

EUROPEAN UNION FAMILY POLICY OUTLOOK 2024



EUROPEAN UNION
FAMILY POLICY
OUTLOOK
2024



KINCS
MÁRIA KOPP INSTITUTE
FOR DEMOGRAPHY
AND FAMILIES

2024

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Demographic Trends in Europe	7
Demographic Winter in Europe	27
Demographic and Family Policy Aspects of the Hungarian EU Presidency	42
A comparison of family policy systems in the EU Member States	63
Country profiles	85
Methodological notes	87
Austria	92
Belgium	102
Bulgaria	110
Croatia	118
Cyprus	124
Czech Republic	130
Denmark	138
Estonia	146
Finland	152
France	160
Germany	168
Greece	176
Hungary	182
Ireland	194
Italy	200
Latvia	208
Lithuania	216
Luxembourg	222
Malta	228
Netherlands	234
Poland	240
Portugal	248
Romania	256
Slovakia	264
Slovenia	270
Spain	276
Sweden	284
Comparative table	292
Authors and editors	302

Foreword

In 2024, Europe, and especially the European Union, has reached another turning point in a rapidly changing and complex world. In order to maintain its political and economic importance and to strengthen its role in the world, it needs self-examination, one of the most important cornerstones of which is how it faces the serious demographic crisis that fundamentally affects its population and human resources.

The “old continent” continues to age, and the seemingly unstoppable loss of its population in the long term is becoming more and more evident. Europe is a continent of empty cradles despite migration. Although we see similar processes in more and more regions of the world, the number of births in none of the European Union countries reaches the level required for self-preservation. The “demographic winter” in the EU is now a matter of fact, the decline in the birth rate since the 1960s and the increase in life expectancy have led to the coexistence of a shrinking young generation facing difficult future prospects and an expanding ageing generation, often financially better off than the young. Furthermore, there is both the shrinkage of the workforce and the unavailability of an adequate workforce in certain regions. The decline in the competitiveness of the European Union is directly related to the transformation of the structure of human resources required for the functioning of the economy from generation to generation, more and more inactive people must be supported by fewer and fewer active people, and this is not a temporary but a constant and increasing challenge in view of fertility trends, which we are now predicted to have to live with in the future. This is the basic situation that the EU and its Member States must tackle with a positive outlook and effectively if they want to remain at the forefront of the world’s economies.

Population processes therefore have a significant impact on the transformation of Europe’s position, weight and importance in the world. Although these changes are less on the agenda of policymakers today, as in the short term, population decline and the aging of population are almost unnoticeable, but their impact is expected to appear more defined in the future, not only on the political scene but also in the everyday lives of European families. In the second half of 2024, the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union aimed to channel this challenge into the decision-making processes of the highest level of the European Union and the work of its institutions on a permanent basis: one of the key factors of Europe’s competitiveness needs to be given the right weight.

Meanwhile, Europe is one of the most important destinations for mass immigration. Although immigration may increase the active working-age population in a society, even in the case of successful integration, there is a risk that the cultural and ethnic composition of the host society will radically transform. For this reason, the Hungarian government has been relying on the internal resources of society for the past 14 years and

wants to stop the population decline with an effective family policy, continuing to focus on families having and raising children.

The aim of our volume is to provide following a 5-year period a comprehensive picture of the family policies of the European Union Member States, the support of Europe's families in each country, the local family policy measures and their effects on having and raising children, thus placing Hungarian family policy in a European context.

Country portraits, like the KINCS publication of 2019, provide a systematic insight into the demographic situation of a country, the system of family support and measures aimed at work-life balance that are being implemented. Taking into account the second half-yearly EU Presidency of Hungary in 2024, the volume examines the Member States of the European Union. In this way, our handbook of practical, descriptive information provides a broad comparison of EU Member States' policies in support of families, based on data available at the beginning of 2024.

During the preparation of the volume, we were assisted by the Századvég Center for Public Knowledge Foundation and the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute of the HCSO. I would like to thank them and all my colleagues in KINCS for their joint work in creating the "European Union Family Policy Outlook 2024".

I hope that the manual will be turned into a useful reading by all our esteemed readers.

October 2024

Tünde Fűrész
President
KINCS

Demographic Trends in Europe

Zsuzsanna Makay, Fruzsina Ökrös

INTRODUCTION

In just over a decade since the turn of the millennium, the Earth's population has grown by one billion and the upward trend has continued ever since. As a result, in November 2022, the world's population exceeded eight billion and is projected to reach 10.4 billion by the mid-2080s (UN, 2024). A total of 59.2% of the world's population lives in Asia, 18.1% in Africa, 9.3% in Europe, 8.1% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 4.7% in North America, and 0.6% in Oceania (Dyvik, 2024). The two most populous countries in the world are China and India, each with populations of over 1 billion people; while India's population continues to grow, China's population seems to have peaked in 2022 and has been declining since (UN, 2024). Despite global growth, there are quite large differences in trends around the world, which have different impacts on the social, political and economic structure of countries.

This study focuses on a slice of the world, Europe, and explores the demographic trends in the European region, taking stock of the most important changes since 2010. The key element of our analysis is fertility, thus we address this component in the greatest depth before analysing the other two factors of population trends: mortality and migration.

In 2023, Europe was in a year of "recovery" from the COVID-19 pandemic as life expectancy at birth and population began to rise again after two years (Eurostat, 2024). However, the pandemic has widened disparities in many respects. Even taking all demographic factors into account, the situation varies widely between countries due to differences in childbearing, mortality and the rate and nature of migration.

In our paper, we present these factors and try to explain the reasons behind the differing changes in population.

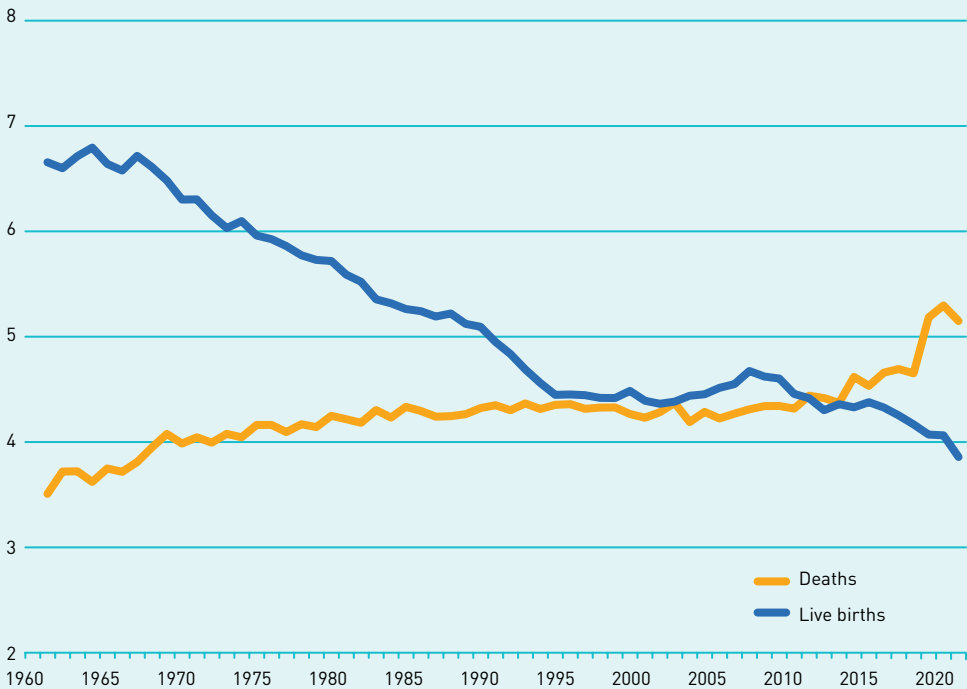
Mortality, migration and population change

On 1 January 2023, the population of the European Union was 448.4 million, an increase of 2.8 million year-on-year. Compared to 2022, 20 Member States recorded an increase in population, while seven Member States experienced a decrease. Differences between countries are explained by differences in natural change and net migration, and while natural change has long been more important, the importance of net migration in population growth has increased over the last decade. This can be attributed to the decline in the number of live births observed in essentially all countries (Sobotka and Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, 2020).

In this respect, 2012 can be seen as a turning point, as it was the first year in the EU countries when, on average, the number of children born fell short of the number of persons who died. This trend seems to be stabilising, as the gap between the two rates has been widening ever since, according to Eurostat data (Figure 1).

The number of births (for the current Member States) was 6.7 million in 1960, dropping below 5 million in 1990 and then below 4 million in 2022. Conversely, the number of deaths rose over this period and is expected to increase further with the ageing of societies. Consequently, the future change in the population, whether increasing or decreasing, will be determined primarily by the balance between immigration and emigration. We will come back to this point later, but first let us look at the main trends in mortality.

Figure 1: Live births and deaths in the European Union, 1961-2022 (million)



Source: Eurostat (*demo_find*) and https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_and_population_change_statistics#EU_population_shows_a_strong_increase_in_2022 (Accessed: 18.06.2024)

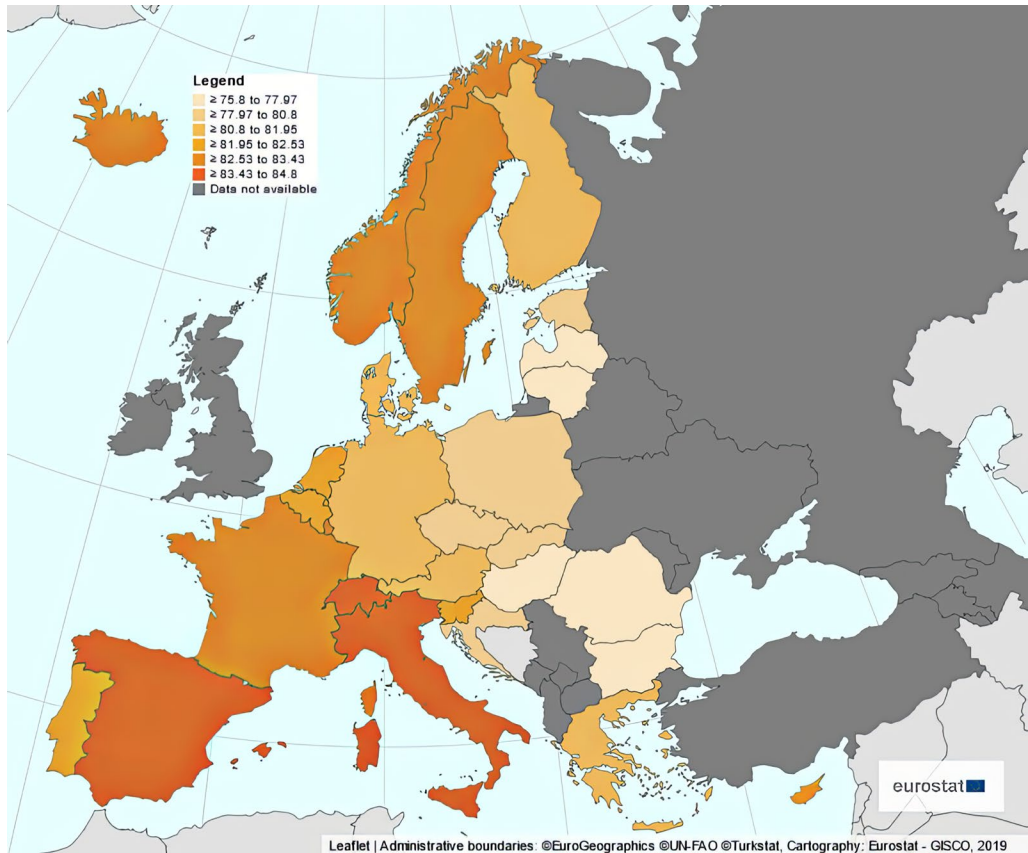
In recent decades, life expectancy at birth has increased significantly in the European Union, but growth slowed in the 2010s. In 2016, average life expectancy in the 28 countries reached 81 years, and in some countries exceeded 83 years. It was highest in Spain and Sweden (over 83 years), while in two-thirds of the countries it was over 80 years. In many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, however, it was only around 75 years. At the end of the decade, life expectancy increased further, averaging 81.3 years in 2019.

In 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decline in life expectancy at birth in European countries. As a result of the decline, life expectancy at birth in the EU barely reached 80 years in 2021, a full year less than in 2019. In 2022, after the pandemic, life expectancy at birth was still only 80.6 years, that is, not yet back to the previous level.

In 2023, however, the indicator reached its highest ever value of 81.5 years (according to preliminary data)¹, but the differences between countries increased.

Life expectancy is shortest in Bulgaria for both women and men, averaging 74.2 years, and below 75 years in Latvia. In 2023, life expectancy at birth in Hungary was 76 years, ranking fifth from the bottom of the 27 Member States. Life expectancy is the longest in Spain, at 83.2 years, but it also exceeds 83 years in Sweden and Luxembourg (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth in the European Union, 2023

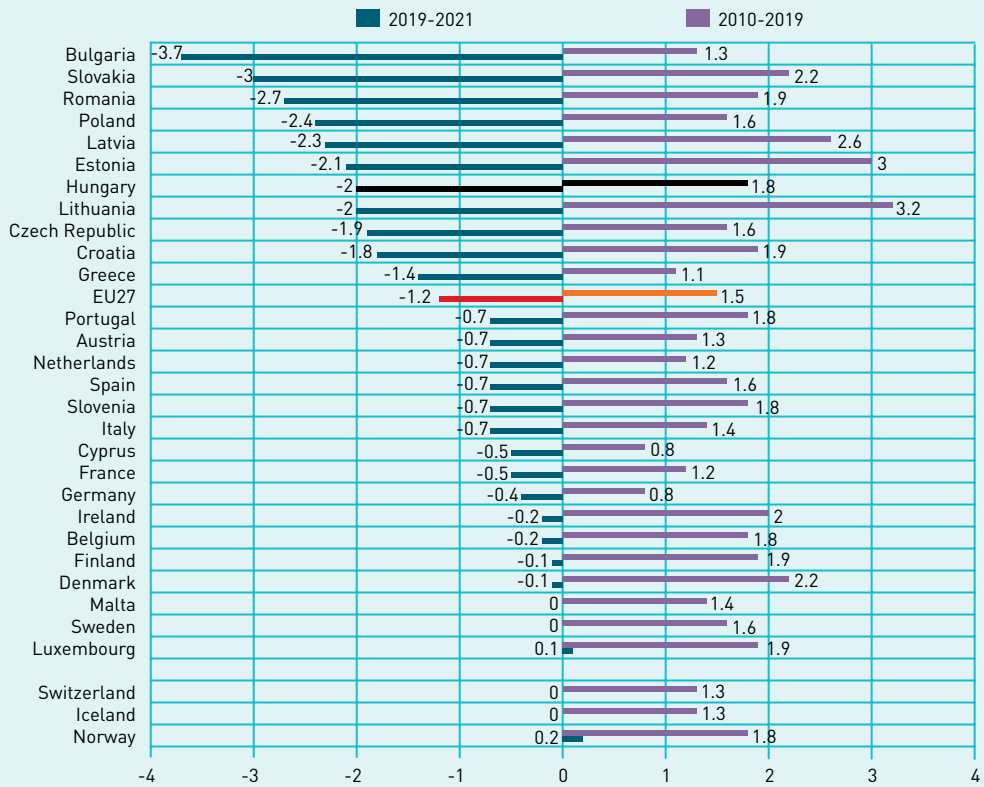


Source: https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_MLEXPEC (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

The pandemic led to a sharp widening of the life expectancy gap across EU countries, as Central and Eastern European countries suffered significantly higher excess mortality than most Western and Northern countries did. In Bulgaria, life expectancy fell by 3.7 years between 2019 and 2021, and in all eastern Member States except Slovenia, there was at least a two-year decrease. No comparable decline was observed in any of the old Member States, where the average decline was 1.2 years (Figure 3).

¹ See: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240503-2> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Figure 3: Gains and declines in life expectancy by country, 2019-2021 and 2010-2019 (number of years)



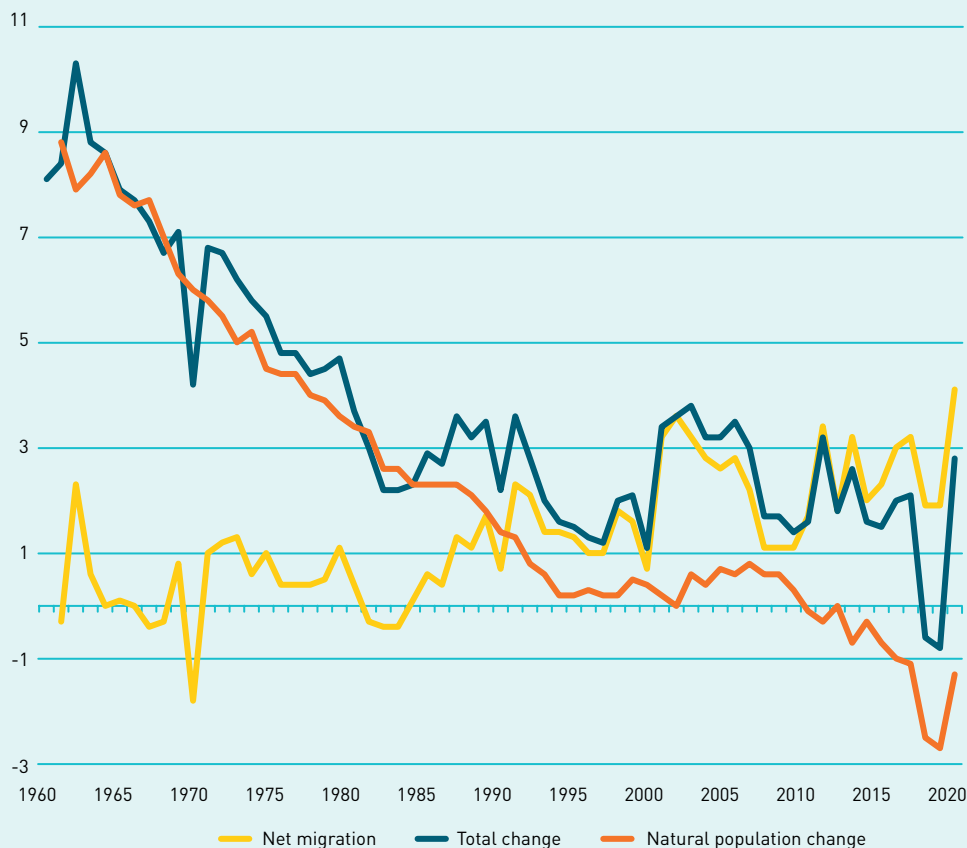
Source: <https://doi.org/10.1787/507433bo-en> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.) Health at a Glance: Europe 2022, OECD.

Women live longer than men in all EU countries – 5.4 years on average across the EU in 2022. While the gender gap was narrowing before the pandemic, it has widened slightly since the beginning of the pandemic as COVID-19 mortality has been higher among men than women. In 2022, women lived on average 83.3 years (up by 0.4 years from 2021 but 0.7 years less than in 2019), while for men the figure was 77.9 years. There are large differences between countries: in Latvia women live approximately ten years longer than men, while in the Netherlands the gender gap is only 2.9 years, in Ireland 3.3 years and in Sweden 3.4 years.² Increasing life expectancy and declining fertility are leading to an ageing population in Europe. The proportion of the population aged 65 and over rose from 16% to 21% between 2001 and 2020 and is expected to reach 28.5% of the population by 2050³.

² See: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240314-1> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

³ See: <https://www.age-platform.eu/ageing-europe-looking-at-the-lives-of-older-people-in-the-eu-eurostat-2019-report/> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Figure 4: Population change of the European Union by the three demographic components (annual crude rates), 1960-2022, per 1,000 persons



Source: Eurostat (*demo_find*) and https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_and_population_change_statistics#EU_population_shows_a_strong_increase_in_2022 (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Moreover, the proportion of very old people (85 and over) is increasing at an accelerating rate, with twice as many women as men. The quality of life of the elderly is a socially important issue. It is measured by the healthy life expectancy indicator, which shows the number of years of life that are lived in good health or without some health issues, activity limitations or disabilities. In 2021, the number of healthy life years at birth was approximately 64.2 years for women and 63.1 years for men showing a smaller gender gap. This represented 77.4% and 81.7% of the total life expectancy for women and men, respectively. In Hungary, the same figures are 63.5 years for women and 61.6 years for men⁴.

⁴ See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Healthy_life_years_statistics (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Fertility trends will be discussed later, but in general it can be said that the decline in the number of births characterises the entire region. As a result, migration is playing an increasingly important role in population growth. Migration has been on the rise in the EU since the 1980s and has been a main determinant in population growth since 1990. In 2022, it was solely due to a positive net migration that the population of the area did not decrease: while the natural decline was 1.3 million, net migration was 2.9 million. Thus, overall, the population increased by 1.7 million, or 2.8 thousandths, in one year (Figure 4).

International migration is the least stable and least predictable element of demography for the future. However, it is one of the factors that currently accounts for the differences in population changes between countries.

Table 1. Contribution of natural population change and net migration to population change in the countries, 2022

Growth due:	
only to natural change	-
more to natural change	-
more to positive net migration	Belgium, Ireland, France, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Sweden
only to positive net migration	Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Romania, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Spain
Decline due:	
only to natural change	Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Italy
more to natural change	Greece
more to negative net migration	-
only to negative net migration	-

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_and_population_change_statistics#EU_population_shows_a_strong_increase_in_2022 (Downloaded: 18.06.2024.)

In 2023, 27.3 million citizens of non-member countries were residing in an EU Member State⁵, representing 6.3% of the EU population. In absolute terms, the largest numbers of third-country nationals were found in Germany (7.7 million), Spain (4.4 million), France (4.1 million) and Italy (3.8 million). At the same time, the highest proportions of third-country nationals compared to the resident population were observed in Malta (17%), Estonia (16%) and Latvia (14%), while their rate was 9.1% in Germany and 1.5% in Hungary. There is also considerable internal migration within the European Union. The highest share of non-EU national population is that of Luxembourg, where their share exceeds one-third of the total population. Luxembourg is followed by Cyprus with 10%

⁵ See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant_population:_27.3_million_non-EU_citizens_living_in_the_EU_on_1_January_2023 (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

and Belgium with 8%. The largest number of non-EU citizens live in Germany: 4.6 million persons or 5.5% of the population.

The contribution of natural growth (or decline) and net migration to population change varies considerably between countries (Table 1). Among the 20 Member States where population growth was recorded in 2022, seven had both positive natural population change and net migration (e.g. Belgium and Ireland). In the 14 Member States where net migration was positive, natural population change was negative, i.e. population growth was due solely to migration (e.g. Germany and the Czech Republic). In six Member States, the population declined, and in most of them this was due to natural decrease, while net migration was positive. Italy recorded the largest overall population decline between 2022 and 2023, with a decrease of around 180,000, while Germany recorded the largest increase of around 1.1 million.

FERTILITY

Some theories explaining fertility decline

Although all developed countries have now gone through the stages of the first demographic transition – i.e. societies with high birth rates and high death rates have been transformed into societies with low birth rates and declining death rates (Kapitány, 2015) – the theory is incomplete in that it does not paint an accurate picture of the fertility patterns that can be expected after the transition. Today, mortality is improving only to a negligible extent, and in most developed countries fertility has fallen below the level required for simple reproduction since the 1960s and 1970s (Andorka, 2006). To make up for this shortcoming, new theories and new approaches have been developed to explain the decline in fertility (Andorka, 1987). The explanation of fertility through *economic theory* is the work of Gerry Becker and Harvey Leibenstein of the Chicago school, while another set of explanations rooted in *sociological theory*, which, similarly to the “Value of Children” concept known in *psychological theory*, is still rather rudimentary. Richard Easterlin (1978), an American economic demographer, observing the baby boom period, while accepting the theses of economic theory based on cost-benefit calculations, has elaborated on Becker’s approach, extending it to include the labour market aspect of fertility cyclicity (Easterlin, 1980). This means that when it comes to having children, it is not only the economic situation (and the calculation derived from it) that matters, but also the preferences of the couple. A third group of theories explaining fertility decline is the second demographic transition theory, which is attributed to Ron Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa. Their observations suggest that changes in fertility behaviour and relationship patterns since the 1960s and 1970s (starting in Western Europe) were driven, on the one hand, by changes in values, and on the other hand, by increasing individualisation coupled with more modern gender role conceptions and non-conformism, as well as strengthening consumer aspirations (Kapitány, 2015; Spéder, 2006). The former child-centredness was increasingly replaced by self-centredness and relationship-centredness in a process of value changes in which de Kaa (1996) highlighted the increasing emphasis on self-actualisation and self-fulfilment, personal freedom of choice, personal development and lifestyle, and the expansion of the emancipation of women. Most of the once traditional societies have thus been

transformed into modern societies, and the spread of effective contraception has led to the prevailing idea that by default, no children are born unless couples choose to have them (Lesthaeghe, 2010). The transformation of the post-industrial economy has thus brought about a number of changes in the population of each region (Somlai, 2013). In many European countries, including Hungary, the age at first marriage has significantly grown, and the number of marriages has been dropping in recent decades due to the increase in cohabitation and other alternative forms of relationships. However, after the regime change, the number of those who believe that if a couple wants to have children they should marry has increased (1988: 26.5%; 2022: 40.5%).

A similar discrepancy can be observed between the intention to have children and the fulfilment of this intention. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), it is the strength of intentions that determines the specific behavioural outcomes, given that intentions are interpreted as planned (rational) actions. Ajzen (1991) argues that planned behaviours are influenced by attitudes on the one hand, and by subjective norms and perceived behavioural control on the other. Extrapolating their theories to the fulfilment of childbearing intentions, it can be concluded that individual attitudes to childbearing, socially accepted norms of childbearing (e.g. the two-child family model) and people's perceptions of how easy or difficult childbearing will be, and how capable they feel of carrying out the task, play a crucial role.

This interesting aspect of fertility decline is also highlighted in an article by Livi Bacci in 2002, in which he addresses the question of how it is possible that neither the ideal number of children nor the planned number of children is reached by the total fertility rate. To explain the difference between projected and actual fertility, the author identifies two factors for countries with low fertility. First, he mentions involuntary infertility, which results in involuntary childlessness. People in this group have not chosen not to have children, but are prevented by some external, usually biological, factor (infertility). The second group includes those who, although they have not yet reached the desired number of children, decide not to have more children for certain reasons (e.g. career, negative experiences with previous pregnancies). However, it should also be taken into account that when asked about the ideal number of children, respondents tend to be influenced by stereotypes that exist at different levels of society, in particular by the idea of the two-child family model. For this reason, Livi Bacci considers the projected number of children to be a more accurate indicator. However, when comparing this indicator with the total fertility rate, it is important to take into consideration the distorting effect of timing, which places into the category of the involuntary childless some of those who had planned to have children but postponed for too long and, in the end, did not have any. The reasons for postponement can be numerous, including a deteriorating standard of living, rising unemployment, the growing costs of having children or an increased feeling of insecurity. Another group of explanations is the interpretation of postponement as a rational decision, which in this context appears as a kind of response to the expansion of education and widening labour market opportunities (Őri and Spéder, 2020); and there

is also a close link with the psychological and mental reasons for having children, as shown in Hungarostudy 2021 (Pári and Balog, 2022).

In a 2014 study, Spéder and Kapitány further nuance the complex picture of childbearing plans by examining the specificities of each region and country, taking into account the differences between Western Europe and post-socialist states. While in the West, changes in relationship patterns and value orientations brought about by the second demographic transition can be identified as early as the 1970s and 1960s, in the former communist countries these changes are more likely to be observed only after the political changeover. In their results, Spéder and Kapitány stress that the chances of realising childbearing intentions are significantly less in former communist bloc countries than in Western Europe. This is due to the fact that although the former communist countries also witnessed a departure from established social norms (e.g. the spread of cohabitation and childlessness), shifts in values were less dramatic, while structural changes (e.g. transition to a market economy, rising unemployment, deteriorating economic situation, and transformation of the welfare system) were relatively rapid (Spéder and Kapitány, 2014).

Total fertility rate in Europe

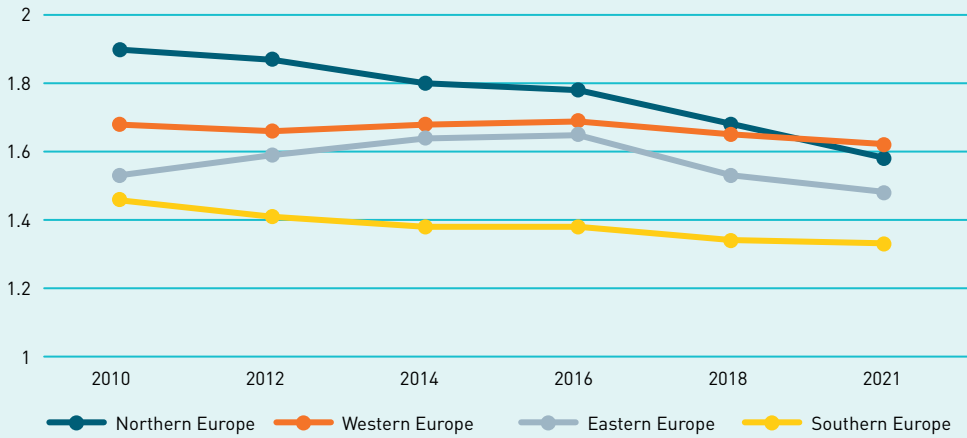
On the whole, it is true for all European regions that between 2010 and 2021 the total fertility rate did not reach the reproduction rate of 2.1, and that in the last decade, all regions have seen a decline in the rate, albeit with different patterns (Figure 5).

While in 2010 Northern Europe had the highest fertility rate, by 2019 Western Europe had caught up (1.63) and taken the lead by 2021⁶. Among the regions, the most volatile trend is observed in Eastern Europe, where, unlike the other regions, TFR typically increased between 2010 and 2016, and even seemed to catch up with Western Europe by 2016, but started to decline after 2016 and fell below the 2010 level (1.68) in 2021 (1.62). Southern Europe shows a relatively “balanced” decline. In this region, TFR was already at its lowest in 2010 (1.46), but continued to drop by 2021 (1.33), albeit at a slower rate.

However, looking at the total fertility rate in the Central European region, it is conspicuous that most countries in the region saw an upturn between 2010 and 2021. The only exception is Croatia, where the rate dropped from 1.49 in 2010 to 1.45 in 2021. All the other countries in the region, however, experienced an increase, although at varying rates. Hungary saw the largest increase in TFR over the period, which is not surprising given that in the 2010s it had the lowest TFR. After hitting a low in 2011 (1.24), TFR jumped to 1.58 in 2021. The rate of increase is even higher in the Czech Republic (+0.2) and Slovakia (+0.14). In 2021, TFR was highest in the Czech Republic (1.71), followed by Slovenia (1.63) and Hungary (1.58) (Figure 6).

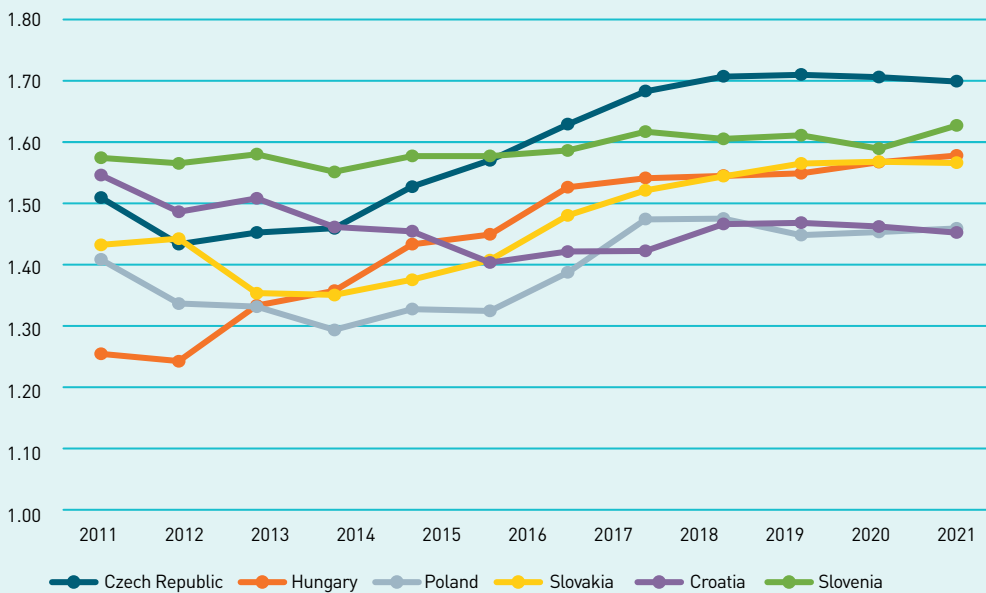
⁶ See: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition. (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo/>, accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Figure 5: Total fertility rate in Europe by regions⁷, 2010-2021



Source: UN - Population Division, 2024. Authors' editing.

Figure 6: Total fertility rate in Central and Eastern Europe, 2010-2021



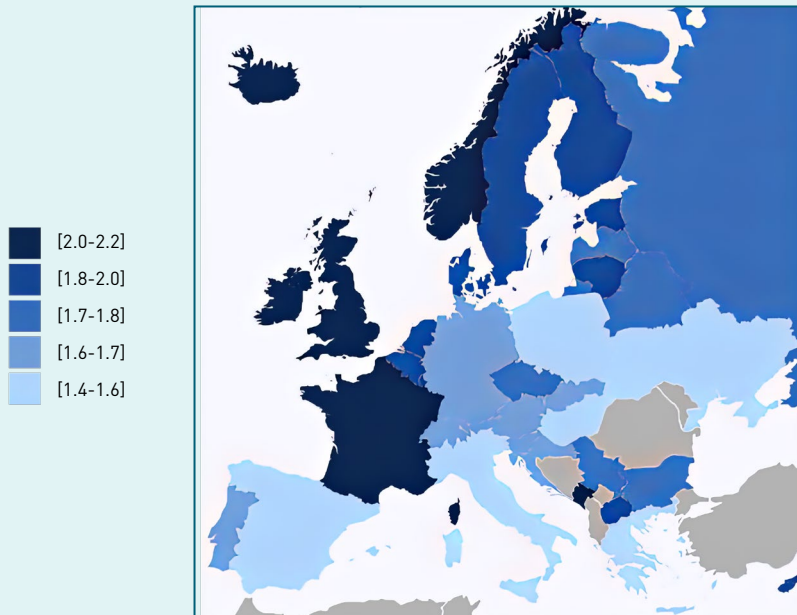
Source: UN - Population Division, 2024.

⁷ 6 Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine. Northern Europe: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom Southern Europe: Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland

Looking at the period 2010-2021, it is to be noted that for the Visegrád countries, there was a trough in each region after which TFR started to rise. Even if there was stagnation or a decline in the meantime, TFR did not revert to the previous bottom value in any of the countries. Bottoming out occurred at different times in each country, with Hungary (1.24) and the Czech Republic (1.43) reaching a low in 2011 and Slovakia (1.34) and Poland (1.29) reaching a historic bottom in 2013 (CSO, 2021). It is nevertheless an important question whether the upward TFR trend will be maintained in the future. In Hungary, the total fertility rate was 1.52 in 2022, and according to preliminary data from Hungary's Central Statistical Office (CSO), it fell further to 1.51 in 2023 (CSO, 2024). The change is even more dramatic for Poland, where TRF was 1.26 in 2022, according to the national statistical office, meaning that it fell below its previous low (Statistics Poland, 2024). A similar trend can be observed for the Czech Republic, which leads the field with a TFR of 1.62 in 2022 (ČSÚ, 2023). In Slovakia, the fertility rate seems to stagnate for the time being, with a TFR of 1.57 in 2022 (@tatistická Ročenka Slovenskej Republiky, 2023).

Cohort-specific fertility indicators can also be observed for specific birth cohorts. By looking at completed cohort fertility, we can track the average number of children born to women in a cohort (i.e. women who were born in a given year) by the end of their reproductive life (typically up to age 49).

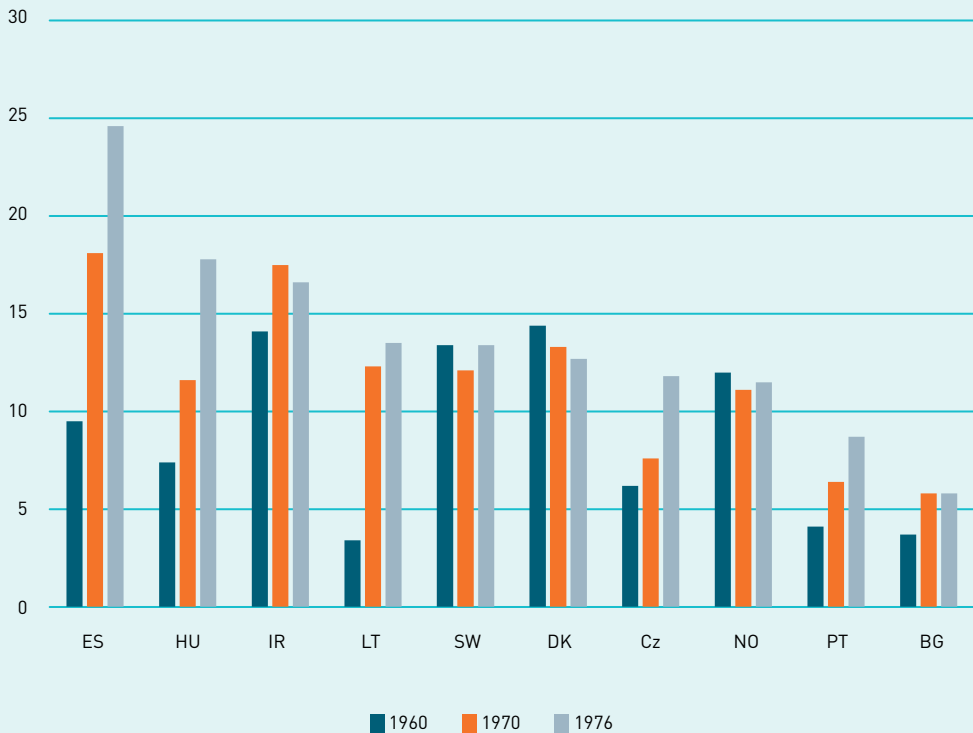
Figure 7: Average number of children of women born in 1980, Europe, 2020



Source: European Demographic Datasheet, 2022

In Europe, the completed fertility rate for women born in 1980⁸ was highest in the Western countries, almost reaching 2 in 2020. This was followed by Northern Europe (1.91) and then Eastern Europe (1.64). The cohort's completed fertility rate was the lowest in the Southern European region at 1.44. The bloc of Germany, Austria and Switzerland (1.62) was close to, but below, the EU average (1.66), and the same applied to the Central-Eastern European region (1.56), including Hungary (1.47)⁹ (Figure 7).

Figure 8: Rates of childless women in some cohorts in 11 European countries



Source: Human Fertility Database, authors' editing.

In addition to the decline in the average number of children, rising childlessness is a major factor in fertility in European countries. However, childlessness is not a new phenomenon: around 20-25% of women born at the beginning of the 20th century remained childless. Their proportion declined in the following cohorts and was the lowest among women born in the 1940s, with only around 10% of women remaining childless (Beaujouan et al., 2017). The phenomenon then became more common again, and the

⁸ Although women born in 1980 were only 42 years old in 2022 (that is, below the age of 49, which marks the end of the general reproductive age), it can be stated that childbearing is no longer common in this age group. Observing the female cohort born in 1980 therefore gives a roughly accurate picture of completed cohort fertility.

⁹ See: <https://www.humanfertility.org/File/GetDocument/Files/HUN/20220314/HUNtfrVH.txt> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

proportion of childlessness among the women born in 1960 was around 15% to 18% in Western countries, compared to around 10% in Eastern countries. Since then, the rate has continued to rise, and in some countries between a quarter and a fifth of the youngest generations are expected to end their productive lives without children. For the cohorts of women born in 1976, the childless rate is 25% in Spain and 18% in Hungary, and both countries have seen a spectacular increase compared to women born in 1960 (Figure 8). On the other hand, the rate remains low in some countries. In Portugal and Bulgaria, for example, less than 10% of women currently aged 48 are childless.

Figure 9: Changes in the number of women of childbearing age in Europe, 2010-2023



Source: Eurostat, [demo_pjan]. Authors' editing.

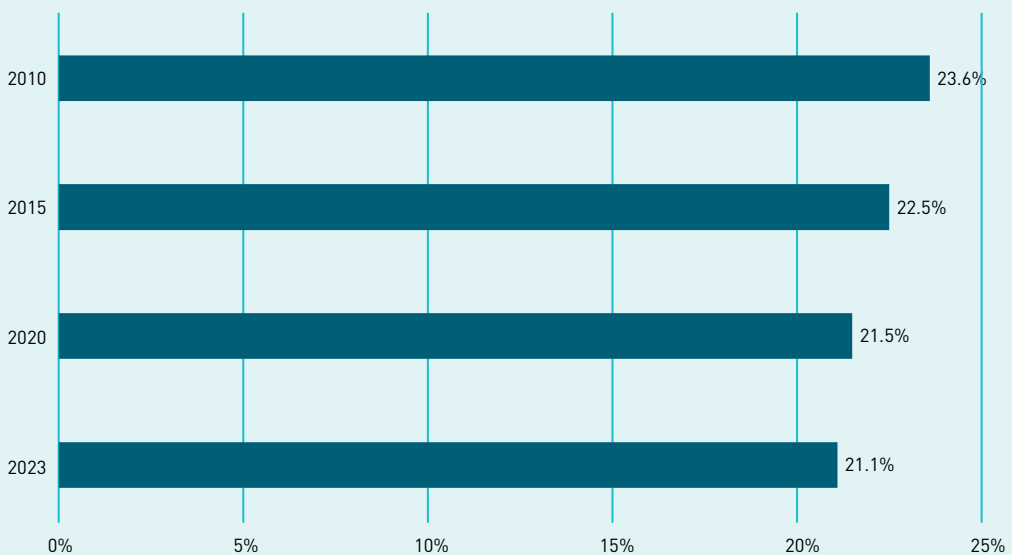
Changes in the number of women of childbearing age in Europe

Along with the changes in fertility, it is crucial to examine the changes in the number of women of childbearing age (15-49 years), as this sub-population has a direct impact on the fertility rate itself. A decrease in the number of women of childbearing age usually implies a decrease in the number of births.

Since 2010, there has been an average downward trend in the female population of childbearing age in the European Union. While in 2010 there were 103,795,317 women in this age group, by 2023 their number had dropped to 94,682,183. The largest shrinkage among the Member States appeared in Italy, where there were 2,046,051 fewer women in this age group in 2023 than in 2010. Italy is followed by Germany (-1,703,953), Poland (-1,091,760) and Spain (-1,021,339). But some Member States see an increase in the number of women of childbearing age. In Sweden, 133,983, in Ireland 78,925 and in Belgium 44,954 more women have entered this age group (Figure 9). There is also an increase in the number of women of childbearing age in Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Malta, Denmark, Iceland and Cyprus.

A closer look at the EU average reveals that it is not only the number of the female population aged 15-49 that is going down – their rate within the total population is likewise shrinking. Between 2010 and 2023, the rate of women of childbearing age in the total population of EU Member States dropped from 23.6% to 21.1% (Figure 10).

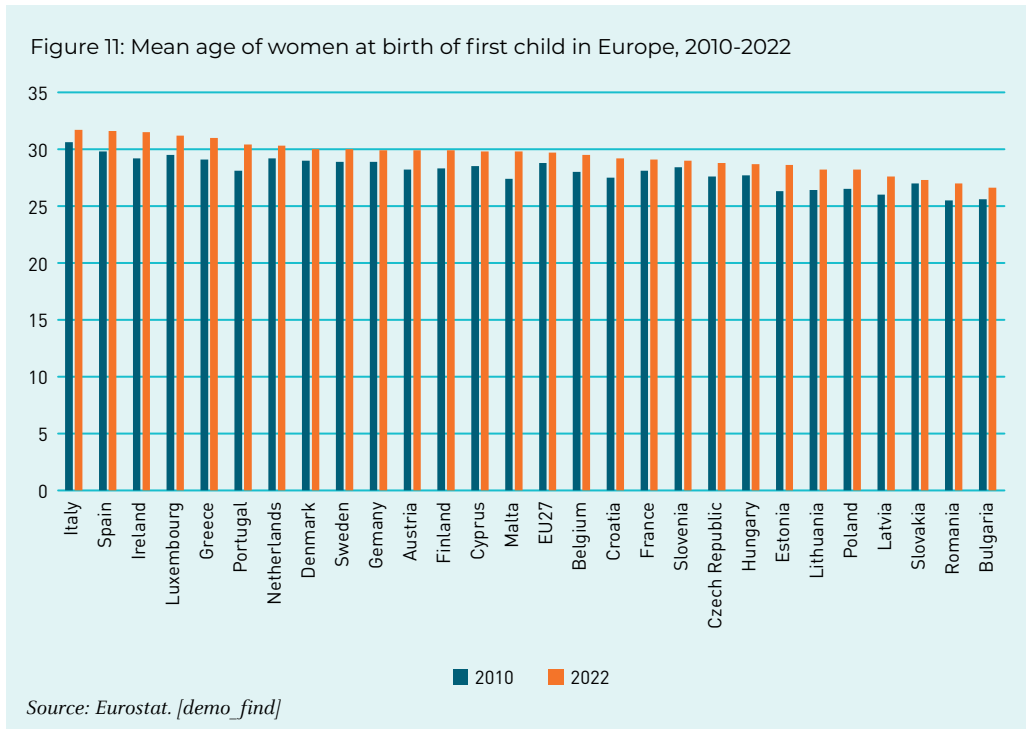
Figure 10: Rate of women of childbearing age in the total population, 2010-2023, European Union average



Source: Eurostat, [demo_pjan]. Authors' editing.

Mean age of women at birth of the first child

Not only has the number of live births per woman been decreasing, the time for women to give birth to their first child has also been shifting to an older age since the second half of the 20th century. While in the 1960s and 1970s women became mothers in their early to mid-20s, in the following two decades this time shifted to the late 20s (Engler-Pári, 2022, Bali-Péterfi, 2023). All these postponements can be attributed to the patterns of the second demographic transition described above, including prolonged years in education, shifting values related to social roles, changing forms of relationships, changes in the institution of the family, the devaluation of marriage, and postponement of leaving the parental home (Zeman et al., 2018, Patakiné Bende, 2022, Doblhammer-Spéder, 2024).



Note: EU mean: data from 2013 instead of 2010, Denmark: data from 2012 instead of 2010, France: data from 2013 instead of 2010, Italy: data from 2013 instead of 2010.

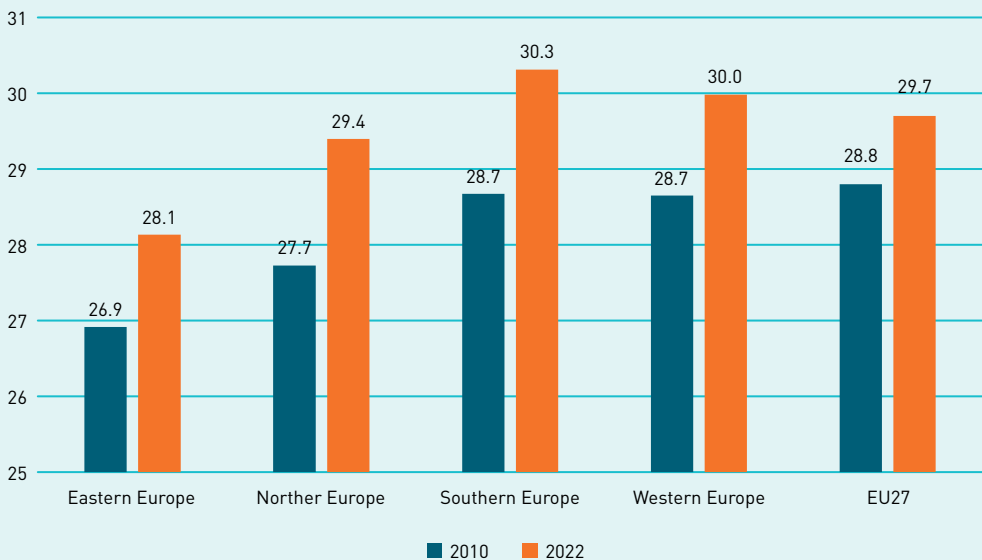
In the European Union, the average age at which mothers have children increased between 2010 (28.8 years) and 2022 (29.7 years). In 2022, the age of women at the birth of the first child was highest in Italy (31.7 years), followed closely by Spain (31.6 years) and Ireland (31.5 years). Hungary is roughly midfield among the Member States, below the EU mean, with women typically having their first child at 28.7 years (Figure 11).

The largest increase between 2010 and 2022 can be seen in Malta, where the age of women at the first childbirth rose by almost two and a half years on average. In the same period, the age at the first childbearing also increased by more than two years in

Estonia, Ireland, Portugal and Norway. The smallest increase, only 0.3 years over the 12-year period, was recorded in Slovakia.

In terms of European regions¹⁰, Western Europe has the highest average age at the birth of a first child. The largest increase (1.7 years) over the period was registered in the Northern European region. In contrast, the increase in the age of women was somewhat more moderate in Eastern Europe (1.2 years) and Western Europe (1.3 years). Across the EU Member States, the average delay in becoming a mother has increased by 0.9 years over the last 10 years (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Mean age of women at birth of first child in Europe, 2010 and 2022



Source: Eurostat. [demo_find]. Authors' editing.

Nevertheless, there is no conclusive correlation between childbearing age and fertility. While women in Central Europe tend to become mothers at a somewhat younger age than women in Western Europe, this is not the region where fertility is the highest. Following the trend in Western Europe, despite the increase in the age of women at first childbirth, in 2022 the total fertility rate was highest in this region. Although fertility is also high in Northern Europe, the average age of women at the birth of their first child is slightly lower in these countries than in Western Europe. In the case of Southern Europe, however, it still seems that low fertility has become typical in some regions, besides a high childbearing age.

¹⁰ **Eastern Europe:** Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania. **Northern Europe:** Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden. **Southern Europe:** Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Cyprus. **Western Europe:** Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands.

Summary

Demographic trends in Europe show both differences and similarities between countries. Overall, there are similarities in the main trends, albeit to varying degrees: fertility is falling, life expectancy at birth is rising, and the population is ageing. Although the population of the European Union is growing, many countries are losing population and the population of the region as a whole is expected to decline in the near future. These phenomena are the result of decades of demographic changes, and it is therefore not surprising that there are significant differences between the countries of Western and Central and Eastern Europe, which have followed different historical and economic paths. Globally, out of the 15 countries with the largest population losses between 1989 and 2021, 14 are in Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region. In the course of this period, the population of Eastern Europe decreased by 6%, while that of Western Europe increased by 11% (Sobotka and Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, 2020). Moreover, while several former socialist countries experienced a natural decrease, only two Western countries (Germany and Italy) had a slightly negative net natural population change over the same period (VID, 2018). So, as can be expected in the future, the change in the past was not completely one-way across regions. Moreover, a West-East divide is discerned.

One of the biggest challenges for the future will be ageing and the decline in the working-age population, i.e. people aged between 20 and 64. Their share is projected to peak in the current years and to decline significantly in the coming decades. In 2026, around 64% of the European population is expected to be in this age group, but according to Eurostat forecasts, their proportion may fall to around 57% by 2060¹¹. In Hungary, their proportion may shrink by as much as 25%, according to OECD calculations¹². This transformation seems to be inevitable, but the rate of the decline (and with it the evolution of the population in each country) will depend on both future fertility rates and the trend in net migration.

In addition to policies that support childbearing, policies that promote increased labour market participation of the inactive population can also moderate labour market effects. Moreover, measures to reduce outward migration and encourage the return of the Hungarian expatriate population can also help to alleviate imbalances. The number of immigrants in Hungary has increased significantly over the past decade but especially in the last two years, and in 2024 it will be at an all-time high of 71,000. At the same time, CSO data suggest that emigration from Hungary has also been increasing since 2021, while the number of people returning has been decreasing (KSH data,^{13,14}). The overall net migration balance is positive, but in most countries, immigration will not be able to meet the challenges that an ageing population will bring in the future.

There are also potentials in a declining population. For example, it may be possible to further raise educational attainment levels, which may be beneficial to the society since research has shown that higher educated groups are the most active and productive

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20230330-1> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

¹² United Nations World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d9aef235-en/index.html?i-temId=/content/component/d9aef235-en> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

¹³ https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0032.html (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

¹⁴ https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0031.html (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

in the labour market. In other words, investing in human capital can mitigate labour shortages and economic losses from declining productivity (Lutz et al., 2019, Sobotka and Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, 2020). However, the future impact of demographic change can only be softened, there is no realistic demographic scenario that can provide a clear answer or solution to the challenges of ageing.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), pp. 179–211.
- Andorka, R. (ed.) (2006). *Bevezetés a szociológiába [An introduction to sociology]*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó
- Andorka, R. (1987). *Gyermekszám a fejlett országokban [Number of children in developed countries]*. Budapest: Gondolat
- Bali, J. & Péterfi, P. (2023). A női gyermekvállalási életkor változása és regionális mintázatai az Európai Unióban [Changes and regional patterns in the female childbearing age in the European Union]. *Kapocs* 4, pp. 25–41.
- Beaujouan, E., Sobotka, T., Brzozowska, Z. & Zeman, K. (2017). Has childlessness peaked in Europe? *Population and Societies*, 540, 14. INED.
- Český Statistický Úřad (2023). *Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic*. <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/196592860/32019823.pdf/ee58edba-3a90-4b34-b96c-5b6c2983afff?version=1.0> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)
- Doblhammer, G. & Spéder, Zs. (2024). Editorial on the Special Issue “Demographic Developments in Eastern and Western Europe Before and After the Transformation of Socialist Countries”. *Comparative Population Studies*, 49, pp. 118–141. *Comparative Population Studies*, 49, pp. 118–141.
- Dyvik, E. H. (2024). *Distribution of the global population by continent 2023*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/237584/distribution-of-the-world-population-by-continent/> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)
- Easterlin, R. A. (1978). The Economics and Sociology of Fertility. In Tilly, Ch. (ed.): *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 57–134.
- Easterlin, R. A. (1980). *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare*. New York: Basic.
- Engler, Á. & Pári, A. (2022). A család jövője – az elsődleges szocializációs közeg társadalmi szerepváltozása [The future of the family. The changing social role of the primary socialisation medium]. *Századvég*, (2)3, pp. 11–34.
- United Nations (2024). *Population*. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/population> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

- Fishbein, M. & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behaviour: An introduction to theory and research*. Addison–Wesley, Reading, MA
- Eurostat (2024). Demography of Europe 2024. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2024#about-publication> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)
- Human Fertility Database. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany) and Vienna Institute of Demography (Austria). www.humanfertility.org (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)
- Kaiser, F. (2011). A túlnépesedés és globális biztonsági kihívásai. [Challenges of overpopulation and global security]. *Nemzet és Biztonság–Biztonságpolitikai Szemle*, 4(8), pp. 27–36.
- Kaiser, F. (2018). Túlnépesedés, erőforrás szűkösség „életter” konfliktusok [Conflicts of overpopulation, scarcity of resources and “living space”]. *Confessio*, 40(1), pp. 21–29.
- Kapitány, B. (ed.) (2015). *Demográfiai Fogalomtár [A glossary of demographic terms]*. Budapest: KSH (CSO) Hungarian Demographic Research Institute.
- Hungarian Demographic Research Institute (2021). *A visegrádi országok demográfiai jellemzői [Demographic characteristics of the Visegrad Group]*. https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/pdf/V4_demografiai_jellemzok.pdf, (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)
- Central Statistical Office (2024). *STADAT 22.1.1.6. Élveszületések és teljes termékenységi arányszám. [Live births and total fertility rate]*. https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0006.html (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)
- Lesthaeghe, R. (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review* 36(2), pp. 211–251.
- Livi Bacci, M. (2002). Supplement: Global Fertility Transition. *Population and Development Review*, 27. pp. 282–289.
- Lutz, W., Amran, G., Belanger, A., Conte, A., Gailey, N., Ghio, D., Grapsa, E., Jensen, K., Loichinger, E., Marois, G., Muttarak, R., Potancokova, M., Sabourin, P., & Stonawski, M. (2019, June 3). Demographic Scenarios for the EU. JRC Publications Repository. <https://doi.org/10.2760/590301>
- Óri, P. & Spéder, Z. (2020). Folytonos átmenet: Magyarország népesedése 1920 és 2020 között [Permanent transition. Hungary’s population, 1920–2020]. *Statistikai Szemle* (98)6, pp. 481–521.
- Pári, A., & Balog, P. (2022). A gyermekvállalást jelenleg elutasító gyermektelenek a fiatal felnőttek körében. [Childless young adults who currently reject parenthood.] In: *Magyar Lelekiállapot 2021. Család – egészség – közösség*, pp. 147–167.
- Patakiné Bende A. (2022). A visegrádi országok válasza a demográfiai kihívásokra – fókuszban a családpolitika. [Response of the Visegrad Group to demographic challenges – family policy in focus.] *Polgári Szemle*, (18)1-3, pp. 235–249.
- Sobotka, T., & Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, A. (2020). Demographic change in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe: Trends, determinants and challenges. In R. Holzmann, D.

Ritzberger-Grünwald, & H. Schuberth (eds.), *30 Years of Transition in Europe*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839109508.00027>

Somlai, P. (2013). *Család 2.0 [Family 2.0]*. Gondolat, Budapest, pp. 105–162.

Spéder, Zs. & Kapitány, B. (2014). Failure to Realize Fertility Intentions: A Key Aspect of the Post-communist Fertility Transition. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 33(3), pp. 393–418.

Spéder, Zs. (2006). Változások az ezredfordulón [Changes at the turn of the millennium]. In Andorka R. (ed.): *Bevezetés a szociológiába*, Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, pp. 213–214.

Sobotka, T., & Berghammer, C. (2021). Demography of family change in Europe. In: *Research Handbook on the Sociology of the Family* (pp. 162–186). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap-0a/edcoll/9781788975537/9781788975537.00019.xml> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Statistics Poland (2024). *Demographic Yearbook of Poland 2023*. <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbooks/demographic-yearbook-of-poland-2023,3,17.html> (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Štatistická Ročenka Slovenskej Republiky (2023). *Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 2023*.

Van de Kaa, D. J. (1996). Anchored narratives: the story and findings of half a century of research into the determinants of fertility. *Population Studies*, 50, pp. 389–432.

Vienna Institute of Demography (VID) and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). (2022). *European Demographic Datasheet 2022*. Wittgenstein Centre (IIASA, VID/OEAW, WU), Vienna. www.populationeurope.org (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Vienna Institute of Demography (VID) and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). (2018). *European Demographic Datasheet 2018*. Wittgenstein Centre (IIASA, VID/OEAW, WU), Vienna. www.populationeurope.org (Accessed: 18.06.2024.)

Zeman, K.; Beaujouan, É.; Brzozowska, Z., & Sobotka, T. (2018). Cohort fertility decline in low fertility countries: Decomposition using parity progression ratios. *Demographic Research*, 38, pp. 651–690.

Demographic Winter in Europe

Factors Related to Starting a Family in Europe and Hungary

Krisztina Kolozsvári, Dömötör Gere, Péter Pillók

INTRODUCTION

The social and economic landscape of Europe has undergone a major transformation in recent decades. Demographic trends on the continent, including postponement of childbearing, longer life expectancy at birth, pluralisation of family forms, ageing populations, have led to different population and social policy strategies in the Member States, forming a fault line between Member States, European citizens and the general policy directions of the European Union (Gere, 2024; Pári et al., 2023a). The upward shift of childbearing age and the increase in life expectancy at birth, coupled with improving living conditions and health care, have led to a paradoxical situation: there are fewer and fewer persons of active age for an increasing number of elderly persons (Bauer and Nagy, 2021).

Demographic changes will have an impact on Europe's competitive advantage in the medium to long term: an ageing population and declining fertility rates has a negative impact on the economy and society: the old-age dependency ratio increases as the working-age population is shrinking, labour shortages are aggravating and public finances are being hit. The declining number of children could subsequently affect the education system, the real estate market, and consumption patterns; it could result in higher migration and hinder the green and digital transition. All these impacts reinforce regional disparities and threaten social cohesion (European Commission, 2021, 2023).

Migration as a demographic solution has become a highly divisive issue for the population and is generating an increasingly heated debate in the political discourse. To reverse the negative demographic trend two instruments of intervention and social narratives are confronted: the presence and sustainability of different (social) policy instruments, and the different degrees of permissiveness of immigration. Whichever solution a country chooses, it undoubtedly has a significant impact on its population and the well-being of its citizens (Gyorgyovich and Regős, 2021).

Strengthening family support has been a cornerstone of recent EU economic policy. Although we are witnessing a pluralisation of family forms (Gyorgyovich and Pári, 2023), the family remains one of the most important pillars of society. In the last decade, Hungarian family policy has developed a substantial family support system to encourage childbearing. Preparing for starting a family, creating a stable financial background, and providing state support for childbearing decisions are of paramount importance for Hungarians, and in recent years home creation scheme and the situation of single-parent families have been given special attention (Gyorgyovich and Regős, 2021; Fűrész and Görög, 2018).

Understanding the causes and effects of demographic change is important in addressing the problems and challenges. In this paper, relying on data captured in 2020 and 2022 in the context of the Europe Project Survey 2020-2022 of Századvég, we analyse European citizens' views on the importance of the family, starting a family, as well as attitudes towards population policies and public interventions. Our aim is to explore the attitudes of EU citizens to key demographic trends amidst the current demographic changes.

Demographic trends in Europe

The world's population reached 8 billion in 2022, of which nearly 60% is in Asia, 18% in Africa and 9% in Europe (United Nations, 2022). Although the population of the European Union is growing on the whole, its share of the global population is steadily declining¹. The demographic picture of the continent is complex, with slow but significant demographic changes in the Member States, including Hungary, resulting largely from the second demographic transition, also known as the demographic winter. The transition is leading to significant changes such as a fall in fertility rates, a fall in mortality, and an increase in population due to immigration.

Table 1: Components of the population of the European Union and Hungary

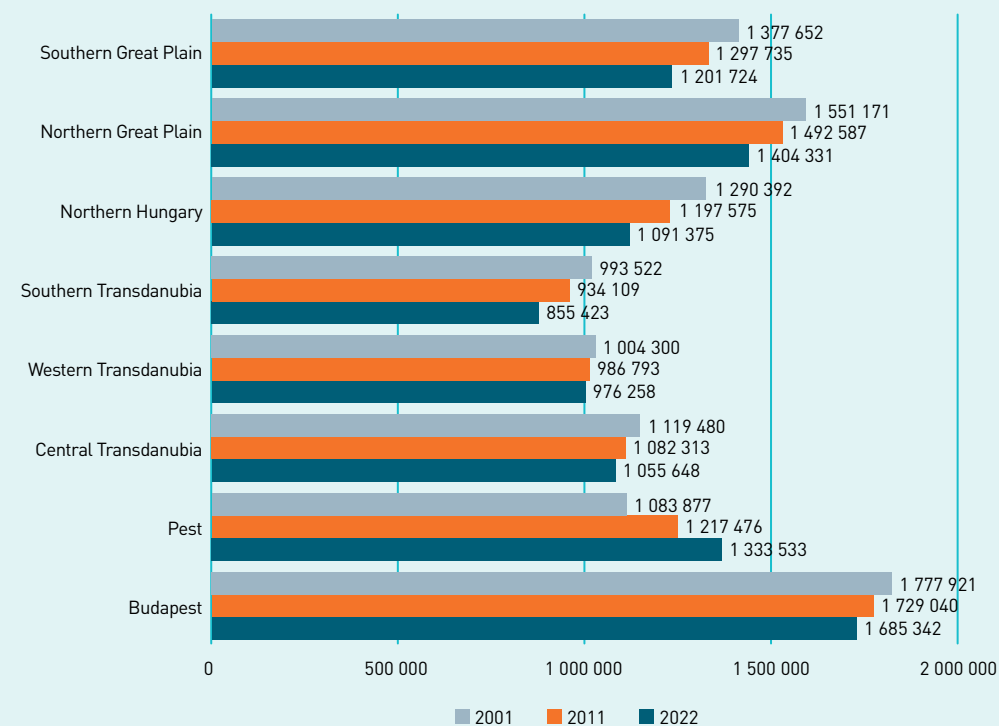
Year	Population size, million (31 December)	Births, thousand	Deaths, thousand	Net migration, thousand	Population change, thousand
EU27					
2010	439.9	4 604	4 345	503	762
2015	444.8	4 331	4 620	1 426	1 136
2020	447.0	4 071	5 184	835	-278
2022	448.4	3 886	5 149	3 973	2 710
Hungary					
2010	10.0	90.3	130.5	11.5	-28.6
2015	9.8	92.1	131.6	14.4	-25.1
2020	9.7	93.8	141.3	8.8	-38.8
2022	9.6	89.7	136.8	36.6	-10.5

Source: Eurostat.

Similar trends can be observed in Hungary (Table 1), with a population decline in all regions between 2001 and 2022, except for the Pest region (Figure 1). Since 1981, there has been a strong natural decrease, which peaked in 2021, when the country's population fell by 62 thousand. However, this effective decrease was significantly alleviated by a positive immigration balance between 1981 and 2022 (20.6 thousand in 2021). (CSO, 2021)

¹ By 2070 the contribution of Europe to the global population is expected to drop from the current 6% to approximately 4%.

Figure 1: Population by regions (thousand)



Source: CSO, 2022

Demographic change in the European Union, including Hungary, is driven by a number of factors. One of these factors is the evolution of the total fertility rate, which fell slightly between 2010 and 2021 (from 1.57 to 1.53) in the EU². In 2022, fertility rate in Hungary was higher (1.61) but still short of the reproduction rate³. Another factor, but one that is strongly correlated with fertility trends, is the postponement of childbearing and thus the extension of the childbearing age. In Eastern European countries, women are still younger, aged 26-29, when they have their first child (CSO, 2021). In Hungary, the average age at first childbirth increased steadily over the past decades, then slowed down and barely changed: between 1990 and 2010 the average age of women having their first child increased by more than 5.2 years, while between 2011 and 2018 it increased by only 0.4 years. In recent years, in Hungary on the average mothers had their first child at the age of 29.8 years⁴, which is 6 years higher than in 1990 and around 7-8 years higher than the average age of 21-22 in the 1970s. So the trend is clearly shifting towards later childbearing in Hungary (Veroszta et al., 2021).

² Currently, fertility in most European countries is 25-40% below what is needed for simple population reproduction.

³ The target for 2020 to maintain the population is 2.1. Hungary last reached this target in 1978.

⁴ It is important to note here that although the age when women give birth to their first child is delayed, according to the women in the Kohorsz '8 (Cohorts '18) study, the ideal age for having the first child is less, 25.7 years.

The low birth rate in Europe, coupled with rising life expectancy at birth and falling mortality, is leading to an ageing European population and a decline in the working-age population. Partly due to the state of the health care system and lifestyle factors, life expectancy at birth (excluding the decline during the COVID-19 pandemic) is on an upward trend, and reached an EU average of 80.1 years in 2021.⁵ Life expectancy in Hungary is somewhat lower, averaging 74.5 years. The share of the senior population has been on the increase since 2006, while the share of the working-age population has been steadily shrinking since 2007 (64.9% on 1 January 2022 compared to 68.9% in 2007) (CSO, 2022). Currently, the proportion of people aged 65 and over in the population is around 20%, and is expected to rise to 30% by 2050. The highest proportions of people aged 65 and over are found in Italy (23.8%), Portugal (23.7%) and Finland (23.1%). According to the 2022 census data, there are 141 elderly persons per 100 children in Hungary, slightly higher than in the previous year (CSO, 2022; Fl6r, 2022).

Demographic forecasts predict that the European Union will face complex challenges: the population will decline in the long term, the age structure will continue to shift towards ageing, the active-age population will decline, the average age at which women have their first child will continue to rise, consequently reducing the number of women of childbearing age, and the gap between the number of desired and actually born children will continue to widen. This poses a major challenge for population trends, but also for the sustainability of welfare systems and the health sector. The question arises whether having all the desired children to be born would be a solution, and from this perspective, whether efficient family support can contribute to stabilising population growth.

Pluralisation of family forms and the statistics on young people

Since the second half of the 20th century, Europe has witnessed an increase in the diversity of family forms and a change in the patterns of starting a family – a process that fits in well with the demographic transition discussed above. The changes in relationships, childbearing and forms of cohabitation can be traced back to the rise of individualisation (Harcza and Monostori, 2014; Gyorgyovich and Reg6s, 2021). The traditional nuclear family model based on marriage is being replaced by an increasing variety of family forms, such as cohabiting partnerships, single-parent families and mosaic families. The family role has also changed significantly with the widespread employment of women and the transformation of the education system, the most significant consequence being that starting a family is being delayed. At present, couples in Hungary have children on average at the age of 30, an age shift that illustrates how the evolution of family roles and family forms can affect the life, future plans and life events of the family (Gyorgyovich 6s P6ri, 2023).

In recent years, marriage rate in the European Union has fallen while the number of partnerships has increased, so that 42.2% of births in 2022 were out of wedlock. While the propensity to marry remains unbroken in Hungary, the rise in cohabitation has led to an increasing number of unmarried couples living together and having children (Markos and Zenovitz, 2023). The diversity of family forms and the diversification of

⁵ At a European level, life expectancy of women remains higher: in 2021, it was 82.9 years compared to 77.2 years for men (Eurostat).

individual life paths challenge family and population policies, as the impact of policies varies from country to country. This is why the relationship between demographic trends and changes in family structure is so complex and varies across countries (Harcza and Monostori, 2014; Gyorgyovich and Regős, 2021).

Recognising the ageing population structure and its effects, most family support policies focus on young people, so in this paper we consider it important to briefly discuss the situation of young people in terms of parenthood and starting a family. Research shows that young Hungarians on average want to have two children. The main factors influencing their desire to have children are the financial situation (68%), a secure environment (36–39%), maturity for parenthood, and a stable relationship (Domokos et al., 2020). The later independence and childbearing of young people are also associated with a delay in separation from their parents. According to an international survey covering 12 countries (Youth Research Institute, 2023) respondents, including Hungarians, believe that young people should be supported until the age of 24 on average. Parental involvement is primarily financial support (76%)⁶ but respondents also consider parental involvement in housing necessary (71% of young Europeans on average, 65% in Hungary). Romanians need parental support until the age of 26 on average, while the South Slavs consider that parental support is important for the shortest period of time (up to 23 years of age).⁷

Hungary offers a variety of support schemes to young people and families including the Family Housing Support Programme (CSOK), baby-expecting support, family tax allowances and tax relief for first-time married couples. The popularity of these forms of support has been high since the beginning, but when we look at the effectiveness of the schemes, we find that it is over the longer term that they can contribute to the financial security of couples and thus to increasing the propensity to have children (Gyorgyovich and Regős, 2021). The question arises whether the family support schemes introduced and planned will lead to social stability and economic prosperity in the long run (Gyorgyovich, 2022). In this paper, we do not offer an answer to this question, but we present our results to highlight the attitudes of the European population towards the role of the state.

Overall, we can see that family forms are becoming more diverse, the number of one-person households is increasing, the childbearing age and the age at which people leave education and start working is also shifting increasingly later. All these effects lead to a gradual divergence between the actual and desired number of children (with regional differences, of course). Recognising the negative demographic trends, family and population policies offer instruments and forms of support that can lead to a sustainable and stable future in the long term, but not in the short term.

Methodology

Relying on data from Project Europe survey conducted by Századvég, our analysis explores the differences between regions and groups of countries, as well as changes in public attitudes over time. The Europe Project aims to survey public opinion on the

⁶ Two extremes should be noted here: in Serbia this rate is 90%, while in North Macedonia, it is 58%.

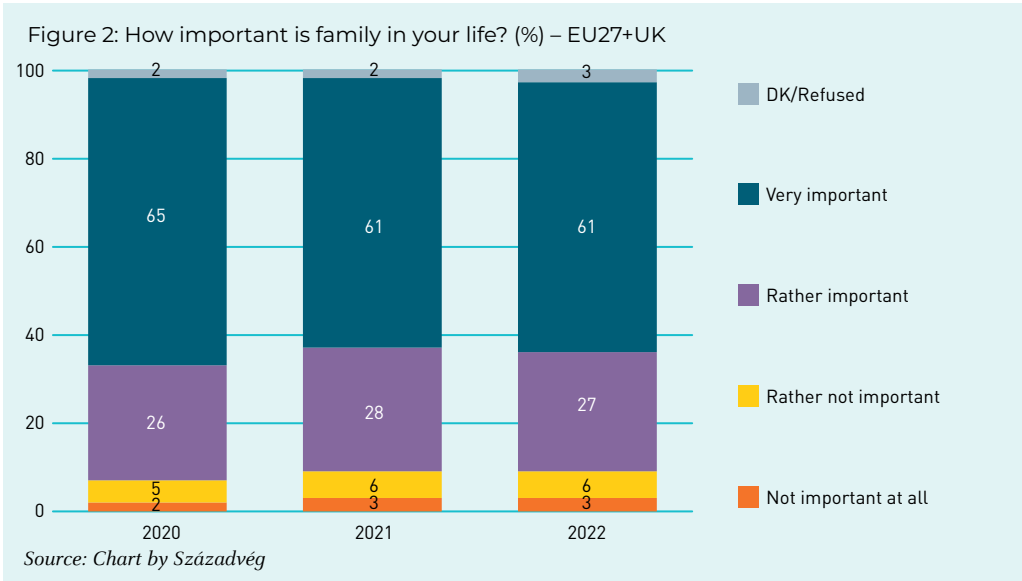
⁷ The survey was conducted in April 2023 and involved 12 respondents, one thousand from each country. The following countries were involved: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia.

most important social issues facing the continent. To this end, a total of 30,000 persons in the 27 Member States of the European Union, plus the United Kingdom, Norway and Switzerland, were interviewed using questionnaires. The survey was conducted using the CATI⁸ method with randomly selected adult participants. The sample is representative of each country by gender, age group and region. In this analysis, we present the results of the 2020, 2021 and 2022 surveys. Our study focuses in particular on the differences between EU and national results and on the differences between groups of countries. The groups of countries to be compared are as follows: the founding states of the European Union, the 20th-century accession countries, the former communist countries and the Visegrád Group (V4). In the analysis, special attention is paid to factors that reflect the attitudes and value preferences of citizens of the studied countries regarding family forms, family support and demographic events.

Findings of the Europe Project

Importance of the institution of the family and ideal number of children

The family is a pillar of society, the most ancient and enduring institution of human culture. The family is an essential source of socialisation, emotional support and economic security, as well as a critical transmitter of heritage and cultural values (Parsons, 1955; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

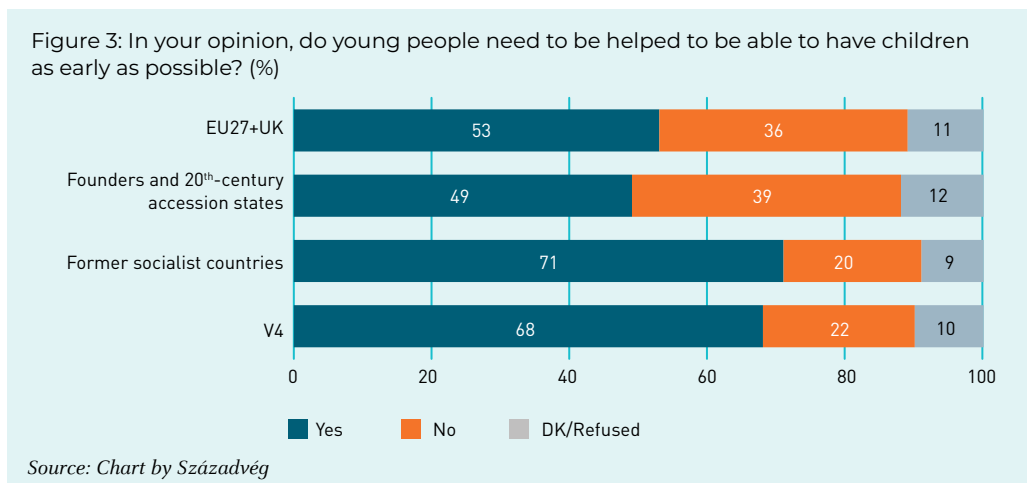


According to the results of Project Europe, attitudes towards the family are extremely positive in the European Union countries and the UK. Surveys in recent years show more or less the same trend (Figure 2). The Balkan countries have the most positive

⁸ Computer Assisted Telephone Interview

attitudes towards the family, but the Visegrád Group and the Former Socialist countries also expressed positive views on the importance of the family above the European average. Hungary also has an outstanding position among Member States in terms of the importance attributed to the family: in 2022, 89% of respondents considered the institution of family very important, while 9% considered it rather important. There are significant differences between countries, despite the fact that the vast majority of the countries surveyed have a rather positive attitude towards the institution of family. Only three of the countries surveyed have a positive opinion rate below 50%: 46% of respondents in Belgium and Finland and 48% in Switzerland consider the family to be very important.

When it comes to the ideal number of children, in line with the results of recent surveys, the majority of European citizens questioned consider two children to be ideal⁹. The proportion of respondents planning to have two children is almost the same in all country groups: 57% of respondents in the V4 and Former socialist countries and 55% in the Founders would ideally like to have two children. The results of the survey show that among the Former socialist countries Estonia (43%), Latvia (42%) and Hungary (38%) have the highest proportions of people who consider three children in a family to be ideal, while only 2-4% of respondents imagine life without children. The trend in the number of children considered ideal typically suggests that the life course before having children is becoming more standardised, with the average childbearing age extended. This has an impact on childbearing and, although medical science is improving, it is clear that those who have their first child later in life are more likely to give birth to fewer siblings than those who have their first child earlier (Pári et al., 2023b).



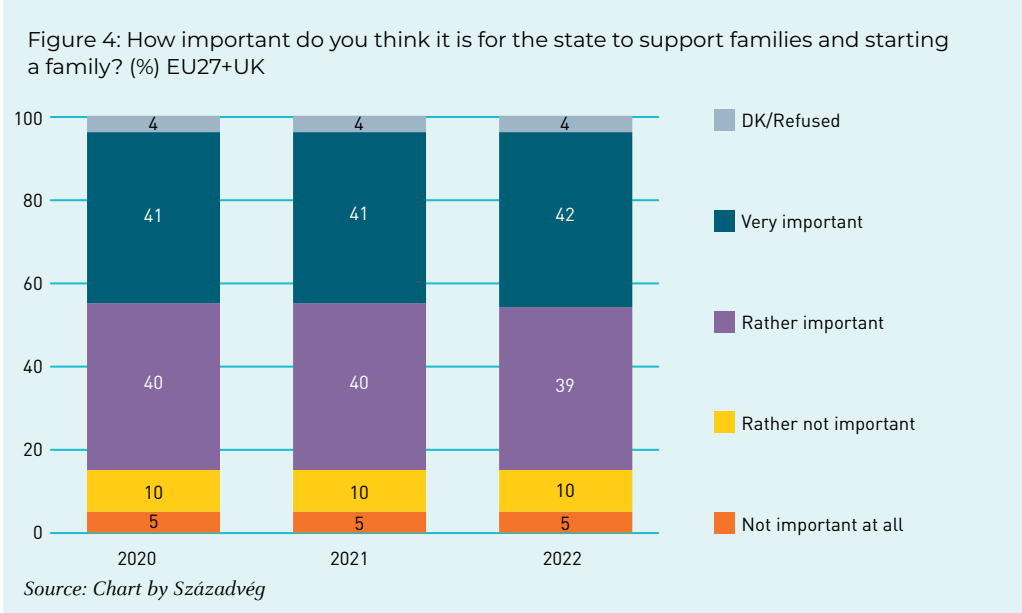
Today’s social and economic events are increasingly influencing the birth of desired children, so we asked how important European citizens think it is to support young people in having children. At a European level, opinions on this issue are very mixed: half of Europeans

⁹ Question: In your opinion, what would be the ideal number of children in a family?

surveyed (50% in 2020 and 53% in 2022) consider it important to support young people, while almost one in four (37% in 2020 and 36% in 2022) do not consider it important at all. The Former socialist countries rate support of young people as a top priority (71%), followed by the V4 countries (68%), only 3 percentage points behind, while the Founders are the most divisive, with 49% in favour and 39% against (Figure 3). As expected, Hungary is the most supportive on this issue (85%), while the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries – UK, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands – are the least supportive.

Supporting families – state involvement

Research over the past few years (Engler, 2018; Domokos et al., 2020; Engler and Pári, 2021) shows that before having children young people consider starting a family and building a career equally important, although career building is at times prioritised for personal economic reasons. Among those planning to start a family, financial situation, owning a home and having a secure job are among the main economic conditions for starting a family. Family support measures and a family-friendly mindset are needed to support personal well-being, to be successful at work and to reconcile these two aspects, thus reducing the “career-or-family” dilemmas.



We also assessed European citizens’ attitudes towards family support. When asked about the importance of family support at state level, European citizens gave an overall positive response: 42% of respondents rated family support by the state as very important, while another 39% rated it as important (Figure 4). There are regional differences in the perceived importance of family support: in Eastern Europe (e.g. Bulgaria and Slovakia), there is generally a higher level of support for public involvement than in Western Europe (e.g. France and Portugal). Hungary is outstanding in this question compared to

the other countries, with the vast majority of respondents (74%) rating the importance of public support for families as “*very important*”. Regional differences can be explained by a number of factors, such as the economic development of each country, its family policy system, cultural values and the awareness of its citizens.

Owning one’s home is an increasingly important goal in life when it comes to having children and starting a family. The high rate of renting a home among young people planning to have children (27% in 2018) reflects the protracted transition between parenthood and starting a family (Kocsis, 2023). Real estate prices are gradually rising, housing costs are escalating and the future is increasingly unpredictable (Domokos et al., 2020). In 2022 our research also assessed whether European citizens think it is important for a family to own their own home. Two-thirds of the European respondents (63%) consider it somewhat important or very important to own a home, a very firm view based on data from recent years. The Former socialist countries and the V4 countries are the most supportive in this respect. Looking at the data for each country, Hungary is particularly supportive: 63% of Hungarian citizens consider it very important to own their own home, while another 25% consider it important.

The survey also examined whether support for large families is seen as a priority. At the European level, society is highly divided, with 54% of respondents saying that support for large families should be a priority, while nearly one in three (34%) disagree. In some countries, a significant majority of respondents – 82% in Greece, 77% in Latvia, 76% in Estonia and 75% in Hungary (75%) – consider it important to support large families. In other countries, such as Sweden (39%) and Denmark (26%), the proportion of respondents who emphasize the importance of support is much lower.

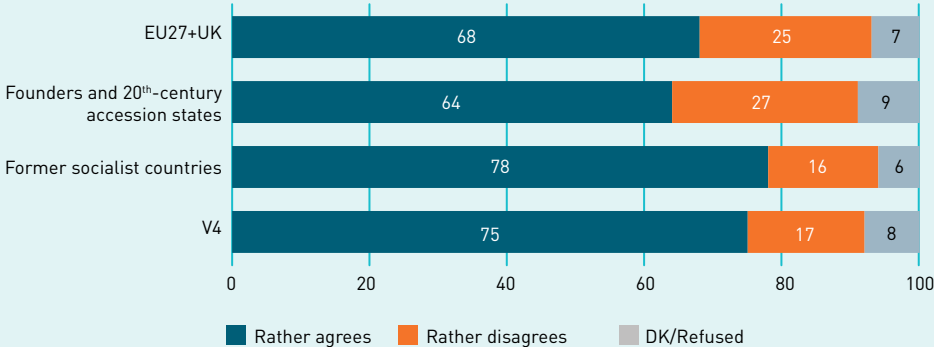
Our findings reveal that at the European level, fostering a family-friendly mindset is as important as providing financial support: three-quarters (79%) of European citizens consider it important or very important to strengthen a family-friendly attitude. The majority of respondents in all countries are strongly in favour of strengthening a family-friendly mindset. Overall, a significant proportion of European citizens favour state-level family support. The Hungarian data are extremely positive on a number of issues, which is not surprising given that the Hungarian family policy has developed substantial family support schemes in recent years to encourage childbearing. For example, with the introduction of the first Family Housing Support Programme, the Hungarian government introduced a very significant, unprecedented, spectacular and generous family support solution, but similar support is provided by the baby-expecting support, loans with subsidised interest, and the reduction of VAT on newly-built houses and flats. Housing as a prerequisite for starting a family is of paramount importance, and family support instruments targeting employment and housing have the greatest impact on Hungarian fertility rates (Bördös et al., 2021).

Supporting families versus migration

As explained in the introductory chapter, social policy responses to demographic challenges represent a significant fault line between the Member States of the European Union, European citizens and the general policy orientations of the European Union. To reverse the negative demographic trend, two instruments of intervention and social

narratives are confronted: the presence and sustainability of different (social) policy instruments, and the different degrees of permissiveness of immigration (Fúrész et al., 2021).

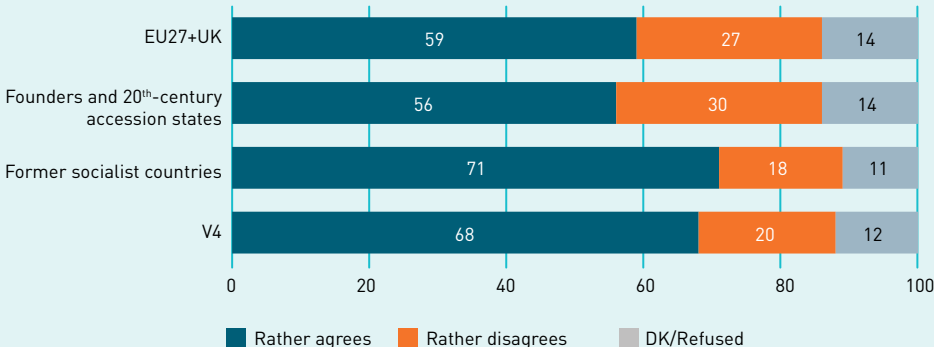
Figure 5: Do you rather agree or rather disagree with the following statement? Your country should use its internal resources and support local families instead of migration. (%)



Source: Chart by Századvég

In our research, we explored European citizens’ views on the intervention instruments mentioned in the introduction. First, we asked respondents whether their country should rely on internal resources and support local families instead of encouraging immigration (Figure 5). The European opinion climate markedly shows that, given the choice between relying on internal resources and supporting local families or prioritising immigration, European citizens strongly prefer internal resources and thus supporting local families (68%). The Former socialist countries agree with the view the most (78%), while the Founders agree the least (64%) to agree. The highest levels of agreement are found in Hungary (88%) and the Czech Republic (88%). The populations of the three countries at the bottom of the list (Spain, Luxembourg and the Republic of Ireland) are greatly divided on this issue. While they are mostly in favour of supporting local families, they are not shying away from encouraging immigration either.

Figure 6: Do you rather agree or rather disagree with the following statement? The problem of population decline should be solved by increasing the number of children to be born rather than by immigration. (%)



Source: Chart by Századvég

We also asked European citizens whether interventions to encourage childbearing and support families are a sufficient solution to the demographic problem, or whether some level of immigration should be allowed. The results are significantly diverging across the European population: the Former socialist countries and the V4 countries would increase the number of children born, while only 56% of the Founders agree with increasing the number of children, and are therefore not opposed to allowing some immigration (Figure 6). Hungary has an exceptionally high proportion (84%) of all countries in favour of increasing the number of children born to address demographic problems, reflecting the importance of supporting and protecting families.

SUMMARY

Our study aimed to survey the opinion climate in Europe in relation to the current demographic challenges by examining the factors associated with starting a family. Demographic forecasts suggest that the European Union – and the world – faces complex challenges: a long-term population decline (although a positive balance from immigration will mitigate the population decline from natural attrition), an ageing population structure, a shrinking working-age population, a further pluralisation of family forms, and a continued shift in childbearing age, with a further decline in the number of women of childbearing age. These demographic changes are leading to regional disparities and pose a long-term threat to Europe's economic stability and social cohesion. The question arises whether supporting families and encouraging childbearing is the solution by itself to demographic challenges and population trends. In our study, we aimed to get closer to the answers by analysing the European opinion climate.

The results of Project Europe clearly confirm that the family is a key institution in Europe, with a particularly high proportion of respondent sharing this opinion in Hungary. In spite of the diversification of family structures, it is of paramount importance for European citizens to strengthen family-friendly attitudes, to protect families and to increase measures to support parenthood and starting a family. As to the ideal number of children, it is clear that at a European level the ideal number of children is two, and only few people imagine their lives without children. However, a significant problem and challenge remains that the number of children actually born is significantly lower than the number of children desired. Those who have their first child later in life are also likely to have fewer siblings than those who have their first child earlier.

Migration as a solution to the demographic challenge remains a highly divisive issue. The European public believes that the main response to population decline and current demographic challenges should rely on internal resources and supporting local families, while at the same time some countries are not averse to the simultaneous application of family and migration policies. Hungary has an exceptionally high proportion (84%) among all countries in favour of increasing the number of children born to address demographic challenges, which clearly reflects the importance Hungarians attach to the institution of the family. Our results show that it would be very difficult to solve demographic problems at a European level by encouraging childbearing in itself.

European citizens, especially Hungarians, are broadly supportive of state-level interventions supporting families, although there are regional differences in the perception of family support measures. For young people who do not yet have children, starting a family and building a career are equally important, although at times career building is prioritised for financial reasons. Among those planning to start a family, financial situation, owning a home and having a secure job are among the main economic conditions for starting a family. Family support measures and a family-friendly mindset are needed to support personal well-being, to be successful at work and to reconcile these two aspects, thus mitigating “*career-or-family*” dilemmas.

Dealing with the demographic crisis in Europe is therefore a complex issue that requires an integrated approach. Member States need to take proactive steps to tackle ageing, support young generations and balance migration policies. Family policies and social policies remain crucial to ensuring future stability and prosperity, although it is important to recognise that a real demographic turnaround in a society can take generations, so even the most effective interventions will take decades to achieve spectacular results.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES

Bauer, B. & Nagy, M. T. (2022). A népesség elöregedésének társadalmi hatásai Magyarországon [Social impacts of ageing in Hungary]. *Századvég Riport 2021*, pp. 405–432.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.

Bördös, K. & Szabó-Morvai, Á. (2021). A 2000–2015 közötti családpolitikai intézkedések hatása a születésszámra Magyarországon [Effect of family policy measures taken between 2000 and 2015 on birth rates in Hungary.] *Demográfia, Vol. 64*, pp. 2–3, pp. 137–170.

Domokos, T., Kántor, Z., Pillók, P. & Székely, L. (2020). *Magyar Fiatalok 2020 [Hungarian youth 2000]*. Budapest, Társadalomkutató Kft. https://tarsadalomkutato.hu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/magyar_ifjusag_2020_web-v%C3%9Ag.pdf (Accessed: 15.04.2024)

Engler, Á. (2018). Párkapcsolati elköteleződések és családalapítási szándékok [Commitments to partnerships and intents to start a family]. Engler, Ágnes (ed.) *Család és karrier. Egyetemi hallgatók jövőtervei [Family and career. Future plans of university students.]* Debrecen University, Centre for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD-Hungary), pp. 12–41.

European Commission (2021). *Green paper on ageing – Public consultation: Synopsis report*. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-06/green_paper_ageing_2021_en.pdf (Accessed: 25.04.2024).

European Commission (2023). *The Impact of Demographic Change in a Changing Environment*. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/Demography_report_2022_o.pdf (Accessed: 10.04.2024)

European Commission (2023). Communication on demographic change in Europe: A toolbox for action. https://commission.europa.eu/publications/communication-demographic-change-europe-toolbox-action_en (Accessed: 20.04.2024)

Eurostat (2023a). Demography of Europe. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2023> (Accessed: 25.04.2024)

Eurostat (2023b) Fertility statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Fertility_statistics#Highest_share_of_children_from_foreign-born_mothers_in_Luxembourg (Accessed: 25.04.2024)

Flór, N. (2022). Demográfiai körkép Magyarországon [A demographic outlook to Hungary]. <https://www.oeconomus.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Demografiai-korkep-Magyarorszagon-Flor-Nandor-2022-november.pdf> (Accessed: 05.06.2024)

Fűrész, G., Erdős, G., Maurer, Sz., Speidl, B. & Hortay, O. (2021). *Közös pontok a magyar és az uniós közvéleményben* [Common points in Hungarian and EU public opinion]. Magyarország 2021, pp. 39–49.

Fűrész, T. & Szakáli, I. L. (2024). Demográfia és versenyképesség az Európai Unióban. [Demography and competitiveness in the European Union.] https://www.koppmariaintezet.hu/docs/Demografia_es_versenykepesség_az_Európai_Unióban.pdf (Accessed: 09.07.2024)

Kapocs [Links], Vol. 6, 2023 (2-3), 66-75. https://epa.oszk.hu/02900/02943/00092/pdf/EPA02943_kapocs_2023_2-3_066-075.pdf (Accessed: 09.07.2024)

Gyorgyovich, M. & Regős, G. (2022). A családpolitikák társadalmi megítélése [A societal assessment of family policies.] *Századvég Riport 2021*, pp. 285–306.

Gyorgyovich, M. (2022). A családpolitikák társadalmi megítélése [A societal assessment of family policies.] *Kapocs, 5. évfolyam, 2022 (3-4)*, pp. 41–48. https://epa.oszk.hu/02900/02943/00090/pdf/EPA02943_kapocs_2022_3-4_041-048.pdf (Accessed: 20.04.2024)

Gyorgyovich, M. & Pári, A. (2023). A család(fogalom) pluralizálódása a magyar társadalomban [The pluralisation of the family (concept)]. In: *Család – Érték – Tér*, pp. 13–35. https://epa.oszk.hu/02900/02943/00093/pdf/EPA02943_kapocs_2023_4_003-024.pdf (Accessed: 03.06.2024)

Harcsa, I. & Monostori, J. (2014). Demográfiai folyamatok és a családformák pluralizációja Magyarországon. [Demographic trends and pluralisation of family forms in Hungary]. *Társadalmi Riport, Vol. 13, 1*, pp. 83–109.

Kapitány, B. & Spéder, Zs. (2021). Gyermekvállalás Entering parenthood. In: Monostori, J. – Óri, P. – Spéder, Zs. (eds.) *Demográfiai Portré 2021. Jelentés a magyar népesség helyzetéről.* [A demographic portrait 2021. Report on the Hungarian population.] Budapest, CSO Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, pp. 45–63.

Központi Statisztikai Hivatal [Central Statistical Office]. Népmozgalom. [Population movement] (2021). <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepmozg/nepmozg21/>

index.html#anvekvtermeszetesfogystcsakmrskelnitudtaazemelkedbevndorlsitbblet (Accessed: 20.04.2024)

Központi Statisztikai Hivatal [Central Statistical Office] 2022. Fenntartható fejlődés indikátorai (2022). [Indicators of sustainable development (2022)]. https://www.ksh.hu/s/kiadvanyok/fenntarthato-fejlodes-indikatorai-2022/fenntarthato_fejlodes_indikatorai_2022.pdf (Accessed: 16.04.2024)

Központi Statisztikai Hivatal [Central Statistical Office] 2022. Az első gyermekvállalás életkorának változása Magyarországon. [Changes in the age of having the first child in Hungary.] *Demografia.hu/Korfa*, 22(3).

Markos, V. & Zenovitz, L. (2023). A párkapcsolat típusa és a gyermekvállalás [Partnership types and childbearing]. In: *Család – Érték – Tér*, pp. 111–124. https://epa.oszk.hu/02900/02943/00093/pdf/EPA02943_kapocs_2023_4_003-024.pdf (Accessed: 03.06.2024)

Obádovics, Cs. & Tóth G., Cs., (2021). A népesség szerkezete és jövője [The structure and future of population.] *Demográfiai portré*, pp. 251–75.

Papházi, T., Tárkányi, Á. & Kapdebo, Á. (2022) Gyermekvállalási szándékok a Hungarostudy adatainak tükrében [Childbearing intents in the light of Hungarostudy data.] In: Engler, Ágnes, Purebl, György, Susánszky, Éva et al. (eds.): *Magyar lelkiállapot 2021. Család – egészség – közösség [Hungarian mood 2021. Family, health, community.]* Budapest: Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families, pp. 69–92.

Parsons, T. (1955). *The American Family: Its Relations to Personality and the Social Structure*. In: T. Parsons & R. F. Bales (eds.), *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, pp. 3–33. Free Press.

Pári, A. Rövid, I. & Fűrész, T. (2023a). Népesedési folyamatok Európában magyar szemszögből. [Demographic trends in Europe from a Hungarian perspective.] *KAPOCS*, 2023(4), pp. 3–24. https://epa.oszk.hu/02900/02943/00093/pdf/EPA02943_kapocs_2023_4_003-024.pdf (Accessed: 03.06.2024)

Pári, A., Papházi, T., Trieb, M. & Agócs, G. (2023b). Öröklődő családi minták: a testvérszám és a gyermekvállalás kapcsolata [Inherited family patterns: relations between the number of siblings and childbearing.] In: *Család - Érték - Tér*, pp. 267–280.

Kocsis, J., B. (2023). A magyarországi fiatalok nyolcadik legégetőbb problémája: lakáshoz jutás, lakásproblémák [The eighth most serious problem of young people in Hungary: homeownership and housing.] Pillók, Péter – Székely, Levente (eds.), *Kívánj tized*, pp. 157–173. Budapest, Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács Szövetség. ISBN 978-615-01-7060-2.

R. Fedor A. & Balogh E. (2016). A fiatalok családalapítási mintázata. [Patterns of starting a family among young people.] *Különleges Bánásmód, Vol. II, No. 2016/3*, 31–40. DOI 10.18458/KB.2016.3.31

Századvég (not dated). Europe Project. <https://szazadvég.hu/europa-projekt/> (Accessed: 06.06.2024)

United Nations (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022. Summary of results*. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/wpp2022_summary_of_results.pdf (Accessed: 05.04.2024)

Veroszta, Zs., Boros, J., Kapitány, B., Kopcsó, K., Leitheiser, F., Szabó, L. & Spéder, Zs.(2021). *Várandósság Magyarországon: Jelentés a Kohorsz '18 Magyar Születési Kohorszvizsgálat 1. Hullámáról [Pregnancy in Hungary. Report on Stage I of the Kohorsz '18 Hungarian birth year cohort survey.]* Kutatási Jelentések 104. Budapest: KSH Hungarian Demographic Research Institute

Demographic and Family Policy Aspects of the Hungarian EU Presidency

Árpád Mészáros, Éva Gellérné Lukács, Tünde Fűrész

INTRODUCTION

In the EU, demographic winter is now a fact of life. Since the 1960s, falling birth rates, coupled with rising life expectancy, have led to a situation where a shrinking younger generation with bad prospects live together with a growing older generation, whose members are often better off financially than those of the young generation. At the same time, there is a loss of labour force which, in some regions, is coupled with a lack of (suitable) jobs. This is the basic situation that the EU and its Member States need to address with a positive approach, and they are attempting to do so. On the one hand, services intended to meet the needs of the elderly make reference to the job-creating potential of the silver economy and to *the Europe of long life*, and, on the other hand, they seek to improve, through various means, opportunities for people living in economically less developed regions. The stakes are high: consequences of a negative scenario include a breakdown in social solidarity as well as a slowdown in economic innovation and a loss of the EU's competitiveness. One must think over the fact that currently brain drain, a "dark side" of the free movement of persons (one of the fundamental freedoms of the EU's internal market) seems to be more apparent than ever before. This paper discusses the EU's response to demographic challenges in the light of the overall demographic priorities of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024, with a special focus on the EU's flagship initiative for 2023, the Demography Toolbox and its implications. The paper seeks to highlight how the EU's institutional framework can make a significant contribution to addressing these challenges and the fact that these processes entail a great potential for Hungary (the Member State which will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024), offering it an opportunity to channel its values (above all, its family policy values) into the mainstream of demography policy.

I. THE CREATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEMOGRAPHY TOOLBOX

I.1 Background

The EU's demographic situation has been a subject to discourse for a long time now. The debate is based on the fact that was stated as early as in the European Commission's 1989 communication on family policy and has been valid ever since: in the EU, the number of children is declining, less people decide to get married, more and more opt for divorce,

while Europe is exposed to the impacts of an ageing population (European Commission, 1989). Consequently, the working-age population is shrinking, an increasing number of relatively small and fragile households are created, and, ultimately, some regions face depopulation, while the gap between urban and rural regions is widening. If not addressed, the consequences of the demographic change may exacerbate other existing economic and social challenges (e.g. climate change, geopolitical disruptions, repeated shocks to supply chains, increasing labour shortage) (Pári et al., 2023).

While it is easy to see that demographic winter exists, its causes are more complex to pin down. According to the authors of this paper, the most likely reasons are the devaluation of the role of the family and the relativisation of the family's functions (Fűrész – Molnár, 2023). Back in 1989, the above-mentioned communication put it very clearly: “*Given that the number of children is declining, Europe’s demographic future depends on families*” (European Commission, 1989). Yet this approach, which was still so clear 30 years ago, has faded since then, and has been replaced by an increasingly migration-centred approach to the demographic challenge (Fűrész – Mészáros, 2024). This held particularly true for the period from 2014 to 2019, when considerations and approaches based on internal human resources completely receded to the background, and policy-making came to be determined by the increasing pressure exerted by migration and the migration processes which, by then, had become a fact of life for European countries. At the level of policies and policy-making, demographic issues were determined by various aspects of the challenges posed by migration (Fűrész – Mészáros, 2024).

Although in 2019 a commissioner responsible for demography was appointed for the first time, namely *Dubravka Šuica*, and this development indicated that demographic issues were to be addressed in the context of a comprehensive approach across policy areas (that is, not by a single body), the first major document that reverted to the former approach to possible EU responses to demographic challenges was not issued until 2023. That document was the Demography Toolbox (European Commission, 2023). This means that it took more than 30 years for the field of demography to gain new momentum in the search for balanced, complex and realistic EU-level responses, including childbearing. This seems to be confirmed by the Council’s involvement in putting the issue on the political agenda. Still, mention must be made of the fact that by mid-2024 no body responsible for demographic issues has been set up in the Council. Similarly, there is no dedicated commission in the European Parliament or an institutional structure attached to the Commissioner’s post – a situation allows for but limited intervention.

To have an insight into the new opportunities offered by the Demography Toolbox, let us discuss what has happened at the EU level since 2019 in terms of the demographic challenge. The immediate precursors of the Demography Toolbox include the European Commission’s Communication of 14 January 2020 entitled *A strong social Europe for just transitions* (European Commission, 2020), which takes a neutral approach to the phenomenon of ageing. The communication points out that due to the advances in medicine and public health people live longer and enjoy better health, which can

strengthen the silver economy and the economic sectors providing care services. Yet, at the same time, ageing population and urbanisation result in a shrinking of the population in rural areas and in a widening gap between urban and rural areas. Back then the European Commission placed more emphasis on the potential of the silver economy (European Commission, 2018)¹. In 2021, The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan also called for a better reconciliation of family life and work as a way to share care responsibilities (European Commission, 2021a). It must be noted that the Communication of 2022 does not dwell on the issue of the concept of family – it merely mentions it in connection with the risk of poverty (pointing out the need to combat family poverty and child poverty) and significance can be attributed to it merely as to a precursor to the EU Strategy of 2021 on the Rights of the Child (European Commission, 2021c). The Communication of 2022 fails to focus on those solutions to the demographic challenge that would contribute to the renewal of the EU's human capital (i.e. its population) in general by relying on internal resources. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan does not make a direct reference to the concept of family, but in the context of equal opportunities it does discuss the sharing of care responsibilities, the prevention of child poverty and the strengthening of social protection systems.

At this point, let us have a look at the 2021 Strategy on the Rights of the Child. On the one hand, it links the concept of the family to child poverty. *“Strengthening the socio-economic inclusion of children is essential to address the passing of poverty and disadvantage through generations. Social protection and support to families is essential in this respect.”* (European Commission, 2021c, Points 2.1 and 6). It also mentions family when it discusses mental health and domestic violence, and, in this respect, calls for support for families (European Commission, 2021c, Point 2.2.). The Annex to the Strategy lists the EU *acquis* and policy documents related to the rights of the child. The lengthy list contains references to numerous directives, Council and Commission recommendations, communications, etc. Tellingly, Point 2.1.2 (Family Life) lists no more than four documents: the Council recommendation on child care, the directive on work life balance, the directive on safety and health at work, and the framework agreement on parental leave. The European Child Guarantee (Council of the European Union, 2021), intended to implement the Strategy, puts even more emphasis on poverty and vulnerability.² In general, the approach focuses on the individual protection of the child, which falls in line with international trends of the last decades³.

However, as a sign of a slow change in the approach, a 2020 Communication entitled *A strong social Europe for just transitions* makes references to the foundation on which

¹ In a “silver economy”, economic activity serves the needs of people aged 50 and over, for instance via products and services purchased and the further economic activity their spending generates. European Commission (2018), *The silver economy – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

² Council Recommendations, Points 1–2: “1. The aim of this Recommendation is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access of children in need to a set of key services, thereby also contributing to upholding the rights of the child by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities. 2. This Recommendation applies to children in need”

³ See: Statement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crc/statements/CRC-Article-5-statement.pdf>

the 2023 changes were built. The Communication takes a solid demographic stance when it stresses that “*ageing is not the only demographic challenge. New household patterns such as higher number of single-person households, mobility to the cities leading to depopulation of rural areas, brain-drain or even migration flows all contribute to a changing demographic landscape in the EU.*” (European Commission, 2020). Here the Commission starts making the first references to those factors which by 2023 would become more accentuated at the European level.

In January 2023, the European Commission published its report *The impact of demographic change – in a changing environment*, (European Commission, 2023c). The report is a descriptive document whose main body, quite absurdly, fails to mention “family” even once. By contrast, it offers a detailed description of the negative trend which leads to depopulation in some European regions where there is a lack of jobs, the infrastructure is inadequate and young people are leaving in search of a better life. The report makes an important statement when it points out that “*young women are more likely to leave rural areas than young men*” (European Commission 2023c)⁴, which, expectedly, results in falling birth rates in the region. It is high on the EU institutions’ (but especially the regions’) agenda to look in detail at who opt for migrating and why, to identify the possible ways to keep them in the region or convince them to move back, and how to attract new residents (preferably, young people planning to have children, or families with children) to the region. The report also offers accurate data on the declining birth rate and the process of ageing, a factor which increases the expenses of health care and public finances. The report makes mention of the family in but one footnote, in connection with the percentage of residence permits issued to third-country nationals for the purpose of family reunification (European Commission 2023c).⁵ In this respect, the approach of the report is far from satisfactory, as the situation, needs and opportunities of families should and must be discussed not only in this context, given that European parents and families play an undeniable and indispensable role in solving demographic challenges.

Still, the report has a major impact inasmuch as in June 2023 it was discussed by the European Council, which, in its June conclusions, invited the Commission to “*present a toolbox for addressing the impact of demographic challenges on Europe’s competitive edge.*” (European Council, 2023, Point 18 g). Thus, the focus is shifted to an economic approach (i.e. competitiveness), but the document, when setting this objective, leaves room for the European policy-making to deal with the demographic challenge in a broader context in the upcoming period. Accordingly, the Granada Declaration of 6 October 2023 stresses that addressing the demographic challenge is part of efforts to build a stronger, more dynamic, more competitive and more cohesive Europe in a changing world (Council of the European Union, 2023a). The Declaration thus recognises the impacts of the demographic challenge on the future of the European Union and the importance of addressing it.

⁴ Report, p. 9.

⁵ Report, fn. 10.

The Demography Toolbox, compiled at the request of the European Council, was published by the European Commission on 11 October 2023 (European Commission, 2023b). It is a more balanced document than those prepared by the Commission in the past decade. The very first page reflects a change in orientation: *“Demographic change is primarily determined by life choices that individuals and families make. However, EU and national policies should help ensure that people in Europe can fulfil their aspirations.”* (European Commission, 2023b).⁶ Obviously, this is a broad way of phrasing, yet the objective can only be achieved if the interests of the community – and its smallest unity, the family – are taken into account, not only those of the individuals, given that individuals cannot achieve their goals in a meaningful way on their own, but only as members of communities. The sentences cited above make this not only possible, but significant, making the interests and aspects of the family (and not only those of the individual) subject to substantive scrutiny.

The Demography Toolbox was presented at the General Affairs Council of 24 October 2023, where ministers called for a follow-up to the initiative.⁷ In its conclusions adopted on 12 December 2024, the General Affairs Council stressed the importance of continued efforts to address the demographic challenge and its impact on competitiveness, human capital and equality (Council of the European Union, 2023b).

The Council recognised that it was high time to deal with the demographic challenges of the Member States in a meaningful way at the European level, and realised the importance of the fact that the Commission, at the invitation of the European Council, analysed the situation in the Member States and, on that basis, decided to shed light on the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges. On this basis, the Council supported the Commission in its commitment to support Member States in addressing the demographic challenge through a range of policy instruments available at EU level.

At this point, it is worth recalling the European Commission, in its 1989 communication, already proposed that when it comes to new and feasible measures, Europe must apply a family policy framework and, what is more, raised the idea of the harmonisation of family policies (Fűrész – Mészáros, 2024). It must be emphasised that in the 21st century in the community of the European Union this goal is not pursued by anyone. Still, it is evident that the marginalisation of the role of the family (a process characteristic of recent decades) is not a proper solution either. Given its lack of EU competence (then Community competence), in 1989 the Council did not endorse the European framework for family policy as an EU objective. This is why it was of particular importance what approach the European Commission would take 30 years later in order to tackle the

⁶ Demography Toolbox, Point 1, p. 1.

⁷ At the meeting of the General Affairs Council on 24 October 2023, ministers exchanged views on the demographic challenges Europe is currently facing. They focussed, above all, on EU policy instruments and further steps to address demographic challenges and their impact on competitiveness as efficiently as possible. The ministers welcomed the Commission communication and stressed the importance of addressing demographic change as soon as possible. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2023/10/24>

even more severe demographic problems, and how the main political decision-making bodies such as the Council and the Parliament would react to the failure of the efforts and measures of the past decades to achieve any substantial success in the context of the accelerating process of European demographic decline.

The Commission and the Council also seem to have moved away from their former approach that had focused on single elements of the bigger picture. Essentially, the Council identified two main focal points in terms of the demographic challenge: first, the continuation of EU-level actions to maintain competitiveness by investing in human capital (Points 6–10) and, second, the prevention of lagging behind of EU regions (Point 5). Importantly, in Point 9 of the conclusions, the Council points out that, although the main responsibility for tackling demographic challenges lies with the Member States, the EU must provide Member States with substantial support. Among the instruments serving this purpose, the Council draws attention to the 9th Cohesion Report, adopted in early 2024, to cohesion policy instruments, and to the programme “A long-term vision for rural areas” (European Commission, 2023a), thus highlighting the scope for action and also identifying certain lines of supportive intervention.

The issue was also addressed by the European Parliament within the framework of regional policy, stressing the demographic aspect in its resolution as follows: *“cohesion funding should benefit both urban and rural areas in a balanced way; calls for cohesion policy to include a stronger urban and rural dimension through designated investments in both urban and rural areas as well as stronger links between urban and rural projects and sustainable investments in order to address the demographic challenge, the development trap and the urban-rural divide that affect EU regions”* (European Parliament, 2024).

Finally, in the context of regional policy, mention must be made of the fact that in the last decade the European Committee of the Regions has been almost the only European political actor to make a clear statement on demographic challenges in its opinions of 2016 and 2020 and to place demography high on the agenda (European Committee of the Regions, 2017 and 2020). The Opinion of 2020 pointed out that *“the contribution made by migration is only a short-term solution and will not be enough to resolve the problem of the falling birth rate. While migration provides more labour in the immediate term, it also increases the adult section of the population present in the EU and does not resolve the problem of the falling birth rate and the general ageing of that population”*, while the 2020 Opinion underlines that *“as long as there is a fertility gap in the EU Member States, there is a primary role to reduce the fertility gap, migration can only occur thereafter. Every effort must be made to encourage and incentivise childbearing.”* (European Committee of the Regions, 2017)⁸. The Committee of the Regions will prepare a new opinion in 2024, to be adopted at its 162nd meeting (to be held from 7 to 9 October 2024), during the Hungarian Presidency (European Committee of the Regions, 2024).

⁸ European Committee of the Regions (2017), Point 2; European Committee of the Regions (2020), Point 16.

I.2 Areas of intervention

With the Demography Toolbox, the Commission aims to make a positive shift in the narrative, emphasising that Europe is not an ageing continent but a Europe of longevity. The EU and national governments must cooperate to find solutions to the problems posed by demographic changes and by their implications. Relevant policies should be based on the principle of intergenerational fairness, and should embrace other mega-trends, such as the green and digital transitions (European Commission, 2023c). It is no coincidence that at the Belgian Presidency conference, *Nicolas Schmit*, Commissioner for Employment and *Elisa Ferreira*, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms stressed the utmost importance of demographic issues with regard to cohesion, the urban-rural divide, skills or labour market sustainability, and pointed out the need for a demographic transition alongside the green and digital transitions.⁹ *Elisa Ferreira*, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms underlined that, first of all, the challenges posed by demographic change must be made a political priority. In her opinion, real cohesion development means tackling the inequalities or asymmetries between urban and rural regions, making sure nobody feels left behind.

From Hungary's perspective, the most important point is that the Demography Toolbox no longer regards encouraging migration to be the only solution to demographic challenges. In essence, the Commission presents migration as a complementary factor for the future, and mentions it in terms of the labour market: *"Policy makers at all levels need to create an environment that enables people across the Union to realise their life choices and to reconcile family and professional lives. Complementing these efforts, legal migration and the effective integration of third country nationals legally residing in the EU can help alleviate labour market pressures and provide an additional boost to innovation and entrepreneurship."* (European Commission, 2023b).¹⁰

This shift in approach is reinforced by the identification of areas for action and pillars of intervention that render migration ancillary. Efforts must be made to achieve: 1) better reconciling family aspirations and paid work, notably by ensuring access to quality childcare and work-life balance; 2) supporting and empowering younger generations to thrive, develop their skills, facilitate their access to the labour market and to affordable housing; 3) empowering older generations and sustaining their welfare, through reforms combined with appropriate labour market and workplace policies; 4) where necessary,

⁹ On 25 March 2024, under the aegis of the Egmont Institute, the Belgian Presidency and the European Commission organised a joint conference on demography, hosted by Dubravka Šuica, the Commission's Vice-President for Demography and Democracy, and Hadja Lahbib, Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Affairs. (*Conference "The Demographic Transformation: Paving the Way for the EU's Future", Brussels Charlemagne Building*) The conference was the follow-up to a series of three workshops on demography organised by the Belgian Egmont Institute in autumn 2023, where participants analysed the impact exerted by the demographic transition on human capital and on regional and global conditions. The event formed a part of the Vice-President's vision and ambition to ensure that priority attention is paid to demography during the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Trio Presidency in order to bring the issue to the forefront in the strategic agenda for the next institutional cycle. (https://www.egmontinstitute.be/events/https-www-egmontinstitute-be-subscribe-2-the-demographic-transformation-paving-the-way-for-the-eus-future_/)

¹⁰ Demography Toolbox, pp. 6–7. If not addressed, the consequences of demographic change may exacerbate other existing economic and social challenges (e.g. climate change, geopolitical disruptions, repeated shocks to supply chains, increasing labour shortage).

helping to fill labour shortages through managed legal migration in full complementarity to harnessing talents from within the Union. It must be pointed out that the use of migration to address labour shortages is included in the public policy guidelines as an option to be applied only “where necessary”, that is, the Commission’s Demography Toolbox sends a clear message which opposes the idea of addressing demographic challenges through migration alone.

As part of a general assessment, mention must be made, last but not least, of the significance of the territorial dimension. The Commission emphasises that policies intended to address demographic challenges must have a strong territorial dimension to them, that is, local circumstances must be taken into consideration and regional and local stakeholders must be involved (European Commission, 2023b)¹¹. Otherwise, there is a risk of increasing territorial disparities within and between Member States, which, in turn, undermines social cohesion and trust in democratic institutions and processes in Europe (European Commission, 2021b). However, in its assessment of the Toolbox, the Commission lays less emphasis on the territorial dimension than on competitiveness aspects in general (it focuses on the talent development trap, intended to be tackled by a programme the Commission launched in 2023¹²) (European Commission, 2023a). This approach is understandable given that the European Council’s mandate focussed on competitiveness rather than on regional disparities or marginalisation. Nevertheless, the political decision-maker has the obligation to place this aspect more prominently on the agenda in the future, and, to create a basis for that, the Commission must develop and present new instruments that cover a much broader scope than today.

In particular, Europe needs to address the development trap to ensure that territorial disparities do not grow into gaps which are impossible to bridge and which make life extremely difficult for people living in the affected areas – an inevitable consequence of exposure to risks to life and health and a reduction in access to services, which has a decisive impact on quality of life in deprived areas. At the same time, in some regions daily subsistence and the excessive burden on service provider institutions can pose seemingly equally unmanageable challenges to individuals who opt for moving to large cities.¹³ In the meantime, efforts must be made to fine tune the development of medium-sized urban centres in a manner that supports a more diversified development in the

¹¹ Demography Toolbox, last paragraph of Point 2.

¹² Almost parallel with the Demography Report, on 17 January 2023, the European Commission its communication *Harnessing talent in Europe’s region, as the first key initiative of the European Year of Skills*. The main message of the communication is that as the EU population is ageing and the available workforce is shrinking, many regions in the EU are facing a massive brain drain of young and skilled workers. The communication recognises that migration has a negative impact on those regions which are already disadvantaged, and, therefore, is expected to cause new and ever-growing territorial disparities. This, in turn, threatens the economic dynamism of the region concerned, curbs innovation and, thus, has a negative impact on the competitiveness and cohesion of the EU as a whole. The communication identifies 46 regions in the talent development trap (with 16% of the total EU population) and a further 36 regions at serious risk of falling into the talent development trap (with almost a third of the total population). *Harnessing talent in Europe’s region*.

¹³ Several relevant maps and data sets are available in the report published by the Commission in the framework of its Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion: Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion | European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu)

expected increase in natural urbanisation processes and which creates a healthier, “fit for life” environment for the European population. It is evident that by now the demographic challenge has three factors to it, not the least in terms of the territorial dimension.

In the light of the above it should not come as a surprise that at the 9th Cohesion Forum on 11 and 12 April 2024, Commission President *Von Der Leyen* herself and Cohesion Commissioner *Ferreira* spoke of a “triple transition”. Beside the green and digital transitions, which have clearly dominated the public debate so far, the social aspects must come to the foreground. Specific mention was made of the demographic challenge as the third horizontal challenge that Europe must address through a change of approach.

1.3 Main elements of the Demography Toolbox

The main part of the Demography Toolbox is its Part 3, which gives an insight into the tools for examining and managing demographic change. This part is centred around four concepts, namely: parents (families), young people, the elderly and migration. As for parents (families), it calls for facilitating work-life balance and support in implementing plans to start a family (European Commission, 2023b).¹⁴ Point 3.1 of the Toolbox sets forth an idea that can serve as a basis for common thinking in the EU: that the gap between the number of children desired and children actually born can be closed by identifying and addressing the reasons for postponing childbearing. Causes include the difficulty to reconcile work and care responsibilities, persistent gender inequalities, as well as economic and social insecurity linked to employment prospects, the cost of living and housing. To tackle these challenges, the Toolbox offers a number of good practices, with a focus on, among other factors, enhancing and improving the labour market participation of women, especially those with young children. In terms of efficiency, important factors include the implementation of the principle of equal pay for equal work, the use of flexible work patterns and modifications of taxation systems that help those with children. It is up for the Member States to decide which elements they choose to best complement their own national strategies and measures.

The Demography Toolbox (albeit not in the section on parents, but in the section on young people) makes a reference to Hungarian good practice: it mentions the Family Housing Subsidy (a non-refundable state subsidy for families raising at least one child) and the Rural Family Housing Subsidy (European Commission, 2023b)¹⁵. This is yet another factor that underlines the necessity to link and prioritise the first two pillars. Mention must be made of a study which examined whether the Family Housing Subsidy had an impact on population change (e.g. birth rate increase) in those municipalities where it was available (Uhljár et al., 2023). The study came to the conclusion that in municipalities where the Rural Family Housing Subsidy was available there has been a trend of improvement in birth rate and net migration balance as explanatory variables since 2019.

¹⁴ Demography Toolbox, p. 5.

¹⁵ Demography Toolbox, p. 9.

The Demography Toolbox discusses the situation of children as well, in harmony with the Strategy on the Rights of the Child: “*Together with supporting parents’ income, key policy solutions include guaranteeing access to inclusive, quality services for children, in particular early childhood education and care, basic education (including school-based activities), healthcare and nutrition*” (European Commission, 2023b).¹⁶ However, here the context is broader: support given to parents is regarded as an element of assistance just as important as services provided by other actors. This marks a departure from the previous approach focussed on the individual.

Quite evidently, presenting the Toolbox and its instruments was primarily intended to put Member States in a position where they are able to tackle their own demographic challenges. Yet this alone will not suffice to ensure successful action by Member States. The adoption of the Toolbox is not a solution in itself, but rather a first and major step on the way leading to a solution, in other words, a starting point rather than a breakthrough at European level.

1.4 The practical relevance and potential applications of the Demography Toolbox

As to the Demography Toolbox and its future, it can be concluded that by 2024, based on the Council’s guidance, demography has become an increasingly important topic for the horizontal policy agenda and dialogue.

As *Enrico Letta*, former Italian Prime Minister and author of the 2024 Report on the Single Market pointed out at the 9th Cohesion Conference in Brussels, on 11 April 2024¹⁷, Europe can be proud of the fact that its citizens live longer than citizens anywhere else in the world. This a major achievement that deserves protection. Yet at the same time attention should be drawn to the depressing fertility rates in Europe: while in 1957 20% of the world’s population lived in Europe, the rate today is much lower (7%) and continues to fall. *Enrico Letta* highlighted that brain drain is a real danger which, by now, has become an increasingly serious problem for the European Union and is expected to become even more severe with the future enlargement as migration from the Western Balkans will intensify. Therefore, generally speaking, there is an urgent need to improve key public services (hospitals, schools, care for the elderly etc.) to make sure that valuable workforce is retained throughout the EU. With regard to the long-term sustainability of the conditions for the development of the internal market, *Letta* calls attention to the key idea that demography is naturally closely linked to territorial cohesion, given that people move within and between countries in order to have better access to services and to opportunities, and, therefore, proper attention must be paid to this link in the future at the EU, national and local levels.

¹⁶ Demography Toolbox, p. 13.

¹⁷ Enrico Letta’s contribution at the 9th Cohesion Conference, Brussels, 11 April 2024.

Letta drew attention to the need to continue demographic representation at Commission level, as did Commission Vice-President *Suica*.¹⁸ It is high time to talk about the need for the EU to promote not only mobility but also freedom to stay, added *Enrico Letta*. In the upcoming budgetary period, resources should be allocated to ensure that individuals who desire to leave can do so while those who want to stay do not need make sacrifices either. For that, the Cohesion Policy Toolbox offers a very effective tool.

When considering the issue, one must take into account the fact that while some prefer to use cohesion funds for the enlargement of the Union, some cite legitimate arguments about the need to offset the negative effects of the internal market, a factor that undeniably plays a role in the development of growing territorial disparities, above all, inequalities between regions. Undeniably, the right to free movement of persons is legitimate in the context of the internal market, but, at the same time, from an economic perspective, in certain Member States and regions it is associated with a significant reduction in human resources (as a productive force). Obviously, any restriction of the right to free movement of persons is not an appropriate response. Still, the EU's institutional system must put in place appropriate compensatory mechanisms to counterbalance the negative effects.

All these challenges do not only pertain to the potential depopulation of some regions, but also further reinforce the unfavourable demographic effects of unplanned childlessness. An example for that is the shrinking range of housing or affordable and people-centred childcare options in the centres of urbanisation, where infrastructure developments are unable to keep pace with the ever-increasing demands of young couples, parents and families whose available resources are not growing in line with the costs of urban life.

The reflections of Commissioners *Suica* and *Ferreira*, as well as of rapporteur *Letta* offer food for thought and convey important messages. Evidently, a number of high-profile political figures have called attention to the fundamental links between cohesion policy and the effective management of demographic challenges independently and from different perspectives. This, in turn, reflects a favourable policy environment that foresees a horizontal and sufficiently broad approach to demographic challenges and offers a good opportunity for Hungary to take up and manage successfully the issue of demography.

The possibilities of the Hungarian presidency now extend beyond just to sending messages at the highest political level about the need to tackle demographic challenges and about their potential future directions. The political context also sheds light on the need to put in a broader context EU policy-making related to addressing demographic challenges. This draws attention, among other things, to the required retaining power of regions and to the need to renew demography-oriented tools. Central tasks must include ensuring that lagging areas affected by depopulation catch up with other areas, and, at the same time, challenges of the overpopulation of overburdened regions with urban centres (their inability to cater for their population's needs) deserve a new focus and additional EU resources and instruments.

¹⁸ Letta's contribution at the demography conference of the Belgian Presidency (25 March 2024).

II. HUNGARY'S OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES IN POLICY MAKING

II.1 The role of the and EU instruments Demography Toolbox in policy-making

It is of particular importance for Hungary that the European Commission has responded to the problem affecting the European economy and society as a whole by presenting a holistic approach to the challenges of demographic change. Hungary has long been calling for the mobilisation and support of the society's internal resources in the field of demography as a key element in preserving Europe's human capital, and has long been stressing that family policy is a natural instrument in that, thus recognising the importance of the role of families (Fűrész – Molnár, 2020) (Barzó, 2023) (Pári et al., 2023). The key to tackling challenges with long-term internal resources is to support families and promote bearing all desired children. In that regard, the Demography Toolbox is a good starting point, and the political stance of the Council conclusions adopted on 12 December 2023 – putting families in the spotlight and thus paving the way for family policy approaches to be put on the agenda at European level – is forward-looking.

When it comes to joint work, it is of great significance to ensure that all Member States disseminate good practices of family support. Hungary can share many good practices from its family policy instruments of the past 14 years, for example, tax benefits and housing subsidies which contribute to work-family balance, and are part of Hungary's three-pillar approach to adequate housing and financial stability. Hungary is convinced that other Member States have good practices, too, perhaps not at the national level, but, for instance, in the form of programmes aimed at closing the gap between developed regions and those lagging behind or at improving equal access for urban and rural settlements. Therefore, the identification, dissemination and exchange of good practices is of key importance.

In order to counterbalance demographic decline, parents need to be given the opportunity to plan childbearing and it must be ensured that all desired and planned children are born. Mention must be made of the importance of the European Social Fund, which also has a role to play in financing the extension of early childhood care. In addition, demographic changes impact SMEs, e.g. small family businesses as well, which need to plan takeover by the new generations. This process can be supported by EU funding.

As for the challenges posed by a declining and ageing population, it is to be noted that as a result of its ageing population the EU is expected to have more and more smaller households European Commission (2023b).¹⁹ Yet those individuals who can rely on their families (their children) have access to other resources than solely state support. That is, a family offers better protection for the elder generation from vulnerability; therefore, childbearing is not only a contribution to society, but also an investment into one's future.

¹⁹ Demography Toolbox, p. 4, "older people tend to live in smaller households". This fact is mentioned in reference to carbon emissions, but is also relevant for the present study.

II.2 Hungary's priorities for the EU Presidency

During its Presidency, Hungary's main goal is not to represent its own national interests, but to take EU processes forward, build the right European consensus and have forward-looking solutions adopted in the Council. This is what the other Member States and the institutions expect Hungary to do: to ensure the progress of the common cause, even if it often means that its own interests are pushed to the background. Yet the success of a Presidency is best reflected by the integration of the national character and interests into the process and outcome of the EU's collective progress through appropriate compromises.

All in all, the events of the Swedish Presidency and of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Trio Presidency brought about a shift in the opportunities of addressing the demographic challenge at the European level. This, in turn, serves as a firm basis for the implementation of the Hungarian Presidency programme, which – in harmony with the documents issued by the institutions in 2023 – redirects the focus to the instruments and policies that seek to mobilise the Union's internal resources.

Point 10 of the Council conclusions of 12 December 2023 (Council of the European Union, 2023c) provide a practical basis for including the demographic challenge and transformation, as highlighted by the President of the Commission²⁰, in the political agenda as an integral and prominent item. This gives an opportunity to open up EU resources directly to Member States (at a governmental or even a regional/local level) which seek to develop, renew and implement their demographic policies, strategies and actions.

Consequently, the Hungarian Presidency will build on the followings in the field of demography:

- There has been a shift in the overall perception of demography, and, as a result, there are no barriers to putting the issue of demography on the political agenda as a top priority;
- Today, people in Europe still want more children than will eventually be born. This is a potential to be utilised, and it means that there is a strong social support for a change in the current policy approach;
- Those countries see a steady increase of their citizens' willingness to have children that have sought to mitigate population decline not by promoting migration, but by supporting the birth of children and strengthening families (Fűrész – Molnár, 2023). This is why other countries are also seeking practical means to implement solutions based on internal resources. An example is *Rotkirch's* list of ten cost-effective methods which include, beside raising fertility awareness, a family-friendly mindset, equal opportunities, and the appreciation of men and fathers (Gietel-Basten et al, 2022);

²⁰ See the last paragraph of Point I.2.

- There is a general consensus on the need to put strengthening intergenerational solidarity (especially in relation to caring responsibilities) into the focus of EU policy-making. Evidently, a holistic approach to care for the elderly and to childcare (along with offering opportunities and freedom of choice to families) is an aspect that European institutional decision-makers should and must promote. People concerned must be given a real choice between taking care of their family members mainly relying on assistance from an appropriate care system or at home, within the family.

Since the 1970s, women have had their first child increasingly later in life. The general economic and social causes of postponed childbearing need to be addressed. It is absolutely fundamental to recognise that there lies a European interest in the support and promotion of starting a family. In this context, due regard must be given to the fact that people tend to increasingly postpone having children. Consequently, the tools for successful action must be complemented with raising awareness among young women and men of the biological barriers to late childbearing as a way to give them access to accurate information so that they can make a free choice (Beaujouis – Sobotka, 2022). The circumstances under which children are born to relatively old parents play a major role in the decline in the number of children (Beaujouis, 2020). As mentioned above in connection with the *Rotkirch* study, it would certainly be worthwhile to employ a modern 21st-century approach to the practical realisation of the goal of supporting family formation (for example, through family-friendly higher education or by raising fertility awareness among young people).

Putting the demographic challenge on the EU agenda does not change the established order of subsidiarity and of the division of competences. The legal order of the EU delegates family policies into national competence, yet it can contribute to laying the foundations for EU resource mobilisation to support them. Maintaining sovereignty in the area of family policy is a clear priority. However, in the context of the Demography Toolbox and the Council Conclusions of December 2023, the diversity of national approaches now has a realistic prospect of being recognised by the decision-makers of the European institutional system. For instance, in the framework of creating more opportunities, targeted support may be offered to specific groups such as families with three or more children or single parents, in other words, the scope for fight against impoverishment should be extended to include new focal points. The majority of Europeans opine that support for families is needed rather than the exclusive recognition of and support for migration (Fűrész – Molnár, 2023) (Gere, 2023). This mindset is further reinforced by the fact that citizens of both Central and Eastern Europe and Southern Europe regard the family as the single most important value (Kiss Kozma, 2022).

Therefore, it must be recognised at a European level that all national solutions that strengthen Europe's competitiveness have a role to play in Europe. Successful solutions should be shared and examined, and then national governments should be given not only the opportunity to implement them but must also be supported in their implementation. Given that the interpersonal support provided by the family is a key to mental health (and,

therefore, in many respects to physical health), healthy, harmonious European societies are based on strong families. Loneliness, its accompanying illnesses and depopulation that results from loneliness also have a negative impact on European societies, and, thus, on European economies and, in a pan-European context, on the competitiveness of the EU and of the European continent. As already observed, preventing Europe's competitiveness from deteriorating and preserving the self-sustaining internal strength and social cohesion of its Member States is our common European goal. It is our duty to explore, share and apply all effective potential responses to these challenges.

II. 3 Specific challenges and target areas

In this context, it is a very legitimate aim to ensure that the new EU institutional structure that is taking shape under our Presidency be complemented with organisational departments and responsible persons with competence in this field. The issue must be prioritised adequately, which in practice means that demography must constantly be kept on the political agenda.

As for content, all the three pillars of the Demography Toolbox (parents, young people, the elderly) must be given emphasis in the process of demographic transition, and it must be ensured that the importance attached to the pillars for parents and young people are not smaller than that attributed to measures to support the third pillar (older generations) simply because in the near future the elderly will be the largest demographic group in the European Union. The fourth pillar, that is, nurturing and attracting talent within the EU, cannot bring positive results without being accompanied by appropriate compensatory mechanisms.

In terms of EU resources and especially cohesion instruments, demographic change should and must be addressed as a top priority. Forward-looking responses must be found to tackle a situation where new challenges that became prominent at the beginning of the decade (e.g. security, or permanent challenges such as those stemming from the enlargement) are currently competing and will continue to do so with demographic challenges for finite resources. Still, this fact should not dissuade us from making efforts to ensure that the tools of tackling demographic change and challenges are reflected in the access to EU resources, possibly in the form of specific, earmarked budget elements. A study compiled by the European Parliamentary Research Service (European Parliament, 2024), under the heading "Measures and policies aimed at reversing negative regional trends" gives a list of

a number of instruments²¹ and funds²² that render the EU-level mobilisation of resources possible. The EU cohesion funding instruments that can contribute to the mitigation of the unfavourable implications of demographic change are manifold.

In the light of the above, it is our interest as Presidency to make sure that the policies which underline the following considerations are given special emphasis and are included in the political discourse as organic elements:

- mobilising resources within the EU is a key driver for solutions at a European level;
- our targeted efforts should support parents and families, promote childbearing, and focus on a European-level support for the widest possible range of instruments which help the start of independent life for the youth, and the quality of life and largest possible number of years lived in good health for the elderly, while regulated legal migration remains a secondary policy option;
- for all regions of the EU, it is essential that a social environment supportive of childbearing (complemented by job security, quality of life and access to a wide range of services) is considered as a key factor in starting a family or having more children;
- young people and parents need support to enter (or return) to the labour market.

Still, it must be clarified that the “more children” approach by no means implies an obligation. Instead, all measures and policies are designed to promote the choice of the individual, based on an approach that supports the birth and upbringing of desired children. Similarly, encouraging mothers to return to work as soon as possible on the basis of their own individual choice, is not just a labour market issue, but relates to a comprehensive approach to a balance of family life and work.

Demographic change must be clearly reflected at the level of EU policy-making. *A good example for that is the variety of approaches incorporated in the programme of the Hungarian Presidency²³:*

- - *the organisation of policy debates on the demography in various Council formations, with special focus on the power of rural areas to retain their population, on the role of cohesion policy in tackling demographic challenges, on the impact of the demographic transition on pensions and budgets, on connecting rural areas through transport development and on work-life balance in digital life;*
- - *an informal meeting organised specifically for ministers responsible for demographic issues on the topic of demography as a third transition underpinned by intergenerational*

²¹ E.g. Talent Booster Mechanism and the Harnessing Talent Platform.

²² EU cohesion funding instruments which can contribute to the mitigation of the unfavourable implications are as follows: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF+, which in any case includes family support: ESF+ funding for childcare and family services aims at improving work-life balance and, potentially, at increasing birth rates), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) – the Interreg, the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the REACT-EU (recovery assistance for cohesion and the territories) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), which improves transport and enhances environmental protection through infrastructure development, combating rural depopulation and urban decline by improving living conditions.

²³ Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, programme:<https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/hu/program/program/>

solidarity and justice, giving an outlook to the future, in particular to the support offered to young people on the threshold of their independent life;

- *- the impact of demography/demographic transition on the EU's competitiveness as a topic to be discussed at a European Council meeting.*

III. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Demographic issues are a common challenge to everyone in the EU, reshaping geopolitics and geoeconomics. Any debate on demography would be impossible without mentioning families; therefore, it is a welcome development in the field of demography and family policy that the year 2023 marked a turning point in the European Union, when, after many decades, families were mentioned again in the context of the issue of population. The Demography Toolbox, published by the Commission in 2023, also takes into account parents and families as an important factor, highlighting their role – something that has not been done explicitly so far. The approach employed by the Toolbox is important inasmuch as it offers firm policy proposals to support personal decisions concerning childbearing by presenting good practices in Member States. The practices and considerations fall in line with Hungary's family policy mindset: they pertain to, for example, enhancing the financial security of families with young children or providing special tax-benefit systems and social support.

In the context of addressing demographic challenges, the Demography Toolbox deals with the promotion of legal migration from third countries to the EU merely as a complementary factor, and the use of migration to address labour shortages is included in the public policy guidelines only "where necessary". The Hungarian Presidency seeks to keep demographic challenges (and the need to address them) on the political agenda. This is a major opportunity for Europe to start trusting once again the value of its own resources and a family-based approach to demographic challenges, which, by definition, is complex. Demography can no longer be regarded as solely a national problem. The Hungarian Presidency has a key contribution to make to ensuring that the EU institutions pay due attention to the issue as well as to the need to support families, which is a key factor in shaping Europe's future in the long run.

REFERENCES, SOURCES:

Agócs, G., Szomszéd, O. & Fűrész, T. (2019). Európai családpolitikák – a KINCS Európai Családpolitikai RangSORA [European family policies – the European family policy ranking by KINCS].

https://epa.oszk.hu/02900/02943/00082/pdf/EPA02943_kapocs_2019_3-4_003-011.pdf (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

Barzó, T. (2023). A demográfiai kihívásokra adott családpolitikai válasz hazánkban [The family policy response to demographic challenges in Hungary.] Miskolci Jogi Szemle, 18(1), 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.32980/MJSz.2023.2.23>

- Beaujouan, É. & Sobotka, T. (2022). Is 40 the New 30? Increasing Reproductive Intentions and Fertility Rates beyond Age 40. In: D. Nikolaou – D. Seifer (eds.): *Optimizing the Management of Fertility in Women over 40*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 3–13. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009025270.002>
- Beaujouan, É. (2020). Latest-Late Fertility? Decline and Resurgence of Late Parenthood Across the Low-Fertility Countries. *Population and Development Review*, 46: pp. 219–247. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12334>
- Engler, Á. (2017). A család mint erőforrás [Family as a resource.] Budapest, Gondolat.
- Engler, Á. & Pári, A (2022). A család jövője – az elsődleges szocializációs közeg társadalmi szerepváltozása [The future of the family. Changes in the role of the primary scene of socialisation]. *SZÁZADVÉG*, pp. 11–34.
- Engler, Á., Markos, V. & Major, E. (2022). Gyermekvállalási tervek a párkapcsolati jellemzők tükrében [Childbearing plans in the light of relationship characteristics]. *Kapocs*, 2022. 1:10.
- Fűrész, T. & Molnár, B. (2020). A családbarát Magyarország építésének első évtizede az Európai Unióban [The first decade of building a family-friendly Hungary in the European Union], *Kapocs*, 2020/3-4: pp. 3–11.
- Fűrész, T. & Molnár, B. (2023). Európa demográfiai kihívásainak kezelése a migráció ösztönzése helyett a családok támogatásával [Addressing Europe’s demographic challenges by supporting families rather than encouraging migration]. In: Navracsics, T., Schmidt, L., Tárnok B. (ed.). Úton a magyar uniós elnökség felé [On the road to the Hungarian EU Presidency]. Budapest: Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó, pp. 35–45.
- Fűrész, T. & Mészáros, Á. (2024). Európa demográfiai kihívásai kezelésének feladatai az Európai Unió Tanácsának második soros magyar elnöksége alatt [Tasks related to tackling Europe’s demographic challenges during the second Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union]. In: Navracsics, T. –Tárnok B. (ed.). A 2024-es magyar elnökség [The Hungarian Presidency of 2024]. Budapest: Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó, pp. 165–192.
- Gellénné Lukács, É. (2021). Support for Families. *Hungarian Yearbook of International and European Law* 9(1), pp. 91–110.
- Gellénné Lukács, É. & Mészáros, Á. (2024). In the lead or among the laggards? – CEE countries and work-life balance, manuscript.
- Gere, D. (2023). Családszemlélet Európában és Magyarországon egy nagymintás nemzetközi felmérés alapján [Attitudes to the family in Europe and Hungary based on a large-sample international survey]. *Kapocs*, 2023. 2/3, pp. 66–76.
- Gietel-Basten, S., Rotkirch, A. & Sobotka, T. (2022). Changing the perspective on low birth rates: why simplistic solutions won’t work. *BMJ*, Online report. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2022-072670> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)
- Tóth, G., Kincses, Á. & Kovács, M. (2024). A termékenység térbelisége Magyarországon [The spatial aspects of fertility in Hungary], 2021, *TERÜLETI STATISZTIKA* 64/1, pp. 30–50.

Novák, K. & Fűrész, T. (eds.) (2021). *Családbarát évtized 2010–2020 [A family-friendly decade, 2010–2020]*. Budapest: Kopp Mária Intézet a Népesedésért

Novák, K., Görög, N., Bagi, K., Pári, A., Farkas, P., Horváth, V., Jakubeczné Nagy, K., Kovácsné Bárány, I. & Székely, A. (eds.) (2017). *Családbarát fordulat 2010–2018 [A family-friendly paradigm shift, 2010–2018]*. Budapest: Családbarát Ország Nonprofit Közhasznú Kft.

Pári, A., Varga, A. & Balogh, E. (2019). Magyar családpolitikai folyamatok a Családvédelmi Akcióterv 2019. szeptember végén rendelkezésre álló eredményeinek tükrében [Family policy developments in Hungary in the light of the results of the Family Action Plan available at the end of September 2019]. *Kapocs*, 2019. 3–4, pp. 12–25.

Pári, A., Rövid, I. & Fűrész, T. (2023). Népesedési folyamatok Európában magyar szemszögből [Population trends in Europe from a Hungarian perspective], *Kapocs*, 2023/3-4, pp. 3–24. Székely András (ed.). (2019): *Nemzetközi családpolitikai kitekintő [An international family policy outlook.]* Budapest: Kopp Mária Intézet a Népesedésért és a Családokért

Uhljár, P., Pári, A. & Papházi, T. (2023). A falusi CSOK hatása a települések népességére [The impact on Rural Family Housing Subsidy on the population of municipalities]. In: *Modern Geográfia*, Vol. 18/3, pp. 41–52.

EU documents

United Nations (UN 2023). Statement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crc/statements/CRC-Article-5-statement.pdf> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Commission (1989). Communication from the Commission on family policies. (8 August 1989) COM (89) 363 final. Brussels.

European Commission (2018). *The silver economy – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Commission (2020). *A strong social Europe for just transitions*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Care Strategy, COM(2020) 14 final.

European Commission (2021a). *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, Luxembourg, pp. 25–26.

European Commission (2021b). The Demographic Landscape of EU Territories, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Commission (2021c). *EU strategy on the rights of the child*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0142&from=en> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Commission (2023a). *A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040*, COM (2021)345 final

European Commission (2023b). Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action COM(2023)577 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0577> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Commission (2023c). The impact of demographic change in a changing environment, https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/Demography_report_2022_o.pdf (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Commission (2023d). Talent Booster Mechanism: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism_en (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Commission (2023e). Harnessing talent in Europe's regions – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Care Strategy, COM(2023) 32 final. Harnessing Talent Platform: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/23-11-2023-10-eu-regions-will-receive-technical-assistance-under-pillar-1-of-the-talent-booster-mechanism_en (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Commission (2024). Ninth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion | European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu) (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Council meeting (29 and 30 June 2023) – Conclusions, Point 18 g) <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee.

Council of the EU (2023a). The Granada declaration of 6 October 2023, downloadable: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/06/granada-declaration/pdf/> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

Council of the EU (2023b). General Affairs Council, 24 October 2023

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2023/10/24> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

Council of the EU (2023c). Managing demographic change in Europe – Council conclusions (12 December 2023) ST-16754-2023-INIT_en pdf (europa.eu) (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

The programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2024). <https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/hu/program/program/> (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Parliament (2024a). European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2024 on cohesion policy 2014-2020– implementation and outcomes in the Member States (2023/2121(INI), Point 76, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0174_EN.html (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Parliament (2024b). Briefing Demographic change in Europe: A toolbox for action by EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service Authors: Marketa Pape and Balazs Szechy with Mislav Grbesa Members' Research Service [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762302/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)762302_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762302/EPRS_BRI(2024)762302_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

European Committee of the Regions (2017). Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — The EU response to the demographic challenge (18.1.2017.)

European Committee of the Regions (2020). Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Demographic change: proposals on measuring and tackling its negative effects in the EU regions (2020/C 440/07)

European Committee of the Regions (2024). European Committee of the Regions, DRAFT OPINION, Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture, Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action (SEDEC-VII/047.) 3.6.2024. COR-2024-01066-04-00-NB-TRA (EN/FR) 7/7

Conference 'The Demographic Transformation: Paving the Way for the EU's Future' Brussels Charlemagne Building, 25 March 2024. (https://www.egmontinstitute.be/events/https-www-egmontinstitute-be-subscribe-2-the-demographic-transformation-paving-the-way-for-the-eus-future_/) (Accessed: 10.07.2024.)

A comparison of family policy systems in the EU Member States

Gergely Agócs, Kata Eplényi, Kinga Joó, Kriszta Kállay-Kisbán, Réka Szász

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “family policy” varies widely across the European Union. In some Member States, family policy is more part of social policy, while in others, for instance in Hungary, it also entails tackling demographic challenges (i.e. population policy). In some Member States, family policy is more focused on promoting work-life balance, prioritising measures such as flexible working hours or the extension of childcare facilities, while in others family support is aimed, among others, at creating financial security for families and encouraging childbearing.

Given the fact that the European Union does not have exclusive competence in the area of family policy, Member States are free to decide which methods to apply when it comes to supporting and protecting families. The principle of subsidiarity applies in this area, which means that EU-level intervention can only be taken if it proves to be more effective than action at Member State level (European Commission. Areas of EU action).

EU legislation and policies should help employees to reconcile work and family life, and they should incentivise flexibility for employers and employees alike. If they succeed in doing so, they boost economic growth and benefit society as a whole, including children and people who need care in their families (European Council, 2024). Such legislation and policies may be complemented by national laws and policies aimed at protecting families – as the basic unit of society and of nation – and at supporting would-be parents.

In recent years, Europe, when trying to launch a partnership of Member States that serve the interest of families, has been facing the challenges posed by demographic problems, by the fact that stakeholders attribute various significance to these problems, by the resulting responses and by the different concepts of “family” in each Member State. Yet when it comes to tackling these European demographic problems, strengthening Member State family policies is indispensable, as this is what ensures that Member States are able to respond to their ever-changing social and economic contexts. During this process, all parties must respect the Member States’ right to shape their own family policies.

LEGISLATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In recent years, family policy aspects have appeared in EU legislation primarily in directives on employment.

As per the subsidiarity principle, the European Parliament and the Council can adopt incentivising measures and directives (i.e. pieces of legislation that set forth minimum

requirements, while allowing Member States to adopt more stringent provisions). These directives pertain to the following areas:

- safety and health at work;
- working conditions;
- the social security and social protection of workers (the definition of the basic principles of a Member States' social security systems remains in the competence of the given Member State);
- protection of workers in the event of termination of their employment contract;
- the equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.

At EU level, a number of directives on gender equality and working conditions already address some of the issues relevant to work-life balance. These directives include Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, Directive 2010/41/EU on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity, and Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, Directive 97/81/EC concerning the Framework Agreement on part-time work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC, and Directive 2010/18/EU on the implementation of the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and the ETUC (WLB Directive (8)).

The first volume of the European Family Policy Outlook of the Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families was published in 2019. Since then, in terms of the legislative process of the European Union, the most important impact on family policies of the Member States (that is, of Member States which have an explicit family policy) has been exerted by Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU Directive (adopted on 13 July 2019) (Hereinafter: WLB Directive).

The European Commission, relying on the objective of the European Pillar of Social Rights to create a social Europe for the benefit of all European citizens, in December 2016 tabled a proposal for a **Work-Life Balance (WLB) Directive** that maintains existing rights and, building on them, provide for more solid or new rights. The proposal aims to strike the right balance between work and private life. It also seeks to guarantee more equal opportunities for women and men, at work and at home alike. The Directive was adopted by the Council on 13 June 2019, and entered into force on the 20th day following its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union. After that, Member States had three years (until 2 August 2022) to transpose it into their respective national law. The Directive will be reviewed in 2027.

The Directive lays down minimum requirements related to paternity leave, parental leave and carers' leave, and to flexible working arrangements for workers who are parents, or carers. As per Article 16 of the WLB Directive, by facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life for such parents and carers, the Directive should contribute to the Treaty-based goals of equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities, equal treatment at work and the promotion of a high level of employment in the Union.

The WLB Directive specifies that Member States must take the necessary measures to ensure that fathers or, where and insofar as recognised by national law, equivalent second parents, have the right to **paternity leave** of 10 working days that is to be taken on the occasion of the birth of the worker's child. Fathers are entitled to paternity leave regardless of their marital status, which means that there is no distinction between married and unmarried couples.

In terms of **parental leave**, Member States must take the necessary measures to ensure that each worker has an individual right to parental leave of four months that is to be taken before the child reaches a specified age, up to the age of eight. Member States must ensure that two months of parental leave cannot be transferred. It is up to each Member State to determine the minimum appropriate level of payment or allowance available during parental leave.

According to the new EU-level concept, workers who provide personal care or support to a relative who is in need of care or support has the right to carers' leave of **five working days** per year. Member States may allocate carers' leave in various ways: they may allow it on a case-by-case basis or may define further requirements (European Council, 2024).

According to Article 9 of the WLB Directive, Member States must take the necessary measures to ensure that workers with children up to a specified age (at least eight years), and carers, have the right to request **flexible working arrangements** for caring purposes.

Although the Directive applies to all workers (men and women alike) who have an employment contract or employment relationship as defined by the law, collective agreements or practice in force in each Member State, some issues are left within the Member States' competence. Therefore, as per Article 18, Member States have the competence to define marital and family status, as well as to establish which persons are to be considered to be a parent, a mother and a father.

Currently, the Netherlands is the only Member State that has adequately transposed the WLB Directive into its national law. In 23 Member States, the level of transposition is only sufficient, which means that further provisions must be adopted in certain areas. In the autumn of 2023, the European Commission initiated proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union against three Member States (BE, ES, IE) for failure to fully transpose the Directive (European Commission, 2023b).

In the 26 Member States where transposition has not been performed fully, the followings can be concluded with regard to the main problem areas.

- Paternity leave is the area where the WLB Directive has been transposed into national law most fully: shortcomings have been identified only in three Member States.
- Gaps in the provision of carers' leave are identified in one-third of the Member States.
- The biggest room for improvement is in the areas of parental leave and flexible working conditions: 16 and 18 Member States have not yet fully transposed the relevant provisions, respectively.

These have been the major EU-level legislative developments in recent years in the area of family policy. The following sections of this paper are dedicated to a comparison of the family policy systems of the individual Member States. Based on the structure of the country profiles in this volume, the general features, the importance of and the differences between the individual family support measures are examined. Each section is complemented with the description of a good practice.

ELEMENTS OF FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATES

Benefits in the form of birth grant

Birth grant-type benefits are a very common form of support in the Member States. As a rule, such benefits are provided in the form of a one-off lump sum payment. The vast majority of the Member States provide support, subject to certain conditions, to expectant women or women who have recently given birth or who adopt a child, to make sure that assistance is offered in covering the increased costs incurring at the time of pregnancy and childbirth. Eight Member States (AU, DE, DK, NL, IT, PT, RO and SE) do not provide such benefits; the remaining 19 Member States do.

In the Member States where some form of birth grant is provided, the almost uniform practice is that the amount is paid to the mother after the child is born. In Finland and Cyprus, pregnant women who lose their child after the 22nd and 28th week of pregnancy, respectively, are also entitled to the benefit. In France, birth grant is disbursed at the end of the 7th month of pregnancy. Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia are exceptions in that respect inasmuch as the relevant legislation does not explicitly designate the mother but “one parent” as the beneficiary.

In every case, maternity allowance is a one-off payment and usually is a lump sum. The exceptions are Greece and Luxembourg, where the one-off payment is made in two or three instalments (at the end of the pregnancy, at the time of giving birth and when the child reaches two years of age). Generally, the allowance must be claimed within two, three, six or a maximum of 12 months after the child is born. Many countries provide additional, higher amounts of support for children born with a disability. In the majority of countries where such support is available, adoptive parents are also entitled to the grant, which, in some countries, is higher than in the case of childbirth.

There are two categories of Member States depending on whether support is given on universal basis (subject to certain minimum conditions detailed below (for BE, BG, CY, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, LU, MT, SK, SI), or is provided depending on the family's income (CZ, EL, PL). In a number of cases, the above conditions include compulsory attendance at medical examinations during pregnancy, and/or employment and insurance prior to childbirth, and/or nationality, and/or residence in the given country, and/or residence for a certain period. The Czech Republic, Greece and Poland provide maternity allowance as per the financial situation of the family. In the Czech Republic, the family income cannot exceed 2.7 times the minimum subsistence level. In Greece, the relevant legislation defines an amount that cannot be exceeded by family's annual equivalent income. In Poland, eligibility to claiming the allowance is subject to a threshold set for the family's net monthly income. Bulgaria is an exception in this respect as only the additional one-off grant for parents of twins is income-related.

The amount of birth grant varies widely between the Member States, ranging from EUR 10 to EUR 2,000. *The three countries with the lowest amounts* are Ireland, Bulgaria and Hungary, while *the highest amounts* are offered in Belgium, Luxembourg and Greece.

There is also a difference in the number of times a person can claim birth grant. In the Czech Republic, support can be claimed only after the first two live births, with the amount decreasing: EUR 535 for the first child and EUR 411 for the second. In Slovakia, the same amount (EUR 830) is payable for the first three children, while a reduced amount of EUR 151 for children born subsequently.

There are two such Member States that pay special attention to the situation of pregnant women in higher education. Bulgaria offers mothers who are full-time students at a higher education institution a one-off payment of an amount that exceeds ten times the amount of birth grant. The payment is made in two instalments: 50% after the child is born and 50% if the mother enrolls for the next semester before the child reaches the age of one. In Slovakia, pregnant students in higher education are eligible for a pregnancy scholarship benefit every month from the 27th week of pregnancy until the child is born.

Good practice: Estonia

In Estonia – similarly to the above common practice – birth grant is paid as a one-off allowance in the amount of EUR 320 when the child is born. For multiple birth, EUR 1,000 per child is paid. The disbursement of childbirth allowance is subject to the mother’s employment before the childbirth, compulsory insurance and the registration of the birth in the population register. Estonia also offers an adoption allowance in the form of a one-off payment of EUR 320 to the adoptive parent.

Maternity leave and infant care allowances

In the European Union, mothers have a fundamental right to maternity leave, so that they can care for their newborn child and recover after childbirth. Maternity rights are set forth in Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding. The Directive entitles pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth or adopted a child to a continuous maternity leave of at least 14 weeks. Two weeks of leave are compulsory before and/or after childbirth, coupled with an allowance whose amount is specified in the relevant national legislation (European Parliament, 2023). In many countries, mothers can freely decide when they want to take their leave before the childbirth. In most countries, only those women are entitled to maternity leave who have worked for a specified number of hours or who have paid social security contributions. During pregnancy and the period of maternity leave, the mother is protected against dismissal (European Union, 2024). Mention must be of the fact that there is a trend in an increasing number of countries (e.g. in the Czech Republic, Portugal, Sweden) of mothers entitled to transfer at least a part of their maternity leave to fathers, even without a medical reason.

As for the length of the maternity leave period and the allowance amount available, there are major differences between the Member States, the length of the leave ranging from a few weeks to several months: the mandatory minimum duration is 14 weeks in Germany and Sweden, while a 58-week period is available in Bulgaria. Mention must be made of

the fact that in Sweden it is compulsory to take minimum of 2 weeks of maternity leave, but either parent is entitled to take unpaid childcare leave until the child reaches the age of 18 months. In the majority of Member States (in 15 Member States) the duration of the leave ranges between 14 and 20 weeks. In nine countries (BG, CZ, HR, HU, IE, IT, LU, PL, SK) it exceeds 20 weeks. With maternity leave of a duration ranging from 30 to 58 weeks, Slovakia, Croatia, Ireland and Bulgaria offer the most generous option. In Hungary, the length of maternity leave is 24 weeks.

In most European countries, the benefit amount provided during maternity leave must reach at least 50% of the worker's previous salary. In most cases, mothers receive two-thirds of their previous earnings, yet a significant number of Member States provide, for at least a part of maternity leave, an amount that equals (or almost equals) the mother's salary (AT, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI). It is important to note that in several countries mothers are entitled to longer maternity leave when they are pregnant with their second, third etc. child. For instance, in France the duration of maternity leave is 16 weeks, but it increases to 26 weeks after the third child and the children born subsequently.

Good practice: Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, during pregnancy and maternity leave mothers are entitled to a cash benefit. The leave must start 45 days before the expected due date. The amount of the benefit is 90% of the average income calculated for the previous 24 months, but cannot be lower than the statutory minimum wage. Since 2020, upon the birth of another child within 410 days, the amount of the benefit for the second child must remain at the same level as for the first child (which means that the mother will not receive less for the second child). If the mother returns to the labour market after the child reaches six months of age, she receives 50% of the benefit amount. With the mother's consent, after the child reaches six months of age the father can take the leave days that remain from the available 410 days. In that case, the benefit is disbursed to him. However, the first 135 days are available only to the mother.

Paternity leave

Most Member States have revised their paternity leave system based on the Work-Life Balance (WLB) Directive, which came into force in August 2022. Accordingly, fathers (or, in some countries, equivalent second parents) are granted at least 10 days of paternity leave during the period when the child is born or adopted. The objective is to allow a stronger bond to develop between fathers and their babies, as well as to encourage a more equal sharing of childcare responsibilities between women and men.

Paternity leave is available in all 27 Member States; in some Member States (ES, IT, PT) it is obligatory for fathers to take paternity leave either in full or in part. The length of paternity leave is minimum 10 days (as specified by the WLB Directive) in all Member States. In 13 Member States (AT, BE, BG, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, LT, NL, PT, SI, SK) it exceeds

10 days. In all cases, fathers are entitled to paternity leave as a non-means-tested benefit. In 15 Member States (AT, BE, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LV, MT, NL, PT, SE, SI), equivalent second parents are also entitled to the leave.

Countries can be divided into three groups, depending on when fathers can take paternity leave. In the largest group (19 countries: AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK) fathers are entitled to at least 10 days of leave any time until the child reaches six months of age. In three countries (BG, ES, MT) fathers take leave immediately after the child is born, while in five countries (EE, FI, FR, LT, PL) they are entitled to do so once their child is six months old. The third group does not fall fully in line with the provisions of the WLB Directive, whose Article 4(1) specifies that paternity leave is to be taken on the occasion of the birth of the worker's child, when the child is born.

Twenty-five Member States comply with the WLB Directive inasmuch as they do not impose any specific conditions for taking paternity leave, given that the right to paternity leave must not be made subject to a period of work qualification or to a length of service qualification. The remaining two countries are Austria (where the right to leave is conditional on the father living in the same household as the child) and Bulgaria (where the father must be married to or must live in civil partnership with the mother).

During paternity leave, Member States provide financial compensation to fathers for the whole period of leave. In the majority of the Member States (21), such compensation is covered by social security contributions (although in Romania it is paid in advance by the employer). In the remaining six countries, paternity allowance is either disbursed by the employer (EL, MT) or by the state and the employer (BE, HU, LU, NL). As a rule, that is, in 24 Member States, the amount is calculated as a percentage of the worker's previous salary. The amount is generally relatively high: at least 70-80% of the previous salary. In more than half of the Member States (15), the amount is capped, albeit at a high level, ranging from EUR 1,700 to EUR 12,541. In 15 of the 27 Member States, fathers receive unconditional financial support. In 12 countries, the disbursed amount is proportional to periods of previous employment, which is allowed by the WLB Directive with certain limitations. In the countries concerned, the payment depends on the periods of previous employment, which must not exceed six months immediately prior to the expected date of the birth of the child (Article 8(2) of the WLB Directive). Four countries (IE, DK, FR, SK), however, apply more conditions than allowed by the WLB Directive: the required periods of previous employment exceed the one defined in the Directive or may constitute a discrimination of part-time workers. Article 20(7) of the WLB Directive allows Member States not to provide financial support during paternity leave as long as two conditions are otherwise met: first, both parents must be entitled to a parental leave of at least six months and, second, the allowance amount must be at least 65 % of the worker's net wage. Member States may make the right to a payment or an allowance subject to periods of previous employment, which shall not exceed six months immediately prior to the expected date of the birth of the child. (European Commission, 2022).

Good practice: Romania

In Romania, fathers are entitled to a paternity leave of ten working days; however, if they attend a childcare course, they are entitled to an extra five days. Paternity leave can be taken at any time until the child reaches eight weeks of age. During paternity leave, the amount of the benefit is equal to the father's previous monthly earnings.

Parental leave and childcare benefits

In conformity with the provisions of the WLB Directive, all EU Member States grant four months of parental leave to each biological or adoptive parent. Two and two months of the leave are non-transferable, which contributes to a more balanced distribution of childcare responsibilities within the family. Determining the amount of the benefit paid during parental leave falls into the competence of the Member States. In 23 Member States, parental leave is longer than the period of 4+4 months set forth in the WLB Directive. There are only four member states where parents are entitled to the minimum period of parental leave: four months in Belgium and Greece, 18 weeks in Cyprus, and eight months per family in Croatia. In 16 countries, the duration of parental leave is specified per parent (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, SE, SI, SK), while in four (EE, IT, PL, RO) per family. In three countries (Malta, Portugal and Hungary) the two approaches are combined. In Hungary, there are two types of entitlement to parental leave. First, each family is entitled to up to three years of childcare leave; second, each parent is entitled to 44 working days of non-transferable leave per child until the child reaches the age of three years.

In some of the Member States referred to above, the parental leave of 2+2 months is an individual and non-transferable right, in conformity with the WLB Directive (BE, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FR, LU, LV, NL, SK). In other Member States, the right is only partially of such nature, and the non-transferable period may exceed the required duration (BG, CY, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI). In Hungary, for example, the family may decide who takes parental leave, which allows for great flexibility and freedom of choice. Another aspect on the basis of which Member States can be categorised is the time when parental leave can be taken. In 10 countries (AT, CZ, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, LT, RO, SK), parental leave can be taken within three years after the childbirth or adoption, while in 15 countries (BE, BG, CY, DE, EL, HU, HR, IE, IT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE), this period is longer than three years. In the 25 Member States referred to above, both parents are entitled to the same period. In 11 of these Member States, parents have to take their parental leave in full in the first three years, while in 14 countries they can do so until the child reaches the age of 12 years. The case of Luxembourg and Slovenia is different though, given that the father and the mother are entitled to different periods of parental leave.

In 14 Member States eligibility to parental leave is subject to certain conditions, while in 13 it is not. Of the 14 countries that do impose a condition, seven (BE, CY, FR, IE, MT, PL, RO) do so in line with the WLB Directive, that is, the length of the period of previous employment/service does not exceed one year. The case of Greece is an interesting

example: one year of service is required for each child, which means that for the second (third, fourth etc.) child an additional year of employment is required after the expiry of parental leave for the previous child. Albeit Member States should not impose any conditions for parental leave other than a specific period of employment, five countries (AT, DE, HR, LU, PT) do so. In Austria or Germany, for example, the working parent must live in the same household as the child to be entitled to parental leave.

As for the way of taking parental leave, workers are entitled to request to take parental leave on a part-time basis and in alternating periods in the first four months. Thirteen Member States comply with this WLB provision; the remaining 14 comply only partially.

Mention must be made of parents who, for some reason, raise children in a special situation, for example, are adoptive parents, parents with a disability, have a child with disability, or have a chronically ill child. Most Member States (AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, PL, PT, RO, SI, SE, SK) have specific measures in place for this group of parents. Most measures entail an extension for adoptive parents of the period during which parental leave can be taken (as a rule, this period is defined on the basis of the child's age). Three countries regulate parental leave for parents with disabilities (DE, EL, SE): they provide for the possibility for one parent (or another family member) to take the leave if one parent (or both parents) is/are unable to do so due to illness. In 15 Member States (BE, CY, DE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK), special measures apply to parents of children with disabilities: most often, parents are entitled to a longer period of parental leave.

Parents receive financial support during parental leave in all Member States. In 11 Member States, parents are entitled to such compensation for the whole period of their parental leave, while in the other 16 Member States financial support is available only for a part of the leave. In the majority of Member States, the period during which parents get support exceeds the 2+2 (4 months in total) specified by the WLB Directive. However, there are only 14 Member States where the amount of such allowance exceeds 65% of that of the parent's previous earnings, and out of them only 10 Member States (AT, FI, HR, LT, LU, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK) where parents are entitled to a non-transferable parental leave of 2+2 months, during which they receive an adequate amount of financial support. In the remaining 13 Member States, the level of support is as follows: seven Member States (BE, BG, CZ, EL, FR, IE, MT) provide a flat-rate benefit of a moderate amount, five Member States (DE, HU, IT, LV, PT) an income compensation whose amount, calculated as a percentage of the previous income, ranges between 10% and 65% (in Denmark, it reaches 100% but is capped at a low amount). As a rule of thumb, parents in all EU Member States should be entitled to any financial compensation during parental leave if they are actually on leave, but there are two Member States (CZ, LV) where parents are entitled to a certain percentage of the allowance even if they are engaged in gainful employment in the meantime, and four Member States (AT, EE, HU, SK) where 100% of the allowance amount is paid to working parents, too.

Good practice: Finland

Parents are entitled to take parental leave once the child is born. The leave period is 320 days (calculated excluding Sundays) and is divided equally between the two parents (160-160 days). Parental leave can be taken until the child reaches two years of age. In Finland, parents can opt for partial parental leave, which means that the parent works part-time and spends part of the time caring for the child. The amount of the allowance to be disbursed is 70% of the previous daily earnings and is calculated as per working day. When parental leave ends, parents can take childcare leave until the child reaches three years of age, during which time they may receive a childcare fee. Having taken parental leave, parents of children under three years of age may also to claim a flexible childcare fee, provided that they work less than 80% of the normal full working time, that is, maximum 30 hours per week. The benefit can only be claimed for one child at a time, even if there are several eligible children in the family.

Child benefit

Child benefit as a form of family policy measures is available in all EU Member States. In Hungary, the predecessor of child benefit started to evolve in the early 20th century, but did not become universal until 1979. There are Member States where child benefit has a history of half a century, while in others it was introduced a few years ago. The universal child benefit is intended to contribute to the cost of bringing up the child(ren) in each household.

In the majority Member States, child benefit is made up of a basic benefit and, in some cases, a supplementary benefit. As a rule, the amounts are disbursed monthly. In most cases, child benefit is a tax-free allowance. As for the amount of benefit, it varies widely between Member States, however, it is difficult to compare them given the complexity of the systems. Nevertheless, the monthly amount per child varies between EUR 10 and EUR 600, the most common amount being around EUR 100.

As a rule, the beneficiary is the parent: the parent is entitled to receive benefit for the child, the only exception being Luxembourg, where the entitled person is the child. In most Member States, the mother receives the allowance; nevertheless, in a number of Member States the parents may apply for a split payment. In Germany, even grandparents can claim the allowance provided that the child lives with them. In Finland, the child can claim it, too, provided that he or she has reached the age of 15 and lives in a separate household.

In the majority (16) of Member States (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SI), child benefit is granted depending on the family's income and wealth status; however, the calculation methodology differs: some states have a ceiling, others have a banding system. In contrast, in 11 Member States (DE, EE, FI, IE, HU, NL, LT, LV, LU, SE and SK), entitlement to child benefit is a universal right, and the basic amount does not depend on the family's financial situation, or only depends on the number of children or the type of family. In one Member State (DE) even the age or number of children does not change the amount of child benefit per child. However, in some of the

above 11 Member States the amount of supplementary child benefit is already income-related allowance.

Nevertheless, there may be certain conditions applicants must meet. For example, they must live in the same household as the child and have a permanent address. In some Member States, the applicant is required to have been resident in the given Member State for at least three or five years. Some Member States (HU, RO) make the award of child benefit conditional on compulsory schooling and the number of days of unjustified absences from school.

In all cases, family allowance is paid until the child reaches a certain age (generally until the end of secondary education), but may continue to be paid if the child pursues further studies in higher education or adult education. In the latter case, many Member States set a ceiling maximum amount for the annual income of a child residing at the parental home as a condition for retaining entitlement to child benefit. In some member states, there are special provisions in place for people in compulsory military service, orphans, or people with incapacity or disabilities; for them, the age limit may be higher: 24, 25 or even 26 years. In some Member States, the disburseable amount depends on the age of the eligible child, too. In that regard, two approaches are pursued: the amount of the allowance either increases or decreases with the age of the child.

In most Member States, it is the number of eligible children in the family that determines the amount of child benefit which generally increases with the number of children (in some cases, in varying proportions). The exception to this general practice is France, where family allowance is paid only to parents with two or more children, the consideration being that no additional allowance is needed for one child supported by both parents. In Germany and Slovakia, neither the number nor the age of the children matters, as parents are entitled to the same amount for each child. With regard to the number of children, mention must be made of the fact that in a number of countries large families receive an additional supplementary allowance on top of the basic benefit.

In the vast majority of Member States, single parents are entitled to an additional supplementary benefit. As another common practice, special support is provided for parents of children with disability, where the supplementary benefit is often independent of income (e.g. Italy). In Estonia and Lithuania, families where a parent is in compulsory military service receive a supplementary allowance. Denmark offers a higher amount of allowance to parents of twins, and a special support for students in higher education and for mothers of children whose father is unknown. Finally, it is to be noted that several countries provide a “13th-month family allowance” for starting school, intended to contribute to covering the increased costs that incur at the beginning of the school year. This benefit can be a one-off payment or an amount disbursed every year for children of compulsory school age. Finally, mention must be made of Portugal, where low-income earners are entitled to claim a “pre-natal family allowance” from the 13th week of pregnancy. If awarded, the allowance is paid until the child is born, but no child benefit is paid thereafter.

Good practice: Denmark

In Denmark, the child benefit is a basic allowance disbursable for all children under 18 who reside in Denmark. The benefit amount depends on the child's age and the family's income. Entitlement is conditional on the claimant having lived or worked in Denmark for at least six years in the 10 years preceding disbursement. The benefit amount decreases with the age of the child (EUR 636 per month for young babies and EUR 132 per month for secondary-school students). In the case of joint custody, the amount can be shared between the parents. If the parent's annual tax base exceeded EUR 114,312 per year in 2023, the child benefit amount is reduced. In Denmark, the number of people entitled to a supplementary child benefit is particularly high. Beneficiaries include single parents, parents of twins until the children reach seven years of age, retired parents with children under 18, parents pursuing studies in higher education (provided that they have lived in Denmark for six years in the last 10 years), and mothers if the father of the child is unknown or the paternity proceedings are still pending.

Family taxation

Four-fifths of EU Member States offer some form of income tax benefits for families with children. There are four Member States (CY, FI, LT, SE) where no such options are available. The remaining 23 Member States (AU, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, HR, IE, IT, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK) provide family tax benefit options, albeit practices differ widely. In some Member States, the tax base is reduced, some provide targeted tax benefits, and some allow for monthly, quarterly or annual tax credits. Some Member States (e.g. BE, FR) have a family taxation system (joint spousal taxation system) in place, which means that tax is declared on the basis of a joint tax number. The income of the spouse and the number of dependent children are also taken into consideration, and both parents are entitled to tax benefits. In some cases (e.g. BG, EE, GR), child tax benefits are only available up to a certain annual income threshold, while in others (e.g. HU, LV) tax credits are available regardless of income. Practices of the Member States also vary when it comes to the disbursement period. The lowest age is 12 years (e.g. NL), while some Member States offer allowance also for young people in higher education (e.g. FR, and to some extent HU). In some Member States, tax benefits are awarded on the basis of entitlement to child benefit (e.g. DE, HU). Germany is unique inasmuch as families may choose between child benefit and tax benefits, depending on their preferences. The amount also varies considerably across Member States, with annual tax base reductions for children ranging from EUR 20 to EUR 2,400 per child.

Member States also provide tax benefits for persons with special needs, for example, some offering higher allowances for single-income couples or single parents (e.g. AU). In several countries (e.g. BE, BG, PT), parents of children with disabilities can claim higher tax base reductions; in most cases (e.g. HU, PL), large families are also entitled to higher (or very high) reductions.

Recent years have seen a new trend in a number of countries: typically with the intention to reduce emigration young people under 26 are offered exemption from personal

income tax in their home country (e.g. HU, PL). In other Member States (e.g. HR) those under 30 pay 50% less tax. Hungary and Poland lead the way in supporting parents with four children: in Hungary mothers of four or more children enjoy life-long exemption from the payment of income tax, while in Poland, parents of four or more children only below a certain income threshold are entitled to the same exemption. In Hungary, as of 1 January 2023, mothers who become parents before the age of 30 are also exempt from personal income tax.

Good practice: France

An important element of French family policy is the family taxation system, that is, support offered via the taxation system, the fundamentals of which have remained largely unchanged since World War II. The system is intended, among others, to ensure that families of different composition but with similar income before tax do not have different living standards because of having children. More specifically, upon the assessment of income tax, the composition of the family and the number of children are also taken into consideration, which means that large families pay less tax than smaller families or families without children do. Another objective of the system is to incentivise parents to have at least three children, as families with three or more children receive a higher tax reduction. Within the framework of the family taxation system, married couples and civil partners file a joint tax return. The maximum amount of the available tax benefit is EUR 1,759 per child for the first and second child, and double this amount for the third child. Additional tax benefits can be claimed by parents of children in secondary or higher education. The amount of the tax benefit depends on the level of education and is available until the child reaches 25 years of age, provided that he/she is not engaged in gainful employment.

Housing

Family housing subsidies and/or accommodation support are not offered in all EU Member States within the family support systems. There are mainly cultural reasons for this difference: while in Western Europe there is a high proportion of people living in rented accommodation in cities, Central and Eastern European people regard home ownership as a priority.

The majority of Member States (17) offer some form of housing subsidies; they fall into two broad categories. The larger group, consisting of 12 Member States (AU, BE, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, LU, PT, SE) provide some form of needs-based assistance to contribute to covering the costs of housing or rent. The smaller group, made up of three countries (HU, LV, PL), operate purchase-related housing subsidy schemes. Twelve out of the 27 Member States (BG, CY, EE, EL, HR, IT, LT, MT, NL, RO, SI, SK) do not offer any housing-related assistance.

Countries providing housing assistance, typically in Western Europe, normally offer direct help in rent payment to those in need. As for the conditions for awarding the subsidy, some Member States define an income threshold, while others take into consideration the percentage of salary spent to cover housing costs. In some cases, the subsidy is

disbursed to the tenant, while in other cases directly to the landlord. Some Member States “subsidise” landlords via tax benefits, provided that the property is rented by tenants who are entitled to rent support. In a number of Member States, supported target groups are comprised of large families and young people aged between 18 and 35. For the former target group, the subsidy amount may increase with the number children, while for the latter the subsidy is age-related and is intended to help young people starting out in their careers. In these Member States, there are three other housing-related forms of support in addition to rent subsidy. In some cases, the state provides a subsidy for the payment of the deposit (usually in the form of vouchers) which then can be transferred to the landlord; in some cases, support is available for heating costs; and in some member states means-tested assistance is offered to the costs of moving house.

There are three Member States, however, which prioritise support for house purchases. The Polish state offers a “housing voucher” based on the number of household members. In Latvia, families with three or more children are entitled to a non-repayable grant to buy or build a house. In Hungary, a new system of Family Housing Subsidy was introduced in 2015, consisting of a non-repayable grant until 2023, coupled with a state-subsidised loan at a very favourable interest rate. The loan amount is determined on the number of children born and to be born. In Italy, first-time home buyers under 36 years of age were granted a subsidy for three years. In the Netherlands, parents were allowed for seven years to give their children money as tax-free gift to purchase a home (the scheme was discontinued on 1 January 2024).

It may be concluded then that EU Member States prioritise reducing the housing costs of those in need, and less than a fifth of them attach importance to financial contributions to purchasing a home.

Good practice: Hungary

The Hungarian government, first with the Family Housing Subsidy system (Hungarian abbreviation: CSOK) introduced in 2015 and then with its renewed version (CSOK Plusz) in 2024, introduced a housing subsidy that encourages the birth of desired children and provides meaningful help to families. The subsidy is available to those married couple as well who already have a child/children, but decide to have more. CSOK Plusz is a state-subsidised loan with an interest rate of up to 3%. The interest rate is guaranteed by the state until the end of maturity. The minimum loan amount is HUF 2 million (EUR 5,000), the maximum is HUF 50 million (EUR 125,000), with the actually disbursed amount depending on the number of children born and to be born in the family. The support is available to married couples who are planning to have a child/children. Another condition is that the woman must be under 41 years of age. As of 1 January 2024, a two-year transitional period was introduced, during which the support can be claimed regardless the woman's age, provided that a proof of a 12-week pregnancy is produced. If the children planned are born, the couple can apply for another benefit: for up to one year after the first child is born, loan repayment is suspended, and with each more child the loan principal is reduced by HUF 10 million. Another preferential condition is that if no child is born then in the first year after taking out the loan the couple must pay only interest, but no principal.

RECONCILING FAMILY AND WORK IN THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATES

All Member States attach particular importance to the reconciliation of family life and work, given that it is a factor that has a direct impact on the social well-being and performance of workers in the given country and, thus, on the economic growth of the European Union as a whole. In a competitive society, work and having children are aspects of life that do not exclude but reinforce each other. This means that the employment of parents with young children, the existence of flexible working arrangements or carers' leave, and the assessment of the institutional system for early childhood education and care may give an insight into how successfully people can hit work-life balance in a Member State. However, mention must be made of the fact that each Member State provides relevant arrangements and schemes according to its own cultural traditions. In some Member States, the maternity/parental leave period is relatively short, and the majority of parents return to gainful employment before the child reaches one year of age. In other Member States, parents can opt for a longer leave.

Employment

As shown by 2022 data, the reasons for 25-64-year-old persons to take up part-time employment differ widely. For women, the top reason is to care for children or for adults in need of long-term care (29.2% of women and 7.7% of men), while for men is that they have failed to find a full-time job (19.2% of women and 29.6% of men) (Eurostat, 2023). In 2022, 17.0% of the employed worked part-time. In all Member States (except Romania) women were more likely to belong to this category than men were (27.8% vs. 7.6%). Part-time employment was most widespread in the Netherlands (38.4%), Austria (30.1%), Germany (27.9%) and Belgium (23.0%). The Member States where more than one-third of female employees worked part-time in 2022 are as follows: the Netherlands (60.6%), Austria (51.0%), Germany (47.3%) and Belgium (37.5%). The largest differences between women's and men's part-time employment were detected in the same countries. The lowest rates of part-time employees among full-time workers (less than 4%) were measured in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania.

Another factor to be examined is the link between the share of part-time employment and the number of children. In 2022 in the EU, nearly one-third (31.5%) of employed women aged 25-54 with children worked part-time, while the proportion of part-time was much lower (20.2%) among employed women without children. As for men, an opposite trend is detected: the rate of those in part-time employment is lower among men with children than among men without children (4.9% as opposed to 7.2%). In all but a few countries (DK, EL, LT, PT), the share of women with children working part-time was higher than the share of women without children working part-time.

For historical and cultural reasons, the availability of the option of part-time work is not uniform across EU Member States: in some Member States, especially in the Central and Eastern European countries (BG, HU, HR, LV, PL, PT, RO, SK), the rate of part-time

workers in the total employed population was below 10%, regardless of the employees having or not having children.

Carers' leave

Having a sick or dependent relative has also been shown to have a negative impact on women's employment and results in some women dropping out of the labour market entirely. Therefore, to ensure that workers with caring responsibilities have better chances to remain in the labour market, the WLB Directive (referred to in the Introduction) specifies that all workers must be entitled to at least five days of carers' leave per year in case of the illness of their child or other relative. The Directive does not determine a minimum level of remuneration for the leave period.

All Member States comply with this provision: half of the Member States (AT, BE, CY, DK, EL, FI, HR, HU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO) provide for the minimum number of days (five days), while 14 Member States have a more generous carer's leave scheme in place, with leave periods ranging from 10 days (BG) to two years (ES). The average number of days granted in the Member States is 14 days. In most Member States, the leave period is defined in terms of the total number of days taken in a given year; yet in some Member States (HR, CZ, DK, EE, FI, LT, SI, ES) the number of leave days is determined on the basis of the illness in question. In several Member States (EL, FR, MT), public administration employees are entitled to more leave days than other workers are.

In 22 Member States, the individual worker is entitled to carer's leave, while in the remaining five (BG, IE, EE, SE, SI) it is a family entitlement. Given the fact that caring tasks are mainly performed by women, family entitlement does not contribute to a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women. Therefore, it is more appropriate for all employees to have an individual and non-transferable right to carers' leave, as provided for in the WLB Directive.

As indicated by relevant data, not all Member States regard carers' leave as a priority. In Belgium, Cyprus, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta and Cyprus, carers' leave, by definition, is unpaid and available for very short periods (3-10 days; the exception being Italy, where for children under three years of age the sick leave period is unlimited). In Ireland and Denmark, carers' leave can be taken for only a few days (2-3 days); however, during that period employees receive 100% of their previous earnings. The majority of Member States offer a compensation of the loss of earnings with an amount that equals the amount paid to persons on sick leave. In some cases, for example in Croatia or Romania, the length of leave entitlement or the rate of compensation decreases as the child grows older.

Good practice: Sweden

Parents of children under 12 years of age can opt for temporary parental leave to care for a sick child. During the leave period, they receive an allowance of 77.6% of their previous income (up to a certain income limit). Overall, parents have a maximum of 120 days of parental leave per child to care for a sick child, but in case of a serious illness, there is no time limit. Parents are entitled to this type of leave until the child reaches 12-15 years of

age, conditional on a medical certificate. A medical certificate is required in all cases of illness of more than seven consecutive days. Should the primary carer fall ill, 60 of the 120 days can be taken by another relative of the young child.

For children under 18 years of age suffering from a terminal/serious illness (among life-threatening conditions), there is no upper limit to the number of leave days, and both parents can be on leave at the same time. Parents whose child is ill for a period exceeding six months are entitled to disability care allowance (omvårdnadsbidrag) and a supplementary child care benefit (merkostnadsersättning för barn).

Flexible working arrangements

Flexible working arrangements such as part-time employment, remote working arrangements or special working arrangements tailor-made to the needs of the worker are essential for a good work-life balance. The WLB Directive requires all Member States to allow workers with children up to the age of eight years and workers with caring responsibilities to request flexible working arrangements, including a reduction in working hours, remote working arrangements or flexible working schedules.

Three Member States (FR, IE and LU) do not comply with this requirement inasmuch as they do not offer their workers any form of flexible working arrangements. Fifteen Member States (AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, HU, IT, LV, PT, SE, SI and SK) implement the provisions of the Directive to a certain degree. In some Member States, certain categories of workers are excluded from the opportunity of flexible working arrangements. Such categories include private sector workers (AT), public sector workers (ES), employers with a low number of employees (AT and PT) or those in management (HU) (European Commission, 2022).

Three Member States (HR, LT, MT) provide flexible working conditions for the workers concerned as required by the Directive. Six Member States (BE, DK, EL, NL, PL and RO) offer even more, for example, they have extended the parents' entitlement to request part-time up to a relatively older age of the child or made worker's right to part-time employment a universal right. Such arrangements are available for public sector workers in Belgium, for companies with more than 10 employees in the Netherlands and for all employees in Romania.

The employer must consider and respond to a request for flexible working arrangements, taking into account the needs of both the employer and the worker. Employers must provide reasons for any refusal of such a request or for any postponement of such arrangements. As for the latter provision, the only exception is Italy, where employers, should they refuse the worker's request, are not obliged to justify their decision (European Commission, 2022).

A special form of reduction in working hours is the break given to breastfeeding mothers. This option is available in Member States where the combined length of maternity leave and parental leave is relatively low, and, therefore, mothers typically return to work before their child reaches 12, 9 or 6 months of age. As a rule, within the framework of this arrangement mothers can take breaks of a combined duration of 1-1.5 hours per day.

For the break periods, mothers are entitled to 100% of her earnings (Blum et al., 2023, European Commission, 2023c).

Good practice: The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, employers are obliged to offer flexible working arrangements and the option of working from home to any worker whom they have employed for at least six months, provided that the employer has more than 10 employees and the work schedule allows for such arrangements. This means that employees with children are entitled to request flexible working arrangements (and the employer is obliged to provide them) even after their child reaches eight years of age, provided that the above conditions are met.

Early Childhood Education and Care

All EU Member States have day-care facilities for young children, such as crèches, kindergartens and other childcare arrangements. The availability of institutional early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilitates the participation of women with young children in the labour market and may promote the child's social and cognitive development, especially in the case of disadvantaged children.

A further consideration is the relatively favourable trends in birth rates observed in countries that prioritise the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities of parents with young children. Nevertheless, given the differences in the cultural and social contexts and family support systems of the individual countries, the take-up rate for early childhood care services varies considerably. There are major differences, for instance, as to at what age a young child is guaranteed a place in ECEC. There are only seven Member States (DK, DE, EE, LV, SI, FI and SV) where guaranteed access to day care is offered immediately after a well-paid parental leave period (European Commission, 2023c).

There are only eight Member States (BE, CZ, ES, FR, LU, HU, PL, PT) where state-subsidised free pre-school placement is guaranteed to children between the age of three and that of compulsory schooling. In one-third of the Member States, children are guaranteed admission only for the last 1-2 years of kindergarten. In three Member States (IT, MT, IE) there is no universal entitlement to a place in kindergarten at any age (European Commission, 2023c).

As for the take-up of services, it reflects, among others, the preferences of families, which, again, may vary considerably between countries. For the age group from newborn babies to children of the age of two years, the take-up of institutional (or formal) day care is low in most countries: it is below 30%, while non-formal day care (family or other care arrangements) is much more common than formal care. This holds particularly true for some Southern Member States, as well as for the majority of Central and Eastern European Member States.

Recognising that the rates of access to child daycare are far below the desired levels, the European Council in 2002 adopted the “Barcelona targets”, which specify that 33% of children under three and 90% of children between three and six years of age must have access to day care.

By 2016, the EU average rates had almost reached the targets in both age groups; however, there are significant differences at the Member State level. In 2022, the European Commission proposed a revision of the Barcelona targets in order to give new impetus to the individual countries’ efforts to improve access. Having taken into account the fact that in many European countries day care for children is expensive while its quality is not adequate, the European Commission also made recommendations on affordability and quality.

In the EU in 2023, 37.4% of children aged 0-3 years received day care services. The rate was 89.1% among children between the age of three and that of compulsory schooling. Therefore, the overall conclusion is that since the introduction of the Barcelona targets most Member States have seen an increase of the rate of young children in day care, for the 0-3 (nursery) and 3-6 (pre-school) age groups alike.

Good practice: Slovenia

In Slovenia, children from the age of 11 months on are entitled to state-subsidised ECEC care, which means that for the parents there is no gap between well-paid childcare period and guaranteed ECEC placement. Nursery care and kindergarten care are combined, and the parents can freely decide whether to enrol their child or not. Slovenia boasts of one the highest enrolment rates: 52.3% for children under three years of age and 96.4% for those under six years of age. In Slovenia, the employment rate for women with young children significantly exceeds the EU average (81.6% as opposed to 65%).

SUMMARY

As shown by the facts discussed above, individual Member States apply various tools to support families and to promote the reconciliation of family and work. The reason for such differences lies in the different needs arising from the individual historical, cultural and social contexts, as well as in the intentions of the governments. The ways of the implementation of family support schemes also differ, depending on whether the given country’s government regards childbearing and childrearing as a private matter or as public matter, whether it sees family support as a social policy issue, or how it defines the institution of the family. At this point, it must be added that country’s family support system influences economic welfare and emotional well-being alike (Fűrész, 2024), which calls for a very careful adoption of relevant measures. As regards to supporting families, each Member State pursues different practices, yet, at the same time, there are similarities between certain regions.

In northern Member States (e.g. DK, FI, SV), family support systems are characterised by high levels of social spending on families. Policy focuses include gender equality, as a strong emphasis is placed on the equal participation of both parents in the labour market and in family life. Moreover, special attention is paid to early childhood education and care services, with the intention to ensure that children have access to high-quality services.

In Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. HU, PL, RO), a long parental leave is offered (up to three years) to promote the deepening and strengthening of family ties as early as possible. Under these arrangements, parents are free to decide if they prefer to return to gainful employment as soon as possible or to stay at home and deepen family life. The institutions of early childhood education and care services have a long tradition and, as a rule, are available free of charge. Policies reflect a combination of traditional family roles and work-life balance as a modern concept, and many Member States offer special support to large families.

Compared to other Member States, Southern countries (e.g. EL, IT, PT) typically have less extensive family support systems in place. In many cases, the accessibility of early childhood education and care services is not adequate, while their quality varies greatly, which often leads to family members providing care. Financial support for families is generally of a lower amount and less comprehensive in nature. Previously, Member State policies used to focus on social issues; by contrast, nowadays addressing demographic challenges is prioritised as low birth rates urge Member States to place an increasing emphasis on contributing to higher fertility through various forms of support.

Family support systems in Western European Member States (e.g. BE, DE, NL) combine, on the one hand, elements of comprehensive support (similar to those in place in Northern Europe) and, on the other hand, a relatively limited level public intervention (characteristic of Southern European Member States). Family support policy centres around the social support offered to families; at the same time, a strong emphasis is laid on the promotion of work-life balance, typically through shorter periods of parental leave. These Member States allow same-sex marriage, which is an indication of a concept of “family” that is highly different from the concept prevalent in, for example, Central and Eastern European Member States.

Several countries opt for a neutral approach, relying on social policy consideration while seeking only to alleviate the disadvantaged situation of families with children. By contrast, other Member States implement family support measures with the intention to remove the financial and social barriers to childbearing and to benefit those who rear children. In all Member States, a growing number of young people delay starting a family or have fewer children than they originally planned, which is all too often due to financial considerations, coupled with the difficulty of reconciling work and care responsibilities. To improve this situation, the EU adopted a single directive which, however, offers but a partial remedy. Family policy falls into the Member States’ national competence, which means that any comparison, even when performed on the basis of a uniform set of criteria, will necessarily be limited. One can safely conclude though that people in Europe need support for families, as evidenced by a 2022 survey of the Századvég Europe Project, representative of all EU Member States (plus the United Kingdom): 42% of respondents

attach great importance and a further 39% attach importance to state support subsidising families and family formation (Századvég, n.d.).

Family support measures, if selected carefully, contribute to the families' financial prosperity and emotional well-being and, thus, may be able to address the issues of population ageing, a shrinking working-age population, the shortage of labour, migration and integration problems, depopulation and brain drain. Balanced and flexible family support systems that are responsive to the needs of families may enhance the awareness of the values represented by the family among EU citizens.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES

Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L1158> (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., Kosłowski, A. & Moss, P. (2023). International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023. http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/ (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

European Commission (2022). The transposition of the WLB Directive in EU Member States (II). <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/6048-the-transposition-of-the-work-life-balance-directive-in-eu-member-states-ii-considerable-work-still-to-be-done> (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

European Commission (2023a). Communication on demographic change in Europe: A toolbox for action. https://commission.europa.eu/publications/communication-demographic-change-europe-toolbox-action_en (Accessed: 09.07.2024)

European Commission (2023b). Work-life balance: Commission decides to refer BELGIUM, IRELAND AND SPAIN to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failing to fully transpose the Work-Life Balance Directive https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5372 (Accessed: 09.07.2024)

European Commission (2023c). Eurydice: Access to early childhood education and care in Europe 2022/2023 https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/ECEC_Access_factsheet220.pdf (Accessed: 09.07.2024)

European Commission (2023d). Flash Eurobarometer 534 - Demographic change in Europe <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3112> (Accessed: 09.07.2024)

European Commission (2024). Demographic change in Europe: A toolbox for action EP Briefing Authors: Marketa Pape and Balazs Szechy with Mislav Grbesa Members' Research Service PE 762.302 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762302/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)762302_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762302/EPRS_BRI(2024)762302_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

European Commission. Areas of EU action https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/role-european-commission/law/areas-eu-action_en (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

European Council (2024). Work-life balance for parents and carers <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/work-life-balance/> (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

European Parliament (2023). Maternity and paternity leave in the EU [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/739346/EPRS_ATA\(2023\)739346_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/739346/EPRS_ATA(2023)739346_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

European Council (2024). Leave and flexible working https://europa.eu/youreurope/business/human-resources/working-hours-holiday-leave/leave-flexible-working/index_en.htm (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

Eurostat (2023). Part-time and full-time employment – statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Part-time_and_full-time_employment_-_statistics (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

Fűrész, T. (2024). Család: a legszemélyesebb közérdek. [Family: the most personal public interest.] Budapest, Kommentár 2024/2

Századvég (n. d.) Európa Projekt. [Project Europe] <https://szazadvég.hu/europa-projekt/> (Accessed: 09.07.2024.)

Country profiles

Country portraits - methodological notes

The aim of our volume is to provide as much insight as possible into the family policy system of each EU Member State. These systems also affect the population and demographic indicators of countries, which in turn highlight the demographic phenomena and concerns that a country has to face.

In the first part of the country portraits, based on the most recent data available at the time of preparation of the volume, we explore the demographic situation of the given country, present its main population data, the decisive population changes over the past two decades (2001-2023), and its population pyramid. Following these basic data, in the second part, we present the family policy systems of each country, first focusing on family supports in a narrower sense; reviewing what supports a family can expect from the birth of children until they reach adulthood. In a separate subsection, we review the tax benefits, as well as the options available for home creation and housing support. At the end of the country portraits, we take a closer look at those measures that support the reconciliation of work and family life: including employment data, carer's leave and flexible working arrangements, as well as the nursery and kindergarten systems providing day care for young children.

We hope that by providing a broad overview of the European Union, and a comparable presentation of supports and benefits for families, we will create an opportunity for more people to get to know and compare the different practices of European countries.

ABBREVIATIONS

In our volume, countries follow each other according to the Hungarian alphabet. In many cases, European Union Member States are referred to by their abbreviations, as follows:

Austria	AT	Italy	IT
Belgium	BE	Latvia	LT
Bulgaria	BG	Lithuania	LV
Croatia	HR	Luxembourg	LU
Cyprus	CY	Malta	MT
Czech Republic	CZ	Netherlands	NL
Denmark	DK	Poland	PL
Estonia	EE	Portugal	PT
Finland	FI	Romania	RO
France	FR	Slovakia	SK
Germany	DE	Slovenia	SI
Greece	EL	Spain	ES
Hungary	HU	Sweden	SV
Ireland	IE		

SOURCE OF DATA

Throughout the presentation of the demographic data and the family policy system of each EU Member State, we have tried to provide as up-to-date information as possible. The manuscript was closed in terms of demographic data in August 2024, while the review of family policy systems was finalized in June 2024.

Demographic data

The volume includes data from the current 27 Member States of the European Union, with demographic data from the Eurostat database and the official website of the country's statistical office. The latter are marked with * and the given statistical office is indicated.

Family policy

The description of the family support system of the EU Member States was based on the information contained in the MISSOC (*Mutual Information System on Social Protection*; <https://www.missoc.org/>). These have been supplemented with information from the European Commission on the support system of the given Member State (<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=858&langId=en>) and, if applicable, information from the Member State's own national information pages. These sources are included in a footnote.

In compiling the country portraits, we relied heavily on the *19th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research*, published by Blum et al. in September 2023,¹ which provides an international overview of maternity and childcare leave in 50 countries, measures for workers with young children, and the main elements of early childhood education and care policies.

In order to provide the most complete picture of the structure, operation and financing of nursery and kindergarten care in the 27 Member States of the EU, we used the² information of the Eurydice portal on European education systems in the section on early childhood education and care.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The family policies of the countries are basically examined from a Hungarian perspective, therefore the elements of the Hungarian system are the reference points for the classification of different family support measures, and we have categorized the benefits

¹ https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2023/Blum_et_al_LPRN_full_report_2023.pdf

² <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/>

of each country accordingly. The conditions of each benefit may vary significantly from country to country, so we have tried to make the definitions we have created sufficiently broad to make the classification of different measures, subsidies and benefits as clear as possible.

Demographic data

Population pyramid: a graph showing the age distribution of the population by gender. The population pyramid shows the distribution of a given population by gender and age in such a way that the number of women on the right and the number of men on the left for each age (or age group) is depicted in the form of stacked diagrams. (Eurostat)

Live birth: A live birth is the birth of a child who showed any sign of life; the number of live births refers to the number of births excluding stillbirths. (Eurostat)

Mortality: Mortality is the number of deaths for a given area during a given period. (Eurostat)

Immigrant: An immigrant is a person who arrives in the destination country with the intention of either settling or long-term residence. (Eurostat)

Emigrant: An emigrant is a person who leaves the country without the intention of returning. (Eurostat)

Marriage: A ceremony or legal process in which two people formally connect their lives. It may be of a civil or religious nature, and its validity may be determined by means recognized by the laws of each country. (Eurostat)

Divorce: A marriage dissolved or annulled by a final court judgment. Divorce is possible in all Member States of the European Union, in almost every country the divorce is dissolved in a legal process, in the court. (Eurostat)

Total Fertility Rate (TFR): One of the most commonly used fertility indicators. It shows how many children, on average, a woman would give birth to in her lifetime if fertility data for a given year were to remain constant. The value required to maintain the population of a country without immigration or emigration is above 2. (Eurostat)

Family policy

Since all Member States of the European Union are bound by Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council (20 June 2019) on work-life balance for parents and carers, in the case of paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave and flexible working arrangements, we have followed the definitions in Article 3 thereof.

System of family support

Birth grant

In most cases, a one-time allowance is provided to one of the parents, typically the mother, after the birth of the child. In addition, there can be support available for expectant mothers and adoptive parents to help cover the increased costs associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

Maternity leave and benefit

Maternity leave is leave of a specified duration after or partly immediately before childbirth. The benefit disbursed during maternity leave, which is related to the birth of the child, the care of the infant, and is primarily paid to the mother, is called maternity benefit.

Paternity leave

Paternity leave is work leave granted to fathers and is directly related to the birth of a child.

Parental leave and benefit

Parental leave is granted to parents to care for the child after maternity leave. The benefit paid (in part) for parental leave for the purpose of caring for a young child is called parental benefit.

Child benefit

Regular, cash benefits provided by the state from the birth of the child until the end of his/her student status. Its purpose is to contribute to the costs related to the upbringing of the child(ren) living in each household.

Family taxation

Allowance that reduces the tax payable by parents, depending on the presence and number of children.

Housing

It is a grant that helps the home creation or housing situation of families with children.

Reconciling work and family life

Employment

Employment data (employment rate, part-time employment rate, employment rate of men or women raising young children) are obtained from Eurostat databases. The latest available data (2023) has been used for all countries. The reference year may vary from country to country, given the data provided by the given Member State, the earliest data of the examined period (2001-2023) was taken into account.

Employment rate

The employment rate is the percentage of people employed as a percentage of the total population. In the case of the data series dealing with this, the 15-64-year-olds, that is, the economically active group, were highlighted. (Eurostat)

Employment rate of women and men raising young children

The proportion of people employed raising young children under the age of 6 as a percentage of the total population. In the case of women raising young children, we compare it to the entire female population, and in the case of men raising young children, to the entire male population. In the case of the data series dealing with this, the 18-64-year-old age group was highlighted. The reason for choosing the age group was that quite a few people under the age of 18 raise children under the age of 6, which could have given a false picture of the employment of parents with young children. (Eurostat)

Part-time employment rate

Part-time work is a form of employment in which the employee spends less time at work than full-time employees. It may be different in each country, but usually the limit is 30-35 hours. The part-time employment rate is the percentage of people employed part-time as a percentage of the total population. In the case of the data series dealing with this, the 15-64-year-olds, that is, the economically active group, were highlighted. (ILO Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175)³; A. van Baestelar, 1997⁴)

Carer's leave

Leave from work for employees in order to provide personal care or support to a relative, or to a person who lives in the same household as the worker, and who is in need of significant care or support for a serious medical reason, as defined by each Member State.

Flexible working arrangements

The possibility for workers to adjust their working patterns, including through the use of remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules, or reduced working hours.

Early childhood education and care

This refers to the institutional system of early childhood education and care (ECEC): organized day care -typically nursery and kindergarten- for children from birth until they reach primary school age. (Eurostat) This includes services and opportunities that help parents of young children to (re)enter the labour market and work by providing care for them during the day.

³ https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C175 [Accessed: 03. October 2024]

⁴ van Bastelaer, A., G. Lemaitre and P. Marianna (1997), „The Definition of Part-Time Work for the Purpose of International Comparisons”, *OECD Labour Market and Social Policy Occasional Papers*, No. 22, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/132721856632>.

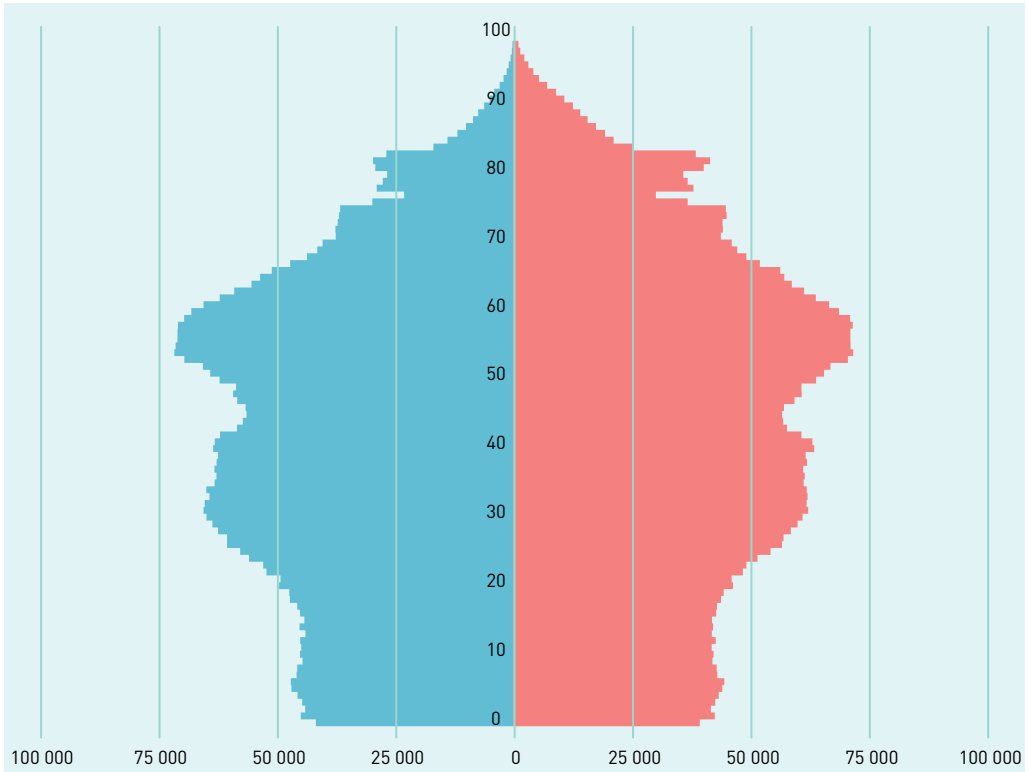


Austria

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	8 020 946	8 375 164	8 700 471	8 932 664	8 978 929	9 104 772
Live birth (persons)	75 485	78 109	87 675	86 078	82 627	77 605*
Death (persons)	74 767	76 479	80 669	91 962	93 332	89 760*
Immigrant (persons)	89 928	82 230	129 509	118 511	201 622	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	72 654	51 197	64 428	67 299	74 271	N/A
Marriage (number)	34 213	36 426	44 890	41 111*	47 482*	45 855*
Divorce (number)	20 582	17 295	15 919	14 510*	13 997*	14 721*
TFR	1.33	1.43	1.53	1.48	1.41	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Austrian Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Austria on 1 January 2023 was 9,104,772. The population increased by 13% between 2001 and 2023. In Austria, in addition to the Austrian population, three traditional nationalities (Carinthian Slovenes, Croats and Hungarians) and immigrants make up the country's population. According to the latest data, the majority of immigrants are of German, Serbian, Turkish and Romanian origin.

The country's population pyramid shows an aging society, with the number of people aged under 25 stagnating.

The annual number of births was around 75–78 thousand between 2001 and 2011, after which it increased strongly, which coincided with the increase in immigration to the country. Overall, compared to 2001, the number of live births increased by 3% and the number of deaths by 25% by 2023. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has been experiencing natural decrease: while previously the number of births exceeded the number of deaths, in the last three years more people have died than were born. In 2023, the difference was more than 15 thousand people.

The population growth is mainly due to immigration. Net migration has been positive for decades and has been rising steadily. In 2001, it was slightly more than 17 thousand people, and in 2022, it exceeded 125 thousand people. While in 2001, nearly 90,000 immigrants arrived in the country, this number has more than doubled by 2022 (201,622). The number of emigrants fell by 30% between 2001 and 2011, then gradually increased, but did not reach 40% of immigration in 2022.

There is a positive trend in both marriages and divorces, with the number of marriages having increased by approx. 39% between 2001 and 2023, while the number of divorces has fallen by a third by 2022. Same-sex couples' marriage is being recognised in Austria since 2019, so the figures for recent years include same-sex marriages.

The total fertility rate fluctuated between 2001 and 2016, rising from 1.33 to 1.53, the closest to the EU average over the period. Between 2016 and 2022 (with the exception of 2021), the rate decreased and dropped to 1.41 in 2022.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Austria, there is no such benefit.

Maternity leave and benefit

The length of maternity leave (*Mutterschaftsurlaub*) is 16 weeks, of which 8 weeks must be taken before the expected due date and 8 weeks after the birth. In some cases (e.g.: high-risk pregnancy), maternity leave may start up to 12 weeks before delivery, or the postpartum period may be extended to 12 (or even up to 16 weeks) in the case of caesarean section, twins or premature birth.

Mothers are entitled to maternity benefit (*Wochengeld*) for 8 weeks before and 8 weeks after the expected date of childbirth. The amount paid depends on the expectant mother's previous earnings. To qualify, she must be covered by compulsory insurance at the start of the maternity leave and have an income above the income threshold (EUR 501 per month in 2023). Only mothers are eligible, and the benefit is not transferable to other persons, including fathers. The benefit of employees is equal to 100% of their previous monthly net salary, with no upper limit. Those entitled to unemployment benefits receive a maternity allowance equal to 180% of the most recent benefit paid. Support for people who are in marginal employment and who have voluntary insurance is EUR 10 per day.¹ Self-employed women are entitled to a flat-rate benefit of EUR 61 per day.²

Paternity leave

Fathers are entitled to one month of paid leave (*Papamonat*) within the first 91 days following birth. Paternity leave cannot be taken intermittently nor part-time and it cannot be transferred to the other parent.³ The amount of the benefit for paternity leave (*Familienzeitbonus für Väter (FZB)*) has been EUR 52 per day (up to EUR 1626 per month) since 1 January 2024.⁴

Parental leave and benefit

Parental leave (*Elternkarenz*) starts after the end of maternity leave and lasts until the child is 2 years old (in the case of twins, until the children are 5 years old). Parental leave is a family entitlement and can be taken by both parents. Parents must agree in advance on who will

¹ MISSOC

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1101&langId=en&intPageId=4402>

³ MISSOC

⁴ <https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/papamonat>

exercise this right and when. Parental leave can be shared twice between the parents, i.e. a total of three periods of leave are permissible (e.g. mother/father/mother). Each period has to last for at least 2 months. All parents in employment relationships are legally entitled to parental leave, which requires only legal residence, not Austrian citizenship. Parents also have the right to change their contractual working time or work pattern if they do not want to use the leave for their full working time specified in the contract. Termination protection also applies during parental leave and extends to the father. After returning from maternity or parental leave, the women's employment contract becomes fully effective again, allowing employees to return to their previous jobs.

The benefit received for the parental leave, called child care allowance in Austria (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*), is available to both parents. In the event that the family's income is below the defined income threshold, the parent receiving the child care allowance may also engage in other gainful activities. They distinguish between a flexible flat-rate child care allowance and an income-related child care allowance:

- The flexible flat-rate child care allowance (*Kinderbetreuungsgeldkonto*) is paid to one parent within the duration of 365 and 851 days (approximately 12-28 months) from the birth of the child, and to both parents from 456 to 1063 days (approximately 15 and 35 months). The child care allowance is EUR 39 per day for the shortest variant and EUR 17 per day for the longest. The longer it is taken, the less the daily amount becomes. All parents legally residing in Austria are entitled to the flat-rate child care allowance regardless of their employment status and nationality. For this variant 20% is allocated to the other parent, which is not transferable (in the shortest variant it is 91 days).
- The income-related child care allowance (*Einkommensabhängiges Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) can be received by one parent for up to 365 days from the birth of the child and by two parents for 426 days. The income-dependent child care allowance is 80% of the last income earned, up to a maximum of EUR 77 per day. This support is given to parents on a monthly basis. In this case, 61 days is non-transferable and reserved for the other parent.⁵

The child care fee is always paid for the youngest child, i.e. it is not possible to apply for more than one child at the same time. For twins, the income-related allowance is unchanged, and the flat-rate is increased by one and a half times. From 2023, the child care allowance will automatically increase with the rate of inflation in January each year.

The condition for receiving the allowance for the entire period is that the 10 (otherwise free) examinations indicated in the Mother-Child Health passport (*Mutter-Kind-Pass*) - five before and five after childbirth - must be carried out at the prescribed time and

⁵ <https://www.bundeskazleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/family/family-benefits/childcare-allowance.html>

the Austrian health insurance fund (Österreichische Gesundheitkassa - ÖGK) must be notified about it in time. If only one test is not carried out or its completion is not confirmed in time, EUR 1300 will be deducted from the child care allowance.⁶

The child care allowance may be accompanied by a partnership bonus (*Partnerschaftsbonus*). If both parents share the duration of the parental leave almost equally (50:50 or 40:60) for at least 124 days each, they can receive a partnership bonus of EUR 500 per person. This payment will be made after the maximum possible period of entitlement to childcare allowance.⁷

Childcare support or aid (*Kinderbetreuungsbeihilfe*)⁸ is available to those who have difficulty covering the costs of paid childcare. In the event that either:

- a change in their working hours necessitates the institutional placement of the child;
- their financial situation has significantly deteriorated despite their employment, so they want to use an institution for day care of the child;
- are currently looking for a job and/or attending a course.

The condition of the application is that the child lives in a common household with the claiming parent and is under the age of 15. The monthly gross income of the claimant shall not exceed the total income of EUR 2,700 for singles. The support can be provided for a maximum period of 6 months at a time, the maximum support period is 3 years per child. Job-seeking mothers and fathers can receive up to EUR 300 per child per month, depending on their income and the childcare costs incurred. Childcare costs are supported up to the age of 15, however if the child is disabled, then up to the age of 18. The support can be used for nursery, kindergarten, after-school care center, employed childminders with the appropriate childcare license and self-employed childminders.

Child benefit

In Austria, a parent living with a child in the same household is entitled to child benefit (*Familienbeihilfe*)⁹ - called “family allowance” in Austria -, if he/she has registered employment and insurance in Austria. Family allowance is normally paid until the child is 18 years old. If the child continues studying in vocational training or adult education, he/she can apply up to the age of 24, if the annual income of the child does not exceed EUR 15,000. The amount of family allowance depends on the number and the age of the children, and it is paid on application and monthly.

⁶ https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/finanzielle-unterstuetzungen/3/2/Seite.080625.html

⁷ https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/finanzielle-unterstuetzungen/3/2/Seite.080631.html

⁸ <https://www.sozialleistungen.at/b/Kinderbetreuungsbeihilfe>

⁹ MISSOC

Monthly basic amount of family allowance in 2024:¹⁰

- EUR 132 per child aged 0–3,
- EUR 142 per child aged 3 to 10 years,
- EUR 164 per child aged 10–18,
- if the child continues his/her studies, EUR 192 between the ages of 19–24.

The monthly amount of family allowance is increased for each child by the sibling supplement, i.e.: by increasing the basic amount according to the age of the children:

- EUR 8 for two children,
- EUR 20 for three children,
- EUR 31 for four children,
- EUR 37 for five children,
- EUR 42 for six children,
- EUR 60 for seven or more children.

Children with severe disabilities are paid an additional EUR 181 per month in 2024.

In addition to the child benefit - a so-called 13th month benefit -, a school start allowance (*Schulstartgeld*) of EUR 116 is paid in August each year for each child between the ages of 6 and 15. The school start allowance is paid together with the August child benefit, no separate application is required.¹¹

Parents with three or more children are also entitled to an income-related additional multi-child allowance (*Mehrkindzuschlag*) of EUR 23 per month for the third and each additional dependent child. The additional allowance can be claimed for an annual income of less than EUR 55,000. This additional allowance must be claimed separately each calendar year and is paid as part of the employee tax assessment or included in the income tax return.¹²

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

As of 2019, the previous “child discount” (*Kinderfreibetrag*) has been replaced by the so-called “*Familienbonus Plus*”, which is a tax base-reducing discount for all families in which Austrian employees work. The annual amount is EUR 2000 per child up to the

¹⁰ https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/familienbeihilfe/Seite.080714.html and <https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/berufundfamilie/BeihilfenundFoerderung/Familienbeihilfe.html>

¹¹ <https://www.finanz.at/steuern/familienbeihilfe/schulstartgeld/>

¹² https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/familienbeihilfe/Seite.080713.html and <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/austria/individual/other-tax-credits-and-incentives>

age of 18. After the age of 18, the family receives a reduced Familienbonus Plus in the amount of EUR 650 per year, if child benefit is still paid to the family after the child. Familienbonus Plus can be shared with spouses and cohabiting partners.¹³

The child deduction (*Kinderabsetzbetrag*)¹⁴ is available to those taxpayers who are entitled to family allowance. The child deduction is 68 EUR per month per child.¹⁵ The amount is paid together with the family allowance, there is no need to apply separately. This aid is also paid to non-taxable persons and to low taxpayers.

Single-income families are entitled to a family tax credit.¹⁶ There are two types of this credit, with slightly different rules but the same amount:

- a) Single-earner tax credit (*Alleinverdienerabsetzbetrag*) for families where both parents raise their children together, but only one of them has earnings; and
- b) Single-parent tax credit (*Alleinerzieherabsetzbetrag*);

The discount reduces the annual tax base, by number of children, by the following amounts:¹⁷

- for 1 child EUR 572;
- for 2 children EUR 774;
- for each additional child EUR 255 each.

Housing

The rent subsidy (*Wohnbeihilfe*) supports citizens in need to pay their rent, but the rules vary from province to province. In general, if a family's total income is below the minimum set by the province, a subsidy of up to 25% of the housing costs can be claimed.¹⁸ The amount of the subsidy depends on the number of people living together in the apartment, the total income of the persons living in the household and the size of the apartment. The rent subsidy is available if the claimant lives in privately financed apartment, lives in rented accommodation, is the main tenant of the apartment and is at least 18 years old. Support is only available for housing that qualifies as a primary residence. Under certain conditions, it is even possible to get rent benefit for a home that one owns. (The average rent for an apartment in 2022 was EUR 900.)

¹³ <https://www.bmf.gv.at/themen/steuern/arbeitnehmerinnenveranlagung/steuertarif-steuerabsetzbetraege/familienbonus-plus.html> and <https://www.usp.gv.at/en/steuern-finanzen/einkommensteuer/steuerabsetzbetraege.html> and <https://www.bmf.gv.at/en/topics/taxation/family-and-children/family-bonus-faq.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/results/>

¹⁵ <https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/beratung/berufundfamilie/BeihilfenundFoerderung/Familienbeihilfe.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.bmf.gv.at/themen/steuern/arbeitnehmerinnenveranlagung/steuertarif-steuerabsetzbetraege/alleinverdiener-alleinerzieher-absetzbetrag.html> and <https://www.usp.gv.at/en/steuern-finanzen/einkommensteuer/steuerabsetzbetraege.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.usp.gv.at/en/steuern-finanzen/einkommensteuer/steuerabsetzbetraege.html> and <https://www.bmf.gv.at/themen/steuern/arbeitnehmerinnenveranlagung/steuertarif-steuerabsetzbetraege/alleinverdiener-alleinerzieher-absetzbetrag.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.wohnnet.at/finanzieren/wohnbeihilfe-oesterreich-49741791>

With the federal housing and heating subsidy introduced in 2023, an additional subsidy of between EUR 200 and EUR 400 per person is available for the lowest one third of the Austrian population, with the amount and procedure also varying from one province to another.

II. Reconciling work and family life

In recent years, Austrian family policy has focused on expanding childcare services and reconciling work and family life. One strategy to improve employment opportunities for mothers is to increase fathers' commitment to parental and childcare responsibilities.

Employment

In 2023, the employment rate for women aged 15-64 was 70.3% (EU-average: 65.7%) and 77.9% for men (EU-average: 75.1%). The employment rate for women aged 18-64 with young children under 6 years of age has hovered around 67% over the past decade but was 73.7% in 2023 (EU-average: 75.1%). The employment rate for men with children under 6 was around 90% over the past decade and peaked at 92.4% in 2022. This changed to 91.1% in 2023 (EU-average: 89.6%). While the share of women aged 15-64 working part-time and/or in flexible arrangements was 43.7% in 2009, it rose to 50.1% in 2023, well above the EU average which was 28.5% in 2023. In 2009, 8.1% of men worked part-time, but by 2023 the share of men working part-time had risen to 12.2%, slightly above the EU average (8.4%) in 2023.

*Carer's leave*¹⁹

Employees are entitled to two weeks' leave per year to care for sick children under the age of 12 and one week per year for other dependents/family members who need care, with full earnings replacement. This entitlement is also available for adoptive and foster parents.

There are two types of extended care leave in Austria. Firstly, employees have a statutory right to take up to 6 months of family hospice leave (*Familienhospizkarenz*) to care for terminally ill family members. If the leave is taken for seriously ill children, it can be extended to 9 months. The leave for care of severely ill children may be renewed twice (i.e. in total up to a maximum of 27 months). Secondly, if their employer agrees, workers (who have worked with their current employer for the previous three months) can take long-term care leave (*Pflegekarenz*). This leave allows carers to organise (formal) care or provide (informal) care for sick family members for up to 3 months. The minimum duration of the leave is 1 month. It can be extended from 3 to 6 months if the patient's health

¹⁹ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

deteriorates significantly. Workers are entitled to a cash benefit (*Pflegekarenzgeld*) during the above-mentioned carer's leave, amounting to 55% of average net earnings, paid by social security. The maximum duration of the payment is 6 months per worker (or 12 months per dependant if the leave is shared).

In Austria, workers can take between 2 and 12 months' leave for private reasons (e.g. further studies or family reasons). This is based on a mutual agreement between the employer and the employee and is unpaid. If the leave is taken for educational reasons (*Bildungskarenz*), it is possible to claim continuing training allowance from unemployment insurance funds (although the employee must also meet the eligibility conditions for unemployment benefit and the employer must employ a replacement for the period of leave).

Flexible working arrangements

Mothers are allowed to a 45-minute breastfeeding break per day by law if they work between 4.5 and 8 hours a day. If a mother works 8 hours or more, she is entitled to two 45-minute breaks or one 90-minute break per day.

Parents are entitled to work part-time (*Elternteilzeit*) until their child's seventh birthday (or the start of school) if they live in the same household with the child, work in a company with more than 20 employees and have been continuously employed by their current employer for at least three years. It is not possible to work part-time for less than 12 hours or more than 32 hours a week. Parents working in companies with fewer than 20 employees can ask their employer for agreed parental part-time work until the child's fourth birthday. An employee cannot request part-time parental leave if the other parent is on parental leave.

Parents are protected under employment law until their child's 4th birthday and cannot be dismissed without justification until the child's 7th birthday (or the start of school).

Caregivers of sick family members are also entitled to work part-time for a period of time in both of the carers' cases detailed above, both for family hospice leave (*Familienhospizkarenz*) and long-term care leave (*Pflegekarenz*). From 1 January 2020, part-time carers' leave can be requested for up to 2 weeks, which can be extended by a further 2 weeks. For long-term care leave, a minimum working week of 10 hours is compulsory.

Early childhood education and care

In Austria, there are two levels of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services: day care for children up to the age of 3 is provided by centrally (state) regulated nurseries, while children aged 3-6 attend kindergartens. For children aged 5, a compulsory and free kindergarten year was introduced in Austria in 2009. In the year before starting school, children must attend kindergarten for at least 4 days a week for 20 hours.

Some provinces provide free childcare for certain age groups²⁰:

- Vienna: free full-day childcare up to the age of 6
- Burgenland: free half-day and full-day childcare up to the age of 6
- Lower Austria: free half-day childcare (7-13 hours) for children up to the age of 6.
- Upper Austria: free half-day childcare (7-13 hours) for children up to the age of 6
- Carinthia: 100% of the parental contribution is reimbursed up to the age of 6.
- Tyrol: free half-day childcare for children aged 4 to 6.
- Salzburg: free half-day childcare for children aged 3-6.

There is also a system of family day care and a regulated home-based family day care scheme for children and young people up to the age of 16. In the years preceding the compulsory kindergarten year, the costs taken by parents or guardians for their children's attendance at nursery and kindergarten vary by province. Compared to 2010, the number of nursery groups more than doubled by 2020, while the number of kindergarten groups increased by 12% over the same period.

In 2023, 24% of children aged 0-3 were in nursery care, below the EU average of 37% and a significant increase from 4% in 2005. In 2023 92% of children aged 3-6 were in kindergarten or equivalent services above the EU average (89%), compared to only 26% in 2005.

²⁰ <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/en/agenda/family/early-childhood-education.html>

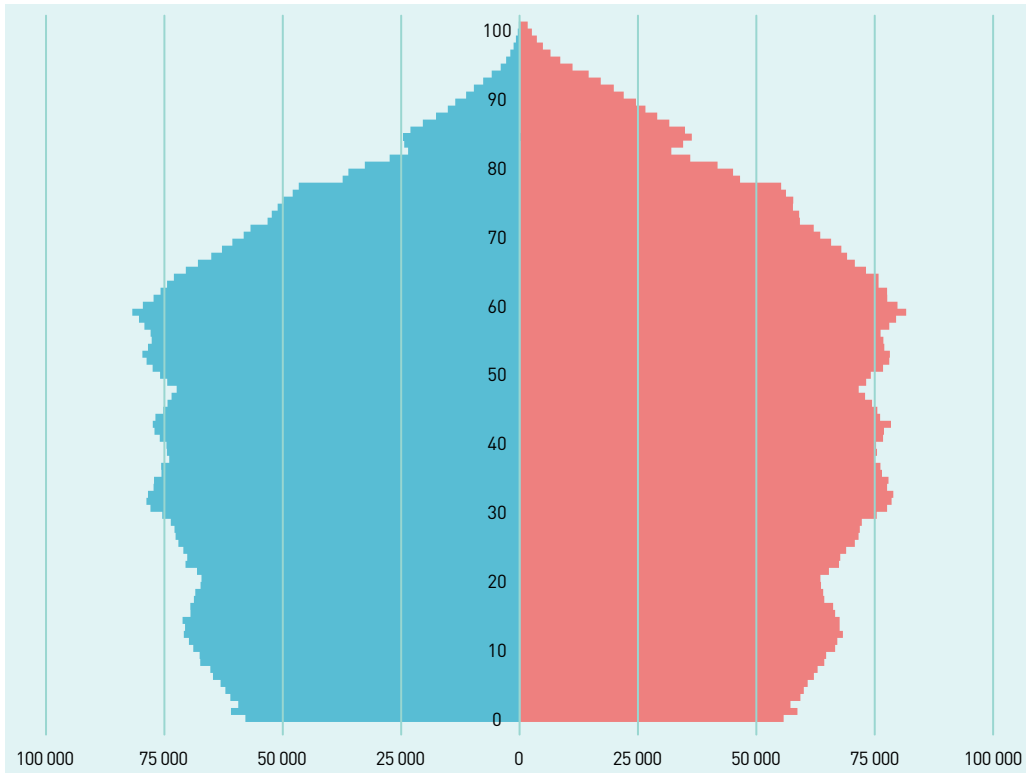


Belgium

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	10 263 414	11 000 638	11 311 117	11 554 767	11 617 623	11 742 796
Live birth (persons)	115 372	128 705	121 896	118 349	114 095	110 198*
Death (persons)	103 447	104 292	108 097	112 331	116 424	111 255*
Immigrant (persons)	110 410	147 377	123 702	139 743	208 356	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	75 261	84 148	92 471	87 272	84 627	N/A
Marriage (number)	42 110	41 001	44 725	40 845	48 513	46 564*
Divorce (number)	29 314	27 522	23 583	22 72	19 363	20 034*
TFR	1.67	1.81	1.68	1.60	1.53	1.47*

Source: Eurostat, Belgian Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Belgium on 1 January 2023 was 11,742,796¹, which, in addition to a trend of continuous growth, represents an increase of 14% compared to the population number of 2001. The population of Belgium is made up of two major communities: the Dutch-speaking Flemish (55%) and the French-speaking Walloons (31%). A small number of Germans also live in Belgium, that is why German is the third official language. Belgium's population pyramid shows the picture of a slowly aging society, with an almost continuously decreasing population under the age of 55.

A natural increase can be observed in the number of live births after 2001, then a gradual decrease between 2011 and 2023 and there was an overall decrease of 4.5% between 2001 and 2023. Although the number of deaths showed a slow but persistent increase until 2022, and then started to decline in 2023, with an overall increase of 7.5% between 2001 and 2023.

The number of immigrants has almost doubled from 2001 to 2022, and each year typically more immigrants arrive than children are born in Belgium. The rate of emigration is fluctuating, but its magnitude falls short of that of immigration. The positive net migration of 2022 (+123,729 people) can presumably be explained by emigration from the areas affected by the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The number of marriages has shown a fluctuating trend in recent decades: in 2013 and 2014, fewer than 40,000 marriages took place, but this number was even smaller in 2020 when - due to the coronavirus epidemic - less than 33,000 couples tied the knot. In 2021, we can see growth again, until 2022, when already 48,513 marriages were registered, which is almost 9% more than the average of the period 2017-2019, so in 2022, presumably, many weddings were celebrated that had to be postponed before due to the pandemic. In 2023, this number started to fall again. The number of marriages increased by 10.6% between 2001 and 2023. In Belgium, same-sex couples have been allowed to marry since 2003, that is why since 2003 the data already include same-sex marriages.

The number of divorces decreased continuously between 2001 and 2022 by 35% overall, then increased again in 2023. The number of divorces fell below 20,000 for the first time in 2022, but exceeded 20,000 again in 2023.

The total fertility rate reached its peak in 2010 with a value of 1.86 (EU-average: 1.57), but in 2023 it was only 1.47.

¹ <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/population/structure-population>

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support²

Birth grant

The one-off amount paid upon the birth or adoption of a child (*allocation de naissance/ kraamgeld*) is EUR 1,289 for the birth of the first child in the French-speaking part of the country (Wallonia and the Brussels region), EUR 586 for the birth of additional children, and the amount is doubled in the case of twins. In 2022 the amount in the Dutch-speaking part of the country (Flanders) was EUR 1,191, and EUR 1,198 in the German-speaking area, here the amount is also doubled in the case of twins.

Maternity leave and benefit

Maternity leave (*congé de maternité/moederschapsverlof*) is 15 weeks (17 weeks in the case of twins). It can be started 6 weeks before the expected due date (8 weeks in the case of twins), but it is obligatory to take leave 1 week before the birth. The remaining part must be taken after the birth (9 weeks after delivery is mandatory). In the case of self-employed women, the length of maternity leave is 12 weeks, of which 1 week must be taken before the expected date of delivery and 2 weeks after. Maternity leave is extended by 1 week if the mother is unable to work in the 6 weeks before the birth. The condition for taking maternity leave is 120 days of insurance.

Employed women receive 82% of their salary during the first 30 days (15 weeks) of maternity leave (*indemnité de maternité/moederschapsuitkering*), and 75% from the 31st day, with a maximum of EUR 171 per day in 2023. Self-employed women are entitled to EUR 830 for the first 4 weeks (50% of this in the case of part-time work), and EUR 760 (50% of this in the case of part-time work) from the 5th week onwards.

Unemployed mothers are entitled to unemployment benefit plus 19.5% of their previous earnings in the first month (maximum gross EUR 135 per day). From the second month they can receive the unemployment benefit plus 15% of their previous earnings (maximum gross EUR 128 per day).

Paternity leave

Under the birth leave, previously known as paternity leave (*congé de naissance/geboorteverlof*), the father is entitled to 20 working days of leave from 1 January 2023, which can be taken during the first four months after the birth of the child. 100% of the salary is due for the first 3 days, and 82% for the following days, with a maximum amount of EUR 171 per day in 2023. All male employees and self-employed workers are eligible.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1102&dlangId=en&intPageId=4414> and <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1102&dlangId=en&intPageId=4415>

Parental leave and benefit

All parents who work full-time or part-time are entitled to parental leave (*congé parental/ouderschapsverlof*) until the child is 12 years old. Both parents can take it at the earliest after the end of the maternity leave. Parental leave is a maximum of 4 months (per parent) if it replaces full-time work, and a maximum of 8 months if the parent continues to work for 4 hours and takes it only for the remaining 4 hours.

A lump sum can be claimed during parental leave. The amount depends on the age of the parent (under or over 50), on the level of employment, and on whether it is a one- or two-parent family. If the parent has worked full time, he or she receives EUR 978 per month, and EUR 1,647 as a single parent. If the parent continues to work for 4 hours and takes parental leave for the remaining 4 hours, he or she receives a monthly allowance of EUR 489 (if the parent is single, the amount is EUR 823) under the age of 50 and EUR 659 (singles receive EUR 823) over the age of 50 in 2023. Self-employed mothers can take 12 weeks of optional leave in 7-day increments within 36 weeks after giving birth. The individual 7-day sections can be divided into 14-day part-time sections.

Child benefit

The child benefit consists of a basic allowance and other additional parts, which depend on the family's income and social situation (for example being a single parent), the age of the children, and the degree of disability in the case of raising a child who lives with disability. The amount of the benefit can also vary according to the provinces and language areas of the country. In general, the benefit is granted until the child is 18 years old, but if the child is participating in vocational training or pursuing higher education, the upper age limit is 25 years. The recent change in the family allowance system also meant that children born before or after 1 January 2019 are uniformly differentiated in the country. For children born after 1 January 2019, the benefit amounts are higher. In the case of children born after 1 January 2019, the monthly amount of the child benefit varies between EUR 173 and EUR 181 per child. Depending on income, province and the number of children, an amount of between EUR 30 and EUR 100 is paid as an additional poverty allowance. As an additional allowance for age, depending on the region and the age of the child, EUR 16 and EUR 63 per month is being disbursed.

Additional support for children with disabilities

This new type of additional support has been paid monthly since 1 January 2023 for children with disabilities under the age of 21. Its amount varies depending on the degree of disability (number of points on the social-medical scale). The amount of support for each category differs minimally between the three communities, in total an amount of between EUR 87 and EUR 287 can be provided as additional support.

Education allowance

The education allowance is paid once a year, in August, together with the child benefit, to make it easier for families to prepare for the start of school. This benefit is automatically added to the July child benefit (which is paid in August). The allowance varies depending on the child's age and need. The annual one-time payment is between EUR 23 and EUR 137 per child.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

When calculating the personal income tax, the income of the spouse and the number of dependent children are taken into account. The tax declaration of the spouses is based on a common tax number, and the tax-free part of the income increases based on the number of dependents.

According to the rules valid for 2024, this amounts to³:

- For 1 dependent child: EUR 1,850;
- For 2 dependent children: EUR 4,760;
- For 3 dependent children: EUR 10,660;
- For 4 dependent children: EUR 17,250;
- for each additional child: EUR 1,850.

A tax credit can be claimed in a double amount for a disabled child.

Housing⁴

In the Brussels Region, relocation assistance (*allocation de relogement/allocation déménagement*) and rent allowance (*allocation loyer*) are available to those in need. The purpose of relocation assistance is to enable low-income people to move from an unhealthy, overcrowded neighbourhood to a healthier place. In 2017, this meant a one-time benefit of EUR 1,009 for a married couple with two children. The amount of the rent allowance varies between EUR 120 and 160 per month, depending on the income, and on top of that there is an additional EUR 40 per child available. The support can be requested for a maximum of two 5-year periods. Both benefits are income dependent. In 2017, a married couple with two children was only eligible if their total household income of 2016 did not exceed EUR 22,670. The measure was introduced in 2014, and in 2022, 12,000 Brussels residents met the conditions for the rent allowance. In the Flemish part, university students can also receive rent subsidies. This can amount to a maximum of EUR 160 per month. The average rent for an apartment in 2022 was EUR 1,000.

³ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/belgium/individual/deductions>

⁴ <https://www.brusselstimes.com/225689/brussels-failing-to-pay-rent-allowance-owed-to-citys-most-vulnerable>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Belgium, the employment rate of mothers between 18-64 with children under the age of 6 was 69.6% in 2023, which is slightly higher than the EU average (66.4%). There was no significant change in the rates between 2009 and 2023: in 2009, the rate was 67.0% (EU average: 57.4%). The employment rate of fathers with small children was 87% in 2009, and 85,6% in 2023, the EU-average being 89,6%. Part-time work is very widespread in the country, well above EU-average. In 2009, 40.7% of women worked in this way, falling slightly to 38.1% by 2023, compared with an EU average of 28.5%. In 2009, 8.7% of men worked part-time, rising slightly to 10.8% in 2023, also above the EU average (8.4%).

Roughly half of fathers claim paternity leave in Belgium, typically using the entire available period. In 2010, 38,053 women took parental leave, and by 2022 this number rose to 55,908. The number of men taking parental leave has almost tripled in ten years, from 13,891 in 2010 to 30,402 in 2022. The proportion of fathers among all leave takers rose from 27 to 35 percent in the period 2010-2022.

Carer's leave

Employees are entitled to 10 days of unpaid carer's leave a year for the purpose of caring for their child or other relative. In the case of a severely ill family member, 1-12 months of paid care leave can be requested, and in the case of taking care of a relative requiring palliative care, 2 months of benefits are paid under the same conditions as parental leave. In the 9 months following childbirth, the mother is entitled to a breastfeeding break of 30 minutes per day if the daily working time is shorter than 7.5 hours, and 60 minutes per day if the daily working time is longer than 7.5 hours.

Flexible working arrangements

Since November 2022, parents with young children can apply for a four-day working week, i.e. they can merge the 5 working days of the week into 4 days, but they cannot work more than 10 hours a day.⁵

Early childhood education and care

Early childcare is available for children up to the age of 2 and a half years (up to the age of three in the case of the German-speaking community). In the case of childcare centres parents usually pay around EUR 45 per day. For state-subsidised providers, the proportion of the cost borne by parents depends on their income, ranging from EUR 1 to EUR 30 per day.

⁵ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

BELGIUM

Different rules apply to kindergarten in the 3 provinces: in Flanders, children are legally entitled to free kindergarten education from the age of 2.5. In Wallonia, children from the age of 2.5 years are legally entitled to 23 hours of free kindergarten education per week. In the German-speaking Community, children are entitled to free kindergarten education from the age of three,

Kindergarten care is mainly public, but there are also private and church-run institutions. In Belgium, starting from the 2020-2021 academic year, compulsory schooling starts from the age of 5 instead of 6 with the compulsory kindergarten, so-called “pre-primary” education, while primary education starts from the age of 6. Childcare for children up to the age of three is subject to a fee.

In 2023 in Belgium, 56% of 0-3 years old children attended nursery, higher than the EU average (37%), which is an increase compared to the 2005 Belgian figure (41%). In 2023, 99% of 3-6-year-olds attended kindergarten, higher than the EU average (89%) and there is no change in the value compared to 2005 (99%).

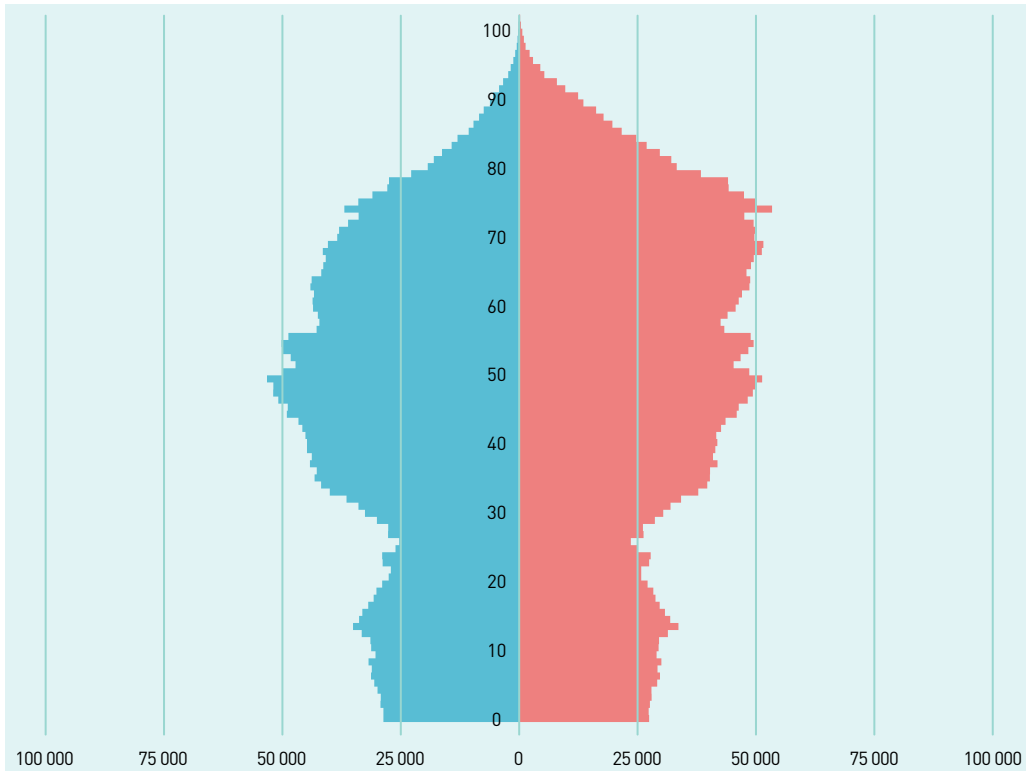


Bulgaria

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	8 149 468	7 369 431	7 153 784	6 532 117	6 482 484	6 447 710
Live birth (persons)	68 180*	70 846	64 984	58 678	56 596	55 103
Death (persons)	112 368	108 258	107 580	148 995	118 814	98 928
Immigrant (persons)	N/A	N/A	21 241	39 461	40 619	56 807*
Emigrant (persons)	N/A	N/A	30 570	26 755	13 175	15 227*
Marriage (number)	31 974	21 448	26 803	26 620	26 013	21 800**
Divorce (number)	10 275	10 581	10 603	10 021	9 525	9 088**
TFR	1.2*	1.51	1.54	1.58	1.65	1.81**

Source: Eurostat,*World Bank (Download date: 04.06.2024.),** Bulgarian Statistical Office (Download date: 08.12.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Bulgaria's population has been decreasing since the 1990s, and on 1 January 2023, the total population was 6,447,710, which represents a 21% decrease compared to 2001. Bulgarians make up nearly 79% of the population. A large number of Turks (8%) and Gypsies/Roma people (4%) are also present.¹

Bulgaria's population pyramid paints the picture of an aging society, with far fewer people aged 30 and under than older cohorts.

One of the main reasons of the shrinking of the population is that the number of deaths far exceeds the number of live births. In 2023, almost twice as many people died (98,928 people) as were born (55,103 people). In 2001, 68,180 children were born, in 2023 only 55,103, which represents a 19% decrease. Since 2001, the number of deaths has fluctuated, but showed a significant imbalance only during the COVID pandemic, when the number of deaths rose to nearly 150,000. From 2001 to 2023, the number of deaths decreased by 12%.

In the past years, the number of immigrants has increased significantly, therefore recent years have been characterized by a migration surplus. According to the data of the Bulgarian Statistical Office, in 2023 almost four times as many people arrived in the country (56,807 people) than emigrated (15,227 people). Between February 2022 and December 31, 2023, 2,151,780 Ukrainian citizens entered the territory of Bulgaria as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, out of which 52,180 settled in the country.² Until the 2020s, the country's migration balance was slightly negative, with a few thousand more people leaving the country than arriving.

We can witness a slight decrease in the number of marriages after 2016 and then in 2023 the number suddenly dropped compared to 2022. Compared to 2001, the figure is already almost 32% lower. Nevertheless, the number of marriages is steadily higher than the number of divorces, in 2023 almost twice as many people got married (21,800) as divorced (9,088). Since 2001, the number of divorces has decreased by 11.5%.

While the country's fertility rate was 1.2 in 2001 - which was the third lowest value (the EU average was 1.43) - in the last 15 years it has been permanently above 1.5. In 2022, it reached 1.65, which was the third highest in the EU. In 2023, the rate reached 1.81.

¹ https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x_2=2110

² <https://bulgaria.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11291/files/inline-files/-2023-iom-bulgaria-ukraine-response-sitrep.pdf>

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

Every mother receives a one-time allowance (*еднократна помощ*) upon the birth of her child, regardless of the family's financial situation. The amount is BGN 250 (EUR 128) for the first child, BGN 600 (EUR 307) for the second, BGN 300 (EUR 153) for the third, and BGN 200 (EUR 102) for each additional child. In the case of adoptive parents, one of them receives a one-time grant of 250 BGN (128 EUR) for each adopted child.

There is also a one-time allowance for multiple births (*Еднократна междвий помощ за хорошов на близнаци*). This benefit is also provided to parents regardless of the family's income. The allowance is BGN 1,200 (EUR 614) per child. When a child is born with a disability, the parents are entitled to an additional, one-time subsidy of BGN 100 (EUR 51).

Mothers studying full-time receive a lump sum of BGN 2,880 (EUR 1,473) upon the birth of their child in two instalments, half after the birth of the child, and the other half if the child enrolls in the next semester before turning one year old.³

Maternity leave and benefit

Mothers who have been insured for at least 12 months are entitled to a total of 410 days of paid leave during maternity leave (*Обезщетение за грубансь и работа*), which must start 45 days before the expected due date. The amount of the benefit is 90% of the average income calculated for the last 24 months, but it cannot be lower than the minimum wage defined by law (780 BGN (399 EUR) in 2023).

Since 1 January 2020, if another child is born within 410 days, the amount of the maternity pay for the second child remains the same as for the first child (thus ensuring that the mother cannot receive less for the second child).

If the mother returns to work after the child is 6 months old, 50% of the benefit is paid. With the mother's consent, the father can also use the remaining 410 days from the child's age of 6 months, and then he will receive benefits instead of the mother for this period. However, only the mother can use the first 135 days.

Women who do not have the required insurance period but have a permanent residence in Bulgaria and whose average monthly income per person is less than BGN 610 (EUR 210), can receive a one-time subsidy of BGN 150 (EUR 77) during pregnancy.

If the pregnant woman is insured but does not have the required insurance period, she will receive a proportional part of the pay for a maximum of 45 days. And after the birth

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1103&dangId=en&intPageId=5060>

of the child, she will receive the pay (*Месечни помощи за зодом на дете до навършване на една година*) until the child is 1 year old, the amount of which is BGN 200 (EUR 102) per month. In 2022, one fifth of mothers used this form of support.

Mothers raising a child with a permanent disability, receive a monthly benefit of BGN 200 (EUR 102) regardless of their income level, until the child is 2 years old.⁴

Paternity leave

A father who has paid social insurance for at least 6 months is entitled to 15 calendar days of paid paternity leave after the birth of the child, which he has to take following childbirth. The amount is calculated in the same way as in the case of the mother, i.e. the father receives 90% of the average earnings of the previous 24 months, in the amount of at least BGN 710 (EUR 363) per month.

From August 2022, fathers (including adoptive fathers) are also entitled to 2 months of paid leave until the child turns 8 (*отпуск за отглеждане на дете до 8-годишна възраст от баитста/осиновителъа*). For this period, a monthly benefit of 710 BGN (363 EUR) applies.

Parental leave and benefit

After taking 410 days of maternity leave, one of the parents or grandparents insured for at least 12 months is eligible to parental leave until the child turns 2 years old and receives child care assistance during that period (*Обезщетение за хорошой на малъко дете до 2-гранный обшит*), the amount of which in 2023 BGN 780 (EUR 399) per month. Until the child reaches the age of 8, both parents are entitled to 6 months of unpaid childcare leave each. The leave can be used in parts, both parents can decide when they want to use it, but they cannot use it at the same time. A maximum of 5 months out of the 6 months can be transferred to the other parent.

In the case of a single parent, childcare leave can be up to one year.

Adoption leave (for the adoption of a child under the age of five) is 365 days and can be used from the day of the child's arrival until the child's fifth birthday at the latest, amounting to BGN 780 (EUR 399) per month in 2023.

Single adoptive fathers/mothers are entitled to the same leave and benefit.

Child benefit

The child benefit (*Месечни помощи*) is a monthly allowance until the child reaches the age of 20 or completes secondary education. The benefit is available to families whose monthly per capita income does not exceed BGN 510 (EUR 261). The amount of the family allowance in 2023:

⁴ MISSOC

BULGARIA

- 50 BGN (25 EUR) for a family with one child;
- 110 BGN (56 EUR) for a family with two children;
- 165 BGN (84 EUR) for a family with three children;
- 175 BGN (89 EUR) for a family with four children;
- increases by BGN 20 (EUR 10) for each additional child.

In the case of twins, the amount of the child benefit is 75 BGN (38 EUR) per child. In the case of families raising a disabled child, the child benefit is paid regardless of the household's income. Parents (adoptive parents), relatives or voluntary foster families of a permanently disabled child are entitled to monthly support until the child turns 18 or completes high school studies, but no more than 20 years of age. The amount of the subsidy depends on the degree of disability:

- 90% or more severe - BGN 930 (EUR 476)
- 70% - 90% - 450 BGN (230 EUR)
- 50% - 70% - BGN 350 (EUR 179)

If the family's monthly income per person in the previous year is between BGN 510 (EUR 261) and BGN 610 (EUR 312), they are entitled to 80% of the above amounts.

Parents receive support if their child is in grades 1-4 or continues studies in grade 8. The grant amounts to BGN 300 (EUR 154) and is paid in two equal instalments at the start of the first and second semesters.

Tax credits and other benefits

One-time allowance: Mothers raising 3 or more children receive free round-trip national rail and bus travel (*годетни майки*) once per calendar year.⁵

Family taxation

Families with children can enjoy a tax discount, the amount of which depends on the number of children. For each child, the tax base can be reduced by BGN 6,000 (EUR 3,067) per year, up to a maximum of BGN 18,000 (EUR 9,200). A tax base reduction of BGN 12,000 (EUR 6,134) per year can be claimed for a disabled child.⁶

Housing

In Bulgaria, there is no such support.

⁵ MISSOC

⁶ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/bulgaria/individual/deductions>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2009, the employment rate of women aged 15-64 was 58.3%, which surpassed the EU average and increased to 67.4% by 2023 (EU average that year: 65.7%). An increase can also be seen in the case of men during the examined period: in 2009, 66.9% of men was working. In 2023 the percentage was 73.9%, which was close to the EU average (75.1%). In 2023, 64.8% of women aged 18-64, who were raising children under the age of 6 were employed, which is only minimally behind the EU average measured in the same year, which was 66.4%. 85.1% of men raising children under the age of 6 were employed, which is also close to the EU average, which was 89.6% in 2022. Compared to 2009, the employment of those raising minor children increased significantly for both genders: it was 49.2% for women and 78.6% for men.

In 2023, only 1.4% of the Bulgarian population between the ages of 15 and 64 worked part-time (women 1.5%, men 1.3%). These values were significantly lower than the EU average (28.5%, respectively 8.4%).

Carer's leave

Insured family members have 60 days per year to take care of a sick family member or child (*отпуск при временна неработоспособност*). During this period, they are entitled to 80% of their monthly gross earnings.

Working mothers with a collective work agreement are entitled to 2 days off each year if they care for two or more children under the age of 18 (*платен отпуск за две И меж живи детца*). Mothers raising three or more children are entitled to 4 days.

Flexible working arrangements

For the purpose of (breast)feeding a baby (*отпуск за кармене И новъй на малко дете*) the mother is allowed 2 hours of absence per day if the child is younger than 8 months and the mother works full-time (8 hours per day). When the child reaches the age of 8 months, the paid absence due to (breast)feeding is reduced to 1 hour per day. If the mother works 7 hours a day or less, she is entitled to a one-hour break.

As of August 1, 2022, the possibilities for reconciling personal and professional life have been broadened, as a result of which the employee can request remote work or a modification of working hours if necessary. This option can be used by parents of children younger than 8 years old, as well as those who care for their parents, spouse or other relatives due to serious health reasons. Before 2022, only those returning from maternity/parental leave could apply for flexible working. However, the employer is not obliged to allow flexible working, but is obliged to give reasons for rejecting the request.

Early childhood and education care

Since April 1, 2022, municipal nurseries and kindergartens are completely free of charge. Bulgarian children can attend nurseries between the ages of 3 months and 3 years, and kindergarten from the age of 3. If there are not enough places in the nursery school in the affected settlement, children can start kindergarten from the age of 2.⁷ In the two years before school, pre-school education is compulsory and is provided free of charge by the kindergarten or primary school, including teaching aids.⁸

In 2023, 17% of children aged 0–3 received nursery services, which was significantly lower than the EU average (37%) and represented a slight increase compared to 2005 (16%). In 2023, 95% of 3-6-year-olds attended kindergarten, which exceeded the EU average (89%) and is a significant increase compared to 2005 (38%).

⁷ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/bulgaria/early-childhood-education-and-care>

⁸ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/bulgaria/organisation-education-system-and-its-structure>

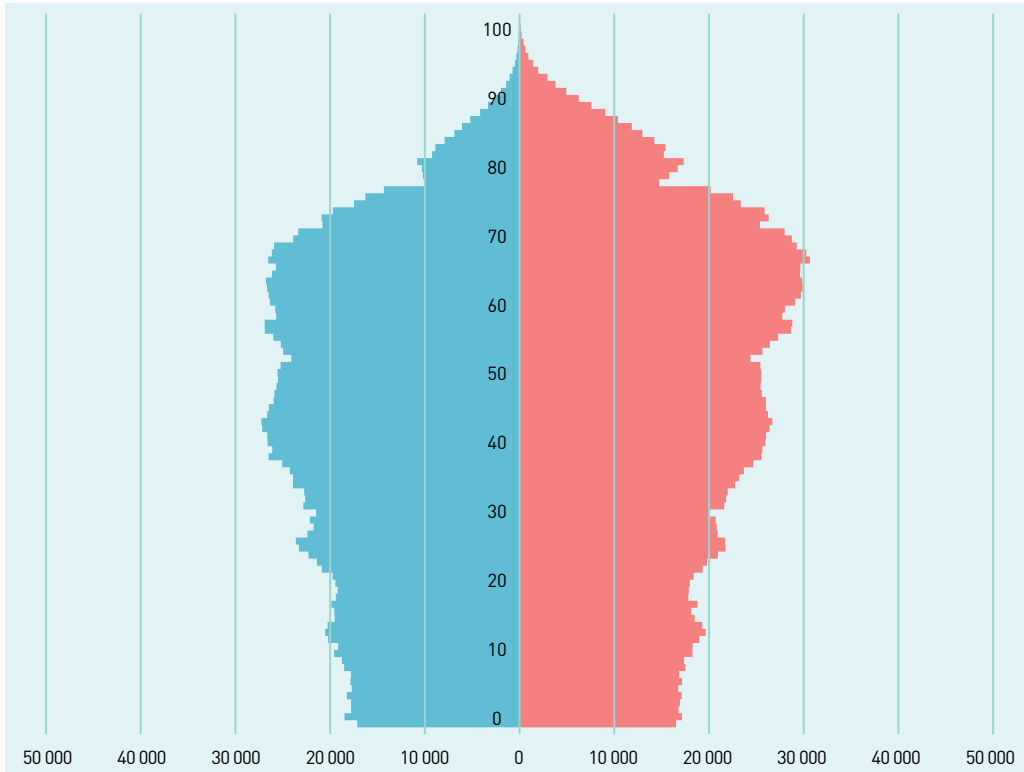


Croatia

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	4 295 406	4 289 857	4 190 669	4 036 355	3 862 305	3 850 894
Live birth (persons)	40 993	41 197	37 537	36 508	33 883	32 170
Death (persons)	49 552	51 019	51 542	62 712	56 979	51 275
Immigrant (persons)	24 415	8 534	13 985	35 912	57 972	69 396*
Emigrant (persons)	7 488	12 699	36 436	40 424	46 287	39 218*
Marriage (number)	22 076	20 211	20 467	18 203	18 074	17 306*
Divorce (number)	4 670	5 662	7 036	5 100	4 808	4407*
TFR	1.46	1.48	1.42	1.58	1.53	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Croatian Bureau of Statistics (Download date: 09.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Croatia is steadily decreasing. On 1 January 2023, the population was 3,850,894, a decrease of 10% since 2013. According to the 2021 census data, Croatia is mainly populated by Croats (91.6%). The largest ethnic minority is Serb (3.2%), while the others represent less than 1-1% of the population (Albanians, Bosniaks, Czechs, Hungarians, Slovenes, Roma, Italians).¹

Croatia has been steadily losing population over the last three decades. The demographic decline is partly the result of war-related losses of life in the 1990s, and partly influenced by a declining birth rate, increasing emigration and limited immigration. Since Croatia joined the European Union in 2013, emigration of young and educated people has reached a record high.

The country's age profile shows an ageing society, with a steady decline in the under-65 age group, apart from two small waves of growth. Children aged 0-14 account for just over 14% of the population, while those aged 65 and over make up 22.7%.

In February 2024, the Croatian government adopted a strategy for “demographic renewal”, which it aims to complete by 2033. It sets two key objectives: a stimulating built environment for families and young people, and balanced mobility of the population.² For the implementation just over EUR 9.6 billion is planned.

As in other countries in the region, Croatia has a higher death rate than births, and emigration is a major contributor to depopulation.

In 2023, the number of live births was 22% lower than in 2001, while deaths were 3% higher. The country has been experiencing a natural decrease in population for decades, from around 10,000 per year in the early 2000s to 19,000 last year, which represents 60% of the birth rate.

Emigration in Croatia became significant after 2010, with 9,000 people leaving the country in 2007, nearly 13,000 in 2011 and more than 47,000 in 2017. The number of emigrants fell sharply (by around 16%) from 2017 to 2018 but started to rise again in 2022. The number of immigrants was at its lowest in 2011, but has been increasing every year since then, reaching almost 60,000 in 2022, presumably due to the war. As a result, the negative migration balance of the last decade turned positive again in 2022, with a surplus of 30,000 in 2023. Since 2001, immigration has almost tripled, while the number of emigrants has more than quintupled.

In Croatia, the marriage rate has been decreasing, from around 20-23,000 marriages per year in the past to around 17-19,000 in the recent period. Compared to 2001 (22,076), the number of marriages has decreased by 22% by 2023 (17,306). In contrast, the number

¹ <https://dzs.gov.hr/u-fokusu/popis-2021/popisni-upitnik/english/results/1501>

² <https://www.portfolio.hu/global/20240215/a-horvatok-ujra-megprobaljak-lassitani-a-nepessegfogyast-669377>

of divorces increased sharply until 2018 (one and a half times), but then decreased year by year, and by 2023 it had decreased to 4,407, which is even lower than in 2001 (4,670). The fertility rate used to be below the EU average, stagnating since 2011 and then slightly increasing from 2016 onwards. Since 2020, it has been higher than the EU average, but it slightly decreased in 2022 (1.53).

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

Female workers are entitled to a one-off maternity allowance of EUR 310 on the birth of their child. The allowance is paid in one lump sum to mothers after the birth and to adoptive mothers within 30 days of the adoption.

Maternity leave and benefit

Maternity leave (*rodiljni dopust*) for working mothers starts on the 28th day before the due date and lasts until the child is 6 months old. Maternity leave is divided into two parts: a non-transferable, compulsory leave of 70 days and a part-time leave transferable to the father. During the maternity leave, the mother is entitled to maternity benefit (*rodiljna naknada*), which is 100% of the previous average net wage, with no upper limit. To qualify, the mother must have been in continuous employment for 9 months or interrupted employment for 12 months in the 2 years preceding the birth.

Unemployed mothers or mothers with a shorter period of insurance or inactive mothers are entitled to a benefit called maternity exemption from work (*rodiljna poštuda od rada*) from the date of birth until the child is 6 months old and receive a monthly amount of EUR 310 until the child is 6 months old.

Paternity leave

As from 1 August 2022, all fathers are entitled to 100% paid paternity leave for 10 days or 15 days in the case of twins. Paternity leave is optional, but if the father decides to take it, his employer must grant it. Paternity leave can be taken during the first 6 months of the child's life. All employed fathers are entitled to paid paternity leave if they have at least 9 months of continuous service or 12 months of interrupted service in 2 years.

Parental leave and benefit

For employees, the period of parental leave (*roditeljski dopust*) is 4 months for the first two children (per child and per parent) and 15 months for the third and subsequent children. Parents can take the leave in several instalments up to the age of 8, share it and

work full-time or part-time. In the latter case, the period of leave is doubled. Unemployed or ineligible parents receive a total of 6 months, and twins or parents with three or more children receive 2½ years.

During the first 6 months of parental leave (from the age of 6 months to the age of 1 year), the full amount of the previous salary is paid, up to a maximum of EUR 995 per month and a minimum of EUR 310 per month. After 12 months, the monthly amount is EUR 552.³ After parental leave, unpaid leave can be requested until the child reaches the age of 3.

A parent of a child with a severe physical or mental disability is entitled to childcare leave until the child is 8 years old, with a monthly allowance of EUR 552. The allowance is also available after the child reaches the age of 8 if the parent takes up a part-time job.

Child benefit

The child benefit (*doplatak za djecu*) is an income-related benefit. It is payable if the net income per person in the family does not exceed EUR 310 per month and the family has lived in Croatia for at least 3 years. It is paid up to the age of 15, up to the age of 19 for children in education and up to the period of disability for disabled children. The monthly amount of the benefit per child varies according to the family's monthly per capita income:

- below EUR 72: EUR 40;
- between EUR 72 and EUR 149: EUR 33;
- between EUR 149 and EUR 310: EUR 27.

The amount is 15% higher for single parents and 25% higher for disabled or orphaned children. The family allowance is EUR 66 per month for a third child and EUR 133 per month for a fourth or more.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

Tax relief is available for those who have children, including children over 18, if they are in regular education or if they are disabled. The amount is EUR 280 per year for the first child, EUR 392 per year for the second child and EUR 560 per year for the third or more children. In addition, for children with a disability, EUR 168 is paid for a mild disability and EUR 560 for a 100% disability.⁴

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1104&langId=en&intPageId=4454>

⁴ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/croatia/individual/deductions>

Tax allowance for young people

In order to encourage young people to work and reduce youth emigration, a partial personal income tax exemption for under-25s was introduced from 2020, while those aged between 26 and 30 pay 50% less personal income tax. The personal income tax system in Croatia is a two-rate system: a 20% tax rate applies to income below EUR 45 500 per year, and a 30% tax rate applies to the part above that.

Young people do not benefit from the tax relief on a monthly basis (their monthly net income does not increase), but can claim back the personal income tax paid each year. The reduction applies to income from employment, not to income from self-employment. They can also claim the reduction for the tax year in which they reach the age of 25. The same rules apply to employees aged between 26 and 30, except that they can receive a 50% refund instead of a 100% refund.

Housing

In Croatia, there is no such allowance.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2023, the share of employed persons with young children (aged 18-64) was 77.4% in the EU and 80.1% in Croatia. 89.2% of men aged 18-64 with children under 6 were employed, close to the EU average (89.6%). For women aged 18-64 with young children, the rate was 71.7%, slightly above the EU average (66.4%). The share of women aged 15-64 working part-time was only 4.5% and 3% for men in 2023, both significantly below the EU average (28.5% and 8.4% respectively).

Carer's leave

Workers are entitled to carer's leave to look after a sick child: its length is up to 60 working days per family per year, for which 100% of previous earnings are paid for children under 3 years of age, and 70% of previous earnings for children aged 3 to 7. For children aged 7 to 18, carer's leave is up to 40 working days per family and 70% of previous earnings are paid. In the case of serious illness of an adult relative, the maximum length of carer's leave is 20 working days per family member, and 70% of previous earnings is paid.

In addition, the worker is entitled to 5 days' unpaid leave per year to care for a relative living in the same household.

Flexible working arrangements

A mother breastfeeding her child under 12 months is entitled to a breastfeeding break of 1x2 hours or 2x1 hours per day, during which time she is entitled to 100% of her earnings.

After the childcare leave has been fully used, the parent can request to work 20 hours a week until the child is 3 years old, if the child's health or development requires care. A monthly allowance of EUR 486 is paid for this period.

A worker with a child under 8 years of age may request flexible working arrangements, which the employer must consider.

Early childhood education and care

Croatia has a unified institutional system for day care for young children from 6 months to 7 years of age. Since 2015, children are obliged to attend a pre-school programme one year before starting school. Those born between January and March start school in the year they turn 6 and the rest when they turn 7.

Apart from the last year of kindergarten, nursery and kindergarten care is not free of charge and fees are regulated and set at regional level.

There are regional differences in accessibility and affordability, and participation rates are low, particularly in poorer areas in central and eastern Croatia.

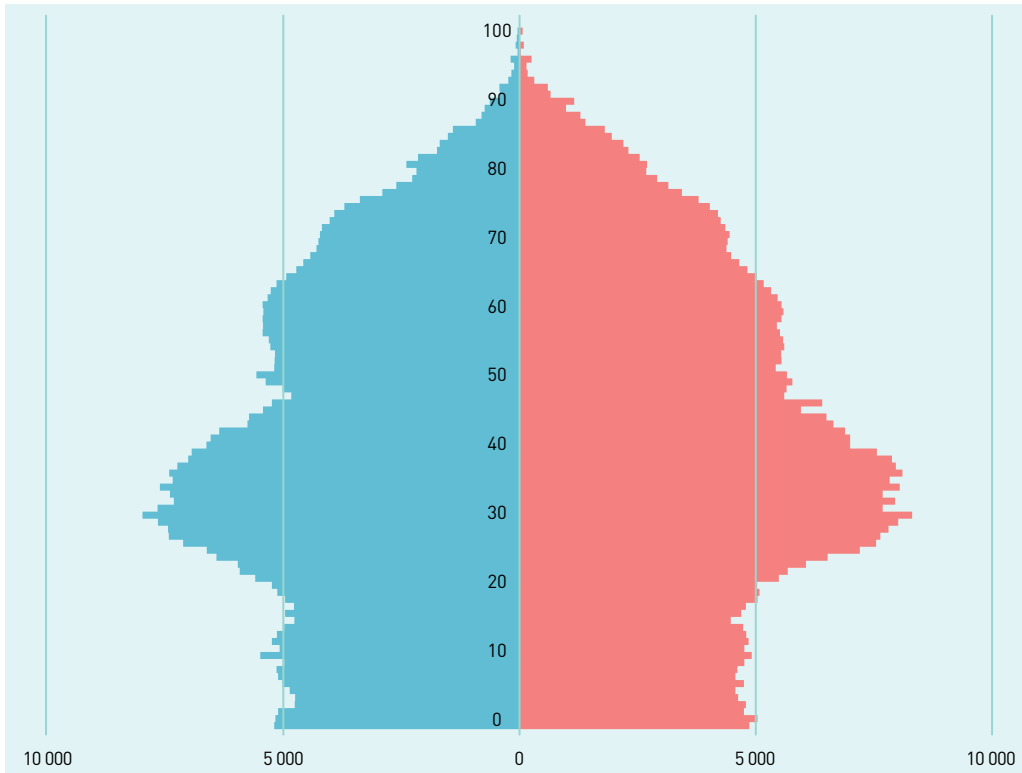
In 2023, 30% of children aged 0-3 in Croatia attended nursery, lower than the EU average (37%) but a significant increase compared to the first available Croatian data in 2013 (10%). In 2023, 82% of 3-6-year-olds attended nursery, below the EU average (89%) but a notable increase compared to 53% in 2013.



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	697 549	839 751	848 319	896 007	904 705	920 701
Live birth (persons)	8 167	9 622	9 455	10 309	10 197	N/A
Death (persons)	4 827	5 504	5 471	7 202	7 295	N/A
Immigrant (persons)	17 485	23 037	17 391	24 001	31 052	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	N/A	4 895	14 892	18 410	17 958	N/A
Marriage (number)	10 574	6 210	6 375	5 066*	6 645*	N/A
Divorce (number)	1 197	1 934	1 948	2 061*	1 503*	N/A
TFR	1.57	1.35	1.37	1.39	1.37	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Cyprus Statistical Office (Download date: 04/06/2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Cyprus has been growing steadily for the past 50 years. As of 1 January 2023, the population of the country was 920,701. Compared to 2001, the population has increased by one third, that is, by 223 152 persons. Almost 99% of the population are Greeks, the other 1% are Turks, Armenians and other minorities.

The population pyramid of Cyprus shows the picture of an aging society with a sharply decreasing population between the ages of 10–30.

The reason for the increase in the population is that the number of live births exceeds the number of deaths, and the number of immigrants is also higher than that of emigrants. Compared to 2001, the number of live births increased by 24% and the number of deaths by 51% in 20 years, but still almost a third fewer people die than are born. Thanks to natural increase, the population of the country has increased by 3-4 thousand people per year.

From 2011 to 2022, emigration nearly quadrupled, with immigration increasing by about 80%. Thanks to the positive migration balance of the country, the population of the country increased by 5-7 thousand people per year, the rate of which further developed in 2022, the positive net migration amounted to almost 15 thousand people.

The number of marriages is significantly higher than that of divorces, the number of marriages decreased by more than 40% between 2001 and 2011, and then increased slightly by 2022. The number of divorces showed an upward trend until 2021 and almost doubled; in 2022, however, it fell significantly.

The overall fertility rate has fallen from 1.57 in 2001 (EU average: 1.43) to 1.35 in 2011, with no significant change since then, standing at 1.37 in 2022, which is lower than the EU average of 1.46.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Family support generally applies to families who have lived legally and continuously in the territory under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus for at least 5 years prior to the submission of the application. Eligibility for the support is determined by the residence requirements, the total gross income of the family and its assets. The amount of benefits is calculated depending on the number of children and the income level of the family.¹

Birth grant²

Child birth grant (*Βοήθημα Τοκετού*) is a one-off benefit paid to the insured married woman or the insured man's uninsured wife after the birth of the child. The amount is also due to the woman if she has lost her child after at least 28 weeks of pregnancy. The application for the grant must be submitted within one year from the date of birth. The child birth grant amounted to EUR 581 in 2022.

Special child birth grant (EUR 581 in 2022) is available to mothers (e.g. unmarried or uninsured) who are not eligible for the child birth grant but have resided in Cyprus for the last 12 consecutive months. The application for the special child birth grant must be submitted within three months from the date of birth.

Maternity leave and benefit³

Mothers are entitled to 18 weeks of paid maternity leave (*Επίδομα Μητρότητας*) if they have had at least 26 weeks of insurance. 2 weeks of maternity leave must be taken before the expected due date, while 9 weeks must be taken after the date of birth. The length of maternity leave is extended by 6 weeks in the case of premature birth and by 4 weeks in the case of multiple births.

During maternity leave, the woman receives 72% of her previous income (which increases to 80%, 90% and 100% depending on the number of twins in multiple births), and there is no upper limit to the benefit. One will not be able to receive maternity benefit if one returns to work full-time. In the case of part-time work, one may receive the benefit, but the amount of the wage and the benefit may not exceed the total amount of the wage. The same conditions apply to the adoptive parent or surrogate.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1105&dlangId=en&intPageId=4999>

² <https://child-birth-grant.service.gov.cy/>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1105&dlangId=en&intPageId=5000>

The benefit is paid for 18 weeks starting from the second week before the expected due date, for 16 weeks in the case of adoption, or for 14 weeks in the case of a surrogate mother. In the case of multiple births, the 18-week period is extended by 4 and 8 weeks respectively.

Paternity leave⁴

The insured father is entitled to two weeks of paternity leave (*Επίδομα Πατρότητας*) after childbirth, which must be taken in a consecutive period and until the child is 20 weeks old. During this time, he receives 72% of his previous salary (which increases to 80%, 90% and 100% depending on the number of twins in multiple births), and there is no upper limit to the benefit. Adoption is also subject to these rules. According to Cypriot social security data, 35% of fathers used the possibility of paternity leave in 2021 compared to the number of births.

Parental leave and benefit⁵

Following maternity leave, both parents are entitled to an additional 18 weeks of parental leave (*Γονική Άδεια*) (23 weeks for widows or single parents), which can be taken by the mother after the end of maternity leave and by the father following paternity leave, at the latest until the age of 8 for the child or until the age of 18 for the disabled child. Out of the 18 weeks, 2 weeks are transferable if the parent has used at least 2 weeks of the leave before. A maximum of 4 weeks of leave may be taken in a calendar year (or 7 weeks in the case of three or more children). As of 1 January 2025, already 5 weeks may be taken.

The parental benefit (*Επίδομα Γονικής Ύδειας*) is paid to insured parents on parental leave. The benefit is due to each parent for up to 6 weeks per child, with the further 12-week period being unpaid. From August 2024, the parents receive benefits for the first 8 weeks of parental leave.⁶

In the case of a child with a disability, the duration of parental leave benefit is extended by:

- Four weeks provided that the child has been certified as a person with a severe disability or with a moderate mental disability.
- Six weeks provided that the child has been certified as a person with a total disability.

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1105&langId=en&intPageId=5000>

⁵ *MISSOC* and https://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/parentalleave_en/parentalleave_en?opendocument and <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1105&langId=en&intPageId=5000>

⁶ <https://gzig.com.cy/news/announcements/the-new-paternity-parental-caring-force-majeure-leave-and-flexible-work-arrangements-for-work-life-balance-law/>

Child benefit

The amount of the child benefit (*Επίδομα Τέκνου*) depends on the number of children and the family's income and assets. The condition for receiving the benefit is that the family has lived in Cyprus for at least 5 years. It is normally paid until the age of 18 of the child, extended to 20 if the child has not completed secondary school, or 21 if the child is serving in the military. In addition, it is paid for all children regardless of age who are permanently unable to take care of themselves.

The benefit is payable for families with one child under a total annual family income of EUR 49,000 and two children under EUR 59,000. For each additional child, the ceiling is increased by EUR 5,000. In addition to the income criterion, the child benefit is also not payable if the total value of the family's assets, including real estate, shares, bonds, securities and deposits, exceeds EUR 1,200,000.

The amount of the child benefit in 2023:

Annual income of the family	In the case of 1 child	In the case of 2 children	In the case of 3 children	In the case of 4 children
0 – 19,500 EUR	EUR 540	EUR 648	EUR 1,188	EUR 1,904
19,500 EUR – 39,000 EUR	EUR 483	EUR 591	EUR 1,131	EUR 1,734
39,000 EUR – 49,000 EUR	EUR 432	EUR 432	EUR 864	EUR 1,432
49,000 EUR – 59,000 EUR	-	EUR 392	EUR 784	EUR 1,290
59,000 EUR – 59,500 EUR	-	-	EUR 784	EUR 1,290
59,500 EUR – 60,000 EUR	-	-	-	EUR 1,290

Single parents are entitled to an additional single parent benefit of EUR 204 per child per month below an annual income of EUR 39,000 and EUR 181 per child per month in case of an annual income between EUR 39,000 and EUR 49,000. Payment shall be made annually in the case of one and two children and monthly in the case of three or more children. An application for a child benefit shall be submitted every calendar year.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Cyprus, there is no family tax credit.

Housing

In Cyprus, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

The employment rate among women aged 18-64 with children under the age of 6 was 73.5% in 2023, exceeding the EU average of 66.4%. For men, the indicator was 91.6%, which is also above the EU average (89.6%). Between 2009 and 2023, only a slight increase is visible: in 2009, 71.4% of women with young children worked, compared to 91.3% of men. Part-time work is not widespread. In 2023, the part-time employment rate for women aged 15–64 was 4.5% and 3% for men, the former being much lower than the EU average (28.5% and 8%, respectively).

Carer's leave

In order to care for dependants, each worker is entitled to a maximum of 7 days of unpaid leave per year in case of force majeure (i.e. urgent cases such as a dependent's illness or accident). As dependent is considered a worker's child, husband, wife, parent, sibling or grandparent. Such leave may be granted as a single leave period or divided into separate periods. In the case of married couples, both spouses are entitled to such leave separately.

Flexible working arrangements

Working parents have the right to request flexible working hours for care reasons. This includes restructuring employment patterns, so they can also request teleworking, flexible scheduling or reduced working hours. To be eligible, employees must have six months of continuous employment with the same employer. Employers must respond to the request within one month and have the right to reject or postpone the request for a reasoned decision.

For 6 months following maternity leave, the working mother may arrive at work one hour later as a breastfeeding time reduction and leave one hour earlier or take a one-hour break during the working day for 6 months.

Early childhood education and care⁷

In Cyprus, nurseries (*pedokomikoi/vrefokomikoi stathmoi*) are open to children from birth to 4 years and 8 months. There are public, community and private nurseries, all of which are typically fee-paying, with varying rates of contribution.

A free preschool class starting at the age of 4 years and 8 months is mandatory for all children. Primary education in Cyprus starts at the age of 5 years and 8 months.

In 2023, 37% of children aged 0–3 received nursery care, which is the same as the EU average and more than double the 2005 figure (16%). 88% of 3–6-year-olds in the country attended kindergarten in 2023, almost the same as the EU average (89%).

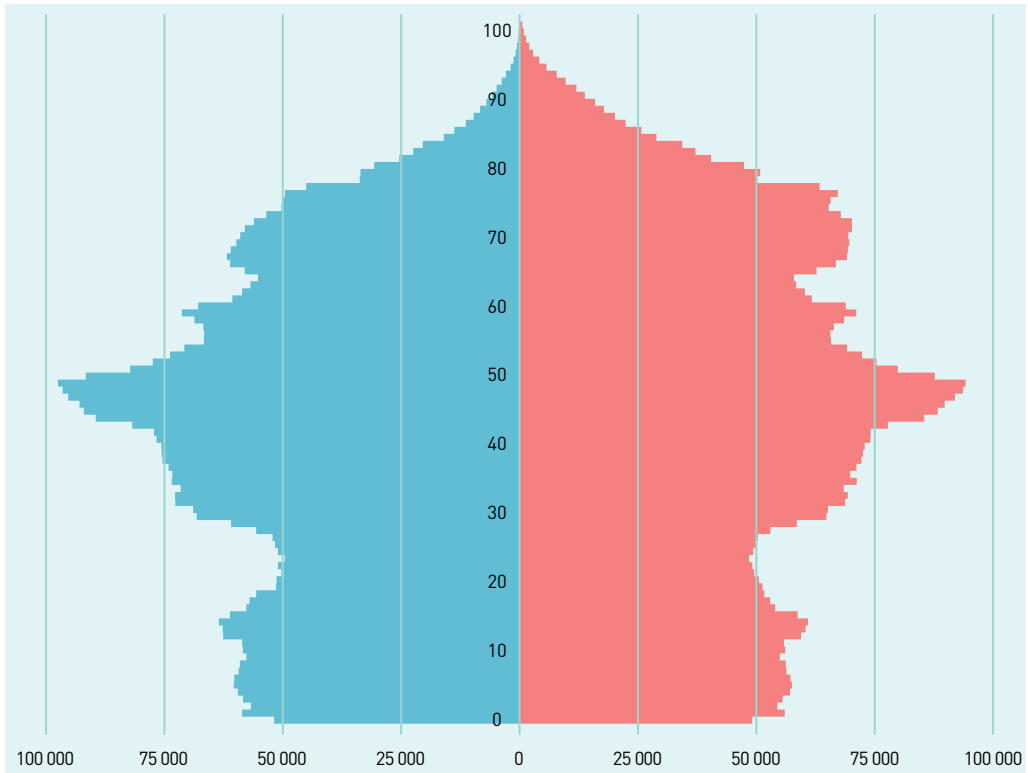
⁷ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/cyprus/overview>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	10 232 027	10 486 731	10 553 843	10 494 836	10 516 707	10 827 529
Live birth (persons)	90 715	108 673	112 663	111 793	101 299	91 149*
Death (persons)	107 755	106 848	107 750	139 891	120 219	112 795*
Immigrant (persons)	12 918	27 114	64 083	69 360	347 429	141 263*
Emigrant (persons)	21 469	55 910	38 864	18 630	31 764	46 591*
Marriage (number)	52 374	45 137	50 768	46 778	54 820	48 268*
Divorce (number)	31 586	28 113	24 996	21 107	19 846	19 453*
TFR	1.15	1.43	1.63	1.83	1.64	1.45*

Source: Eurostat, * Czech Statistical Office (Download date: 12/08/2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of the Czech Republic was 10,827,529 as of 1 January 2023. According to the 2021 census, 4.7% of the population were foreign citizens. The highest proportion of them are citizens of Ukraine (1.4%), Slovakia (0.9%) and Vietnam (0.5%).¹

The country's population pyramid apart from the 10-12 age group, shows an aging society, and the mass retirement of the current 40-year-old age group will be a challenge in the coming decades. As in other countries in the region, the Czech Republic has a higher proportion of women over the age of 60.

In the Czech Republic, the population increased by 6% (595 thousand people) from 1 January 2001 to 1 January 2023, and since 2011 there has been a slight increase, followed by an increase of more than 300,000 from 2022 to 2023. The natural loss of the population is not more than a few thousand people, however, the positive net migration has increased significantly in recent years, exceeding 300 thousand in 2022, and 141 thousand in 2023, which is presumably the result of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The lowest number of births since 2011 was in 2023 (91,149 people), with a decrease of about 16% compared to 2011. In 2001, a total of 90,715 children were born, which is 0.5% lower than the number of live births in 2023. The number of deaths is slightly increasing in the country: compared to 2001, 5% more people died in 2023. In 2021 (139,891) and 2022 (120,219), the country experienced a spike in deaths, which was probably the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with deaths reaching around 110,000 in 2019 and again in 2023. In 2023, the Czech Republic had one of the highest death rates (12.7), ranking third in the EU. The EU-27 average was 15.7.

From 2011 to 2019, the natural increase was mild, a few thousand people a year, but since 2020, there has been a shift to natural population decline amounting between 20-30 thousand people yearly.

There has been negative net migration at the beginning of the 2000s, but the population of the country has been increasing by 25-35 thousand people annually in the recent period. The positive net migration of 2022 and 2023 was extremely high due to the refugees from Ukraine, in 2022, nearly 350,000 people arrived in the country, and in 2023, 141,000. Compared to 2001, the number of immigrants has increased more than tenfold. Emigration has also increased in the Czech Republic over the past decades, with 21,469 people leaving the country in 2001, but doubling to 46,591 in 2023.

¹ <https://scitani.gov.cz/citizenship#null>

The number of marriages is around 45-55 thousand per year, 48,246 marriages were concluded in 2023 in the country, 8% less than in 2001 (52,374). The number of divorces decreased: while in 2001, there were 31,586 divorces, in 2023, there were only 19,453, which means a 38% decrease.

The Czech Republic had the lowest fertility rate in the EU in 2001 (1.15), well below the EU average (1.43). Looking at the period 2011-2021, the fertility rate in the Czech Republic increased from 1.43 to 1.83 (an increase of 28%), meaning the second highest value in the European Union in 2021, but decreased to 1.64 by 2022 (fourth highest value). In 2023, the ratio has fallen further to 1.45. Considering the large number of forty-years old seen in the country's population pyramid, it is expected that this age group will be affected by a further strong decrease in the next decade.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Pregnancy and maternity compensatory benefit

Employed expectant mothers and mothers with young children who have been placed in a lower position as a result of having children are entitled to a compensatory benefit (*vyrovnávací příspěvek v těhotenství a mateřství*) until the 6th week before childbirth or, in exceptional cases, after childbirth. The benefit is the difference between the average daily earnings of the last 12 months and the average daily earnings of the lower position.

Birth grant

In the Czech Republic, birth grant (*porodné*) is paid to the mother for the first two live-born children. This is a one-time benefit paid to families whose income does not exceed 2.7 times the family subsistence minimum (CZK 29,673 (EUR 1,176) for a couple expecting their first child) in the quarter preceding the birth of the child. The amount of the grant is CZK 13,000 (EUR 535) for the first child and CZK 10,000 (EUR 411) for the second child.

Maternity leave and benefit

Eligibility for maternity benefit (*peněžitá pomoc vmateřství*) is subject to at least 270 days of insurance for employees in the two years before maternity leave, at least 180 days of insurance for entrepreneurs in the year before childbirth, and university/college students are also eligible for maternity benefit.

Length of the maternity leave is 28 weeks (37 weeks in the case of multiple births), during which time mothers receive 70% of their previous income, up to a maximum of CZK

47,700 (EUR 1,931) per month. Of the maternity leave, 6–8 weeks can be used before and 20–22 weeks after birth. 14 weeks of leave is mandatory, of which at least 6 weeks must be taken after childbirth. From the 7th week after the birth, this leave can be shared between the parents, so the mother and father can take turns with the child, and part-time work is also possible from week 7.

Paternity leave

The paternity leave (*otcovská dovolená*) is 14 days (as of 2022, previously it was 7 days), which can be taken in one period, within 6 weeks of the birth of the child (unless the child or mother needs hospitalization, in which case this period is extended by the number of days spent in the hospital). The paternity allowance is 70% of the previous salary, but a maximum of 22,260 CZK (EUR 902) for the 14 days. In the case of adoption, fathers are entitled to 10 days of leave. In addition, fathers receive leave with wage compensation for the time when the mother of their unborn child is taken to the hospital, and they are entitled to unpaid leave for the time of childbirth. The proportion of fathers taking paternity leave has been around 40% since its introduction in 2018.

Parental leave and benefit

Parental leave (*rodicovska dovolena*) is an unpaid leave to which both parents are entitled until the child turns 3 years old. The mother can take parental leave after maternity leave and the father can take parental leave after the birth of the child, which cannot be transferred to another person.

Parental allowance (*rodicovský příspěvek*) is available for those who do not send their children to private or public day care. In the case of children born after 1 January 2024, the parental allowance is only payable up to the age of 3 (in the case of children born until 31 December 2023, it is payable up to the age of 4 of the child) and can only be used by one of the parents, and it is also possible to work part or full-time while receiving the allowance.

The maximum amount of the allowance is

- CZK 350,000 (EUR 13,896) for children born after 1 January 2024 and CZK 525,000 (EUR 20,804) for twins,
- CZK 300,000² (EUR 12,150) for children born by 31 December 2023 and CZK 450,000 (EUR 18,226) for twins.

Parents are free to choose the monthly amount they want to receive and the length of the payment, but the benefit per month cannot exceed CZK 53,910 (EUR 2,136). Those who are not insured are entitled to a monthly parental allowance of up to CZK 13,000 (EUR 515).

² <https://www.mpsv.cz/web/en/state-social-support>

The allowance can also be used by grandparents or other persons who take care of the child during the day.

Since July 2021, families will be provided with a lump sum payment for the unused portion of the parental allowance if they have another child before the full amount of CZK 350,000 (EUR 12,150) is being disbursed.

Child benefit

In the Czech Republic, child allowance (*prídavek na dítě*) is linked to school attendance and family income and is being disbursed until the child reaches the age of 15. An exception is made if the child continues to study, is living with disability, or is unable to work in the future for other health reasons (e.g. disabled). In these cases, the allowance may be granted up to the age of 26.

Depending on the family income, the monthly amount of the child allowance was CZK 830/CZK 1,330 (EUR 33/53) for children under 6 years of age, CZK 970/CZK 1,470 (EUR 38/55) for children between 6 and 15 years of age, and CZK 1,080/CZK 1,580 (EUR 43/58) for children between 15 and 26 years of age in 2023.³ If a family member receives a minimum wage or other social allowance, they will receive a higher child allowance.

When assessing the support, the family's income is taken into account, which cannot exceed 3.4 times the family subsistence minimum (which varies depending on the number of people living in the household and the age of the children). There is no child allowance provided above this amount.

Supporting single parents

Thanks to the measure introduced in December 2020, the state provides financial support (*náhradní výživné*) to single parents raising their children if the other parent does not pay the child maintenance. This benefit aims to offset income loss caused by unpaid alimony up to maximum of CZK 3,000 (approximately EUR 123) per month. Single parents can apply for the benefit from 1 July 2021 onwards, for a maximum period of 24 months.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

Tax allowance is granted if the child lives in the same household as the taxpayer. The tax base is reduced by a fixed amount, which is deducted from the tax advance. In 2022, the tax allowance amounted to CZK 15,204 (EUR 626) per year for the first child, CZK 19,404 (EUR 799) for the second and CZK 24,204 (EUR 996) for the third and each additional

³ <https://www.mpsv.cz/web/en/state-social-support>

child. If the tax advance payable by the taxpayer is less than the tax allowance, the taxpayer can claim the difference.

Those whose husband's/wife's annual income does not exceed CZK 68,000 (EUR 2,799), are entitled to tax allowance in the amount of CZK 24,840 (EUR 1,022) per year.

Housing

Housing allowance may be claimed if 30% of the family's total income (35% in Prague) is insufficient to cover the housing costs. The difference can be claimed in the form of state aid.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In the Czech Republic, the employment rate of mothers (in the age group 18-64) raising children under the age of 6 is quite low, 45.4% according to 2023 data. The EU average is 66.4%, leaving the Czech Republic well behind. However, there is an improvement compared to 2009, when 33.5% of mothers with young children were employed. At the same time, the employment rate of fathers with young children is 94.4%, which is one of the highest values in the EU, as the EU average is 89.6%. As of 2009, the Czech Republic significantly exceeds the EU average for employment of fathers with young children. Part-time employment (in the age group 15-64) is less widespread in the country, with 11.6% of women (EU average: 28.5%) and 3.2% of men (EU average: 8.4%) working this way in 2023. Compared to 2009, there was an increase for both men and women, with the share of part-time employment at 2.0% for men and 8.5% for women, but still well below the EU average.

Carer's leave

A worker may take leave to care for a sick relative at home (in case of illness of a child under the age of 10 in any case or in case of serious illness of other relatives). During the leave period, an amount equal to 60% of the earnings is due, up to a maximum of CZK 855 (EUR 36) per day. A worker can take a maximum of 9 days of leave at a time, but there is no limit on the frequency of taking leave. Parents can take turns taking leave to care for their sick child.

Flexible working arrangements

In the case of a worker caring for a child under the age of 15, the employer is obliged to grant the request for part-time work, unless this would cause serious operational problems in the workplace. From 2023, part-time employment has also been made more

attractive for employers by receiving a 5% discount on the social security contribution for part-time employment of parents with children under the age of 10.

Teleworking is regulated by law as of 2023.⁴ In the case of some protected workers (e.g. pregnant workers, a worker caring for at least one child under the age of 9 or a worker responsible for the long-term care of another person), if they apply for a teleworking opportunity and the employer does not approve the application, the employer must justify its decision in writing.

Early childhood education and care

In the Czech Republic, children under 3 years of age attending nurseries are subject to the fees set by the relevant law, provided that the place is financed by an operating subsidy from the state budget.

Kindergarten care is mainly provided by the state, but there are also private and church institutions. The child can be enrolled from the age of 3, but kindergarten education is mandatory from the age of 5 and is free of charge. Primary education starts at the age of 6.

In 2023, only 4% of 0–3-year-old children in the Czech Republic attended nursery, being the second lowest value in the EU, well below the EU average (37%) and only slightly higher than in 2005 (2%). 81% of 3–6-year-old children attended kindergarten in 2023, which is lower than the EU average (89%) and a slight increase compared to 2005 (76%).

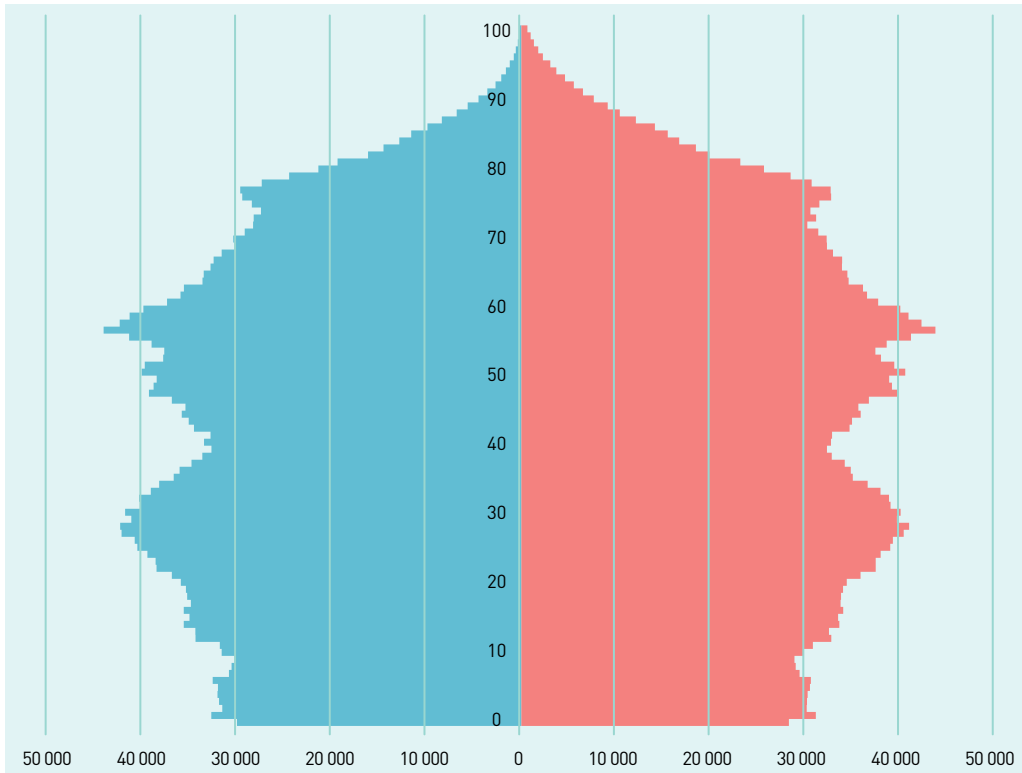
⁴ <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/big-updates-to-czech-labor-code-come-into-force-how-will-you-be-affected>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	5 349 212	5 560 628	5 707 251	5 840 045	5 873 420	5 932 654
Live birth (persons)	65 458	58 998	61 614	63 473	58 430	57 469*
Death (persons)	58 338	52 516	52 824	57 152	59 435	58 384*
Immigrant (persons)	55 984	52 833	74 383	63 489	121 183	98 344*
Emigrant (persons)	43 980	41 593	52 654	44 008	62 927	68 172*
Marriage (number)	36 567	27 198	30 767	27 643	32 544*	31 068*
Divorce (number)	14 597	14 484	17 222	12 760*	12 145*	12 684*
TFR	1.74	1.75	1.79	1.72	1.55	1.50*

Source: Eurostat, *Danish Statistical Office (Download date: 12/08/2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Denmark has been increasing since 2000, and as of 1 January 2023, it was 5,932,654. Since the start of the millennium, the population has grown by 11%, with nearly 600,000 people. 90% of Denmark's population are Danes, the rest are of German, Albanian, Arab or Pakistani descent.

The population pyramid of Denmark shows the image of a balanced, slightly aging society. The population of Denmark is constantly growing, which is clearly due to the positive net migration.

Although the birth rate slightly decreased in the early 2010s, it then increased again and stagnated around 61-63 thousand per year. In 2022, however, the number of births fell again below 60,000, and, following a further decrease to 57,469 by 2023. Thus fewer children were born than died in the country. In the previous years (including the years 2020 and 2021 affected by the COVID-19 pandemic), the country increased by 6-8 thousand people through natural increase. The number of deaths decreased to 52-53 thousand per year by the beginning of the 2010s, but in 2023, it has exceeded 58 thousand again. Between 2001 and 2023, the number of live births fell by 12%, while the number of deaths remained stable.

Between 2001 and 2023, the rate of emigration has risen with fluctuations. From 44,000 at the beginning of the century to one and a half times that figure (68,000). In the case of immigration, no clear trend can be identified. It decreased slightly by the 2010s (from 56 thousand to 53 thousand) and reached 63 thousand in 2021. In 2022, the figure almost doubled (to 121 thousand), while the following year it fell back to 98 thousand. The country's net migration is positive: in the 2000s, immigration increased by an average of 8-10 thousand people, but since 2010 it has increased significantly, and in 2023, 40 thousand more people arrived than emigrated.

The number of marriages was about double the number of divorces, and even triple of it in 2019. The number of marriages increased until 2018 and then began to decrease. The 2022 spike may be due to the replacement of marriages postponed during the pandemic. The number of divorces decreased significantly in 2019 and then increased significantly again in 2020 (by 48%). Compared to 2001, both marriages and divorces decreased by 10-15%.

The total fertility rate has been above the European average in recent years, in 2001, the country had the third highest fertility rate with a value of 1.74 (EU average 1.43). but by 2023 it has fallen significantly to 1.5.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In the case of adoption of a foreign child, adoption allowance (*adoptionstilskud*) can be claimed, which amounts to a lump sum of DKK 57,635 (EUR 7,731), otherwise there is no such benefit.

Maternity leave and benefit¹

Pregnant women are entitled to 4 weeks of pregnancy leave (*graviditetsorlov*) before childbirth and 10 weeks of maternity leave (*barselorlov*) after childbirth, of which 2 weeks must be taken after childbirth. During this time, they will receive maternity benefit. The amount of the benefit is calculated on the basis of the number of working hours and the hourly wage of the worker, which is a maximum of DKK 4,550 (EUR 610) gross per week or DKK 123 (EUR 16,5) per hour (on a 37 hours per week-basis).

Women who are not eligible for the full amount of the allowance and do not have unemployment insurance receive a so-called holiday allowance (*ferieydelse*), which is conditional on 12 months of employment before giving birth. The benefit is paid from 1 May after giving birth to 30 April the next year. The amount of the holiday allowance is equal to the amount of the maternity benefit.

The same rules apply to adoption. Special family allowance (*særligt børnetilskud*) is due to those parents who decide to adopt as a single or retired person. This amounts to DKK 4,380 (EUR 588) per child per quarter, which can be reduced if the family income exceeds the social benefit threshold.

Paternity leave

Fathers are entitled to 10 weeks of paid paternity leave (*fædreorlov*), which can be used until the child is 1 year old. 2 weeks are non-transferable and must be taken after the birth of the child. Strictly speaking, this 2-week (10 working days) paternity leave is due to fathers after the birth of their child. The amount of the benefit is the same as the maternity benefit.

Parental leave and benefit²

As of July 1, 2022, there are new rules on the allocation of the duration of parental leave. The new rules on same-sex and single parents came into force on 1 January 2024. The amendments are based on the EU's wish to provide both parents with separate leave to

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1107&dlangId=en&intPageId=4487>

² <https://bm.dk/arbejdsomraader/aktuelle-fokusomraader/orlovsregler-for-boern-foedt-fra-2-august-2022/>

achieve a better work-life balance and promote gender equality. The new rules apply to parents of children born on or after August 2, 2022.

According to the new regulation, parents are entitled to 48 weeks of paid parental leave (*forældreorlov*) together with maternity leave after the birth of the child. The 48-week leave is divided equally between the parents, so both parents will be given 24 weeks of leave following birth.

2+8 weeks out of 24 weeks should be taken around the expected due date (see above). Thereafter, an additional 14 weeks are available to the parents, of which 9 weeks are non-transferable and must be claimed before the child is one year old, and an additional 5 weeks are transferable and can be claimed until the child is 9 years old. This means that a total of 2+9 weeks of maternity/parental leave has been reserved for each parent. The remaining 8+5 weeks of leave are transferable to the other parent. (Previously, 48 weeks were also available, of which 14 weeks were reserved for the mother and two weeks for the father. The remaining 32 weeks could be shared between the parents.) As of January 2024, single parents can transfer a few weeks of their parental leave to close family members, while same-sex couples can transfer them to each other.

During paid parental leave, parents receive an allowance similar to the maternity benefit. The amount of the benefit is calculated on the basis of the number of working hours and the hourly wage of the worker, which is a maximum of DKK 4,550 (EUR 610) gross per week or DKK 123 (EUR 16,5) per hour (on a 37 hours per week-basis).

The conditions of the benefit for workers:

- at least 160 hours of working time during the 4 months preceding the paid leave and 40 hours of working time per month for at least 3 months during this period; or
- eligibility for unemployment benefits.

The conditions of the benefit for students:

- recent graduates (who completed their studies not more than 1 month before receiving the benefit); or
- have completed their studies after childbirth, up to the child's age of 46 weeks; or
- have completed at least 18 months of continuing vocational training before the birth of the child; or are currently pursuing such studies; or are students in paid professional practice.

The conditions of the benefit as recent graduates:

- being with the child every day, i.e. physically together during the leave, and meeting one of the following conditions:
 - 1) Have attended a business training course of at least 18 months' duration and completed it no more than one month before the expected due date.
 - 2) After giving birth, have completed her studies and made herself available as a job seeker in the employment center, that is, she is entitled to unemployment benefits.

- The condition of the benefit for entrepreneurs is that they worked a minimum of 18.5 hours per week for at least 6 months during the 12 months before giving birth.

Child benefit³

The child benefit (*børne- og ungeydelse*) is a benefit for all children under the age of 18 living in Denmark, the amount of which depends on the age of the child and the family's income situation. The full amount of the benefit is conditional on the claimant having lived or worked in Denmark for at least 6 years in the 10 years preceding the payment. (If they have lived in Denmark for less time, they are entitled to a proportionately smaller amount.)

In 2022, amounts per child were as follows:⁴

- 0–2 years - DKK 4,746 (EUR 636) per quarter;
- 3–6 years - DKK 3,756 (EUR 503) per quarter;
- 7–14 years - DKK 2,955 (EUR 396) per quarter;
- 15–17 years - DKK 985 (EUR 132) per month.

If the parents exercise joint custody of the child and live together, both parents will automatically receive half of the benefit. If only one of the parents exercises full custody, he/she will receive the full amount.

If the parent's tax base exceeded DKK 852,600 (EUR 114,312) per year in 2023, they are entitled to a reduced amount of family allowance.

Quarterly supplementary family allowance (*børnetilskud*) is due:

- for single parents as an extra child benefit (regardless of the number of children) of DKK 1,558 (EUR 209) or DKK 1,588 (EUR 213) per child until the age of 18.
- for parents with twins up to the age of 7 of the child (if they received child benefit before 1 January 2018, they will continue to receive child benefit if they have lived in Denmark for at least 2 years within 10 years). The amount of the child benefit is DKK 2,572 (EUR 344) for twins and DKK 5,144 (EUR 689) for triplets per quarter.
- for retired parents raising children under 18 years of age. (If they received child benefit before 1 January 2018, they will continue to receive child benefit if they have lived in Denmark for at least 2 years within 10 years). The amount of the benefit is DKK 1,558 (EUR 209) if both parents are retired, and DKK 3,984 (EUR 534) if only one of the parents is retired.
- for students with children, if they have lived in Denmark for 6 years within the last 10 years, or if they received child benefit before 1 January 2018, they will continue to receive child benefit if they have lived in Denmark for at least 2 years within 10 years. Another condition is that their net income does not exceed DKK 327,580 (EUR 43,921) per year if they raise their child alone or DKK 409,460 (EUR 54,884) for

³ MISSOC

⁴ <https://www.legaldesk.dk/privat/boerntestamente/boernepenge>

parents living together. The amount of the allowance is DKK 2,047 (EUR 274) per quarter.

- in the case of an unknown father or if the paternity proceedings are still ongoing, the mother is entitled to a benefit of DKK 4,500 (EUR 604) per quarter until the age of 18 of the child.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

There is no family tax credit.

Housing⁵

Since February 2016, residents in Denmark can apply for a “*boligstøtte*” (housing allowance), which can reduce the monthly rent. This is a tax-free amount that is available to anyone renting an apartment, provided that the apartment meets certain criteria and the household’s income does not reach a certain level. One of these conditions is that the rental property must have its own kitchen (which excludes student apartments with shared kitchens, which are called *kollegier* in Danish) and one must live in the property for the long term.

Homeowners may also be eligible to apply for housing allowance in certain circumstances. The amount of the allowance - the amount of money received per month - depends on the total income of the household (the sum of the incomes of all earners living at the address), the number of children and adults living at the address, the amount of the rent and the size of the house or apartment. The average rent for a property is DKK 9,000-13,000 (EUR 1,170-1,690) per month.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

Denmark has one of the highest employment rates of women with small children in the EU. The employment rate of mothers (in the age group 18-64) raising children under the age of 6 was 78.3% in 2023, which is much higher than the EU average of 66.4%. For men, this indicator is 89.5%, almost the same the EU average (89.6%). Danish family policy focuses on the principle of “dual-earners”, thus supporting equality between women and men. Part-time work is very widespread in the country, with 35.2% of women and about 16.1% of men choosing this form of employment in 2023 (the EU average is 28% for women and 8.4% for men).

⁵ <https://lifeindenmark.borger.dk/housing-and-moving/housing-benefits>

Carer's leave

Most employment contracts and labour market agreements include the right to take leave to care for a sick child. Civil servants are entitled to 2 days of 100% paid carer's leave.

Depending on the assessment of the local government, all employees may be entitled to care allowance (*plejevederlag*) if they are caring for a terminally ill relative or close friend at home. The municipality determines the duration and extent of the allowance. There is no entitlement to leave associated with this allowance.

Flexible working arrangements

Parents with young children may apply for flexible working with their employer, which may include teleworking, working from home or reducing working hours. The employer must give reasons if the application is rejected. The prohibition of dismissal during leave also applies when the employee requests a change of work schedule. The changes will be effective as of August 2022, while for same-sex parents, they will be effective as of 1 January 2024.

Early childhood education and care

In Denmark, municipalities are obliged to ensure early childhood education and care services for all children between the age of 26 weeks and the start of primary school. According to the Act on Day Care Facilities, the fees charged cannot exceed 25 % of the gross operational expenses including lunch. The fee is paid by the parents as a monthly fixed amount. The public funding therefore comprises at least 75 % of the expenses and is covered by the municipalities. Institutional childcare is free of charge, provided that the total income of those living in the household does not exceed DKK 15,475 (EUR 2,075) per month.

From the age of 2, all children are assessed for their language skills, and where language development is not age-appropriate, help is provided. Parents may lose the general child benefit if they do not accept language development and training.

Instead of providing institutional care, the municipality may support the parent caring for the child (*tilskud til pasning af egne børn*) or the financing of private care (*tilskud til privat pasning*). Both subsidies are available from the age of 26 weeks until the start of school. In the case of childcare allowance, it is a condition that the parents reside in Denmark for 7 of the previous 8 years and that the parents speak the Danish language at the appropriate level, which is necessary for the child's language development (the latter condition does not apply to EU/EEA/CH citizens).

Exceeding the EU average of 37%, 70% of children under 3 in Denmark were in nursery care in 2023 (the second highest rate among EU Member States), a slight decrease from 73% in 2008. 97% of 3–6-year-olds attended kindergarten in 2023, above the EU average (89%) and the same as in 2008.



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	1 392 720	1 329 660	1 315 944	1 330 068	1 331 796	1 365 884
Live birth (persons)	12 632	14 679	14 053	13 372	11 646	10 949*
Death (persons)	18 516	15 244	15 392	18 587	17 315	16 002*
Immigrant (persons)	241	3 709	14 822	19 524	49 414	26 399*
Emigrant (persons)	2 175	6 214	13 792	12 481	9 657	12 543*
Marriage (number)	5 647	5 499	6 360	6 396	7 200	6 504*
Divorce (number)	4 312	3 099	3 262	2 554	2 546	2 648*
TFR	1.32	1.61	1.60	1.61	1.41	1.31*

Source: Eurostat, Estonian Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Estonia's population on 1 January 2023 was 1 365 884, a slight decrease of 5% compared to 2001 (1 392 720). Estonians make up nearly 70% of the population, with Russians making up the highest proportion of ethnic groups at 24%, but there are also Ukrainians, Belarusians and Finns living in Estonia.

The country's population pyramid shows a picture of a rapidly ageing society, with a sharp decline in the under-30 age group.

One of the main reasons for the population decline is that deaths have consistently outnumbered births, resulting in a natural decrease of a few thousand people a year. The number of live births has been around 12-14 thousand per year since 2001 but fall below 11 thousand by 2023. While in 2001, 18 thousand people died, in the 2010s the figure was around 15 thousand, in 2021 it jumped to 18 thousand and then fell to 16 thousand in 2023. Between 2001 and 2023, live births fell by 13.3% and deaths by 13.6%.

Immigration was practically non-existent in 2001, but by 2015 it had increased sharply. In 2022 - presumably as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war - the number of immigrants was almost 50,000, more than double the 2021 figure. This compares with a significant decrease in 2023, when almost half (26,000) of the total number of immigrants arrived in the country. This figure remains high compared to 2001 and 2011. Although emigration has also increased over this period (12,000 in 2023), the migration balance has remained positive for many years, steadily increasing the population.

The marriage and divorce rates in Estonia have been on an upward trend: while in 2001 the number of divorces was almost 80% of the number of marriages, in 2023 it was only 40%, i.e. almost two and a half times as many marriages were registered than divorces. This is partly because the number of marriages has risen steadily and because divorces have fallen. Between 2001 and 2023, the number of marriages increased by 15.2% and divorces decreased by 38.6%.

The total fertility rate rose from 1.32 in 2001 to 1.72 in 2010, before falling back to 1.41 in 2022, below the EU average (1.46). In 2023 it further reduced to 1.31.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant¹

The childbirth allowance is a one-time allowance of EUR 320 (*sünnitoetus*) paid after the birth of the child. For multiple births, the allowance is EUR 1,000 per child. The grant is conditional on employment before the birth, compulsory insurance and registration of the birth in the population register.

Estonia also has an adoption allowance (*lapsendamistoetus*), which is also a one-time payment of EUR 320 to the adoptive parent.²

Maternity leave and benefit³

Maternity leave (*sünnituspuhkus*) for a working mother is up to 100 consecutive calendar days. 70 days may be taken before the expected due date and minimum 30 calendar days have to be taken after the birth. Maternity leave is non-transferable and cannot be interrupted or taken part-time. In the case of adoption, the adoption leave (*lapsendamispuhkus*) is a paid leave for a maximum of 70 days (if the adopted child is under 18).⁴

The maternity benefit (*ema vanemahüvitis*) paid during this period is 100% of the mother's previous earnings; from 1 January 2024, its lower limit is EUR 725 gross per month, and there is no upper limit. For insured mothers who did not work in the reference year, the amount of the maternity benefit is equal to the monthly minimum wage paid in the preceeding calendar month. For adoptive parents, the adoptive benefit (*lapsendamishüvitis*) during the adoption leave is also 100% of the reference wage.

Paternity leave⁵

Paternity leave (*isapuhkus*) in Estonia is 30 calendar days, which can be taken up to 30 days before the expected due date or up to 3 years after the birth of the child, even in several instalments.

The amount of the paternity benefit (*isa vanemahvitis*) is 100% of the previous average salary. From 1 January 2024, its minimum amount is EUR 725 gross per month and its

¹ MISSOC, <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-allowances/childbirth-allowance>

² <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-allowances/adoption-allowance>

³ MISSOC and <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-benefits-overview/maternity-benefit-and-maternity-leave>

⁴ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-allowances/adoption-allowance>

⁵ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-benefits-overview/paternity-benefit-and-paternity-leave>

maximum is EUR 4,734 gross per month. Employed and unemployed fathers (including self-employed) receive the paternity benefit for 30 calendar days.

According to Estonian Health Insurance Fund data for 2021, 74.7% of new fathers took up paternity leave, an increase compared to 2020, when only 60% took up the option.⁶

Parental leave and benefit⁷

Parental leave (*jagatav vanemapukhus*) is available up to the age of 3 of the child. During parental leave, benefits are paid for up to 475 days up to the age of 3. While maternity and paternity benefits are individual rights of the parents, parental leave is a family entitlement and can be shared between parents. The shared parental leave can be taken in stages from the child's 31st day of life up to the age of 3. However, parental leave can be taken for a maximum of 60 days at a time (in which case the total period of parental leave is reduced accordingly). Parents can also transfer the leave to the person who is actually caring for the child. The same provisions apply to adoptive parents if the adopted child is under 13. In 2021, 83.8% of parental leave was taken by women and 16.2% by men.

The benefit (*jagata vanemahvitis*) paid during parental leave is 100% of the average salary, alike paternity benefit. From 1 January 2024, its minimum amount is EUR 725 gross per month and its maximum is EUR 4,734 gross per month. In addition to parental leave, it is possible for the parents to work. If the parent earns up to EUR 2,367 per month, the parental benefit will not be reduced. The same provisions apply to adoptive parents.

If a family has triplets or multiple twins, the state pays the family an allowance for multiple birth of three or more children (*kolmikute või enamaarvuliste mitmike toetus*). The allowance amounts to EUR 1,000 per family per month and is paid until the children are 18 months old.

In Estonia, both parents get 10 (paid) days off per child per year and can take an additional 10 unpaid working days off for childcare reasons.

Child benefit⁸

The Estonian state pays child allowance (*lapsetoetus*) for each child from birth until the end of that school year during which they turn 19 years of age. The child allowance is paid monthly, regardless of income. In 2024, the amount of the allowance is EUR 80 for the first and second child and EUR 100 for the third and each additional child.

⁶ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

⁷ MISSOC and <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-benefits-overview/shared-parental-benefit> and <https://www.eesti.ee/en/family/benefits-and-allowances/shared-parental-benefit-and-parental-leave>

⁸ MISSOC and <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-allowances/child-allowance>

Single parents or parents raising a disabled child are entitled to a higher child allowance. Single parents (*üksikvanema lapse toetus*) receive a supplement of EUR 80 per month on top of the child allowance. Disabled child allowance (*puudega lapse toetus*)⁹ depends on the degree of disability, ranging from 540% of the social benefit rate for disabled persons (*sotsiaaltoetuste määr*) to 945% of the social benefit rate. It is paid on top of other benefits.

Families with three or more children are entitled to a large family allowance (*lasterikka pere toetus*)¹⁰ until the eldest child reaches the age of 19. The allowance is EUR 450 per month for families with three to six children and EUR 650 per month for families with seven or more children. The allowance is paid per family and the beneficiary can be one of the children's parents or a guardian or carer.

In Estonia, there is also a conscript's child allowance (*ajateenija lapse toetus*)¹¹ if one of the child's parents is serving in the Estonian Defence Forces, or in alternative non-combat service. The allowance is EUR 900 per month for each child and paid until the end of the parent's military service.

Tax credits and other benefits

*Family taxation*¹²

In Estonia, tax relief is available for families with children if the parent's taxable income is less than EUR 25,200 per year. The yearly income tax exemption is EUR 7,848 and is available up to an annual income limit of EUR 14,400. If the annual income level is between EUR 14,400 and EUR 25,200, the tax credit is reduced proportionally.

Housing

In Estonia, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

The employment rate for women with children under 6 years of age was 72.4% in 2022, above the EU average of 66.4%. For men, the indicator is 91.2%, also above the EU average (89.6%). Part-time work is not widespread. In 2023, 13.5% of the population aged 15-64 worked part-time, well below the EU average (17.8%), even though the rate is improving year by year. The share of women aged 15-64 in part-time employment is higher at 18.1% in 2023 (still low compared to the EU average of 28.5%), while the share of men is slightly

⁹ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/disability-and-welfare-services/benefits-disabled-people/allowance-disabled-child>

¹⁰ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-allowances/allowance-family-many-children>

¹¹ <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/en/family-benefits-and-allowances/family-allowances/conscripts-child-allowance>

¹² <https://www.eesti.ee/en/family/benefits-and-allowances/parental-benefit-income-tax-exemption>

above the EU average: 8.9% of Estonian men work part-time, compared to the overall EU average of 8.4% in 2023.

*Carer's leave*¹³

In Estonia, a person with health insurance is entitled to carer's leave in the following cases:

- for up to 14 days per illness for a person caring for a child under 12 or a disabled person under 19 (80% of earnings is paid);
- for a maximum of 60 consecutive days for a person caring for a child under 12 years of age if the cause of the illness is a malignant tumour and the treatment of the child requires hospitalisation;
- up to 7 consecutive days for a person caring for a sick family member at home;
- if the person caring for a child under 3 or a disabled child under 16 is himself or herself ill, for a maximum of 10 consecutive days.

Parents caring for a child with disability may take 1 day of leave per month, with full working time allowance, or 5 working days per year to care for a relative with a severe disability.

Flexible working arrangements

There are special provisions for breastfeeding in Estonia¹⁴: Mothers who have returned to work and are breastfeeding a child under 18 months of age can take either one 30-minute breastfeeding break every 3 hours during their working hours or a one-hour break once a day. The state compensates 100 percent of the breaks, except for mothers who receive parental benefit.

Early childhood education and care¹⁵

In Estonia, local authorities have a duty to provide all children aged between 1.5 and 7 living in their area and whose parents request it with the opportunity to attend nursery and kindergarten. Attendance at kindergarten is not compulsory. In both nurseries and kindergarten, parents cover the cost of enrolment and meals. The fee varies according to the age of the child but cannot exceed 20% of the minimum wage. Compulsory primary education starts at the age of 7.

In 2023, 38% of children aged 0-3 years attended nursery, the same as the EU average (37%) and much higher than the 11% in 2005. 95% of Estonian children aged 3-6 years attended nursery in 2023, higher than the EU average (89%) and meaning an increase from 79% in 2005.

¹³ <https://www.kriis.ee/en/education-work-life-services/work-life-employee/sick-days-certificates-care-leave>

¹⁴ <https://www.eesti.ee/en/family/further-activities-after-the-birth/breastfeeding-at-work>

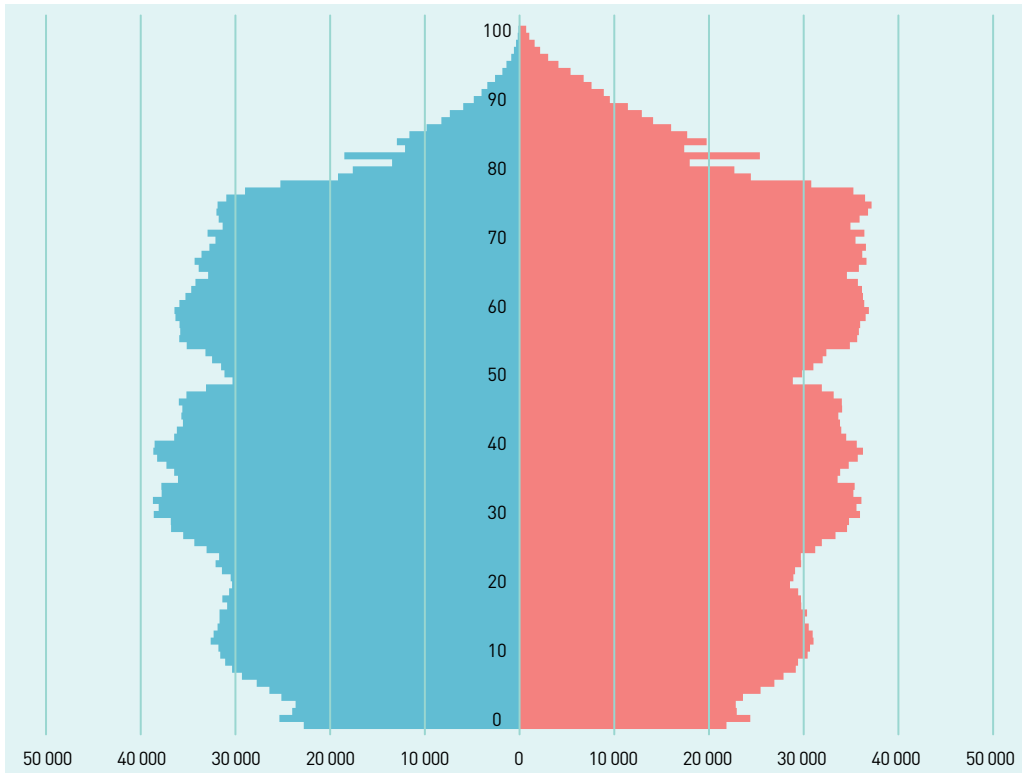
¹⁵ Eurostat and <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/estonia/early-childhood-education-and-care>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	5 181 115	5 375 276	5 487 308	5 533 793	5 548 241	9 104 772
Live birth (persons)	56 189	59 961	52 814	49 594	44 951	77 605*
Death (persons)	48 550	50 585	53 923	57 659	63 219	89 760*
Immigrant (persons)	18 955	29 481	34 905	36 364	49 998	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	13 153	12 660	18 082	13 459	15 635	N/A
Marriage (number)	24 830	28 408	24 464	19 579	21 942	45 855*
Divorce (number)	13 568	13 469	13 541	12 081*	11 370	14 721*
TFR	1.73	1.83	1.57	1.46	1.32	N/A

Source: Eurostat, *Finnish Statistical Office (Download date: 12/08/2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Finland's population has been rising since 2000. The country's population on 1 January 2023 was 5 563 970, an increase of almost 9% compared to 2001. Finnish speakers make up 89% of the country's population. The other two larger groups are Swedish and Russian speakers.

Finland's population pyramid has long been revealing a relatively balanced society, but the number of people under 30 has declined significantly compared to older people. Until 2016, there were more births than deaths, but since then there has been no birth surplus, but a positive net migration balance, which is responsible for the natural increase in the population.

The number of live births showed an increasing trend until 2011 but has been decreasing significantly since then. The birth rate in 2023 shows a drop of almost 25% compared to 2001. While in the early 2010s there were nearly 60,000 births a year, by 2023 there were only 43,000. While the number of births has fallen, the number of deaths has risen by roughly 24% by 2023 compared to 2001.

In terms of migration flows, between 2001 and 2022, immigration increased by a factor of almost two and a half, with a further dramatic increase in 2023, when it was one and a half times the 2022 figure. Emigration has fluctuated over the same period, increasing by only 18% over the period reviewed. In 2023, almost five times as many people entered the country as left.

The number of marriages increased by 14.5% from 2001 to 2011, but declined after 2013, and although it increased again slightly in 2022, overall, it fell by 17% in 2023 compared to 2001. In Finland, the Marriage Act was amended in 2017 to include same-sex couples, so that as of 2017, the number of marriages includes same-sex marriages.¹ The number of divorces was essentially unchanged for the first fifteen years of the period under review, after which it started to decrease and in 2023, there were 16% fewer divorces than in 2001.

In 2001, they had the fourth highest fertility rate in the EU (1.73) (EU average 1.43), but after 2011, it started to fall significantly. Finland still had the fourth highest fertility rate among EU countries in 2011, but by 2022 it had fallen to 1.32 (EU average 1.46). The rate of 1.26 in 2023 represents a further decline.

¹ <https://www.stat.fi/en/statistics/documentation/ssaaty/2023-08-18>

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

In Finland, the family leave reform entered into force on 1 August 2022, replacing maternity and paternity benefits with a single parental allowance (*vanhempainraha*) and a single pregnancy allowance (*raskausraha*). The main changes include the introduction of gender neutral terminology, equal distribution of leave quotas between parents, the possibility to transfer part of the leave to the other parent, an extension of the duration of parental leave and greater flexibility. The reform aims to increase equality between men and women in the workplace and between parents and to take better account of different types of families.²

Birth grant³

The maternity grant (*äitiysavustus*) is a one-time tax-free benefit of EUR 170. In Finland, a pregnant woman can get a maternity grant only if she has been pregnant for at least 154 days and has had regular medical check-ups during pregnancy. Mothers can choose to receive the maternity grant in cash or in a package worth EUR 170, which includes various items needed for the first period of childbearing.⁴ The benefit is payable for each child and is also available for adopted children under 18 years of age. In the case of a twin birth, the mother receives the standard maternity grant multiplied by two for the second child, making a total of three times the grant. For a third child, the amount is tripled, so that for a triplet birth, the maternity grant is six times the amount.

In the case of international adoptions, the Finnish state provides an adoption grant (*adoptiotuki*)⁵ to cover the costs of adopting from abroad. The adoption grant varies between EUR 5 000 and EUR 9 000, depending on the child's country of origin. There is no such grant for adoptions within Finland. The adoption grant is a lump sum payment and is free from tax. If more than one child is adopted at the same time, the adoption grant paid for the second and each additional child adopted is equal to 30% of the full grant.

Maternity leave and benefit⁶

Maternity leave (*raskausvapaa*) is 40 working days (calculated on a 6-day working week), of which 14-30 days can be taken before the expected due date. In practice, it usually starts 30 days before the expected due date. When the maternity leave starts,

² <https://stm.fi/en/reform-aims-to-encourage-both-parents-to-take-family-leave> and <https://www.kela.fi/families-quick-guide>

³ <https://www.kela.fi/maternity-grant> and <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1109&langId=en&intPageId=4514> and MISSOC

⁴ <https://www.kela.fi/maternity-package-2023>

⁵ <https://www.kela.fi/adoption-grant>

⁶ <https://www.kela.fi/pregnancy-allowance-and-special-pregnancy-allowance> and <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1109&langId=en&intPageId=4514> and MISSOC

the “birthing parent” (terminology used in Finnish law) receives 40 days of maternity benefit, or in other words pregnancy allowance (*raskausraha*) from Kela, the Finnish social security. The pregnancy allowance is only paid to the mother and cannot be shared between the parents. In the case of adoption, the parents are not entitled to maternity leave and therefore to the allowance. The pregnancy allowance during maternity leave is 90% of daily earnings up to EUR 64,048 per year and 32.5% of earnings above the part of earnings exceeding EUR 64,048.

Non-employed parents and those with an annual income lower than EUR 10,665 per year are entitled to a flat-rate benefit of EUR 32 per working day (EUR 800 per month). In 2022, 15% of pregnant women received this minimum benefit.

If someone is exposed to radiation, chemicals or infectious diseases at work and cannot be transferred to another job, they can stay off work as soon as their pregnancy is confirmed. They are entitled to a special pregnancy allowance (*erityisraskausraha*) for this period. The special pregnancy allowance is paid until the actual start of the pregnancy allowance, and is paid by Kela to the employer.⁷

Paternity leave

Since the reform of the family leave system in 2022, there is no longer a dedicated paternity leave (formerly known as *isyysvapaa*), the parental leave shared equally between parents.

Parental leave and benefit⁸

Parental leave (*vanhempainvapaa*) starts after the birth of the child and lasts 320 days (excluding Sundays), divided equally between the two parents (160 days each). Out of these, 97 days are reserved for both parents, while the remaining 63 days may be granted to the other parent, the parent’s spouse or other legal guardian of the child. In the case of a single parent, the parent is entitled to all 320 days. In the case of multiple births or adoption, 84 days are added to this period for each additional child. The leave can be taken until the child is 2 years old or until 2 years after adoption. If parents move to Finland with a child aged 1 or over, parental leave is half of the total days.

In Finland, there is also partial parental leave (*osittainen vanhempainvapaa*), which means that the parent works part-time and spends part of the time caring for the child. The part-time work must be agreed with the employer and the parent can then apply for partial parental allowance (*osittainen vanhempainraha*). During the period of partial parental leave, the working time cannot exceed 5 hours a day (25 hours a week).⁹

⁷ <https://www.kela.fi/special-pregnancy-allowance>

⁸ <https://www.kela.fi/parental-allowance-and-partial-parental-allowance>, <https://www.kela.fi/child-care-allowances>, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1109&langId=en&intPageId=4514>, <https://www.pam.fi/en/working-life/guide-to-working-life/employment-relationships/holiday-and-leaves/family-leave/> and MISSOC

⁹ <https://www.kela.fi/parental-allowance-and-partial-parental-allowance#partial-parental-allowance>

Following the reform of family leave, the minimum amount of parental leave allowance (*vanhempainpäivärahat*) was EUR 32 per day in 2023. All parental allowances are calculated on the basis of annual income, calculated for the reference period of 12 calendar months preceding the calendar month in which the entitlement to parental allowance starts. The allowance is paid on working days (Monday to Saturday, excluding public holidays) and is equal to 70% of daily earnings up to an annual earning of EUR 41,629; 40% for the part of earnings between EUR 41,630 and EUR 64,048; and 25% for the part of earnings above EUR 64,048. For the first 16 working days of parental leave, the parental allowance is 90% of earnings up to an annual amount of EUR 64,048, and 32.5% for the part of the earning exceeding this amount.

Parents can also take child home care leave (*hoitovapaa*) after the end of parental leave until the child is 3 years old. While on leave, parents may receive a child home care allowance (*kotihoidon tuki*) as long as the child is not receiving childcare provided or financed by the local authority. The amount of the allowance is not affected by the family's income and is paid separately for each eligible child, in a monthly amount of¹⁰:

- EUR 378 for a child under 3,
- EUR 113 for each additional child under 3,
- EUR 73 for each child over 3 years old but under school age.

The average child home care allowance per family was EUR 406 per month in 2021. The parents of an adopted child are also entitled to child home care leave for the first 2 years after adoption and until the child starts school.

Parents of children under 3 are also entitled to a “flexible care allowance” (*joustava hoitoraha*) after parental leave if the parent works less than 80% of full-time, i.e. up to 30 hours a week. The allowance can only be claimed for one child at a time, even if there are several eligible children in the family. However, both parents can claim it at the same time if they care for the child at different times of the day or on different days of the week. Parents can also get a flexible care allowance if the child attends a municipal day-care centre. The flexible care allowance is EUR 179 per month if the working week does not exceed 30 hours, i.e. 80% of the full working week, and EUR 269 per month if the working week does not exceed 22.5 hours, i.e. 60% of the full working week.¹¹

In Finland, there is a contribution to support childcare costs outside an institution, the private day care allowance (*yksityisen hoidon tuki*) if the child is looked after by a carer paid by the family or by a private provider. Such an allowance is payable after the end of parental leave, at the earliest at the beginning of the month in which the child turns 9 months old. The amount of the allowance is not affected by the family's income and is

¹⁰ <https://www.kela.fi/child-home-care-allowance>

¹¹ <https://www.kela.fi/flexible-care-allowance>

EUR 192 per month for each eligible child. This allowance is not available if the child is attending a local authority early childhood education centre.¹²

In addition, parents of young school children can receive a partial care allowance (*osittainen hoitoraha*) if the parent works up to 30 hours a week while caring for the child and the child is in first or second grade. The partial care allowance is only available for one child, even if there are several eligible children in the family. The allowance is EUR 108 per month, paid through the employer. The allowance is paid from 1 August of the year the child starts school and is payable until the end of the child's second year of schooling (31 July).¹³

Child benefit¹⁴

The child benefit (*lapsilisä*) is paid to parents from the month following the birth of the child until the child is 17 years old. Child benefit is normally paid to the mother or the father or other adult responsible for the care of the child. If the child runs his or her own household (and is aged 15 or over), it may also be paid to him or her by special agreement. The child benefit is tax-free, is paid monthly, and the amount is not affected by the family's financial situation or income.

The amount of the child benefit per month is:

- EUR 95 for one child,
- EUR 105 for the second child,
- EUR 134 for the third child,
- EUR 173 for the fourth child,
- EUR 193 for the fifth and each additional child.

Single parents can get an additional allowance if they are unmarried and not living with someone else. The supplementary allowance is EUR 73 per month from 1 January 2024.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Finland, there is no such benefit.

Housing

In Finland, people on low incomes can apply for a general housing allowance from the Finnish Social Insurance Institution (Kela) to cover housing costs. This allowance is available for rental housing, owner-occupied housing and shared housing. The housing

¹² <https://www.kela.fi/private-day-care-allowance>

¹³ <https://www.kela.fi/partial-care-allowance>

¹⁴ <https://www.kela.fi/child-benefit>, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1109&langId=en&intPageId=4515> and MISSOC

allowance can cover up to 80% of housing costs. It can be paid towards the rent or maintenance fees.

The amount of housing benefit depends on the income of all household members. When someone moves into a rented property, they usually have to pay a deposit for a few months or pay the rent in advance. Kela can help with the deposit in the form of a voucher, which can be given to the landlord. The average rent for an apartment in 2022 was EUR 1,000.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

The employment rate for mothers (aged 18-64) with children under 6 years was 70.4% in 2023, higher than the EU average of 66.4%. For men, the rate is 89.2%, which is almost the EU average (89.6%). Compared to 2009, there is an increase of 8 percentage points for women and 2 percentage points for men. Part-time employment among working women (aged 15-64) in Finland in 2023 was 22.4%, below the EU average (28.5%); for men it was 11.4%, above the EU average of 8.4%. Compared to 2009, there has been a slow but steady increase.

*Carer's leave*¹⁵

Parents of children under the age of 10 can take 4 days paid leave to care for dependents (*tilapäinen hoitovapaa*) per illness. There is no limit on the number of times a year parents can take carers' leave.

A special care allowance (*erityishoitoraha*) can be claimed if the parent of a seriously ill or disabled child under 16 years of age needs to be temporarily absent from work without pay to attend to the treatment or rehabilitation of the child.¹⁶ The amount of the allowance is the same as the amount paid during parental leave and can be claimed for up to 60 days of hospital care followed by 60 days of home care, without entitlement to leave.

*Flexible working arrangements*¹⁷

Parents of children under 2 years of age can take parental leave flexibly, in several instalments (working parents can take up to four instalments per calendar year, and more than four if the employer agrees). They can also take part-time leave and partial parental leave if they work up to 5 hours a day (see section on partial parental leave). The employer must give written reasons for refusing part-time leave. In Finland, breastfeeding leave is not considered necessary as parental leave lasts until the child is 10-13 months old.

¹⁵ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023* and <https://www.kela.fi/sickness-if-a-child-gets-ill>

¹⁶ <https://www.kela.fi/special-care-allowance>

¹⁷ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023* and <https://www.pam.fi/en/working-life/guide-to-working-life/employment-relationships/holiday-and-leaves/family-leave/>

Parents can also work reduced hours (*osittainen hoitovapaa*) from the end of parental leave until the end of the child's second year at school. Workers are entitled to partial child home care leave if they have worked for the same employer for at least 6 months in the last 12 months. A reduction in working time to a maximum of 30 hours must be requested by the worker's employer, who may refuse to grant it only if the reduced working time would be seriously disadvantageous to the employer. Both parents may take partial parental leave in the same period, but not at the same hours of the day. Entitlement to partial parental leave shall end at the end of July of the year in question.

Early childhood education and care¹⁸

Participation in early childhood education and care is a universal right in Finland for all children aged 0-7 years. Care is mainly organised in nurseries and family day care centres. After parental leave, when the child is usually 10-13 months old, parents have three options: i) municipal ECEC services, ii) private ECEC services or childcare through the use of private childcare subsidies, iii) childcare leave and childcare allowance until the child is three years old. Municipalities have a legal obligation to provide ECEC services in accordance with local needs.

The vast majority of children (81%) attend municipal kindergartens in 2021. Families pay a fee for childcare, ranging from free to EUR 295 monthly for full-day care, depending on the age of the child and the family's income. Private nurseries generally charge higher fees.

In 2023, 44% of children aged 0-3 attended nursery, higher than the EU average (37%), being an increase compared to 2005 (24%). In 2023, 94% of children aged 3-6 were in kindergarten, higher than the EU average (89%) and an increase compared to 79% in 2005. Four-fifths of children aged 0-6 attend public and one-fifth private institutions.

¹⁸ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/finland/early-childhood-education-and-care>

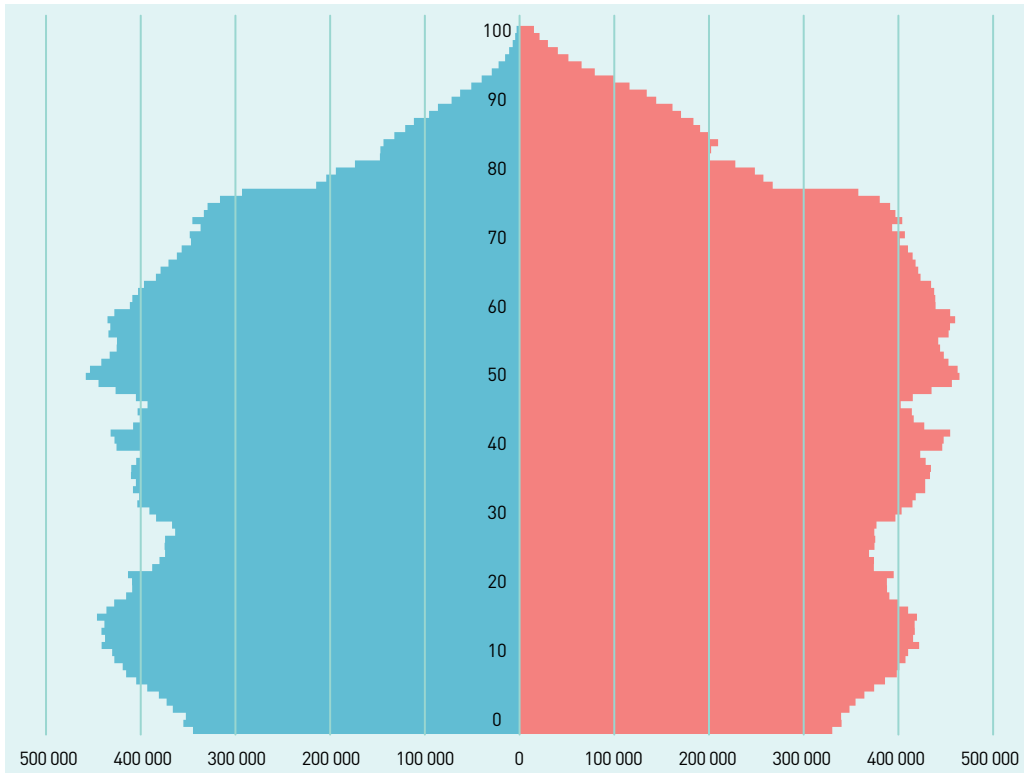


France

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	60 979 315	64 978 721	66 638 391	67 728 568	67 957 053	68 172 977
Live birth (persons)	804 052	824 263	784 325	742 602	726 533	678 200*
Death (persons)	541 184	545 221	594 005	661 779	675 271	631 000*
Immigrant (persons)	N/A	319 816	377 709	336 398	431 017	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	N/A	291 594	313 622	177 028	249 355	N/A
Marriage (number)	295 882	236 975	232 865	218 946	241 831	242 000*
Divorce (number)	115 388	132 977	128 043	N/A	N/A	N/A
TFR	1.90	2.01	1.92	1.84	1.79	1.68*

Source: Eurostat (Download date: 29.07.2024.), * French Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of France has been growing dynamically since 2001, by 2023 it has increased by nearly 12%, from 61 million people to more than 68 million people. The number of inhabitants of the country on 1 January 2023 was 68,172,977. France is considered one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Europe, where the proportion of immigrants has increased due to the migration policy of recent years. Apart from the immigrants the historical ethnic groups living in the country (Germans from Alsace, Occitans and Provençals) and the natives living in overseas territories (DOM-TOM) must also be taken into account.¹

The population pyramid of France shows the image of a balanced society, but the number of age groups younger than 10 years old shows a continuous decrease. In addition to the birth surplus, the growth of the French population was also facilitated by immigration. However, in 2003 only 678,200 babies were born in France, which is almost 7% less than in 2022 and 16% less than in 2001, according to the annual report of the French National Institute for Statistics (INSEE).²

One of the reasons for population growth in France is that the number of live births is relatively high, while the number of deaths is lower. Between 2001 and 2011, the difference did not change significantly, but the number of deaths was 10% higher in 2016, 22% in 2021, and 17% higher in 2023 than in 2001. At the same time, the previous 260-280,000 difference between deaths and births was reduced to 50,000.

Compared to 2001, immigration has quadrupled by 2022, so in 2022 the balance of migration amounted to 182,000 people,³ which significantly contributes to population growth.

By 2023, the number of marriages fell by 54,000, i.e. by 18% compared to 2001. The number of divorces increased by 10% in 2016 compared to 2001, and the number of marriages thus exceeded the number of divorces by only 100,000. Since 2016, no data on divorce is available.

Among the 27 EU member states, France has the highest total fertility rate. In 2001, they had the second highest fertility rate (1.9). The value of the indicator reached 2.03 in 2010, at which time only Cyprus and Ireland surpassed it. Since 2015, the TFR has shown a continuous downward trend, in 2022 it has already decreased to 1.79, which was still the highest value in the union and significantly exceeded the EU average (1.46), but compared to previous years, the decline was still serious. In 2023, there was a further decrease, and as a result the French government announced its “demographic rearmament” program at the beginning of 2024.

¹ *In France, in accordance with the constitutional principle of equality, the government is prohibited from collecting data on the racial, ethnic, and religious background of citizens in any context. National census questions also do not cover race or ethnicity.*

² <https://www.insee.fr/en/statistiques/7757334>

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/686137/net-migration-france/>

FAMILY POLICY

In France, family policy is part of the social security system. In the middle of the 20th century, the Family Allowance Funds (*Caisses des allocations familiales - CAF*) were created to ensure the payment of family allowances. Although their original function was the allocation of the family allowance, today they also pay out several benefits that are based on a social basis, i.e. dependent on income, but at the same time they are not related to marital status or the number of children.

One of the distinctive features of France is that the influence of family associations is quite strong. The approximately 7,500 of these associations are united in a large central association, the National Union of Family Associations (*Union nationale des associations familiales - UNAF*), which has been the only one entitled to represent the interests of families to the state since 1945. It participates in the development of family policy, makes proposals and comments on all political initiatives that may affect the quality of life of families.

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In France, every mother is entitled to a maternity benefit of EUR 1,019 (*prime à la naissance ou à l'adoption de la Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant*), which is paid before the last day of the month following the 6th month of pregnancy. Parents who adopt a child under the age of 20 can also receive a lump sum benefit, amounting to EUR 2,039.

Maternity leave and benefit

Maternity leave (*congé de maternité*) is 16 weeks (34 weeks for twins, 46 weeks for triplets), 26 weeks after the third and every subsequent child. Out of the 16 weeks, 6 can be used before the birth, 10 after the birth, and 8 of the 26 weeks before the birth and 18 after the birth. In the case of a high-risk pregnancy, an additional 2 weeks of maternity leave is available before and an additional 4 weeks after the birth.

It is obligatory for the mother to take at least 8 weeks of maternity leave, of which 6 weeks must be taken after giving birth. During this period, a mother is entitled to maternity benefit if she had an income of at least 1,015 minimum hourly wages during the 6 months before giving birth (or had an income of 2,030 minimum hourly wages during the previous 12 months) or 150 hours of employment in the previous 3 months, or 600 hours of employment in the previous 6 months.

The amount of the benefit depends on the income, but cannot be less, than EUR 11 per day and more than EUR 100 per day. The benefit is subject to tax and contribution.

Paternity leave

Since 2013, the mother's spouse or partner is entitled to paternity leave (*congé de paternité et d'accueil de l'enfant*) even if he is not the father of the child. Since July 2021, the leave is 28 days long (25 days covered by social security, 3 days by the employer), of which 7 days must be taken right after the birth of the child. The rest of the leave can be taken in one or two instalments until the child is six months old. In the event of a multiple birth, 7 additional days of paternity leave are granted. If the child is hospitalized immediately after birth, an additional 30 days of leave can be granted. The eligibility conditions and amounts for the benefit during paternity leave are the same as those described for the maternity leave.

Parental leave and benefit

The first pillar of support for families with children is early childhood support, which has two forms. One is the maternity benefit and the other is a basic allowance. After the birth (or adoption) of the child, the mother is entitled to basic care (*allocation de base de la prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant*) until the month before the child's 3rd birthday (or for 3 years after the adoption, up to the child's 20th birthday). The amount of this varies between EUR 92 and EUR 185 per month.

The second pillar of the French family support system is the childcare allowance or childrearing benefit (*prestation partagée d'éducation de l'enfant*). The benefit can be used by families raising their own children under the age of 3 or adopted children under the age of 20, where the parent does not work or works reduced hours due to raising the child. The condition of the benefit is that for the first child, the parent has a continuous employment for 2 years prior to the birth, for the second child, 4 years, and for the third child, 5 years. The monthly amount of the pay is 429 EUR. If the parent works part-time and the working time does not exceed 50% of the full working time, a partial benefit of EUR 277 can be used. If the working time exceeds 50% of the total working time, but does not exceed 80%, the amount of the benefit is EUR 160. This allowance is tax-free.

The period of payment of the benefit depends on the number of children:

- In the case of one child, parents can use it for 6 months each, until the child is 1 year old. Single parents can use it for 12 months, also until the child is 1 year old. (Even in the case of adoption, up to 12 months from the date of adoption.)
- In the case of two children, both parents can use it for 24 months, until the second child is 3-years old (a single parent from the month after stopping work or reducing working hours until the age of 3).
- In the case of three or more children, both parents can use the benefit for 48 months, until the youngest child is 6 years old (single parent throughout, until the youngest child is 6 years old).

In the case of two or more children, the number of entitlement months is reduced by the duration of the maternity leave. For parents who take a break from work and raise at least three children, an increased amount of childrearing support can be granted for a maximum of 8 months before the child turns one. The amount of the increased benefit is EUR 701.

Child benefit

The child benefit (*allocation familial*) goes to families with at least two children who have been living in France for at least three months, until the child is 20 years old.

The total monthly amount for two children is 142 EUR, for three children it is 324 EUR and 182 EUR for each additional child. The benefit includes an age allowance, starting with the second child and EUR 71 per month for each child older than 14 years.

Families with at least three children can receive an additional pay of EUR 90 per month for a maximum of one year, until the oldest child is 20 years old.

The child benefit is an income-related allowance, and since 2022, families with two children receive a reduced amount of pay above an annual income of EUR 74,966, with an annual income of EUR 81,212 in the case of three children, and an annual income of EUR 87,458 in the case of four children. Each additional child raises the threshold by EUR 5,932.

Parents raising their child alone or raising a chronically ill child are entitled to higher amounts. The maintenance allowance (*allocation de soutien familial/ ASF*) is paid for a child who does not receive support from one or both parents, or as a supplement to low child maintenance. The amount is EUR 261 for each child who has lost both parents, EUR 196 for a child who has lost one parent or is being raised by one parent. In the case of a disabled child, there is a special education allowance (*allocation d'éducation de l'enfant handicapé/ AEEH*) which amounts to EUR 149 per month.⁴

Tax credits and other benefits⁵

Family taxation

An important part of the French family policy is the support through the tax system.⁶ The support is primarily implemented through the so-called *quotient familial* system, with the help of which the composition of families and the number of children are taken into account when determining income tax. One of the goals of family taxation is to ensure

⁴ https://www.cleiss.fr/docs/regimes/regime_france/an_4.html

⁵ It should be noted that when reestablishing family taxation, the Hungarian government considered the most stable French family taxation system, fundamentally unchanged since the Second World War, as an example.

⁶ Stefán-Makay Zsuzsanna: A franciaországi családpolitika and a magas termékenység összefüggése, *Demográfia*, 2009. 52. évf. 4. szám 313–348. Ariane Pailhé, Clémentine Rossier, and Laurent Toulemon: French family policy: Long tradition and diversified measures, *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 2008, pp. 149–164

that the living standards of families with similar incomes do not differ significantly because of the number of children, and to provide special support to families with three or more children. To this end, for the same income, large families pay less tax than smaller families or those without children. The other goal is to encourage families to have at least three children, since families receive a greater discount after the birth of the third child than after the birth of the first two children. In the context of family taxation, married couples (or partners) submit a joint tax return and are counted as 2 units (so husband and wife: 1-1). The first and second children count as 0.5 units each, the third child as 1 unit and each additional child as 0.5 units. That is, after the birth of one child, the income of the parents living together is divided 2.5 times, after two children, 3 times, after three children, 4 times, after four children, 4.5 times, and so on. The amount of tax relief is a maximum of EUR 1,759 for every 0.5 units.

Those whose children are pursuing secondary or higher education may receive additional tax relief. The amount of the discount depends on the level of studies. The child may not have an employment contract and may not receive remuneration other than the remuneration for the professional internship completed as part of the basic education. The child is considered a dependent until the age of 25. The maximum amount of the tax credit is EUR 61 for high school students aged 11-15 (*collège*), EUR 153 for high school students (*lycée*) aged 15-18, and EUR 183 for students in higher education.

Housing

Three types of financial support are available for housing, which cannot be combined:

- Social housing allowance (*Allocation de Logement à caractère Social, ALS*) is a benefit paid directly to tenants. To be eligible, the tenant must live in the residence for at least 8 months per year. This is the most common social benefit used by students.
- Personalized housing allowance (*Aide Personnalisée au Logement, APL*) is a benefit paid directly to the landlord. The tenant pays the landlord only the difference between the total amount of the rent and the APL. In order to use the APL, the landlord must undertake to rent the apartment to low-income tenants, respecting a certain rent threshold.
- Family housing allowance (*Allocation de logement familiale, ALF*) is a financial aid whose purpose is to reduce the amount of rent for those raising children.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2023, the proportion of women aged 15-64 working part-time was 25.8%. This rate was lower than the EU average (28.5%). For men, it was 7.7%, which was also lower than the EU average (8.4%). Compared to 2009, an increase can be observed in the case of men: the proportion of those employed part-time increased from 5.9% to 7.7%. However, there

was a decrease for women from 31.0% to 25.8%. The employment rate of women aged 15-64 was 69.6% in 2023 (EU average: 66.4%), while in 2009 this value was 63.9%. The proportion of men raising minor children was 89.3% in 2023 (EU average: 89.6%), and in 2009 it was 87.6%. For parents of children born after 2015, parental leave has been more regular and the duration of the leave has been reduced. The benefit paid after the birth of the first child is available to parents who take leave simultaneously or consecutively, or they reduce their working time.

Carer's leave

An employee is entitled to a maximum of 3-5 days of unpaid leave per year for the purpose of caring for a sick child under the age of 16. From this the private sector may differ, while in the public sector 14 days per year are available as unpaid leave.

In order to take care of a seriously ill child under the age of 20, a parent with at least one year of employment can take up to three years of long-term care leave with part-time or full leave. In the course of this, a maximum of 310 days of benefits will be paid to the parent in the amount of EUR 44 per day if one of the parents stops working, or in the amount of EUR 52 per day if a parent is taking care of the child alone. Similar care can be requested if it is necessary to provide palliative care for the child (or a parent) living in the same household as the employee.

Flexible working arrangements

All employees can request to work from home for part of their working time, typically a combination of 1-2 days of telework and 3-4 days of office work is common in office jobs.

Parents raising young children have the right to choose part-time employment after parental leave.

Early childhood and education care

The ECEC system provides many forms of care, kindergarten (pre-primary schools) is mandatory and free for all children from the age of 3 (*écoles maternelles*). Depending on the available places, children can be admitted from the age of 2. There is no statutory guarantee of day care for children under 3 years of age. Primary education starts at the age of 6.

Different forms of childcare are available for children younger than 3 years old. The Family Allocations Office (*Caisse des allocations familiales*) provides significant support for child care solutions even before the age of 3. Parents, if they have a registered job, can choose from 4 options:

- employment of a certified childcare worker in the family's home: additional support can be requested;
- family day care: additional support can be requested;

- mini-crèches : care fee adjusted to income situation;
- crèches: care fee adjusted to income situation.

In 2023, 57% of children aged 0–3 received nursery services, which was higher than the EU average (37%) and 32% in 2005. In 2023 97% of children aged 3–6 attended kindergarten / pre-primary schools, thus exceeding the EU average (89%) and barely changing compared to 2005 (96%).

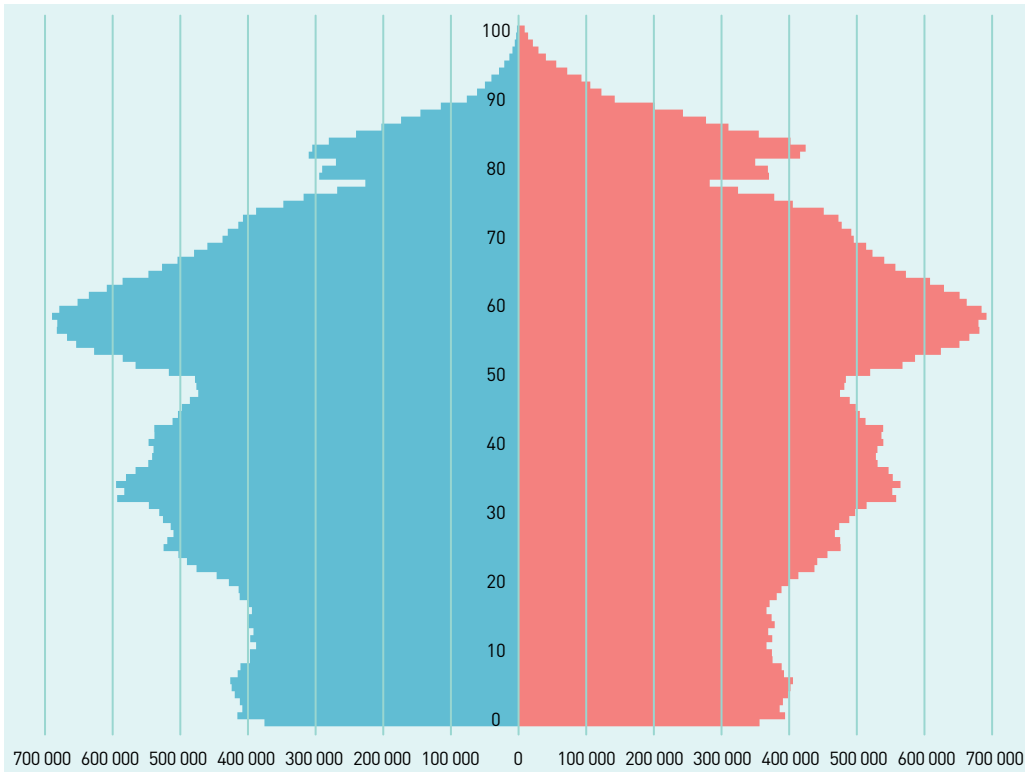


Germany

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	82 259 540	80 222 065	82 175 684	83 155 031	83 237 124	84 358 845
Live birth (persons)	734 475	662 685	792 141	795 492	738 819	692 989 *
Death (persons)	828 541	852 328	910 902	1 023 687	1 066 321	1 028 200 *
Immigrant (persons)	879 217	489 422	1 029 852	874 367	2 071 690	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	606 494	249 045	533 762	543 162	533 485	N/A
Marriage (number)	389 591	377 816	410 426	357 785	390 743	360 979 *
Divorce (number)	197 498	187 640	162 397	142 751	137 353 *	129 008*
TFR	1.38	1.39	1.60	1.58	1.46	1.35*

Source: Eurostat, *German Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

After the turn of the millennium, the German state kept its population above 82 million for nine years, which began to decline as of 2009, but even then it exceeded 80 million. In 2015, the population started to grow again and reached 84,358,845 people on 1 January 2023.

Approximately 14 million foreigners lived in Germany at the end of 2023.¹ According to the Federal Statistical Office, one-third of the total foreign population comes from the EU, while two-thirds comes from outside the EU. The three largest groups are the Turks (1.5 million; 11%), the Ukrainians (1.2 million; 9%) and the Syrians (1 million; 9%). The number of Polish and Romanian citizens is also approaching 1 million.

The population pyramid of Germany shows the picture of an aging society, with a slight increase only in the age group around 30.

The number of live births increased by 61,000 between 2001 and 2021, and then decreased by more than 100,000 by 2023, resulting in a 5.6% decrease between 2001 and 2023. The number of deaths has increased gradually and has already exceeded 1 million in the last three years. There was a significant increase between 2001 and 2023 (24.1%). The number of deaths exceeded the number of births in all examined years, but while in 2001 there was a natural decrease of 94 thousand people, it exceeded 335 thousand people by 2023.

The increase in the population of the country is due to the positive migration balance. Immigration was extremely high during the migration crisis, the number of immigrants almost doubled from 2014 to 2015. In 2014, 884,893 immigrants were registered, and in 2015, 1,571,047 foreign citizens arrived to the country. In 2022, the number of immigrants exceeded the 2015 value and more than 2 million people arrived, increasing their number by 135.6% between 2001 and 2022. The number of emigrants decreased first from 2008-2009 and then increased again from 2013. From 2001 to 2022, 12% fewer people left Germany overall.

There is a fluctuation in the number of marriages. There has been an increase since 2011, with almost 20,000 more marriages in 2016 than in 2001. Then the number of marriages began to decrease. In 2022, following the coronavirus outbreak, the number of marriages increased and 390,743 couples got married. By 2023, this did not last, with almost 30,000 fewer people joining their lives than in 2022, and 7.3% fewer than in 2001. In today's Federal Republic, only during the First World War, between 1915 and 1918 were recorded fewer marriages.

The number of divorces has been declining steadily since 2011, except for 2019, where there was a small increase compared to the previous year. In 2023, approximately 31%

¹ <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/nowcast-foreigner-citizenship-time-series.html>

fewer divorces were registered than in 2011. The number of divorces also decreased in 2023, and 34.7% fewer divorces were registered compared to 2001. The fertility rate was 1.38 in 2001, which increased steadily from 2009 to 2016, when it was 1.60. After 2016, its value fluctuated between 1.5 and 1.6. In 2022, it decreased significantly (1.46), equal to the EU average. The decline continued in 2023 (1.35).

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Germany, there is no such benefit.

Maternity leave and benefit

The length of maternity leave (*Mutterschaftsurlaub/Mutterschutzfrist*) is 14 weeks, of which 6 weeks can be taken before childbirth and at least 8 weeks must be taken after childbirth. In the case of premature or multiple births, this increases with 4 weeks and can be taken up to 12 weeks after childbirth.²

The maternity benefit (*Mutterschaftsgeld*) is eligible during maternity leave for working mothers who have health insurance. The monthly amount of the maternity benefit is 100% of the average wage for the 3 months preceding the birth, of which EUR 13 per day is covered by the health insurance, while the excess is paid by the employer.

Uninsured mothers receive a one-time benefit of up to EUR 210 for the entire period of maternity leave. Adoptive mothers are not entitled to maternity leave, but are entitled to parental leave.

Paternity leave

There is no dedicated paternity leave in the country, fathers can take parental leave at the birth of their child, of which 2 months are exclusively reserved for them. The Federal Minister for Family Affairs has announced that fathers will be entitled to 2 weeks of paid paternity leave by law in the course of 2024.

Parental leave and benefit

Parental leave (*Elternzeit*) can be taken up to the age of 3: the mother can use it after the end of maternity leave, and the father can use it from the day of the child's birth at the earliest. Parents are free to decide when and for how long to take childcare leave, or to divide it into two or three separate parts. Adoptive parents and foster parents are entitled

² <https://familienportal.de/familienportal/familienleistungen/familienleistungen-ueberblick>

to parental leave under the same conditions as biological parents. In the case of adoption, the entitlement is valid from the time the child enters the household until the age of 8. The use of parental leave is independent of the parental allowance (*Elterngeld*), but the benefit is basically paid until the child is 2 years old. During parental leave, there are three forms of childcare benefit for parents that can be combined:

- parental support (*Basiselterngeld*);
- parental support plus (*ElterngeldPlus*);
- partner bonus (*Partnerschaftsbonus*).

Parental support (*Basiselterngeld*) is available up to 12 months of age of the child. Parents are entitled to an extra payment of 2 months per so-called partner month if both parents use the parental allowance and their income from earning activity decreases for at least 2 months (shared months) or if the parent raises their child alone. The amount of the benefit is 65% of the previous year's earnings, depending on income, EUR 300-1,800 per month. Unemployed parents are therefore entitled to EUR 300 per month. A parent receiving parental support may engage in part-time gainful activity for up to 32 hours per week if the parental support is combined with the parental support plus.

Parental support plus (*Elterngeld Plus*) can be used for a maximum of 24 (+4 bonus) months until the child turns 2 years old. The additional amount of the parental support plus is 65% of the difference between the earnings before the birth of the child and the current earnings, depending on income, EUR 150-900 per month. Parental support plus, as a rule, can be used until the child turns 2 years old, but if the other parent also uses it (working 24-32 hours a week part-time), it will be paid as a partner bonus (*Partnerschaftsbonus*) for 2-4 additional months. The amount of the partner bonus is calculated in the same way as the parental support plus.

If the parent raises at least two children under the age of 3, or at least three children under the age of 6, or a disabled sibling under the age of 14, the amount of the allowance will be increased by 10%, by at least EUR 75 per month for the parental support and by EUR 37 for the parental support plus (*Geschwisterbonus*).

Child benefit

All taxpayers, persons residing in Germany are entitled to child benefit (*Kindergeld*) for their own or adopted children or the children of their spouse. It can also be used by grandparents, if they live in the same household with children. The benefit is due until the child is 18 years old, or 21 years old if he/she has not yet had an employment relationship and is registered as a job seeker, or 25 years old if he/she is in school or vocational training, performs voluntary service, has a transition between courses of up to 4 months, cannot continue the internship due to the lack of internships or is permanently ill or disabled. The monthly amount of the child benefit is EUR 250 per child, regardless of age.

The supplementary allowance (*Kinderzuschlag*) is paid in addition to the child benefit to families with a gross income of at least 900 EUR or 600 EUR for single parents, where the family cannot cover all its needs. For being eligible to it, it is a condition that an unmarried child under the age of 25 shall live in the household and that the family can make ends meet together with the supplementary allowance and the housing allowance. The amount depends on the financial situation of the family and is up to EUR 209 per child per month.

Families receiving supplementary allowance or housing allowance are entitled to an education and participation package (*Bildungs- und Teilhabepaket*), in the framework of which children can participate in excursions, receive a subsidy of EUR 156 per year for school equipment, as well as free public transport tickets, school meals, tutoring support, and sports and cultural program support up to EUR 15 per month.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In the event that a family is better off with a child tax allowance (*Kinderfreibetrag*), it may decide to use the tax allowance instead of the child benefit. (So it is worth using the tax allowance for families with higher incomes.) The tax allowance is due until the child is 18 years old (21 years old in the case of a job-seeking young person), in the amount of EUR 6,384 per year in 2024, of which both parents are entitled to half. In addition, a tax deduction of EUR 2,928 (EUR 1,464 per parent) is due, which can be applied in the field of childcare, education or training.

In 2024, married couples do not have to pay any personal income tax up to the annual income limit of EUR 23,208.³

Housing

Under the housing allowance (*Wohngeld*), approximately 2 million households are eligible for housing maintenance support. The average amount of housing allowance paid is EUR 400 per household per month. The amount of the allowance is determined by the size of the family, its income and the amount of the rent: the income threshold is EUR 1,450 per month for singles, EUR 2,250 for couples without children, and EUR 3,270 for a family with two children.

³ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/germany/individual/taxes-on-personal-income>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

The employment rate of women and men aged 18-64 raising young children is quite high in Germany: in 2023, this rate is 67.4% (EU average: 66.4%) for women raising children under the age of 6, and 91.3% (EU average: 89.6%) for men, which increased compared to 2009, (male: 87.8%, female: 54.7%). Part-time employment among working women was 47.9% in 2023 and 11.5% for men. These values are also above the EU average (28.5% and 8.4%, respectively). Compared to 2009, the data has deteriorated, then 54.3% of women and 12.4% of men worked part-time. In 2022, three-quarters of the parental support was used by mothers and one-quarter by fathers. 38.7% of eligible mothers and 16.1% of fathers chose parental support plus (paid for longer periods). The average duration of parental leave planned by mothers in 2022 was 14.6 months.

Carer's leave

In the case of sickness of a child (under the age of 12), working parents with public health insurance (not parents with private health insurance) can take up to 30 days of leave per child (60 days in the case of a single parent). Parents usually receive 90% of their net salary during carer's leave. In the case of three or more children, parents are entitled to a maximum of 65 days of leave per person per year (130 days in the case of a single parent).

In the event of an unexpected illness of a person in need of care, his/her relative is entitled to 10 days of leave, and otherwise 6 months of long-term care leave. Both entitlements are unpaid.

Flexible working arrangements

Mothers are entitled to 60-90 minutes of paid breastfeeding break per day. Mothers working from home should be paid an amount equal to the average hourly wage for breastfeeding.

The Ministry of Family, Elderly, Women and Youth, together with employers and trade unions, has developed the "Family is a Success Factor" "*Erfolgsfaktor Familie*" program, which encourages employers to offer flexible working opportunities to employees.

Part-time employment is available during parental leave: Workers who have worked in the same workplace for more than 6 months and have more than 15 employees in the company can benefit from a reduction to part-time work (*Teilzeit*).

Temporary part-time work (*Brückenteilzeit*) is available to employees who have worked for more than 6 months in the same workplace and where more than 45 employees work for the company. They have the right to reduce their working time for a specified period, which can be between 1 and 5 years, and then return to full-time work. Employers may reject a worker's request for such a temporary reduction of working time for operational reasons.

Early childhood education and care

In Germany, the day care of young children is provided by a wide range of institutions, including nurseries, kindergartens, parent-child centers, family day care centers, childcare centers and all-day schools. Since August 2013, every child has the right to attend a children's institution after the age of 1. In most cases, participation in the institution is subject to the payment of a fee, which means a lower amount in public institutions. The state reduces the fee for families with various discounts and vouchers.

Based on 2023 data, 23% of children aged 0–3 received nursery care, which is much lower than the EU average (37%) and represents an increase compared to 16% in 2005. In 2023, 86% of children aged 3–6 went to kindergarten, which is below the EU average (89%) and shows only a slight increase compared to 2005 (83%).⁴

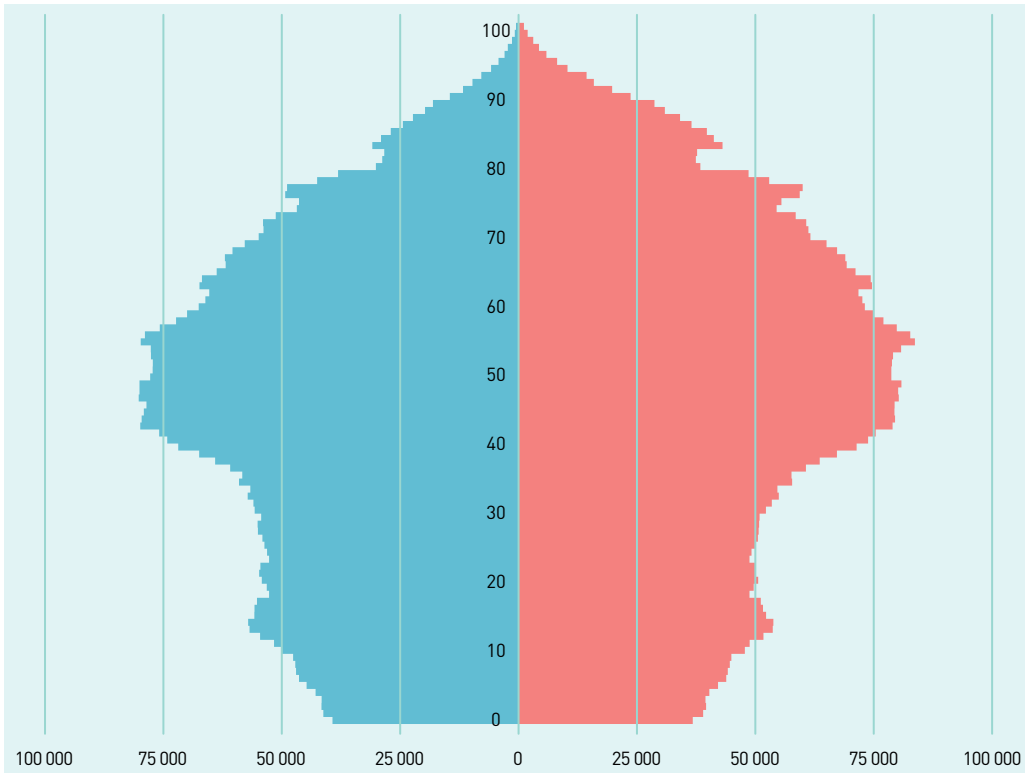
⁴ <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Soziales/Kindertagesbetreuung/Tabellen/betreuungsquote.html;jsessionid=8E36F4B501E9CF037BA4360C38A14DC9.live741>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	10 835 989	11 123 392	10 783 748	10 678 632	10 459 782	10 413 982
Live birth (persons)	102 282	106 428	92 898	85 346	75 899	71 220
Death (persons)	102 559	111 099	118 788	143 923	139 921	127 183
Immigrant (persons)	98 471	60 089	116 867	57 120	96 662	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	45 909	92 404	106 535	79 596	80 307	N/A
Marriage (number)	58 491	55 099	49 632	40 759	43 355	N/A
Divorce (number)	11 184	12 705	11 013	13 921	14 477*	N/A
TFR	1.25	1.40	1.38	1.43	1.32	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Greek Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Greece's population grew steadily between 2000 and 2011, but this reversed in 2012 and has been on a downward trend since then. From the turn of the millennium to 2011, the number of inhabitants increased by 3%, while from 2011 to 2023 it fell by more than 6%. On 1 January 2023, the population of Greece was 10,413,982. More than 90% of them are Greeks, while there are also significant numbers of Turks, Macedonians, Albanians and Bulgarians living in the country.

The population pyramid of the country shows the picture of an aging society, where the number of people under the age of 40 is decreasing sharply. There was a slight increase only in the case of the age group in their early 10s, but among those under 10 years the decrease is significant again.

During the years following 2011, the number of live births, which was previously around 110,000, decreased significantly, first to 90,000, and then to less than 72,000 in 2023, which is a 30% decrease compared to 2001. During the same period, the number of deaths increased by 24%. While the number of live births and deaths was the same in 2001, in 2016, 26,000 more people died than were born, and in 2023 the number of deaths exceeded the number of live births by 80%.

Since 2001, the rate of emigration has almost doubled. From 2012 to 2018, more than 100,000 people left the country every year, while in the period before 2010, the number of emigrants was only around 40-60,000 per year. In 2001, immigration was still around 100,000 people, which dropped to 60-70,000 people, but in 2016 it increased again significantly and in 2022, it was still high. The balance of migration has been positive since 2016 - excluding the year 2021 affected by closures due to COVID-19 - while in previous years 30,000 to 60,000 more people left than arrived in general.

The number of marriages shows a continuous decrease, compared to 2001, about 26% fewer people got married in 2022. The number of divorces increased in the same period, with nearly 30% more people getting divorced in 2022 than in 2001.

The total fertility rate rose from the early 2000s to 2009 (1.5), then fell back to 1.29 in 2013, and was between 1.3 and 1.43 since then. In 2022, its value was 1.32, which was below the European Union average of 1.46.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

Mothers residing legally and permanently in Greece receive a childbirth benefit (Επίδομα Γέννησης) after giving birth, provided that the family's annual income does not exceed EUR 40,000.¹ The amount is EUR 2,000, which is paid in two equal instalments to the mother: the first in the first month after birth, the second in the sixth month after birth. For women who give birth outside of a hospital (legally and under controlled conditions), there is a special lump-sum childbirth allowance (βοήθημα τοκετού). This amounts to EUR 900 for one child, EUR 1,200 for twins and EUR 1,600 for triplets.

Maternity leave and benefit

The Greek system of subsidies for the care of young children is basically based on three forms of support: maternity benefit, supplementary maternity allowance and special maternity protection allowance. The benefits are linked to the social security system and are taxed.

In the 2 years before giving birth, you must have at least 200 days of certified employment in order to use the maternity benefits (επίδομα κυφορίας-λοχείας). The period of maternity leave (αδεια μητροτητας) is 119 days, of which 56 days can be used before the expected date of birth and 63 days after. The amount of the benefit is 50% of the daily wage estimated based on the insurance category, which is calculated from the average earnings of the 30 days before the birth, as well as an additional 10% of this amount per child. Its amount cannot be less than two-thirds of the previous earnings, the maximum amount for one child is EUR 47 per day, and for four or more children the maximum amount increases to EUR 66 per day.

Supplementary maternity allowance (συμπληρωματικες παροχες μητροτητας) can be used by the mother for an additional 119 days after the end of maternity leave, up to a maximum of 6 months. Its amount covers the difference between the wage paid by the employer and the maternity benefit (if any). Thus, it provides working but low-income mothers with extra benefits.

The special maternity protection allowance (Ειδικη Παροχη Προστασιας) can be used by working mothers for a maximum of 9 months after maternity leave (of which 7 months can be transferred to the father under certain conditions). It is paid by the employment service, and the amount is the same as the minimum wage, which was EUR 713 in 2022. The above benefits are also available for adoptive parents.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1112&intPageId=4560&langId=en>

Paternity leave

In Greece, fathers are entitled to 14 days of paternity leave (Άδεια Πατροτητας), for which they are entitled to 100% of their previous earnings. Paternity leave can start 2 days before the expected due date and can be used continuously or intermittently until the child is one month old.

Parental leave and benefit

Under the parental leave (Γονική Άδεια), both parents are entitled to a maximum of 4 months of non-transferable leave, of which the first 2 months are paid, and this is paid by the employment service. In the event of the birth of several children, the benefit is extended for an additional 2 months, regardless of the number of children born together. In special cases, when one parent is not present, the leave and benefits are doubled (i.e. a maximum of 8 months of leave, of which the first 4 months are paid by the employment service). Parental leave can be used until the child is 8 years old, its monthly amount is the same as the minimum wage, in 2022 it was EUR 713 per child.²

In addition to the above, employees in the public sector are entitled to 5 years of parental leave per parent, during which the amount due for general parental leave is paid for 4 months each, and the rest of the leave is unpaid.

Child benefit

All parents are entitled to child benefit (Επίδομα Παιδιού) who have lived in Greece for at least 5 years (12 years is required for residents of a third country). It is paid until the child is 18 years old, or until the age of 19 for secondary school studies, and until the age of 24 for higher education studies, in case of disability or orphanhood.

The amount of the child benefit depends on which income category the family falls into based on total income and the number of children.

- In the range below EUR 6,000, the child benefit is EUR 70 for the first and second child, EUR 140 for the third and all subsequent children.
- Between EUR 6,001 and EUR 10,000, EUR 42 for the first two children, then EUR 84 from the third child.

With an income between EUR 10,001 and EUR 15,000, families receive a benefit of EUR 28 for the first two children and EUR 56 for the third and subsequent children.

The child benefit is tax- and contribution-free and is paid every two months.

² Blum et al. Leave Policies 2023

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Greece, there is no such benefit.

Benefit for families living in mountainous and disadvantaged areas³

The benefit granted to families living in mountainous and disadvantaged areas (Επίδομα Ορεινών Και Μειονεκτικών Περιοχών) is granted to families living in mountainous and/or disadvantaged areas for at least 2 years before the application is submitted, whose family income does not reach EUR 4,700.

The amount is:

- EUR 600 per year, if the family's annual income does not exceed EUR 3,000;
- EUR 300 per year for annual family income between EUR 3,000.01 and EUR 4,700.

Housing

In Greece, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Greece, the labor market participation of mothers with young children is low: in 2023 among families where the youngest child is under 6 years old, the employment rate of mothers of age 18-64 was 54.5%, which was one of the lowest among EU member states (EU average 66.4%). For fathers, this rate (90.0%) is close to the EU average (89.6%), while in 2009 the Greek value was still well above the EU average (86.1% and 93.8%). The scope of part-time work opportunities has expanded little over the past decade: in 2023, 11.7% of women aged 15-64 worked part-time (EU average 28.5%). For men, the same rate is 4.0% (EU average 8.4%). In 2009, part-time employment for men was 2.9%, and for women 10.7%, which values were still below the EU average.

Carer's leave

Greece has a very extensive carer's leave system. A parent working in the private sector is entitled to 6-10 days of paid sick leave per year, for the purpose of caring for a sick child, to which both parents are entitled separately and receive at least 66% of their salary. In addition, in case of long-term hospital care, the parent is entitled to 30 days of unpaid leave. Every parent whose child (up to the age of 18) needs regular transfusions or dialysis, has cancer, needs a transplant, is affected by Down's syndrome or autism

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1112&intPageId=4560&langId=en>

is entitled to 10-10 days a year which is at least 66% paid. In addition to the above, the employee is entitled to 5 days of unpaid leave per year for the purpose of taking care of relatives, as well as 1 day twice a year in case of force majeure.

Parents working in the public sector are also entitled to 6-10 days of paid sick leave per year for the purpose of caring for a sick child, to which both parents are entitled separately and receive at least 66% of their salary. In addition, in case of long-term hospital care, the parent is entitled to 30 days of unpaid leave. Every parent whose child (up to the age of 18) needs regular transfusions or dialysis, has cancer, needs a transplant, is affected by Down's syndrome or autism is entitled to 22-32 days of leave - which is at least 66% paid - per year. A parent raising a child with cancer is entitled to 2 days per treatment which is also at least 66% paid. In the case of a severely disabled child, the parent is entitled to at least 6 days of 66% paid leave per year. In the case of a spouse affected by a certain illness, the employee is entitled to 32 days of at least 66% paid leave per year. In the case of a spouse with cancer, the employee is entitled to 2 days of unpaid leave per treatment.

Flexible working arrangements

In addition to parental leave, one parent is also entitled to additional childcare leave (αδεια φροντίδας τεκνίου). You can choose from several options: you can reduce your working time by 1 hour for 30 months, or 2 hours for 12 months and 1 hour for 6 months. If you choose these options, you will receive your full salary from your employer. Eligibility requires working in the private sector and at least 6 months of employment.

All working parents raising or caring for a child under the age of 12 are entitled to request flexible working hours, telework or part-time employment for taking care of the child. To benefit from such measures, the working parent or carer must have 6 months of continuous employment or a consecutive fixed-term employment contract with the same employer. In case of rejection, the employer must document the reason for the possible rejection or postponement of the request.

Early childhood and education care

Greek children can attend early childcare centres (nurseries) from the age of 6 months to 4 years. Between the ages of 2.5 and 4, parents can apply for a place, while from the age of 4, children can attend pre-school (weekly 25 hours program), which is compulsory for children aged 5-6. Primary school education begins at the age of 6.⁴ Pre-school participation is free in Greece, but the different ECEC institutions for children under age 4 may require fees on a monthly basis, depending on the economic status of the family. In 2023, 30% of children aged 0-3 attended nursery, which was better than the EU average (37%), thus increasing significantly compared to 9% in 2007. In 2023, 80.587% of 3-6-year-olds went to kindergarten, which was the same as the EU average (89%) and higher than 72% in 2007.

⁴ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/greece/early-childhood-education-and-care>

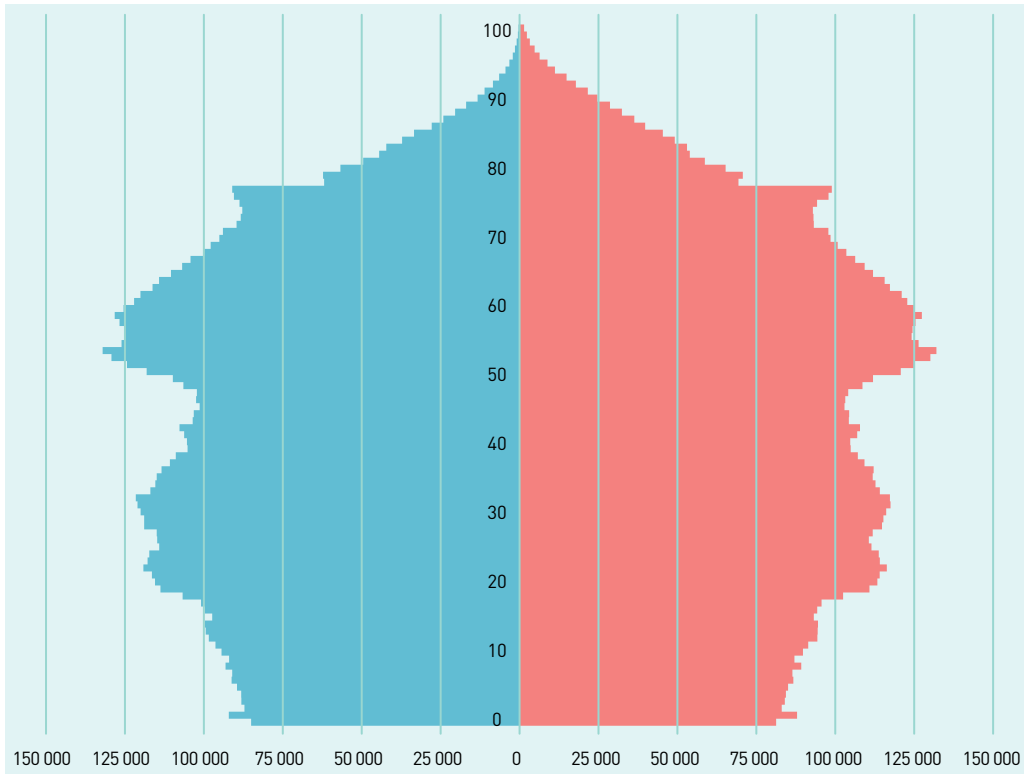


Hungary

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	10 200 298	9 985 722	9 830 485	9 730 772	9 689 010	9 599 744
Live birth (persons)	97 047	88 049	95 361	94 003	89 669	87 671
Death (persons)	132 183	128 795	127 098	156 131	136 823	128 176*
Immigrant (persons)	22 079	28 018	53 618	80 471	94 148	96 192*
Emigrant (persons)	2 591	15 100	39 889	67 999	58 408	71 369
Marriage (number)	43 583	35 812	51 805	72 030	63 967	50 139*
Divorce (number)	24 391	23 335	19 552	18 092*	17 695	16 791*
TFR	1.66	1.52	1.53	1.61	1.56	1.51*

Source: Eurostat, * Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Download date: 21.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Hungary has been declining continuously since 1981 (10,712,781 people). In 2023, there were 9,599,744 people, 10.4% less than in 1981 and 4.8% less than in January 2001. At the time of the 2022 official census, 84% of the population declared themselves Hungarian, 2% Gypsy/Roma, 1% German, and 14% did not answer the question.

The population pyramid of Hungary shows the picture of an aging society with a sharply decreasing population between the ages of 30–40.

The number of live births decreased sharply from 2001 to 2011, and then the trend reversed, and despite the continuous decrease in the number of women of childbearing age, the number of births increased to over 90,000, and from 2022 the number of births began to decrease again.

The death rate fluctuated, exceeding the number of live births by at least 30-40 thousand throughout. The exception is the extremely high value due to the 2021 COVID epidemic, when the difference was 62 thousand. In 2023, mortality fell to pre-pandemic levels and decreased by 3% compared to 2001. The rate of immigration more than quadrupled during the period under review (2001: 22,079 persons; 2023: 96,192 persons). The rate of increase in emigration, similar to immigration, has increased significantly since the middle of the 2010 decade, increasing by almost 79% between 2016 and 2023.

Between 2011 and 2021, the number of marriages more than doubled, decreasing in 2022 and 2023 compared to the peak in 2021. However, compared to 2001, 6.5 thousand (15%) more people got married in 2023. The number of divorces decreased by 31.2% (7,600) compared to 2001. Between 2019 and 2022, the balance of marriages is positive, that is, more marriages were concluded in Hungary than were terminated by divorce or the death of one of the parties.

The fertility rate increased by 30.9% from a low of 1.23 in 2011 to a peak of 1.61 in 2021, and then decreased in 2022 and 2023. In 2011, Hungary was the country with the lowest fertility within the European Union, but in 2022, it had the sixth highest value, above the EU average (1.46).

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support¹

Birth grant

Maternity allowance is a one-off benefit after childbirth, subject to the condition that the pregnant woman participates in pregnancy care at least 4 times. Its amount is HUF 64,125 (EUR 160) in 2024 and HUF 85,500 (EUR 213) for twins per child. The adoptive parent is also entitled to maternity allowance. Maternity allowance under the Umbilical Cord program is also paid from 2018 for children of Hungarian citizenship or Hungarian descent born abroad.

Baby Bond

The Baby Bond is a registered government bond that can be purchased until the child is 18 years old. For all children born in Hungary and born abroad with Hungarian citizenship or “Hungarian ID”, the state provides a life start allowance of HUF 42,500 (EUR 106), which is deposited in a deposit account in the Hungarian State Treasury. If a Treasury Start Securities Account is subsequently opened for the child and the support is transferred to it, it will continue to be remunerated as a Baby Bond, on which any additional amounts can be paid into the account until the child is 18 years old. Currently, the state pays an annual inflation plus an interest premium of 3% on the amount on the account. The account can be accessed after the child has reached the age of 18, at the earliest after the 3rd year following the opening of the account and at the expiry of the Baby Bond.

Maternity leave and benefit

The mother is entitled to 24 weeks of maternity leave at the birth of her child, of which she must take 2 weeks. Maternity leave must be granted in a way that does not exceed 4 weeks before the expected date of birth.

The infant care allowance (csed) is a monthly cash allowance for maternity leave, depending on earnings, subject to prior employment or insurance coverage. The condition of its disbursement is an insured status of at least 365 days within the 2 years preceding the birth. It amounts to 100% of the previous income and is a personal income taxable benefit, so its net amount is higher than the mother’s previous salary. Infant care fee is paid for a period equal to the duration of the maternity leave, i.e. up to 24 weeks, but not more than 168 days after the birth of the child. Infant care fee is not paid if the mother is engaged in earning activities.

¹ In terms of benefits, we calculated with a HUF-EUR exchange rate of HUF 400

Paternity leave

The paid leave available to fathers in the case of the birth of a child (also in the case of twins) is 10 working days. It can be used until the end of the 2nd month after birth at the latest and can be taken in not more than two parts. The employee is entitled to absentee pay (i.e. 100% of his earnings) for the first 5 working days and 40% of the absentee pay for the remaining period.

Parental leave and benefit

Parental leave, after the end of maternity leave, is an additional leave that can be taken for the purpose of caring for the child, which can be taken by the mother or father at the choice of the family until the child reaches the age of 3. This period is considered an insured relationship and the claiming parent is entitled to termination protection. For this period, several types of benefits can be requested depending on the age of the child, the number of siblings and the insured status of the parents.

The child care fee (gyed) is a monthly cash allowance depending on earnings, subject to prior work. The condition of its use is that the parent raising the child in his/her own household is insured for 365 days within 2 years before the birth of the child (this does not have to be continuous). Its amount is 70% of the average of the calendar day of the eligible income, up to a maximum of 70% of the double of the current minimum wage per child, which is HUF 373,520 (EUR 933) gross per month in 2024. If a parent would be entitled to gyed for more than one child at the same time, the maximum amount is to be calculated per child. Simultaneous with the disbursement of child care fee, earning activities can be carried out, personal income tax and pension contributions are deducted from this benefit.

Child care fee is payable from the day after the expiry of the infant care fee until the child reaches the age of 2, even if the parent is working and even if the child has a sibling (Gyed Extra), after whom the parent is also entitled to the same age-appropriate benefit. In the case of twins, the disbursement is extended for another 1 year, that is, until the children reach the age of 3.

Child care fee for graduates

A higher education student can receive a so-called child care fee for graduates if she meets all of the following conditions:

- had an active higher education status for at least 2 semesters within 2 years before the birth of the child,
- at the time of birth of the child, no more than 1 year has elapsed since the suspension or termination of the student status,
- raises the child in her own household,
- is a citizen of Hungary or an EEA Member State,

- had a place of residence in Hungary at the time of birth of her child.

The father may also be entitled to child care fee for graduates if he meets the conditions, while the mother does not. Child care fee for graduates is disbursed from the birth of the child until the child reaches the age of 2. In 2024, its daily amount is one-thirtieth part of 70% of the minimum wage (in 2024: HUF 266,800 (EUR 667), HUF 6,225 (EUR 15) per day) valid on the start date of eligibility for students participating in higher education, vocational education or vocational training. For students enrolled in a master's, single, split or doctoral programme, it amounts to one-thirtieth part of 70% of the guaranteed minimum wage valid on the start date of eligibility (in 2024: HUF 326,000 (EUR 815)), HUF 7,607 (EUR 19). It is possible to carry out earning activities from the 169th day of receiving the allowance.

Child care fee for grandparents

As of January 1, 2020, non-retired grandparents can also become entitled to child care fee (gyed) if they undertake to participate in the care and upbringing of their grandchild while the parents are at work. In addition, it is a condition that the grandparent is insured for 365 days within 2 years before the birth, the parents of the child engage in gainful activity and raise the child themselves. Grandparents' child care is paid until the child is 2 years old, or until the child is 3 years old for twins. Its amount must be determined on the basis of the rules applicable to general child care fee. A grandparent can only pursue other earning activities at home.

Child care allowance

The child care allowance (gyes) is a monthly cash allowance for the parent raising the child in his/her own household, from the birth of the child until the age of 3 (up to 6 years in the case of twins, up to 10 years in the case of a permanently ill child). It cannot be disbursed in addition to infant care fee and child care fee. Its monthly amount is equal to the current pension minimum of HUF 28,500 (EUR 70) and is due per child for twins. A grandparent is also entitled to child care allowance if the child is over 1 year old, is raised by the parents, and there is no other child in the parent's household receiving child care allowance. From the age of 3, the grandparent can engage in occupational activities for a maximum of 30 hours a week or full-time if he/she does so at home.

Child raising support

Families with three or more children are entitled to child raising support (gyet), the monthly amount of which – regardless of the number of children – is the current pension minimum, i.e. HUF 28,500 (EUR 71). The support is paid from the age of 3 to the age of 8 of the youngest child. Eligibility ceases if the number of children under the age of 18 falls below three. In addition to child raising support, earning activities can be carried out for a maximum of 30 hours a week, or without a time limit if the work is carried out at home.

Child benefit

In Hungary, family allowance (child raising allowance until the beginning of the compulsory school age, then called educational allowance) is granted on a universal basis for a child living in the household until the age of 18. This can be extended to the age of 20 if the child is studying in a public education institution or vocational training institution, and to the age of 23 in the case of a disabled child. A condition of disbursing the allowance is that the child fulfills his/her obligation to attend kindergarten or school. The person entitled to the allowance is the biological or adoptive parent, as well as the spouse/partner living with the parent, guardian or the head of the institution where the child is placed. A person over the age of 18, or who is permanently ill or severely disabled and is no longer entitled to educational allowance may apply for child raising allowance in his/her own right. The amount of family allowance per month in 2024:

in a two-parent family:

- HUF 12,200 (EUR 30) for 1 child;
- HUF 13,300 (EUR 33) for 2 children (per child);
- HUF 16,000 (EUR 40) for 3 or more children (per child);
- HUF 23,300 (EUR 58) for a permanently ill, disabled child (per child);

in a single-parent family:

- HUF 13,700 (EUR 34) for 1 child;
- HUF 14,800 (EUR 37) for 2 children (per child);
- HUF 17,000 (EUR 42) for 3 or more children (per child);
- HUF 25,900 (EUR 64) for a permanently ill, disabled child;
- HUF 20,300 (EUR 50) for an adult, disabled child (per child).

Family tax credits and benefits

In Hungary, the family policy system provides several types of tax benefits, which can be used side by side, depending on income. Tax credits are considered in the following order: 1. Tax credit for mothers of four or more children, 2. Tax credit for young people under the age of 25, 3. Tax credit for mothers under the age of 30, 4. Personal benefit, 5. Tax benefit for newly married couples, 6. Family tax credit and 7. Family contribution credit.

Family tax and contribution benefit

Family-type taxation has been in force in Hungary since 2011, in which the tax and contribution payment obligation of parents raising children is reduced on the basis of the number of children. A spouse who is entitled to family allowance or lives with such a person in the same household, as well as a pregnant woman and her spouse, may benefit from personal income tax and contribution allowance, even jointly or shared. The condition for the discount is the declared employment or other gainful occupation.

The family tax and contribution allowance can be applied from the age of 91 days of the foetus. The net monthly amount per child increases with the number of children in the family: HUF 10,000 for a family with one child, HUF 20,000 per child for a family with two children, and HUF 33,000 per child for large families (3 or more children).

This means that in 2024, the tax base can be reduced per child by HUF 66,670 (EUR 166) for one child, by HUF 133,300 (EUR 333) for two children, and by HUF 220,000 (EUR 550) for three or more children, which can also be applied from personal income tax (family tax credit) and social security contributions (family contribution benefit).

It means that every month in 2024, the net income of the family

- with one child, is higher with HUF 10,000 (EUR 25),
- with two children, HUF 40,000 (EUR 100),
- with three children, HUF 99,000 (EUR 247).

Tax credit for mothers of four or more children

From 1 January 2020, all mothers with four or more children are exempt from paying personal income tax (currently 15%).

Tax credit for young people under the age of 25

From 1 January 2022, young people under the age of 25 do not have to pay personal income tax if their monthly income does not exceed the average wage (HUF 576,601, that is, EUR 1,441 in 2024). In 2024, the discount means a maximum tax saving of HUF 86,490 (EUR 216) per month, which is how much more young people can receive. If their wage is more than that, they have to pay tax on the amount above HUF 576,601. It can be used for the last time in the month in which the beneficiary reaches the age of 25.

Tax credit for mothers under the age of 30

From 1 January 2023, women who have children before the age of 30 will be exempt from personal income tax up to the amount of the average wage tax until their age of 30. In 2024, the discount is provided up to HUF 576,601 (EUR 1,441) per month and can mean a maximum tax saving of HUF 86,490 (EUR 216) per month. If their wage is more than that, they have to pay tax on the amount above HUF 576,601. This tax credit and the tax credit for young people under the age of 25 cannot be applied at the same time.

Tax credit for first married couples

If at least one of the spouses has had their first marriage, their income may increase by HUF 5,000 (EUR 12) per month for 2 years after conclusion of the marriage.

Baby expecting subsidy

Between 1 July 2019 and 31 December 2023, any married couple - where the wife is between the ages of 18 and 41 - could apply for an interest-free loan of HUF 10 million

(EUR 25,000). After 2024, the baby expecting subsidy is available for married couples where the wife is between the ages of 18 and 30 and at least one of them has 3 years of insurance. The loan amount will be a maximum of HUF 11 million (EUR 27,500) from 2024. If the wife is aged over 30 but under 41 and can prove that she is at least 12 weeks pregnant, the couple will still be entitled to the subsidy.

The loan repayment installment is a maximum of HUF 51,000 (EUR 127) per month, with a maturity of 5-20 years. If a child is born in the family within 5 years after the loan application is submitted, they do not have to pay the installment for 3 years and become entitled to interest-free repayment for the entire term, in the case of twin children, the repayment suspension is 5 years. If the second child is born, the repayment will be suspended for another 3 years and 30% of the debt will be released. If the third child arrives, the entire remaining debt will be waived. Only children born or adopted after submitting the credit application count.

If no child is born, the interest subsidy received so far must be repaid and the remaining capital will be repaid at an interest rate similar to the market. There is a possibility of fairness when there is no need to repay the penalty interest or the couple may be exempted from the obligation to repay the interest subsidy, for example, if they can prove that they have unsuccessfully participated in a reproduction procedure on several occasions, or it was found during the treatment that the couple cannot have a child.

Discounts related to student loans

From 1 January 2023, mothers under the age of 30, if they gave birth to or adopted a child during their higher education or within 2 years after their successful completion, the full amount of their student loan debt will be waived (waiving the student loan debt of mothers under the age of 30).

In the case of the birth (adoption) of their second child, the mothers with student loans are released from half of the student loan debt, and in the case of the birth (adoption) of a third or more child, the entire outstanding debt (waiver of student loan debt).

Women with a student loan can request the suspension of their repayment obligation from the 91st day of pregnancy for 3 years, during which their student loan debt will not increase, as the interest payment is taken over by the state (student loan interest subsidy and suspension of repayment).

For the duration of the infant care fee/child care fee/child care allowance, it is also possible to request the suspension of the repayment obligation and the interest subsidy, this discount can be used by any eligible parent (even the father) (student loan interest subsidy and suspension of repayment).

Free textbooks

In Hungary, all students participating in public education receive their textbooks free of charge. Textbook support is provided on a universal basis from the first grade, that is, from the age of 6 until the end of high school, usually until the age of 18 of the children.

Housing

CSOK Plus

Since 2016, the Family Housing Subsidy (CSOK), which is a non-refundable state subsidy and the related preferential CSOK loan, has been helping families with children to buy their own homes that are more suitable for them. Thanks to CSOK, every fourth Hungarian family has been able to move to a better and more modern home in the past eight years. The rules of CSOK were amended and CSOK Plus was introduced as of 1 January 2024. CSOK Plus can be used by married couples where the wife has not yet reached the age of 41 and who are planning to have children. Based on the number of children, it can be applied for up to HUF 15, 30 or 50 million (EUR 37,500, EUR 75,000, EUR 125,000), with a maximum interest rate of 3%. Upon the arrival of the first child, the repayment of the loan is suspended for up to 1 year, and the capital debt of the loan is reduced by HUF 10-10 million (EUR 25,000 – 25,000) for the second and each additional baby. In the first year after the loan is taken out – if no child arrives yet – only the interest part of the installment shall be paid, not the principal part.

	1 future child	2 future children	3 future children
0 existing children	A loan of HUF 15 million (EUR 37,500) and a one-year moratorium at the birth of the child	HUF 30 million (EUR 75,000) loan, birth of the first child: a one-year moratorium birth of a second child: HUF 10 million (EUR 25,000) release from the capital	HUF 50 million (EUR 125,000) loan, birth of the first child: a one-year moratorium , birth of a second child: HUF 10 million (EUR 25,000) release from the capital birth of a third child: HUF 10 million (EUR 25,000) release from the capital
1 existing child	HUF 30 million (EUR 75,000) loan and a one-year moratorium at the birth of the child	HUF 50 million (EUR 125,000) loan, birth of the first child: a one-year moratorium , birth of a second child: HUF 10 million (EUR 25,000) release from the capital	
2 existing children	HUF 50 million (EUR 125,000) loan and a one-year moratorium at the birth of the child		
3 or more existing children			

An additional condition for the application is the social security relationship and the absence of public debt for at least 2 years. The state sets a deadline for the birth of children: 4 years for one child, 8 years for two children and 10 years for three children. If the couple wishes to have children by adoption, the deadline for having children may be extended by 2 years. The purpose of CSOK Plus is to support realistic housing purposes, so when acquiring the first common home, the price of the apartment should not exceed HUF 80,000,000 (EUR 200,000), and in other cases HUF 150,000,000 (EUR 375,000). CSOK Plus can also be applied for together with the Village CSOK. For homes purchased with CSOK Plus, families are exempt from paying the 4% on-cost transfer duty.

Village CSOK

As of 1 July 2019, the Village Home Subsidy is available, which can be applied for in settlements with a population decreasing more than average. Within the framework of the Hungarian Village Program, it can be used in more than 2,600 settlements, up to 5,000 people, for the purchase, expansion, modernization, expansion, modernization of existing second-hand apartments, or the purchase or construction of new single-dwelling residential buildings.

The amount of the Village CSOK subsidy:

for the purchase of a second-hand apartment with expansion and/or modernization, as well as in the case of the purchase or construction of a new single-dwelling residential building:

- one child (existing or future): HUF 1,000,000 (EUR 2,500);
- two children (existing or future): HUF 4,000,000 (EUR 10,000);
- three or more children (existing or future): HUF 15,000,000 (EUR 37,000).

A maximum of 50% of the amount can be spent on the purchase of a second-hand apartment, on the remaining expansion and modernization.

In case of modernization/expansion of an existing apartment:

- one child: HUF 600,000 (EUR 1,500);
- two children: HUF 2,000,000 (EUR 5,000);
- in the case of three or more children: HUF 7 500 000 (EUR 18 750).

In addition to the non-refundable state support, an interest-supported home loan can be taken out, both when buying used and new property: up to HUF 10 million (EUR 25,000) for two children and up to HUF 15 million (EUR 37,500) for three or more children.

For residential properties purchased with Village CSOK, families are exempt from paying the 4% transfer duty.

Mortgage waiver

The residential mortgage debt taken out before the birth or adoption of the child may be reduced by HUF 1 million for families with a second child, HUF 4 million for those with a third or more children, and HUF 1 million for each additional child.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Hungary, the employment rate of mothers with young children (age group 18-64) was 71.1% and that of fathers was 92.3% in 2023. The employment rate of parents with young children increased for both men and women: in 2006, the employment rate of children under the age of 6 was half of the 2023 data for women, 34.1%, and 79.2% for men. Part-time work is less common than the EU average: in 2023, 5.9% of women and 2.4% of men worked less than 40 hours per week. Compared to men and women in 2009, there is a decrease of 1.2 percentage points for men and 0.6 percentage points for women.

Carer's leave

In Hungary, an employee who cares for a relative with a serious medical condition or someone living in his/her household is entitled to 5 days of unpaid leave per year. Both parents are entitled to extra leave for their children under the age of 16: 2 working days for one child, 4 working days for two children, 7 working days for three or more children, during which the employee is entitled to an absentee pay equal to 100% of his/her earnings. Extra leave increases by 2 working days per disabled child.

Child home care allowance

Child care sick pay is due to the working parent during the illness of a child under the age of 12. Its duration depends on the age of the child: no time limit under 1 year; up to 84 days for a child aged 12-35 months; 42 days for a child aged 36-71 months; and 14 days per year for a child aged 6-12 years. Single parents are entitled to double leave. Leave is family entitlement and sick pay is 50 or 60% of actual earnings up to a certain amount. The maximum daily amount of sick-pay that can be paid is one-thirtieth of twice the minimum wage, in 2024 HUF 17,787 (EUR 44) gross per day.

A parent (including an adoptive parent) caring for a child who is permanently ill (foreseen to be cared for for more than 3 months) or severely disabled and unable to care for himself/herself is entitled to financial support. In 2024, the amount is HUF 266,800 (EUR 667), of which 10% pension contribution is deducted. Those raising two sick children will receive one and a half times this amount, HUF 400,200 (EUR 1,000). Besides receiving this subsidy, earning activities outside the home can be carried out for up to 4 hours a day, and the duration of working from home is not limited.

Flexible working arrangements

Breastfeeding mothers are entitled to 2 x 1 hour per day (2 x 2 hours for twins) for the first 6 months and 1 hour per day (2 hours for twins) for the next 3 months.

Parents returning from parental leave are entitled to flexible working arrangements, if requested by the parent, then the employer is obliged to employ the child part-time instead of full-time until the age of 4. Parents with large families can request flexible working conditions until the youngest child is 6 years old.

Early childhood education and care

Nurseries welcome children from 20 weeks to 3 years of age. Since the restructuring of the nursery system in 2017, parents can choose from several types of nursery, in addition to traditional institutional nursery schools, mini, family and workplace nurseries have also appeared. In all settlements where more than 40 children under the age of 3 live, nursery care must be organized, which can be done by the municipalities independently, by agreement and by association. Nursery care in institutional nurseries run by municipalities is mostly free of charge, parents usually only pay for the catering for children, but it is also free for children from families with three or more children, as well as for children who are permanently ill or disabled. From September 2024, the Hungarian State Treasury will provide a monthly subsidy of HUF 50,000 to rural working parents whose children attend nurseries, which can be used for nursery care and/or meal fees. A parent raising their child alone, as well as a parent with a child of special educational needs, eligible for early development, permanently ill or disabled, may be provided with a monthly allowance of up to HUF 65,000 per child.

In Hungary, the kindergarten is compulsory and free of charge from the age of 3 to 6, where children can eat free of charge depending on the family's income and other considerations (e.g. the number of children raised in the family). Approximately three-quarters of children are entitled to free meals. Primary education can be started at the age of 6.

In 2023, 20% of children aged 0-3 received nursery care (including private childcare), which is a threefold increase compared to 2005, when this figure was only 7%. By 2024, every third Hungarian settlement has a nursery, and nursery care is available in all districts with national coverage.

100% of those aged 3-6 went to kindergarten in 2023, which shows an increase of 15 percentage points compared to 2005, when the participation rate was 85%.

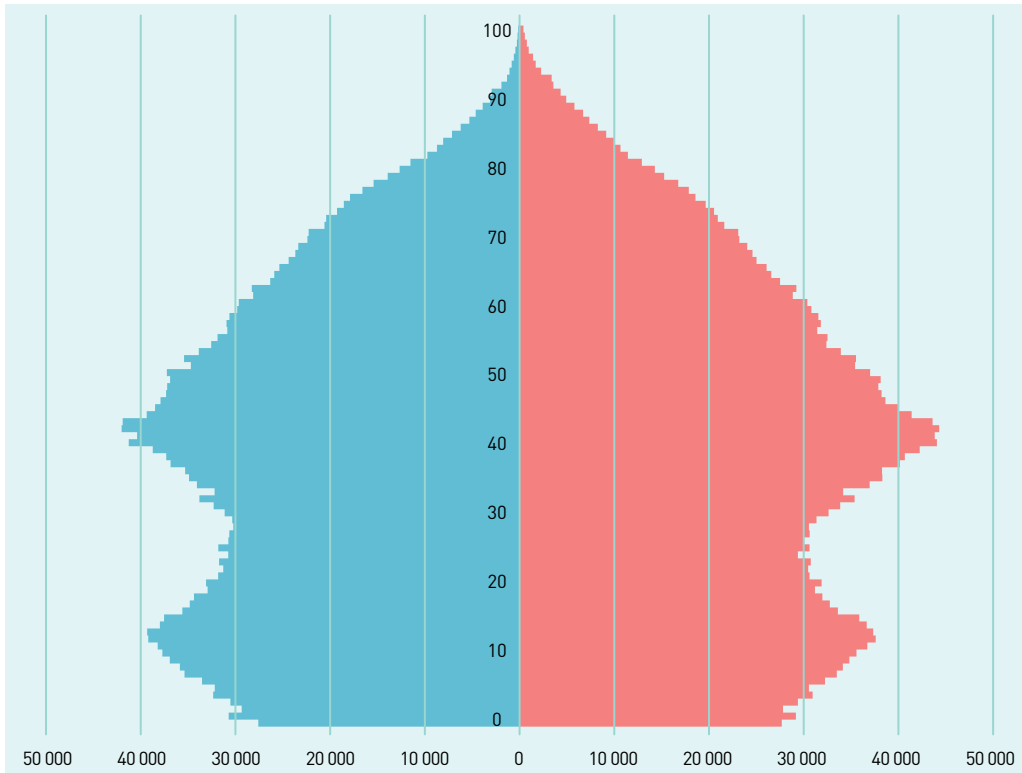


Ireland

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	3 832 783	4 570 881	4 726 286	5 006 324	5 060 004	5 271 395
Live birth (persons)	57 854	74 033	63 841	60 553	54 411	54 686
Death (persons)	30 212	28 456	30 667	34 292	35 000	35 156
Immigrant (persons)	64 925	57 292	85 185	80 732	157 537	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	25 750	83 049	62 056	52 429	61 133	N/A
Marriage (number)	19 246	19 855	22 626	17 217	23 061*	20 513*
Divorce (number)	2 838	2 819	3 197	5 856	N/A	N/A
TFR	1.94	2.03	1.81	1.78	1.54	N/A

Source: Eurostat, *Irish Statistical Office (Download date: 09.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Ireland on 1 January 2023 was 5,271,395, an increase of nearly 1.44 million - some 38% - compared to 2001. More than 80% of the population is Irish, but there are also ethnic groups from neighbouring countries, the Scots and the Welsh. Ireland's largest immigrant groups include the British, Croats, Poles, Americans, Lithuanians, Latvians and Germans.

Ireland's population pyramid shows a balanced society, with a decline in the 20-30 age group and an increase in the teenage population.

Ireland has one of the highest rates of live births in the European Union, ranking second in 2023. There are probably cultural reasons for this, but it has also long had one of the strictest abortion laws. The number of live births increased in the first decade of the millennium but has been on a steady decline since 2011. In 2023, there were around 26% fewer births than in 2011. The number of deaths has been around 30-35,000 per year over the period under review, with an upward trend due to the impact of pandemic COVID-19. Ireland has one of the lowest death rates in 2023. As births are almost twice as high as deaths, the population has increased by 20-35 thousand per year due to natural increase. Births to Irish citizen mothers accounted for more than three quarters (76%) of births in 2022. In 2022, the average age of mothers having their first child was 31.5 years and the average age at childbearing was 33.2 years¹, making Ireland the country with the highest average age at childbearing, two years higher than the EU average (31.1).

In 2001, 25,570 people left Ireland, and between 2011 and 2013, emigration surged, resulting in a negative migration balance. Since then, the number of emigrants has been steadily declining, with 61,133 people leaving the country in 2022 compared to 83,049 in 2011. But this is still almost two and a half times higher than in 2001. At the same time, the number of immigrants has also increased significantly, from 64,925 in 2001 to 57,292 in 2011. Almost two and a half times the number of immigrants in 2001, 157,537 people were moving to Ireland in 2022, the highest number in almost two decades.

The number of marriages has been around 20,000 per year, but presumably because of the epidemic it was very low in 2021, and then peaked in 2022 due to postponed marriages. Compared to 2001, the number of marriages has increased by 6.6% by 2023. Due to the country's traditionalism, the number of divorces was very low, around 3,000 per year, but has increased in recent years. In 2001, there were 2,838 divorces in Ireland, 20 years later, in 2021, the number of divorces more than doubled, with 5,856 couples dissolving their marriages.

¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/05/26/irish-birth-rate-declined-by-20-in-the-last-decade-cso-figures-show/>

Although the number of births has also fallen in recent years, the fertility rate is still higher than the EU average. It peaked between 2007 and 2011, when it exceeded 2.0, and was the country with the highest fertility rate in the EU during this period. After 2011 (2.03), it started to decline and in 2022 it was only 1.54. This is a significant drop compared to 1.78 in 2021 and is now only the ninth highest among the Member States.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Ireland, the Health Service Executive (HSE) directly pays a one-off maternity cash grant of EUR 10 to mothers with full eligibility and health card.

Maternity leave and benefit

Maternity leave is 42 weeks, of which at least 2 weeks must be taken before and at least 4 weeks after the birth. Paid maternity leave for the care of young children is subject to employment and requires at least 39 weeks of social insurance in the year before the birth. The maternity benefit is paid for a total of 26 weeks (156 days) and was EUR 262 per week in 2023.² The benefit is taxable, but no contributions are deducted. No benefit is payable for the additional 16 weeks of maternity leave. In the case of adoption, 40 weeks of leave are granted, of which 24 weeks are paid and 16 unpaid.

Paternity leave

The father is entitled to 10 days' paid leave in the first 6 months after the birth or adoption of the child. The amount of the benefit was EUR 262 per week in 2023.

Parental leave and benefit

Both parents are entitled to 9 weeks of paid parent's leave, which can be taken within the first two years following the birth or adoption of a child. The amount of benefit was EUR 262 per week in 2023. Parent's leave can be taken after maternity or paternity leave.³

In addition, Ireland allows 26 weeks of unpaid parental leave for both parents. The leave can be taken up to the age of 12 of the child, in stages of at least 6 weeks.⁴

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1115&langId=en&intPageId=4602>

³ <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/leave-and-holidays/leave-for-parents/>

⁴ *Blum et al. Leave Policies 2023*

Child benefit⁵

In Ireland, child benefit is provided on a universal basis and tax-free for children up to the age of 16 or 17 if they are in full-time education or have a severe disability. The amount was EUR 140 per child in 2024, paid monthly. For twins, the amount is increased by one and a half times, and for triplets or multiple twins by two times for each child.

A single-parent family with at least one child under 7 years can get a supplementary allowance (*one-parent family payment, OFP*) if the household income is low. The default amount in 2023 was EUR 220 per week, with a supplement of EUR 42 per child aged 12 and under and EUR 50 for older children if they have more than one child. The allowance is taxable.

Low-income families also receive an additional regular tax-free weekly cash benefit (*working family payment, WFP*). The minimum conditions to qualify for this benefit are a 38-hour working week⁶ (self-employment does not count) and at least one child under 18 (under 22 if pursuing full-time education) living with the parents. The amount of the benefit is 60% of the difference between the net family income and the income threshold for the family size in question, but at least EUR 20. In 2023, the benefit was payable for one child if the family's weekly income does not exceed EUR 591, for two children EUR 692, for three children EUR 793, with each additional child increasing the limit by EUR 101.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation⁷

A general family tax allowance is available for those whose dependent child earns less than EUR 16,156 per year. The tax credit amounts to EUR 245 per year. In addition, single-parent families benefit from an annual tax credit of EUR 1,750 in 2024.⁸

Housing

The rent supplement is a means-tested payment, and the tenant must work no more than 30 hours a week to qualify. Tax relief is available to landlords who have tenants in receipt of rent supplement. In addition to the rent supplement, they will still have to contribute to the rent. The minimum contribution is EUR 30 per week for a single person and EUR 40 per week for couples. The average rent for a flat in 2022 was EUR 1,482.

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1115&langId=en&intPageId=4603>

⁶ In Ireland, biweekly payment of wages is common, which explains why the condition is not given as a monthly working time.

⁷ <https://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/health-and-age/dependant-relative-tax-credit/index.aspx>

⁸ <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/money-and-tax/tax/income-tax-credits-and-reliefs/single-person-child-carer-tax-credit/>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Ireland in 2023, the employment rate for mothers with young children aged 18-64 was 71.4% (EU average: 66.4%) and for fathers aged 18-64 92.3% (EU average: 89.6%). Employment rates for parents with young children have increased for both men and women. In 2009, the employment rate for women aged 18-64 with children under 6 was 55.8%, compared with 79.8% for men aged 18-64 with young children. Part-time work is more prevalent than the EU average: in 2023, 30.3% of women aged 15-64 (EU average: 28.5%) and 11.2% of men aged 15-64 (EU average: 8.4%) worked less than 40 hours per week. Compared with 2009, there was an increase for men and a decrease for women, when 10.9% of men and 33.4% of women working part-time in Ireland.

Carer's leave

Parents are entitled to 3-3 working days per year each to care for their sick child, during which time they are entitled to an absence allowance equal to their previous earnings. In the case of caring for another sick relative, the worker may be entitled to unpaid leave or paid leave of between EUR 237 and EUR 355 per week for up to 2 years, depending on the number of dependants and the degree of kinship.

Flexible working arrangements

Parents returning from parental leave are entitled to flexible working conditions, with the possibility to reduce the number of working hours for 6 months. From July 2023, breastfeeding mothers returning to work are entitled to a daily break of 1x60 or 2x30 minutes until their child is 2 years old, whereas previously this was only available until the child was 6 months old.

From November 2023, 5 days paid leave per year will be granted to workers who have been victims of relationship violence and are absent from work as a result.⁹

Early childhood education and care

There are free and paid options for combining family life and work in Ireland. Childcare facilities and au-pairs are also available. Childcare for children under 3 years is not free, but children between 6 months and 3 years receive an average of EUR 80 per month if they spend 40 hours a week in registered childcare. In the public institutional system, kindergarten care is free of charge for children between 3 (but at least 2 years 8 months) and 6 years, typically for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, and 38 weeks a year. For longer

⁹ <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/leave-and-holidays/domestic-violence-leave/>

stays, the institution may charge the family a fee. Children aged 2 to 4 are enrolled in pre-school programme. Children become compulsory-school-age at 6.¹⁰

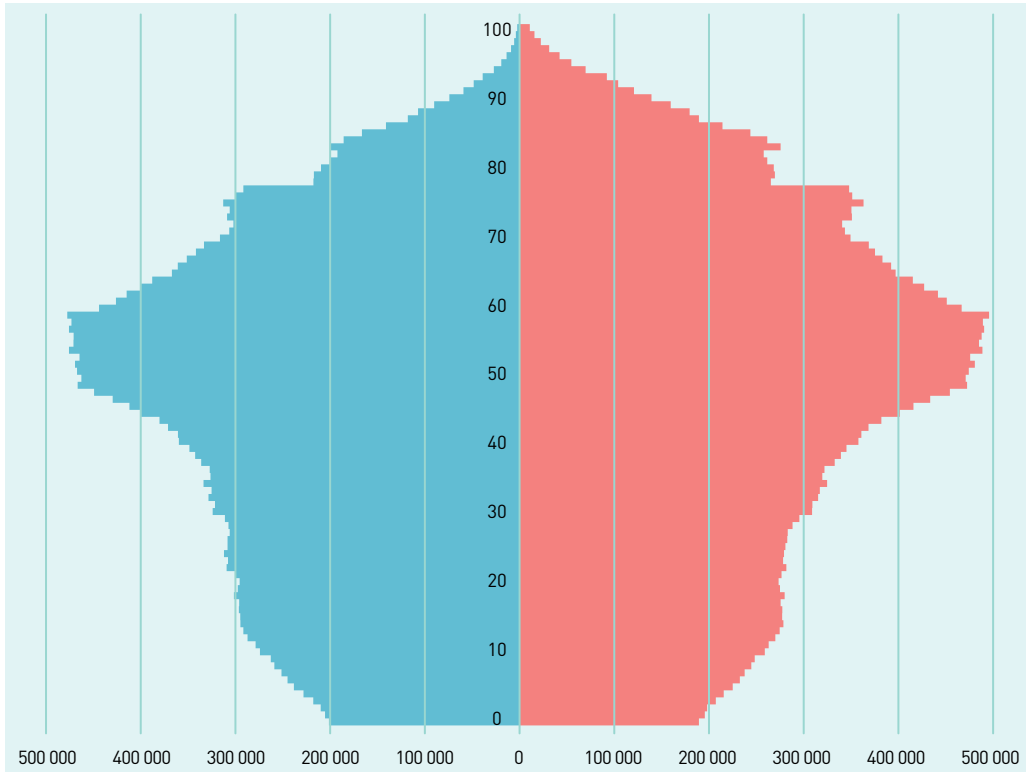
In 2023, 22% of 0–3-year-old children were attending nursery or receiving a similar service, lower than the EU average (37%) and slight increase from 2005 (15%). In 2023, 94% of 3-6-year-old children attended kindergarten, higher than the EU average (89%) and an increase compared to 80% in 2005.

¹⁰ <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre-school-education-and-childcare/early-childhood-care-and-education-scheme/>

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	56 960 692	59 364 690	60 665 551	59 236 213	59 030 133	58 997 201
Live birth (persons)	535 282	546 606	473 438	400 249	393 333	379 000*
Death (persons)	556 892	593 404	615 261	701 346	713 499	661 000*
Immigrant (persons)	208 252	385 793	300 823	318 366	410 985	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	56 077	82 461	157 065	158 312	150 189	N/A
Marriage (number)	264 026	204 830	203 258	180 416	189 140	N/A
Divorce (number)	40 051	53 806	99 071	83 192	82 596	N/A
TFR	1.25	1.44	1.34	1.25	1.24	1.20*

Source: Eurostat, * Italian Statistical Office (Download date: 12/08/2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Italy's population has shown a long-term upward trend, but has been declining since its peak in 2014 (60.8 million people). The population of the country was 58,997,201 in January 2023, which is still a population increase of 2 million (3.6%) compared to 2001. Almost 93% of the country's population is Italian, and 7% is made up of other ethnic groups such as Romanians, North Africans, Albanians, Chinese.

The Italian Bureau of Statistics (ISTAT)¹ estimates that Italy could lose nearly a fifth of its population, with the population falling to 54.2 million by 2050 and 47.7 million by 2070 in the baseline scenario. In its most recent report, ISTAT drew attention to the fact that every fourth resident of Italy is over 65 years old, and the number of centenarians has tripled and increased to 22,000 in the last 20 years. In 39 of Italy's 107 counties, the number of pensioners over the age of 65 is already higher than that of those in active age. The population pyramid of Italy shows the picture of a continuously aging society, where the number of people under the age of 55 is decreasing sharply.

While in 2001 535,282 children were born, in 2023 there were only 379,000, which means a 29.2% decrease. In parallel, the number of deaths has increased, from 556,892 deaths registered in 2001 to 661,000 in 2023, an increase of 18.7%. The impact of the coronavirus epidemic is that the number of deaths was 17% higher in 2020 compared to the previous year, and only in 2023 it fell again below 700,000 people. At the beginning of the 2000s, the number of births and deaths in the country was almost the same (-21,610 people in 2001), but since 2012, natural decrease has been increasing: in recent years, it has been continuously around 300,000 people.

The previous increase in the population of the country and its current stagnation are due to the permanently positive migration balance: thanks to this, the population of the country increased by almost half a million in the middle of the 2000s. In recent years, the value of the migration balance has slightly decreased, but there are still 150-260 thousand more immigrants per year than those who left the country. Between 2001 and 2022, the number of immigrants almost doubled (97.3%). Emigration has been increasing continuously since the beginning of the millennium, and by 2022 it has increased almost three times (from 56,000 to 150,000) as at the beginning of the century, but still less than half the rate of immigration.

From 2001 to 2021, the number of marriages decreased continuously from 264 thousand to 180 thousand. In 2022, it increased slightly, by almost 9,000, but still 28.4% fewer people connected their lives than in 2001. The number of divorces increased year by year

¹ <https://www.istat.it/en/archivio/288492>

from 2001 (40 thousand) to 2016, when it approached 100,000. Since then, apart from the value of 66 thousand in 2020, the decrease has been continuous. By 2022, the number of divorces had doubled compared to 2001.

The fertility rate was 1.25 in 2001, below the EU average (1.43), then increased until 2008 (1.44), and after a short stagnation, the desire to have children decreased continuously from 2010 onwards. The highest value was reached between 2008 and 2010 with 1.44, which fell to 1.24 by 2022, which is the third lowest indicator in the European Union. In 2023, fertility continued to decline (1.20).

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Italy, there is no such benefit.

Maternity leave and benefit

5 months maternity leave (*congedo di maternità*) paid at 80% is due to the insured mother: 1–2 months before childbirth and 3–4 months after childbirth. For up to 3 months after giving birth, the father can also claim “maternity” leave if the mother does not wish to take it. In the case of twins or premature birth, the period of paid leave is extended by 12 weeks.

Paternity leave

Fathers with an insured status are obliged to take 10 days (20 days in the case of the birth of twins) of 100% paid leave (*congedo papà*), which can be started 2 months before the expected birth of the child and can be used up until 5 months of age of the child. In addition to the mandatory paid leave, one additional unpaid day is available. The same rules apply to adoption.

Parental leave and benefit

After the end of the compulsory maternity leave, parents can apply for 9 months of paid childcare leave (*congedo parentale facoltativo/congedo di paternità alternativo*). 3 months are exclusively for the mother, 3 months are exclusively for the father, and 3 months can be shared between the parents until the child is 12 years old. For the first 9 months of parental leave, all employees are entitled to benefits, and if the father takes 3 months of leave, he receives an additional 1 month of parental leave (i.e. the family entitlement increases to 10 months).

For the first month of parental leave, the benefit is 80% of the previous earnings, for the second month it is 60% of the previous earnings, if they take leave before the child turns 6 years old. For the remaining 7 months it is 30% of the previous earnings. After that, the

benefit can be claimed for a further maximum of 2 months until the child reaches the age of 12. In such cases, cash benefits can only be paid if the salary of the claiming parent does not exceed two and a half times the pension minimum (EUR 515 per month in 2021). Those working in the public sector are entitled to 100% of their previous earnings for the first month of childcare leave. A single parent is entitled to 11 months of childcare leave.

Child benefit

The uniform and general support for dependent children (*Assegnounico e universale per i figli a carico*) was introduced in the country in March 2022. The allowance is a monthly financial support paid to households each year on the basis of a specific economic situation indicator (*Indicatore della Situazione Economica Equivalente, ISEE*). The benefit is a differentiated allowance based on the number of children, income situation or other aspects.

All dependent minor children and foetuses from the 7th month of pregnancy are entitled to the benefit. In the case of dependent adult children, the allowance is paid until the age of 21, if the child participates in school, vocational training or professional practice or works and has a total annual income of less than 8,000 EUR. There is no upper age limit for dependent children with disabilities.

The monthly amount of the allowance is between EUR 50 and EUR 175 per child under the age of 18 (regardless of the submission of the family income certificate ISEE, or in case the ISEE value exceeds EUR 40,000 per year). The specific amount also depends on the number of children and the composition of the family, as follows:

- EUR 50-175 for 1 child;
- EUR 100-350 for 2 children;
- EUR 165-610 for 3 children;
- In the case of 4 or more children, the monthly amount of the child benefit is EUR 430-970.

The amount of the allowance determined on the basis of ISEE is also increased by:

- An additional EUR 105 per month per dependent with a disability who is not able to provide for himself/herself, to be reduced to EUR 95 per child with a severe disability or EUR 85 per child with a mild disability.
- Monthly plus EUR 50 for each disabled child between the ages of 18-21.
- Monthly plus EUR 22 for each minor child if the mother is under 21 years old.
- Monthly plus EUR 33 for each minor child if both parents have an income.
- Monthly plus EUR 100 for families with four or more children.

The new benefit has replaced a number of other so-called ‘baby bonuses’ and combined different subsidies aimed at supporting families. It is also called “universal” because it applies to all families with dependent children residing in Italy. Unification of family

support was requested by the European Commission. The bonus for kindergarten costs (*bonus asilo*) remained in place.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

Family tax relief is granted to taxpayers who have a dependent spouse, children and other relatives living with the taxpayer, provided that the annual income of each dependent does not exceed EUR 2,841 (EUR 4,000 for children aged 21-24). In the case of a dependent spouse, a maximum of EUR 800 per year can be claimed, which decreases with the increase in taxable income and is not provided above an income of EUR 80,000. In the case of a dependent child aged 21-24, a maximum of EUR 950 per year can be claimed, which decreases with the increase in taxable income and is not provided above an income of EUR 95,000.²

In its budget for 2024, the government stated that mothers with two or more children will be granted a special tax allowance, but the detailed rules have not yet been published.

Housing

Assistance for the acquisition of the first apartment (Bonus prima casa)

The general discount for the purchase of a first home is the registration tax being reduced to 2%, which applies to everyone, regardless of age and income. In addition, if the young person buys a property from a company, such as a newly built apartment directly from the contractor, the VAT payable will decrease from 10% to 4% of the apartment price.

Home improvement

In Italy, a special kind of state aid is available to help with energy renovations and seismic protection of buildings, the so-called super bonus. Supported works include thermal insulation, modernization of air conditioning, installation of solar panels, power storage devices, fast electric chargers for electric cars. Previously, the total cost was reimbursed, from January 2024 only 70% of the amount will be reimbursed, and from 2025 it will be reduced to 65%.

Other benefits

Free prenatal care and free laboratory tests for pregnant women, and until the child is 6 years old and under 36,152 EUR per year of family income.

Children over the age of 18 receive a one-time lump sum amount of EUR 500, called the culture voucher (*Bonus cultura*), if the annual income of the family does not exceed EUR 35,000 per year.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1116&langId=en&intPageId=4617>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Italy, the employment rate of women with children under the age of 6 in 2023 was 54.1%, which was significantly below the EU average (69.6%). A lower value was only measured in the Czech Republic and Romania. For men, this value is 89.0%, which is close to the average of the Member States (89.6%). In 2023, part-time employment in the country did not differ significantly from the EU average (8.4% of men, 28.5% of women): 7.4% of men and 31.4% of women worked in this form.

In the case of women, childbearing is taken into account in retirement in a limited way: for each mother, the retirement age is reduced by 1 year per child, but no more than 2 children are included.

Carer's leave

Unpaid carer's leave is available to care for a sick child: unlimited for a child under 3 years of age, 5 days per parent for a child between 3 and 8 years of age. During their entire career, employees are entitled to a total of 2 years of long-term carer's leave for the purpose of caring for a permanently ill relative, during which period they are entitled to 100% of their previous salary up to a limit of EUR 47,351 per year.

Home care support for children (*Forme di supporto presso la propria abitazione*): families raising children under the age of 3 with an income below EUR 25,000 may apply for EUR 3,000 per year if the child is unable to attend kindergarten due to a serious chronic illness.

Flexible working arrangements

The paid breastfeeding/feeding working time allowance (*Permesso per allattamento*) is a daily 1-2-hour breastfeeding/feeding working time allowance for the mother or father of the child: in the case of part-time or full-time work, until the child is 1 year old, with full pay.

Flexible working conditions may be required for workers under the age of 6 and for workers raising children who are minors but have a disability.

Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care (nursery, kindergarten) is part of the Italian education system, but participation is not mandatory. Nursery care is organized by the regions, according to uniform regional rules. Supply should be provided at the municipal level, so there is a wide difference between them, there is no uniform solution, and it largely depends on the budgetary opportunities of the municipalities. Both nursery and kindergarten care are subject to the payment of a reimbursement fee.

The city or region provides free or subsidized childcare facilities for low-income families. In the budget for 2024, it was stated that the nursery place will be provided free of charge from the second child, but the detailed rules have not yet been published.

Kindergarten support (*Bonus asilo nido*) is available to working mothers who are not exempt from the kindergarten reimbursement fee. Its amount is EUR 3,000 per year if the annual income of the household does not exceed EUR 25,000, EUR 2,500 per year if the annual income of the household is between EUR 25,001 and EUR 40,000, and EUR 1,500 per year if the annual income of the household exceeds EUR 40,000. In order to use the maximum amount, the receiving parent must live in the same household with his child, otherwise only EUR 1,500 per year can be disbursed. In families where at least one child under the age of 10 is raised and a new child is born, the minimum amount of kindergarten support is EUR 2,100, while the maximum amount increases to EUR 3,600 with the same income limits.³

In 2023, 35% of children aged 0–3 in Italy received some form of nursery care, which is just below the EU average (37%) and represents a slight increase compared to 24% in 2005. In 2023, 95% of Italian children aged 3–6 went to kindergarten, above the EU average (89%), which represents a slight increase compared to 2005 (93%).

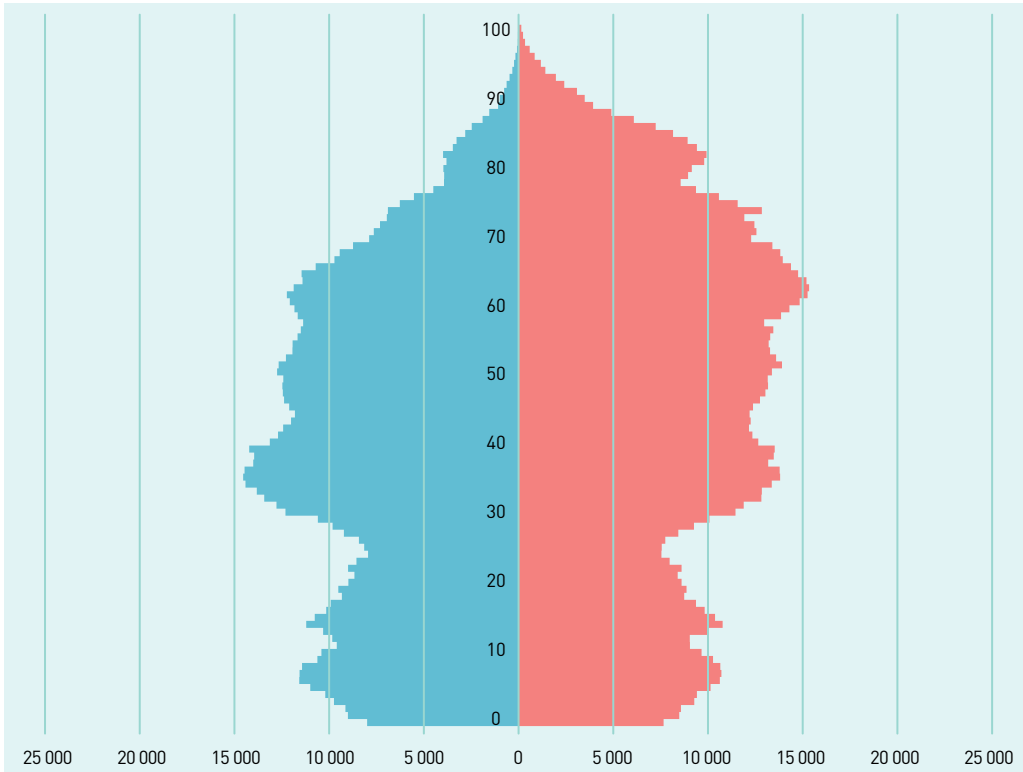
³ <https://siulp.it/bonus-asilo-nido-da-3600-euro-novita-2024/>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	2 353 384	2 074 605	1 968 957	1 893 223	1 875 757	1 883 008
Live birth (persons)	19 726	18 825	21 968	17 420	15 954	14 490
Death (persons)	32 991	28 540	28 580	34 600	30 731	28 031
Immigrant (persons)	N/A	10 234	8 345	12 689	38 708	18 710*
Emigrant (persons)	24 539	30 311	20 574	12 975	16 680	16 295*
Marriage (number)	9 258	10 760	13 002	11 228	11 848	10 549*
Divorce (number)	5 740	8 302	6 061	4 643	5 407	5 312*
TFR	1.36	1.33	1.74	1.57	1.47	1.36*

Source: Eurostat, *Latvian Statistical Office (Download date: 09.08.2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Latvia's population has been in steady decline since the 2000s. While in 2001, the population was 2,353,384, by 1 January 2023 it had fallen to 1,883,008¹, a decrease of 20% compared to 2001.

The country's population pyramid shows a basically ageing society, with a shrinking youth population, with the age group of 25 years and older being the lowest, and the younger age groups showing some increase.

Latvia's population peaked in 1990 at 2.7 million, but has been falling steadily since the 1990s, partly because of natural decrease (deaths have doubled the number of births in recent years) and partly because of a negative migration balance. It is important to note, however, that in 2022 the number of immigrants increased sharply due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Since 2017, the number of births has been steadily decreasing. In 2023, 14,490 children were born, 9.1% fewer than in 2022 and a decrease of 26.5% compared to 2001. This is the lowest rate in the last 100 years. Since 2021, twice as many deaths as births have occurred each year. 2023 was no exception, with deaths exceeding births by 13,541. The number of deaths fell by 15% between 2001 and 2023. The largest difference between births and deaths - 17,180 - was recorded in 2021.

Immigration data from 2001 is not available, but the number of immigrants nearly doubled between 2011 and 2023, with a significant increase in 2022 due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. While in 2021, 12,689 people arrived, in 2022 the number tripled and 38,708 people arrived in Latvia. The largest share of immigrants came from Ukraine (16,801). Emigration decreased steadily from 2011 to 2021, then increased by almost 4,000, from 30,000 people leaving the country annually in 2011 to 16,295 in 2023, of whom 8,670 were Latvian citizens. Compared to 2001, 33.6% fewer people emigrated in 2023.

In 2023, there were 10,549 marriages, an increase of 14% compared to 2001. In 2023, there were 5,312 divorces, a decrease of 7.5% compared to 2001. Among the EU Member States, Hungary (6.9 marriages per 1000 inhabitants) and Latvia (5.6) had the highest number of marriages as a percentage of the population. However, unlike Hungary, Latvia also leads in divorces, with 2.7 divorces per 1000 inhabitants, compared to an EU average of 1.6 in 2022.

Latvia's fertility rate was at its lowest in 2001, at only 1.22. It rose steadily over the following seven years until 2008, then, presumably due to the economic crisis, it fell until 2011. It rose to 1.74 in 2016 and has since fallen again. While in 2021 it was 1.57, in 2022 it was only 1.47, just above the EU average (1.46). In 2023 it fell further to 1.36.

¹ <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/population/247-population-and-population-change?themeCode=IR> - Population on 1 January 2023.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

The maternity allowance (*bērna piedzimšanas pabalsts*) is a one-off benefit of EUR 421 in 2023. It is paid to one parent per child and is of universal basis.²

A compensation for adoption (*atlīdzība par adopciju*) is granted to the person who has adopted a child, after the court decision approving the adoption has come into force. The lump sum of the compensation is EUR 1,423 per child.

Maternity leave and benefit³

Paid maternity leave (*grūtniecības un dzemdību atvaļinājums*) is granted for 112 days, of which 56 days are taken before the birth (pregnancy leave) and 56 days after the birth (maternity leave). It is compulsory to take 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after childbirth. In the event of a threatened pregnancy, the leave can be extended by a further 14 (paid) days.

The amount of the benefit (*maternitātes pabalsts*) for maternity leave is 80% of the average earnings for the previous 12 months.

Paternity leave⁴

After the birth of a child, fathers are entitled to 10 days' paid leave (*atvaļinājums bērna tēvam*). From 2022, paternity leave is 10 working days instead of 10 calendar days. Leave can be taken up to 6 months after the birth. The amount of the benefit (*paternitātes pabalsts*) is 80% of the previous 12 months' average earnings. The average amount of paternity benefit in 2023 was EUR 602.

Parental leave and benefit

Parental leave is a maximum of 18 months, which can be used until the child is 8 years old at the latest and is granted to socially insured parents. The parents can share the leave between them. Parents are entitled to two different allowances for the duration of the leave:

- Child raising allowance (*bērna kopšanas pabalsts*) is available to all parents raising small children and if they have a permanent address in Latvia. The mother is entitled to this benefit even if she is on maternity leave and is no longer employed. The

² MISSOC and https://www.vsa.gov.lv/en/services/childbirth-allowance?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2F

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1117&dangId=en&intPageId=4631>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1117&dangId=en&intPageId=4631>

allowance is paid until the child is 2 years old. The amount of the allowance in 2023 was EUR 171 per month for a child younger than 18 months, and EUR 43 for a child aged 19-24 months. If several children are born during the 2 years of payment, the benefit can be used for each child.⁵

- Parental benefit (*vecāku pabalsts*) is paid to families in which one of the parents previously had an insured relationship. This benefit is provided to one parent until the child is 13 or 19 months old (mostly used by mothers). Parents can choose the duration of the benefit by themselves. If they request the benefit for 13 months, the amount is 60% of their previous earnings, if for 19 months, then 43.75%. Previously, it was possible to apply for this benefit for 1 or 1.5 years, but as of January 1, 2023, the period of parental benefit became 1 month longer. In addition to the benefit, employment is allowed, but in this case, they only receive half of the benefit amount.⁶ If the parental leave expires, the parent can continue to receive child raising allowance until the child is 2 years old.

Adoptive parents are also entitled to paternity and parental leave. Benefits are financed on the same basis as for biological parents. In addition, in the case of a family adopting a child under the age of 18, one of the adopters must also be granted 10 (calendar) days of leave.

Child benefit

The child benefit (*gimenes valsts pabalsts*) is the right of every parent with a permanent address in Latvia, the amount of which depends on the number of raised children. The payment period is minimum of 1 year and maximum of 16 years. If the child is studying in secondary school, the age limit for payment is 20 years, while in the case of a disabled child it is 18 years old.

The monthly amount of family state benefit depends on the number of raised children:

- EUR 25 for one child;
- EUR 100 for two children (EUR 50 per child);
- EUR 225 for three children (EUR 75 per child);
- EUR 100 per child for four or more children.

Single parents do not receive an increased amount of benefit. Parents raising a child with a disability receive EUR 107 per month until the child turns 18. In the case of a multiply disadvantaged family, the amount may increase to EUR 213.

⁵ MISSOC

⁶ MISSOC

Tax credits and other benefits

Since 2013, large families (with three or more children) have benefited from property and vehicle tax exemptions, from 2017 they are entitled to travel concessions on regional train and bus services, and from March 2018 they can benefit from additional family allowances.

Family taxation

Since 2022, employees receive a tax allowance of EUR 250 per month for each child. A non-working spouse caring for a minor child may also receive spousal allowance under certain conditions.⁷

Housing

In June 2020, the Latvian government adopted the Subsidy Balsts (“Support”) programme, modelled on the Hungarian CSOK, which allows families with three or more children to receive non-refundable one-time state support for buying a home or building a house. A family with three children can receive EUR 8,000 to buy a home, or EUR 10,000 if the family buys a home that meets energy-efficient requirements (zero energy demand). The grant for a family with four or more children is EUR 10,000 and EUR 12,000 respectively. The price of the property cannot exceed EUR 250,000 and the annual gross income per family member cannot exceed EUR 17,000. Beneficiaries must be tax resident in Latvia (at least in the previous 12 months). The grant cannot be more than 50% of the total transaction value.⁸

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2023, 75.7% of women aged 18-64 with children under 6 years and 87.7% of men were in work, well above the EU average for women (66.4%) and just below for men (89.6%). Employment of parents with young children, especially mothers, increased between 2009 and 2023. In 2009, 57.2% of women with children under 6 years of age worked, compared to 73.9% of men. Part-time employment is low in the country: in both 2022 and 2023, only 8.9% of women aged 15-64 worked part-time. This is well below the EU average of 28.5% in 2023. For men in Latvia, the figure was 4.2% in 2022 and 4.7% in 2023, also below the EU average of 8.4% in 2023.

⁷ <https://www.fm.gov.lv/en/media/9952/download>

⁸ <https://www.altum.lv/en/services/individuals/subsidy-balsts/>

Carer's leave

Parents with social insurance are entitled to sick leave and benefit for a child up to 14 years of age. Parents are entitled to 14 days off per sickness; if the child needs home care or is hospitalised, 21 days; if the child has an injury caused by bone fracture, 30 days. Parents whose child has been diagnosed with a severe illness, or parents who receive the allowance for the care of a disabled child, are entitled to up to 26 weeks' sick pay if their child needs long-term hospital treatment. Grandparents, foster parents and guardians may also be entitled to sickness benefit. Sickness benefit is taxable and calculated in the same way as maternity and paternity benefit.

An employer may grant leave if the employee's spouse, parent, child or other close family member or a person living in the same household with the employee needs to be cared for due to a serious health reason. Such leave may be granted for a period of 5 working days within one year.

Flexible working arrangements

Parents (both mothers and fathers) with a child up to 18 months of age are entitled to a paid additional break for (breast)feeding their child – at least 30 minutes every three hours (or at least 60 minutes every three hours, if a parent has more than one child up to 18 months of age). Upon request, parents are entitled to combine these breaks, thus prolonging a lunch break or shortening their working day.

Pregnant women and mothers a child up to 14 years of age (or up to 18 years if a child has a disability) are entitled to part-time work.

An employee who has a child under the age of 8 (or who has to care personally for a spouse, parent, child or other close family member or person living in the same household) is entitled to ask his or her employer for flexible working.

Early childhood education and care

The maximum duration of maternity and parental leave is 38 months, but just over half of this is paid leave, so many parents return to work when their child turns 18 months old. According to the Education Act, the municipality/local authority is responsible for ensuring that children over 18 months of age registered in its territory receive early childhood education and care in the institution nearest to their place of residence. In principle, therefore, when a parent returns to work from paid parental leave, the institutional care of his/her child is guaranteed. In public nurseries, attendance is free of charge. In practice, however, municipalities are not able to provide places in municipal institutions for all the children in their area. For example, in October 2022, around 7,000 children aged between 1.5 and 6 years were left without a place. Municipalities therefore provide financial support to pay the fees of private institutions if there is no place for a child in municipal institutions after the age of 18 months.

Education in kindergarten is provided by state, by municipalities, as well as by private facilities. Public kindergartens are free, but parents pay extra for meals and other school supplies. The pre-school programme is compulsory and free for children aged 5 and 6.⁹ In 2023, 35% of children aged 0-3 attended nursery services (including private childcare), an increase of 25 percentage points compared to 2005, when the figure was 10%. 95% of children aged 3-6 years attended nursery school in 2023, an increase compared to 2005 when the participation rate was 70%.

⁹ <https://www.liveriga.com/en/12264-the-education-system-in-latvia>

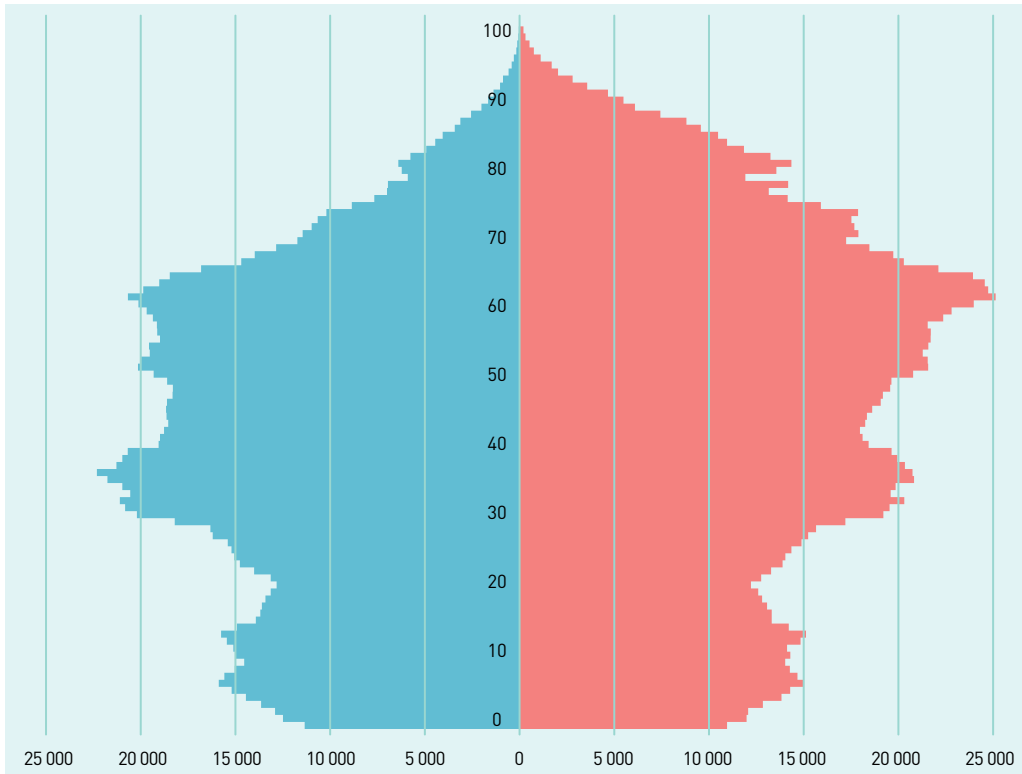


Lithuania

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	3 486 998	3 052 588	2 888 558	2 795 680	2 805 998	2 857 279
Live birth (persons)	31 185	30 268	30 623	23 330	22 068	20 623
Death (persons)	40 399	41 037	41 106	47 746	42 884	37 005
Immigrant (persons)	4 694	15 685	20 162	44 858	87 367	66 682 *
Emigrant (persons)	27 841	53 863	50 333	25 205	15 270	21 688*
Marriage (number)	15 764	19 221	21 347	16 795	16 016	13 997*
Divorce (number)	11 024	10 341	8 879	7 822	7 395	7 231*
TFR	1.29	1.55	1.69	1.36	1.27	1.18*

Source: Eurostat, * Lithuanian Statistical Office (Download date: 08. 09. 2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Lithuania's population has been on a steady downward trend since the 2000s. In 2001, the population of the country was 3,486,998, which decreased to 2,857,279 people by 1 January 2023, which meant a population loss of nearly 630,000 people - 18% - over the last two decades. More than 84% of the population is Lithuanian and the proportion of Polish, Russian and Belarusian minorities is around 13.3%.

The country's population pyramid basically shows an aging society and a declining youth due to a significant decrease in those under the age of 30.

Until 2018, the number of live births varied around 30,000 per year, and since then there has been a significant decrease: from 2001 to 2023, the number of live births decreased by 33.9%. The number of deaths increased until 2021. After the 2021 peak (pandemic-related), the decline started and decreased by 2023 by 8.4% compared to 2001. While the country experienced a negative natural increase of 9,000 people in 2001, it increased to 16,000 people by 2023.

The number of immigrants has increased significantly since 2011, which has increased further in recent years, to a total of 9 and a half times between 2001 and 2021. And from 2021 to 2022, presumably due to the war in Ukraine, their number doubled but decreased by a quarter (23.7%) by 2023. There is also a fluctuation in the rate of emigration in Lithuania. While the population decreased by 30 thousand in 2016 due to international migration, the migration balance has been clearly positive in recent years. Compared to 2001, the rate of immigration increased by 14 times, while the number of emigrants decreased by 22.1%.

The number of marriages increased until 2016, but has decreased since then, with 11.2% fewer marriages in 2023 compared to 2001. The number of divorces has been declining steadily since 2011, by about a third in total compared to 2001.

Among the Lithuanian population, the desire to have children increased from 2001 to 2016: from 1.29 to 1.63, the latter already above the EU average. However, the trend has reversed in the recent period and dropped to 1.27 in 2022, which is even lower than the previous negative record of 2001. In 2022, the EU average was 1.46 and Lithuania had the fourth lowest indicator, which continued to deteriorate in 2023.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

Every newborn or adopted child is entitled to a lump sum child benefit (*vienkartinė išmoka vaikui*) equal to 11 times the basic social benefit (EUR 605 in 2024). Lump sum child benefit is payable to one of the child's parents, single parent, adoptive parents, or guardian.¹

Maternity leave and benefit

In order to take maternity leave, the mother has to have maternity social insurance record of at least 12 of the previous 24 months. The maternity benefit (*motinystės išmoka*) is paid for 126 days, starts 70 days before the expected date of birth, and is paid until the child is 56 days old. For the period of maternity leave (*motinystės atostogos*), a maternity benefit of 78% of the previous earnings is due, the amount of which cannot be lower than EUR 294. Lithuania is one of the few countries where there is no mandatory maternity leave. In case of multiple births or complications, eligibility is extended by 14 days.²

A pregnant woman who is not eligible for maternity benefit is entitled to a lump sum benefit for pregnant women (*vienkartinė išmoka nėščiai moteriai*) equal to 6.43 times the basis social benefit (EUR 354 in 2024)³ 70 days before the scheduled childbirth date.⁴

Paternity leave

Fathers are also entitled to paid paternity leave (*tėvystės atostogos*), if they have been in employment for at least 6 months in the 2 years prior to the birth of the child. The leave is 30 calendar days, which can be split into two parts until the child is one year old. The amount of the paternity benefit is 77.58% of the previous earnings and cannot be lower than EUR 294.

Parental leave and benefit⁵

Parental leave (*vaiko priežiūros atostogos*) in Lithuania lasts until the child is 3 years old. For the duration of the leave, the parent receives a childcare benefit (*vaikopriežiūros išmoka*), which is conditional on social insurance and can be granted until the child is 2 years old.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1119&langId=en&intPageId=4659>

² Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

³ <https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/activities/family-and-children/social-assistance-to-families-and-children/assistance-to-pregnant-women-and-families-raising-children>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1119&langId=en&intPageId=4660>

⁵ <https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/activities/social-insurance-1/social-insurance-benefits/childcare-benefit>

The condition of eligibility is that the claimant has at least 12 months of insurance in the 24 months before the birth of the child. Since January 2023, both mother and father are entitled to a non-transferable period of 2 months, during which they receive 78% of their previous salary. The duration of the transferable part of the parental leave can be chosen by the (grand)parent, the shorter the stay at home, the higher the amount of the benefit. If someone insured chooses to receive the benefit up until the child is 18 months old, it amounts to 60% of their earnings. Where someone chooses to receive the benefit up until the child is 2 years old, it amounts to 45% of earnings for the first year, and 30% for the second year. Twins are also entitled to the full amount in the second year. The amount of the benefit cannot be lower than six times the basic social benefit (EUR 294). If more than one child is born at the same time, an additional EUR 220 per child will be added to the childcare benefit. The benefit is paid monthly, from birth until the child is 2 years old. There is no childcare benefit disbursed during parental leave between the ages of 2 and 3 of the child. If a sibling is born during parental leave, the parent is entitled to benefits for both children, provided that the total amount of benefits cannot exceed 78% of his/her previous salary.

Special rules apply to work during the payment of the childcare benefit. If the parents are engaged in gainful activity during the non-transferable leave period, the benefit is reduced by the amount of income. It is also possible to engage in gainful activity during transferable parental leave period, but the amount of the benefit and the wage together cannot exceed the salary from which the benefit is calculated. For parents receiving the minimum childcare benefit amount, the benefit will not be reduced if the childcare benefit and other additional income do not exceed the monthly minimum wage.

In the absence of an employment relationship, a childcare benefit for persons in training or education (*Išmoka besimokančio ar studijuojančio asmens vaikopriežiūrai*) is due to the biological parent or adoptive parent with a student status until the age of 2 of the child, if no childcare benefit is paid to the other parent. It amounts to EUR 330 per month in 2024 during studies and for 12 months after completion of studies.

Child benefit⁶

The child benefit (*išmoka vaikui*) consists of two subsidies. Both are due until the child is 18 years old or 23 years old if they continue their education. The basic child benefit is provided to every family, regardless of family income, while the additional child benefit is dependent on the income and the number of children.

The amount of the basic child benefit in 2024 is 1.75 times the minimum allowance, EUR 96 per month for each child. Entitlement to the supplementary child benefit depends on the number of children and the family's per capita income. The amount is EUR 57 EUR

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1119&langId=en&intPageId=4659>

per month, which is paid in addition to the basic child benefit. Eligibility is conditional for families with one or two children, provided that the per capita income does not exceed EUR 352. Income is not assessed for families with three or more children or children with disabilities.

In families where one parent performs compulsory military service, an additional amount of EUR 83 per month is paid for each child for the duration of the service.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Lithuania, there is no family tax credit.

Municipalities pay families EUR 96 per month for each child up to the age of 18 or 21 for full-time study.⁷ Additional child benefit is also available for certain low-income families, families with three or more children, etc.

Housing

In Lithuania, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

According to the 2022 data of the Lithuanian Social Insurance Fund Directorate (SODRA), 75.6% of those taking parental leave were mothers and 24.4% were fathers.

The employment rate among women with children under the age of 6 (age group: 18-64) was 75.4% in 2023, exceeding the EU average of 66.4%. For men, the indicator was 90.2%, also above the EU average (89.6%). In 2009, these values were lower, 76.0% for men and 63.9% for women. In 2023, the part-time employment rate for women aged 15-64 was 7.7% and 4% for men, both much lower than the EU average (28.5% and 8.4%, respectively). A decrease can be observed for both genders, as in 2009, 9.1% of women worked part-time and 6.7% of men.

Carer's leave

Both parents are entitled to 2 weeks of childcare leave per year to care for their sick child under the age of 14.

⁷ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/lithuania/individual/deductions>

The provisions of the Work-Life Balance directive on carers' leave have not yet been transposed in Lithuania.⁸

Flexible working arrangements

The conditions for flexible working have been created since 2017. It became possible to conclude individual agreements, to work according to a flexible work plan, to work overtime or to combine working hours.

In addition to the general rest periods to be held at least every 3 hours, breastfeeding mothers may be provided with a half-hour breastfeeding break during which the worker is entitled to her average wage.⁹ At the request of the mother, breastfeeding breaks may be combined and used to shorten the working day.

Early childhood education and care

The early childhood education and care institutional system is available until the beginning of pre-school education, that is, until the age of 5-6 years, but is not compulsory. Since the length of parental leave is typically 1-2 years, children rarely attend an institution before the age of 1.5. The vast majority of facilities welcome children from the age of 2.

Care for children under 3 years varies by region, it is not free but subsidised. Education in kindergarten between 3 and 6 years of age is free in public institutions. Parents pay extra for meals and other services. Children must start pre-school in the calendar year in which they turn 6. Primary education begins at the age of 7.

In 2023, 20% of children aged 0–3 in Lithuania received nursery care, which is well below the EU average (37%) and represents an increase compared to 2005 (11.1%). In 2023, 92% of children aged 3–6 went to kindergarten, above the EU average (89%), which is a significant increase compared to 2005 (62.1%).

⁸ Executive summary | Integrating Services for Older People in Lithuania | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org)

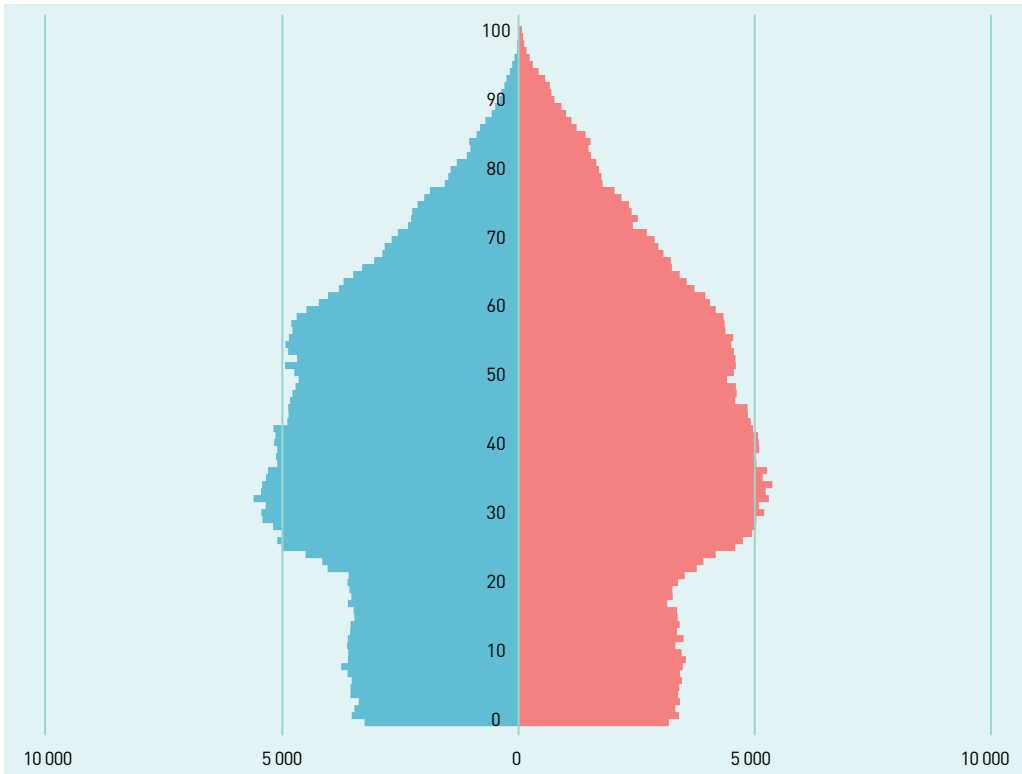
⁹ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	439 000	511 840	576 249	634 730	645 397	672 050
Live birth (persons)	5 459	5 639	6 050	6 690	6 495	6 320
Death (persons)	3 719	3 819	3 967	4 489	4 449	4 431
Immigrant (persons)	12 135	20 268	22 888	25 335	31 433	26 964 *
Emigrant (persons)	8 824	9 264	13 442	15 959	17 227	16 588*
Marriage (number)	1 983	1 714	1 884	1 945	2 475	2 539*
Divorce (number)	1 028	1 218	1 241	1 400	1 243	1 359*
TFR	1.66	1.52	1.41	1.38	1.31	1.25*

Source: Eurostat, * Lithuanian Statistical Office (Download date: 08. 09. 2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Luxembourg has been growing steadily over the last two decades. In 2001, the country was inhabited by 439,000 people, and by January 2023, the population had risen to 672,050, meaning an increase of 53%. Half of the population of Luxembourg (52%) is Luxembourgish, with the largest number of minorities coming from EU countries, including Portuguese, French, Belgian and Italian.

The population pyramid of Luxembourg depicts an ageing society where the number of young people has decreased significantly, while the age group of 30 is the largest.

Both births and deaths increased over the period examined: the number of live births increased by 15.8% and the number of deaths increased by 19.1% between 2001 and 2023. The number of births significantly exceeds the number of deaths, and the population increases by about 2,000 per year due to natural increase.

The rate of immigration has steadily increased over the past 20 years, and apart from the year 2022, which was marked by the war, the number of immigrants more than doubled between 2001 and 2023, increasing by 122.2%. In parallel, emigration almost doubled, from 8,824 to 16,588, meaning an 88% increase. The country's migration balance has been positive since 2001: while the population of the country increased by 3,300 in 2001, it approached 10,000 by 2021 and exceeded 14,000 in 2022.

The desire to marry basically stagnated from 2001 to 2021, during this period slightly less than 2,000 marriages were contracted annually. From 2022, this number has increased to over 2,000, reaching 2,539 in 2023. Thus, it increased by 28% between 2001 and 2023. At the same time, the number of divorces also increased by 32.2% from 2001 to 2023.

Despite the growing population, the desire to have children is constantly decreasing. Its value decreased from 1.66 in 2001 to 1.31 in 2022, which is below the EU average (1.46). In 2023, the desire to have children decreased further to 1.25.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Luxembourg, birth grant (*allocation de naissance*) is granted to women who have undergone all mandatory medical examinations. The birth grant amounts to EUR 1,740 and is paid in three equal instalments (EUR 580) during pregnancy after 5 examinations, after childbirth and when the child is 2 years old.¹

Maternity leave and benefit

Mothers who have worked for at least 6 months in the year before giving birth are entitled to maternity allowance (*prestations en espèces de maternité*) from the 8th week before the expected birth of the child to the 12th week after giving birth. It amounts to 100% of the previous income, which cannot be lower than the Luxembourg minimum wage (EUR 2,571 in 2023) and cannot be higher than five times the minimum wage (EUR 12,855 in 2023). The benefit is subject to tax and contribution. The adoptive parents are entitled to 12 weeks of leave after the adoption.

Paternity leave

The duration of paid paternity leave (*pappecongé*) is 10 days, for the first 2 days of which the employer pays 100% of the earnings. For the remaining 8 days, the state pays the full salary, but up to an amount equal to five times the social wage minimum, which is EUR 12,541 per month in 2022. Paternity leave can be taken in several instalments, but only until the child is 2 months old.

Parental leave and benefit

The condition for taking parental leave is that the parent can prove at least 1 year of employment in Luxembourg. The duration of paid parental leave, depending on the weekly working time, is 4-20 months for each parent separately. This paid leave must be commenced by one of the parents immediately after the maternity leave. The other parent can use his/her part at any time until the child is 6 years old. Since both parents have their own entitlements, it cannot be shared or transferred, but it is possible for the parents to use it at the same time.

The benefit for this period is the parent's previous salary but cannot be less than the minimum wage and more than 5/3 of the minimum wage, that is, between EUR 2,508

¹ <https://cae.public.lu/en/allocations/primes-de-naissance.html>

and EUR 4,180.² During parental leave, at least 10 hours of work per week is mandatory. In the case of part-time work, the leave period increases proportionally while reducing the amount. In addition, it is also possible for the parent to suspend work for 1 month at a time for 20 months.

Child benefit

In Luxembourg, the child is entitled to “*allowance for the children’s future*” regardless of the family’s income (*allocation pour l’avenir des enfants or allocation familiale*). It is granted to all children, who have their legal domicile in Luxembourg aged under 18, or 25 if they are still pursuing secondary studies or affected with disability. State financial assistance is provided for university studies instead of a family allowance.

Its amount increases with age. In 2023, the basic amount was EUR 300.³ For children aged 6–11, this amount is increased by EUR 23 per month and for children over 12, by EUR 57 per month. Children under 25 who have a permanent reduced mental or physical capacity of at least 50% receive an additional monthly amount of EUR 200.

An “*allowance payable at the beginning of the school year*” (*allocation de rentrée scolaire*) is paid once a year to compensate for financial costs related to the new school year, such as the purchase of school supplies, clothing, etc.⁴ The amount is EUR 115 for children aged 6–11 and EUR 235 for those over 12.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

The amount of the tax relief for children (*bonification d’impôt pour enfant*) is EUR 923 per child, provided that the income of taxpayer parents does not exceed EUR 76,600. If 6 or more children live in the parent’s household, the income threshold of EUR 76,600 is not considered.⁵ Single people are entitled to a higher amount of child tax relief (EUR 1,500) if their income is less than EUR 35,000. For incomes between EUR 35,000 and EUR 105,000, this gradually decreases to EUR 750. Above EUR 105,000 the tax allowance is EUR 750.⁶

² Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

³ <https://cae.public.lu/en/allocations/allocation-pour-lavenir-des-enfants/montants.html>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1120&langId=en&intPageId=4675>

⁵ <https://guichet.public.lu/en/citoyens/fiscalite/declaration-impot-decompte/pension/changement-situation-personnelle/enfant-bonification-impot.html>

⁶ <https://www.fiduciaire-lpg.lu/en/publications/personal-taxation/dependent-children-and-tax-benefits>

Housing

There are several types of support available in the country:⁷

- *Rent subsidy*: the most disadvantaged households can benefit from it if the rent exceeds 25% of their monthly income. A single person earning a maximum of EUR 3,127 will receive a grant of EUR 200, a couple earning EUR 4,800 will receive EUR 360, and a family with three or more children may receive up to EUR 400 per month, depending on income.
- *State aid to finance a security deposit*: it helps tenants who are unable to pay the deposit required at the time of signing the rental agreement, which can amount to up to 3 months of rent.
- *Subsidized housing rental*: some housing is reserved by the state for low-income households. These homes can be requested from the Housing Fund or the Social Office of the municipalities.

The WeConnect platform connects seniors with sublet-seeking students to ensure intergenerational coexistence. On the one hand, it provides companionship and assistance for the elderly, as well as additional income, and on the other hand, it provides affordable housing for students. The average rent for an apartment in 2022 was EUR 1,479.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Luxembourg, the employment rate of those raising children under the age of 6 (age group 18-64) was higher than the EU average (66.4% for women and 89.6% for men), with 78.4% of women and 91.1% of men being active on the labour market in 2023. In 2009, this value was still 63.9% for women, that is, the employment rate of women with children under the age of 6 increased by almost 25% compared to 2023. Among men, there was no significant change over the period. In 2009, 91.6% of men with small children worked. The proportion of part-time employment among 15-64-year-olds is similar to the EU average: 29.4% for women and 8.4% for men in 2023. (The EU average is 28.5% for women and 8.4% for men.) In 2009, 34.9% of women worked part-time and 4.5% of men.

Since 2016, parental leave has become increasingly attractive to fathers. While 3,557 women and 1,163 men used it in December 2016, the number of female and male beneficiaries equalized by December 2018. By December 2022, the number of male beneficiaries had already exceeded the number of women (7,169 men took parental leave, compared to 5,529 women). In 2022, about 68% of mothers took the full-time version

⁷ <https://guichet.public.lu/en/citoyens/aides/logement-construction/aides-logement.html>

of leave, about 21% chose the part-time version, and only 11% took leave in several instalments. For fathers, the pattern is very different; 30% used the full-time version of parental leave, 22% used the part-time option, and 48% took leave in several instalments.

Carer's leave

Up to 18 days per child per year (depending on the age of the child) of at least 66% paid carer's leave or, in the case of disability or serious illness, up to 52 weeks of carer's leave is available per parent (this latter can be taken in 2 years). In addition, as carer's leave for family members a maximum of 5 days per relative can be taken, paid at 50%.⁸

Flexible working arrangements

Mothers who breastfeed their children are entitled to a 2x45 minute or 1x90 minute break per day, for which they are entitled to their salary.

After returning from parental leave, civil servants may require flexible working arrangements until the child is 4 years old, while private sector workers may require flexible working arrangements until the child is 1 year old.

Early childhood education and care

The multilingual education programme introduced in Luxembourg enables children from 1 to 4 years of age to receive 20 hours of free day care per week (for 46 weeks per year), which is available only to children attending institutions (i.e. not to children raised by nannies). The nursery may charge families a fee if they spend more than 20 hours a week in the institutions. In practice, entitlement to early childhood care begins at the age of 3 and the compulsory school system begins from the age of 4. Through the system of childcare vouchers, the state provides support for the use of childcare services up to the child's age of 12.⁹ The provision of childcare also includes a number of specialized care networks: the Maison Relais (MRS – a day-care centre controlled by the local authority), nurseries, foster homes, and parental assistants. For families with more than 4 children, parents do not have to pay for childcare services. The financial contribution is limited to 60 hours per week and EUR 6 per hour (in the case of parental assistance EUR 4 per hour.).

In 2023, 60% of children aged 0–3 in Luxembourg received nursery care, which is higher than the EU average (37%) and represents a significant increase compared to 2005 (22%). In 2023, 85% of children aged 3–4 went to kindergarten, which is slightly below the EU average (89%), and a slight increase compared to 2005 (74%).

⁸ <https://guichet.public.lu/en/entreprises/ressources-humaines/conges/situation-perso.html>

⁹ <https://luxtoday.lu/en/knowledge/childcare-service-vouchers-csa-in-luxembourg>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	391 415	414 989	450 415	516 100	520 971	542 051
Live birth (persons)	3 957	4 165	4 476	4 395	4 309	4 374
Death (persons)	2 935	3 267	3 342	4 163	4 182	4 164
Immigrant (persons)	N/A	5 465	17 051	18 148	34 964	42 239*
Emigrant (persons)	N/A	3 806	8 303	13 509	13 166	21 279*
Marriage (number)	2 194	2 562	3 034	2 276	2 546	2 036*
Divorce (number)	*	42	371	320	502	501*
TFR	1.48	1.45	1.37	1.13	1.08	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Maltese Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Malta's population has been growing steadily since the 2000s, reaching 542,051 on 1 January 2023, a significant increase of 38.5% compared to 2001. According to official statistics, Malta is not considered to have a diverse ethnicity, although there are African communities living on the island.

The country's age pyramid shows a picture of an ageing society, with a steep decline in the number of people under 30.

The number of live births increased by 10.5% and deaths by 41.9% between 2001 and 2023, with a rather upward trend until 2016, then fluctuating and stabilising around 4,300-4,400 from 2020. The number of deaths increased significantly after 2016, but has stagnated in the last three years. Although the gap between births and deaths has narrowed in the last years of the period under review, the country is still characterised by natural increase.

From 2011 onwards, both immigration and emigration have increased in Malta. Between 2011 and 2023, the number of immigrants increased from 5,465 to 42,000, an increase of more than seven and a half times. The increase is smaller for emigration, but from 2011 to 2023, the number of emigrants has more than five and a half times increased. The country has a positive net migration balance, which has allowed the population to grow steadily.

The number of marriages jumped sharply from 2001 to 2016, then fell from 2017 onwards, and fell further in 2020, presumably due to restrictions imposed by Covid. However, even after the restrictions were lifted, marriage rates did not return to their previous levels, although they rose in 2022, but still fell by 7.2% overall between 2001 and 2023.

Divorce was not possible in Malta until 2011 (42 divorces were registered in that year), however, after the authorization, the number of divorces increased almost eightfold from 2011 to 2021. The sudden increase in 2022 (502 divorces) may also be linked to the amendment of the legislation in 2020, which reduced the previously required 4 years of separation to 6 months. In 2023, the number of divorces did not increase further, 501 divorces were registered, which is twelve times the number in 2011.

The fertility rate in Malta shows that the desire to have children decreased significantly between 2001 and 2022. In 2001, the rate of 1.48 exceeded the EU average (1.43). By 2022, this had dropped significantly, and the number of 1.08 was the lowest in the European Union, far below the EU average (1.46). Since 2017, Malta has been the country with the lowest fertility in the EU.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant¹

The Child Birth or Adoption Bonus (*Bonus Għal Twelid ta' Tarbija jew Addozzjoni*), introduced from 1 January 2020, is paid to the mother of a newborn child or the adopter of a newborn child if they have been resident in Malta for 10 years prior to the child's arrival. The amount is a one-off payment of EUR 400. If the mother gives birth to or adopts more than one child, the bonus is paid for each newborn or adopted child.

Maternity leave and benefit²

For working or self-employed mothers, the total maternity leave is 18 weeks, of which 10 weeks must be taken after the birth and 8 weeks can be taken freely, before or after the birth. The maternity benefit (*Benefiċċju tal-Maternità*) for the first 14 weeks is paid by the employer and is 100% of the mother's earnings, with no upper limit. For the remaining 4 weeks of maternity leave, the Maltese government provides a maternity leave benefit (*Benefiċċju dwar Liv tal-Maternità*), which is equal to the statutory minimum wage, and was EUR 193 per week in 2023. Adoptive parents are also entitled to this benefit. For unemployed mothers, maternity leave is 14 weeks, for which they receive a benefit of EUR 101 per week.

Paternity leave³

The father is entitled to 10 working days' paid leave, during which he receives his full salary, with no upper limit. The leave must be taken in one go within 15 days after the birth or adoption of the child.

Parental leave and benefit⁴

Parental leave is an unpaid entitlement in Malta that requires at least 12 months of continuous employment. For private sector workers, both parents are entitled to 4 months (for a total of 8 months), while public sector workers are entitled to 12 months. The leave can be taken up until the child is 8 years old, in several instalments (4, 6 or 9 consecutive months) and can be shared between the parents, if both are public servants. In the private sector, the 4 months can be broken down into one-one-month periods and can be taken up until the child is 10 years old - full-time or part-time, in phases or on a time credit basis. Parents cannot be on parental leave at the same time.

¹ <https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/en/information-and-applications-for-benefits-and-services/family-benefits/child-birth-and-adoption-bonus/>

² <https://dier.gov.mt/en/Employment-Conditions/Leave/Pages/Maternity-Leave.aspx>

³ <https://dier.gov.mt/en/Employment-Conditions/Leave/Pages/Birth-Leave.aspx>

⁴ <https://dier.gov.mt/en/Employment-Conditions/Leave/Pages/Parental-Leave.aspx>

Public administration employees may also take a single 5-year career break in Malta until the child reaches the age of 10. This is unpaid but is considered a social security entitlement (so-called credit) for parents and legal guardians caring for a child under 6 years of age. The credits are paid for the first three children, even if the parent does not return to work. The 5 years must be completed in one continuous period, but can be reduced by multiples of 3 months (e.g. 36, 39, 42 months). If the 5 years are not used in full, unused leave may be taken for subsequent periods to care for another child/children. The career break can be taken by both parents at the same time, if they are both public sector employees. In the private sector, this option is at the discretion of the employer.⁵

Child benefit

The child benefit (*Allowance tat-Tfal*) is an income-related benefit that is paid until the child reaches the age of 16, or 21 if the child is in further education. It is usually paid to the mother.

Its minimum amount is EUR 450 per child per year, its maximum amount per month is, depending on the number of children:⁶

- One child: EUR 104;
- Two children: EUR 209;
- Three children: EUR 313;
- Four children: EUR 417;
- Each additional child: EUR 104.

If the total annual income of the two parents is below EUR 27,006, they subtract their income from the EUR 27,006 and receive 6.5% of the difference for each child. Above the income threshold of EUR 27,006, families receive an annual payment of EUR 450 per child.

In addition to the above, families with an income above the threshold of EUR 27,006 will also receive a lump sum of EUR 390 per year and families with an income below the threshold will receive EUR 410.

In addition to the family allowance, single parents are also entitled to social assistance (*Għajjnuna Soċjali*) if they are unemployed or on a low income. The amount of social assistance is EUR 111 per person per week, plus EUR 8 per week for each additional member of the household.

A parent caring for a disabled child receives an additional benefit of EUR 30 per week, regardless of the parents' income. This benefit (*Allowance għal tfal b'Diżabilità*) is paid to all families with children with a physical or mental disability who do not receive any other social security benefit for the same disability.

⁵ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1121&langId=en&intPageId=4690>

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation⁷

In Malta, the personal income tax rate is a flat rate of 35% for annual income above EUR 60,000 and 0-15-25% below EUR 60,000, depending on income. Parents with children under 18 (and with an annual income of up to EUR 3,400 in their own right) can benefit from the lower tax rate up to a higher income threshold. Married taxpayers also benefit from a more favourable tax treatment than the rates for parents, and in certain cases single parents or widows may also be eligible.

Housing

In Malta, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2023, the employment rate of women aged 15-64 was 70.7% (EU average: 65.7%), and that of men was 84.5% (EU average: 75.1%). Between 2009 and 2023, employment in Malta increased significantly. In 2009, only 38% of women and 71.9% of men worked. The employment rate of women with young children (18-64-year-olds raising children under 6) was 73.7% in 2023 (EU average: 66.4%); for men, the same was 95.2% (EU average: 89.6%). Compared to 2009, the proportion of working mothers with young children has increased significantly (2009: 38.2%, 2023: 73.7%). An increase is also visible in the case of men, but not as significant as in the case of women (2009: 90.5%, 2023: 95.2%). In 2023, the proportion of women aged 15-64 working part-time was 18%, and for men the same was 5.5%, which in both cases is below the EU average (28.5% and 8.4%). Between 2009 and 2023, the proportion of women working part-time decreased (from 23.4% to 18.0%), while this proportion increased somewhat for men (from 4.6% to 5.5%).

Carer's leave

All employees are entitled to 5 working days per year of unpaid carers' leave to care for a relative or a person living in the same household as the worker for serious health reasons. The employee must provide a medical proof stating that the relative or person living in the same household as the worker is ill and needs care.⁸

⁷ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/malta/individual/taxes-on-personal-income>

⁸ <https://dier.gov.mt/en/Employment-Conditions/Leave/Pages/Carers-Leave.aspx>

Public administration workers who have completed their probationary period may request up to one year of unpaid leave to care for dependent elderly parents, children, spouse or partner (renewable every year).

Flexible working arrangements

Women are entitled to up to one hour of paid leave per working day for breastfeeding, which can be taken either 1x60 minutes, 2x30 minutes or 3x20 minutes per day.

Parents are not required to work overtime for 12 months after the birth of their child.

Employees with at least 3 months' service in the public administration may request flexible working time for up to 12 months. Public administration employees can also work reduced hours (i.e. between 20 and 35 hours per week) until their child reaches the age of 16. In addition, from 2023, public administration workers will be able to work up to 20% of their weekly working time remotely during normal working hours. According to 2019 data, part-time working in public administration has decreased, while teleworking has increased by almost 5%.

In Malta, 100 hours (60 hours for the person undergoing treatment, 40 hours for the partner) of fully paid IVF leave are granted to people undergoing reproductive procedures. Both parents can use it at the same time and up to 3 assisted reproductive procedures are allowed, for a total of 300 hours.⁹

During 12 months, 3 months of unpaid leave are possible for any reason, including creation of work-life balance.

Workers are entitled to paid marriage leave, which is regulated by the sector in which they are employed. This means a minimum of 2 working days after the marriage.¹⁰

Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care in Malta consists of three phases: childcare (for children aged 0-3), pre-school (for children aged 3-5) and the first 2 years of compulsory primary education (for children aged 5-7). The first two are optional. Since 2017, nursery (for children aged 0-3) is free of charge for children whose parents work or study, but they have to pay for meals. Optional kindergarten care and the first 2 years of compulsory primary education are free for all children, but meals have to be paid for.

In 2023, 51% of Maltese children aged 0-3 years received nursery care, higher than the EU average (37%) and a significant increase compared to 2005 (5%). In the same year, 93% of Maltese children aged 3-6 years attended kindergarten, higher than the EU average (89%) and a significant increase compared to 2005 (65%).

⁹ <https://dier.gov.mt/en/Employment-Conditions/Leave/Pages/IVF-Leave.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://dier.gov.mt/en/Employment-Conditions/Leave/Pages/Marraige-Leave.aspx>

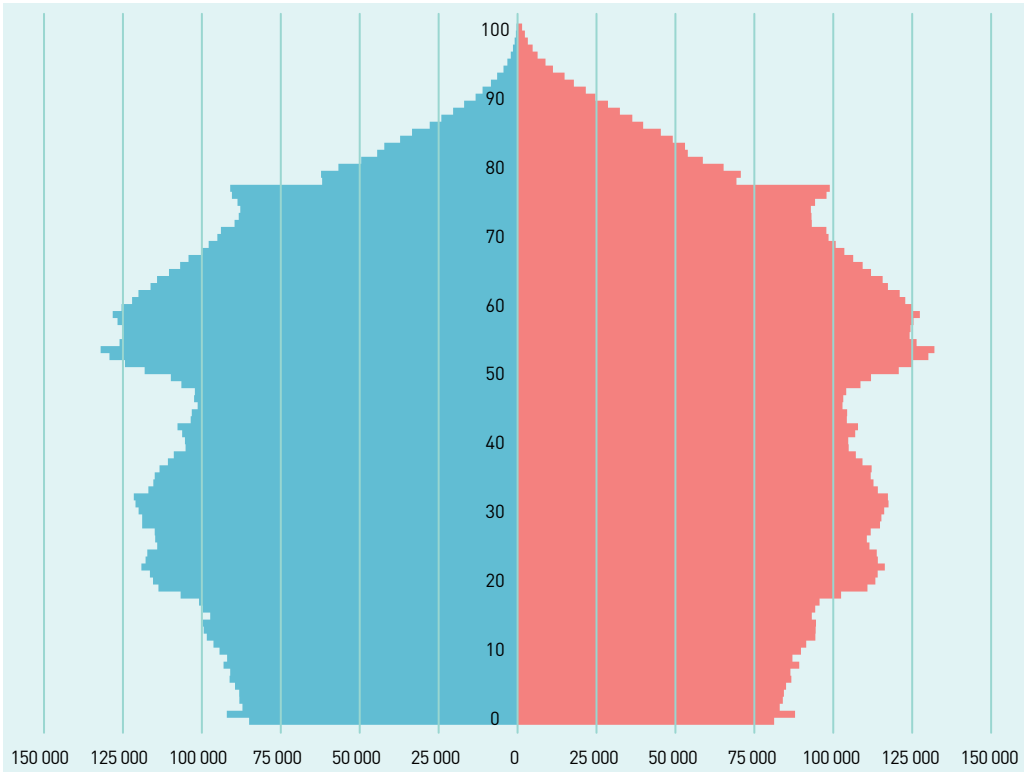


Netherlands

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	15 987 075	16 655 799	16 979 120	17 475 415	17 590 672	17 811 291
Live birth (persons)	202 603	180 060	172 520	179 441	167 504	164 487
Death (persons)	140 337	135 741	148 997	170 972	170 112	169 521
Immigrant (persons)	133 404	130 118	189 232	252 528	403 108	336 900*
Emigrant (persons)	63 318	104 201	111 477	110 342	109 616	192 500*
Marriage (number)	79 677	71 572	65 249	56 419	70 608	67 959*
Divorce (number)	37 104	33 755	33 414	25 962	23 603	24 310*
TFR	1.71	1.76	1.66	1.62	1.49	1.43*

Source: Eurostat, * Statistics Netherlands (Download date: 09.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of the Netherlands has been growing steadily since 2001, increasing by around 2 million people - 11% - in twenty years, reaching 17,811,291 on 1 January 2023.¹ Dutch people make up 79% of the Dutch population, 6% of the population is from other European nations, 5% is of South-East Asian origin and 2-3% is of Turkish and Moroccan origin.

The population pyramid of the Netherlands shows a picture of a slowly ageing society, with a slight population increase in a wave for those under 50.

The number of live births has decreased slightly: in the first half of the 2010s, it was around 180-170,000 per year, while in recent years it has been slightly less than 170,000. Compared to 2001, the change is more striking, with live births falling by 18.8%. The trend in the number of deaths is similarly intense, with a 20% increase by 2023 compared to 2001. In the early 2000s, there were 50,000 more births per year than deaths, which fell to 18,000 in 2019, and in recent years has turned into a natural decrease (-5,000 in 2023).

The number of immigrants to the country has been rising steadily, from 130,118 in 2011 to 252,528 in 2021 and 336,900 in 2023. Between 2001 and 2023, the number of immigrants has increased more than two and a half times. The number of emigrants has been around 110,000 people per year since 2012, but in 2023, 192,500 people emigrated from the country, more than three times as many as in 2001 and almost twice as many as in 2011. The migration balance was negative until 2007, reaching an increase of 55,000 in 2015, since when it has been increasing population by more than 100,000 people per year. In 2023, the number of immigrants fell from the high numbers in 2022, but still remained relatively high (336,900), while the emigration rate (192,500 in 2023) soared.

In the Netherlands, the number of marriages has been around 65,000 per year since 2013, declining in the years 2020-2021, however this decline was made up in 2023, as 67,959 marriages took place that year. The Netherlands had the highest number (2,411) of same-sex marriages in 2001, the year when it was authorized. In 2023, the number was 1,626, accounting for 2.4% of all marriages.

During the period under review, the number of divorces has steadily decreased: from more than 33,000 in 2013 to 23,603 in 2022, which means a decrease of about 30%. From 2001 (37,104 divorces) to 2023 (24,310 divorces), we can see a decrease of almost 35%. By 2022, the total fertility rate had fallen back almost to the EU average (1.46) and was only 1.49. In 2023, it fell further to 1.43, despite having been around 1.7 until 2014.

¹ <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/visualisations/dashboard-population/population-dynamics/population-growth>

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In the Netherlands, there is no such benefit.

Maternity leave and benefit

Pregnancy and maternity leave (*zwangerschaps- en bevallingsverlof*) is a 16-week paid leave for mothers, of which 4-6 weeks are to be taken before and 10-12 weeks after the birth. If the child is born before the due date, the leave is added to the postnatal period, and if the birth is after the due date, the extra days are not deducted from the postnatal period.

The amount of the maternity benefit (*zwangerschaps- en bevallingsverlofuitkering*) for this period is 100% of the mother's previous average wage, but cannot be higher than EUR 257 per day.² The payment of the benefit should start at the latest in the 34th week of pregnancy. If the child is premature, the first day of funding is the day of the child's birth. In the case of adoption or foster care, both parents are entitled to a 6-week paid leave.

Paternity leave

Fathers are entitled to 5 days of 100% paid paternity leave and a further 5 weeks of 70% paid paternity leave, up to a maximum of EUR 178 per day. The benefit is paid by the employer, who can increase the benefit to 100% for the 5-week period.

Parental leave and benefit

Working parents are entitled to 26-26 weeks of parental leave (*partnerverlof*) per child until the child is 8 years old. From 2022, the first 9 weeks of the 26 weeks are to be paid at 70% of the salary, but employers can increase this amount. The paid part of parental leave must be taken until the child reaches the age of 1 and is a maximum of EUR 178 per day.

Child benefit

There are two forms of child benefit: the general child benefit and the supplementary child benefit.

The general child benefit (*kindersbijslag*) is paid for all children under 18 years of age. Its amount increases with age and depends on the place of residence of the child. A child over 16 years of age who is working is entitled if he or she either lives at home with his or her parents and earns up to EUR 1 266 per quarter or does not live at home and earns

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1122&langId=en&intPageId=4987>

less than EUR 1 721. If the child is under 16, he or she will always get the child benefit, regardless of the child's income. It is paid quarterly and is conditional on being insured. The amount of the general child benefit paid quarterly per child from January 2024:

- EUR 279 for children under 5 years;
- EUR 339 for children aged 6-11 years;
- EUR 399 for children aged 12-17 years.³

The amount is doubled if the child does not live with his or her parents because he or she is a student, disabled or invalid, or if the child with a severe disability is cared for at home. In addition to the standard child benefit, a supplementary benefit, called child budget (*kindgebonden budget*) is paid to families earning below a certain income level and with low savings, which is higher than the standard child benefit, the exact amount depending on the number of children, their age, the number of working adults and the family's financial situation.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

Working parents with young children can claim a combined tax credit at the rate of their income from the Tax and Customs Board. The tax credit means that parents pay less income tax and social security contributions. The income-related combined tax credit is for parents living and working in the Netherlands who are caring for a child under 12 years of age and have an annual income of between EUR 5,548 and EUR 29,076. The amount of the credit is linked to the parent with the lowest income, with a rate of 11.45% of the part of the income above EUR 5,548. This is the Dutch government's way of encouraging parents to take up paid work.⁴ Those earning above the income ceiling can claim a tax credit of up to EUR 2,694 per year.⁵

Housing

After 2017, parents could gift up to EUR 100,000 (tax-free) to their children to help them buy a home in the Netherlands. However, the government has changed the rules for the tax-free gift known as "jubelton"; from 1 January 2023. The maximum amount that could be gifted was reduced to EUR 27,231, and later abolished completely (from January 2024).

³ <https://www.svb.nl/nl/kinderbijslag/bedragen-betaaldagen/bedragen-kinderbijslag>

⁴ <https://www.government.nl/topics/income-related-combination-tax-credit>

⁵ <https://www.government.nl/topics/income-related-combination-tax-credit> & <https://taxsavers.nl/dutch-tax-system/tax-credits/income-related-combination-tax-credit/>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

The Netherlands is a leader for part-time employment, which makes it easier to reconcile work and private life, with 62.9% of women aged 15-64 and 23.6% of men working part-time in 2023. Both numbers are several times higher than the EU average of 28.5% for women and 8.4% for men. In the Netherlands, the employment rate for women aged 18-64 with children under 6 is one of the highest in the EU at 81.8% (EU average: 66.4%), while the employment rate for men aged 18-64 with young children is 95.2% (EU average: 89.6%). This is one of the highest averages for men in the EU (apart from Malta).

In 2021, 90% of eligible fathers took paternity leave right after the birth of the child and almost all fathers took at least 4 days. One third of fathers took 5 weeks or more of leave. In 2021, 18% of female workers with a child aged 8 or undertook parental leave. For male workers, the rate was 17%. The gap between men and women has narrowed in recent years, compared to 21% of women and 15% of men taking parental leave in 2015.

Carer's leave

To care for a sick child or a relative, a worker can take 5 days carer's leave twice a year, for which 70% of his/her previous earnings are paid. In addition, if a relative needs long-term care, the employee is entitled to 30 days of unpaid leave per year.

Flexible working arrangements

Up to 25% of the working time can be taken as breastfeeding leave until the baby is 9 months old, for which time the mother is compensated.

Employers are obliged to offer flexible working conditions and the possibility to work from home to employees who have been employed for at least 6 months, if they have more than 10 employees and the work schedule allows it.

Early childhood and education care

Up to the age of 4, Dutch children can receive full-day, centrally regulated private care or regulated family day care. In addition to the private sector, children aged 2 to 4 years can attend state-subsidised playgroups, which provide mostly half-day care. For children in the last two years before school (ages 5 to 6), day care is available as pre-school and is compulsory from age 5. Primary education starts at the age of 6, but children generally attend these institutions from the age of 4. Parents do pay a parental contribution (depending on income).

Parents who place their children in institutional care receive a childcare benefit (*kinderopvangtoeslag*) in addition to the child benefit, which is intended to cover part of the cost of day care (nursery, kindergarden, family day care). The childcare benefit is paid on the basis of the family's income and the mother's employment status. In 2024, the

maximum amount of the benefit per hour of day nursery/day care is EUR10 and can be claimed for up to 230 hours per month.⁶

In 2023, 73% of children aged 0-3 years received nursery care, higher than the EU average (37%) and an increase compared to the Dutch figure for 2005 (60%). In 2023, 97% of children aged 3-6 years in the Netherlands attended kindergarten/school, higher than the EU average (89%) and an increase compared to 92% in 2005.

⁶ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kinderopvangtoeslag/bedragen-kinderopvangtoeslag-2024>

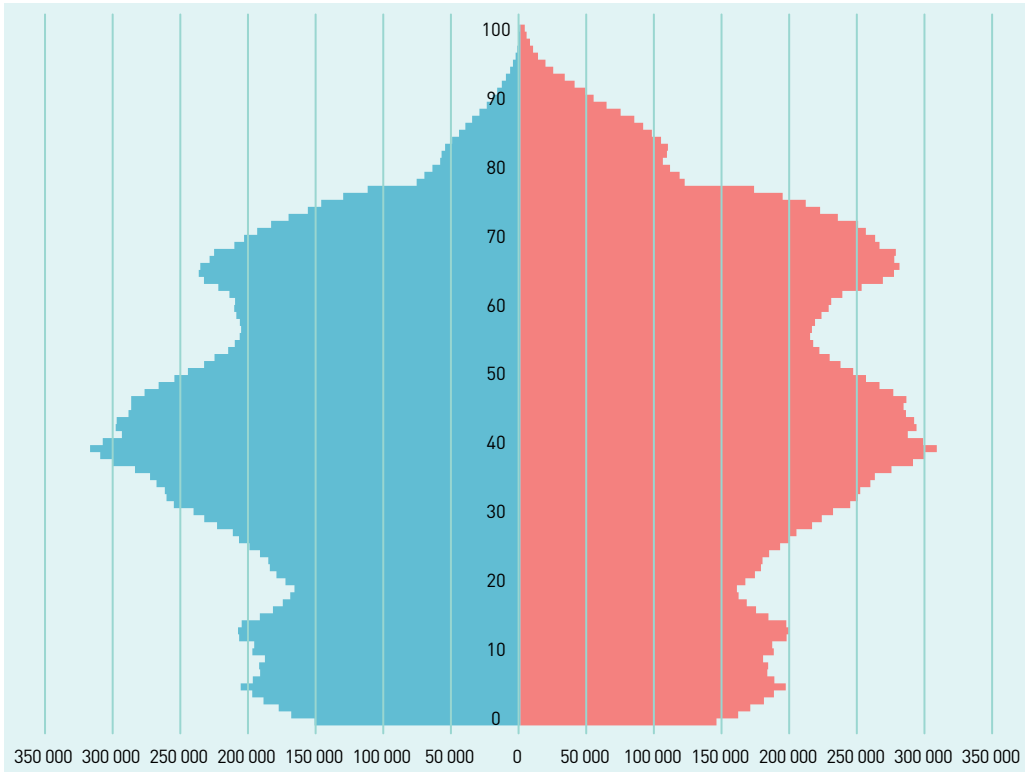


Poland

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	38 253 955	38 062 718	37 967 209	37 840 001	37 654 247	36 753 736
Live birth (persons)	368 205	388 416	382 257	331 511	305 132	272 451
Death (persons)	363 220	375 501	388 009	519 517	448 448	409 036
Immigrant (persons)	6 625	157 059	208 302	241 116	275 515	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	23 368	265 798	236 441	201 595	228 006	N/A
Marriage (number)	195 122	206 471	193 455	168 324	155 817	145 898*
Divorce (number)	45 308	64 594	63 497	60 687	60 162	56 892*
TFR	1.31	1.33	1.39	1.33	1.29	1.16*

Source: Eurostat, *Polish Statistical Office (Download date: 09.08.2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Poland's population declined between 2000 and 2008, slightly improved and stagnated since 2010, so on 1 January 2023 it was 36,753,736, and has fallen by 1.5 million (4%) since 2001. 96% of the population is Polish, with the main nationalities being Silesian, German, Belarusian and Ukrainian.

The country's population pyramid shows the picture of an ageing society, with a high number of 30-40-year-olds today followed by a steep decline in the younger age groups, with only a slight increase in the teenage population.

Births and deaths were relatively evenly balanced until 2017, but in recent years natural decrease has spiked, reducing the country's population by around 150,000 people a year. In 2023, there were 272,451 births and 409,036 deaths, reducing Poland's population by 136,585. Live births fell by 26% between 2001 and 2023, while deaths rose by almost 13% over the same period.

The migration balance was negative until 2017, but this trend has been reversed in recent years, with a migration surplus of 40-60,000 people, in which, in addition to the Russian-Ukrainian war, the number of Poles returning to their country because of Brexit and formerly working in Great Britain is thought to play a decisive role. Immigration and emigration, which was negligible in 2001, has skyrocketed, with immigration rising 41-fold and emigration nearly 10-fold by 2022.

Between 2001 and 2011, the number of marriages increased by 5.8%, but then fell below 200,000 by 2016, and the pandemic further reduced the number of marriages, with around 29.3% fewer marriages in 2023 than in 2011 and 25.2% fewer than in 2001. The number of divorces increased steadily from 2001 to 2011, by 42.6%, and has since fallen, by 11.9% between 2011 and 2023, still 25.6% higher than in 2001.

Poland's fertility rate is low, rising from 1.29 in 2013 to 1.48 in 2017, but falling steadily over the last five years, returning to 1.29 in 2022, well below the EU average (1.46 in 2022). Compared to 2010, Poland is the only country in the Visegrad Four to have a lower TFR, and fertility rate in 2023 is the lowest in a quarter of a century.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

The Polish maternity grant (*dodatek z tytułu urodzenia dziecka*) is PLN 1,000 (EUR 220), paid in one lump sum to the mother immediately after the birth of the child. Introduced in 2006, the childbirth grant is income-related (since 2013), available to families with a net monthly per capita income of less than PLN 1,922 (EUR 452).

A so-called “For Life” lump sum benefit can be granted to a parent for the birth of a child diagnosed with a severe and irreversible disability or an untreatable life-threatening illness, which originated in the period of prenatal development of the child or during labour. The benefit is PLN 4,000 (EUR 880).¹

Maternity leave and benefit

An insured mother is entitled to 20 weeks (31-37 weeks for multiple birth, depending on the number of children) of maternity leave (*urlop macierzyński*), with a minimum of 14 weeks for the mother after childbirth and up to 6 weeks may be allocated to the father. 6 weeks of the maternity leave may be taken before the birth.

Maternity benefit (*zasilek macierzyński*) is payable to the insured mother during maternity leave as follows:

- 100% of average earnings during the previous 12 months for maternity leave and the first 6 weeks of parental leave (8 weeks for twins) and 70% for the remaining 35 weeks of parental leave;
- or 81.5% of salary during both maternity and parental leave.

For mothers/fathers on low incomes, if the maternity benefit would be less than PLN 1 000 (EUR 220) per month, the difference is made up by the state.²

Paternity leave

Paternity leave was introduced in 2008 and has been 1 week of paid leave since 2010. Since 2022, fathers with insurance have been entitled to 2 weeks of paid paternity leave (*urlop ojcowski*), which can be taken in one or two instalments up to the age of one year. During the leave, 100% of the salary is paid.³

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1124&dangId=en&intPageId=4718> and <https://www.gov.pl/web/uw-podlaski/jedno-razowa-zapomoga-z-tytułu-urodzenia-sie-dziecka>

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1124&dangId=en&intPageId=4719>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1124&dangId=en&intPageId=4719> and <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/urlop-ojcowski>

Parental leave and benefit⁴

From January 2023, the mother and father will be entitled to a total of 41 weeks (43 weeks for twins) of parental leave (*urlop rodzicielski*) after the end of maternity leave, of which 9 weeks are non-transferable. The amount paid for the period of leave depends on the option chosen by the mother taking maternity leave:

- if the mother chooses to receive a payment equivalent to 100% of earnings during maternity leave, 70% of her average earnings for the 12 months preceding the birth is paid for the period of parental leave, with no upper limit on pay;
- if the mother opts for a payment of 81.5% of earnings during maternity leave, the parental leave benefit is paid at the same level.

The father is paid 70% of previous earnings.

Parental leave can be shared, taken concurrently or consecutively, and parents can work part-time while receiving the benefit, in which case parental leave can be extended to a maximum of 64 weeks. Parental leave may be taken in instalments, up to a maximum of five periods.

Irrespective of parental leave, low-income parents who have worked for at least 6 months before taking parental leave are entitled to a maximum of 36 months of childcare leave (*urlop wychowawczy*), of which 1 month each is non-transferable. It may be taken until the end of the calendar year in which the child reaches the age of 6. Childcare allowance is PLN 400 (EUR 88) per month for 24 months (36 months for twins and 72 months for disabled children) if the family's net monthly per capita income does not exceed PLN 674 (EUR 150) or PLN 764 (EUR 170) for disabled children.

Parental benefit (*Świadczenie rodzicielskie*) is paid to parents who do not have insurance. They can receive this benefit for 52 weeks (65-71 weeks for twins, depending on the number of children) at a monthly rate of PLN 1,000 (EUR 223). The mother is entitled to the first 14 weeks of this benefit.

Child benefit⁵

The child benefit (*zasilek rodzinny*) is an income-related benefit linked to the number of children. It is normally paid until the age of 18, until the age of 21 if the child is in further education, and until the age of 24 if the child is disabled. It is available to families with a monthly per capita income of less than PLN 674 (EUR 148), or PLN 764 (EUR 168) for a disabled child.

The monthly amount varies depending on the age of the child:

- up to 5 years: PLN 95 (EUR 21);
- 5-18 years: PLN 124 (EUR 27);
- 18-24 years: PLN 135 (EUR 30).

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1124&langId=en&intPageId=4719>

⁵ <https://www.gov.pl/web/uw-podlaski/zasilek-rodzinny>

Since 2016, families whose income is slightly over the income limit (up to the amount of the benefit exceeding the income limit) can also receive family allowances, in which case the amount over the income limit is deducted from the total amount of the benefit (including supplements).

In addition to the family allowance, a supplement of PLN 95 (EUR 22) per month can be paid to families with three or more children for the third and subsequent children (*dodatek z tytułu wychowywania dziecka w rodzinie wielodzietnej*), if the family's per capita income entitles them to the basic family allowance. Single parents receive a supplement (*dodatek z tytułu samotnego wychowywania dziecka*) of PLN 193 (EUR 42) per child (up to a maximum of PLN 386 (EUR 85) for all children), and a family allowance supplement of PLN 90-110 (EUR 20-24) per child for the education and rehabilitation of disabled children (*dodatek z tytułu kształcenia i rehabilitacji dziecka niepełnosprawnego*). If a single parent raises a disabled child, the supplement is PLN 273 (EUR 63) per child, up to a maximum of PLN 546 (EUR 126) for all children.

Since 2016, the "500 Plus" (*Świadczenie wychowawcze, 500 Plus*) scheme has included an additional family allowance, which is a monthly allowance paid for children under 18. It amounted to PLN 500 (EUR 110) per child per month, until 2019 from the second child onwards, and only for the first child depending on income (PLN 800 (EUR 164) per month net per capita income) or if the child was disabled. As of April 2019, the scheme was extended to first-born children and the income threshold was abolished. As of January 2024, the monthly financial support for children was significantly increased from PLN 500 to PLN 800.

The Family Care Capital Act came into force on 1 January 2022. Under the new law, parents of young children can receive up to PLN 12,000 (EUR 2 775) in additional cash support - PLN 1,000 (EUR 230) per month for 1 year or PLN 500 (EUR 115) per month for 2 years. The allowance is tax-free and independent of the family's income. It is paid from every second child for children aged 12-35 months. The family care capital is designed to help families reconcile work and childcare.⁶

Tax credits and other benefits

Schooling aid

Under the "Good Start" (*Dobry Start*) scheme, launched in 2018, parents can receive PLN 300 (EUR 69) for their children attending primary, secondary, higher and other educational institutions, regardless of income, to buy textbooks, exercise books and equipment for pupils. The benefit is paid once a year until the child reaches the age of 20 or until the age of 24 for a disabled child attending school.⁷

⁶ <https://www.gov.pl/web/family/family-care-capital-step-by-step>

⁷ <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/dobry-start>

Family taxation

In Poland, the annual personal income tax allowance depends on the number of children. For one child, the amount is PLN 1,112 (EUR 244) per year, if the taxpayer's annual income is less than PLN 112,000 (EUR 24,645). For the second child, the amount is also PLN 1,112 (EUR 244) per year, but without any income limit. The annual amount of the tax allowance is PLN 2,000 (EUR 440) for the third child and PLN 2,700 (EUR 594) for the fourth or more children. Introduced in 2007, the tax credit was increased for third and children from 2013.⁸

From 2022, those with at least four children, if their annual income does not exceed PLN 85,528 per person, will benefit from an income tax exemption. If both parents benefit from the tax relief, their combined tax-free income will amount to PLN 171,056 (EUR 39,617). The fourth child born on the last day (31 December) of the tax year also qualifies for the tax credit for that tax year.

Tax exemption for young people under 26

As of 1 August 2019, workers under 26 years of age are exempt from personal income tax if their annual income does not exceed PLN 85,528 (EUR 19,808). From 2021, young people under 26 who earn income through practical training during their university studies will also be exempt from personal income tax.⁹

Large family card

The Large Family Card (*karta dużej rodziny*) was introduced in 2014 for families with at least three children, regardless of income. Benefits are provided by public institutions and private companies that have joined the scheme.¹⁰

Housing

The Polish government provides support for buying a home through so-called "housing vouchers". Housing vouchers are granted in an amount calculated on the basis of the number of members in the household, with a special focus on children and people with disabilities. Two types of housing vouchers are available: social and family vouchers. The social housing voucher is for people who do not own their own home and whose income limits their ability to borrow a loan. Under the family voucher, single households receive PLN 5 000 (EUR 1,161), couples without children PLN 10,000 (EUR 2,322), couples with one child PLN 25,000 (EUR 5,804) and couples with two children PLN 40,000 (EUR 9,287) support.

The average rent for an apartment in 2022 was EUR 600.

⁸ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/poland/individual/other-tax-credits-and-incentives>

⁹ <https://studio.pwc.pl/aktualnosci/preferencje-w-pit/eng/relief-for-young-people-2023>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/uzyskaj-karte-duzej-rodziny>

The state guaranteed housing loan

The guaranteed housing loan introduced by the Polish Deal programme is available up to 100% of the purchase price of a dwelling or the construction cost of a single-family house. The loan is available from the end of May 2022. A state guarantee is available for part of the mortgage loan taken out for the purchase of a dwelling. This part cannot be less than 10% and no more than 20% of the value of the property, up to a maximum of PLN 100,000 (EUR 23,160). The guarantee replaces the requirement of a down payment. The guaranteed housing loan may be reduced if a second or additional child is born in the household during the repayment period of the loan. BGK Development Bank will repay part of the guaranteed housing loan once the child is born. The amount of repayment assumed by the bank:

- PLN 20,000 (EUR 4,632) upon the birth of a second child,
- PLN 60,000 (EUR 13,896) for the birth of a third or subsequent child.

The loan must be granted for a minimum term of 15 years and can only be granted in Polish currency to exclude exchange rate risk.¹¹

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2023, the employment rate for women aged 18-64 with young children was 70.7%, while the rate for men aged 18-64 with children under 6 was 93.3%, both above the EU average (66.4% and 89.6% respectively). Compared to 2009, both genders show an increase, with only 54.4% of women working with a child under 6 in 2009 compared to 85.7% of men. Part-time employment is low in the country, with 8.4% of women and 3.4% of men working part-time in 2023, compared to the EU average of 28.5% and 8.4% respectively. In 2009, the share of part-time workers was higher than in 2023: 10.9% for women and 5.0% for men.

Carer's leave

Parents are entitled to 14-14 days of 80% paid leave per year, plus 5-5 days of unpaid leave per year to care for a sick child or a family member living in the same household. Workers with a child under 14 years of age are entitled to 2 days' paid leave per year. In the event of the unforeseen closure of educational establishments, parents with children under 8 years of age may take up to 60 days' leave per year and are entitled to a salary equivalent to 80% of their salary.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.pl/web/development-technology/housing-without-own-contribution--sejm-adopted-another-bill-of-the-polish-deal>

Flexible working arrangements

Mothers are entitled to a breastfeeding break of 2x30 minutes per day, during which time they receive 100% of their earnings.

Flexible working conditions are available if the child has a disability or serious illness.

Early childhood education and care

There are four forms of day care for children under 3 years in Poland, of which the state nursery is free of charge:

1. nursery (from 20 weeks of age, public or private, open 10 hours a day),
2. day nursery (from 1 year of age, up to 30 children, open 10 hours a day, private or public),
3. family day care (from 20 weeks of age, up to 8 children), and
4. a nanny working for the family (may look after the baby from 20 weeks of age).

Kindergarten is free for children aged 3-6 for five hours a day; additional hours may be subject to a fee. Parents pay an additional fee for meals. In 2014, the age limit for compulsory education was lowered to 6 years, and as a result of subsequent debates, it was raised again to 7 years in 2016. The compulsory pre-school age was then set at 6 years.

To stimulate the development of institutional places, the Polish government launched in 2022 the so-called “Maluch+” program, which aims to encourage local authorities to create new nursery and playschool places and private individuals to create family day care centres. In 2013, to alleviate the shortage of places, requirements for the provision of early childhood care were relaxed, public spending on the construction and maintenance of nurseries was increased and a cap on nursery fees was introduced.¹²

In 2023, 13% of 0–3-year-old children in Poland received some form of nursery care, well below the EU average (37%) and only a slight increase compared to the first available Polish figure in 2011 (11%). In 2023, 75% of 3–6-year-old children attended kindergarten, well below the EU average (89%), but a significant increase compared to 52% in 2011.

¹² https://www.sgi-network.org/docs/2015/country/SGI2015_Poland.pdf

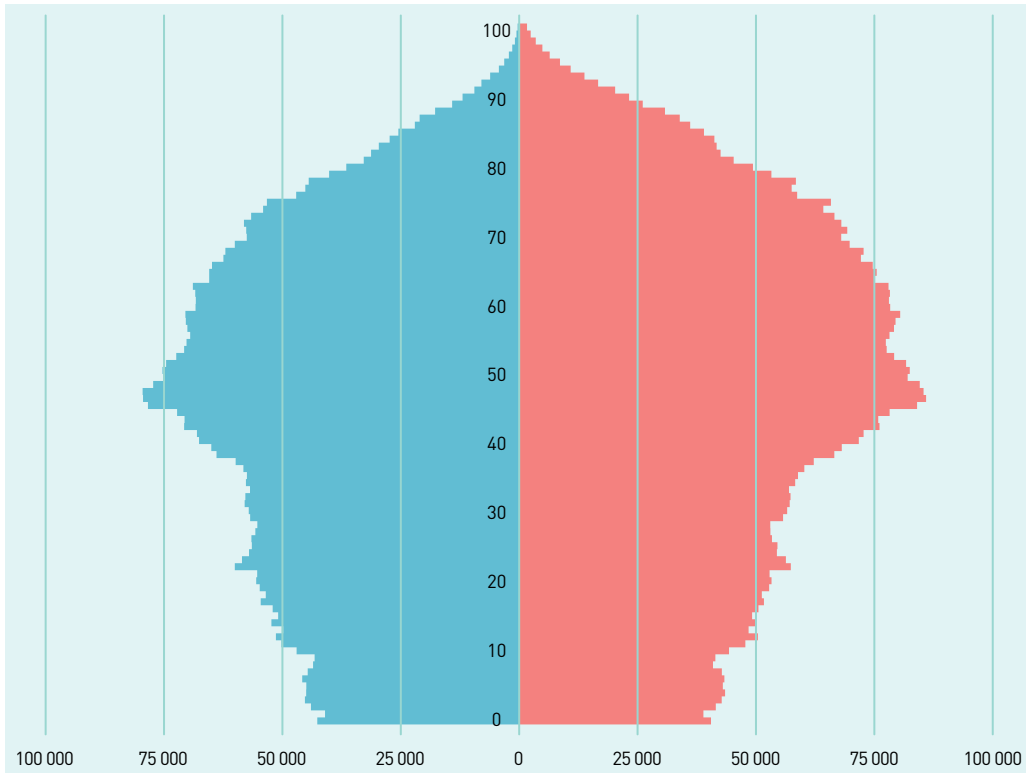


Portugal

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	10 330 774	10 572 721	10 341 330	10 298 252	10 352 042	10 516 621
Live birth (persons)	112 774	96 856	87 126	79 582	83 671	85 699*
Death (persons)	105 092	102 848	110 573	124 802	124 311	118 295*
Immigrant (persons)	61 609	19 667	29 925	50 721	117 843	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	5 396	43 998	38 273	25 079	30 954	N/A
Marriage (number)	58 390	36 035	32 399	29 057	36 952	36 980*
Divorce (number)	18 851	26 750	22 340	17 279	18 464	N/A
TFR	1.45	1.35	1.36	1.35	1.43	1.44*

Source: Eurostat, *Portugal Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Portugal's population was 10.3 million in the early 2000s, rising to over 10.5 million in 2010. In the following decade, the population declined steadily, but in recent years it has started to increase again. On 1 January 2023, the country's population was 10,516,621. Compared to 2001, the Portuguese population has increased by 186,000 (almost 1.8%).

Portugal's population is one of the most homogeneous within the European Union, with 99% of the population being Portuguese, with a minority of gypsies (around 40,000), Brazilians and black African groups.

Portugal's population pyramid shows a picture of an ageing society, with a steady decline in the under-40 age group.

The number of live births decreased by about 30% between 2001 and 2021, but following the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of births increased in 2022 and 2023, so the decrease between 2001 and 2023 was 24%. The number of deaths showed a fluctuating trend over the period, with an increase of 12.6% in deaths in 2023 compared to 2001. Although in 2001 there were still more births than deaths, the latter has consistently outnumbered the former over the last 15 years, reducing the country's population by around 20-40 thousand people per year.

Immigration has started to rise from its low point in 2012, increasing by a factor of two and a half between 2011 and 2021, and more than doubling by 2022 compared to the previous year. Emigration increased almost six-fold by 2022 compared to 2001. The country's migration balance was negative until 2016, but since then more people arrive than leave the country each year. Portugal's population growth is due to this positive net migration.

The number of marriages decreased significantly until 2020, reaching a historic low of 18,902, no doubt due to the COVID-19 epidemic, but since 2021 there has been an increase. The number of marriages fell by 36.7% compared to 2001.

The number of divorces has followed a more fluctuating trend, with the highest number of divorces in 2010, when the number of divorces reached nearly 28,000, but then declining until 2021. By 2022, it had risen slightly, reaching 18,464, thus compared with 2001, the number of divorces fell only minimally, by 387.

The fertility rate was over 1.4 until 2005. Between 2010 and 2013, the rate dropped significantly from 1.39 to 1.21, and then rose to 1.43 by 2019, after which it fell below 1.42 (1.35) only in 2021. At the same time, in 2022, the desire to have children increased only in Portugal in the European Union. By 2023, it reached a value of 1.44, which is almost exactly the same as the fertility rate measured in 2001 (1.45).

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant¹

In Portugal, a pregnant woman can claim a prenatal family allowance (*abono de família pré-natal*) if her annual income is up to EUR 11,404. The allowance is equal to the family allowance for a one-year-old child (35% higher for single parents). The prenatal family allowance is paid for 6 months, from the 13th week of pregnancy until the date of birth. Insured pregnant women are entitled to up to three “dental vouchers” (*cheques-dentista*), issued by their general practitioner, which they can use for 60 days after childbirth.²

Maternity leave and benefit³

The length of the so-called initial parental leave (*licença parental inicial*) is either 120 or 150 consecutive days, depending on the amount of the benefit, and is granted to both parents. After childbirth, the mother is obliged to take 42 days, plus a maximum of 30 days before the birth (*licença parental inicial exclusivo da mãe/ initial parental leave reserved for the mother*); fathers must take 21 calendar days within 42 days of childbirth. The remaining period can be divided by mutual agreement between the parents.

Parents who have worked for at least 6 months before the birth are entitled to an initial parental leave benefit (*subsídio parental inicial*). The amount of the benefit depends on the length of the payment: they can receive 100% of previous earnings for 120 days or 80% of previous earnings for 150 days, depending on their request. There is no upper limit to the benefit.

Parents can get an additional 1 month of paid leave if both parents take parental leave. In this case, 100% of previous earnings is being disbursed for 5 months or 83% for 6 months. If the father takes at least 60 consecutive days off or two consecutive 30-day periods after the mother returns to work, the payment is increased to 90% of earnings. In the case of twins, an extra 30 days per child is paid.

Adoptive parents, if the child is under 15 years old, are entitled to adoption leave (*licença para avaliação*), which can be extended by 120 or 150 consecutive days, as with parental leave, or by an additional 1 month.⁴

¹ <https://www.seg-social.pt/abono-de-familia-pre-natal2> and <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1125&dangId=en&int-PageId=4734>

² <https://www2.gov.pt/en/guias/ter-uma-crianca/acompanhamento-na-gravidez>

³ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023* és <https://eportugal.gov.pt/en/guias/ter-uma-crianca/licenca-parental>

⁴ <https://eportugal.gov.pt/en/guias/ter-uma-crianca/adocao-em-portugal>

A working grandparent is entitled to a grandchild care allowance (*subsídio para assistência a neto*) after the birth of a grandchild, which is a leave of 30 consecutive days if the parent is a teenager (i.e. under 16) and still lives with his/her parents. This leave can be shared between grandparents. The grandchild care allowance is equivalent to 100% of earnings.⁵

Paternity leave⁶

Fathers are entitled to a total of 28 days of leave (*licença parental inicial exclusivo do pai*), which can be taken consecutively or in stages. Of these, at least 7 days must be taken after the birth of the child and a further 21 days must be taken up to the age of 6 weeks, in minimum periods of 7 days. For this period, the benefit (*subsídio parental inicial exclusivo do pai*) is 100% of the previous salary. These 28 days are part of the 120-150 days of parental leave. In the case of multiple births, fathers receive an additional 2 days per child from the second child on. In addition to the 28 paid days, fathers are entitled to an additional 7 days of unpaid leave.

Parental leave and benefit⁷

After the end of parental leave, and directly linked to it, parents are entitled to an additional 3-3 months of paid extended parental leave (*licença parental alargada*), which can be taken until the child is 6 years old. Extended parental benefit (*subsídio parental alargado*) is payable for this period if taken immediately after the initial parental leave, amounting to 40% of the previous average wage.

After the extended parental leave, and only if this leave has already been taken, one parent may take up to 2 years of full-time unpaid childcare leave (*licença para assistência a filho*), which may be extended to 3 years for a third or additional child. Unlike extended parental leave, this special leave can only be taken by one parent and requires proof that the other parent is working or unable to work.

Child benefit

The child benefit (*abono de família para crianças e jovens*) is paid until the child reaches the age of 16, or 24 if he or she is in higher education. The monthly amount depends on the family's annual income (there are 5 income levels), the age and number of children:⁸

⁵ <https://eportugal.gov.pt/en/guias/ter-uma-crianca/licenca-parental>

⁶ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*, <https://eportugal.gov.pt/en/guias/ter-uma-crianca/licenca-parental#>

⁷ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

⁸ MISSOC

PORTUGAL

	0–36-month-old child	36–72-month-old child	Child older than 72 months
EUR 0 – 3,564	EUR 183	EUR 72	EUR 72
EUR 3,565 – EUR 7,129	EUR 155	EUR 72	EUR 72
EUR 7,130 – EUR 12,120	EUR 127	EUR 57	EUR 52
EUR 12,121 – EUR 17,824	EUR 85	EUR 43	-
EUR 17,824 EUR –	-	-	-

There is no family allowance for annual income above EUR 17,824. Single parents receive a 50% higher amount at the 1st income level, while the 2nd, 3rd and 4th income levels receive a 42.5% higher amount.

Parents of children with disabilities also receive an additional monthly amount (*bonificação do abono de família para crianças e jovens com deficiência*) depending on the age of the child, as follows:⁹

- between 0–14 years old: EUR 71;
- between the ages of 14 and 18: EUR 104;
- between the ages of 18–24: EUR 139.

Needy families living in extreme poverty receive an additional benefit of EUR 100 per month. The measure affects around 123,000 children.

Tax credits and other benefits

*Family taxation*¹⁰

In Portugal, the amount of the family tax allowance for children living in the household is EUR 600 per child and EUR 525 for grandparents living there, provided that they do not earn more than the pension minimum. The rate of the discount is EUR 126 higher for all children under 3 years of age. If there is more than one dependent in the household, the amount of the discount increases by EUR 300 for the second and subsequent children up to 6 years of age.

In the case of caring for a disabled family member, depending on the level of disability and the family's income, an inclusivity allowance (*prestação social para a inclusão*) is paid in the amount of up to EUR 275 per month, in addition, there is also a special education subsidy (*subsídio de educação especial*) for a disabled family member under the age of 24.

⁹ <https://eportugal.gov.pt/servicos/requerer-a-bonificacao-por-deficiencia-do-abono-de-familia-para-criancas-e-jovens>

¹⁰ <https://eportugal.gov.pt/en/guias/ter-uma-crianca/apoios-financeiros-e-deducoes-nos-impostos> and <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/portugal/individual/other-tax-credits-and-incentives>

*Housing*¹¹

Young people between the ages of 18 and 35 who have difficulty paying their rent can count on rent subsidies in Portugal from June 1, 2023, if certain conditions are met. Within the framework of the so-called “Mais Habitação” (“More housing”) program, a maximum of EUR 200 monthly rent subsidy can be obtained per family.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

The full-time employment rate of mothers raising small children in Portugal is very high. In 2023, 79.8% of women raising children under the age of 6 were active in the labor market, thus exceeding the EU average of 66.4%. For men, the value of the indicator is 88.7% (EU average 89.6%). Part-time work is not widespread: in 2023, the part-time employment rate for women aged 15-64 was 9.8% and for men 4.6%, both figures are much lower than the EU average (which is 28.5%, respectively 8.4%).

*Carer’s leave*¹²

As a parent, you can take a maximum of 30 days of carer’s leave per year to care for a sick child, if the child is under 12 years, and a maximum of 15 days per year, if the child is over 12 years. Leave increases by 1 day for each additional child. In the case of children over the age of 18, they are only entitled, if they live in the beneficiary’s household. If a child under the age of 12 needs hospital care, the entitlement lasts as long as the child is in hospital.

For the duration of the carer’s leave, the parent is entitled to 100% of the net earnings, but no more than 65% of the gross earnings, which applies if the other parent does not take the same leave at the same time.

If there is a disabled or chronically ill child living in the household, including adopted or stepchildren, one parent is entitled to 6 months of long-term care leave, which can be extended to 4 years or 6 years if the need is supported by a medical certificate. Only one parent can take this leave, and 65% of the salary is paid for the duration of the leave.

There is a maximum of 15 days of unpaid leave per year for the purpose of caring for a spouse or close relative (parents, grandparents, siblings - even if they do not live in the same household). For this period, public sector employees are entitled to a benefit equal to 65% of their daily earnings, and to an additional 15 days of unpaid leave per year to care for a disabled or chronically ill spouse.

¹¹ <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc23/comunicacao/noticia?i=programa-mais-habitacao-perguntas-e-respostas>

¹² Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

Leave due to pregnancy loss (licença por luto gestacional): If the pregnancy ends in miscarriage, the employee is entitled to a maximum of 3 consecutive days of absence. The father can also use this leave.

*Flexible working arrangements*¹³

In Portugal, parents working part-time or on flexible working arrangements cannot be disadvantaged in terms of assessment and professional advancement.

In the first year after the birth of their child, parents are entitled to daily 2 hours of nursing leave, without a reduction in earnings. This leave is called breastfeeding or feeding leave (*dispensa para amamentação e aleitação*), since the working time allowance can be used by the mother, the father or both (in this case, both parents can take 1 hour each). The employer pays the leave and must authorize it. This 2-hour of breastfeeding leave can be a family entitlement if mothers do not breastfeed their children. If the mother is breastfeeding her child, the 2-hour working time discount lasts as long as she is breastfeeding the child.

Parents raising children under the age of 3 (there is no age limit in the case of a chronically ill or disabled child) are entitled to telework (work from home). The possibility of remote work can be extended until the child's 8th birthday in the case of families where the parent is raising the child alone, or where both parents share telework or where only the work of one parent meets telework conditions.

A parent raising a child under the age of 12 (there is no age limit in the case of a chronically ill or disabled child) is entitled to part-time employment after taking additional parental leave. Part-time work can be used in the following ways: 5 days a week part-time or 3 days a week full-time.

Parents are entitled to 4 hours of absence per school year to attend school meetings and events until the child reaches the age of 18. Adoptive parents have the right to be away from work to participate in adoption discussions.

Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care in Portugal is divided into two phases, with different services for younger children (0-3 years) and older children (3-6 years). Care for children under 3 years focuses on nurseries, while kindergarten education is considered the first phase of primary education. From 2024, all children enrolled in nursery are entitled to free nursery care, regardless of the type of provider. For children aged 3 to 6, 25 hours of kindergarten education per week are free of charge, with the fee for the remaining hours being proportionate to the parents' earnings.

In 2023, 56% of children aged 0-3 years in Portugal received some form of nursery care, higher than the EU average (37%) and a significant increase compared to 30% in 2005. In 2023, 88% of Portuguese children aged 3-6 years attended kindergarten, just below the EU average (89%), also a significant increase compared to 2005 (46%).

¹³ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

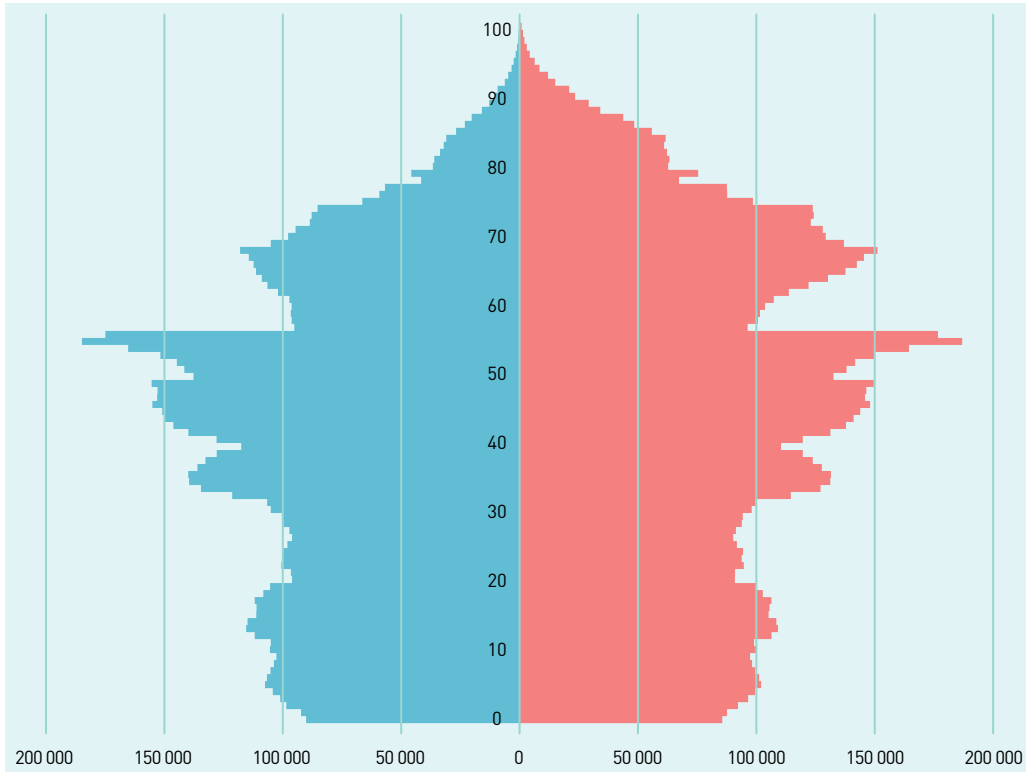


Romania

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	22 430 457	20 199 059	19 760 585	19 201 662	19 042 455	19 054 548
Live birth (persons)	N/A	196 242	205 773	193 191	178 233	153 397
Death (persons)	259 603	251 439	258 404	335 527	272 953	242 918
Immigrant (persons)	N/A	147 685	137 455	194 642	293 024	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	N/A	195 551	207 578	210 861	202 311	N/A
Marriage (number)	129 930	105 599	133 183	114 207	118 300	111 122*
Divorce (number)	31 135	35 780	30 497	27 024	23 289	22 715*
TFR	1.3	1.47	1.69	1.81	1.71	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Romanian Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Romania was 19,054,548 on 1 January 2023, a decrease of 15.1% compared to 2001.

The country's population pyramid shows an ageing society. The surge in the number of people aged 54 is a consequence of the abortion ban that was introduced in 1966. In the younger age groups several small waves of slight increases can be seen.

In the 2010s, around 200,000 children were born each year, rising to 210,000 in 2017. Since then, there has been a steady decline, with the number of births reaching a historic low in 2023 (153,397), a 21.8% drop compared to 2011. Following the spike in deaths due to COVID, the number of deaths fell back to the level of previous years, with 6.4% fewer deaths in 2023 compared to 2001. The number of deaths has exceeded the number of births since the 1990s. In recent years, the natural decrease in the population has been around 90,000, compared with 50-60,000 in the past.

Immigration is also on the rise in Romania, with twice as many people arriving in 2022 than in 2011. Emigration was at its lowest in 2013, when the number of emigrants fell below 162,000, but four years later more than 242,000 people left the country. Since the fall of the communist regime in 1989, nearly a quarter of Romania's population has moved to Western Europe.¹ This trend accelerated after the country's accession to the EU in 2007, with Italy receiving 1,137,000, Spain 1,087,000 and the United Kingdom 950,000 Romanians. Since the change of regime, the country has had a negative migration balance: in the period around the EU accession, the country's population decreased by 100-150 thousand people per year, but later declined to 15-40 thousand people per year. In 2022, however, the situation was reversed, as the number of immigrants exceeded the number of emigrants by 90,000.

The number of marriages rose steadily between 2011 and 2018, then fell by around 11% in 2019 compared to the previous year, and continued to do so in 2020, with a 37% drop in the number of marriages compared to 2019. After a low point in 2020, there was an increase, and overall in 2023 there were 14.5% fewer marriages than in 2001. The number of divorces rose between 2001 and 2011, then fell, so that by 2023 there were around 27% fewer divorces than in 2001.

After a low of 1.27 in 2001, Romania's fertility rate started to rise rapidly, reaching 1.66 in 2009, above the EU average of 1.56. After a decline in the next few years, the fertility rate rose to 1.81 in 2021, before falling slightly to 1.71 in 2022, the second highest in the EU after France.

¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/08/28/romania-s-demographic-decline-is-crippling-its-economy_6111720_19.html

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Romania, there is no such benefit.

Maternity leave and benefit

The total length of maternity leave is 126 days, of which a maximum of 63 days can be taken before and a minimum of 42 days after childbirth. The monthly benefit for maternity leave (*indemnizație pentru concediu de maternitate*) is equal to 85% of the average gross earnings in the 6 months preceding the birth, but cannot be more than 12 times the gross minimum wage. In the case of stillbirth or death of the child during maternity leave, the benefit is payable for the entire period of the leave.

Pregnant women or mothers whose employer cannot guarantee working conditions that do not endanger their health or the health of their child may claim a maternal risk allowance (*indemnizație de risc maternal*), which may be granted before or after maternity leave for a maximum of 120 days in total. The monthly amount of the risk allowance is equal to 75% of the average gross earnings in the preceding 6 months, but may not be more than 12 times the gross minimum wage.

Paternity leave

Fathers are entitled to 10 working days of paternity leave. Fathers who have completed a childcare course are entitled to 5 extra working days of paternity leave (15 days).

The paternity leave can be taken at any time up to the child's 8th week of age and the amount of the benefit is equal to the father's previous earnings.

Parental leave and benefit

All parents (including adoptive and foster parents, guardians) are entitled to childcare leave and benefits (*concediul pentru creșterea copiilor*) up to the age of 2, or 3 in the case of a disabled child. Parental leave is a family entitlement if both parents meet the conditions, with at least 2 months reserved for the other parent. This means that if the mother takes parental leave, the father's sole entitlement is 2 months. While receiving the benefit, the parent can earn a maximum taxable income of RON 11,968 (EUR 2,406) per year.

The childcare benefit for the entire period of leave is 85% of the average net monthly income earned in the 12 months preceding the birth.

In the case of twins, each child will receive an additional 2.5 x RSI (Social Reference Indicator (*Indicatorul Social de Referință*), RSI = RON 598 (EUR 120) in 2024)), i.e. around RON 1,250 (EUR 250) per person.

The minimum benefit is RON 1,495 (EUR 302) per month and the maximum is RON 8,500 (EUR 1,746) per month.

Parents who take parental leave and return to work are entitled to a bonus of:

- RON 1,795 (EUR 360) per month if the parent returns to work before the child is 6 months old (1 year old if the child is disabled) - the allowance is paid until the child is 2 years old, or 3 years old if the child is disabled,
- RON 777 (EUR 156) per month if the parent returns to work after the child is 6 months old (after the age of 1 in the case of a disabled child) - the allowance is paid until the child is 2 years old, or 3 years old in the case of a disabled child,
- RON 777 (EUR 156) per month if the parent returns to work after the child reaches the age of 2 (i.e. after the child's parental leave has been fully used) (after the child reaches the age of 3 in the case of a disabled child) - in such cases, the allowance is paid until the child reaches the age of 3, or 4 in the case of a disabled child.

Child benefit

In Romania, the child benefit consist of two benefits, the child-raising benefit (*alocație de stat pentru copii*) and the family support benefit (*alocație pentru susținerea familiei*). Benefits are available for children raised in the same household up to the age of 18 or until the end of secondary education (up to the age of 26 for children with disabilities). To be eligible, the child must also be attending some form of education, have a minimum number of unexcused absences and a minimum behaviour score of 8 out of 10.²

The monthly amount of child-raising benefit paid to parents (including adoptive and foster parents and guardians) varies according to the age of the child:

- RON 719 (EUR 144) if the child is younger than 2 years old (in the case of a disabled child);
- RON 292 (EUR 58) if the child is between 2 and 18 years old (or until graduation);
- RON 719 (EUR 144) if the disabled child is between 3 and 18 years old.³

The monthly amount of family support benefit varies according to the income, the number of children and the social reference index (RSI) (RSI = 598 RON (EUR 120) in 2024)

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1126&langId=en&intPageId=4749>

³ <https://www.edupedu.ro/alocatiile-de-stat-pentru-copii-in-2024-292-de-lei-pentru-cei-pest-2-ani-pana-la-doi-ani-sau-cei-cu-dizabilitati-vor-primi-719-lei-in-februarie/>

1. If the average monthly net income per family member is $0.40 \times \text{RSI}$ or less, the amount of the benefit is monthly:

Number of children	Amount of support
1	$0.1640 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 19)
2	$0.3280 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 39)
3	$0.4920 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 59)
4+	$0.6560 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 78)

2. If the average monthly net income per family member is between $0.4 \times \text{RSI}$ and $1.06 \times \text{RSI}$, the amount of the benefit is per month:

Number of children	Amount of support
1	$0.15 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 18)
2	$0.3 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 36)
3	$0.45 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 54)
4+	$0.6 \times \text{RSI}$ (approx. EUR 72)

The total amount of social assistance received by a person or a family per year must not exceed a certain coefficient linked to the RSI. This is fixed each year in a government resolution.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

A symbolic tax allowance of RON 100 (EUR 20) per child per month is available to all parents. The tax allowance, introduced in 2023, can be claimed up to the age of 18 but only one parent can claim it from the employer.

General tax relief⁴

All employees are entitled to a monthly personal income tax reduction up to the minimum wage plus RON 1,550 (6,975 EUR) per month, depending on their income and the number of children. The monthly amount is at least RON 9 (EUR 2) and up to RON 25 (EUR 5) for 1 child and at least RON 19 (EUR 4) and up to RON 35 (EUR 7) for 3 children.

Housing

In Romania, there is no such benefit.

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/TaxBEN-Romania-latest.pdf>

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Romania, the employment rate for mothers aged 18-64 with children under 6 years in 2023 was 47.1%, well below the EU average (66.4%). Female employment lags behind male employment, with 81% of men aged 18-64 with young children in work, also below the EU average.⁵ The employment rate for parents with young children was 83% for fathers and 50.2% for mothers in 2022.

The share of women aged 15-64 working part-time was among the lowest in the EU in 2023, at 2.9% (EU average 28.5%). For men, the share was 3.8% (EU average 8.4%).

Carer's leave

Mothers with children under one year of age are entitled to a breastfeeding break of 2x1 hour per day or a reduction of 2 hours per day (the mother is also entitled to full pay for the breaks).

Carer's leave (*concediul de îngrijitor*): 45 days per year for children under 7 years or 5 days per year for persons living in the same household as the worker and needing care. The worker must provide medical evidence of a serious health problem.

Under a carer's leave to care for a cancer patient (*concediul medical pentru îngrijirea*) a worker over 18 years of age who accompanies a worker suffering from cancer for treatment prescribed by a specialist is entitled to 45 days' leave. The leave is covered by medical benefits at a rate of 85% of income.

Flexible working arrangements

Workers who care for a dependent older person may work part-time (4 hours a day). Reduced working hours for this reason are considered full-time for pension contributions and other insurance benefits.

The employee may request any adjustment to the working hours from the employer on the grounds of general caring responsibilities. Although the employer is not obliged to accept this, it must give written reasons for the refusal.

Early childhood education and care

In Romania, children are entitled to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) from any age, with fees in nurseries based on the parents' income. However, in the 2000s, the

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/12743486/14207633/RO-EN.pdf>

closure of public nurseries led to a shortage of places for children under 3 years of age. Between 2009 and 2023, nearly 350 new institutions were opened⁶ and children aged 2 to 3 years became eligible for public kindergarten places, which were previously reserved for children over 3 years of age. Kindergarten is free of charge, but in rural areas the facilities are typically open for half a day and close after lunch.

In 2023, only 12% of children aged 0-3 in Romania attended nursery, well below the EU average (37%), although it showed an increase compared to the first year (2007), when it was only 6%. In 2023, 69% of children aged 3-6 attended kindergarten, which was also well below the EU average (89%) and only showed a slight increase compared to 2007 (61%).

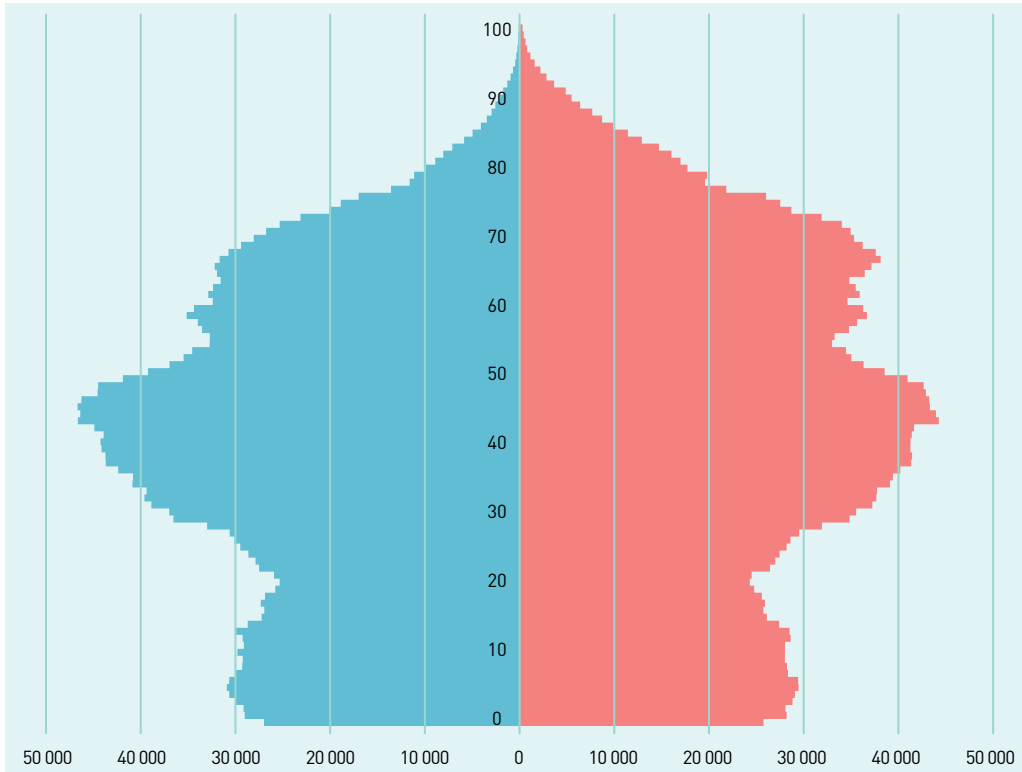
⁶ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/romania/national-reforms-early-childhood-education-and-care>



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	5 378 783	5 392 446	5 426 252	5 459 781	5 434 712	5 428 792
Live birth (persons)	51 136	60 813	57 557	56 754	52 668	48 788*
Death (persons)	51 980	51 903	52 351	73 461	59 583	54 133*
Immigrant (persons)	2 023	4 829	7 686	5 733	5 463	5 923 *
Emigrant (persons)	1 011	1 863	3 801	3 395	4 468	N/A
Marriage (number)	23 795	25 621	29 897	26 350	29 172	26 484 *
Divorce (number)	9 817	11 102	9 286	8 131*	8 180	N/A
TFR	1.2	1.45	1.48	1.63	1.57	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Slovak Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Slovakia has increased by a few tens of thousands of people per year in the last 20 years until 2021, and from 2022 the population has started to decrease, albeit slightly. As of 1 January 2023, the population of the country was 5,428,792. According to the results of the 2021 census⁵⁷, the majority of the population in Slovakia (83.8%) are Slovaks, the largest minority is Hungarians with 7.7%, and there are also Romanians, Czechs, Rusyns and Ukrainians living in the country.

The population of Slovakia shows the picture of an aging society, where the number of people under the age of 40 has decreased significantly.

The country was characterized by a moderate natural decrease in 2001 and then a significant natural increase between 2011 and 2016. However, in recent years (2021-2023) more people die than are born, which is only slightly reduced by the positive migration balance.

The number of live births ranged from 50,000 to 60,000 since 2001, with most children born in 2011 (60,813). Starting from 2016, it started to decrease, and in 2023 there were only 48,788 live births. In 2023, there were 4.6% fewer births compared to 2001 and 19.8% fewer births compared to 2011. The number of deaths varied around 50,000 after 2001, but as a result of the negative impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, it jumped to over 70,000 people in 2021, which normalized by 2023, returning to pre-pandemic levels. Overall, the number of deaths increased by 4.1% from 2001 to 2023.

Compared to 2001, the rate of immigration has tripled, although only about 6,000 people came to the country in 2023. The number of emigrants also increased and more than quadrupled by 2022, however, the number of immigrants exceeded that of emigrants in each year of the examined period.

In 2023, the number of marriages was about 11.3% higher than in 2001, while the number of divorces decreased significantly from 2011 to 2021 by 26.8%, and remained at this level in 2022. In total, 16.7% fewer divorces were registered in 2022 compared to 2001. The change in the fertility rate indicated an increase in the desire to have children from 2002 to 2011, and then decreased significantly in 2012 (from 1.45 to 1.34). However, fertility continued to increase until 2021. In 2022, there was a slight decrease to 1.57.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

The amount of the birth grant (*príspevok pri narodení dieťaťa*) in 2022 is a one-off EUR 830 per child after the birth of the first three children and EUR 151 for the birth of additional children. In case of multiple births, the mother is entitled to an additional EUR 75 per child. In Slovakia, since April 2021, there has been a pregnancy benefit (*tehotenské*), which is a contributory benefit and aims to provide income support to insured pregnant women to compensate for expenses during pregnancy. The benefit is due from the 27th week before the expected date of birth to the day of birth. Its amount is 15% of the average daily salary of the previous year.

Pregnancy scholarship benefit (*tehotenskéštipendium*) can be granted to pregnant students in higher education over the age of 18 from the 27th week of pregnancy to childbirth. The benefit amounts to EUR 200 per month.

Maternity leave and benefit

The duration of maternity leave (*materská dovolenka*) is 34 weeks and starts 6–8 weeks before childbirth. Maternity leave should not be less than 14 weeks and should not end earlier than 6 weeks after giving birth. Its length is 37 weeks for single mothers and 43 weeks for multiple births. Except for the first 6 weeks, the parents can share the leave among themselves. The same conditions apply in the case of adoption. The condition of the infant care benefit paid during leave is that the parent has an employment relationship of at least 270 days in the 2 years before the birth of the child and pays health insurance contributions.

The infant care benefit (*materské*) amounts to 75% of the previous 12-month net average wage. The upper limit of the benefit (in 2022) was 1,851 EUR, that is, 75% of the double of the national average wage 2 years ago. If this amount is lower than the parental benefit, a supplement is due to the mother.

Paternity leave

By law, fathers are entitled to 14 days of paid leave (*otcovská dovolená*) in the first 6 weeks after childbirth. For this period, fathers receive 75% of the average earnings of the previous calendar year if the employee had earnings and paid health insurance. This period may coincide with the mother's maternity leave period.

Fathers are also entitled to 28 weeks of infant care benefit, which is not transferable to mothers. If the fathers have taken the 14 days paid leave, their entitlement to infant care benefit will be shortened accordingly. The calculation of paternity benefit is the same as the calculation of infant care benefit. Two parents cannot receive infant care benefit at the same time after the same child. At the same time, both parents can receive infant care

benefit if it is received after different children, typically the mother after the newborn and the father after the older child. The same conditions apply in the case of adoption.

Parental leave and benefit

Working parents are entitled to parental leave (*rodičovská dovolenka*) until the child turns 3 years old, which, however, is an optional and unpaid leave and not related to parental allowance. That is, childcare provision is also due if the parent works part-time or full-time.

The parental allowance (*rodičovský príspevok*) is due until the child is 3 years old (up to the age of 6 in the case of disability, long-term illness), and the amount does not depend on the income of the family. If the mother is entitled to parental allowance and infant care benefit at the same time, she may receive only one of them, the one with the higher amount. The monthly amount of the parental allowance in 2024 is EUR 345 or EUR 473, if the mother received infant care benefit.¹ In the case of twins, the amount of the benefit increases by 25% per child. Another condition of the support is school/kindergarten attendance of the child (including his/her siblings), if this is not fulfilled, the amount of the allowance will be halved for 3 months.

The allowance is also supplemented by a childcare allowance (*príspevok na starostlivosť odieťa*), which parents can use to fund children's day care. If a parent pays a private caregiver for the care of their child under the age of 3, they can claim up to EUR 280 per month. The amount varies by type of care, for example EUR 80 per month for public nurseries and kindergartens and EUR 41 if day care is provided by another person (e.g. grandmother).

Family allowance²

In Slovakia, the monthly amount of the family allowance (*prídavoknadieta*) in 2024 is EUR 60 per child and is due until the child is 16 years old or 25 years old if the child is studying at a higher education institution or if he or she cannot work or study due to an illness. At the beginning of primary school, in the first month, a one-time allowance of EUR 110 is added to the family allowance. Supplementary allowance (EUR 30 per month) may be granted to pensioners who take care of the child, have no earnings and do not receive a child tax credit.

¹ <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/podpora-rodinam-detmi/penazna-pomoc/rodivcovsky-prispevok/> és https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/vzory-ziadosti-v-slovenskom-jazyku-a-inych-jazykoch/vzory-ziadosti-pre-oblast-socialnych-ve-ci-a-rodiny/rodivcovsky-prispevok.html?page_id=268773

² <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/results/>

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation³

As of 1 January 2023, the amount of the dependent child tax bonus, as well as other conditions for application and payment, have changed in Slovakia. Until 31 December 2024, EUR 50 per month is being provided for each dependent child over 18 years of age and EUR 140 per month for each dependent child under 18 years of age. The bonus amount will change from 1 January 2025 and will be EUR 50 per month for each dependent child over 15 years of age and EUR 100 per month for each dependent child under 15 years of age.

The tax bonus is available to individuals with taxable income from employment or entrepreneurial activity. The tax bonus reduces the tax liability. It is only available to those who have their permanent residence in Slovakia or for whom at least 90% of the income comes from Slovak sources.

Housing

In Slovakia, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In 2023, the employment rate for women aged 18-64 raising children under the age of 6 was 67.7%, which is higher than the EU average of 66.4%. For men, this indicator was 88.4%, which is slightly below the EU average (89.6%). Part-time employment in Slovakia was 5.0% in 2023, which is the fourth lowest in the Union; and 1.8% for men, which is the second lowest.

In Slovakia, the number of fathers taking paternity leave and parental leave is increasing. Fathers took leave more often if they had higher incomes or were self-employed. In 2019, the most recent year for which data are available, 78% of maternity benefits were paid to mothers and 22% to fathers.

Carer's leave

Employees can take time off to care for their sick relative at home (*ošetrovaniečlena rodiny*) or to take care of their child under the age of 11 (under the age of 18, if the child has long-term health problems) for other reasons (e.g. if the child's school is closed). The duration of the leave is not limited. However, insured parents receive benefits (*ošetrovné*) equal to 55% of their previous daily earnings for a maximum of 14 calendar days. The

³ <https://www.mic.iom.sk/en/social-issues/social-support-benefits/403-tax-bonus.html> és <https://accace.com/amendments-income-tax-act-in-slovakia/> és <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/slovak-republic/individual/other-tax-credits-and-incentives>

number of carer's leaves per year is not limited if they do not exceed 14 days at a time. Insured parents are also entitled to long-term care when caring for a child in need of home care following a hospital stay or palliative care. The amount of the benefit is 55% of their previous daily earnings for a maximum of 90 calendar days and can be shared between the parents.

Flexible working arrangements

If the employee's child is under 6 months old, she is entitled to 2x30 minutes of breastfeeding break per full working day. The breastfeeding break is 1x30 minutes per day from the age of 6 to 12 months of the child. Mothers who do not work full-time but work at least 4 hours a day are entitled to 1 break per child per day until their child reaches the age of 6 months. During the break, the employee is entitled to 100% of her earnings.

Pregnant women and those caring for children under the age of 15 may request shorter working hours from their employer. The employer may reject the request for serious operational reasons.

Early childhood education and care

In Slovakia, kindergarten education is usually provided for children aged 3-6 years, but children aged 2 years can also be admitted if the capacity of the kindergarten allows it. The relationship between schools and kindergartens is strengthened by the system of pre-school education, which can be used 1 year before the start of the first grade. Pre-school education is compulsory for children over 5 years of age until 31 August of the last kindergarten year. In public kindergartens, the compulsory pre-school year is free of charge, otherwise a reimbursement fee is payable. For disadvantaged children and low-income families, the kindergarten is free of charge and they also receive a meal subsidy. Institutions providing care for children under the age of 3 are payable.

In 2023, 1% of children aged 0-3 in Slovakia received childcare, which is the lowest value in the EU and shows a decrease compared to 3% in 2005. In the same year, 73% of children aged 3-6 went to kindergarten, well below the EU average (89%), which represents only a slight increase compared to 2005 (68%).

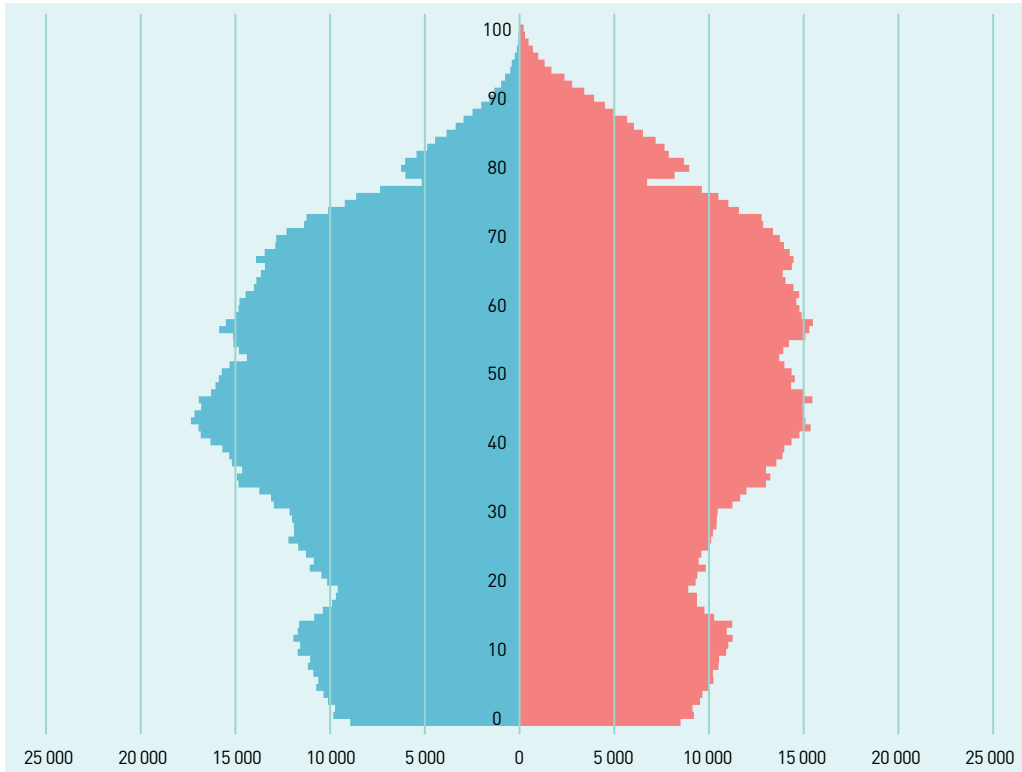


Slovenia

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	1 990 094	2 050 189	2 064 188	2 108 977	2 107 180	2 116 972
Live birth (persons)	17 477	21 947	20 345	18 984	17 627	16 989*
Death (persons)	18 508	18 699	19 689	23 261	22 426	21 540*
Immigrant (persons)	7 803	14 083	16 623	23 624	35 613	33 939*
Emigrant (persons)	4 811	12 024	15 572	21 144	20 956	22 411*
Marriage (number)	6 935	6 671	6 667	5 916	6 768	6 388*
Divorce (number)	2 274	2 298	2 531	2 322*	2 149	2 165*
TFR	1.21	1.56	1.58	1.64	1.55	1.51*

Source: Eurostat, * Slovenian Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Slovenia's population has been on a steadily increasing trend since 2001, in 2023 it was 2,116,972 people. The growth of recent years is mainly due to immigration. The Slovenian population, which was below 2 million in the early 2000s, increased by 6.4% until 2023. Slovenians make up 83% of the population, with Serbs (2%) and Croats (1.8%) being the largest minorities. There are also historical national minorities of Hungarians (0.5%) and Italians (0.5%), each having 1 national seat in the Slovenian Parliament.

The country's population pyramid shows an ageing society, with some growth in the younger age groups and then a decline in recent years.

The number of live births showed a downward trend in the early 2000s, falling below 18,000 during this period. It then started to grow, approaching 22,000 in 2011, but has since started to decline again. Between 2001 and 2023, live births fell by 2.8% and deaths increased by 16.4%.

In Slovenia, immigration more than quadrupled between 2001 and 2023, while emigration increased four and a half times. The slight natural decrease is compensated by a positive net migration, which is also responsible for the growth in the population.

The number of marriages decreased slightly until 2018, then started to increase in 2019, but probably due to the coronavirus epidemic, the number of marriages in 2020 decreased significantly compared to the previous year. Since 2021, the number of marriages has fluctuated, and in 2023, the total number of marriages was 7.9% lower than in 2001. The number of divorces increased from 2001, reaching over 2,400 in 2019, and was slightly lower at 2,165 in 2023. The marriage rate is well above the divorce rate, with three times as many people getting married in 2023 (6,388) as opting for divorce (2,165).

In Slovenia, the fertility rate has been increasing steadily since 2003, with minor fluctuations, reaching 1.64 in 2021. It has been decreasing since then, but is still above the EU average. In 2023, fertility fell to 1.51.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

The childbirth allowance (*pomoč ob rojstvu otroka*) is a one-off benefit of EUR 422 that one of the parents can claim no later than 60 days after the birth of the child.¹ Eligibility is conditional on residence in Slovenia.

Maternity leave and benefit

Mothers are entitled to 105 days of maternity leave (*materinski dopust*), starting at the earliest 28 days before the birth, with 15 days being compulsory.² During this period, the benefit (*materinsko nadomestilo*) is 100% of the previous average wage, which cannot be less than half the minimum wage (EUR 629). There is no upper limit.

Only parents who were covered by parental leave insurance (*zavarovanje za starševsko varstvo*) before the start of the leave - for at least 12 months during the preceding 3 years - are entitled to infant care benefit. Based on the parents' decision, this benefit may also be paid to the father or another person caring for the child. Adoptive parents are also entitled.

Paternity leave

Previously, the paternity leave (*očetovski dopust*) was 30 days, but since 1 April 2023 fathers are entitled to 15 days before the age of 3 months which is non-transferable. This period is extended by 10 days in the case of the birth of twins and 20 days in the case of the birth of triplets.

The benefit for this period (*očetovsko nadomestilo*) is 100% of the previous average salary, but up to a maximum of 2.5 times the average monthly salary (EUR 5,060).

In the event of the death of the mother (or if the mother is unable to care for the child), the father (or the child's carer) is entitled to an additional maximum of 77 days of leave.

Parental leave and benefit

Each of the insured parents are entitled to 160 days of childcare leave (*starševski dopust*), of which 100 days can be transferred to the other parent. Parents may take childcare leave at the same time, but one parent must start taking it after the end of the maternity leave. The period of leave will be extended by 30 days, if the parents already have two or more children under 8; 60 days if they have three; and 90 days if they have four or more children under 8. If the mother is under 18 and still in education, one of the grandparents

¹ <https://www.gov.si/teme/pravice-ob-rojstvu-otroka/>

² <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/results/>

(who is insured for parental leave) can take the leave. During parental leave, parents can work part-time.

The benefit (*starševsko nadomestilo*) is 100% of the previous average earnings for 260 days, which cannot be less than the minimum wage, but can be up to 2.5 times the average monthly wage. The allowance can be shared. Adoptive parents receive the same benefits.

Uninsured parents are also entitled to a benefit (*starševski dodatek*) for one year, the amount of which was EUR 465 per month in 2023. During the first 77 days after the birth, only the mother is entitled to the benefit (the father only if the mother is unable to care for the child). Fathers can claim the benefit from the 77th day after the birth.

Child benefit

All children under the age of 18 living in Slovenia are entitled to a child benefit (*otroški dodatek*), which depends on the number of children, their age and the family's per capita income. The exact amount may therefore vary from month to month.

The amount of child benefit for children under 14 in 2024:³

Average monthly income	1st child	2nd child	3rd and each additional child
Under EUR 231	EUR 141	EUR 155	EUR 169
EUR 231 – EUR 385	EUR 121	EUR 133	EUR 146
EUR 385 – EUR 462	EUR 92	EUR 103	EUR 114
EUR 462 – EUR 538	EUR 73	EUR 83	EUR 93
EUR 538 – EUR 680	EUR 59	EUR 69	EUR 79
EUR 680 – EUR 821	EUR 38	EUR 47	EUR 56
EUR 821 – EUR 1,051	EUR 28	EUR 38	EUR 47
EUR 1,051 – EUR 1,269	EUR 25	EUR 34	EUR 43

For one-parent families, the amount is 30% higher, or 20% higher if the child under 4 is not attending kindergarten (unless the parent is receiving childcare benefit or is on childcare leave).⁴

Families with three or more children under the age of 18 (under 26 for students) are entitled to a one-off allowance (*dodatek za veliko družino*) per year. The allowance is conditional on at least one parent and the children having a common permanent or temporary address in Slovenia. The amount of the allowance was EUR 468 for a family with three children and EUR 569 for a family with four or more children in 2023.⁵

³ <https://www.gov.si teme/otroski-dodatek/>

⁴ <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/results/>

⁵ <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/results/>

For a child in need of special care, a child benefit of EUR 102 per month is paid, while for a child with a disability (serious mental developmental disorder or serious physical disability) or serious illness, a benefit⁶. If a parent stops working to care for a child with a severe disability or more than one mild disability, a partial allowance (*delno plačilo za izgubljeni dohodek*) is payable for the loss of income. This is equal to the minimum wage for full-time care (EUR 1,254 in 2024) and is available up to the age of 18. A proportionately reduced amount is payable for part-time work.

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Slovenia, the tax base can be reduced by a special tax credit for dependent family members.⁷ The amount is calculated on the number of dependents: the employee is entitled to a tax credit of EUR 2,698 per year for the first child, EUR 2,933 for the second, EUR 4,892 for the third, EUR 6,851 for the fourth and EUR 8,810 for the fifth. For a child with special needs, a tax base reduction of EUR 9,777 is available.

Housing

In Slovenia, there is no such benefit.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

Part-time work is not widespread, only 12.2% of women and 5.4% of men were in employment in 2023 (compared to an EU average of 28.5% for women and 8.4% for men). The employment rate for women with children under 6 years old in 2022 was 81.6%, which was above the EU average (66.4%). The employment rate was similarly high for men with young children (93.9%), which was also above the EU average of 89.6%.

Carer's leave

Insured persons are entitled to take leave to care for a sick family member (spouse or child). In general, 7 working days can be taken in such cases. This period is increased to 15 working days for disabled children under 7 years of age. Exceptionally, if the health condition of the sick family member requires it, the period may be extended to 14 or 30 working days, or even longer (up to 6 months) in extreme cases. During this period, the carer receives 80% of their previous average earnings (which cannot be less than 60% of the minimum wage).

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1128&langId=en&intPageId=4774>

⁷ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/slovenia/individual/deductions>

Flexible working arrangements

Full-time nursing mothers have the right to a paid break of at least 1 hour a day until their child is 18 months old.

Parents with a child under 3 years of age (under 18 years of age for a disabled child) or with at least two children (at least one of whom is under 8 years of age), are entitled to the option of part-time work of not less than 20 hours a week. Parents may exercise the right to work part-time at the same time, provided that the total hours worked are equal to or more than half of the total weekly working time. After this they have the right to return to their previous work schedule.

A parent who leaves the labour market to care for four or more children (and who is entitled to parental leave or has been an active jobseeker for at least 12 months in the last 3 years) is entitled to state-paid social security contributions until the youngest child is 8 years old.

Early childhood education and care

Children from the age of 11 months are eligible for placement in a state-subsidized early childhood education and care institution, however, attendance is not compulsory.⁸

Parents' contribution to the cost of the institution depends on their financial situation and ranges from 0% to 77% of the total cost. If several children from the same family are enrolled in the same institution, parents are exempted from paying the fees for the youngest child. They are also exempted from paying the fee for the third child and for each additional child, regardless of whether the children attend at the same time as their siblings. Families whose average monthly income per person does not exceed EUR 1,218 are eligible for this allowance (*znižanje plačila vrtca*).⁹ In the school year 2022/2023, 84.6% of children aged between 1 and 5 years attended an institution. Out of them, 94% attended a public institution.¹⁰

In 2023, 57% of children aged 0-3 years in Slovenia were in nursery care, which was well above the EU average (37%) and was a significant increase compared to 24% in 2005. In the same year, 95% of Slovenian children aged 3-6 attended kindergarten, which was also above the EU average (89%), and was an increase compared to 2005 (81%).

⁸ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/slovenia/early-childhood-education-and-care#:~:text=In%20the%202022%2F2023%20school,Republic%20of%20Slovenia%2C%202023>

⁹ <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/results/>

¹⁰ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/slovenia/early-childhood-education-and-care#:~:text=In%20the%202022%2F2023%20school,Republic%20of%20Slovenia%2C%202023>

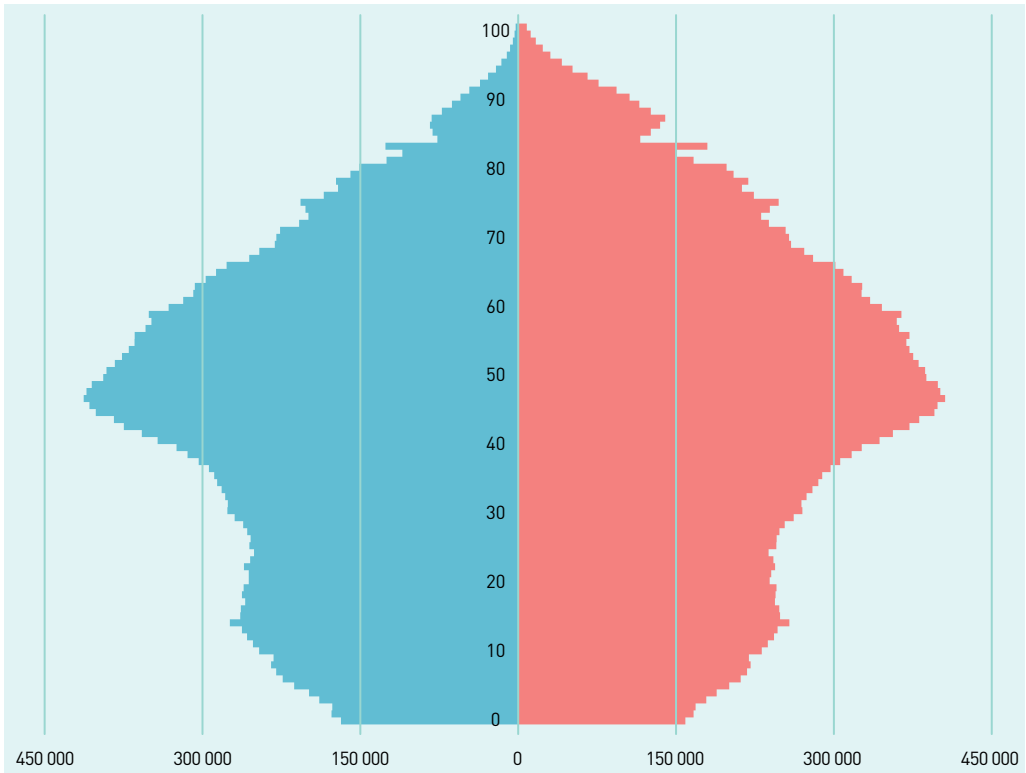


Spain

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	40 665 545	46 667 174	46 440 099	47 398 695	47 432 893	48 085 361
Live birth (persons)	405 313	470 553	408 734	336 247	328 704	322 075*
Death (persons)	357 580	386 017	408 231	449 270	462 734	435 331*
Immigrant (persons)	414 772	371 331	414 746	528 856	1 258 894	N/A
Emigrant (persons)	N/A	409 034	327 325	696 866	531 889	N/A
Marriage (number)	206 266	158 220	173 049	147 673	178 624	N/A
Divorce (number)	39 242	103 290	96 824	86 851	81 302	80 065*
TFR	1.23	1.34	1.34	1.19	1.16	N/A

Source: Eurostat, * Spanish Statistical Office (Download date: 12.08.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Spain's population grew steadily until 2012, and after a slight decrease, it started to rise again in 2017, reaching 48,085,361 people¹ in 2023, an increase of 18.2% compared to 2001. Foreigners account for one sixth of the total population, with more than half of the immigrants coming from the former Spanish colonies, mostly from Latin America, and the other half mainly from Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, Russia). The country's population pyramid shows an ageing society, with a steep decline in the number of people under 40.

In Spain, the increasing rate of natural decrease is offset by a positive net migration, which is responsible for the country's growing population.

The number of live births increased steadily between 2001 and 2008, from 405,313 in 2001 to 518,503 in 2008, after which the birth rate started to fall. In 2023, 20.5% fewer children were born than in 2001. In 2023, Spain had one of the lowest live births per 1,000 inhabitants among EU Member States. However, the number of deaths rose by 21.7% between 2001 and 2023. While until 2016 there were more births than deaths, in 2017 the natural decrease was 31,000 and this trend has continued since then, reaching 130,000 in 2022 and 110,000 in 2023. Among the EU-27, Spain has one of the lowest death rates per 1,000 inhabitants.

The country's migration balance was negative until 2015, but since then the country's population has increased every year due to migration. Immigration increased between 2004 and 2007, when the number of immigrants ranged between 700,000 and 900,000, but fell to around 300,000 in 2012, before increasing again, reaching over 750,000 in 2019 and 1,250,000 in 2022. Data on emigration show a steady increase from 2007 to 2013. In the following years it started to decrease and in 2019 it fell below 300,000. In 2021, the number jumped again, with a total of 696,866 emigrants.

The number of marriages increased until 2004, after which it started to decline. Between 2010 and 2019, the number was around 160,000, reaching a low in 2020, due to the closures caused by the coronavirus epidemic. In 2022, there were 178,624 marriages, a 13.4% decrease compared to 2001. Spain has one of the lowest marriage rates per 1,000 people in the EU. Between 2001 and 2007, the number of divorces in Spain rose steadily. From 2008 to 2010, the number fluctuated. Since 2011, it has been on a downward trend, falling by 22.5% in 2023 compared to 2011, but still twice as high as in 2001.

¹ https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/en/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176992&menu=ultiDatos&tidp=1254735572981

In 2001, the total fertility rate was 1.23 in Spain, after which it increased until 2008, and then decreased until 2013. It then rose slightly, but has been falling steadily since 2017. The 2022 value (1.16) is the second lowest in the European Union.

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In the case of multiple births or adoptions, the following benefits (*prestación por parto o adopción múltiples*) are paid to parents according to the number of children:

- for 2 children: EUR 4,000;
- for 3 children: EUR 8,000;
- for 4 or more children: EUR 12,000;
- EUR 1,000 per birth or adoption for large families, one-parent families or disabled mothers.

Maternity leave and benefit²

The birth and childcare leave for the mother (*permiso y prestación por nacimiento y cuidado del menor*) entitles the mother to 16 weeks of leave. In the case of a twin birth, the birth of a disabled child or adoption, 1 additional week per child is granted, starting with the second child. The period of leave is also extended by 1 week in the case of premature birth or hospitalisation. After childbirth, 6 weeks of leave are compulsory and can start at the earliest 4 weeks before the expected due date. The allowance paid during the leave is 100 % of the calculation base (calculation base: the contribution base for the month preceding the date of the leave divided by the number of days corresponding to the contribution. The maximum contribution base could not exceed EUR 4,495 per month in 2023.)

Eligibility criteria:

For female and male workers aged 26 and over:

- 180 days of contributions in the 7 years preceding the birth of the child (or, in the case of adoption or foster care, in the 7 years preceding the administrative/court decision); or
- 360 contribution days for full-time employment.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1129&langId=en&intPageId=4789>

For workers aged between 21 and 26:

- 90 contribution days in the 7 years preceding the birth of the child (or in the 7 years preceding the administrative/judicial decision in the case of adoption or foster care); or
- 180 contribution days for full-time employment.

For workers under 21, there is no minimum contribution period.

Special leaves:

- Benefit for risk during pregnancy (*riesgo durante el embarazo*) is available for the employee if she is unable to continue her normal occupation during pregnancy. The leave lasts for the time necessary to protect the safety or health of the worker.
- Benefit for risk during breastfeeding (*riesgo durante la lactancia*) is for working mothers who are breastfeeding and therefore cannot continue their normal occupation. It is paid until the child is 9 months old.

In both cases, the amount of the benefit is 100% of the calculation base for the entire period of the leave.

Non-contributory maternity allowance³ (*subsidio por maternidad de naturaleza no contributiva*) is available to all pregnant workers or self-employed persons who meet all the conditions for maternity and childcare allowance, except for the minimum contribution period. The amount of the allowance is 100% of the Spanish social index, IPREM (EUR 600 per month in 2023) for 42 days (56 days in some cases).⁴

Paternity leave

There is a birth and childcare leave which is granted not just for fathers but also for the “parent other than the biological mother” (*permiso y prestación por nacimiento y cuidado del menor del progenitor distinto de la madre biológica*). The conditions for entitlement are the same as for mothers.

Parental leave and benefit

Parents can take unpaid leave to care for their child/children (*excedencia por cuidado de hijo*) from the birth until the child is 3 years old. 4 out of 17 Spanish provinces offer supplementary childcare benefits to residents with family income below a certain income threshold: the amount paid is between EUR 290 and EUR 645 per month.

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1129&langId=en&intPageId=4789>

⁴ <https://www.iprem.com.es/>

Child benefit

From 2022, families with dependent children can receive up to EUR 100 per month, depending on the age of the children and the income level of the parents. Families with two adults and one child whose total annual income is less than EUR 27,000 and families with two adults and two or more children whose total annual income is less than EUR 32,100 can receive this benefit. One-parent families with one child and an annual income of less than EUR 25,700 and one-parent families with at least two children and an annual income of less than EUR 30,800 are also eligible. Families with higher incomes are not eligible.

The amount of benefit per child:

- Families with children aged 0 to 3 years receive EUR 100 per month (for each child in this age group).
- Families with children aged 3 to 6 receive EUR 70 per month (for each child in this age group).
- Families with children aged 6 to 18 receive EUR 50 per month (for each child in this age group).

In Spain, families are entitled to a supplementary benefit for dependent children or foster children (*prestaciones por hijo o menor acogido a cargo*) for a disabled dependent minor child. If the child is over 18, it is only paid if the child is at least 65% disabled. The amount varies:

- EUR 1,000 per year for each minor with a disability of more than 33%;
- EUR 5,440 per year for each adult child with a disability of 65% or more;
- EUR 8,159 per year for each child, foster child or adopted adult with a disability of 75% or more.

Special child benefits are paid to large families (families with four or more children), one-parent families or families where one of the parents lives with a disability (*prestaciones por nacimiento o adopción en caso de familias numerosas, monoparentales o padres o madres con discapacidad*), if the family income does not exceed the threshold value for the number of children. The amount of the supplementary family allowance is a single annual amount of EUR 1,000.⁵

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Spain, working mothers are entitled to a monthly payment of EUR 100 or a tax refund of EUR 1,200 at the end of the year for the first 3 years of their child's life.

⁵ <https://www.seg-social.es/wps/portal/wss/internet/Trabajadores/PrestacionesPensionesTrabajadores/10967/85?changeLanguage=en>

For each dependent child under 25 years of age earning less than EUR 8,000 per year, the tax base is reduced by an annual amount of:⁶

- EUR 2,400 for the first child;
- EUR 2,700 for the second child;
- EUR 4,000 for the third child;
- EUR 4,500 for the fourth and each additional child.

Families with three or more children are also entitled to an additional tax credit of EUR 1,200 per child per year for the third and fourth child and EUR 2,400 for the fifth and each additional child. For children aged 0-3, there is also an annual tax credit of EUR 2,800 to cover the cost of nursery care or paid childcare.

Taxpayers who work outside the home and live in large families or have dependants can claim a tax credit of EUR 1,200 per year. This tax credit can be used in addition to the maternity tax credit.

The tax credit can be increased by up to EUR 600 for each child in a large family who exceeds the minimum number (4) of children to be considered as a large family.

Pension supplement after children

The new maternity (parental) pension supplement in 2023 amounts to EUR 30 per child per month.⁷ Its original purpose is to reduce the difference between the amounts received by men and women. The new mechanism significantly modified the previous supplementary maternity pension. From the first biological or adopted child up to the fourth child, one parent is entitled to pension compensation. (The previous supplement could only be received by the mother and only from the second child.)

The purpose of the supplement is to compensate for the setback in professional careers that women usually suffer after having a child or adopting, which results in lower pensions for them in the long run. The supplement is given to the parent who suffered a greater loss in his professional career after the birth of the child. In the vast majority, these are mothers, but if it is the father, then he is the one who is entitled to the supplement.

Housing

In Spain, the government provides rental assistance to low- and middle-income earners aged 18-35 through the “*Bono Joven Alquiler*” (youth rent). This operates with a budget of EUR 200 million, and it is assumed that more than 70,000 young people will apply for it from May 2023 to May 2025. The applicants can receive an amount of EUR 250 per month to pay their rent.

⁶ <https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/spain/individual/deductions>

⁷ <https://www.seg-social.es/wps/portal/wss/internet/Trabajadores/PrestacionesPensionesTrabajadores/4c-43ce49-6636-4a12-bacf-5e6697eb81da?1dmye&urile=wcm%3apath%3a%2Fwebcontent%2Bsyndication%2Fibmcontent-wcm%253AunresolvedReferences#Cuantia>

To be eligible for the support, the following conditions must be met:

- The applicant must be a Spanish or European Union citizen or a third-country national legally residing in Spain.
- The rent subsidy can only be used to pay the rent.
- The rent cannot exceed EUR 600, or EUR 300 for a room. In exceptional cases, the rent may be higher, up to EUR 900 per property or EUR 450 per room.
- The annual income cannot be more than three times the value of the IPREM (*Indicador Público de Renta de Efectos Múltiples*), which was EUR 24,318 in 2023.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Employment

In Spain, part-time employment is relatively common among women aged 15-64 – about a fifth of women work this way. The employment rate of women aged 18-64 with small children was 63.5% (EU-27 average: 66.4%) in 2023, while that of men aged 18-64 was 83.9% (EU-27 average: 89.6%). The employment rate of women raising young children aged 18-64 was 56.1% in 2006. The employment rate of men raising young children aged 18-64 was 90.3%. Their proportion decreased until 2013, after which it began to rise. It has fluctuated over the past few years, but its value has been around 80%.

Carer's leave

In order to care for a sick child or relative, the employee is entitled to 2-4 days of 100% paid leave per illness. In the case of a child requiring long-term care or hospitalization, the parent is entitled to unlimited leave. Employees in the public sector can request 2-3 years of long-term care leave for a relative who needs long-term care, during which time they can receive a maximum of 66% of their salary.

In June 2023, the law on menstrual leave was adopted. The legislation provides women with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 days per month to stay at home in case of severe menstrual pain. This requires a medical certificate, and from the first day the social insurance pays the amount corresponding to the sick leave.

Flexible working arrangements

Until the baby is 9-12 months old, both parents are entitled to a 1-hour breastfeeding/feeding break per day. A reduction in the number of working hours can be applied for until the child is 12 years old, or for a longer period in the case of a disabled child.

Parents of children under the age of 12 have the right to request flexible working options, including remote work. Employers can reject the application, but they must justify this with objective reasons.

A working parent can reduce his or her working day from one-eighth to half to take care of a child under 12 or to take care of a disabled child of any age (*reducción de jornada por guarda legal*). Employees can decide on the extent and duration of the reduction in working hours within their normal work schedule. This is defined as an individual right and is considered unpaid leave, but social security contributions (which cover pension and other benefits) are credited for the duration of the part-time leave – calculated as full-time for a maximum of 2 years. Individual entrepreneurs cannot benefit from this.

Early childhood education and care

For many parents, it is a problem that the state only provides high-quality parental benefit for 5 months, and that there are not enough places for many children in nurseries. Thus, caring for a child from the age of 6 months to 3 years is a difficulty for a significant number of parents. There is no law that requires the provision of early childhood care under the age of 3, the entitlement opens only at the age of 3. In public nurseries, half-day care is typically available, and in all cases a reimbursement fee must be paid. All children between the ages of 3 and 6 have the right to free kindergarten care, but parents are required to pay for meals. The lack of qualified staff is a problem in kindergartens, with a kindergarten teacher having to take care of an average of 30 children.

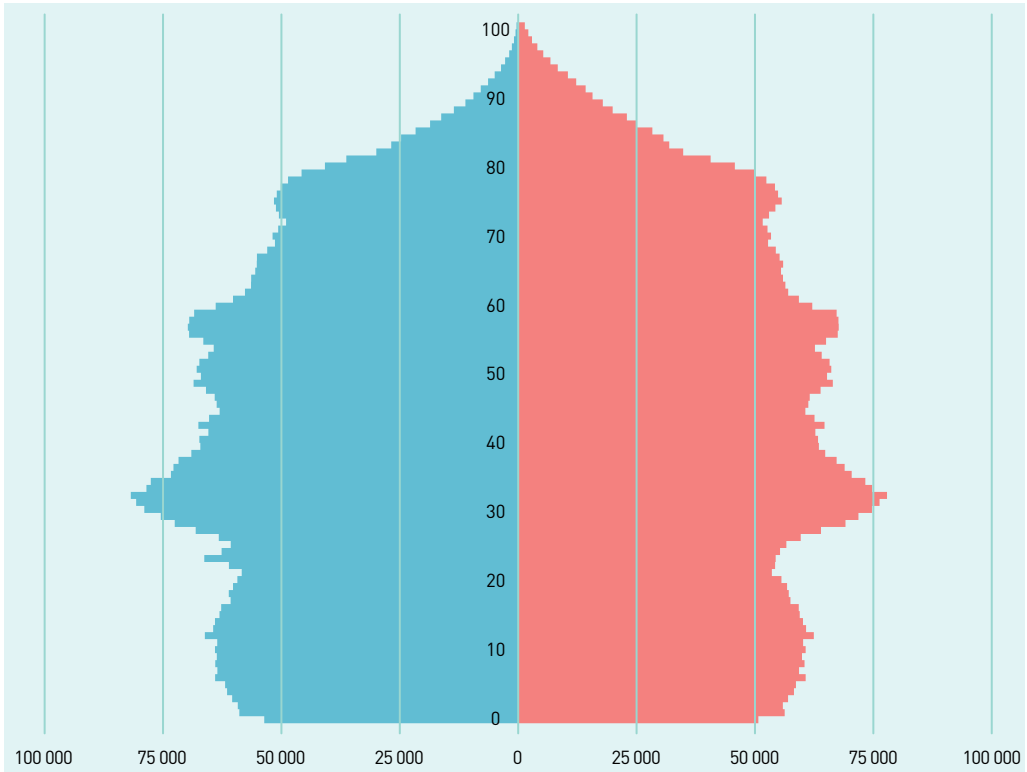
In 2023, 56% of children aged 0-3 were in nursery care, which is much higher than the EU average (37%) and represents an increase compared to 38% in 2005. In 2023, 98% of Spanish children aged 3-6 attended kindergarten, exceeding the EU average (89%), which represents a slight increase compared to the 2005 figure (95%).



KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

	2001	2011	2016	2021	2022	2023
Population	8 882 792	9 415 570	9 851 017	10 379 295	10 452 326	10 521 556
Live birth (persons)	91 466	111 770	117 425	114 263	104 734	100 051*
Death (persons)	93 752	89 938	90 982	91 958	94 737	94 385*
Immigrant (persons)	60 795	96 467	163 005	90 631	102 436	94 514*
Emigrant (persons)	32 141	51 179	45 620	48 284	50 592	73 434*
Marriage (number)	35 778	46 922	53 817	38 895	47 883	44 190*
Divorce (number)	21 022	23 389	24 258	23 647*	21 531	21 231*
TFR	1.57	1.9	1.85	1.67	1.53	1.45*

Source: Eurostat, * Swedish Statistical Office (Download date: 08.12.2024.)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Sweden's population is on the rise, with 10,521,556 people on 1 January 2023, an increase of 18.4% compared to 2001. The majority of the population is Swedish, with the largest minority being Finnish. During the immigration crisis, the majority of immigrants came from Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon.

Sweden's population pyramid shows a relatively balanced society, with an upward trend in the 30-years old's age group.

Natural increase (+5,600 persons in 2023) and positive migration balance (+21,000 persons in 2023) contribute to the country's population growth.

Looking at live births, it can be seen that their number has been steadily increasing over the years, exceeding 117,000 in 2016, but has been gradually decreasing since 2017. Overall, there were 9.4% more live births in 2023 compared to 2001.¹ The mortality rate remained largely unchanged until 2018, but there was a larger decrease in 2019, and in 2020, presumably due to the coronavirus epidemic, the number of deaths increased by 10.5% compared to the previous year, and this increase continued until 2022 and remained at this level in 2023, which is practically the same as in 2001.

Immigration to Sweden has increased between 2011 and 2017, with the number of immigrants rising by 85,000 in 2017, 2.4 times more than in 2001. However, from that year onwards, their numbers decreased year by year until 2021, with around 90,000 arriving in Sweden in 2021 and 2023, and over 100,000 in 2022. Emigration surged in the early 2000s, but has since then been around 50,000 per year. It rose sharply to 73,434 in 2023, up 128.5% compared to 2001.

The number of marriages increased until 2008 and then, after some fluctuations, increased again from 2012 until 2015. From 2016 (except in 2022), the number of marriages decreased year by year, but still 23.5% more marriages were concluded in 2023 than in 2001. In Sweden, the Marriage Act was amended in 2015 to allow same-sex couples to marry. Thus, from 2015, the number of marriages now includes same-sex marriages.² The number of divorces decreased until 2005, then the trend reversed and peaked in 2013, when 26,933 divorces were recorded. Thereafter, it showed a downward trend again until 2023, reaching a level of around 21,000 in 2023, similar to 2001 values.

The total fertility rate was 1.57 in 2001, rising until 2010 (1.98), then declining from 2012 to 1.53 in 2022, the lowest in two decades, and falling further in 2023, which is expected to be the lowest Swedish fertility rate ever (1.45).

¹ <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/pong/statistical-news/swedens-population-2022--population-changes2/>

² https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START__BE__BE0101__BE0101L/GiftSkilsmassaTyp/table/table-ViewLayout1/

FAMILY POLICY

I. System of family support

Birth grant

In Sweden, there is no such benefit. Pregnancy allowance (*graviditetspenning*) is paid to pregnant women who do physically demanding or dangerous work or work in a risky environment and their employer cannot transfer them to another job. Mothers are entitled to an allowance of 77.6% of their income for the last 2 months of pregnancy, up to a maximum of SEK 759 gross per day (EUR 67). Since March 2021, all pregnant women who have reached their 20th week of pregnancy are eligible for COVID-19 risk support. As a result, the number of applications reached almost 38 000 in 2021, i.e. one in three women took advantage of this possibility.³

Maternity leave and benefit

The mother has to take 2 weeks' maternity leave before or after the expected date of childbirth, for which she can claim benefit (*föräldrapenning*) at the expense of her parental benefit. This is possible if the woman is not receiving pregnancy allowance. Either parent may take unpaid child care leave until the child is 18 months old.

Paternity leave⁴

Paternity leave is 10 days, to be taken within 60 days of the child's discharge from hospital. It is possible to split the 10 days into quarters, thirds or half days. In 2021, 77% of men took advantage of paternity leave. The length of leave is increased in the case of multiple births (e.g. doubled in the case of twins). Adoptive parents living together are entitled to 5 days at the time of adoption, single adoptive parents to 10 days.

Parental leave and benefit⁵

A parent who has been insured for at least 240 days before the birth of the child and has an income of more than SEK 180 (EUR 16) per day is entitled to parental benefit (*föräldrapenning*).

Both parents are entitled to 240 days of paid parental leave per child, making a total of 480 days. Each parent has a non-transferable period of 90 days, with the remaining 150-150 days being freely shared and transferable. In the case of twins, an additional 180 days per child is granted. Up to the age of one, parents can use the benefit for 30 days at the same time. After the child's 4th birthday, only 96 days can be used, with a total of 132

³ <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/english/parents/if-you-are-expecting-a-child/pregnancy-benefit>

⁴ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

⁵ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023, MISSOC* és <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/english/parents/when-the-child-is-born/parental-benefit>

days for twins. The parental leave is available until the child reaches the age of 12 or the end of the 5th year of primary school.

The parental benefit ranges from SEK 250-1,021 per day (EUR 22-91) for 390 days, depending on the parent's income, to 77.6% of salary, and SEK 180 per day (EUR 16) for the remaining 90 days. The parental benefit is subject to tax and can be claimed for full or part days. If the parent has not worked for 240 days before the birth of the child or has an annual income of less than SEK 117,590 (EUR 10,345), he or she is entitled to a parental benefit of SEK 250 (EUR 22) per day, including for unemployed persons and students. The allowance for the remaining 90 days is also SEK 180 (EUR 16) per day for these beneficiaries.

Mothers can claim the benefit up to 60 days before the expected date of delivery. It is also possible for parents to claim less than 100% of the benefit, thus extending the period of parental leave.

The length of leave is increased in the case of multiple births: for twins, 90 extra days at 77.6% of earnings, and a further 90 days at a flat rate of SEK 180 (EUR 16) per day. In the case of sole custody, the custodial parent receives all the parental leave (i.e. 480 days). Both in the public sector and in the corporate sector, it is observed, that an additional parental allowance (*föräldralön*) is paid, which is around 10% of income, raising the parental allowance to 90%.

Child benefit⁶

In Sweden, parents receive a child allowance (*barnbidrag*) of SEK 1,250 (EUR 111) per month for each child up to the age of 16. After that, parents get a supplementary child allowance (*förlängt barnbidrag*) and a student allowance if the child is still in secondary school up to the age of 20, both of SEK 1,250 (EUR 111) per month (SEK 2,500 in total). The supplementary child allowance is paid directly to the child after the age of 18.

Families with three or more children also receive an additional amount (*flerbarnstillägg*) until the child is 16: SEK 150 (EUR 13) per month for the second child, SEK 730 (EUR 65) for the third, SEK 1,740 (EUR 155) for the fourth and SEK 2,990 (EUR 267) for the fifth child. To qualify for the large family allowance, there must be a child under 16 in the family or a child over 16 living at home, in full-time education and not yet married.⁷

In the case of children born after 1 March 2014, the child allowance and its supplementary amount are also shared 50-50% between the two parents, if they share custody. If only one of them is entitled, the full amount is paid to that parent. In the case of children born before 1 March 2014, parents can declare whether they want to share the allowance. If they do not, the mother of the child receives the full amount.

⁶ <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatperson/foralder/barnbidrag-och-flerbarnstillagg> and MISSOC

⁷ <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatperson/foralder/barnbidrag-och-flerbarnstillagg>

Tax credits and other benefits

Family taxation

In Sweden, there is no such benefit.

Housing⁸

There are three types of housing benefit (*bostadsbidrag*) in Sweden:

1. The first is for young people aged 18-28 without children, living in a home of up to 60 sqm and paying at least SEK 1,800 (EUR 160) per month. The maximum monthly amount of the benefit is SEK 1,300 (EUR 116). For young people living alone, the annual income must not exceed SEK 86,720 (EUR 7,729).
2. The second is for families with a child under 18. The monthly amount is SEK 3,400 (EUR 303) for one child, SEK 4,200 (EUR 374) for two children and SEK 5,200 (EUR 463) for three or more children.
3. The third type is for parents who live with their child only part-time (e.g. intermittently, e.g. divorced). The amount is SEK 2,400 (EUR 214) per month for one child, SEK 2,800 (EUR 250) for two children and SEK 3,300 (EUR 294) for three or more children.

The above amounts are the maximum, and the amount paid depends on income, housing costs, the size of the apartment and the number of children. Housing benefit is available for both rental and own property. The average rent for a one-bedroom property is SEK 10,000 – 20,000 (EUR 890-1,780) per month.

II. Reconciling work and family life

Swedish parents are very successful in balancing work and family responsibilities. They have the highest female and maternal employment rates in the EU and the lowest risk of child poverty. The country's family policy promotes the two-earner family model and ensures that both women and men can share work and family responsibilities.

Employment

In 2023, the employment rate for women was 75.6% and for men 79.1%. The employment rate for mothers with young children was among the highest in the EU at 83.6% in 2023, and 92.9% for men (the EU average for women was 66.4% and for men 89.6%). A high proportion of women work part-time and/or in flexible arrangements: in 2023, the part-time employment rate for women aged 15-64 (28%) is just below the EU average (28.5%), while for men it is 12.6%, above the EU average (8.4%).

⁸ <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/english/parents/housing-allowance-for-families-with-children>

*Carer's leave*⁹

Parents of children under 12 years of age can take temporary parental leave to care for a sick child and receive 77.6% of income (*tillfällig föräldrapenning*) below a certain income limit. Parental leave for care is limited to 120 days per child, but there is no time limit in cases of serious illness. A medical certificate is required for a period longer than 7 consecutive days. Of the 120 days, 60 days can also be used to stay at home with young children if the regular carer falls ill.

For children under 18 years of age with a terminal/severe illness (life-threatening conditions), there is no upper limit on the number of days of benefit. In such cases, both parents may be on leave at the same time. Parents whose child has been ill for more than 6 months or live with a disability can apply for child carer's allowance (*omvårdnadsbidrag*¹⁰) and an additional cost allowance (*merkostnadsersättning för barn*¹¹).

*Flexible working arrangements*¹²

Until a child reaches the age of eight or completes the first grade of school, parents have the right to reduce their normal working time by up to 25%. The reduced working hours are paid at a proportionately lower rate. In some sectors, such reductions are allowed up to the age of 12. Employees (parents) always have a right to return to the original working hours at any point in time.

Early childhood education and care¹³

Early childhood education and care can be divided into two main stages. Uniform childcare centres (*förskola*) provided by municipalities are available for children aged 1 to 5 years. State-subsidised day care is provided for children aged 1-3 years, with parents paying a reduced fee. From the age of 3, children are provided free of charge for at least 15 hours per week, in addition to which a fee is payable. In the last year before starting primary school, children aged 6 attend compulsory and free pre-school classes (*förskoleklass*). In addition, there is a home-based service called pedagogical care (*pedagogisk omsorg*), which is run by registered childminders and can be organised in different ways (either in the childminders' homes or elsewhere). Many local authorities offer childcare services in open kindergartens (*öppen förskola*), where parents (or childminders) can come with their children whenever they want. Children whose parents are working or studying are entitled to a state-subsidised place in an out-of-school leisure centre (*fritidshem*).

⁹ Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023* és <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/>

¹⁰ <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatperson/foralder/om-ditt-barn-har-en-funktionsnedsattning/omvardnadsbidrag>

¹¹ <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/privatperson/funktionsnedsattning/om-ditt-barn-har-en-funktionsnedsattning/merkostnadsersattning-for-barn>

¹² Blum et al. *Leave Policies 2023*

¹³ <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/sweden/early-childhood-education-and-care>

SWEDEN

In 2023, 57% of children aged 0-3 years in Sweden were looked after in childcare centres, well above the EU average (37%) and a slight increase from 52% in 2005. This proportion is lower in large cities and higher in smaller towns. In 2023, 99% of Swedish children aged 3 to 5 attended kindergarten (71.6% of the age group for more than 30 hours per week), above the EU average (89%) and an increase compared to 2005 (88%).

Comparative table

	EU	AUSTRIA
Population (persons) (Eurostat, 2023)		9 104 772
Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (Eurostat, 2022)	1.46	1.41
Birth grant, amount		None
Length of maternity leave	14 weeks	16 weeks
Maternity benefit in % of previous earnings	May be determined by the Member State	100%
The length of paternity leave	10 days	28-31 days (one month)
Paternity benefit in % of previous earnings		52 EUR per day, so a total of approx. EUR 1.600
Length of parental leave and its use up to a certain age of the child		minimum 2 months until the child is 2 years old
Monthly benefit during parental leave in % of previous earnings or given amount		80%
Eligibility age for child benefit (also in the case of higher education)		18 (24)
Family taxation		available
Female employment rate in the population aged 20-64(%) (Eurostat, 2023)	70.2	73.3
Employment rate of women with at least one child under the age of 6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	66.4	73.7
Nursery attendance rate in the population aged 0-3 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	37	24
Kindergarten attendance rate in the population aged 3-6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	89	90

BELGIUM	BULGARIA	CYPRUS	CZECH REPUBLIC
11 742 796	6 477 710	920 701	10 827 529
1.53	1.65	1.37	1.64
EUR 586 - 1289 (varies by region and in Wallonia the allowance is reduced for the 2nd child.)	EUR 250 - 600 (depending on the number of the child)	EUR 581	EUR 411 - 535 (depending on the number of the child)
15 weeks	58 weeks	18 weeks	24 weeks
82% in the first month, then 75% (the latter has an upper limit)	90%	72% (in the case of multiple births, depending on the number of twins, it can be 80%-90%-100%), there is no upper limit	70%, has an upper limit
20 days	15 days	14 days	14 days
100% in the first 3 days and 82% of the previous payment in the following days (maximum: EUR 144 per day)	90%	In the given contribution year, 72% of the weekly value of the basic insurance points, which may increase to 80%, 90% and 100% for one, two or three children	70%
8 months until the child is 12 years old	12 months until the child is 2 years old	36 weeks until the child is 8 years old	up to the child is 3 years old
EUR 978 per month	EUR 399 per month	N/A	EUR 515 - 2136 per month
18 (25)	20	18 (20)	15 (in case of 26 disability)
available	available	not available	available
68.3	72.6	74.6	74.5
69.6	64.8	73.5	45.4
56	17	37	4
99	95	88	81

	DENMARK	ESTONIA
Population (persons) (Eurostat, 2023)	5 932 654	1 365 884
Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (Eurostat, 2022)	1.55	1.41
Birth grant, amount	None	EUR 320
Length of maternity leave	14 weeks	14 weeks
Maternity benefit in % of previous earnings	varies by individual	100%
The length of paternity leave	10 days	30 days
Paternity benefit in % of previous earnings	up to EUR 630 per week	100%
Length of parental leave and its use up to a certain age of the child	48 weeks until the child is 9 years old	475 days until the child is 3 years old
Monthly benefit during parental leave in % of previous earnings or given amount	max. EUR 610 per week	100%
Eligibility age for child benefit (also in the case of higher education)	18	19
Family taxation	available	available
Female employment rate in the population aged 20-64(%) (Eurostat, 2023)	77	80.9
Employment rate of women with at least one child under the age of 6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	78.3	70.7
Nursery attendance rate in the population aged 0-3 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	70	38
Kindergarten attendance rate in the population aged 3-6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	97	95

FINLAND	FRANCE	GREECE	NETHERLANDS
5 563 970	68 172 977	10 413 982	17 811 291
1.32	1.79	1.32	1.49
EUR 170	EUR 1019	EUR 2000	None
6 weeks	16 weeks	17 weeks	16 weeks
90%, has an upper limit	100%, has an upper limit	55%, has an upper limit	100%, has an upper limit
included by parental leave	28 days (35 days for twins)	14 days	30 days
included by parental leave: 90% in the first 16 days and 70% thereafter	up to EUR 100 per day	100%	100% for the first 5 days and 70% for the other 25 days
320 days until the child is 2 years old	12 months until the child is 2 years old	8 months until the child is 12 years old	36 weeks until the child is 8 years old
minimum EUR 32 per day	EUR 429 per month	the amount of the current minimum wage	70%
17	20	18 (24)	18
not available	available	available	available
78.1	71.7	57.6	79.6
70.4	69.6	54.5	81.8
42	57	30	73
94	97	87	97

	CROATIA	IRELAND
Population (persons) (Eurostat, 2023)	3 850 894	5 271 395
Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (Eurostat, 2022)	1.53	1.54
Birth grant, amount	EUR 310	10
Length of maternity leave	30 weeks	42 weeks
Maternity benefit in % of previous earnings	100%	262 EUR/week for 26 weeks, 16 weeks without payment
The length of paternity leave	10 days (15 days for twins)	14 days
Paternity benefit in % of previous earnings	100%	274 EUR per week
Length of parental leave and its use up to a certain age of the child	8 months until the child is 12 years old	18 weeks until the child is 2 years old
Monthly benefit during parental leave in % of previous earnings or given amount	100%	EUR 1048
Eligibility age for child benefit (also in the case of higher education)	15 (19)	16 (17)
Family taxation	available	available
Female employment rate in the population aged 20-64(%) (Eurostat, 2023)	66.8	74.3
Employment rate of women with at least one child under the age of 6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	71.7	71.4
Nursery attendance rate in the population aged 0-3 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	30	22
Kindergarten attendance rate in the population aged 3-6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	82	94

POLAND	LATVIA	LITHUANIA	LUXEMBOURG
36 753 736	1 883 008	2 857 279	660 809
1.29	1.47	1.27	1.31
EUR 220	EUR 421	EUR 605	EUR 1740
20 weeks	16 weeks	18 weeks	20 weeks
100%	80%	77.60%	100%, has an upper limit
14 days	10 days	30 days	10 days
100%	80%	78%	100%
41 weeks until the child is 6 years old	18 months until the child is 8 years old	until the child is 3 years old	4 - 6 months (12 months in case of part-time), until the child is 6 years old
70-81.5%	If they ask for 13 months, then 60% of their previous earnings, or if they ask for 19 months, then 43.75%.	Parental leave is paid until the child is 2 years old, for which they receive 78% of their previous salary.	The benefit for this period is the parent's previous salary, but cannot be less than the minimum wage and more than 5/3 of the minimum wage, that is, between EUR 2.508 and EUR 4.180.
18 (21)	16 (20)	18 (23)	18 (25)
available	yes	not available	available
72	76	77.7	71.4
70.7	75.7	75.4	78.4
13	35	20	60
75	95	92	85

	HUNGARY	MALTA
Population (persons) (Eurostat, 2023)	9 599 744	542 051
Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (Eurostat, 2022)	1.56	1.08
Birth grant, amount	EUR 168	EUR 400
Length of maternity leave	24 weeks	18 weeks
Maternity benefit in % of previous earnings	100%	100% (for the first 14 weeks), flat-rate allowance for the last 4 weeks (EUR 193/week in 2023)
The length of paternity leave	10 days	10 days
Paternity benefit in % of previous earnings	100% for the first 5 days and 40% for the other 5 days	100%
Length of parental leave and its use up to a certain age of the child	until the child is 3 years old	4-4 months in the private sector, 12-12 months in the public sector, until the child is 8 years old.
Monthly benefit during parental leave in % of previous earnings or given amount	Up to 70% of the double of the current minimum wage, which is HUF 373.520 (EUR 980) gross per month in 2024.	Unpaid
Eligibility age for child benefit (also in the case of higher education)	18 (20)	16 (21)
Family taxation	available	available
Female employment rate in the population aged 20-64(%) (Eurostat, 2023)	76.1	74
Employment rate of women with at least one child under the age of 6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	71.1	73.7
Nursery attendance rate in the population aged 0-3 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	20	50
Kindergarten attendance rate in the population aged 3-6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	100	93

GERMANY	ITALY	PORTUGAL	ROMANIA
84 358 845	58 997 201	10 467 366	19 054 548
1.46	1.24	1.43	1.71
None	None	None	None
14 weeks	21 weeks	17-21 weeks	18 weeks
100%	80%	100% for 120 days or 80% for 150 days	85%
10 days (draft, but will also be fixed by law in 2024)	10 days (20 days for twins)	28 days	10 days
no data, the law has not yet entered into force	100%	100%	100%
until the child is 3 years old	9 months until the child is 12 years old	6 months until the child is 6 years old	until the child is 2 years old
For the first year of maternity leave, the benefit is 65% of the previous year's earnings, depending on income, EUR 300-1800 per month, up to the age of 2, the amount of the parental support plus is 65% of the difference between the earnings before the birth of the child and the current earnings, depending on income, EUR 150- 900 per month.	In the first month, 80% of the previous earnings, in the second 60%, in the rest 30%.	The benefit is 30% of the previous earnings (if both parents take their 3-3 months, it is 40%).	The full-time benefit is 85% of the average net monthly income earned in the 12 months before the birth (the minimum amount is RON 1.495 (EUR 302) per month and the maximum amount is RON 8.500 (EUR 1.746) per month).
18 (25)	18 (21)	16 (24)	18
available	available	available	available
77.2	56.5	75.5	59.1
67.4	54.1	79.8	47.1
23	35	56	12
86	95	88	69

	SPAIN	SWEDEN
Population (persons) (Eurostat, 2023)	48 085 361	10 521 556
Total Fertility Rate (TFR) (Eurostat, 2022)	1.16	1.53
Birth grant, amount	EUR 4000 in case of multiple birth	None
Length of maternity leave	16 weeks	As part of parental leave
Maternity benefit in % of previous earnings	100%	0
The length of paternity leave	16 weeks (80 days) of which 6 weeks (30 days) are mandatory	10 days (parents are entitled to a total of 480 days, of which 90 days are reserved for the father only)
Paternity benefit in % of previous earnings	100%	80%
Length of parental leave and its use up to a certain age of the child	until the child is 3 years old	480 days until the child is 12 years old
Monthly benefit during parental leave in % of previous earnings or given amount	Unpaid	The amount of the benefit is 77.6% of the salary for 390 days, between SEK 250-1.021/day (EUR 22-91) depending on the income of the parent, and SEK 180/day (EUR 16) for the remaining 90 days.
Eligibility age for child benefit (also in the case of higher education)	18	16 (20)
Family taxation	available	not available
Female employment rate in the population aged 20-64(%) (Eurostat, 2023)	65.4	80.2
Employment rate of women with at least one child under the age of 6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	63.5	83.6
Nursery attendance rate in the population aged 0-3 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	56	57
Kindergarten attendance rate in the population aged 3-6 (%) (Eurostat, 2023)	98	99

SLOVAKIA	SLOVENIA
5 428 792	2 116 972
1.57	1.55
EUR 830	EUR 422
34 weeks	15 weeks
75%	100%
10 days	15 days
75% of the calculation basis	100% (cannot be less than EUR 465)
until the child is 3 years old	320 days until the child is 8 years old
The monthly amount of the benefit in 2024 is EUR 345 or EUR 473, if the mother received maternity benefit.	For 260 days, the benefit is 100% of the previous average wage, which cannot be less than the minimum wage, and its maximum is 2.5 times the monthly average wage.
16 (25)	18
available	available
73.6	74.3
67.7	81.6
1	57
73	95

Authors and editors

Hungarian Demographic Research Institute

Zsuzsanna Makay, PhD, Senior Researcher

Századvég Foundation

Fruzsina Ökrös, Junior Research Fellow

Dömötör Gere, Senior Researcher

Krisztina Kolozsvári, Specialist

Péter Pillók, PhD, Director; Associate Professor, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology

ELTE Faculty of Law

Éva Lukács Gellénné, PhD, Assistant Professor

Mária Kopp Institute for Demography and Families

Gergely Agócs, JD, Senior Analyst

Ádám Bencze, Researcher-Analyst

Ágnes Dusa Deákné, PhD, Researcher-Analyst

Kata Eplényi, Senior International Coordinator

Tünde Fűrész, President

Anikó Horváth-Varga, Researcher-Analyst

Kinga Joó, Senior International Coordinator

Kriszta Kállay-Kisbán, Head of International Bureau

Melinda Ludescher, Researcher-Analyst

Árpád Mészáros, JD, Vice President

Tímea Nagy, Researcher-Analyst

András Pári, JD, Head of Research; Assistant Professor, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology

Réka Szász, International Coordinator

Mariann Trieb, Researcher-Analyst

Péter Uhljár, Researcher-Analyst

EDITORS

Gergely Agócs, JD, Senior Analyst, KINCS

Tünde Fűrész, President, KINCS

Kriszta Kállay-Kisbán, Head of International Bureau, KINCS

András Pári, JD, Head of Research, KINCS; Assistant Professor, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology

Published by:
Mária Kopp Institute for Demography and Families (KINCS)

Director of publishing:
Tünde Fűrész

Editors:
Gergely Agócs, Tünde Fűrész, Kriszta Kállay-Kisbán, András Pári

Translated by:
Kata Eplényi, Kriszta Kállay-Kisbán, Réka Szász, Zsuzsanna Tóth

Graphic design and pagination:
György Protzner

Printing house:
Gelbert Eco Print Kft.

ISBN 978-615-6447-23-4

This publication is not for commercial distribution.
Publisher's volumes (in print and e-book formats)
available for order at the KINCS bookshop:
www.ekonyv.koppmariaintezet.hu/en



KINCS

MÁRIA KOPP INSTITUTE
FOR DEMOGRAPHY
AND FAMILIES

Over the last decade, family policy has increasingly become part of everyday public discourse not only in Hungary but also in several other countries of the world. More and more people are recognising that the family is not just a private matter, but a public matter that determines the state and future of our societies, and therefore deserves community support. Although the system and intensity of family support varies from country to country, the objectives are similar: to stabilise and improve the situation of families and promote their growth.

By presenting the family policy systems of the European Union, we wish to provide a broad and detailed insight into the measures of the Member States. This will give us a better idea of which path each country is following, when it comes to supporting families, what measures they are taking to support parents having and raising children, and how they generally approach to the institution of the family and family values.

Our book is a snapshot for 2024 of the frequently and rapidly changing family policies in the Member States of the European Union. We hope that our work will be useful for professionals and those interested in the subject, as well as for those living in families and planning to start one. Our volume draws attention to the fact that, even by European standards, our country's multifaceted family support system provides families with a number of special solutions and unique opportunities that are not available elsewhere in Europe.

The timeliness of the preparation of this volume is given by Hungary's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024.



KINCS

MÁRIA KOPP INSTITUTE
FOR DEMOGRAPHY
AND FAMILIES