

The Covid-19 crisis can deepen Europe's demographic decline, regions and cities warn



Mr Karácsony's [opinion](#) highlights that Europe's ageing population, low birth rates and the worsening unequal distribution of the population require a coherent policy response at all levels of governance and across all EU policies. It particularly insists on the link between demographic change and the improvement of living conditions everywhere.

"When talking about Europe's demography we need to take into account different aspects such as ageing and longer life expectancy, depopulation of rural areas, internal and external migration, brain drain, as well as changing fertility patterns and parenting intentions", says rapporteur Karácsony.

"As the Barometer shows, the family planning is profoundly affected by the Covid-19. Therefore, I have highlighted in my opinion that we need to launch immediate family-friendly support actions in order to avoid the overall decline in the fertility rate", he continues.

The CoR's Annual Local and Regional Barometer estimates that brain drain and other associated demographic problems may plague rural, peripheral and remote regions similarly to the 2008-2012 crisis. The rise in unemployment rates is putting extra pressure on less developed regions already hit by high unemployment, and the loss of young people intensifies the issue of an ageing population, while at the same time making the provision of essential health and care services problematic. Furthermore, the crisis is expected to affect family planning and accelerate the overall decline in fertility rates in many countries.

To address these issues, the CoR opinion is proposing following key actions:

- assessing the demographic impact of all EU programmes and policies so as to better combat the social, economic and territorial divide affecting EU regions whose rural areas are experiencing depopulation
- developing dedicated incentive schemes to attract young people in these areas and improving opportunities for study, innovation and employment through investment in infrastructures, culture and connectivity
- increasing the skills base by investing in education and promoting training and re-skilling tailored to demand and potentialities in each region
- allocating more European funds to combat the brain drain phenomenon
- providing particular support to areas that are sparsely populated or suffer from a considerable population decline, subject to specific regional and national plans to enhance attractiveness, increase business investment and boost the accessibility of digital and public services

- making use of EU tools and programmes, such as structural and investment funds and the Next Generation EU programme, to ensure high-quality digital connectivity for everyone
- creating the right conditions that would make it easier for people who want to have children to have more and earlier: as long as there is a fertility gap in the EU Member States, every effort must be made to encourage and incentivise childbearing
- improving labour market participation, especially for women, through increased investment in better work-life balance, social and family-friendly infrastructure and more gender equality
- ensuring that family policies are not regarded as a cost for the public budget, but rather as an investment
- encouraging active and healthy ageing and promoting social ties between generations.

The CoR also alerts on the development of a “geography of discontent” that is taking place in many EU regions and countries where people feel left behind, which is often closely related to demographic decline. Therefore, the link between democracy and demography should be assessed during the Conference on Future of Europe, paying particular attention to young people’s representation. It also underlines the need for a strong focus on partnership and multi-level governance, reflecting the fact that there are more than one million elected local and regional representatives in the EU.

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