Population structure and ageing

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in February 2025.
Planned article update: February 2026.

Highlights

" On 1 January 2024, the EU population was estimated at 449.3 million people and more than one-fifth (21.6%) of it was aged 65 years and over. "

" On 1 January 2024, the median age of the EU's population reached 44.7 years."

" Between 2014 and 2024, the median age increased in all EU members, except Malta and Germany, where it decreased (-0.7 and -0.1 years, respectively)."

This article looks at the impact of demographic ageing within the European Union (EU) , which is likely to be of major significance in the coming decades. Consistently low birth rates and higher life expectancy are transforming the shape of the EU's population pyramid . Probably the most important change will be the marked transition towards a much older population structure, a development that is already apparent in several EU countries. As a result of demographic change, the proportion of people of working age in the EU is shrinking while the relative number of those retired is expanding. The share of older people in the total population is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades. This may, in turn, lead to an increased burden on those of working age to provide for the social expenditure required by the ageing population for a range of related services.

The share of elderly people continues to increase

The population of the EU on 1 January 2024 was estimated at 449.3 million people. Children aged between 0 and 14 years made up 14.6% of the EU's population (Table 1), while people considered to be of working age (15 to 64 years) accounted for 63.8% of the population. Older people (aged 65 years and over) had a 21.6% share (an increase of 0.3 percentage points (pp) compared with the previous year and an increase of 2.9pp compared with 10 years earlier). For comparison, in 2023 the 3 population groups, children (0 to 14 years), working age (15 to 64 years) and older people (aged 65 years and over) represented, respectively, 14.8%, 63.8% and 21.3% of the EU's population.

Across EU countries, the highest shares of children in the total population in 2024 were observed in Ireland (18.9%), Sweden (17.1%) and France (17.0%), while the lowest shares were recorded in Italy, (12.2%), Malta (12.3%) and Portugal (12.8%). Compared with 2023, only 2 EU countries (Hungary and Austria) had a constant share of children in the population in 2024, while in the other countries this share fell. Regarding the share of older people in the total population, Italy (24.3%), Portugal (24.1%), Bulgaria (23.8%), Finland (23.4%), Greece (23.3%) and Croatia (23.0%) had the highest shares, while Luxembourg (15.0%) and Ireland (15.5%) had the lowest shares. In 2024, compared with 2023, the share of older people increased in 26 EU countries, while it only decreased in Malta.

Population age structure by major age groups, 2014, 2023 and 2024
(% of the total population)

	0–14 years old			15–64 years old			65 years old or over		
	2014	2023	2024	2014	2023	2024	2014	2023	2024
EU (')	15.3	14.8	14.6	66.0	63.8	63.8	18.7	21.3	21.6
Belgium	17.0	16.5	16.3	65.2	63.8	63.8	17.8	19.7	19.9
Bulgaria	13.9	14.2	14.1	66.2	62.3	62.1	19.9	23.5	23.8
Czechia	15.0	16.2	15.9	67.6	63.4	63.6	17.4	20.4	20.5
Denmark	17.2	16.0	15.7	64.5	63.6	63.6	18.2	20.5	20.7
Germany	13.2	14.0	13.9	66.0	63.8	63.6	20.9	22.2	22.4
Estonia	15.8	16.4	16.0	65.8	63.4	63.5	18.4	20.2	20.5
Ireland	21.5	19.3	18.9	65.9	65.5	65.6	12.6	15.2	15.5
Greece	14.6	13.4	13.1	64.9	63.7	63.6	20.5	23.0	23.3
Spain	15.2	13.6	13.2	66.7	66.3	66.4	18.1	20.1	20.4
France (')	18.6	17.2	17.0	63.4	61.7	61.6	18.0	21.1	21.4
Croatia	14.8	14.3	14.0	66.7	63.0	62.9	18.5	22.7	23.0
Italy	13.9	12.4	12.2	64.6	63.5	63.5	21.5	24.0	24.3
Cyprus	16.3	15.4	15.3	69.9	67.2	67.0	13.9	17.3	17.7
Latvia	14.7	16.0	15.6	66.2	63.1	63.0	19.1	21.0	21.3
Lithuania	14.6	14.9	14.5	67.1	65.0	65.1	18.4	20.0	20.3
Luxembourg	16.8	15.9	15.7	69.1	69.3	69.2	14.1	14.9	15.0
Hungary	14.4	14.5	14.5	68.1	65.0	64.9	17.5	20.5	20.7
Malta	14.5	12.7	12.3	67.8	68.7	69.3	17.6	18.6	18.4
Netherlands	16.9	15.3	15.1	65.7	64.5	64.4	17.3	20.2	20.5
Austria	14.3	14.4	14.4	67.4	66.0	65.8	18.3	19.6	19.8
Poland (')	15.0	15.4	15.1	70.1	64.7	64.4	14.9	19.9	20.5
Portugal	14.7	12.9	12.8	65.4	63.2	63.1	20.0	23.9	24.1
Romania (')	15.5	16.1	15.9	68.0	64.2	64.1	16.5	19.7	20.0
Slovenia	14.6	15.0	14.7	67.9	63.6	63.5	17.5	21.4	21.8
Slovakia	15.3	16.1	16.0	71.1	66.1	65.7	13.5	17.9	18.4
Finland	16.4	15.1	14.9	64.2	61.6	61.8	19.4	23.3	23.4
Sweden	17.1	17.4	17.1	63.5	62.2	62.3	19.4	20.4	20.6
Iceland	20.5	18.2	18.3	66.3	66.8	66.2	13.2	15.0	15.6
Liechtenstein	15.2	14.5	14.4	69.2	65.9	65.4	15.5	19.6	20.3
Norway	18.2	16.7	16.4	65.9	64.9	64.9	15.9	18.4	18.7
Switzerland	14.9	15.1	15.0	67.5	65.8	65.7	17.6	19.2	19.3
Montenegro	18.6	17.9	18.2	68.1	65.7	65.1	13.3	16.4	16.7
Moldova	16.0	18.0	17.5	74.0	65.9	65.1	10.0	16.1	17.4
North Macedonia	16.9	16.8	:	70.8	65.5	:	12.4	17.7	:
Georgia	17.1	20.7	19.5	68.9	63.8	64.3	14.0	15.6	16.2
Albania	19.6	16.0	:	68.4	67.5	:	12.0	16.5	:
Serbia	14.3	14.4	14.4	67.6	63.4	63.1	18.0	22.1	22.4
Türkiye	24.6	22.0	21.4	67.7	68.1	68.3	7.7	9.9	10.2
Ukraine	14.8	:	:	69.9	:	:	15.3	:	:

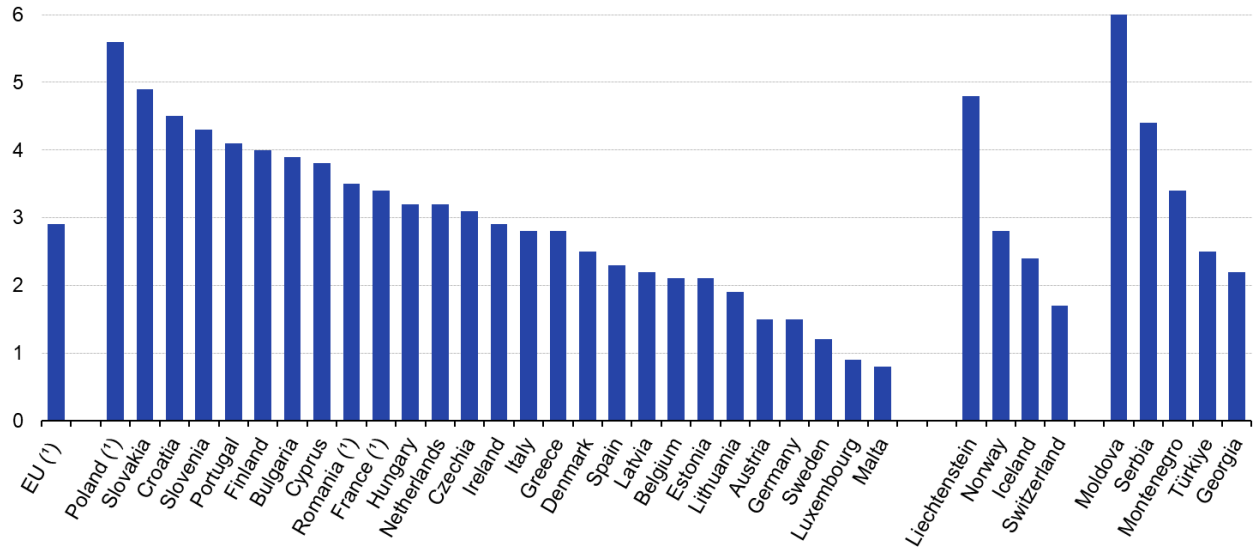
(') 2024 provisional/estimated.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjanind)

eurostat

Table 1: Population age structure by major age groups, 2014, 2023 and 2024 (% of the total population)
Source: Eurostat (demo_pjanind)

The population structure of the EFTA and candidate countries for which data are available was similar to that generally observed in the EU, the main exceptions being Iceland (where the population structure was similar to that of Ireland). In Iceland, the proportion of children was high (18.3%) and older people accounted for a comparatively low share of the total population (15.6%). Türkiye, Georgia and Montenegro also had a relatively low share of older people (respectively, 10.2%, 16.2% and 16.7%). Nevertheless, the trend of population ageing is also visible in these countries (Figure 1).

Increase in the share of the population aged 65 years or over between 2014 and 2024
(percentage points)



(1) 2024 provisional/estimated.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjanind)

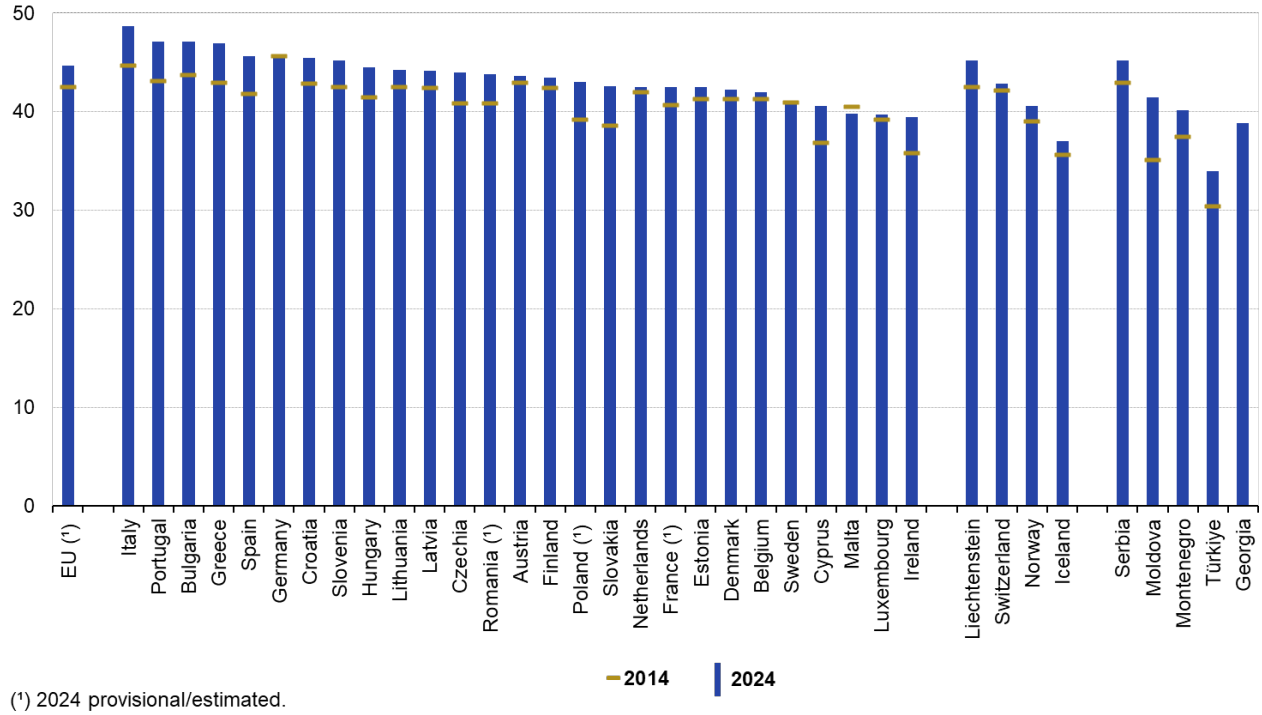
eurostat

Figure 1: Increase in the share of the population aged 65 years and over between 2014 and 2024 (pp) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjanind)

Median age is highest in Italy and lowest in Ireland

The median age of the EU's population is increasing and was 44.7 years on 1 January 2024 (Figure 2). This means that half of the EU's population was older than 44.7 years, while the other half was younger. Across the EU countries the median age ranged from 39.4 years in Ireland to 48.7 years in Italy, confirming the relatively young and relatively old population structures recorded in each of these EU countries.

Median age of population, 2014 and 2024
(years)



(1) 2024 provisional/estimated.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjanind)

Figure 2: Median age of population, 2014 and 2024 (years) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjanind)

The median age in the EU increased by 2.2 years (on average by 0.22 years per annum) between 2014 and 2024, rising from 42.5 years to 44.5 in 2023 and to 44.7 years in 2024. It increased in almost all EU countries, rising by 4 years in Italy, Slovakia, Greece and Portugal, but not in Germany, where it decreased (from 45.6 years in 2014 to 45.5 years in 2024) and Malta (from 40.5 years in 2014 to 39.8 years in 2024). Moldova experienced the largest increase in median age over the past 10 years: rising by 6.3 years, from 35.1 years in 2014 to 41.4 in 2024 (Figure 2). Between 2023 and 2024, the median age increased in 19 EU countries, in 3 EFTA countries and in all of the candidate countries for which data are available, while it decreased in Germany, Malta and Finland, and was constant in Denmark, Croatia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Netherlands. In 2024 the median age recorded in the EFTA countries and in the candidate countries for which data are available was lower than the EU figure, except for Liechtenstein and Serbia (both 45.2 years).

Slightly more than 3 persons of working age for every person aged 65 years and over

Age dependency ratios can be used to study the level of support given to younger and/or older people by the working age population; these ratios are expressed in terms of the relative size of younger and/or older populations compared with the working age population. The old-age dependency ratio for the EU was 33.9% on 1 January 2024 (Table 2), with just over 3 persons of working age for every person aged 65 years and over. The old-age dependency ratio across the EU countries ranged from lows of 21.7% in Luxembourg and 23.6% in Ireland, with almost 5 working age persons for every person aged 65 years and over, to highs of 38.4% in Italy, 38.2% in Bulgaria and 38.2% in Portugal, where there were fewer than 3 working age persons for every person aged 65 years and over. Between 2023 and 2024, the old-age dependency ratio increased in EU by 0.5pp from 33.4% in 2023 to 33.9% in 2024. It increased in 25 EU countries while it decreased in Malta and was constant in Finland.

Population age structure indicators, 1 January 2024
(%)

	Young-age dependency ratio	Old-age dependency ratio	Total age dependency ratio	Share of population aged 80 or over
EU (*)	**22.9**	**33.9**	**56.8**	**6.1**
Belgium	25.5	31.3	56.8	5.5
Bulgaria	22.8	38.2	61.0	5.2
Czechia	24.9	32.3	57.2	4.5
Denmark	24.7	32.5	57.2	5.4
Germany	21.9	35.2	57.1	7.2
Estonia	25.2	32.2	57.5	5.8
Ireland	28.8	23.6	52.4	3.7
Greece	20.6	36.7	57.2	7.0
Spain	19.9	30.8	50.7	6.1
France (*)	27.5	34.8	62.3	6.0
Croatia	22.3	36.6	58.9	5.5
Italy	19.2	38.4	57.6	7.7
Cyprus	22.8	26.5	49.3	4.2
Latvia	24.8	33.9	58.7	6.1
Lithuania	22.3	31.2	53.5	5.7
Luxembourg	22.7	21.7	44.4	3.9
Hungary	22.3	31.9	54.2	4.6
Malta	17.8	26.5	44.3	4.0
Netherlands	23.5	31.8	55.3	5.0
Austria	21.8	30.2	52.0	5.9
Poland (*)	23.5	31.8	55.3	4.4
Portugal	20.3	38.2	58.5	7.0
Romania (*)	24.8	31.2	56.1	4.4
Slovenia	23.2	34.3	57.5	5.8
Slovakia	24.4	27.9	52.3	3.6
Finland	24.0	37.8	61.9	5.9
Sweden	27.4	33.1	60.5	5.8
Iceland	27.6	23.6	51.2	3.6
Liechtenstein	22.0	31.0	53.0	4.9
Norway	25.3	28.8	54.0	4.6
Switzerland	22.8	29.4	52.2	5.6
Montenegro	28.0	25.7	53.7	3.2
Moldova	26.9	26.7	53.5	2.5
Georgia	30.4	25.1	55.5	3.2
Serbia	22.9	35.6	58.4	4.4
Türkiye	31.4	15.0	46.3	1.9

(*) 2024 provisional/estimated.
The age-dependency ratios are given by the number of young and elderly people at an age when both groups are generally economically inactive (i.e. under 15 years of age and aged 65 and over), compared to the number of people of working age (i.e. 15-64 years old).
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjanind)

Table 2: Population age structure indicators, 1 January 2024 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjanind)

The combination of young and old-age dependency ratios provides the total age dependency ratio (calculated as the ratio of dependent people, young and old, compared with the population considered to be of working age, in other words 15 to 64 years). In 2024, this was 56.8% in the EU, indicating that there were approximately 2 working age persons for every dependent person. The lowest total age dependency ratio among the EU countries in 2024 was observed in Malta (44.3%) and the highest in France (62.3%).

A generally increasing trend can be observed for the EU's old-age and total dependency ratios. The old-age dependency ratio increased by 5.6pp during the past decade (from 28.3% in 2014 to 33.9% in 2024), while the total dependency ratio increased by 5.2pp over the same period (from 51.6% in 2014 to 56.8% in 2024).

Past and future population ageing trends in the EU

Population ageing is a long-term trend that began several decades ago in Europe. This trend is visible in the transformations of the age structure of the population and is reflected in an increasing share of older people, coupled with a declining share of working-age people in the total population.

Population pyramids (Figures 3 and 4) show the distribution of the population by sex and by 5-year age groups. Each bar corresponds to the share of the given sex and age group in the total population (men and women combined). The EU population pyramid on 1 January 2024 is narrow at the bottom and has a rhomboid form due to the 'baby boomer' cohorts resulting from the high fertility rates in several European countries after World War II (known as the 'baby boom'). These 'baby boomers' are now increasing the retirement age population, as illustrated by the comparison with the 2009 population pyramid. The 'baby boom' bulge is moving up the population pyramid, leaving the working-age population and the base narrower — as can be seen in Figure 3.

Population pyramids, EU 2009 and 2024
(% of the total population)

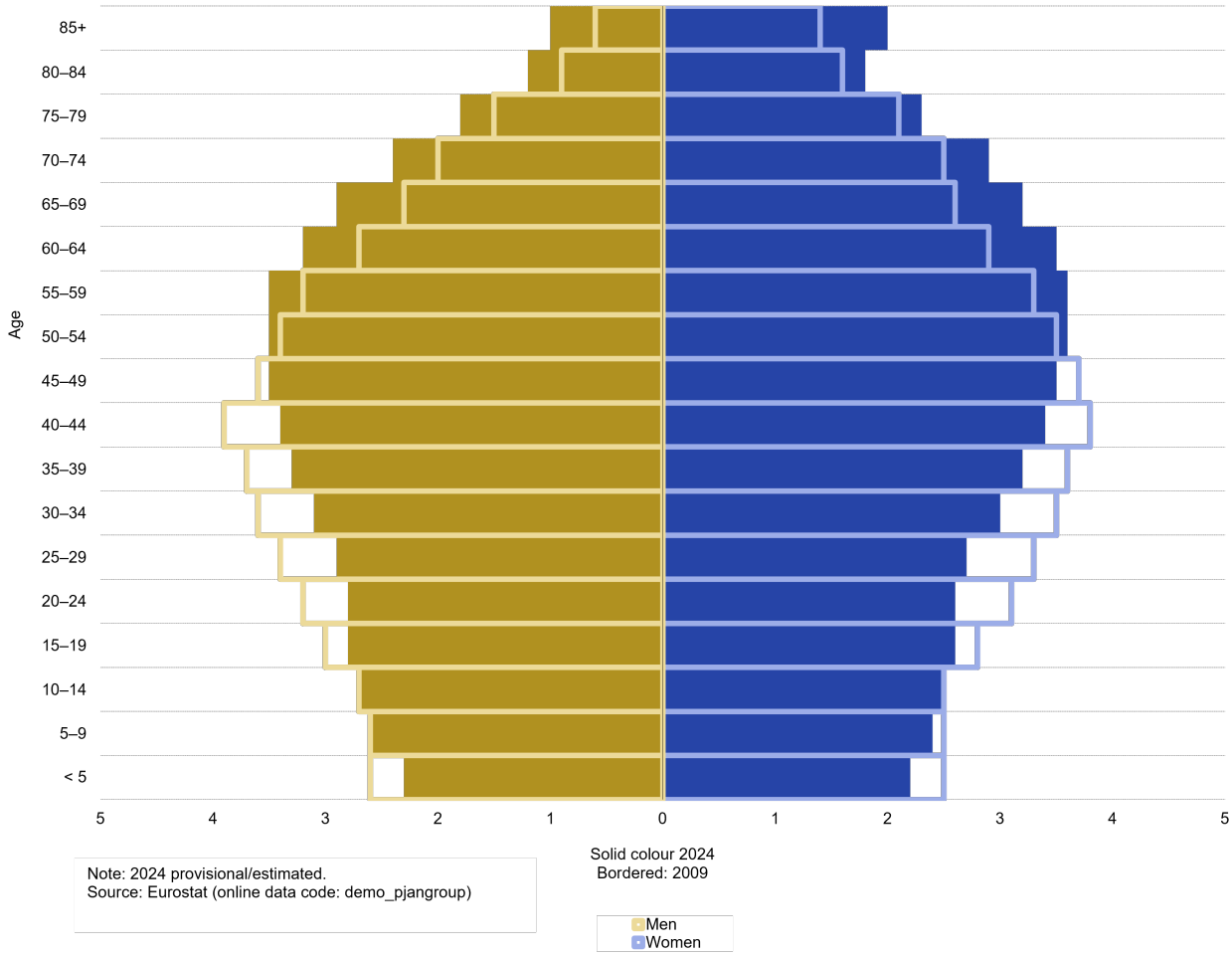


Figure 3: Population pyramids, EU 2009 and 2024_(% of the total population) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjangroup)

The share of the population aged 65 years and over is increasing in every EU country, EFTA country and in the candidate countries for which data are available. The increase within the last decade ranges from 5.6pp in Poland, 4.9pp in Slovakia, 4.5pp in Croatia, and 4.3pp in Slovenia, to 0.8pp in Malta, 0.9pp in Luxembourg and 1.2pp in Sweden. Within the last decade (2014–2024), an increase of 2.9pp was observed for the EU as a whole (Figure 1).

The growth in the relative share of older people may be explained by increased longevity, a pattern that has been apparent for several decades as life expectancy has risen, at least until 2019 (see mortality and life expectancy statistics); this development is often referred to as 'ageing at the top' of the population pyramid.

However, consistently low levels of fertility over many years have contributed to population ageing, with fewer births leading to a decline in the proportion of children and young people in the total population (see fertility statistics). This process is known as 'ageing at the bottom' of the population pyramid, and can be observed in the narrowing base of the EU population pyramids between 2009 and 2024.

In an attempt to look at future trends for population ageing, Eurostat updated its population projections at national level in spring 2023 covering the period from 2023 to 2100. The EU's population is projected to increase to a peak of 453.3 million people around 2026 and thereafter gradually decline to 419.5 million people by 2100.

The comparison of age pyramids for 2024 and 2100 (Figure 4) shows that the EU's population is projected to continue to age. In the coming decades, the number of elderly people will increase significantly. By 2100, the

pyramid
will take more the shape of a block, narrowing considerably in the middle of the pyramid (around the age 45-54 years).

Population pyramids, EU, 2024 and 2100
(% of the total population)

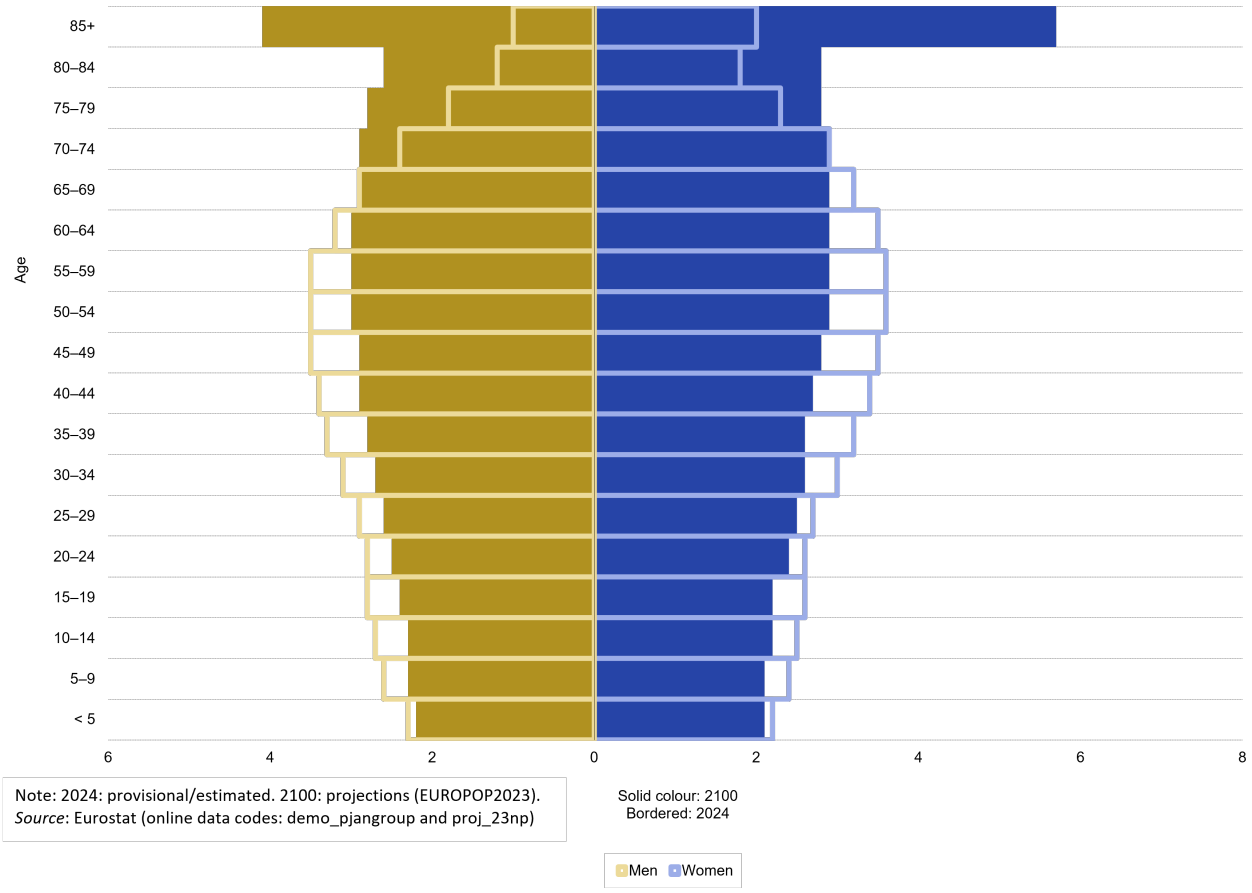
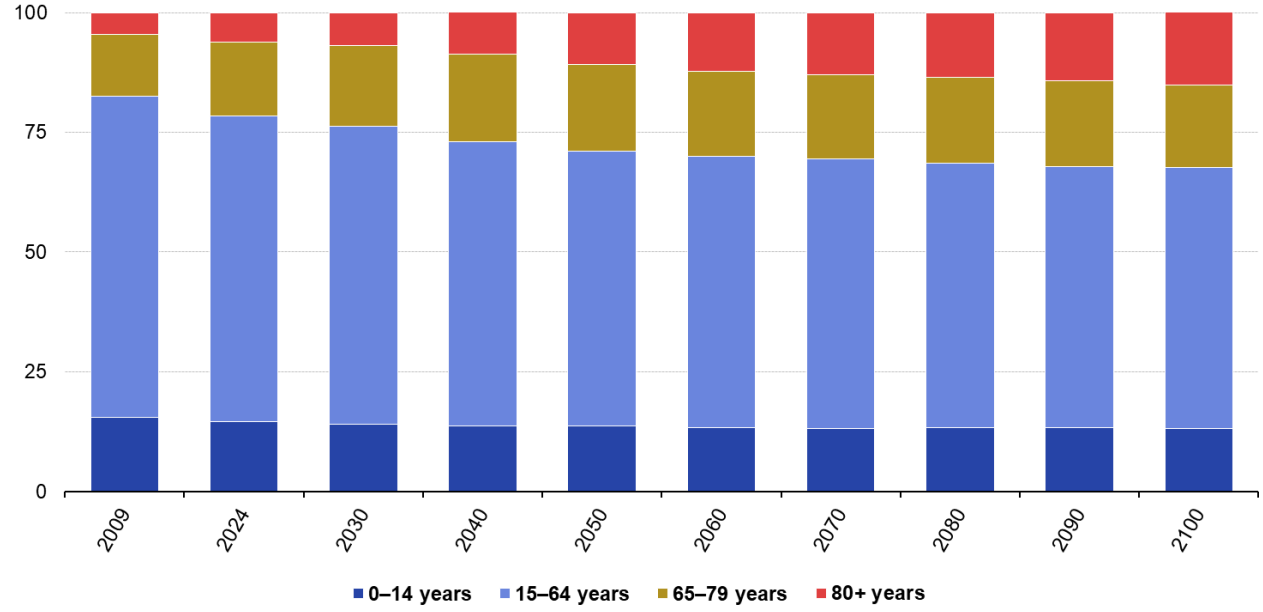


Figure 4: Population pyramids, EU 2024 and 2100 (% of the total population) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjangroup) and (proj_23np)

Another aspect of population ageing is the progressive ageing of the older population itself, as the relative significance of the very old is increasing at a faster pace than any other age segment of the EU's population. The share of those aged 80 years or above
in the EU's population is projected to have a 2.5 fold increase between 2024 and 2100, from 6.1% to 15.3% (Figure 5).

Population structure by major age groups, EU, 2009-2100
(% of total population)

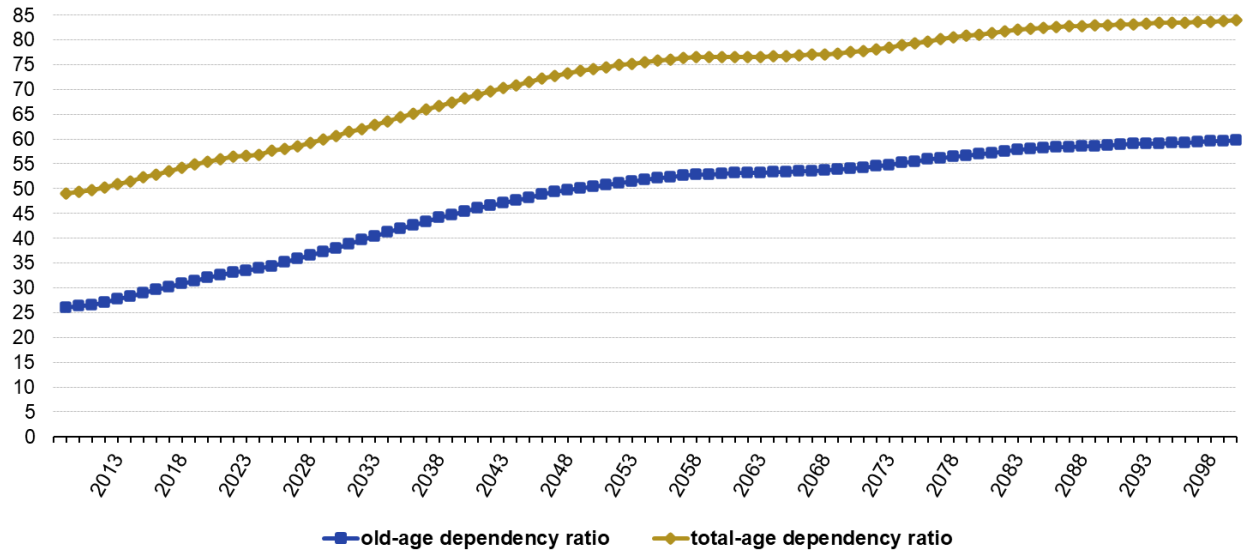


Note: 2024: provisional/estimated. 2030–2100: projections (EUROPOP2023).
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: demo_pjanind and proj_23np)

Figure 5: Population structure by major age groups, EU, 2009-2100 (% of total population) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjanind) and (proj_23np)

During the period from 2024 to 2100, the share of the population of working age is expected to decline, while older people will probably account for an increasing share of the total population: those aged 65 years and over will account for 32.5% of the EU's population by 2100, compared with 21.6% in 2024. As a result of the population movement between age groups, the EU's old-age dependency ratio is projected to almost double from 33.9% in 2024 to 59.7% by 2100 and the total-age dependency ratio is projected to rise from 56.8% in 2024 to 83.9% by 2100 (Figure 6). The median age is expected to increase by 5.5 years, rising from 44.7 years in 2024 to 50.2 years in 2100.

Observed and projected total-age and old-age dependency ratio, EU, 2009-2100
(%)



Note: 2024: provisional/estimated. 2025–2100: projections (EUROPOP2023).
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: demo_pjanind and proj_23ndbi)

eurostat

Figure 6: Observed and projected total-age and old-age dependency ratio, EU, 2009-2100 (%) Source: Eurostat (demo_pjanind) and (proj_23ndbi)

Source data for tables and graphs

- Population structure and ageing: tables and figures

Data sources

Eurostat collects data from EU Member States and other countries participating in its demography data collection exercise in relation to populations as of 1 January each year. The recommended definition is the 'usually resident population' and represents the number of inhabitants of a given area on 1 January of the year in question (or, in some cases, on 31 December of the previous year). In accordance with the United Nations international recommendations, the definition of 'usual residence' is based on a 12 month reference period, in other words, those included should have lived in their place of usual residence for a continuous period of at least 12 months before the reference date, or arrived in their place of usual residence during the 12 months before the reference date with the intention of staying there for at least one year. However, countries may report to Eurostat population figures based on the registered or legal population.

Eurostat provides information for a wide range of demographic data. Data on population includes breakdowns by several characteristics, such as age, sex, marital status and educational attainment.

Eurostat produces long-term population projections every 3 years, since 2022 short-term annual updates between their releases. The latest update covering the period 2023 – 2050 was published in September 2024. These projections are 'what-if' scenarios that aim to provide information about the likely future size and age structure of the population based on assumptions of future trends in fertility , life expectancy and migration . **Methodological notes:**

The population data for the year 2021 and after take into account the results of the latest population census (held in 2021-2022). Following Eurostat's recommendations to ensure consistency of statistics over time, several Member States (Bulgaria, Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland and, Portugal) revised their population time series between the reference years of the population and housing censuses held in 2011 and

2021. While this work was spread over time, revisions were transmitted and released in Eurostat's online database in 2024.

Guidance on the inclusion of refugees from Ukraine who benefit from temporary protection in the EU in the usually resident population : persons from Ukraine granted temporary protection should be counted as part of the usually resident population. Based on this, those who arrived from Ukraine and were granted temporary protection during the year – and who are believed to still be present at the end of the year – should be counted as immigrants during the year and as part of the migrant stock at the end of the reference period. Among EU and EFTA countries, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden and Liechtenstein did not include persons from Ukraine granted temporary protection in their resident population.

Context

A number of important policies, notably in social and economic fields, use demographic data for planning, monitoring and evaluation programmes — for example, population ageing and its likely effects on the sustainability of public finances and welfare provision, or the economic and social impact of demographic change.

The EU has been going through a period of demographic and societal change. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic will leave a lasting impact on the way we live and work together. The outbreak came at a time when Europe had already been going through a period of profound demographic and societal change. More information on the work of the European Commission to tackle the impact of demographic change in Europe can be found in the European Commission dedicated pages .

Eurostat's population projections are used by the European Commission to analyse the likely impact of ageing populations on public spending. Increased social expenditure related to population ageing, in the form of pensions, healthcare and institutional or private (health)care, is likely to result in a higher burden for the working-age population.

Explore further

Other articles

- Fertility statistics
- Mortality and life expectancy statistics
- Population and population change statistics
- Population projections in the EU
- Population statistics at regional level

Database

- Demography, population stock and balance (demo)
- Population projections (proj) , see:

EUROPOP2023 - Population projections at national level (2023-2100) (proj_23n)

Thematic section

- Population and Demography overview

Publications

- All publications on demography, population stock and balance
- Demography of Europe
- Ageing Europe
- The life of women and men in Europe
- Regions in Europe

Methodology

- Methodology: demography, population stock and balance
- Population (ESMS metadata file — demo_pop_esms)
- Population projections (ESMS metadata file — proj_23n_esms)
- Fertility (ESMS metadata file — demo_fer_esms)
- Mortality (ESMS metadata file — demo_mor_esms)
- Marriages and divorces (ESMS metadata file — demo_nup_esms)
- Guidance on the inclusion of refugees from Ukraine who benefit from temporary protection in the EU in the usually resident population

External links

- The impact of demographic change - in a changing environment
- Harnessing talents in Europe's regions
- The 2024 Ageing Report