

VARIA**KRYSTYNA KACPROWSKA****SOCIAL POLICY TOWARDS DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES
IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
– EXAMPLES OF SOLUTIONS AND AN ASSESSMENT
OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS****Introduction**

M. Łakomy points out that the assessment of the changes that have taken place in Europe's demographic in the 21st century requires the identification of how the dynamics of fertility, mortality and migration will affect the evolution of the population and age structure. The statistical offices of individual countries, as well as international research centers, such as the United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Department, the World Bank, Eurostat, the Wittgenstein Centre, or the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, are generally responsible for projecting assumptions concerning population changes¹.

One of the theories of population growth is referred to as modernization, which means fundamental changes that are taking place in society in the economic, social, philosophical, cultural, and demographic spheres. It is worth noting that these changes are influenced by systematic increase in knowledge, industrialization, urbanization, and the transition from the predominance of natural economy in agriculture to the predominance of market production. The effect of modernization is a society completely different from the traditional one. It is a long-term and complex process, and its inseparable element is the demographic transition. A. Landry introduced the concept of demographic revolution to describe the phenomenon of breaking with uncontrolled reproduction of the population².

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¹ M. Łakomy, *Demographic security of Europe in 21st century*, “Geopolitical Review” 21(2017), pp. 31–32.

² J.Z. Holzer, *Demography*, Warsaw 2003.

Easterlin believes that generations of people who were born in a period of high fertility, considering the difficult starting conditions and strong competition on the labor market, decide to have fewer children. In turn, this small generation, noticing the disadvantages of some peers, decides to bring into life numerous offspring³.

Fertility

The European Commission's 2020 report reports that between the 1960s and the mid-1990s, the average number of births per woman in Europe declined. At the beginning of the 21st century, it slightly increased, and in the following decade it remained at a rather stable level. In 2018, the figure was 1.55 children per woman. This value is therefore lower than 2.1, i.e., the level considered necessary to maintain a constant population size, excluding migration. Almost no region in Europe has this level, and in some regions the figure is below 1.25. This applies, for example, to the northwestern regions of the Iberian Peninsula, south-eastern Italy and Sardinia and some regions of Greece. In addition, women, on average, give birth later in life. Between 2001 and 2018, the average age of women giving birth in the EU increased from 29.0 to 30.8 years⁴.

M. Rękas stresses that the continuing downward trend in fertility rates and increasing life expectancy result in an aging population, a shortage of the working-age population, an unsustainable pension system and a shrinking tax base. Considering the negative effects of the state, the government were forced to revise the so-called family policy. In the past, this policy meant primarily a redistribution of funds for the benefit of the poorest families. The aim now is to encourage as many couples as possible to have children. Paradoxically, nowadays also high-income couples are under the care of the state. Changing family policy programs requires the selection of appropriate tools, and their effectiveness, as research shows, varies greatly. It is therefore a difficult topic that has been developing for many years to finally become a threat to the future of many societies⁵.

R. Murkowski notes that a total fertility rate of around 2.1 children per woman of childbearing age on average is a level which guarantees relative stability of the size of a given population. Today, virtually everywhere in Europe, fertility rates for European women are below this figure⁶. The low fertility rate over the years

³ G. Trzpiot, *Changing of Demographic Structure in EU Countries – Challenge for Social Logistics*, "Economic Studies" 175(2013), p. 52.

⁴ Report from the committee to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the impact of demographic change, <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0241&from=EN>>, access: 15.09.2022.

⁵ M. Rękas, *Fertility Rate in the European Union States and Factors Influencing the Rate – Review of Selected Surveys*, "Scientific works of the Wrocław University of Economics" 305(2013), p. 639.

⁶ R. Murkowski, *The Replacement Rate of Generation in Europe in the Period of 2000–2015*, "Studies and Works WNEiZ" 54(2018), p. 275.

Table 1. Fertility rate in EU countries in 2011–2020

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Belgium	1,81	1,80	1,76	1,74	1,70	1,68	1,65	1,62	1,60	1,55
Bulgaria	1,51	1,50	1,48	1,53	1,53	1,54	1,56	1,56	1,58	1,56
The Czech Republic	1,43	1,45	1,46	1,53	1,57	1,63	1,69	1,71	1,71	1,71
Denmark	1,75	1,73	1,67	1,69	1,71	1,79	1,75	1,73	1,70	1,68
Germany	1,75	1,73	1,67	1,69	1,71	1,79	1,75	1,73	1,70	1,68
Estonia	1,61	1,56	1,52	1,54	1,58	1,60	1,59	1,67	1,66	1,58
Ireland	2,03	1,98	1,93	1,89	1,85	1,81	1,77	1,75	1,71	1,63
Greece	1,40	1,34	1,29	1,30	1,33	1,38	1,35	1,35	1,34	1,39
Spain	1,34	1,32	1,27	1,32	1,33	1,34	1,31	1,26	1,23	1,19
France	2,01	2,01	1,99	2,00	1,96	1,92	1,89	1,87	1,86	1,83
Croatia	1,48	1,51	1,46	1,46	1,40	1,42	1,42	1,47	1,47	1,48
Italy	1,44	1,43	1,39	1,37	1,35	1,34	1,32	1,29	1,27	1,24
Cyprus	1,35	1,39	1,30	1,31	1,32	1,37	1,32	1,32	1,33	1,36
Latvia	1,33	1,44	1,52	1,65	1,70	1,74	1,69	1,60	1,61	1,55
Lithuania	1,55	1,60	1,59	1,63	1,70	1,69	1,63	1,63	1,61	1,48
Luxembourg	1,52	1,57	1,55	1,50	1,47	1,41	1,39	1,38	1,34	1,36
Hungary	1,23	1,34	1,35	1,44	1,45	1,53	1,54	1,55	1,55	1,59
Malta	1,45	1,42	1,36	1,38	1,37	1,37	1,26	1,23	1,14	1,13
The Netherlands	1,76	1,72	1,68	1,71	1,66	1,66	1,62	1,59	1,57	1,54
Austria	1,43	1,44	1,44	1,46	1,49	1,53	1,52	1,47	1,46	1,44
Poland	1,33	1,33	1,29	1,32	1,32	1,39	1,48	1,46	1,44	1,39
Portugal	1,35	1,28	1,21	1,23	1,31	1,36	1,38	1,42	1,43	1,40
Romania	1,47	1,52	1,46	1,56	1,62	1,69	1,78	1,76	1,77	1,80
Slovenia	1,56	1,58	1,55	1,58	1,57	1,58	1,62	1,60	1,61	1,59
Slovakia	1,45	1,34	1,34	1,37	1,40	1,48	1,52	1,54	1,57	1,59
Finland	1,83	1,80	1,75	1,71	1,65	1,57	1,49	1,41	1,35	1,37
Sweden	1,90	1,91	1,89	1,88	1,85	1,85	1,78	1,76	1,71	1,67
Great Britain	1,91	1,92	1,83	1,81	1,80	1,79	1,74	1,68	1,65	1,59

Source: Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>.

has contributed to the aging of the population, and the reduction in the birth rate has led to a reduction in the share of young people in the total population. Based on the data in the table (Tab.1) we can see that in 2011 Ireland (2.03) and France (2.01) had the highest fertility rates.

The lowest was reported in Hungary (1.23), in Latvia (1.33) and in Poland (1.33). In 2012, the coefficient remained at 2.01 in France and fell to 1.98 in Ireland. In Poland, it remained unchanged, i.e. at 1.33. It is worth noting that this indicator reached the highest value for Poland in 2017 – 1.48. Since 2015, the index has also been below 2.00 in France. In Ireland, the index fell below 2.00 after 2011. In 2020, none of the surveyed countries reached the level of 2.00. However, the closest to this level were France (1.83) and Romania (1.80).

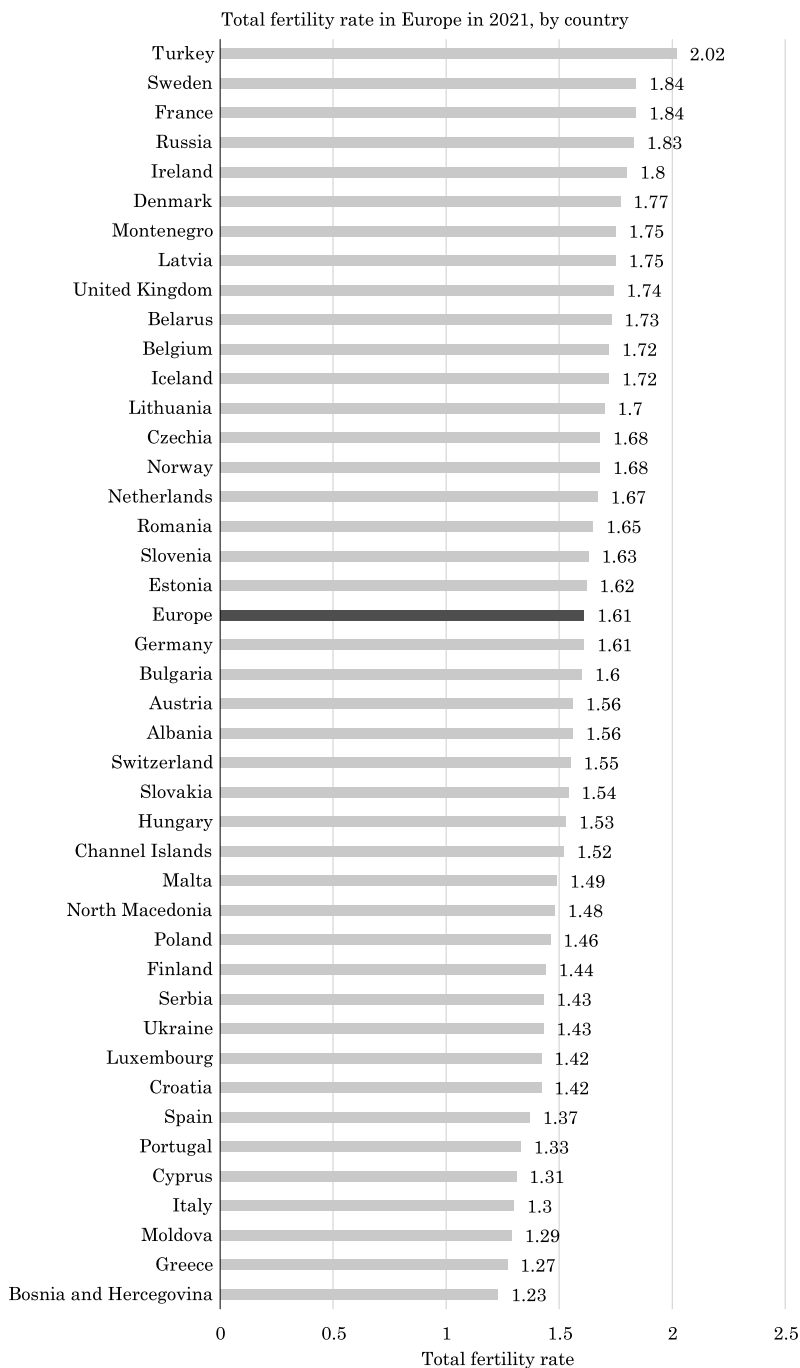


Fig. 1. Total fertility rate in Europe in 2021 by country

Source: Statista (2021). Total fertility rate in Europe in 2021, by country: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/612074/fertility-rates-in-european-countries/>

Based on the data in Figure 1, we can see that the highest fertility rate in 2021 was reached by Turkey – 2.02. The overall coefficient in Europe was 1.61. Sweden (1.84), France (1.84) and Russia (1.83) achieved coefficients closest to the level guaranteeing relative stability of the population. In Poland in 2021, this ratio was only 1.46.

Analyzing family policy, I.E. Kotowska⁷ points out that the conditions for combining parental functions and participation in the labor market include three elements:

- 1) family policy solutions;
- 2) labor market structures related to the possibility of taking up a job and keeping it, using flexible forms of employment and work organization;
- 3) norms and attitudes concerning the social roles of women and men.

The assessment of the degree of facilitating the reconciliation of work and family in the European Union countries places Poland among the countries with the greatest difficulties both in terms of these three dimensions together and in relation to individual dimensions⁸.

Today, the overall dynamics of population development is influenced by the number of births. Its intensity is decreasing, although it is still high on some continents. This applies above all to Africa, where 35 children are born per 1.000 population, while in Europe this number is only 11. More significant in this respect is the fertility rate. It is also decreasing on all continents, but in Africa it is still at a very high level – 4.57 children per woman. In Asia and South America and Central and Eastern Europe, the fertility rate guarantees simple replacement of generations (2.17 and 2.1 children per woman). Only in Europe and North America is the fertility rate below simple replacement. This position of Europe and North America will not change in the coming decades, although the fertility rate of women will increase slightly. On the other continents, the fertility rate will be low, but the world will develop demographically at the level of simple replacement of generations (2.23 children per woman in 2050)⁹.

Mortality and life expectancy

Eurostat has published the latest data on life expectancy for all EU countries. In 2020, life expectancy at birth in the EU was 80.4 years. This percentage was 5.7 years higher for women (83.2 years) than for men (77.5 years). In fact, female life expectancy was higher than male life expectancy in every NUTS 2 region with available data. Compared to 2019, life expectancy at birth decreased (-0.9 years). Men experienced a greater decline in life expectancy (-1.0 years) than women (-0.8 years). However, this reduction in life expectancy at birth

⁷ I.E. Kotowska, *Good climate for the family – Is there a chance for an increase in fertility in Poland?* “Demographic Studies” 2(2013), p. 6.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ J. Stańczak, D. Szałtys, J. Witkowski, *Population potential of the European Union*, “Economic position of Europe in the world” 1(2016), p. 6.

is associated with a spike in mortality in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁰. Life expectancy in the EU is highest in France, Spain, Italy, and Greece.

In Figure 2, we can see that life expectancy at birth has increased dramatically over the last century due to several factors. These include reducing infant mortality, increasing living standards, better lifestyles, and better education, as well as advances in health care and medicine. Official statistics show that since the 1960s life expectancy has increased by an average of more than two years per decade. However, the latest figures suggest that in 2020 the rate fell in 23 out of 27 Member States, except for Denmark, Estonia, Finland, and Cyprus¹¹.

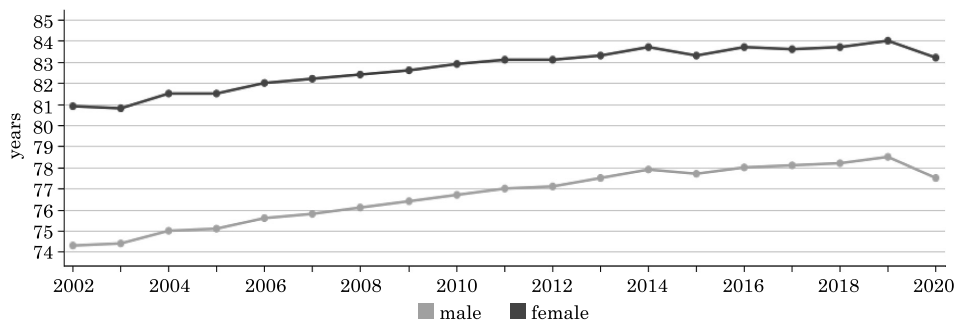


Fig. 2. Life expectancy at birth in the EU, 2002–2020

Source: Eurostat (2022). Mortality and life expectancy statistics: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>

Examples of social policy tools in the face of demographic changes

W.S. Zgliczyński underlines that the aim of social policy in EU countries is to alleviate specific social problems and to ensure the comprehensive well-being of citizens. The social policies of these countries are influenced not only by economic factors, but also by historical, political, and cultural ones. These policies can be categorized into the following models: conservative, social democratic, liberal, Mediterranean (South European), and Central and Eastern European¹².

A. Janiszewska describes the conservative system as that widespread in continental Europe, in which responsibility lies both with the family (familiarism) and with the state. The system maintains the traditional family model in which the male is the main breadwinner and whose capacity in this area should be supported. Despite the social challenges posed by higher levels of education and women’s involvement in the labor market, assistance to women

¹⁰ Eurostat. Mortality and life expectancy statistics, <<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>>, access: 12.09.2022.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² W.S. Zgliczyński, *Social policy in EU countries – expenditures and model solutions*, “Parliamentary Research Bureau” 10(233), p. 1.

in reconciling work and family responsibilities is limited to some extent, except for France. The social security system is based on the insurance principle. Insurance benefits are complemented by universal benefits such as child benefits or social services, as well as by means-tested social assistance targeted at people not involved in work¹³.

B. Balcerzak-Paradowska¹⁴ emphasizes that the social democratic model is aimed at helping and protecting the family. According to the assumptions of this model, the family performs procreative functions, but its task is also to extend the continuity of society. The family policy is combined with the employment and professional activation policy. The sphere of social services for children and families, for the disabled and the elderly is very well developed. The dominant idea here is that children are a condition for maintaining the continuity of society, and therefore it is the responsibility of the state to cover the costs of their possession and upbringing.

A. Janiszewska points out that the liberal model defines the responsibility of the state in a very narrow scope, and that citizens themselves should be responsible for their own situation, and that the market should fight social threats by offering measures to support individual activity of citizens and families. In this model, the state supports the active activities of the family (individual) through an appropriate tax system, as well as social benefits, but their level is rather low and based on the income criterion. It is assumed that having children is a private matter of the parents and that there are no special rights¹⁵.

A. Janiszewska describes the Southern European model as one in which solutions like those used in the conservative model can be found, but there are differences relating especially to family and children policy. This model is characterized by strong familiarity, focus on protecting the traditional family model and structure, maintaining family cohesion and strong family ties. The extended family provides childcare and financial assistance. This reduces the state's responsibility to develop appropriate measures. Social benefits are fragmented, unevenly distributed and generally low. Nowadays, in a situation where traditional family structures become fragile, the Southern European model of the welfare state faces new challenges¹⁶.

M. Sengoku points out that social policy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary) has undergone fundamental changes because of the political and economic transformations of the 1990s. The changes, to put it simply, consisted in the withdrawal of the state from the provision of social services (e.g. liquidation or suspension of various

¹³ A. Janiszewska, *Social policy in the European Countries as a Response to the Demographic Changes*, "Scientific works of the Wrocław University of Economics" 406(2015), p. 204.

¹⁴ B. Balcerzak-Paradowska, *General trends in EU social policy*, in: *Polityka rodzinna w krajach Unii Europejskiej – wnioski dla Polski*, „Biuletyn RPO – MAT. Zeszyty Naukowe”, ed. M. Zubik, Warsaw 2009.

¹⁵ A. Janiszewska, *Social policy in the European Countries as a Response to the Demographic Changes*, "Scientific works of the Wrocław University of Economics" 406(2015), p. 204.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 204–205.

types of subsidies for many goods and services; privatization and marketization of health and care services; encouraging social activities by entities belonging to the so-called third sector) and the introduction of institutional pluralism (e.g. separation of social security funds from the state budget; separation of pension funds from health insurance; imposing responsibility for ensuring social security on several independent institutions; extending the responsibilities of regional and local authorities)¹⁷.

According to Durasiewicz, the current family policies of individual EU countries are adapted to national conditions. However, it is possible to indicate similar directions of activities involving:

- development of instruments allowing for reconciliation of professional and family life based on partnership (response to the processes of activity of both partners),
- a way to reduction of poverty,
- implementation of the principle of primacy of work over benefits and the involvement of social and family policy entities (workplaces),
- development of social services treated as an instrument of investing in the young generation and counteracting social exclusion,
- considering the demographic context indirectly (facilitating the reconciliation of professional and family differences, reducing the cost of living)¹⁸.

Striving for equal rights for women and men in employment and for greater participation of women in the labor market requires increased support for families. Adopted in 1996, the EU Directive on parental leave sets out certain standards. Since 1998, the European Council has been annually adopting the Employment Policy Guidelines, which invariably emphasize the need to facilitate the reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities and activities for equal opportunities on the labor market. State support takes various forms. All EU countries guarantee maternity leave, ranging from 14 to 18 weeks and even longer. In most countries, this is paid leave, although the extent of assistance also varies from country to country¹⁹.

The European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) presents a summary of developments in children and family policies in EU Member States in March 2021²⁰:

- 1) European Union: Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030: The strategy focuses on three themes: ensuring that people with disabilities have the same rights as other EU citizens, the possibility of living independently and autonomously, and protection against discrimination and equal opportunities.

¹⁷ M. Sengoku, *Emerging Eastern European Welfare States: A Variant of the „European” Welfare Model?*, in: *Slavic Eurasia’s integration into the world economy and community*, ed. S. Tabata, A. Iwashita, Sapporo 2004, p. 229.

¹⁸ A. Durasiewicz, *Tasks and challenges of family policy in the EU*, in: *European Union social and economic aspects of integration*, ed. Z. Biegański, J. Jackowicz, Warsaw 2008, pp. 64–65.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ European Commission (2021). *Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion*. March 2021 developments in child and family policies in EU Member States, <<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1246&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9983>>, access: 12.09.2022

The strategy includes support for access to inclusive and accessible education at all levels, with particular emphasis on early childhood education and care (ECEC);

- 2) European Union, Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a Child Guarantee: On 24 March 2021. The proposed Recommendation would call on Member States to ensure that children in need have free and effective access to healthcare, education and schooling, early childhood education and care; free and effective access to at least one healthy school meal per day and effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing;
- 3) Bulgaria: Compensation for families who do not have access to ECEC (early child education and health): The Ministry of Science and Education has announced that families with children who have not had access to public ECEC due to insufficient capacity will receive financial compensation. Compensation will be given to families with children between the ages of 3 and the age of entry into primary school (usually 6 or 7);
- 4) Czech Republic: free meals for children in ECEC institutions: The Ministry responsible for education (Ministerstvo Školství, Mládeže a Tělovýchovy) has launched a pilot program of free meals for children attending ECEC who come from families in a difficult situation. The program will be implemented in cooperation with various non-governmental organizations that will help identify children in need who will benefit from it. The pilot program will first be implemented in two regions of the Czech Republic (Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem) where the level of family deprivation is high. If the program is deemed successful, it may be expanded to other regions. In the Czech Republic, there is already a similar program under which children in a difficult financial situation receive free lunches in primary school;
- 5) France: Funding more ECEC places and in response to the COVID-19 initiative: the French national social security system for families (Caisse Nationale d'allocations familiales) allocated €200 million to support ECEC institutions over the child, including nurseries and kindergartens. The aim of the funding is to ensure that all children have access to high-quality ECEC, address inequalities among children and support parents in reconciling family and professional life. These funds are part of the organization's roadmap to provide greater ECEC (Plan Rebond Petite Enfance) opportunities. The organization has also extended emergency financial support to ECEC facilities, aimed at compensating facilities for loss of income due to COVID-19 lockdowns;
- 6) Latvia: One-off allowance for children in institutional care: On March 24, 2021, the government of Latvia (Valdība) prepared a draft law that provides for the granting of a one-off allowance to support children living in institutions. A one-time allowance of EUR 500 would be granted to children staying in childcare facilities, prisons, educational institutions, and correctional facilities to support children during the COVID-19 period. This provision will now be examined by the Latvian Parliament (Saeima);

7) Europe: Report on child poverty in European cities: EUROCITIES, a network of 190 cities from 39 European countries, has published a report on child poverty in 35 cities in 17 EU Member States. The report highlights the high rates of child poverty in cities compared to national averages, the role of child poverty in intergenerational poverty, and the lack of resources available to city councils to tackle poverty among the youngest members of society. EUROCITIES also provides policy recommendations for cities' involvement in the fight against child poverty²¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already had a devastating impact on children: disrupting schooling, affecting well-being, social interactions and even nutrition. As more parents lose their income, child poverty increases. Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of where they come from or where they live. However, evidence collected by EUROCITIES shows that the socio-economic background of families and the neighborhoods they live in still largely determine a child's future opportunities. Therefore, there is a need to intensify policy action and social investment for children to close the gap in access to services and break the cycle of poverty faced by millions of children in Europe. EUROCITIES plays a key role in this respect²².

To break the vicious cycle of inheriting poverty, it is not enough to focus on children in isolation from their parents, but the whole family must be considered. Improving the situation of children depends on improving the situation of entire families, whether by getting out of debt, helping parents find good and well-paid jobs, or by heating or renovating houses. Another aim of the organization is to include the principle of equal opportunities in all services, from formal and informal education to housing, healthcare, social assistance, employment, culture, and public spaces. According to EUROCITIES, this is a model that should be followed at national and EU level. Despite such efforts, a study by EUROCITIES shows that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on children means that these urban resources are no longer sufficient and child poverty is increasing. Organizations can no longer bear the burden of child poverty alone, need more resources and financial support from the EU and national governments to increase social investment at local level²³.

Conclusion

Social policies in EU countries are influenced by economic, social, and cultural factors. To implement appropriate family policy solutions, access to adequate financial resources is necessary, although even in the case of financial benefits there is no guarantee of achieving the expected results. This is largely dependent

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

²³ EuroCities (2021). Fighting child poverty in European cities, <https://eurocities.eu/latest/fighting-child-poverty-in-european-cities/>.

on young people's attitude to starting a family and having children. As part of social policy, European countries use similar solutions within their own financial capabilities. However, the introduced solutions are still not very effective and are not able to cover the appropriate demand, which in turn leads to the fact that young people are reluctant to decide to enlarge their families, considering the difficulties in ensuring the basic needs of their children. Family policy is not sufficiently adapted to changes in the labor market, health needs of citizens, changes in the housing system. Undoubtedly, greater financial opportunities and a labor market more adapted to the needs of young parents would to some extent contribute to changing the perspective of young people when it comes to trying for a child, but it should also be considered that more and more people choose career development over enlarging the family as their life priority.

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SOCIAL POLICY TOWARDS DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES – EXAMPLES OF SOLUTIONS AND AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

SUMMARY

According to David Gill, social policies are courses of action aimed at influencing the general quality of life in a society, the circumstances of life of individuals and groups in this society, as well as the nature of intra-social relations between individuals, groups, and society. Antoni Rajkiewicz defines social policy as “the sphere of activity of the state and other public bodies and social forces that deals with shaping the living conditions of the population and interpersonal relations (especially in the living and working environment)”. The term “demographic change” describes the age structure of the population adapting to changes in living conditions. Consequently, changes in the composition of the age structure of society are the result of social changes. When analyzing the EU population pyramids, we can see that the first two decades after World War II were characterized by a particularly high birth rate. Since the 1970s, demographers have noted negative trends in the structure of Europe’s population. The lower birth rate in the recent past and present is associated with an increase in the life expectancy of Europeans. Persistently low birth rates lead to an aging population if mortality rates remain low. Consequently, half of the population growth in Europe between 2005 and 2050 will not be due to births, but to more people living longer. The work was written to present and evaluate social policy instruments implemented as a response to the ongoing demographic changes in European countries.

KEYWORDS: demographic changes, fertility, mortality, life expectancy, social policy tools, European countries