

EUROPEAN DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET 2026

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Definition of regions in the regional overview takes into account geographical, historical, and geopolitical divisions, as well as similarity in demographic trends. Countries are grouped into regions as follows:

- Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)
- Western Europe (Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, United Kingdom)
- Germany, Austria, Switzerland
- Southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain)
- Central-Eastern Europe (Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia)
- South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia)
- Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine)
- Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)

Türkiye is not included in any region. Indicators for regions are computed as population weighted averages. European Union refers to the current EU-27 territory.

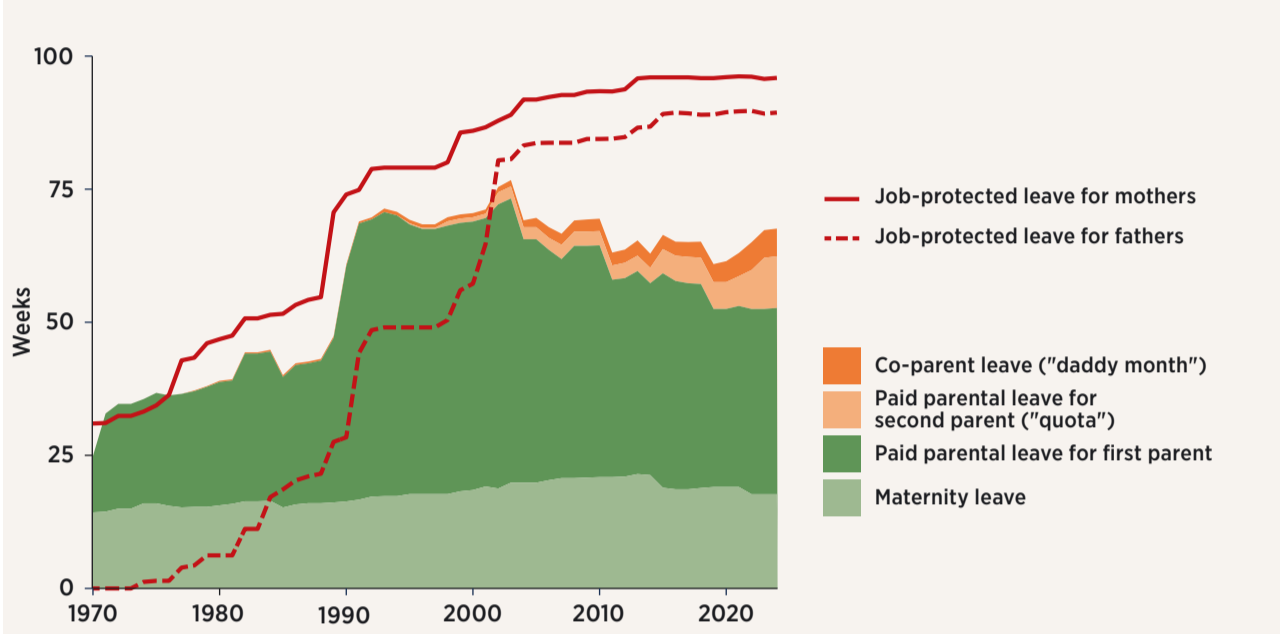
Regional overview: key indicators

COUNTRY	Population (millions)		Proportion of foreign-born population (%)	Projected population SSP2 (millions)	Projected population SSP2 - Zero migration	Total fertility rate (TFR)	Change in TFR 2019 to 2024	Tempo- and parity-adjusted TFR 2022	Completed cohort fertility 1984	Life expectancy at birth (years), 2024		Excess deaths (%) 2020-2023
	1.1.2025	2000 to 2024								Women	Men	
Nordic countries	28	17	17	32	27	1.41	-0.19	1.75	1.85	84.8	81.2	1.8
Western Europe	174	17	16	194	163	1.49	-0.22	1.68	1.95	84.4	80.0	5.5
Germany, Austria, Switzerland	102	5	22	93	70	1.35	-0.18	1.44	1.60	83.8	79.3	5.5
Southern Europe	131	10	15	113	83	1.17	-0.10	1.34	1.42	85.9	81.2	5.8
Central-Eastern Europe	75	-4	6	56	52	1.26	-0.27	1.53	1.55	82.0	75.1	10.0
South-Eastern Europe	42	-16	6	26	28	1.53	-0.20	1.73	1.62	79.8	73.5	12.7
Eastern Europe	194	-	7	162	136	1.28	-0.15	-	1.72	77.1	65.8	-
Caucasus	17	-	3	14	15	1.54	-0.28	2.07	-	79.7	73.7	-
European Union	451	6	14	408	337	1.34	-0.19	1.54	1.63	84.2	79.0	6.7

The evolution of parenting leave policies in Europe

Parenting leave policies in Europe have changed substantially over time. Maternity leave was introduced in some European countries as early as the late 19th century, initially to protect the health of the mother and her newborn child. Paid parental leave, which allows parents to take time off work while receiving income support, emerged later and expanded rapidly during the late 20th century. The European Parenting Leave Policies (EPLP) Dataset provides harmonised information on maternity, co-parent, paid parental and job-protected leave regulations across 21 European countries from 1970 to 2024 (eplp-dataset.org). Of these 21 countries, only three – Austria, Hungary and Sweden – provided paid parental leave in 1970. At that time, the average duration was around 11 weeks. By 1980, it had increased to 23 weeks. By 1990, the average duration had reached 44 weeks, with some countries like Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia providing more than two years of paid parental leave.

Parenting leave regulations 1970–2024
Average across 21 European countries



Initially, parental leave was available only to mothers. Sweden was the first country to make parental leave available to fathers in 1974. During the next decades, most European countries started offering leave to both parents, marking a shift towards policies that focused more on reconciling work and family life and promoting gender equality in paid and unpaid work. In line with this shift, the overall length of paid parental leave largely plateaued from around 1990 onwards, with only job-protected leave continuing to increase. Rather than further extending paid parental leave, reforms concentrated on involving fathers. Two instruments have become increasingly prominent in recent decades: First, paternity leave – short and often job-protected leave reserved for fathers after childbirth – has spread widely across Europe. By 2024, 19 out of 21 countries analysed had introduced statutory paternity leave. Its average duration increased from two days in 1990 to 5.2 weeks in 2024. Second,

many countries introduced non-transferable parental leave quotas reserved for the father or second parent. These individual entitlements created incentives for fathers to take leave by making parts of the benefit conditional on their participation.

In recent decades, parenting leave policies have diversified. Systems have become more flexible, combining multiple schemes and benefit types, e.g. flat-rate and income-replacement schemes. Many countries introduced options to work part time while receiving benefits, split leave between parents in different ways or to use leave until the child is older. Some countries introduced monetary incentives for equal leave sharing between parents. Entitlements

have also increasingly been extended to diverse family forms, including same-sex couples and adoptive parents. As a result, European parenting leave policies have evolved from short leave entitlements intended to protect mothers' health into complex policy packages aimed at income support, improving parent and child wellbeing and promoting labour market attachment and gender equality.

Reference: Spitzer, S., Lemoine, A., Song, Z. et al. (2026). The European Parenting Leave Policies (EPLP) Dataset: Leave duration entitlements for 21 countries from 1970 to 2024. *Demographic Research* (forthcoming).

Future skill mismatches amid demographic change

European Union (EU-27) is expected to undergo significant changes in the next decades, driven by population ageing and continuing expansion of higher education. To better understand labour market impacts of these structural shifts, we developed a dynamic microsimulation model (Link4Skills-Mic). This model integrates demographic, educational and labour force trajectories at the individual level and projects the future occupational distribution of workers based on worker characteristics and projected labour demand by skill level.

more educated than previous cohorts. Consequently, the number of workers with low and medium levels of education is projected to decline by around 40% between 2020 and 2060, much faster than the number of jobs requiring these skills. This imbalance will result in fewer workers available to fill vacancies in medium- and low-skilled occupations.

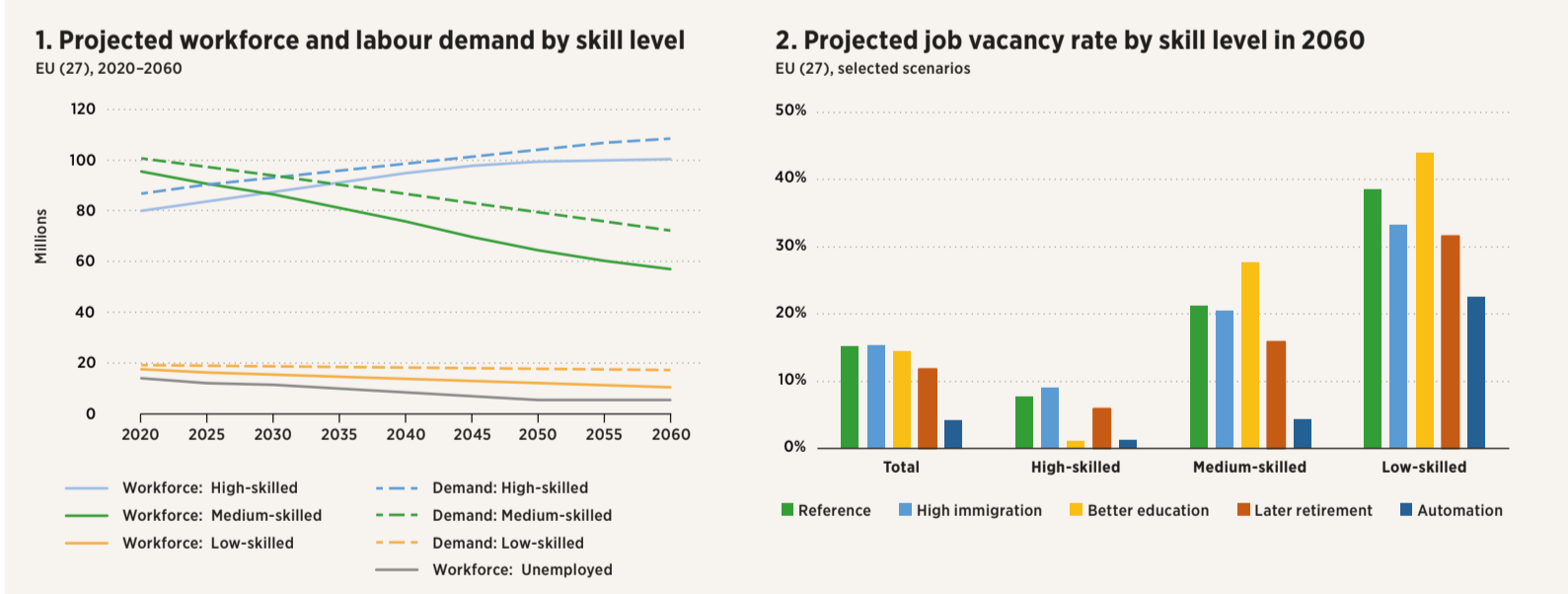
The findings suggest that future labour market tensions in the EU will be driven less by a simple shortage of workers and more by a mismatch between people's skills and the types of jobs available. To assess how these imbalances can be addressed, we have simulated several scenarios of possible policy responses and compared their impact on vacancy rate (Figure 2) and underutilisation of workers. Expanding education and training can reduce vacancy rate for high-skilled but may increase mismatches elsewhere, while immigration has only a limited impact and later retirement modestly

reduces vacancy rates at all skill levels. Automation has the largest impact on vacancy rate, lowering labour demand but increases the risk of underutilisation among highly and medium skilled workers.

In sum, each of these responses can reduce specific imbalances, but no single policy is enough to fully close the gaps that are projected to emerge. Our findings highlight the need for a balanced policy mix of improved training, longer active working lives and automation to effectively address labour market mismatches.

Reference: Marois, G., Potančoková, M., Bezat, A. and Crespo Cuarems, J. 2026. Projecting labour market imbalances and skill mismatch under demographic change in the EU. *European Journal of Population* 42(4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-025-09758-2>

Link4Skills Project: <https://link4skills.eu/>



Overall, total labour demand in the EU is projected to slightly decline from 207 million jobs in 2020 to 198 million jobs in 2060, reflecting slow population growth. However, this apparent stability masks important structural changes. Figure 1 highlights growing mismatches as projected job demand (dashed lines) is not aligned with future labour supply (full lines) at all skill levels. This could exacerbate imbalances between the skills workers have and the available jobs. The projected trends under the reference scenario, which assumes the continuation of past demographic and labour market trends, indicate that demand for high-skilled workers will increase by about 25% by 2060, while the demand for medium-skilled jobs will decline and demand for low-skilled workers will remain relatively stable.

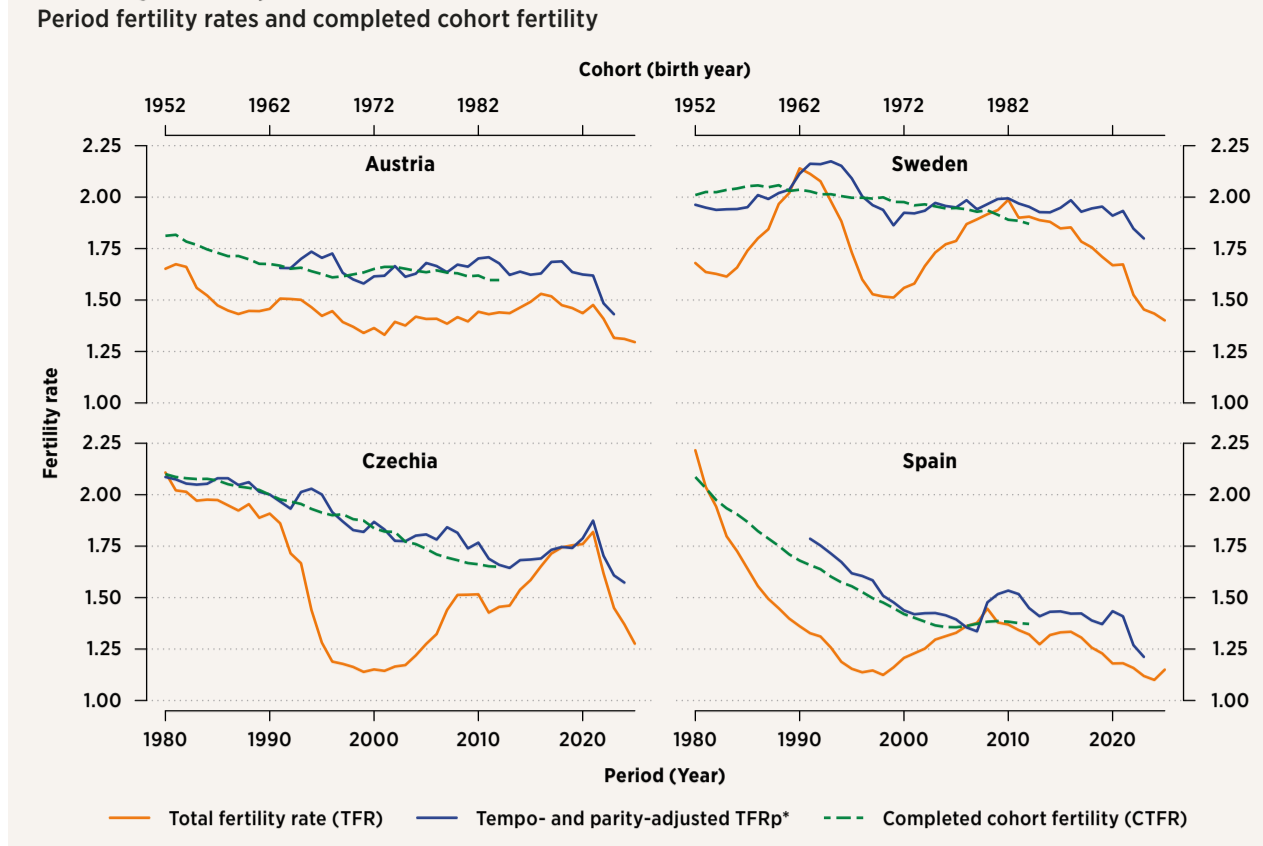
Only for highly skilled the demand and supply increase at the same pace, as younger generations are becoming

Tempo-adjusted total fertility closely tracks cohort fertility

Parents in Europe have their first child at ever later ages. Today, women in some countries, such as Italy and Spain, become mothers at ages 31–32 on average – about seven years later than half a century ago. This trend distorts the most common measure of period fertility, the total fertility rate (TFR). As births shift to later ages, they are both postponed into the future and spread over a longer period of time. This “stretching” of reproduction depresses the period TFR, even if the number of children women have over their reproductive lives (completed cohort fertility, CTR) does not change. A possible correction of this “tempo effect” is offered by the tempo- and parity-adjusted total fertility rate (TFRp), an indicator based on age- and parity-specific fertility rates and changes in the mean age at birth by birth order (Bongaarts and Sobotka 2012). The TFRp is a more accurate measure of the period number of children per woman. While it often diverges markedly from the TFR, the TFRp closely tracks the levels and trends in the completed cohort fertility of the women having children during that period.

The figure illustrates the trends in the period fertility rates (TFR and TFRp) in four European countries in 1990–2025 and compares them with the completed cohort fertility rate (CTR) of women who were aged 28 (a typical age at reproduction) in this period. In Austria, the fertility rates were remarkably stable from the 1990s until 2021, with the TFRp and the CTR remaining at 1.6–1.7, surpassing the period TFR by about 0.2 births per woman. In Sweden, sharp fluctuations in the period TFRs contrasted with much more stable trends and higher levels in the TFRp and the CTR, which hovered close to 2.0. Czechia saw even wilder swings in the TFR. The TFR plummeted in the 1990s and gradually recovered in the 2000s and 2010s. Meanwhile, the CTR and the TFRp continued declining gradually until the two period indicators converged and started rising in the 2010s. By contrast, in Spain, the TFR and the TFRp decreased sharply

Fertility trends, 1980–2025
Period fertility rates and completed cohort fertility



in tandem until the 1990s, underwent a partial recovery in the 2000s and stayed low and rather stable in the 2010s.

Most recently, in 2022–2025, a period covering a later stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine, both the conventional TFR and its adjusted counterpart, the TFRp, fell in parallel (see the “Shocks and babies” box for more details). While the tempo-adjusted

TFRp remained above the TFR, this trend, if sustained, will eventually result in a decline in the cohort fertility rate among women born in the mid- to late 1990s in all four analysed countries.

Reference: Bongaarts, J. and Sobotka, T. 2012. A demographic explanation for the recent rise in European fertility. *Population and Development Review* 38(1): 83–120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2012.00473.x>

Falling short of ideals: ideal and actual family size

Despite fertility rates dropping well below replacement level and permanent childlessness becoming more common, the two-child family ideal remains remarkably persistent in low-fertility societies. Consequently, many people report having unrealised fertility aspirations. Using data from the second round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-II, 2020–2025), we illustrate the relationship between women's retrospective ideal family size and their actual number of children at ages 42–50 across selected countries. This approach captures to what extent fertility aspirations may be perceived as unfulfilled, and how women assess their family size towards the end of their reproductive years.

1. Ideal, actual and gap in family size
Mean number of children among women aged 42–50

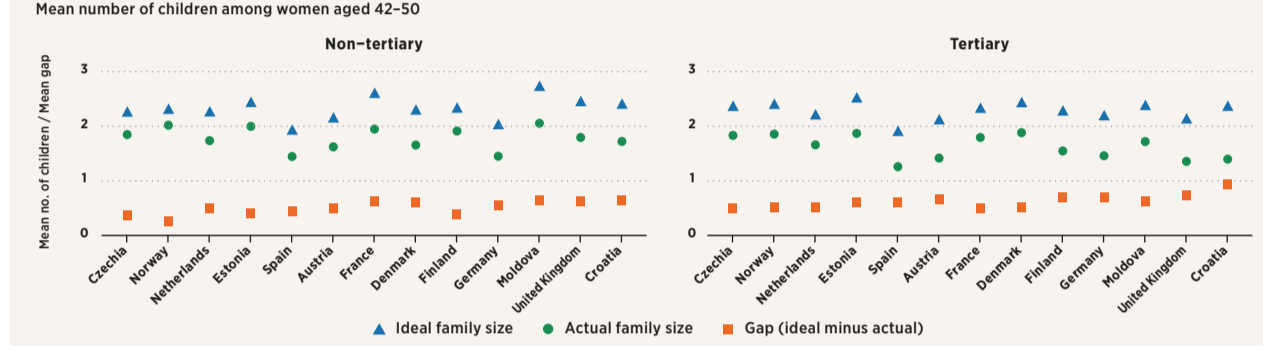
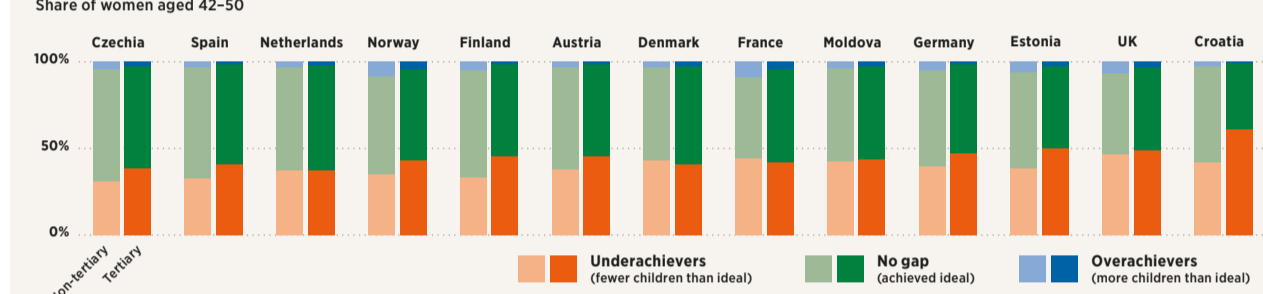


Figure 1 displays the retrospective ideal family size women report near the end of their reproductive life, their actual family size and the gap between the two across countries and by educational attainment. In all countries analysed, women report that they would have ideally had more than two children on average, while their actual number of children is consistently lower. This produces a gap between the ideal and the actual family size ranging from 0.3 to almost one child. Two patterns emerge. First, differences in fertility ideals by education are small. However, tertiary-educated women tend to have fewer children on average, leading to a larger discrepancy between their ideal and their actual family size. Second, although this gap appears in both educational groups across all countries examined, its magnitude varies, with no clear regional pattern.

Figure 2 shifts the focus to the individual level. It shows the share of women aged 42–50 who have fewer children than they consider ideal (underachievers), those who have achieved their ideal family size and those who have exceeded it (overachievers). Many women report falling short of their ideals: in most countries, between one-third and one-half of women report having fewer children than they ideally wanted.

2. Fertility ideal realisation
Share of women aged 42–50



Tertiary-educated women are more likely to report having unrealised fertility than women with lower levels of education. This pattern suggests that highly educated women face greater constraints in achieving their fertility aspirations. However, Denmark, France and the Netherlands diverge from this pattern, as in these countries the risk of experiencing unrealised fertility among tertiary-educated women is similar to or even slightly lower than that among women with less education.

fewer children than they ideally wanted. The continuing shift of childbearing to higher reproductive ages, along with constraints related to partnership opportunities and work-family balance, likely play key roles in limiting the realisation of fertility aspirations.

Overall, for the generations covered here, low fertility levels cannot be attributed to low family size ideals. Rather, many women reach the end of their reproductive years with

References: Generations and Gender Programme 2020–2025. GGS-II Wave 1. <https://www.ggp-i.org/data/>
Lazari, E. and Beaujean, E. 2025. Infertility and unrealized ideal family size. *Population and Development Review* 52(1).
Spanish Statistical Office 2018. Spanish Fertility Survey. Data obtained from the Spanish Statistical Office (INE). <https://www.inec.es/>

Who benefits from European welfare states?

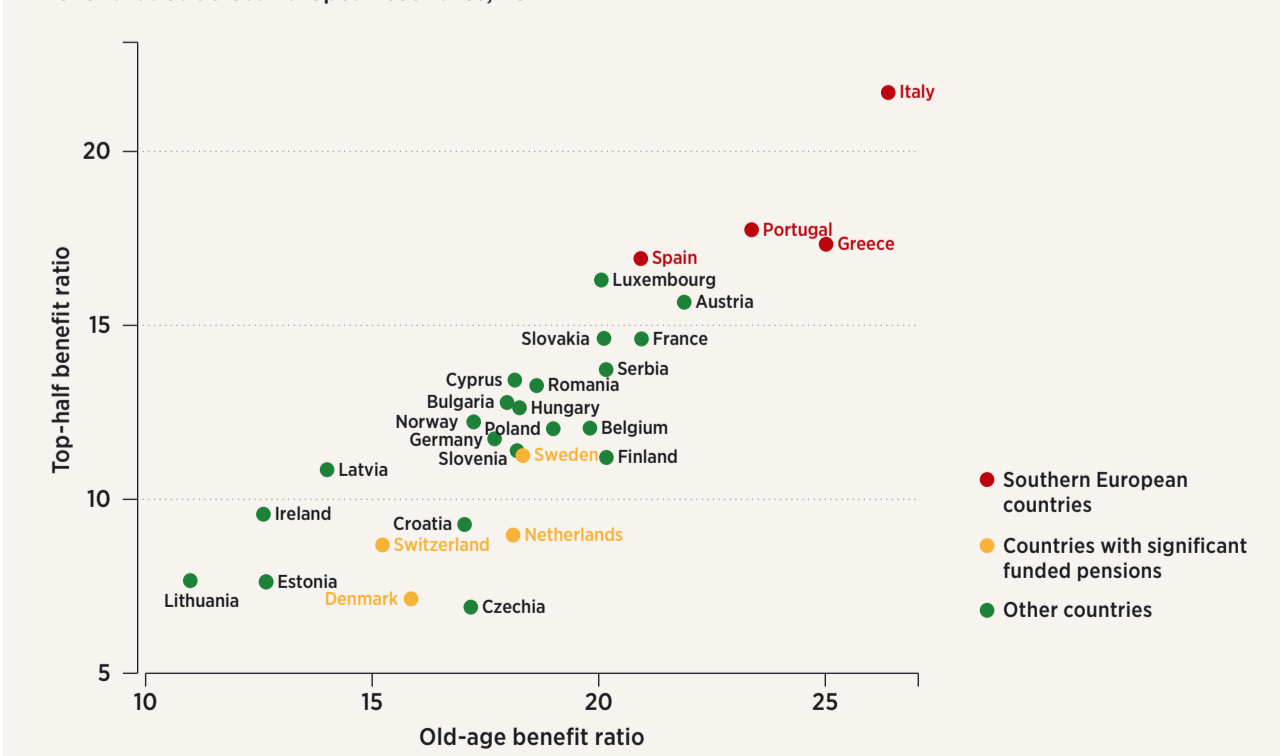
European social transfer systems vary considerably in size and in how they redistribute resources between age and income groups. The extent of pension payments to rich pensioners is a major differentiator of European welfare states. It is closely related to the total size of the social transfer system and the extent of redistribution to the older population.

Benefit ratios can be used to quantify the extent and the direction of social redistribution. We calculate benefit ratios by measuring the total social benefits received by a particular socioeconomic group relative to the total income of households in a country. The old-age benefit ratio measures the social benefits received by the population aged 60 and older relative to the total gross income of all households. The top-half benefit ratio measures the benefits received by the half of the population with the highest equalised income.

The extent of redistribution to the older population differs considerably across Europe: social benefits for the population aged 60 and over account for 11% of the gross income of households in Latvia and for 26% of the gross income of households in Italy. Generally, the old-age benefit ratio is low in the Baltic countries and Ireland, and is high in the Southern European countries.

The degree of redistribution to the older population and the extent of redistribution to the population with high income are closely related. This is because both the high old-age benefit ratio and the top-half benefit ratio reflect pension payments to the population with the highest income. The Baltic countries and Ireland are among the countries with the lowest benefits paid to the richest half of the population, with these benefits accounting for less than 10% of gross income in Ireland, Latvia and Estonia. The welfare states of Czechia, Croatia, Denmark, Switzerland and the Netherlands are also characterised by particularly low levels of redistribution to the richest population. By contrast, the Southern European coun-

Old-age redistribution and income-rich benefits
Benefit ratios across European countries, 2022



tries are among those with the highest benefits for the richest half of the population, accounting for more than 17% of gross income in Portugal, Greece and Spain, and for a staggering 22% of gross income in Italy.

The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland form an equalising cluster of countries. In these countries, where mandatory funded pensions play a large role, the top-half benefit ratio is low compared to old-age spending. The clear relationship between individual contribu-

tions and the size of pensions in funded systems curbs pension claims, which in turn reduces the redistribution of wealth towards the higher-income groups.

Reference: Hammer, B., Christ, M. and De Poli, S. 2023. Public redistribution in Europe: Between generations or income groups? *The Journal of Economic Surveys* 44(1): 1–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jes.2022.100426>

Europe's intergenerational poverty divide

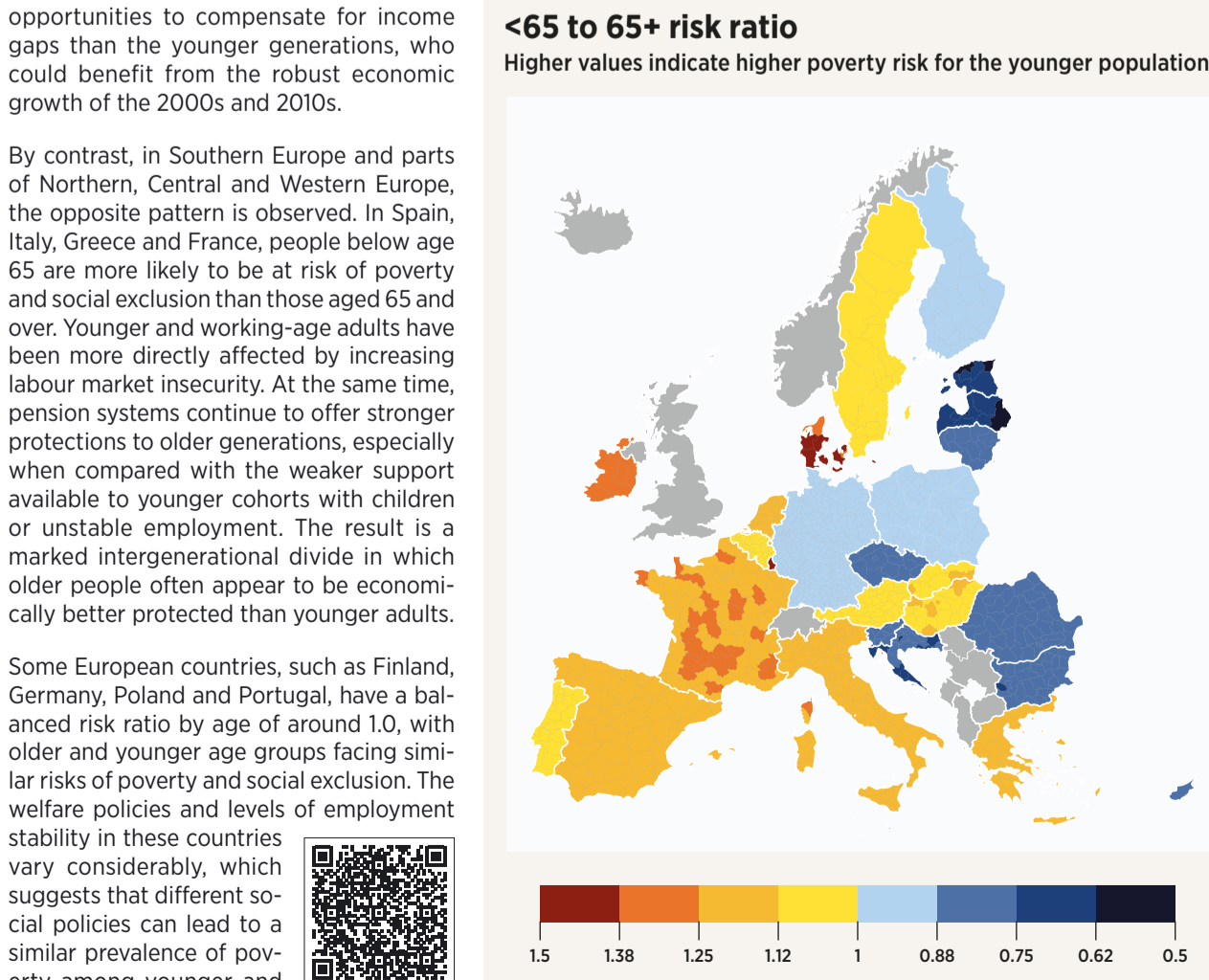
Intergenerational poverty risk is shaped by welfare institutions, demographic change and economic and political transformations.

The map illustrates regional disparities in the age profile of the risk of poverty or social exclusion. Specifically, we consider the ratio of the risk of poverty or social exclusion in the population below age 65 to the risk in the population aged 65 and over, using EU-SILC data at NUTS 3 levels (small-sized regions such as districts, with 1164 regions in the European Union). A value above 1 (red colour shades) indicates that the younger population faces a higher risk than older people, while a value below 1 (blue colour shades) means that the elderly are more exposed.

The map shows that poverty and social exclusion in Europe are strongly age-structured. This inequality varies across Europe depending on the national context. Although some regional variation exists within countries, national welfare regimes, pension systems, labour market structures and family support arrangements remain the main drivers of the observed spatial divides, making sub-national variation relatively weak. The speed and the extent of ageing are also relevant, because in countries where the share of older people is growing rapidly, this trend influences the distribution of public resources and social protection, sometimes strengthening the relative position of retirees while increasing the economic pressure on younger working-age groups.

A first clear pattern is found in the Baltic states and parts of Eastern Europe, where older people are often more exposed to poverty and social exclusion than the population below age 65. This pattern reflects a long-standing divide in several post-communist settings, where pension levels have remained relatively low; wealth accumulation for the current elderly was limited in the past; and the transition to market economies created uneven protections across generations. In these contexts, the elderly

<65 to 65+ risk ratio
Higher values indicate higher poverty risk for the younger population



By contrast, in Southern Europe and parts of Northern, Central and Western Europe, the opposite pattern is observed. In Spain, Italy, Greece and France, people below age 65 are more likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion than those aged 65 and over. Younger and working-age adults have been more directly affected by increasing labour market insecurity. At the same time, pension systems continue to offer stronger protections to older generations, especially when compared with the weaker support available to younger cohorts with children and/or unstable employment. The result is a marked intergenerational divide in which older people often appear to be economically better protected than younger adults.

Some European countries, such as Finland, Germany, Poland and Portugal, have a balanced risk ratio by age of around 1.0, with older and younger age groups facing similar risks of poverty and social exclusion. The welfare policies and levels of employment stability in these countries vary considerably, which suggests that different social policies can lead to a similar prevalence of poverty among younger and older generations.

Reference: Eurostat. At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE))
SPARCCLE project: <https://sparccle.eu/2024/09/13/atlas-of-demography-story/>