

Population dynamics and sustainable development



ICPD =
International Conference on
Population and Development
Beyond 2014



Highlights

Population dynamics in the UNECE region – the last 20 years

In the UNECE region, people are living longer, healthier lives, and have higher levels of education than past generations. This has been accompanied by lower levels of fertility, ageing populations, and more complex migration patterns, all set against a backdrop of economic crisis.

Demographic changes present opportunities rather than threats

Lower fertility, population ageing, and migration are often perceived as threats to economies and societies. Yet societies can benefit from such changes and prosper, provided that governments and individuals anticipate change and invest in human capital.

Investing in human capital is a proven strategy

Human capital requires investments in health and education throughout the life course – from birth to old age. The investment in individuals, including migrants, allows them to enjoy high standards of well-being as well as to productively contribute to society at all ages.

Human rights protection remains vital to policy development

Policies for addressing demographic change and bolstering human capital must focus on the needs, rights and well-being of individuals – not on demographic targets. This will ensure inclusive development and equal opportunities for everyone. Societies with effective, sustainable policies that protect human rights, oppose stigma and discrimination, and establish concrete measures to support the poorest and most vulnerable people will have better development opportunities.

The region plays a crucial role in sustainable development and addressing climate change

The UNECE region is a leader in innovations aimed at energy efficiency and in progressive adaptation policies related to climate change; but it also has the highest level of consumption and CO₂ emissions of all world regions. UNECE countries have the capability to proactively address environmental issues for the region, which will be equally important for global environmental outcomes and climate change.

THE ICPD BEYOND 2014 REVIEW

Two decades after the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994, governments, parliamentarians, civil society, academics and youth representatives around the world have taken part in the ICPD Beyond 2014 review.

This has involved taking stock of what has been achieved since the ICPD, and agreeing on priorities for the future. The process has renewed political support for the ICPD Programme of Action, which has been extended beyond 2014 by the UN General Assembly, and will continue to inform the post-2015 development agenda.

In the UNECE region (comprising Europe, Central Asia, North America and Israel) the review has been led by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). It has consisted of a series of national consultations, three regional expert meetings, and regional forums involving youth representatives and parliamentarians. The process will culminate in the high-level conference “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century” in Geneva on 1-2 July 2013.

This brief is part of a series summarizing key issues and recommendations from the review leading up the July 2013 conference in Geneva. The briefs are meant to inform discussions on how to move ahead with implementing the ICPD agenda in the region in light of recent trends and developments.

Note: This brief captures highlights from the region and is therefore not exhaustive. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of UNFPA, the United Nations, or any of affiliated organizations. All data presented is taken from the report “Population Trends and Policies in the UNECE Region”, prepared by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Human Capital, and the regional report on the *Global ICPD Beyond 2014 Survey*.

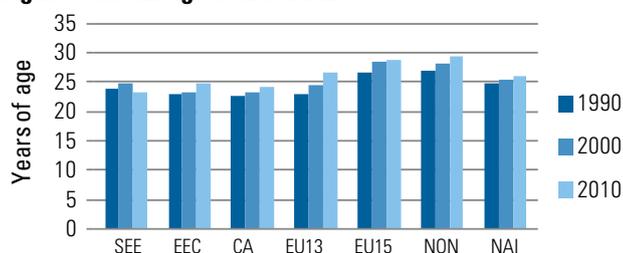
The regional picture

The UNECE region is home to 18 percent of the world's population, including some of the world's richest countries, as well as those with a relatively low level of development. As a result, population dynamics and population changes – which are a result of the interplay of fertility, mortality and migration – vary widely across the region, especially between Western and Eastern subregions.

Western Europe, Israel and North America

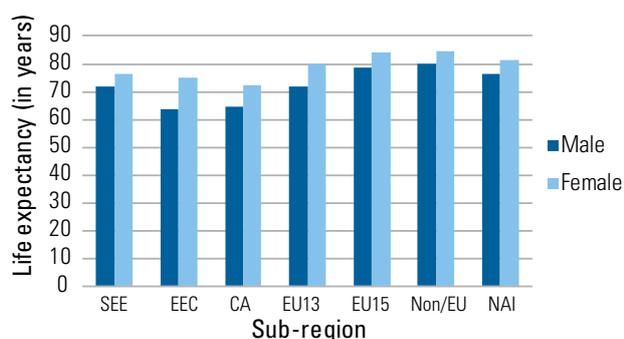
Population trends in the western part of the UNECE region have been characterized by relatively low fertility accompanied by a tendency of women having children later in life (known as postponement) (Figure 1). Life expectancy has increased and is projected to continue to do so in Western Europe, Israel and North America. This is largely attributed to declines in mortality in older age groups (Figure 2), and has led to a rapid increase in the number and proportion of older persons.

Figure 1: Mean age at first birth



The UNECE region is seeing a general increase in the average age at which women give birth to their first child. This is coupled with low birth rates across most of the region.

Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth (2010)



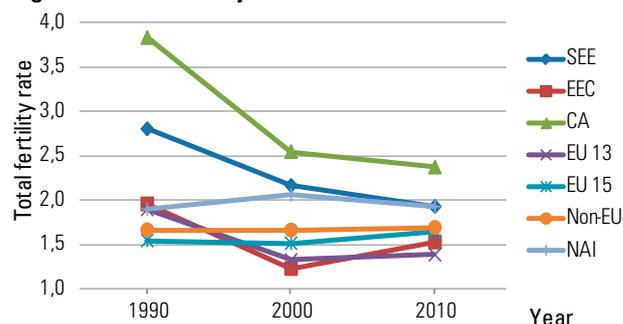
Life expectancy across the region has steadily increased over the past two decades with the exception of Eastern Europe, which has in fact experienced a decline in life expectancy. Similar to global trends, across the whole region men have a lower life expectancy than women and this trend is particularly striking in Eastern Europe.

Uniquely, the post-World War II 'baby boomers' are entering retirement age, which is significantly increasing the number of older people as compared to the working age population. Immigration has also increased in this subregion, leading to more cultural and ethnic diversity, which has many positive economic implications but can also be a source of social and political tensions.

Eastern Europe

Countries of Eastern Europe have experienced rapidly decreasing fertility (Figure 3) and in some cases adverse trends in mortality, including significant declines in life expectancy among men. This is probably the first example in history of a sustained and substantial increase in mortality not associated with a major epidemic or war. Also for the first time in history, some countries in this part of the region experienced natural decreases in population, accentuated by net emigration. This has raised concerns about 'demographic security' and in some places has prompted calls for pronatalist measures, which can threaten the rights of women and couples to make informed choices about their fertility. In terms of migration, some countries in Eastern Europe have become countries of origin as well as transit and destination countries for migrants.

Figure 3: Total fertility rate



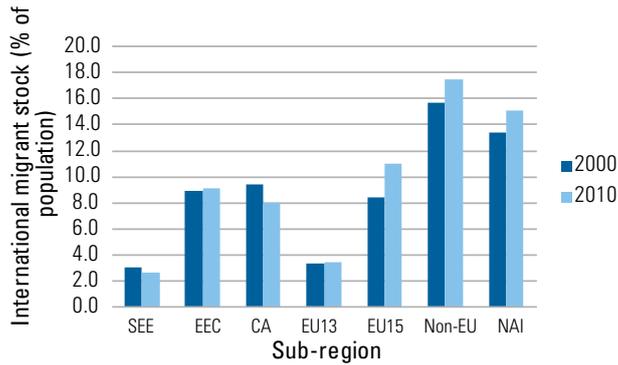
The total fertility rate in parts of the region has declined over the past two decades, while in other areas it remains stable or has increased.

Central Asia

Central Asia's demographic trends and patterns contrast markedly with the rest of the region, with fertility and mortality rates both higher than other parts of the UNECE. For example, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, fertility has increased since 2000, while in Uzbekistan fertility has consistently declined, but it is still higher than rates in European countries. These higher fertility rates coupled with relatively high mortality rates mean that Central Asian populations are significantly younger than in the other parts of the region: more than half of the population is under age 25 with the exception of Kazakhstan, where around half of the population is under age 30. Kazakhstan is also a country of destination for international migration within Central Asia, while the other countries are generally countries of origin. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan experience particularly significant emigration and are among the biggest receivers of remittances¹ in the world.

1 Transfers of money by foreign workers back to their home country.

Figure 4: International migrant stock (% of population)



Migration patterns differ across the region, but overall migration has been on the rise in most areas over the past two decades, and has become increasingly complex.

Reconsidering assumptions about dependency burden

The ageing of many societies in the region often prompts fears that there will not be enough working-age people to support the older population (as reflected in Map 1), but there are reasons to question why a total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.1 is considered desirable, and to reconsider assumptions about the dependency burden. For example, more and more people now are living healthy lives well after the age of 65. They can still be economically productive, participate in social life, do not need to be dependent and are not a particular burden to health care systems. This is reflected in Map 2, showing the prospective old age dependency burden in Europe in the coming decades.

KEY FOR INCLUDED GRAPHS:

CA - Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

EU13 - EU new member-states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

EU15 - EU older member-states: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, United Kingdom

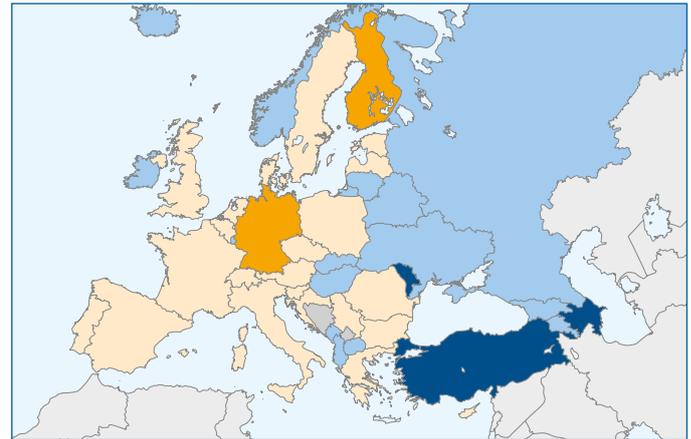
EEC - Eastern Europe and Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine

SEE - South-Eastern Europe*: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey **includes Kosovo*

Non-EU - Western Europe Non-EU members: Andorra, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland

NAI - North America and Israel: Canada, Israel, United States

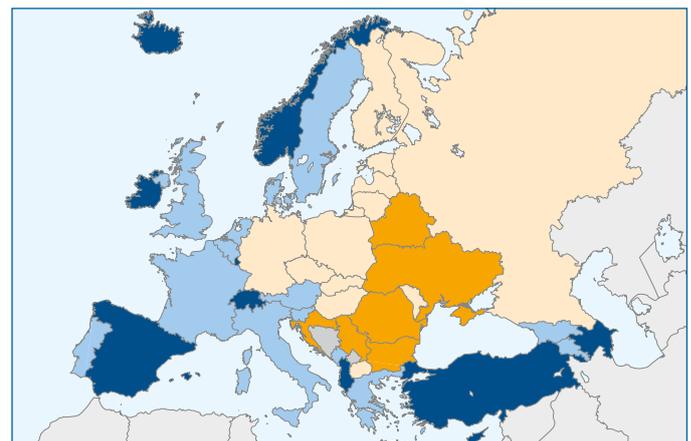
Map 1: Conventional old-age dependency ratio (2030, projected)



Conventional old-age dependency ratio as projected for 2030



Map 2: Prospective old-age dependency ratio (2030, projected)



Prospective old-age dependency ratio as projected for 2030



Prospective old-age dependency ratio is defined as the number of people in age groups with life expectancies of 15 or fewer years, divided by the number of people at least 20 years old in age groups with life expectancies greater than 15 years.

Priorities for action

Focus on people rather than numbers through a rights-based approach

Discussions about population need to centre on individuals, well-being and quality of life for all people, throughout their lives. Policies must address the needs of current populations – whether young, old, ethnically diverse, or otherwise different – as well as the needs of future generations. Policies related to fertility, and especially pronatalist approaches, must consider

potential effects, both good and bad, on individual rights and well-being, so as to avoid undermining gains made since the ICPD.

Take a long-term, holistic approach to population issues

Lower fertility and ageing populations can be positive forces for social and individual well-being if governments take a holistic approach to population dynamics today; understand future population projections; and make continuous adjustments rather than sweeping changes. All policies and approaches should be based on a long-term trajectory which encompasses the rich picture of demographic realities that will unfold in the coming decades. Investing in human capital, throughout the life-cycle, is a primary strategy for policy development in this regard. It recognizes that people's needs change depending on their age, location, income level, and evolving personal preferences and expectations, and that providing for their needs must involve a continuum of care and support.

Support the vitality of ageing populations

The potential of older persons to contribute fully to societies can be unlocked through gradual, evidence-based changes to pension systems, health care and other social supports. This is likely to involve ways to prolong working lives without that being seen as a threat to people's quality of life; or creating policies that safeguard autonomy and independence and enable families to assist their older family members. Positive examples of this approach include the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).

Take a cross-sectoral, human-rights based approach to migration

Migration issues, including the welfare of migrants, are cross-sectoral issues – not just related to economics, employment and labour. For example, in some places, children are being raised by their grandparents after their parents have migrated to find work. This has family and community implications, which must be addressed through effective policies. Also, as migration increases ethnic diversity in some countries, policies to support integration are needed. Regional and/or sub-regional agreements can be particularly effective in addressing migration issues, and rigorous research is also needed to ensure policies are evidence based.

To achieve sustainability, look beyond regional borders and short-term interests

The future of this region depends upon reducing inequalities and improving well-being in other regions of the world as well. Likewise, it is important to address issues of climate change as they impact on our own countries and on how our consumption patterns and lifestyles contribute to climate change in other regions. It is important to reconsider the idea that economic growth is always good, and that a smaller population is always bad, when in fact population decrease can have positive effects,

such as reducing over-consumption. Policy discussions can consider how key population issues – including fertility, ageing and migration – interact with consumption, and how this may affect long-term goals to achieve sustainable development. Investing in human capital is a primary strategy for addressing environmental issues, as education can influence consumption, for example, by making populations better-informed about more energy efficient, less consumptive lifestyles.

Address disaster risk reduction

The number of natural disasters and extreme weather conditions are projected to increase in the coming decades, so disaster risk reduction must be part of policy discussions. Disaster risk reduction can be improved through education, thus investing in human capital is an important approach. In addition, the ability for a society to care for its most vulnerable people, who are likely to be most affected by disasters, is a crucial consideration, and methods to support this are fundamental.

Strengthen regional cooperation and governance

The region's strong record of cooperation should be expanded in efforts to address population and sustainable development. As the region includes donors, emerging donors and recipient countries, consideration should also be given to providing regional assistance, such as technical assistance, to each other, through partnerships and institutional exchanges. It would be useful to find mechanisms for documenting and sharing lessons learned and best practices, and for scaling up effective interventions. Effective regional, sub-regional or bi-lateral agreements must have a long-term and holistic vision, involving a wide range of stakeholders across many sectors, and including civil society, the media and the public.

Improve and expand monitoring and evaluation

One of the region's strengths is its data collection and monitoring, but the quality of data varies across the region, and monitoring of social development is weak in the transition economies and particularly in the Central Asian countries. More commitment needs to be made to fund research and data collection as well making data publicly available. There is potential to improve monitoring region-wide with a single instrument designed to provide regional assessment of statistical systems. To facilitate this, researchers and institutions should develop strong core indicators or composite indices for specific population issues, and systems for impact assessment of interventions. In addition to enhancements to research in the region, and to increase funding for research, there should be a mechanism for continually monitoring the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

