

**REGIONAL POPULATION MEETING
BUDAPEST 6-9 DECEMBER 1998**

**UNITED KINGDOM
NATIONAL REPORT**

POPULATION GROWTH

The total population of the United Kingdom currently stands at 59 million people. The population is projected to continue growing and reach over 62 million by 2021. Longer-term projections suggest that the population will peak in 2031, at almost 63 million and then gradually start to decline. The Government does not operate any policy to influence the overall size or age structure of the population.

Within the total population, the age structure is changing. In 1997, about 16 per cent of the population were aged 65 years and over, and this is projected to increase to 19 per cent by 2021.

FERTILITY

The total period fertility rate (TPFR), which allows for changes in the size and age structure of the female population of childbearing age, remains below replacement level. Average family size has changed little since 1994, when the TPFR was 1.75. Long term population projections for the United Kingdom predict that women will have on average 1.8 children. The Government views decisions about fertility and childbearing as the concern of individuals; though it seeks to provide the information and services to allow individuals to manage their own fertility.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATES

Over 300,000 marriages take place each year in the United Kingdom. The average age at first marriage is now 27 years for women and 29 years for men, continuing the trend to later marriages. Overall, marriage rates have continued to decline slowly from 6.5 marriages per thousand population at the start of the decade, to 5.4 per thousand today. The Government views marriage as an important institution and the foundation of a strong family unit. It has recently introduced new procedures aimed at strengthening the institution of marriage and reducing the divorce rate.

Whilst divorce rates have remained broadly static in recent years, the United Kingdom still has one of the highest rates of divorce in the European Union, with over 150,000 divorces each year. The Government has proposed new provisions to help couples access services to help them better manage their marriages and avoid divorce. The provisions include:

- Providing couples intending to marry with a clear statement of what their new status means.
- Making 'pre-nuptial' written agreements legally binding for those who wish to use them.
- Improving arrangements to help people prepare for marriage.
- Enhancing and modernising the service provided by registrars.
- Supporting marriages in difficulty, including strengthening the availability of marriage counselling.
- Reforming information meetings before divorce to increase the chance of saving more marriages.

In 1997, 37 per cent of all live births in the United Kingdom were to parents who were unmarried; an increase compared with 30 per cent in 1991. The trend of births outside

marriage began in the 1970's and has continued to increase since. Many of the births to parents outside marriage are to cohabiting couples. About 60 per cent of extra-marital births are registered jointly by parents living at the same address.

AGEING

A Ministerial Group established in June 1998 ensures that Government strategy and policy affecting older people is effectively co-ordinated, avoids duplication, and takes account of the needs of older people.

The Better Government for Older People Initiative seeks to ensure that the needs and worries of older people are fully addressed in public policy. The aim of the project is to provide clear and accessible information on older people's rights, give older people a better say in the type of services they get and make better use of the contributions that they are able to make. Efforts are being made to simplify access to services and improve the linkages between services provided for older people, whilst establishing legislation which is more consistent, transparent and fair.

MORTALITY AND HEALTH

The crude death rate in the United Kingdom is now 10.7 per thousand population. Life expectancy at birth continues to increase and is now 75 years for men and 80 years for women.

The Government is developing a strategy to improve the health of the population as a whole, by increasing the length of people's lives and the number of years spent free from illness, and improving the health of the worst off in society. It has four priority areas for action, representing significant causes of premature death and poor health in the United Kingdom: heart disease and strokes, accidents, cancer and mental health. The strategy also addresses the social and economic, environmental and lifestyle factors that affect health.

FAMILY PLANNING

Family planning is available free to all under the National Health Service (NHS). Oral contraceptives are available free on prescription from General Practitioners (GPs) and family planning clinics. Data from the General Household Survey showed that in 1995, 73 per cent of women aged 16-49 were using at least one medical or surgical method of contraception, up from 69 per cent in 1989.

The United Kingdom currently has one of the highest rates of teenage motherhood in the developed world. Between 1990 and 1995, the rate of teenage motherhood fell from 33 to 28 live births per thousand women aged 15 to 19, but then rose again to 30 per thousand live births in 1997.

Teenage motherhood has been identified as both a symptom and a cause of social exclusion in the United Kingdom. Regional disparity in the incidence of teenage motherhood has also been identified. In 1994, rates varied from 11 per thousand in the most prosperous areas to over 40 per thousand, in mining and industrial areas with high levels of unemployment.

The Government set up four Task Groups in November 1997 to help tackle the problem of unintended pregnancies, particularly among the under-16s. The task areas are sex and

relationships education, vulnerable and hard to reach groups, commissioning and providing family planning services and research. A comprehensive national strategy is being developed by a special task force commissioned by the Prime Minister. Its findings are expected shortly.

MATERNAL HEALTH

In the United Kingdom the trend in infant mortality (number of deaths of babies under one year, per thousand live births) has been downward since the start of this century. The rate is now around 6 per thousand live births. Maternal Mortality, is very low and currently stands at 6 per 100,000 live births.

The principle of woman-centred care has become increasingly embedded in mainstream maternity services. 90 per cent of women surveyed by the Audit Commission in 1997 were pleased or very pleased with the way they were treated during pregnancy and childbirth; 90 per cent of women were pleased or very pleased with their midwifery care; 80 per cent with medical care.

Evidence suggests a lack of uptake of antenatal and postnatal care by black and ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom. Ethnic monitoring of patients began in 1995 and the Asian Mother and Baby Campaign helps the maternity services to improve information and take up of services by these groups. Infant and peri natal (mothers in the few weeks before and after birth) mortality rates for these groups are relatively high for Western Europe. In 1996, infant mortality rates amongst babies born to mothers themselves born in Pakistan were 10.1 per 1,000 live births and for mothers born in the Caribbean 8.4 per 1,000 live births. Comparative rates for women born in the UK were 5.8 per 1,000 live births.

Between 1995/6 and 1997/98 the Government funded a £2.3 million campaign aimed at raising awareness amongst women of the importance of taking folic acid before and until the 12th week of pregnancy, to reduce the risk of their babies being born with neural tube defects. There is a National Network of Breast feeding Co-ordinators established and guidelines for the management of high risk pregnancies have been published.

ABORTION

Abortions in Great Britain (but not in Northern Ireland) are permitted if carried out in accordance with the 1967 Abortion Act. In 1996, 79 per cent of conceptions in England and Wales ended in maternity and 21 per cent in abortion.

The abortion rate is highest for women aged 20-24 years old (28 abortions per thousand women in the age group); followed by the 16-19 year olds (25 abortions per thousand). Between 1990 and 1995, there had been a downward trend in the abortion rate. The increase in 1996 and higher levels since may be associated with the coinciding high profile media scare in the United Kingdom about hormonal contraceptive pills.

HIV/AIDS/STD's

The total number of reported HIV infections and AIDS cases in the United Kingdom rose to 30,936 and 15,066 respectively, at the end of 1997, from 22,845 and 10,254 respectively at

the end of 1994. The successful introduction of new combination drug therapies for HIV positive persons are delaying progression to AIDS; vulnerability to related infections and eventual death. Reasonable management of HIV/AIDS illness in the United Kingdom has now been largely achieved.

During 1997, 2,581 cases of HIV and 1,381 cases of AIDS were diagnosed in the United Kingdom. The incidence of diagnosed HIV cases is up from 2,371 in 1994 though the incidence of diagnosed AIDS cases has fallen from 1,775 cases in 1994.

Sexual intercourse between men remains the primary route of HIV transmission, with over 60 per cent of HIV cases and 70 per cent of AIDS cases diagnosed among men who have sex with men. Transmission during sex between men and women accounts for nearly a third of diagnosed HIV infections, and for over a third of AIDS cases. Most infections acquired during sex between men and women have been contracted overseas and have usually had an association with individuals living in or visiting sub-Saharan Africa.

A comprehensive national strategy for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care is being developed to replace guidelines.

SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The Education Act ensures that sex education (including education about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases) is set within an appropriate moral framework and placed within the curriculum of every state school. Attendance at classes on the biological aspects of sex is compulsory. However, parents are able to withdraw their children from all or part of any non-biological sex education provided. School governors retain responsibility for deciding policy on the content and organisation of sex education in their school.

Many schools provide programmes of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), which place sex education in the broader context of teaching about relationships and developing inter-personal skills. Through PSHE teachers are able to address children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The Government recently announced the launch of the Healthy Schools Initiative which is a cross-departmental initiative aiming to raise awareness about various health related issues including sex.

SEXUAL AND GENDER VIOLENCE

(Statistics only relate to England and Wales)

Whilst 60 per cent of all violent incidents reported in 1997 had a male victim, the picture for domestic violence is very different, with around 70 per cent of all incidents involving a female victim. 13 per cent of all violent crimes are committed against women aged 16 to 24 years.

Criminal statistics only reveal the number of convictions for specific violent sex offences. Statistics do not reveal the many offences that go unreported nor cases where people are unsuccessful in securing a conviction. In 1996, there were 2,419 convictions for indecent assaults on women, 552 convictions for the rape of women and 24 convictions for the rape of men in the United Kingdom.

Domestic violence continues to be the most common violent crime committed against women in England and Wales: an estimated 835,000 incidences were recorded in 1997. Recent

research published by Crime Concern suggests that in some parts of Britain, one woman in nine is subjected to severe beatings by her partner each year. In the last few years, a number of activities have been undertaken to raise the profile of the problem of domestic violence amongst health professionals.

The Government strategy in tackling domestic violence involves action on three fronts: law enforcement, victim support and prevention. Circulars were issued in 1997 and 1998, reminding national services about their responsibilities under the Family Law Act. The Government is currently helping to fund the printing and distribution of domestic violence guidelines produced by the Royal College of General Practitioners.

The latest Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths, soon to be published, will for the first time feature a section on domestic violence and maternal deaths. This report will recommend that all health professionals should make themselves aware of the importance of domestic violence in their practice; enquiry about violence should be routinely included when taking a social history; and local trusts and community teams should develop guidelines for the identification and provision of further support.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

It is a criminal offence for a person to carry out female circumcision in the United Kingdom, or to aid, abet, counsel or procure such an act. Legal protection is also provided by the 1989 Children Act. The maximum penalty for this offence is five years imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both. There have been no convictions for this offence in recent years.

The scale of FGM in this country is unknown, although some estimates suggest that up to 15,000 girls may be at risk. This figure is based on the number of immigrants settling in the United Kingdom from countries that practise FGM.

MIGRATION

In 1997, the Government published its long-term strategy for immigration. The Government wishes to put in place a fairer, faster and firmer system of immigration, to better serve the interests of clients.

Under the new strategy, the Government abolished the "primary purpose" rule regarding applicants and marriage status. A concession was also introduced to allow immigration by de-facto marriage partners, both common law and same sex.

Over the last few years there has been a total net inward immigration of approximately 100,000 people per year. The number of persons applying for UK asylum at ports or in country in 1997 was 32,500. The number has fluctuated at around 30,000 people since 1994, the exception being 1995 when almost 45,000 people applied for asylum.

WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT AND CHILDBEARING

Since 1997, a national Women's Unit has led on all Government policy related to Women. This reflects increased recognition of the importance of gender awareness in national policy and strategy formulation. One of the key priorities adopted by the Minister for Women is the promotion of family-friendly employment policies in both the public and private sector.

In the United Kingdom in 1979 only 24 per cent of women returned to work after having children. By 1988, this had almost doubled to 45 per cent and by 1996, this figure had risen again to 67 per cent of women returning to work after the birth of their child. 72 per cent of working mothers with children aged 0-4 years use informal child care. However, the mother still provides the majority of child care (82 per cent for pre-school children, 78 per cent for school children in term time and 77 per cent for school children during the holidays).

In 1998, in an effort to assist parents (predominantly mother's) wishing to return to work the Government has made two changes to national child care legislation. The first is an extension to entitlement, which will allow children to benefit until the September following their 12th birthday.

The weekly child care allowance has also been increased to £100 per week from £60 per week, for families who pay for child care for more than one child. It is hoped that by assisting parents with child care costs, the Government will encourage more mothers back to work.

The Government constantly monitors research into the cost of children, though it reports that research is extremely complex and findings have generally been inconclusive. In recognition of the increasing costs associated with children's upbringing, from April 1999, the new child benefit rates will be £14.40 per week for the eldest child, an overall increase of £2.95 including an extra £2.50 for the eldest child and £9.60 for each subsequent child. All children in the United Kingdom are entitled to child allowance.

GOVERNMENT VIEW REGARDING THE NEED FOR POLICY RELATED COLLECTION OF DATA AND RESEARCH

The Government believes that quality statistics; analysis and research are essential for informed debate, sound policy decision making, monitoring and evaluation. The government supports the collection of data necessary to enable the production of relevant statistics and analysis. Systems are in place to identify information gaps and new needs. The Government will shortly set out proposals on arrangements to ensure integrity and public confidence in official statistics.

The Government recognises the need for internationally comparable statistics and the United Kingdom seeks to influence and encourage efforts by international organisations to co-ordinate statistics and research. In particular, efforts to co-ordinate the collection of data from Member countries is welcomed.