Figure 6: *Mean age of mothers at first birth, 1950-1999, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1970-1999.*

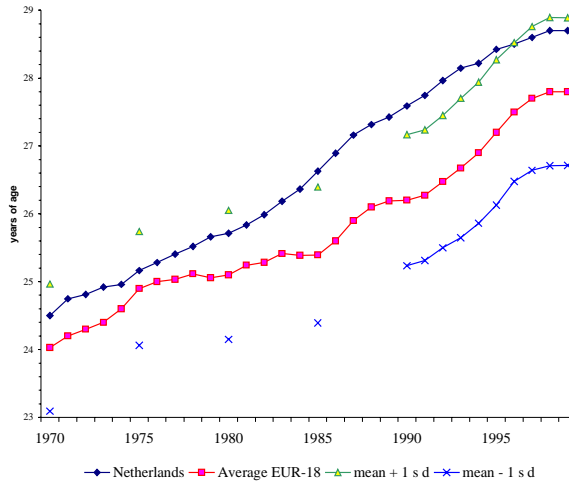
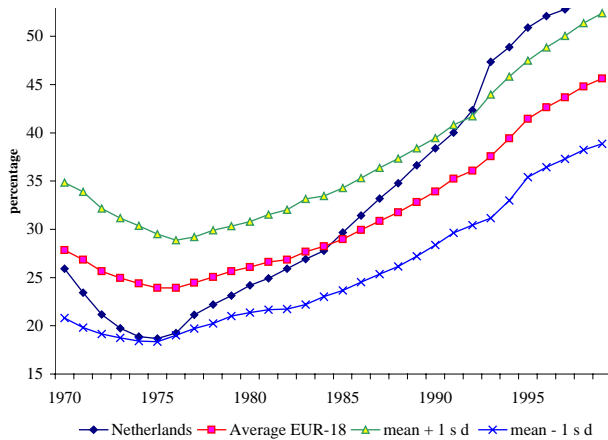


Figure 7: *Percentage of births to mothers aged 30 and over, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1970-1999.*



patterns of younger cohorts of women and the proportions of women having second or third births. The population of the Netherlands has postponed its births more than any other European country but has also had the strongest ‘catching up’ or recuperation of births to mothers over age 30. According to one analysis, the cohorts born in the 1960s may well have on average 1.85 children (quite high for Europe) and maybe even more if the process of postponement is slowing down (Lesthaeghe, 2001). This is slightly higher than official projections. Other measures using data on birth order, however, give lower estimates for the Netherlands (Kohler and Ortega, 2001).

6.3 Childlessness and one-child families

Until recently, childlessness has attracted little attention from researchers in the Netherlands. Childless women form a minority, albeit a minority that is rapidly increasing. Even so, the percentage of childless women is still considerably smaller than that at the beginning of the twentieth century, a pattern that is common throughout Europe. Of all Dutch women born at that time, over a quarter remained childless, a proportion that fell to about one in ten by the middle of the century. At present, the proportion is about one in six, among the highest observed in Europe. This proportion is much higher than those recorded in Belgium and France (both about one in ten), but lower than that in Germany (more than one in five).

In view of the fact that the present share of childless women is considerably above the estimated five percent of all couples who are physically incapable of having children (i.e. are infecund), it is not surprising that the recent increase in childlessness is generally ascribed to conscious choice, having to do with the larger degree of freedom among women to fulfil other roles than those related to family and household.

While it may be correct to attribute most of this childlessness to social rather than to biological factors, it may not be appropriate to attribute all of it to positive conscious decisions. Unavoidable, and to the women concerned undesirable, conflicts of interest appear to lie behind childlessness in many couples. The most recent Dutch Family and Fertility Survey shows that about half of the older cohorts of women state that their childlessness has not been ‘voluntary’ in any positive sense of actively wishing to prefer being ‘childfree’. Instead, the expected heavy burden of combining work and the care of children, the requirements of time and energy, or a partner who is not prepared to share in the responsibilities, are all important factors in explaining their childlessness (Keij and De Graaf, 2001). This survey shows that in the Netherlands, as in other European countries, the average woman would prefer to have at least two children (United Nations/UNECE, 1996-1999). Achieved fertility and childlessness is necessarily the

result of an interaction between desires and the actual conditions perceived by couples, amplified by an element of unwanted fertility and diminished by infecundity.

A relatively strong correlation between fertility and marriage can still be observed in the Netherlands: a majority of couples prefers to marry once a child is planned or under way. Consequently, fewer than one in ten women who have been married for fifteen years are still without children. The share of non-marital births in total fertility (25% in 2000) is somewhat below the average for the EUR-18, a fact that would appear to be in contradiction with the supposedly very liberal attitudes of the Dutch population. On closer consideration, however, this phenomenon fits into a more general pattern observed in the Netherlands. Tolerance of unconventional or at least different behaviour has virtually become part of the social etiquette, a behaviour that is acceptable for other people but not necessarily something to share. In matters pertaining to the family, most Dutchmen clearly prefer to display a more traditional behaviour themselves. However the situation is changing: the proportion of births outside marriage has more than doubled since 1990, when it was 11%.

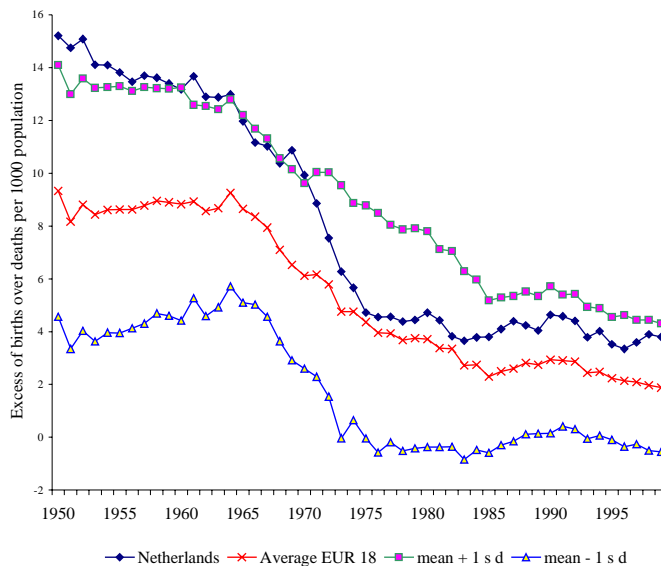
In a manner similar to that observed in other European countries, Dutch women increasingly try to combine both modern and traditional roles. In doing so, children are postponed to such an extent that a growing number of women no longer bear the number of children that they would like to have. Like childlessness, the one-child family has in only one in three cases been a conscious choice of the parents (Keij and De Graaf, 2001). More often, problems in becoming pregnant due to reduced fecundity as well as divorce have limited the number of children. As Cuyvers (2001) states, fertility is presently not only below replacement level, but also below the level that is desired at the individual level. Looking at the national level, the postponement of children and increasing divorce rates have had a considerable downward effect on the number of births. Latten and Kreijen (2001) estimate the number of children who were, during the past fifty years, *not* born due to postponement and divorce in the Netherlands at 750 thousand.

7. Natural growth and age-structure

The high Dutch birth rate earlier in the twentieth century has bequeathed to the Netherlands a more youthful age-structure than some of its neighbours'. Population growth and natural increase have been higher than average, with population trebling over the century, and households multiplying sixfold. More 'average' European countries, such as Germany and the UK, increased by only about 70%. The increase was scarcely 50% in neighbouring Belgium, which has been demographically eclipsed. Rather unusually, of course, land area increased by 6.5% over the period as well. The

excess of births over deaths generated 1.5% population growth in 1950, nearly double the European average and more than one standard deviation away from the mean. Like everything else, that changed at the end of the 1960s. But partly thanks to the youthful age-structure which the earlier fertility has generated, the rate of natural increase (4.2 per thousand in 2000) remains well above the European average (about 1 per thousand; Figure 8), even though the TFR is only just above the EUR-18 average. The strong effect of this positive natural increase on population growth is enhanced by net immigration of almost the same magnitude. Policy and opinion was set against further population growth, and recent policy developments attempt to limit further immigration and encourage return. Nonetheless, net immigration has strongly increased in recent years, from 14 thousand in 1995 to 54 thousand in 2000

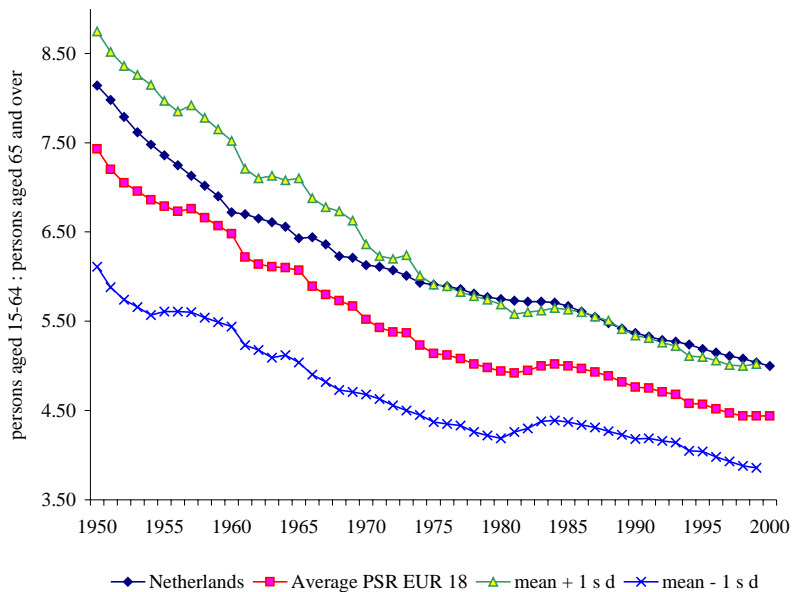
Figure 8: Rates of natural increase 1950-1999, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1950-2000



Consequently, in the past half-century the Dutch population, with its more youthful age-structure, has had a lower old-age dependency burden than its European neighbours. In 1950 the Dutch potential support ratio - the number of persons aged 15-64 to those aged 65 or above - was 8.1, more similar to the ratios in Southern Europe (which then had higher fertility than the rest of Europe) than to those in Western and Northern

Europe (Table 1). This relatively favourable position has been maintained since then, with the Netherlands consistently enjoying a dependency burden one standard deviation lighter than that of the rest of Europe (Figure 9). At present only Ireland (6.0 in 2000) and Iceland (5.6) have more favourable support ratios than the Netherlands (5.1). Over fifty years, the Dutch burden has increased by ‘only’ 63%, whereas the average for Southern Europe more than doubled.

Figure 9: Potential Support Ratio, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1950-2000



This means that in the short to medium turn, the Netherlands can face the issue of population ageing with more equanimity than some of its neighbours. In the longer run the relatively low TFR, if unchanged, will generate an age-structure that compares slightly less well than formerly with the rest of Europe. The share in the total population of those aged 65 or above is projected to increase from today’s very favourable 13.4% to 24.4% in 2050, from rank 14 (out of 17) in 2000 to rank 11 in 2050 (De Beer and De Jong, 1996). Comparisons of the future predicted old-age dependency burden, however, come to more pessimistic conclusions, although made at a time when immigration was substantially underestimated (Gonnot, Prinz and Keilman, 1995). Dutch researchers speak of a ‘sandwich’ generation, in which daughters aged 40-65 increasingly run the

risk of being squashed by a duty of care for children under 20 plus one or more parents 75 or over. One in five persons aged 40–64 was (potentially) in this position in 1990. One in three will be in 2040, then fewer. Thus all bad things come to an end, although that will be little consolation to many.

A TFR of 1.72 with constant mortality implies a stable population declining at a rate of nearly 0.7% per year, with about 15% of the population in the childhood ages, 25% aged 65 or above and about 2.4 nominal workers per old age dependent, corresponding to 1.7 or fewer actual workers per pensioner. In fact, without an increase in fertility the future will be more difficult than that, because no end is in sight to the gains in survival which make the population ever-older and prevent it achieving a stable state. Population projections made at about the same time differ somewhat in outlook. The United Nations 2000-based medium variant projection assumed a rise in fertility to 1.81 by 2045–2050, expectation of life at birth rising to 79.6 and 84.9 respectively for males and females and a constant annual net migration of 30 thousand (The 1996-based UN projection assumed an increase of TFR to 2.1 and a reduction in net migration to zero). The assumptions of the UN 2000-based projections generate a population size in 2050 of 16 million, as today, with 26.5% aged 65 or above - about double the current proportion (UN 2001). In this UN projection the Dutch population is expected to peak at 16.6 million in 2030. The most recent projection prepared by Statistics Netherlands (Steenhof and De Jong, 2001), however, assumes the TFR to stabilise around 1.75 and net immigration to converge to 30 thousand per year. This forecasts 18 million by 2035 and about the same size by 2050. The largest share of persons aged 65 or above in the total population (23%) will be reached by 2040. The relative position of the Netherlands within Europe is not much affected either way.

8. Marriage and divorce

In the divergent family patterns of modern Europe (Kuijsten, 1996) the Netherlands occupies a middle position. Marriage without cohabitation is becoming rare, cohabitation without subsequent marriage is becoming common. In its broad statistical outlines, there seems to be nothing unusual about marriage in the Netherlands. Mean age at first marriage is highly *communautaire*, being very close to the European average. In mean age it is exceeded by Denmark, Sweden and Norway, where marriage is becoming a minority status. Dutch statistical conformism has been evident at least since the 1960s - earlier data are not sufficiently complete for comparison - except for a short period of relatively early marriage, from about 1970 to about 1985 (Figure 10). The intensity of marriage, as measured by the total first marriage rate for females (0.60 in 1999), was just above the average for Western Europe (0.57) and Northern Europe

(0.58) in that year, but well below the average for Southern Europe (0.69). This estimate of proportions marrying has followed the post-war European trend to a slightly exaggerated degree, higher than average (about 1.1) up to about 1970, sharply declining in the 1970s and reaching about today's level as early as 1980 (Figure 11).

Divorce, as measured by the total divorce rate, is at 0.36 about the same as the European average of 0.35. However, as the European average is strongly deflated by very low rates in Southern Europe (average 0.15), the Netherlands only rank eleventh in this respect. Like the total first marriage rate, the total divorce rate shows signs of stabilising in the past decade, along with a number of other countries of Northern and Western Europe. These total period rates, which indicate the current intensity of the process by showing the implication of current rates for lifetime accumulation, do remove the influence of age-structure but nonetheless conflate the experiences of several different cohorts, who are imagined to live through one lifetime. However, such is the diversity of family arrangements in the modern Netherlands that the annual number of divorces in the 1990s (about 30 thousand) is already exceeded by the annual number of broken cohabiting partnerships (about 40 thousand). The latter are, of course, well known to be much more prone to break up: at least twice as much.

Figure 10: Mean age at first marriage, females, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1960-2000

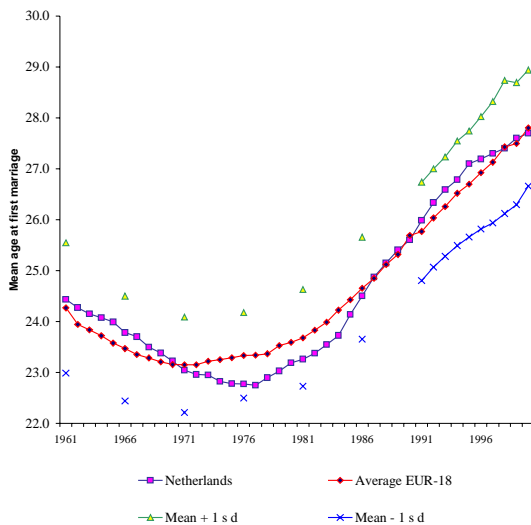
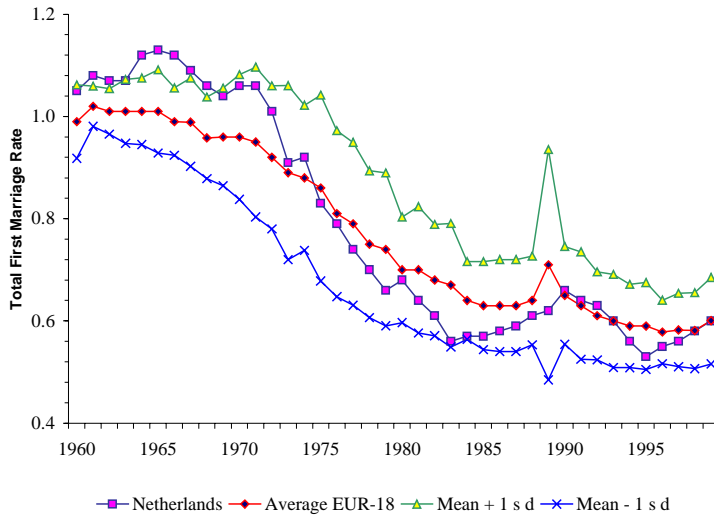


Figure 11: *Total first marriage rates females, the Netherlands and EUR-18, 1960-1999*



9. Cohabitation, family and household

In the Netherlands, as in much of the rest of Western Europe, no single sequence of family household formation is yet emerging, thus creating the biggest diversity of personal experience for centuries. Marriage that is not preceded by cohabitation has become exceptional, largely limited to persons with a foreign or orthodox religious background. The diversity in personal experience is furthermore increased by the growing custom to live alone for some time before entering into a partnership: more than half of those who leave the parental home first set up a single person household. Cohabitation and marriage are increasingly postponed, although this does not result in a higher percentage of persons who are permanently single. As in most other Western and Northern European countries, this process has had a major impact on the number of small households. One in five households in the Netherlands presently consist of only one person, a much larger share than in any Southern European country. The size of the average Dutch household is now 2.3 persons, similar to that in neighbouring countries but much smaller than in Ireland, Portugal or Spain, where the average household size still exceeds three persons. The three-generation household, which is still fairly common

in these countries, is very exceptional in the Netherlands. This strengthens the impression that, despite living in a crowded country, the Dutch seem to be disinclined to economise on space by living with their relatives, or indeed with anyone else. In one of the most crowded areas of the Netherlands, the city of Amsterdam, average household size has even fallen below two persons.

Rather surprising in view of the liberal values that are supposedly held by the Dutch, are the conformist, if not bourgeois practices with respect to sexual relations and family formation. During the past thirty years, an almost constant 70% of all cohabitants have eventually married. For most people, therefore, cohabitation resembles a trial marriage, rather than an alternative living arrangement. The moment of turning cohabitation into marriage is often determined by children. Once a child is planned or on the way, the large majority of cohabitants arrange a wedding. Other aspects of personal life also seem fairly 'bourgeois'; for example the fact that the 'average' woman has only one serious relationship in her life, and that she has her children with the first partner. Only about 15 to 20 percent of all women have eventually had more than one serious relationship (Alders and De Graaf, 2001).

10. Immigration and ethnic minorities

Along with other countries in Western Europe, the Netherlands is a traditional emigration country that has become de facto a somewhat reluctant immigration country. Emigration was encouraged and subsidised by the Netherlands government from the 1950s (as in the UK) up to 1992, in response to the belief that population growth was problematic and a smaller population would be desirable. In net terms, however, since the mid-nineteenth century emigration was never substantial compared with other countries of Northern and Western Europe. Hence, in part, the rapid population growth of the Netherlands.

10.1 The pattern of immigration

Immigration from outside Europe was a novelty to the Netherlands in the early post-war period, following a pattern familiar in outline in other countries. Initially dominated by colonial connections, it began in the early 1950s with Moluccans (originally 12.5 thousand) and Eurasians (between 200 and 300 thousand) from Indonesia. These were followed, relatively late, in the 1970s by migration from the former colony of Surinam, until special entry rights were ended in 1980, and from the Netherlands Antilles, the only remaining overseas territories of the Netherlands. In addition, the Netherlands

recruited guest workers during the economic growth of the 1960s, first from Southern Europe and then from Turkey and Morocco (for a review of the development of migration to The Netherlands, see Lucassen and Penninx, 1997). ‘The Netherlands never deliberately attracted permanent migrants [...] but contrary to past policy objectives, immigration to the Netherlands acquired a more permanent nature’, complained the Netherlands Government in its report to the Cairo conference (1994, p.18) - a common European experience, in Germany and elsewhere.

As in other countries, migration is now strongly positive, dominated by the continued migration of dependants and increasingly by spouse migration for the growing younger generation. In the mid-1990s net immigration was about 7 per thousand population, around the middle of the European range; less than Germany, Austria and Denmark per capita, more than Belgium, Sweden and the UK. However, in the early 1990s overall immigration, especially from Turkey and Morocco, significantly declined (Muus, 1995), but more recently it has increased again. In most of the past twenty years, the Netherlands has absorbed between 8% and 13% of Europe’s legal migrants, corresponding to a net gain of about 840 thousand foreign population.

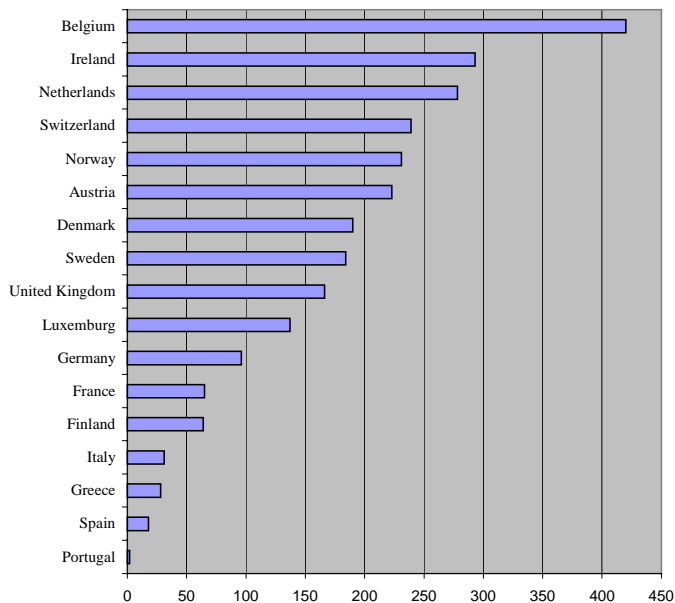
The present European pattern of net migration is highly divergent, with marked declines in some (especially Germany, thanks to the return of displaced persons to the Balkans) and sharp increases in others (e.g. the UK). The official Dutch view, that immigration makes an unhelpfully large contribution to the rate of population growth, is unusually blunt. As a result of migration, the expected decline in population growth arising from low fertility, otherwise due earlier this century, is unlikely to take place before 2030. The Netherlands is no stranger to explicit repatriation policies either, the most recent legislation to encourage return being enacted in 1999.

Other governments (e.g. the UK) have toyed vaguely with supposed ‘demographic needs’ as a pretext for further immigration. The Dutch government, better informed demographically, realises that immigration cannot be used as an instrument to combat the current trend of population ageing and has explicitly stated that it is not considering a policy of selected admission based on the ‘demographic interests’ of the Netherlands (Netherlands Government, 1994, pp.10-11,18-19). Dutch demographers have been prominent in showing the inability of immigration to make much impact on trends in population ageing (Kuijsten, 1995) and associated social security problems (Van Imhoff and Keilman, 1996).

As in many countries, the more traditional forms of immigration have been greatly supplemented by an inflow of asylum seekers. The cumulative total of claims in the Netherlands alone are close to 500 thousand since 1980, rising from a small proportion to about 10% of all claims made in Western Europe. In 2001, the Netherlands were, within Europe, in fourth position with respect to the number of claims, after the UK, Germany and France, and in third position in relative terms (Figure 12). Policy has been

active in attempting to limit the inflow of asylum seekers, speed up the admission procedure, pre-screen manifestly ill-founded applications and remove rejected persons quickly. Detention camps and limited benefits were credited with a sharp reduction in asylum claims in 1995 and 1996 but, as elsewhere in Europe, numbers have since risen again. The effect on immigration is considerable, but the actual numbers of immigrants are hard to determine. About four out of every ten asylum seekers are admitted. These four official immigrants generate a further two immigrants, through family formation and reunion (Nicolaas and Sprangers, 2002). Apart from these legal immigrants, a considerable number of persons stay illegally in the country, in some cases following the rejection of their asylum claims. Hence, while comparison of trends in international migration is very difficult, it is clear that net immigration to the Netherlands is substantial by European standards, despite the apparently firm policy to limit it (as in the UK up to 1997; Coleman, 1997). Judging how it has responded to policy measures to control it, compared with other countries, would need a special study.

Figure 12: Number of asylum applications per 100 thousand inhabitants, 2000



10.2 The foreign population and immigrant policy

As a consequence, the population of foreign origin in the Netherlands is now very large. In 2001 the foreign population (both first and second generation) numbered almost 3 million, or 18%. About half of them are of non-western origin. This non-western component is forecast to grow to 2.3 million by 2015, or 13.5% of the total population, by then accounting for all population growth (Alders, 2001). The population of foreign nationality in 2000, however, was just 652 thousand or 4.1% of the population, less than half that in neighbouring Belgium (8.3%) and Germany (8.9%). According to these figures, a decade of net immigration from 1990, which added 580 thousand foreign citizens to the Dutch population, has increased the foreign population total by just 10 thousand. This statistical absurdity follows from the energetic naturalisation policy, which reduces the foreign population statistically (without reducing the number of persons of foreign origin) as fast as international migration increases it. By this process the foreign presence is understated in many countries. France is another example, but until recently Germany, Austria and Switzerland much less so. In reality, the Dutch proportion of population of foreign origin is much closer to that in Germany, where naturalisation has had more demanding criteria.

The Dutch government's integration policy for permanent immigrants is unusual in that it has been made explicitly multicultural, recognising 'ethnic minorities' with 'group rights'. Here it has gone further than the UK, which has adopted multiculturalism by stealth. However, in the past decade this Dutch policy appears to have slowly eroded, following a hardening of public opinion against measures regarded as excess privileges enjoyed by minorities (Dieleman, 1993), even though demographic data are used for ethnic monitoring (Van Wersch, 1994). Dual nationality law has been revised twice.

Despite all that, however, measures of integration remains very uneven in the various population groups. Towards the end of the 1990s, some of the highest rates of foreign unemployment in Europe were found among minorities in the Netherlands (Turks 18% and Moroccans 15%, against 2% in the native population). Integration as measured by marriages with native Dutch are also highly varied. The large majority of Turks and Moroccans, including the second generation, choose a partner of the same ethnic background. Mixed marriages among Antilleans and Surinamese, on the other hand, are much more common. These mixed marriages are, furthermore, much more likely to end in divorce than marriages between persons of the same background: three out of four marriages between a Turkish or Moroccan man and a native Dutch woman, for example, end in divorce within a period of ten years (Harmsen, 1999). Likewise the trends in convergence of TFR of immigrant populations is mixed, that of Surinamese having converged with the Dutch average, that of Turks and Moroccans remaining much higher, while that of Italians and Spaniards in the Netherlands has fallen below the

national average. Comparisons are obviously difficult, but in these respects the Netherlands shared some experiences with the UK, one of the few other European countries to have immigrant minorities from the West Indies (Coleman, 1994b). There, West Indian populations have very high rates of inter-ethnic unions with natives and moderate birth rates, while Muslim populations retain high birth rates and low levels of inter-ethnic union. The latter is a widespread phenomenon throughout Europe (Coleman, 1994a).

11. Conclusions

The Netherlands at the beginning of the 21st century presents an interesting demographic picture of a modern European society. Can we regard it as a paradigmatic case of the European experience, as a model to which other populations will converge? In many respects, on the world scale, its demographic characteristics place it firmly in the European mainstream, with fairly average overall levels of mortality and fertility, and an immigration situation not startlingly different from that of other Northern and Western European countries. However, we have noted above a number of points where the Netherlands does depart from the European norm. The Dutch tend to have low out-of-wedlock fertility, associated with late first birth, but without giving the very low completed fertility found in some other countries where most births are confined to marriage. While generally tolerant of the 'modern' behaviour of other peoples, they prefer a more traditional style themselves in the sense that they cohabit without having many of their children in such unions. Good contraceptive use is a necessary condition for this state of affairs. In these respects the Dutch differ from the pathological situation in the UK of poor contraceptive use and high teenage fertility, and also from the contrasting fertility patterns of Scandinavia and of Southern Europe with their very different welfare systems and assumptions about the role of the family.

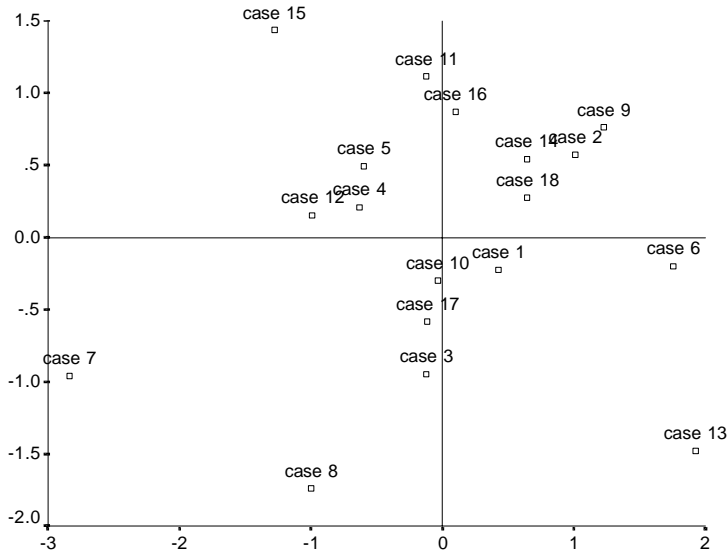
Is it possible to say which predominate; the similarities or the differences? A more multidimensional view does show that the Netherlands does stand out from the flock to some extent. The overall similarity or difference of the Netherlands compared with other European countries can be assessed by taking into account information from several demographic variables at once. There are several ways of doing this. One of them, multidimensional scaling (MDS), can provide a visual representation of the pattern of (dis)similarities between several countries (or other entities) using several variables together (Kruskal and Wish, 1978). The input is a square symmetrical matrix of statistical dissimilarities computed from demographic data. The variables used here include population density, total fertility rate, age-specific fertility rate aged 15-19, percent of births over age 30, proportion of births outside marriage, rate of natural

increase, total first marriage rate, female age at first marriage, crude divorce rate, expectation of life at birth (both sexes), infant mortality rate and aged and youth dependency ratios.

The graphical output (Figures 13a, 13b) shows the Euclidean distances in two dimensions between the countries chosen. Through an iterative process this two-dimensional representation is made to correspond as closely as possible to the statistical information on the dissimilarities between each pair of countries. The axes against which the countries are plotted have no intrinsic meaning and the orientation is arbitrary. It is the clustering, or conversely isolation, that matters. Near-neighbours in the diagram are statistically similar, those further apart less so. The closeness of fit between the graphical representation and the matrix of similarities is known as 'stress'. It may not be possible to represent the pattern of dissimilarities in just two dimensions, of course, at an acceptable level of 'stress'. But in these examples the fit between the distances on the two-dimensional diagram and the computed statistical distances, measured as the 'stress' level, although not perfect, permits a two-dimensional solution. The value of 'stress' is 0.16 both in 1950 and in 1995, corresponding to r^2 values of 0.88 and 0.89 respectively. That is considered to indicate an adequate fit (0.0 would be perfect, up to 0.2 is regarded as 'acceptable'; the criterion is somewhat arbitrary). This common set of demographic variables on fertility, mortality and population structure consistently shows that the Netherlands is somewhat distinct from the broad mass of European countries (Figures 13a, 13b). This restricted set of variables shows that the demographic characteristics of the Netherlands place it away from the centre and closer to Switzerland rather than to its geographical neighbours Belgium or Germany, both in 1950 and in 1995. Other European countries occupy positions considerably more remote, it must be noted. For the most part these are the 'usual suspects' in any study of European demographic deviancy such as Iceland and the Irish Republic, on the edge of Europe's demography as on the edge of its geography. Their statistically peripheral position is familiar, even though its explanation can be taxing.

Some Dutch idiosyncrasies, inherited from the past, can hardly be shared with other European countries. These include, for example, the relatively favourable age-structure and relatively high natural increase, the distinctiveness of which will fade as time goes on. Where the Netherlands may point the way for the rest of Europe is in the age-pattern of fertility and the exceptional degree of its control. The very low level of teenage births would be greatly welcomed in other European countries. All Western populations appear to be acquiring a very late pattern of overall fertility. It cannot be imagined that much further delay in births can be achieved if any substantial proportion of women are to fulfil their declared ambition of having two children, so the

Figure 13a: *Multidimensional Scaling Configurations of the Netherlands' demographic place in Europe, 1995*



Derived Stimulus configuration. Euclidean Distance Model.

Stress 0.16 R2 0.89

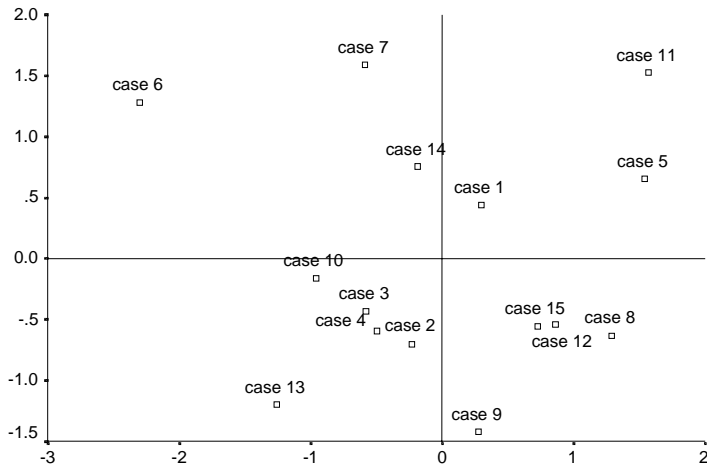
Labels 1 AUT, 2 BEL, 3 DEN, 4 FIN, 5 FRA, 6 GRE, 7 ICE, 8 IRE, 9 ITA, 10 LUX, 11 NL, 12 NOR, 13 POR, 14 SPA, 15 SWE, 16 SWI, 17 UK, 18 FRG.

Variables exclude mean age at first birth (not available for Belgium and Luxemburg)

Netherlands may be close to the *ne plus ultra*, at which point some further recovery of period fertility rates may be expected.

It seems surprising that the second demographic transition, although more or less invented in the Low Countries by Van de Kaa (e.g. 1994) and Lesthaeghe (e.g. 1995), has only been embraced by the Dutch themselves to a relatively modest degree. Cohabitation and divorce remain at an average European level. The percentage of births outside marriage is relatively low, about the same as in Belgium, Germany and Luxemburg and much lower than the exuberant extra-marital fertility exhibited in Scandinavia, France and, in a different context, in the UK. This does not appear to follow from any marked degree of sexual inhibition among the Dutch population. Yet, there may well be, in our view, a certain ‘cognitive dissonance’ between the liberal values that the Dutch consider appropriate for others – and for society at large – and the

Figure 13b: *Multidimensional Scaling Configuration to show the Netherlands' demographic place in Europe, 1950.*



Stress = 0.1911, $r^2 = 0.81$

Key: 1 AUT, 2 DEN, 3 FIN, 4 FRA, 5 GRE, 6 ICE, 7 IRE, 8 ITA, **9 NL**, 10 NOR, 11 POR, 12 ESP, 13 SWE, 14 UK, 15 FRG

more conservative values that they find appropriate for themselves. The historically strong influence of Calvinism may no longer be visible in socio-economic matters, but continues to play an important role in personal norms and values. Consequently, cultural conservatism, conventional behaviour with respect to family matters and rejection of hedonism remain to form a clearly recognizable cluster of views (Felling et al., 2000).

The Scandinavian countries are often regarded as the model for the future demographic patterns of the whole continent. In this view all Europe, including the Netherlands, will eventually acquire a more fragmented and diverse pattern of family and household structures than at present. Up to the present, however, European demographic patterns seem to retain a certain loyalty to place, in the sense that some of today's characteristic national demographic patterns were evident in more modest form in the earlier history of the populations concerned (Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2002). For example Southern Europe, whether Catholic or Orthodox, has remained relatively resistant to new forms of family. Furthermore, while welfare and fertility in most of Scandinavia continue to prosper, the system in Sweden may perhaps have overstepped the mark. In the 1990s domestic political developments and economic challenges unsettled the traditional and expensive welfare consensus. Fertility in Sweden has fallen

to an unprecedented low; Sweden for the time being at least no longer looks like the herald of the future. Questions have also been raised, in particular in respect of the pattern of lone parenthood more common in the English-speaking world, about the costs of more varied forms of family life in terms of welfare transfers and on the prospects of the children brought up in them (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2001). It may be that the Netherlands' more constrained behaviour will be a more typical marker for the future, and in view of these costs of the 'second demographic transition', perhaps a more sustainable or necessary one.

12. Acknowledgements

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