



Recommendation 1683 (2004)¹

Population trends in Europe and their sensitivity to policy measures

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe stands on a demographic threshold. After a century of natural population increase, the outlook for this century is, on the contrary, a natural decrease and excessive ageing of the population. Many eastern European countries are already facing population decline and many of the western countries are expected to experience the same phenomenon in the near future. Migration pressures from surrounding developing countries will, for a long time, continue to persist. Notwithstanding cross-country differences in the intensity and pace of the demographic changes that will persist, all European societies are, or will be, facing essentially the same trends with respect to population decline and ageing.
2. Regarding parenthood, individuals may be happy with having no children or only one or two. Society, by contrast, needs to ensure intergenerational solidarity and continuity and this requires a substantial proportion of larger families. As far as longevity is concerned, individuals aspire to a long and healthy life but society needs to provide an age-friendly environment while maintaining intergenerational equity in all domains of social life.
3. It is likely that the recent, current and possible future changes in relational and reproductive behaviour are due to complex interrelations of accelerated changes in economic, cultural, ideological, social and technological features of advanced societies and cannot be resolved by simple or unique and short-term policy measures.
4. It is worth noting as a special case the recent fast and steep decline in fertility in eastern Europe, where the economic and political changes after the collapse of the communist regimes were accompanied by the weakening of the social situation of women and the decline, or even disappearance, of the social protection system in general.
5. The effects of the recent social, cultural, economic and technological progress have been beneficial in many domains: for most people quality of life has increased, individual emancipation and development have progressed and in particular the social position of women has improved, leisure activities have increased and diversified, the health situation has improved and longevity has increased. On the other hand, recent modernisation and changes in the socioeconomic sphere in most countries have not achieved a harmonious relation between work and family life, have not yet fully realised equal opportunities for women and men, have not been able to maintain or to create a really child-friendly environment and have not offered long-term labour security, or succeeded in offering healthy older citizens adequate access to employment.
6. The demographic challenges in the fields of population decline and excessive population ageing need to be addressed without endangering the fundamental human and societal goals and acquisitions of European democracies, including, inter alia, further improving the quality of life, further increasing participation rates in higher levels of education, further increasing the labour participation of women, young adults and younger elderly and offering long-term work opportunities, further increasing longevity, and providing a generous and just social protection system.

1. Assembly debate on 8 October 2004 (32nd Sitting) (see [Doc. 10182](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, rapporteur: Mr Brunhart; and [Doc. 10320](#), opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mrs McCafferty). Text adopted by the Assembly on 8 October 2004 (32nd Sitting).



7. The Programme of Action, adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo by 179 countries in 1994, represented the acknowledgement by the international community and by all signatory countries, including all Council of Europe member states, that the individual must be placed at the heart of all population, demographic and sustainable development policies. The ICPD Programme of Action, which marks ten years of implementation this year in 2004, is often heralded as a paradigm shift away from the purely demographic targets of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s towards an approach which recognised the central and legitimate right for every individual, in this case particularly women, to make their own informed choices about if and when to found a family, as well as the number of children and the spacing of their births.

8. In general, demographic problems cannot be resolved by quick-fix solutions, short term-policies or simple or unique measures. The current "toolbox" of population- and family-related policies has, in most countries, proven to be either insufficient and/or inadequate to address properly the challenging population issues in Europe. Policies have to address the complexity of demographic and societal interactions and interdependencies. The complexity of demographic processes and their interaction with virtually all social domains requires both adaptive and modifying policies in most areas.

9. Without some considerable changing of current cultural values, socioeconomic living conditions and the political context, it is unlikely that the coming decades will see a substantial and durable recovery of present fertility rates.

10. The Parliamentary Assembly, therefore, recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

10.1. stimulate the emergence of common European policies in the domains of demographic developments and population-related issues;

10.2. promote policies for a better harmonisation of family and working life in particular in favour of women, including the creation of necessary child-care facilities;

10.3. consider the demographic repercussions of policy measures and recommendations planned in all domains of life in society;

10.4. encourage closer co-operation among the dispersed international research instruments in Europe for analysing and monitoring population developments and population-related policies;

10.5. strengthen, in anticipation of a major reorganisation and broadening of international comparative population research in Europe, the European Population Committee (CAHP) of the Council of Europe;

10.6. include in the terms of reference of the European Population Committee that it may be called upon by the Parliamentary Assembly or one of its committees to produce a short policy paper as a background document to be used in drawing up an Assembly report or as a contribution to an Assembly debate or hearing;

10.7. call on member states to:

a. address the major demographic challenges in Europe also seeking inspiration from the ICPD Programme of Action;

b. pursue a general societal consensus on population goals and population-related policies;

c. deal with the problems of population decline and excessive population ageing without endangering the fundamental human and societal goals and acquisitions in Europe;

d. recognise that many people may not wish to have more children or found a family and in this respect adapt social systems to conform to this new reality;

e. develop long-term population-related policies that take adequately into account the generational and intergenerational dimensions of demographic processes;

f. address the fundamental causes of demographic trends which are considered as challenges for social cohesion, intergenerational solidarity and continuity;

g. on the hypothesis that it is considered desirable to redress the current below-replacement fertility level to the replacement level:

address health challenges which inhibit people from having the number of children they desire, improve health conditions to allow people to remain fertile and respond to looming health challenges which can negatively impact on demographic trends, such as HIV/Aids;

further pursue vigorously gender equality and emancipatory policies, not only to facilitate the combination of motherhood with other activities, in particular participation in the labour force, but also to involve fathers in child caring and rearing and household tasks, so that they can fully share family responsibilities with their partners;

more strongly eliminate existing parenthood-linked financial inequities in society;

create a more child-friendly environment, more particularly in urban areas, and providing more childminding facilities in all domains of social life – work, leisure, social gatherings – so that children again appear as a welcome constituent in society;

promote child- and family-oriented values, inter alia, by introducing family and population issues in the educational system;

rethink the organisation of the entire life-course perspective of work, parenthood and retirement;

h. in the domain of population ageing:

adapt the social protection system – pension system, health care and other public-funded care – to the new demographic regime to keep it sustainable in a long-term perspective;

keep the younger elderly active, especially by making pre-pension schemes and retirement age more diversified, so as to keep older workers, albeit in a variable and flexible way, part of the active population;

strengthen intergenerational solidarity with a view to maintaining or redressing intergenerational equity in life opportunities and options;

i. in the domain of immigration: develop comprehensive integration policies adjusted to the specific labour needs and reception capacity of the host country, including measures to give immigrants every opportunity to participate in and contribute to the life of their host society.