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December 15, 2015

UNH Research Finds Deaths Exceed Births in Most of Europe But Not in the U.S.

DURHAM, N.H. – Fifty-eight percent of European counties had more deaths than births in the first decade of the 21st century compared to 28 percent of counties in the United States, new research published in *Population Development Review* by senior demographer Kenneth Johnson from the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire and colleagues.

The research found that natural decrease is more widespread in Europe because its population is older, fertility rates are lower and there are fewer women of child-bearing age. When births fail to keep pace with deaths there is a “natural” decrease in population, a loss that can only be avoided by increased migration.

“Natural decrease is a major policy concern because it drains the demographic resilience from a region, diminishing its economic vitality and competitiveness,” the researchers said. “In Europe, such worries are already widely expressed in both media and public policy circles. The implications of the recent European immigrant surge for natural decrease are uncertain, but it is likely to remain widespread for the foreseeable future.”

In both the U.S. and Europe, the likelihood of natural decrease is greatest in counties with a large concentration of older adults, a small proportion of women of child-bearing age and a low fertility rate. Europe has significantly larger concentrations of older adults and much lower birth rates than the U.S. For example, on average there are only 261 young children per 1,000 women of child-bearing age in Europe counties compared to 371 in U.S. counties.

The researchers also noted that Hispanic immigration and domestic migration have diminished the likelihood of natural decrease in some U.S. counties by increasing births because the migration stream includes many young adults of child-bearing age with higher fertility rates.

“Overall, natural decrease is likely to become more prevalent in both Europe and the U.S. because the population in each region is aging and fertility rates remain low,” the researchers said. “Natural decrease looms particularly large in Europe’s future because there are far fewer young women to produce the next generation of children there than in the U.S.”

Full analysis can be found here: <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/natural-decrease-europe>. The *Population Development Review* analysis can be found here:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00089.x/full>

The research was conducted by Kenneth Johnson, senior demographer at Carsey and a professor of sociology at UNH; Layton Fields, assistant professor of sociology at Mount St. Mary's University; and Dudley Poston Jr., professor of sociology at Texas A&M University.

The Carsey School of Public Policy is nationally acclaimed for its research, policy education and engagement aimed at addressing important societal challenges. The school takes on the pressing issues of the 21st century, striving for innovative, responsive and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

The [University of New Hampshire](#), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 13,000 undergraduate and 2,500 graduate students.

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