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Challenges of longer-life societies

Population ageing has become an increasing concern for Governments in the UNECE region. In most countries, the period which has seen the working-age population at a record high, the time of the so-called "demographic bonus", is gradually coming to an end. While the degree and timing of this process may vary greatly, the change is common to all countries, and has important and far-reaching implications across all spheres of society, including on economic and social development, sustainability and equity.

This year, UNECE member States will take stock of the implementation of the commitments made in 2002 when they adopted the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. What is the real situation five years on? Have Governments been able to take the necessary actions to prepare and adapt their societies for demographic change?

To review progress made and challenges to be met, the Government of Spain and the UNECE are organizing a Ministerial Conference on Ageing in León, Spain, from 6 to 8 November 2007, preceded by a forum for civil society and the scientific community. The Conference is expected to adopt a political declaration that will identify priorities for future action.



Experts have emphasized the need to adopt an integrated approach, that considers the different needs of the various stages of an individual's life course, how to apply mainstreaming ageing as the major policy strategy, and the overarching objective of building society for all ages. Broad participation and social cohesion are the key elements to achieving a society for all ages. A highly participatory approach is therefore essential, whereby older persons are involved in decision-making processes not only on ageing-related issues, but on all social issues. An NGO role in implementing this approach is vital, as is the need for research to strengthen the knowledge base for policymaking.

Potential priorities for future action would, for example, be tackling age discrimination, reconciling work and family life, promoting lifelong learning, and providing flexibility in the transition to retirement and the adjustment of care provisions. Delegates to the Preparatory Committee which met on 12-13 July discussed the roles that these and other policy areas should have in the Conference and the political declaration. ♦

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Economic globalization: a challenge for official statistics

In recent years many concerns have been raised that the traditional methods of measuring the national economy are not suitable in the increasingly globalized world.

A seminar on Economic Globalisation: A Challenge for Official Statistics, organized by UNECE jointly with the European Free Trade Association and the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, in Kiev (3-6 July) was the first of its kind, providing national statistical offices with a forum to share ideas and discuss approaches to cope with the distortion caused by the activities of multinational enterprises on the production of statistics.

The seminar was composed of two modules. The first included a discussion with the main users of statistics to raise awareness of the role of statistics for decision-making and the challenges that the statisticians face due to globalization, for example the importance of reflecting in national statistics the activities of multinational or "virtual" enterprises, which play a growing role in most countries.

The second module was meant for the producers of statistics. It dealt with the practical problems associated with globalization, and pointed at possible solutions, for example how to derive national accounts or balance of payment statistics with more and more international trade and combined production activities across countries.

The seminar is considered as a kick-off event for a series of meetings where representatives of national statistical services will discuss the main distortions in the compilation of national accounts and related source statistics, caused by globalization and will propose approaches and guidance on how to tackle these distortions.

Presentations at the seminar were provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Eurostat, UNECE, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom. Participants from the statistical offices of Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland and Russian Federation also attended together with representatives of different Ukrainian ministries, government agencies, research institutes and universities. ♦

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Off the Press — Fast facts about the 56 UNECE countries

- 📄 Did you know that 46% of Armenia's population is employed in the agricultural sector?
- 📄 Did you know that in 2005, exports of goods and services accounted for 87.1% of Belgium's GDP?
- 📄 Did you know that Iceland has the lowest youth unemployment rate (7.2%) within the UNECE nations?

The UNECE Statistical Division has recently released a new fast fact guide —UNECE Countries in Figures 2007* — containing a two-page profile of social and economic indicators on each UNECE country, in Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and North America.

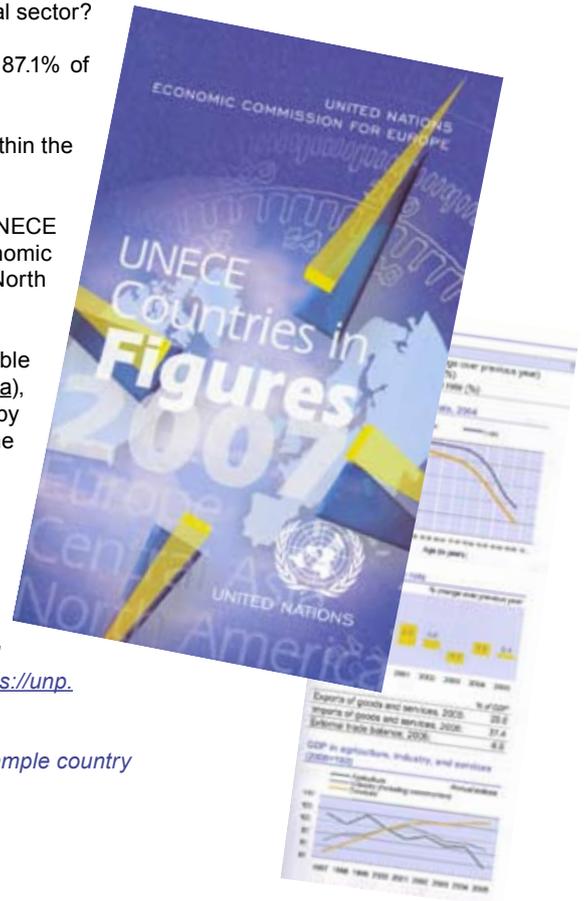
Data is presented for the most recent whole year available. The latest data is available on-line through the UNECE Statistical Database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data>), which contains internationally comparable statistics, and is regularly updated by statistical experts. UNECE Countries in Figures 2007 provides an example of the types of data available in that database.

This publication is also intended for readers who are not so familiar with statistical terms or with interpreting statistical tables. It includes explanations of the terminology used, and translations of that terminology into French and Russian. ♦

*Available through the United Nations bookshops in Geneva and New York, email unogbookshop@unog.ch, or from distributors of United Nations publications: https://unp.un.org/howto_distributors.aspx.

Visit the UNECE Countries in Figures 2007 website for further information and sample country profiles: <http://www.unece.org/stats/profiles2007>.

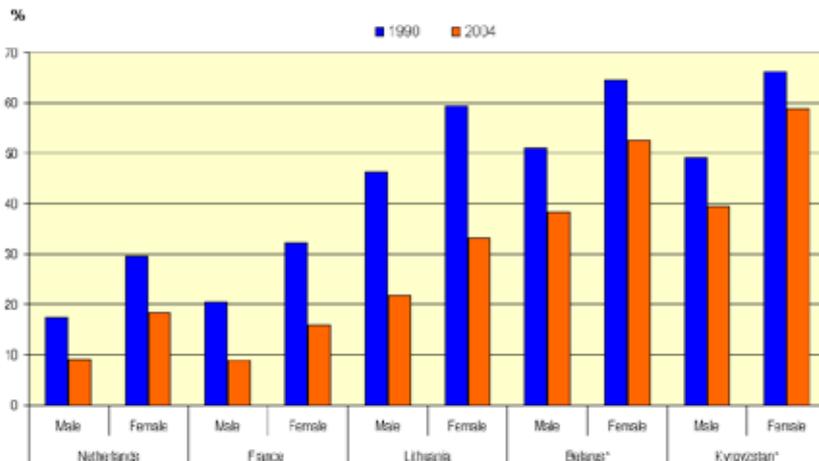
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Facts and figures

Marriage is less and less popular among young people

Proportion of married people in the age group 18-29 by sex



Source: UNECE Gender Database, compiled from national and international sources (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data.htm>).

* Data refer to 2000 instead of 2004.

Marriage trends in recent decades indicate that men and women in the UNECE region have become less likely to marry and when they do, they do it later. For instance, in a sample of 33 UNECE countries the median value of the mean age at first marriage went from 23 for females and 25 for males in 1980 to about 26 and 28, respectively, in 2000. Indeed, the proportion of married young people in the age group 18-29 years declined across the region, and in many high- and medium-income countries this decline was more pronounced among young women. The graph illustrates this change over the 1990-2004 period in five selected countries that to some extent represent the UNECE region's diversity in both geographical and income level aspect.

Perceptibly, the pressures to focus on personal achievement and shifts in gender role attitudes and women's economic prospects have contributed to marriage postponement over time. On the other hand, marriage is losing ground to unmarried cohabitation among the young. ♦