



**Resolution 1864 (2012)<sup>1</sup>**

Final version

## Demographic trends in Europe: turning challenges into opportunities

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The demography of Europe is changing. This phenomenon affects all Council of Europe member States. Europeans are living longer and having fewer children. With increasing mobility and immigration, European societies are becoming more diverse and immigrants are becoming an integral part of them.
2. Demographic trends in Europe must be seen in the global context of population dynamics. In a world where population growth is associated with economic growth and well-being, Europe has to urgently develop the policies and strategies necessary to cope with changing demographics in order to maintain its power and influence in the world. It is important to transform demographic challenges into opportunities so as to guarantee sustainable economic growth and international security, and ensure that the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law remain relevant not only in Europe but in the rest of the world.
3. On 31 October 2011, the world population reached a new milestone of 7 billion people. Within the framework of a growing world population, the current population of the Council of Europe area is 800 million, representing about 12% of the world population. This figure is expected to drop to about 9% by 2050. China will also see a fall in its population while India will see a large increase. Within Europe, there is a wide diversity in demographic trends, with Germany and Russia experiencing population decline, and France and the United Kingdom experiencing a boom in population, largely as a result of migration.
4. As the world's population grows, it is also ageing, in particular in developed countries. By 2050, the world population of those over the age of 60 is projected to triple, reaching 2 billion people. Europe has the highest proportion of older people and this will remain so for decades, more than one third of Europe's population is expected to be over 60 by 2050. This will require major changes in policy and attitudes towards age.
5. However, the Parliamentary Assembly remains concerned that in a number of eastern European member States, low life expectancy continues to be a problem, especially for men. Measures and policies to decrease mortality in those countries will need to include measures aimed at improving health systems and working conditions and reducing daily stress, but also involve steps to convince people to adopt healthier lifestyles.
6. People are the wealth of nations. Nonetheless, it is not only the number of people that is important, it is also, and above all, the skills, abilities and state of health of those people that count. In 21st-century Europe, political goals should not be defined in terms of population size, but rather in terms of "human capital" available for producing the best possible quality of life for everyone. Within this paradigm shift, Europe needs to invest more in its "human capital" and improve citizens' skills and opportunities in order to make sure they are educated, equipped and integrated to take on the challenges presented by an ever more globalised, and populated, world.

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1. Assembly debate on 27 January 2012 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 12817, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Memecan). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 January 2012 (9th Sitting).



7. With the best “human capital”, coupled with relevant experience, Europe should be in a good position to lead revolutions in innovation and technology. This is where its comparative advantage lies. This will contribute to increased productivity and economic growth inside Europe and also give the continent the ability to remain influential in the rest of the world. By leading in these fields, Europe will also be able to influence growth in developing countries such as China and India.

8. Compared to other regions of the world, Europe still provides a high quality of life, good education and social services for its people. This should be maintained, especially in a context where our countries are facing serious economic problems that require the introduction of austerity measures. Such measures should be designed with utmost care, as they may have significant and unintended consequences for the future demographics of Europe.

9. Policies to improve the “human capital” in Europe should be complemented with appropriate family policies that provide individuals and families with an environment where they can freely organise their lives and decide on the number of children they would like to have. It is important to recognise that the decision whether or not to have children is not taken in a social vacuum. Public policies to enhance a family-friendly society, once introduced and sustained over time, can have a positive impact on fertility rates.

10. The Assembly believes that migration, although not a permanent solution to demographic challenges, can be a major asset. Migrants need to be encouraged to be active citizens of their societies and this is a two-way challenge involving migrants and their host communities. The European labour market needs to attract qualified labour from outside of Europe, but the need for external unskilled labour will also remain high.

11. Social cohesion is an essential factor in guaranteeing the conditions necessary for productivity and the well-being of people in diverse societies. Economic growth, innovation and productivity can only happen in societies that are socially coherent, respectful and collaborative. For this reason, European governments must take all necessary measures to promote diversity in their countries and build on its positive effects.

12. The Assembly believes that one of the key strategies for coping with a declining labour force is to increase participation rates amongst traditionally lesser-used or excluded groups, such as women and older people. The increasing participation of women has been one of the most positive factors leading to growth in the European work force and member States’ economies. However, substantial disparities remain between countries in terms of participation of women. As people live longer and healthier lives, older people have valuable experience to transmit and can continue to be productive by participating in the job market if they are provided with the right lifelong learning opportunities.

13. The Assembly is aware that confronting the demographic challenge will be a long-term task. This task can be fulfilled if Europe is committed to promoting demographic renewal, higher rates of employment and longer working lives of better qualified and more productive workers. Europe also has to be open to receiving and integrating migrants, and ensuring social cohesion, which includes ensuring equity between generations and providing adequate social security.

14. In light of the above considerations, the Assembly calls on the member States of the Council of Europe to:

14.1. take demographic changes into account in their political choices by introducing the necessary policies and developing strategies to cope with changing demographics;

14.2. introduce policies to provide the best education and training opportunities to ensure the highest quality of “human capital”;

14.3. foster inter-generational solidarity and development, in particular by:

14.3.1. promoting active ageing in such a way as to make full use of the potential of older persons, including their continued labour force participation;

14.3.2. promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all generations, including on the professional and social use of new technologies;

14.3.3. combating age discrimination against both women and men, by ensuring full access to training programmes and employment;

14.4. support science, innovation and technology in order to increase productivity and contribute to economic growth;

- 14.5. encourage demographic renewal by:
  - 14.5.1. developing policies that help parents bring up their children, including financial and fiscal measures;
  - 14.5.2. developing policies that promote a better work-life balance, including adequate arrangements for child care, and for supporting elderly and/or frail people;
  - 14.5.3. developing policies that reduce the economic precariousness of young parents, combining flexibility and economic security (flexicurity);
- 14.6. promote integration and diversity by:
  - 14.6.1. developing policies which help to reduce migrant unemployment and make the best use of the potential offered by migrants, in particular through their participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the host countries;
  - 14.6.2. enhancing the atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance between migrants and the population of the host country;
  - 14.6.3. fostering policies aimed at integrating and increasing the language skills and the educational level of migrants, their children and, in particular, migrant women;
- 14.7. promote a more inclusive job market by:
  - 14.7.1. enhancing gender equality and equal opportunities, allowing women to fully participate in economic and political life;
  - 14.7.2. combating discrimination against women in society and in employment.
15. The Assembly also invites relevant international organisations to:
  - 15.1. support member States and other stakeholders in further developing active ageing and in raising awareness of the need to mobilise the full potential of an ageing population and to help combat age discrimination against both women and men;
  - 15.2. exchange best practices on active ageing;
  - 15.3. help to implement migration management systems which aim to safeguard and enhance the rights of migrants and ensure their active participation as equal citizens of their societies;
  - 15.4. support member States in creating a database on demographic trends, and ensure that this is kept up to date through ongoing research and monitoring where necessary;
  - 15.5. co-ordinate and facilitate comparative studies and the exchange of information on these matters.