



Resolution 2682 (2026)¹

Towards a family-friendly Europe: policy recommendations for demographic renewal

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe is facing a profound demographic change due to its shrinking population. After decades of vivid growth, its total population of about 751 million is flattening and is set to slowly fall during the 21st century unless significant policy changes intervene. This demographic change includes persistently low birth rates, population ageing, shrinking cohorts of working-age people and the depopulation of rural and peripheral regions, with far-reaching consequences for society, economy and social systems. The demographic question has thus become a critical policy issue in Europe which requires a long-term vision to bridge the gap between people's needs and aspirations and the reality they face.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that over the last ten years, deaths have outnumbered births (natural population change) in the European Union and many other countries across Europe, with population remaining overall stable or growing slightly only thanks to net immigration. It views the changing demographic outlook as one of Europe's major challenges, alongside environmental and digital challenges, representing a genuine structural shift that requires both adaptation and mitigation. The Assembly concurs with the United Nations Population Fund in calling for responses to demographic change that focus on people's rights, choices and empowerment rather than on numerical population targets, in order to build more fair, sustainable and resilient societies.

3. The Assembly observes that Europe's demographic shrinkage is not the result of a single factor, but of a combination of economic insecurity, high costs of housing and childcare, lifestyle expectations, changing attitudes towards having and raising children, the impact of technology, internet and social media use, rising age at first childbirth, difficulties in reconciling work and family life, fertility issues, unequal sharing of care responsibilities, gender inequality, environmental anxiety, weakness of public services and insufficient support for disadvantaged families and persons with disabilities (including both parents and children). The Assembly stresses the need for comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated responses in providing stable support to families in all their diversity.

4. Recalling the relevant Council of Europe standards, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) and its revised version (No. 163), the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention"), the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, "Lanzarote Convention"), as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Assembly underlines the importance of guaranteeing socio-economic rights, equality and non-discrimination in all family policies at national and European level.

1. *Assembly debate* on 1 October 2026 (35th sitting) (see [Doc. 16477](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Mr Georgios Stamatīs). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 1 October 2026 (35th sitting).

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5. The Assembly considers that the growing diversity of family forms and structures prevalent in European societies – including lone parents, blended families, cohabiting couples, rainbow families and families with members who have disabilities – calls for inclusive policies that acknowledge and provide non-discriminatory treatment to all families.
6. At the same time, the Assembly recognises the social and economic value of marriage for its own sake and for demographic renewal and calls for policies to promote the personal and social benefits of forming committed relationships and having and bringing up children, always respecting each person's capacity, freedom, aspiration and discernment.
7. The Assembly is concerned with the negative economic and social impacts of demographic imbalance, such as shrinking labour force, increased old-age dependency ratios, pressure on pension, long-term care and healthcare systems, and territorial cohesion. All these affect intergenerational solidarity and increase the risk of social fragmentation. It emphasises the importance of long-term policy planning and social investment to preserve prosperity and enhance well-being.
8. The Assembly notes that young adults face increasingly long transitions into autonomous living and underlines the need to empower younger generations through improved access to quality jobs, public services, affordable housing and credit, inclusive educational and social policies, lifelong learning, and territorial cohesion measures to combat depopulation and talent drain so that young people can participate fully in building a sustainable future in their home regions.
9. Noting that ageing is a structural and irreversible feature of European societies, the Assembly stresses that older people are a major social and economic asset as long as policies are in place to promote active ageing, autonomy, participation and lifelong learning. It therefore calls for age-friendly societies that strengthen prevention approaches to health and well-being, accessibility, digital inclusion and quality long-term care, recognising older persons as contributors to prosperity and intergenerational solidarity.
10. Recalling its [Resolution 2586 \(2025\)](#) “Immigration, one of the answers to Europe’s demographic ageing”, the Assembly considers that while migration can help to alleviate labour shortages and demographic imbalances, it cannot by itself compensate for ageing or lower birth rates. It stresses that migration policy should be rights-based, skills-aware and well integrated with labour-market and regional-development policies, while remaining a complement to, and not a substitute for, family-support measures.
11. The Assembly expresses its solidarity with Ukraine, whose demographic future is being deliberately undermined by the aggressor, and welcomes the adoption by the Ukrainian authorities of a Strategy for Demographic Development to 2040 and their efforts, under wartime conditions, to support families, protect children and create the conditions for the voluntary return of displaced citizens.
12. The Assembly believes that demographic resilience must be embedded in sustainable development, including affordable housing, quality education, effective health care, clean and climate-resilient infrastructure, and decent employment. It considers that people are more likely to settle, raise families and invest in their communities when they can trust that public services are reliable and continuous, their environment is safe, and their future is secure.
13. The Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:
 - 13.1. adopt coherent, long-term and inclusive demographic strategies and action plans, involving national, regional and local authorities, social partners, civil society organisations and young people in the design, monitoring, evaluation and adaptation of demographic policies;
 - 13.2. establish interministerial co-ordination mechanisms to ensure long-term demographic policy coherence and better-integrated delivery of family-centred services;
 - 13.3. encourage governments to convene expert groups on demographic renewal and to promote the identification and exchange of good practice among member States;
 - 13.4. mainstream policies that support parenthood at the time when people wish to become parents, namely by ensuring gender equality in all aspects of life, addressing the issue of child marriages, guaranteeing access to reproductive health, protecting family life through work-life balance measures, improving access to care, childcare and affordable housing and providing other material conditions for family life that facilitate circular migration linked to labour mobility and family reunion;

13.5. bring family policies in line with Articles 16 and 17 of the European Social Charter, as interpreted by the European Committee of Social Rights, ensuring in particular that family benefits, childcare services and housing for families are adequate and accessible, and that single-parent families and families in vulnerable situations are properly protected;

13.6. strengthen family-friendly measures by:

13.6.1. improving affordability and accessibility of childcare, and ensuring a seamless transition between parental leave and publicly supported early childhood education and care;

13.6.2. expanding and better compensating parental leave for both mothers and fathers, including adoptive parents and foster parents, regardless of their employment status (including self-employed persons and those engaged in seasonal work), and promoting flexible, family-friendly working arrangements;

13.6.3. strengthening legal and practical measures against workplace discrimination linked to pregnancy, motherhood and caregiving which constitutes maternal mobbing;

13.6.4. investing in social housing, especially for young adults, first-time parents and large families, in particular in disadvantaged urban areas and regions affected by depopulation or those undergoing transition towards more sustainable energy sectors and green economy, in line with the Assembly [Resolution 2626 \(2025\)](#) "Analysis and guidelines to guarantee the right to housing"; and encouraging banks to review lending criteria or proposing State-supported loans for young workers to facilitate their access to home-ownership;

13.6.5. supporting youth employment, stable careers, fair wages and skills development to reduce precarity and enable earlier household formation;

13.6.6. ensuring equal treatment, antidiscrimination and targeted financial support where necessary for single-parent families, rainbow families, families including persons with disabilities, Roma and Traveller families and other disadvantaged population groups, in particular through national education systems;

13.6.7. improving access to State-funded maternal, child and reproductive health services, including fertility information, infertility prevention, counselling and treatment where needed;

13.6.8. establishing family centres for providing community support for families and promoting the European Network of Family-Friendly Municipalities;

13.6.9. developing community-based open care and support programmes for vulnerable people which would provide accessible psycho-social counselling to prevent and treat addictions, help secure young persons' transition to parenthood and ensure timely care for mental health issues among young parents;

13.6.10. encouraging family-friendly business practices such as flexible working arrangements (including telework) and employer-supported childcare, establishment of workplace childcare facilities or partnerships with local childcare providers;

13.6.11. ensuring that demographic and family policies fully respect bodily autonomy and the right of all persons to make free and informed decisions about whether, when and how many children to have;

13.6.12. promoting a culture and a work ethic supportive of parenthood, in which caring for children is recognised as a contribution to society and is not penalised in careers, pay or working conditions;

13.6.13. tackling gender inequality in parenthood by introducing, through both legal measures and policies inducing behavioural change, an equal and fair distribution of parental responsibilities between partners;

13.6.14. enhancing co-operation between national and local governments and civil society organisations, particularly associations of parents and/or families, to ensure that families are active protagonists in the framing and delivery of family policy;

13.7. promote age-friendly policies, active ageing, lifelong learning and accessible services for older persons and families with small children, in particular through municipalities and local authorities;

- 13.8. mainstream gender equality across all demographic and family policies, recognising unpaid care as a shared social responsibility rather than a private burden borne mainly by women and ensuring stronger prevention of violence against women;
 - 13.9. address the pay and pension challenges facing parents and especially, at the present time, mothers by compensating, in the calculation of pay, taxation, social protection and pension entitlements, for breaks in service taken for the benefit of bringing up children at home;
 - 13.10. ensure the sustainability of pension systems by introducing or enhancing, as appropriate, the capitalisation tier in pay-as-you-go systems;
 - 13.11. promote family-friendly tax justice, by ensuring that families with children are not disproportionately burdened by taxation measures, by taking account of unpaid care work and family size when imposing and adjusting taxation, and by removing value-added taxes on basic family consumables to assist families with children;
 - 13.12. recognise and value unpaid family service and care generally, including care for children and older relatives, by means of adequate taxation, social protection and pension recognition;
 - 13.13. support territorial cohesion through investment in infrastructure, public services and local development in rural and peripheral areas, as well as tax incentives for the relocation of essential services and economic activities from major urban centres to under-developed or remote regions;
 - 13.14. further analyse and reduce environmental risks that can affect reproductive health, notably pollution and the population's exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals;
 - 13.15. ratify the revised European Social Charter – if they have not yet done so, accept Article 16 thereof and the Additional Protocol Providing for a System of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158), and give full effect to the conclusions and decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights.
14. The Assembly welcomes the innovative national demographic frameworks (such as dedicated parliamentary committees, cross-sector policy co-ordination mechanisms and fiscal initiatives) in several member States, and encourages the adoption of similar frameworks elsewhere, tailored to national and regional contexts.