

France: Year 2000 demographic snapshot

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The number of births and marriages has been increasing in France over the past few years, a departure from the established trend for the past thirty years. However, the leading demographic trends remain unchanged: the population is ageing; the French tend to have children later in life and increasingly out of wedlock. They also get married later and divorce more frequently. The civil solidarity pact was recently introduced and has become widespread. The French live longer, and increasingly tend to become grandparents, great-grandparents, and even live to a hundred years.

At the start of the 21st century, mainland France had 59 million inhabitants. If one factors in the country's overseas territories and dependencies, the total is 60.7 million inhabitants. When compared with the world's population as a whole, one human being in every hundred lives in France; one in six Europeans (16%) live there. France is thus the second most populous state in Europe after Germany, marginally ahead of the United Kingdom and Italy (see *figure 1*).

A pattern of demographic growth that is still founded in the main on the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths

In 2000, France's population increased by 300,000 persons overall, which equates to growth of five inhabitants per thousand. France is ranked fourth in terms of demographic growth in the

European Union, after Luxembourg, Ireland and the Netherlands (see *figure 2*). Like these other countries, France can boast a large positive differential between births and deaths, amounting to natural growth of four people per thousand, at least four times the rate of the European Union as a whole (see *box*). Immigration accounts for two thirds of the growth of the European population as a whole. All European states have a positive migratory balance. Population

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growth in Germany, Italy, Greece and Sweden is solely reliant on inbound migratory flows, since these countries record more deaths than births. In France, migration currently plays a lesser role, accounting for only 20% of the country's overall population growth.

A rise in the number of births over the past few years

Since the end of the Seventies and the end of the baby boom, the number of births had been declining in France. The recovery witnessed in 1979 only lasted three years, and the number of births resumed its long-term decline thereafter. The development of new contraception methods

enabling unwanted pregnancies to be prevented, as well as longer study periods and the ever receding age at which people enter into a stable professional life are all factors that help explain this development. However, since 1995, birth rates have begun to recover, with the total number of births rising from 711,000 in that year to 779,000 in 2000.

The sharpest increase was recorded during the last year of the 20th century: nearly 5%. The number of births is now at the same level as it was in 1986. In 2000, France was the country with the greatest number of births in Europe, ahead of Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy (see *figure 1*). None of our European partners have been experiencing such a marked rise in the number of births.

Women are having babies later in life

The number of women of child-bearing age, i.e. aged between 15 and 49 years, has been falling since 1997. The increase in the number of births recorded is thus the outcome of an even sharper rise in the Total fertility rate: 1.89 children per woman in 2000, versus 1.66 in 1994. This increase is mainly due to rising fertility rates among women aged over 30 for the past quarter of a century. Conversely, the fertility rates of younger women have remained steady for several years, at around one child per woman, after falling over a longer period of time (see *figure 4*).

In 2000, women tended to have their first child at the age of 28

Figure 1 - Key European Union demographic indicators - 2000

	Population at 01/01/2001 (thousands)	Live births (thousands)	Deaths (thousands)	Total fertility rate (no. of children per 100 women)	Life expectancy at birth		Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)
					Men (years)	Women (years)	
Northern Europe							
Denmark	5,349.2	67.1	58.0	176	74.0	78.8	4.2
Finland	5,181.1	56.7	49.3	173	74.1	81.0	3.8
Sweden	8,882.8	90.4	93.5	154	77.4	82.0	3.0
Western Europe							
Germany	82,192.6	754.1	830.3	134	74.4	80.6	4.4
Austria	8,121.3	78.3	76.8	132	75.1	81.0	4.8
Belgium	10,262.2	116.3	105.4	165	74.9	81.4	5.2
France	59,039.7	778.9	538.3	189	75.2	82.7	4.4
Ireland	3,819.7	54.2	31.1	189	73.9	79.1	5.9
Luxembourg	441.3	5.7	3.8	178	74.7	81.2	5.1
The Netherlands	15,983.1	206.6	140.5	172	75.3	80.6	4.8
United Kingdom	59,832.1	679.3	610.6	164	75.0	79.8	5.6
Southern Europe							
Spain	39,489.6	386.5	359.3	122	75.5	82.7	4.6
Greece	10,564.7	101.0	103.0	130	75.5	80.6	6.1
Italy	57,844.0	543.0	560.2	125	76.2	82.6	5.1
Portugal	10,022.8	120.1	105.8	154	71.8	78.9	5.5
European Union	377,026.3	4,038.2	3,665.9	153	74.9	81.2	4.9

Source: Eurostat.

on average. The average age at childbirth, regardless of whether the child is or is not a woman's first, has been rising steadily. On average, women have a child when aged 29 years and five months, as opposed to 26 years and 10 months in 1980.

Definitions

Natural growth / natural balance: Difference between the number of births and the number of deaths recorded over a given period. The rate of natural growth is obtained by dividing the outcome by the average population over the period under consideration.

Migratory balance: Difference between the number of people who settle in the territory (immigrants) and the number of people who leave it permanently (emigrants) over a given period of time.

Total fertility rate: The sum of the fertility rates for every age group recorded over a given year. This indicator denotes the number of children that a woman might have had throughout her life, had the fertility rates recorded for each age group in that year remained unchanged.

Generation: All the people born in the same year.

Lifetime fertility: Average number of children that a generation of women that is not subject to mortality could give birth to over the entire span of their fertile life.

Life expectancy: Average life-span of a fictitious generation whose mortality rates are the same throughout its entire existence as for each age group in the year under consideration.

Infant mortality rate: Number of children who die before reaching the age of one divided by the total number of live births.

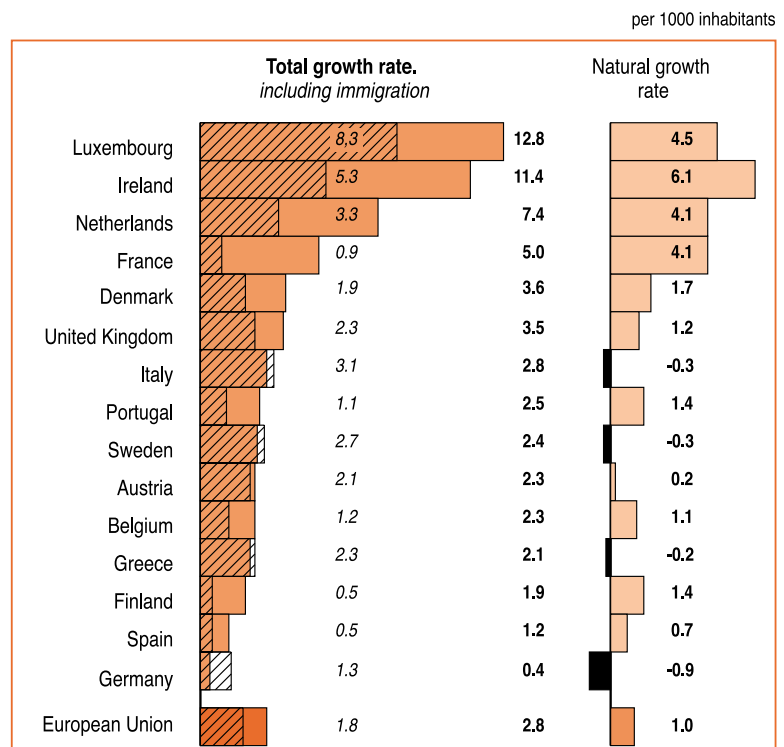
After having their first child, women tend to wait a little under four years (3 years and 9 months) before having their second. After their second child, mothers tend to space out their next pregnancies even more: the average gap between the second and third child is 4 years and 4 months, and between the fourth and the fifth, 4 years and 8 months.

Women have more than two children on average

The total fertility rate betrays behaviour in any given year, but it

does not show the behaviour of women throughout their lives. In order to describe this behaviour, one must count the children of a generation of women having reached the end of their fertile lives: this is known as lifetime fertility (see box). For instance, women born in 1950, i.e. who turned 50 in 2000, had 2.1 children on average. The total progeny of women born after 1950 cannot be determined, because they haven't yet reached the end of their fertile lives. Women born in 1965 had on average 1.8 children come their 35th birthday. At the same age, women born in 1950 already had two children. But this gap may be offset if it

Figure 2 - Natural, migratory and total¹ rate of population increase across the European Union in 2000



1. The total growth rate is obtained by adding up the natural and migratory rates. The figures should be read as follows : France has a natural growth of 4.1 per thousand inhabitants, and a migratory growth rate of 0.9 per thousand, yielding a total growth rate of 5 per thousand. Source : Eurostat.

turns out that younger generations have more children later on in life. Thus women born in 1960 only had 1.9 children come the age of 35, but later went on to catch up: at the age of 40, they had 2.1 children on average, i.e. just as many as the 1950 generation at the same age.

The number of childless women is falling. Among women born in 1930, 13% remained childless. Among those born in 1950, who turned 50 in 2000, only one woman in ten remained childless. This proportion is very low, given that it is believed that 5% of women of that generation never lived as a couple and 4% were unable to have children owing to problems of physiological sterility.

Four in ten children are born out of wedlock

The past twenty years have seen more and more children being born out of wedlock. Only one in ten were born thus until the end of the Seventies. Nowadays, over 300,000 babies are born to unmarried parents each year, accounting for 40% of the total number of births, and 55% of all firstborns (see figure 3). The growth in the trend for long-term steady relationships outside marriage has much to do with this phenomenon. Marriage is no longer seen as a pre-requisite to having children. Nowadays, nearly one in six couples are unmarried: of the 29.6 million people living as couples in France, 4.8 million are unmarried. And the children of unmarried couples are increasingly recognised before their birth, demonstrating the commitment of the parents. In 1999, nearly eight out of ten children (77%) born out of

wedlock were recognised by the father before their birth. The figure was only around one in two in 1980.

The number of children born out of wedlock whose parents marry thereafter is also increasing, but to a lesser extent: 112,000 children were in that position in 1999 (see figure 3).

A resurgence of the institution of matrimony?

During the last year of the 20th century, 300,000 marriages were celebrated in France. Since 1996, the number of weddings has been on the increase, breaking with a downward trend that has been entrenched since 1973 (see figure 5). This rise coincides with unfavourable changes in the taxation regime for unmarried couples with children since 1996. One must also factor in the 'Year 2000' factor. Only by monitoring the situation over the coming years will we be able to ascertain whether the almost unrelenting drop in marriages for the past thirty years has been decisively reversed or whether the figures for the past few years merely represent a temporary blip.

Only one in ten women born in 1950, i.e. aged 50 in 2000, was still single in that year. This proportion is set to increase for subsequent generations, in spite of the recent rise in the number of marriages. The extrapolation of current trends leads one to expect that between 25% and 30% of women will still be single at the age of fifty come 2017.

Nowadays, the institution of matrimony has less to do with creating couples and more with merely transforming unmarried

couples into married ones. In the case of first marriages, the average age of brides is 27 years and 8 months, and that of bridegrooms, 29 years and 10 months. Twenty years ago, the figures were 23 and 25 years of age respectively.

Remarrying is on the rise, in tandem with the increase in the number of divorcees: 17% of

Figure 3 - Number of births in France since 1970

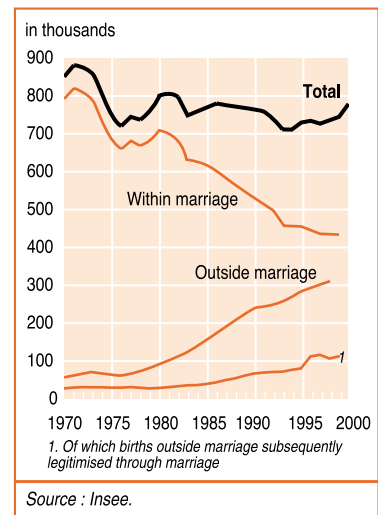
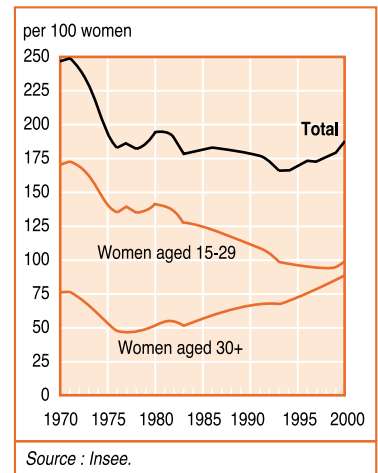


Figure 4 - Total fertility rates in France since 1970



bridegrooms and 16% of brides are already divorcees. In 1980, divorcees accounted for only 10% of newlyweds.

The risk of divorce is rising across all age groups

The number of divorces has remained rather stable for the past fifteen years, at around 110,000 per year (see figure 5). However, given the downward trend in the number of new marriages, this stability in fact betrays a greater probability of marriages ending in divorce. If current divorce patterns remains identical in future, four in every ten marriages celebrated in 1999 (39%) will end in divorce. In 1991, the proportion was only one in three marriages (33%), and in 1981, one in four (24%).

The risk of divorce is greatest around the fifth year of a marriage. It tends to fall off steadily thereafter. The rising trend in the

number of divorces recorded over the past thirty years applies to all marriages across the board, whatever their duration. Thus, divorces after 25 years of marriage were three times more common in 1998 than in 1978 (see figure 6).

The civil solidarity pact

What is known as the civil solidarity pact was introduced at the end of 1999. This institution, which is basically a contract between two people of the same or different sexes, governs their life as a couple in terms of house-keeping, housing, taxes, social rights, etc. It should be pointed out that it has no incidence upon anything to do with children. 30,000 civil union covenants were registered between the end of 1999 and 2000, equivalent to less than 10% of the marriages celebrated over the same period (see

figure 5). Current data does not enable one to determine whether this institution mainly involves homosexual couples or whether it is seen as a viable alternative to marriage by heterosexual couples. Whatever the truth of the matter, its onset did not cause the number of marriages to drop – far from it, as the figure was up substantially in 2000.

Mortality is getting steadily lower

The number of deaths in France has remained steady since 1995, at around 535,000 per year (see figure 7). However, given the ageing of the country's population, had mortality rates remained identical over these past few years, between 4,000 and 7,000 additional deaths should have been recorded per year. The stagnation in the number of deaths thus discloses a drop in the mortality rate.

Figure 5 - Marriages, divorces and civil solidarity pacts in France since 1970

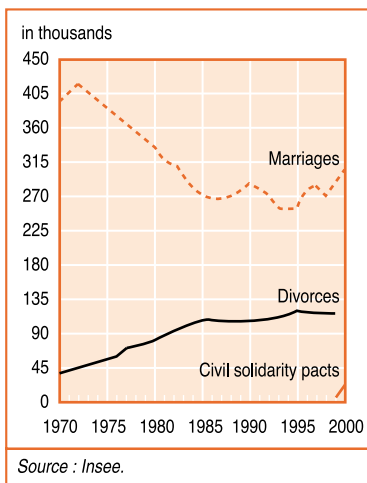
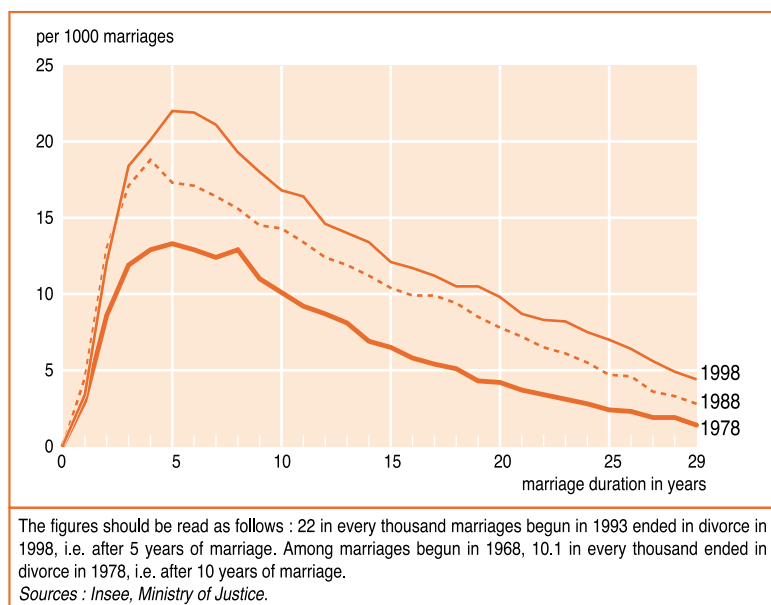


Figure 6 - Divorce rate versus duration of marriage



Infant mortality rates also continued their long-standing dramatic fall, uninterrupted for the past fifty years. In 2000, 4.4 infants aged less than one year old were dying for every 1,000 live births. The rate was ten times that in 1950, and still double that in the early eighties (see *figure 7*). The drop is due to a string of medical advances. Furthermore, since the early Nineties, the campaign to reduce cot deaths has led to a further fall in mortality rates among infants aged over one month.

In Europe as a whole, there are marked differences in infant mortality rates between Scandinavian and other countries. Finland and Sweden have infant mortality rates of under 4 per thousand, compared with over 5.5 per thousand in Greece, the United Kingdom and Ireland.

French women have the highest life expectancy in Europe

Life expectancy at birth is rising constantly – by three months per year on average. Since 1980, it has thus risen by five years for men, and four years and four months for women. In 2000, life expectancy at birth in France was 75.2 years for males and 82.7 years for females.

Current increases in life expectancy at birth are for the most part due to a drop in mortality between the ages of 55 and 65 among men. Among women, most progress has occurred among those aged 75 to 85. Thus the life expectancy of men and women alike aged 60 has increased by three years since 1980. Nowadays, a man aged 60 can hope to live, under current mortality conditions, until the

age of 80. A woman aged 60, assuming the same conditions hold, could aspire to live five years more, up to the age of 85.3.

The life expectancy of French males and females is higher than the European average. In 2000, life expectancy in the European Union as a whole was an estimated 74.9 years for men and 81.2 years for women. In this respect French males are far ahead of their Portuguese and Irish peers, whose life expectancy at birth is lower than 74 years, but far behind the Swedes and Italians. French females, together with their Spanish peers, have the longest life expectancies in Europe (see *figure 1*).

An ageing population

France's population is ageing. This is not a new phenomenon.

Figure 7 - Changes in France's demographics over the years

Year	Population in mid-year	Marriages	Live births	Deaths	Natural increase	Estimated net migration	Rate per 1,000 inhabitants				Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births
							Marriage	Birth	Death	Natural growth	
1970	50,772,227	393,686	850,381	542,277	+ 308,104	+ 179,911	7.8	16.7	10.7	+ 6.1	18.2
1980	53,880,009	334,377	800,376	547,107	+ 253,269	+ 43,974	6.2	14.9	10.2	+ 4.7	10.0
1985	55,284,271	269,419	768,431	552,496	+ 215,935	+ 38,000	4.9	13.9	10.0	+ 3.9	8.3
1990	56,708,831	287,099	762,407	526,201	+ 236,206	+ 80,000	5.1	13.4	9.3	+ 4.2	7.3
1995	57,844,247	254,651	729,609	531,618	+ 197,991	+ 40,000	4.4	12.6	9.2	+ 3.4	4.9
1996	58,025,989	280,072	734,338	535,775	+ 198,563	+ 35,000	4.8	12.7	9.2	+ 3.4	4.8
1997	58,207,490	283,984	726,768	530,319	+ 196,449	+ 40,000	4.9	12.5	9.1	+ 3.4	4.7
1998	58,397,788	271,361	738,080	534,005	+ 204,075	+ 45,000	4.6	12.6	9.1	+ 3.5	4.6
1999 ¹	58,620,363	285,400	744,100	541,600	+ 202,500	+ 45,000	4.9	12.7	9.2	+ 3.5	4.3
2000 ¹	58,891,913	304,300	778,900	538,300	+ 240,600	+ 55,000	5.2	13.2	9.1	+ 4.1	4.4

1. Provisional figures.

Sources : Insee, civil status.

It began some thirty years back. Longer life expectancies, a drop in fertility rates relative to the high levels recorded during the

For further information

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'baby boom' in the fifties and sixties, and the slowing down of migratory flows are all contributory factors. Twenty years ago, 30% of the population was aged under 20; in 2001, this had fallen to a quarter. Over the same period, whereas the total population increased by 5.3 million people (to 59 versus 53.7 million), the number of people aged over 60 increased from 9.2 million to 12.2 million, i.e. an increase of 3 million.

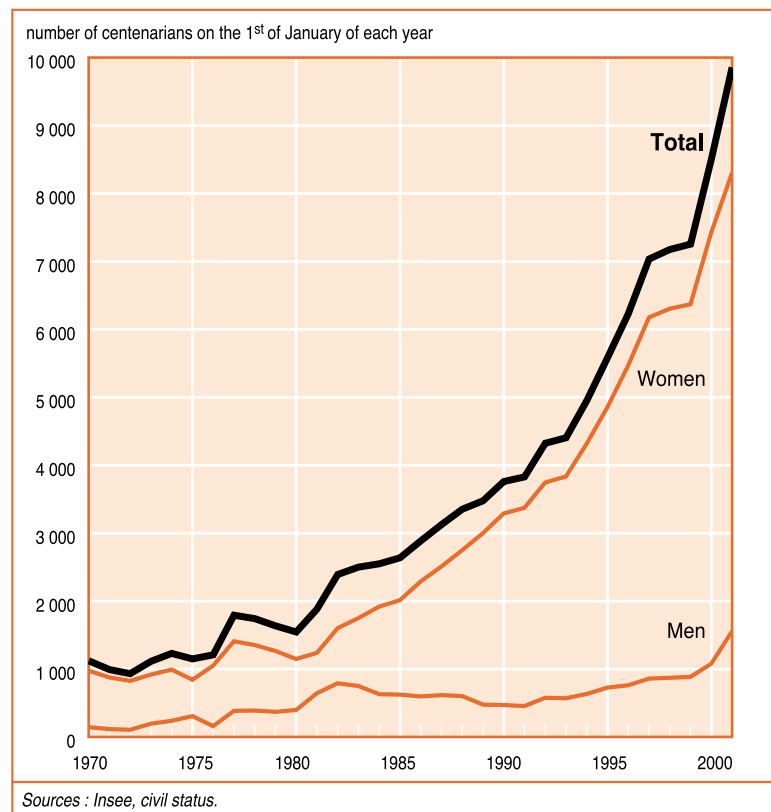
In spite of this, France is one of the countries in the European Union with the highest proportions of under-20s, behind Ireland which is by far the youngest country in the EU (with 31% of its population being under 20 years of age). The ageing trend

affects the whole of the European Union: the proportion of under-20s in the EU has fallen from 30% to 23% over the past twenty years. The proportion of those aged 60 and over has been increasing most dramatically in Southern European countries: Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece. Over one European in five (21%) is now aged 60 or over.

More and more people are becoming grandparents

The combined effect of the drop in mortality rates and the resurgence of fertility rates is leading to a lengthening of family lines. In France, 12.6 million people

Figure 8 - The rise in the number of centenarians in France since 1970



were grandparents in 1999. Of these, two million were actually great-grandparents and 30,000 were great-great-grandparents, heading a family line spanning five generations. Their number is set to grow in the coming years given the increasing life expectancy of younger generations.

It is no longer rare to be a centenarian

Owing to the gradual drop in mortality rates, centenarians are becoming increasingly numerous. Close to 10,000 people lived through the whole of the 20th

century, having been born before 1901 and being still alive on the 1st of January 2001. There were only a thousand centenarians on the 1st of January 1970 (see *figure 8*), and merely a hundred people alive on the 1st of January 1901 who had been born in the 18th century. ■