

## Executive summary

Information on demographic trends is crucial for policy-makers. Changes in the size, growth and composition of the population, like population ageing, have an impact on practically all domains of social life. It follows that demographic indicators should be taken into account in developing and implementing policies with respect to housing, health and social care, education, the labour market, economic and physical planning and the environment. Also family policies as well as social protection and social inclusion policies are closely related to core demographic processes. The European Population Committee (CAHP) of the Council of Europe, provides the most comprehensive, Europe-wide set of demographic indicators in its annual report on Recent Demographic Developments in Europe.

### Declining population growth...

The 2004 edition of the report draws attention to the slow and declining rates of population growth in Europe. The overall rate of European population growth is 0.23% resulting in a growth of 1.9 million new Europeans in the year 2003. The fastest growing countries in 2003 are Ireland, Albania, Spain and Turkey. The lowest (indeed negative) rates of population growth are observed in Ukraine, Georgia, Bulgaria and the Russian Federation.

Looking at the components of demographic change, it is increasingly evident that in a rapidly growing number of European countries natural population growth, which is the balance of births and deaths, has come to a standstill or will shortly do so. As a consequence, for Europe as a whole, more people died in 2003 than were born. Turkey is the country with the highest rate of natural growth, followed by Albania, Ireland and Azerbaijan.

Migration is the other, and increasingly dominant, population growth factor. The highest rates of positive net migration (the balance of immigration and emigration) are witnessed in Southern Europe, with Spain and Italy as the most populous examples.

The total population growth of 1.9 million persons in the year 2003 is the balance of some 2 million migrants and a negative natural population growth of some 63 000. Natural population growth was positive for the 25 countries of the European Union by some 183 000 and negative by 247 000 for the other member states.

Slow and declining population growth signals the onset of population decline as an overall outlook for Europe's population. As indicated in the report, this process already is in full swing at the national level in Central and Eastern Europe. At the

regional level population decline is increasingly evident throughout Europe. How to cope with declining populations will be a major policy issue for the coming decades. Taking into account that the components of natural population growth (fertility and mortality) do not show any indications of major changes, it goes without saying that international migration is the uncertain factor in this regard. International migration trends are highly volatile and difficult to predict or forecast. Economic and political determinants are at play in international migration, as are a multitude of other factors, including for instance admission policies. Reliable and comparable data on international migration are scarce, which seriously hampers the policy process.

### ...and increased population ageing

Another outcome of slow and declining population growth, is population ageing, which currently is the most outstanding feature of Europe's demography. Viewed from a global perspective, today Europe is the oldest world region. The current age structure of the European population reflects its demographic past and is the inevitable outcome of structural changes in fertility and mortality, which are the root causes of population ageing. And as was already indicated, there are no indications of major changes in either European fertility or mortality. It follows that population ageing is "here to stay".

The challenges for European society to successfully address population ageing can only increase since the main thrust of population ageing is yet to come. Policies to accommodate population ageing need to be multifold, addressing for instance the labour market, social and health care, housing, education and social protection.

### ...due to low and late fertility

Looking at one of the root causes of population ageing, namely fertility, currently European women have 1.5 children on average, a decline from 1.8 in 1990. This is well below the so-called replacement level of 2.1 children. The mean age of women who become mother for the first time is currently 25.9 years, an increase from 24.4 years in 1990. Extramarital births are increasingly common. Currently some 28% of children are born out of wedlock in Europe, a large share of whom, however, are born to cohabiting partners.

### ... and favourable mortality

Mortality levels show wide variation across Europe, with generally less favourable conditions

in Central and Eastern Europe. The overall indicators show an increasing average life expectancy for women from 77.0 years in 1990 to a current 78.8 years. For men, the comparable figures are 70 and 72.1, indicating that male life expectancy is growing faster than female life expectancy. Generally speaking the gap between female and male life expectancy is narrowing in Europe.

Europe is experiencing another exciting phase in its demographic transition. The national variation in overall trends is considerable and needs close monitoring. The challenges for society in general

and policy-makers in particular, embedded in the overall trends and patterns of population change, are truly wide-ranging and also call for a close watch.

Through its annual publication on Recent Demographic Developments in Europe, the European Population Committee (CAHP) provides this unique, Europe-wide monitoring to the benefit of policy-makers and population analysts worldwide. CAHP's in-depth studies on policy-relevant population issues add substance to the indicators and trends reported here.