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Food for Thought

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERHEATING?

*In his recent book *Overheating: An Anthropology of Accelerated Change*, anthropologist T. H. Eriksen astutely applies thermodynamic concepts to explain the economic, environmental, and identity challenges endemic to globalization that are endangering social reproduction. The point of friction, he argues, is a matter of scale: The challenges are global in scope but manifest at the local level. Eriksen points to overpopulation, climate change, and the accelerated production of residue—both in terms of waste and redundant people—as signs of overheating.*

As demographers, we know the stress goes much deeper. Very low fertility is a symptom of the failure to achieve gender equality and of the pressure exerted by capital on reproductive biographies. Massive forced migrations are the result of economic, political, and environmental expulsion. Both of these trends are engendering demographic-reproduction crises in European societies.

European governments can make it worse. Have made it worse. By narrowly focusing on feeding their voters and exploiting fear of migrants for electoral gain, governments contribute greatly to a climate of population overheating. Should they be surprised when it boils over?

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Figures in Focus

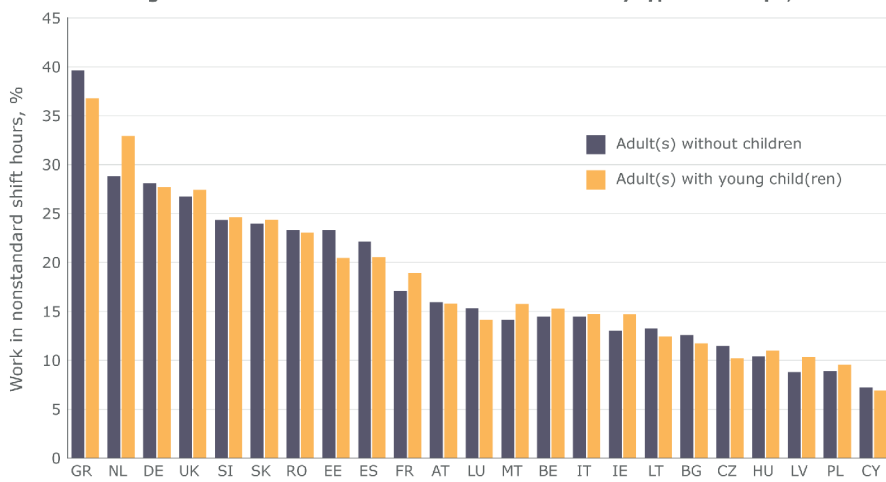
GOOD PARENTS AND BAD JOBS

Depending on the country, nonstandard work shifts can mean work-life reconciliation or a tough labour market

Nonstandard work shifts (NSS) are a controversial feature of labour markets. To some, they represent degradation of working conditions; to others, the flexibility needed to enter the labour market in tough times and reconcile work with home life.

Figure 1 shows the variety of ways in which economic conditions, labour market rules, family policies, and social norms interact.¹ Across the EU, we see the slice of total work hours made up by those in NSS ranges from less than 10% to 40%. In some countries, like Greece, NSS are less likely worked by parents, whereas in others, such as the Netherlands, it's more likely.

Figure 1: Nonstandard work schedules across family types in Europe, %



Source: European Labour Force Survey 2010, author's calculations; sample - working population, aged 15+

But to what extent do parents choose NSS and to what extent do they become a victim of them? In many eastern EU countries, part-time and NSS workers are less protected by national labour laws—meaning parents are unlikely to opt for these arrangements, but rather are pushed into them. In the Netherlands, however, NSS work is highly regulated, making it attractive for households trying to reconcile childcare and employment. Here, surveys indicate that NSS allow parents to desynchronise their schedules and engage in “tag-team parenting”, effectively minimising the hours children are in formal childcare.

In countries like the Netherlands, NSS are facilitating the slow transition away from the male-breadwinner to a one-and-a-half-breadwinner model. We should not ignore that women are overwhelmingly overrepresented in these part-time ‘and-a-half’ positions. But, perhaps, neither should we neglect households’ desire for a little flexibility.

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[1] Kadri Täht and Melinda C. Mills (2016), *Out of Time*, Springer.

DEMOGRAPHY & POLICY

Living in an Ageing Europe

Housing an older population

For the first time in history, the average age of the British population has exceeded 40. In the mid-1970s, it was 34. Thanks to our ever-improving longevity and the ageing of younger migrants, it is estimated the 60+ age group will account for 75% of the UK's population growth by 2040. British people will be living longer in a population that is itself growing older.

This two-fold demographic transformation will affect how we work, care, learn—and indeed how we live. Housing is one of society's most important sectors for wellbeing. Across Europe, population ageing will inevitably affect housing supply, demand, and use, which in turn will touch health, lifestyle, and even inheritance.

Policies for home ownership, private renting, and social housing must adapt. The UK Government Office for Science took an important step by commissioning a report on the Future of an Ageing Population.¹ It is the product of two and a half years of extensive demographic modelling and scientific evidence reviews and concludes that the success and resilience of the UK in the face of population ageing will be determined by individuals' ability to cope with the increased risk and responsibility for their ever-lengthening lives—and by the public sector's ability to coherently support them. Housing policy will be an important part of this.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Population ageing is set to affect housing demand; more homes that meet the needs of older people will be needed, with new ones to be built and existing ones adapted. This means homes with larger, more accessible

bathrooms, for example. Downsizing can also help older people manage their household more efficiently.

Where downsizing is not the optimal solution, intergenerational living may be. It can improve upward and downward care, prevent social isolation, and reduce costs for families. As the number of generations who are alive at the same time increases, the prevalence of intergenerational living is set to rise. Countries where its share is relat-

older people, who have specific needs. Alleviating demand for affordable housing among young families can moderate prices in the wider housing market, ultimately making downsizing or refitting more economically viable. A life-course approach also means accounting for the barriers to intergenerational living, such as the impact of inheritance tax on co-owned properties. Meanwhile, financing and incentives for the construction of new, specialised housing

stock will necessarily vary across countries, regions and cities. Measures for facilitating the construction of certain types of housing, like affordable housing, already range from tax credits for developers to the direct deployment of public money. Likewise, there are many models of financing the retrofitting of older homes to make them more energy efficient. These types of targeted interventions will be needed to adapt housing markets for an ageing population as well.

MAKING THE RIGHT CHANGES

The first step, however, is making the right changes in government itself. Population ageing is a cross-cutting phenomenon, connecting issues like health, housing, and work for which policies are often

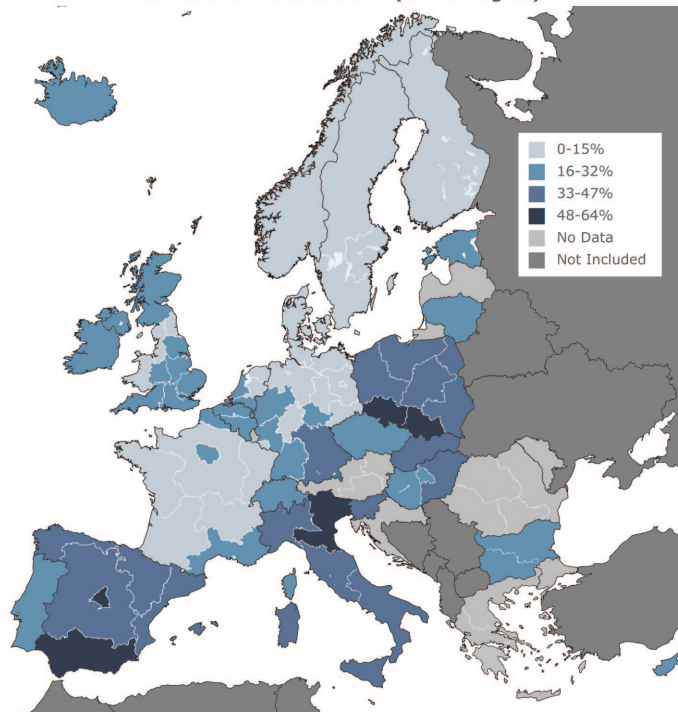
made separately. Housing alone shows they can no longer be addressed in silos. Never in history have we lived so well, but times are changing. Governments across Europe should start preparing now.

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[1] Government Office for Science (2016): Future of an Ageing Population: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/future-of-ageing#project-report>.

Figure 1: % of people aged 55+ living with at least one child in the household (NUTS1 region)



Source: ESS Round 6 (2012)

ively low, like the UK, could learn from the experience of its European neighbours, like Ireland or Italy, where it is high (Figure 1).

POLICY RESPONSES

Adapting will require a life-course approach. This means knocking down barriers to affordable, adequate housing for both the young, who need to begin building a solid foundation for their financial future, and

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