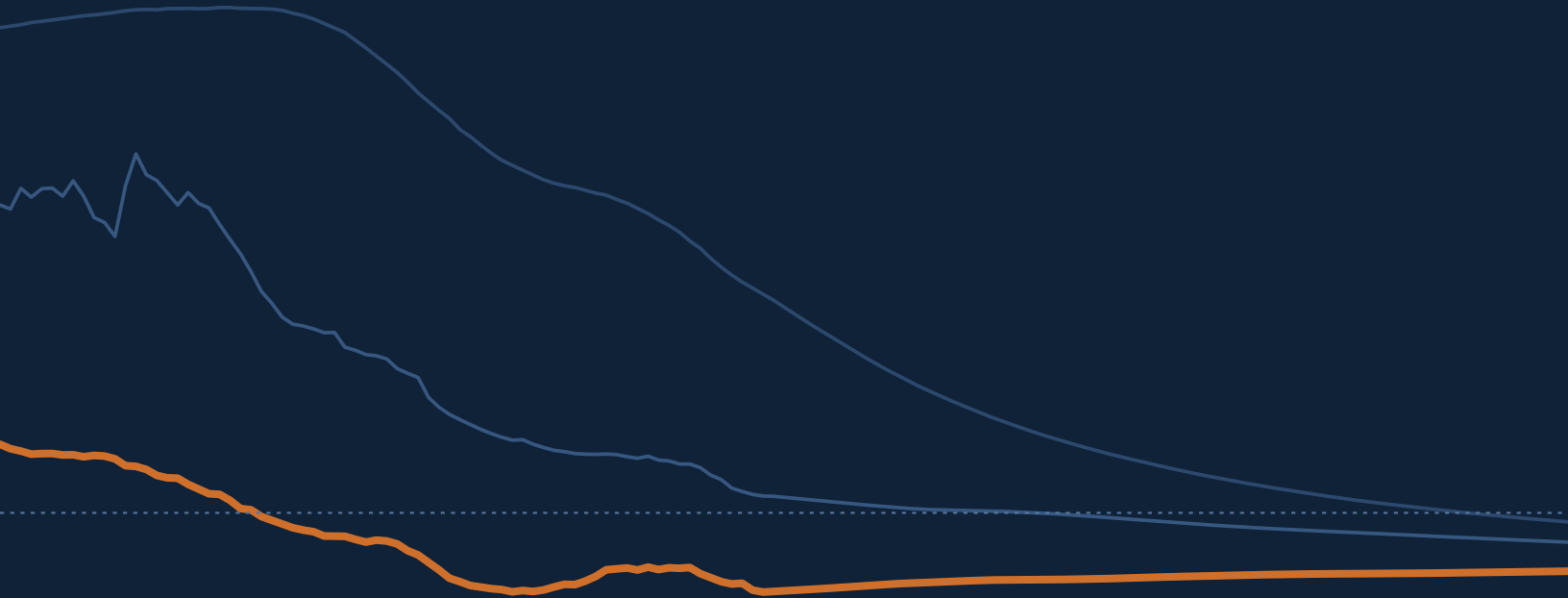

RESEARCH REPORT · OCTOBER 2026

The Great Transformation? Demography, Migration and the Future of the West

An evidence review of the “Western collapse” thesis — population decline, immigration, ethnic change and social cohesion — with scenarios to 2075



Coverage
EU-27, EFTA, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia

Data through
Q3 2026

Figures
30 data exhibits

About this report

This report examines one of the most heated claims in contemporary politics: that the Western world is collapsing because of low native birth rates, large-scale immigration, the growth of minority populations and the cultural changes these bring. We treat that claim as a set of testable propositions, not as a premise or as a taboo.

Some parts of the thesis rest on hard, uncontroversial numbers. European fertility has been below replacement for half a century. Deaths now outnumber births across the EU. Large cities on both sides of the Atlantic no longer have an ethnic majority. Other parts of the thesis, most notably the idea that minorities are “out-reproducing” natives at a pace that drives the change, do not survive contact with the data. Our aim is to separate the two, to quantify what is happening, and to set out plausible paths forward.

APPROACH

All 30 exhibits are built from primary official statistics: Eurostat (population, births, labour-force, projections), the UN *World Population Prospects 2024* and UN DESA migrant-stock estimates (via Our World in Data), the US Census Bureau (Vintage 2024 estimates) and the CDC National Center for Health Statistics (2024 final birth data). We add published figures from national statistical offices (ONS, INSEE, Destatis, SCB, CBS, Statistics Canada), election authorities and peer-reviewed research. Sources appear beneath every exhibit and in full in the References.

TERMINOLOGY

Statistical systems describe origin in incompatible ways: country of birth (Eurostat), citizenship (Destatis fertility data), “migration background” (Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden), self-identified ethnicity (UK census) and race/Hispanic origin (US). We use each source's own categories and say which one applies. “Native” means native-born unless stated. None of these categories is a measure of culture, values or allegiance, and we avoid treating them as if they were.

WHAT THIS REPORT IS NOT

The report does not endorse the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, which holds that demographic change is being deliberately orchestrated to displace a population. That is a claim about intent, and no evidence supports it. Demographic change itself is real and measurable, and refusing to discuss it openly has arguably fuelled the conspiracy narrative. We describe the change; we do not attribute it to a plot.

LIMITATIONS

Projections are conditional scenarios, not forecasts. Figures for the most recent year are often provisional. Cross-country comparisons of integration outcomes are affected by differences in the composition of migrant inflows (labour, family, asylum, intra-EU), which matter more than “immigration” in the aggregate.

CITATION

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Contents

—	Key findings	4
01	The collapse thesis and how we test it	7
02	The demographic cliff: fertility and population decline	9
03	Ageing and the arithmetic of dependency	14
04	Migration: scale, pace and the global backdrop	16
05	Changing composition: generations, births and majority-minority cities	20
06	Testing the “rapid reproduction” claim	27
07	Integration outcomes and intermarriage	32
08	Cohesion, trust, security and public finances	37
09	The political response	40
10	Outlook to 2075: scenarios and signposts	43
11	Conclusion: collapse, transformation, or fragmentation?	48
A	Annex: country indicators	50
—	Methodological notes and references	52

Fig. 1 Fertility has been below replacement in Europe for half a century
Fig. 2 Every EU country is far below replacement fertility
Fig. 3 Deaths now exceed births across the EU every year
Fig. 4 Eastern and southern Europe face the steepest declines
Fig. 5 Without migration, the EU would lose a third of its population by 2100
Fig. 6 Europe is a generation older than its southern neighbour
Fig. 7 Migration slows ageing but cannot stop it
Fig. 8 One in seven EU residents was born abroad
Fig. 9 The foreign-born share has risen sharply since 2015
Fig. 10 Immigrant shares have risen across the Anglosphere and Germany
Fig. 11 Europe's share of humanity is shrinking as Africa's soars
Fig. 12 Population growth is concentrated in Africa
Fig. 13 One in four EU births is to a foreign-born mother
Fig. 14 The share of births to foreign-born mothers keeps climbing
Fig. 15 Young adults are far more diverse than their parents' generation
Fig. 16 American children are already majority-minority
Fig. 17 London passed the majority-minority point before 2011

Fig. 18 Majority-minority status is already the urban norm in many places
Fig. 19 Immigrant and minority fertility is higher, but modestly so
Fig. 20 US fertility is falling in every major group
Fig. 21 Fertility has collapsed in many major origin countries
Fig. 22 Migration, not fertility, determines the scale of religious change
Fig. 23 Employment gaps are largest in northern Europe, and for women
Fig. 24 Children of immigrants face poverty rates three to four times higher
Fig. 25 Early school leaving is two to three times higher among the foreign-born
Fig. 26 Mixed marriages are now common across western Europe
Fig. 27 Restrictionist parties now win 15–30% across western Europe
Fig. 28 The long rise of the restrictionist vote
Fig. 29 Policy choices on migration shape population size far more than ageing
Fig. 30 Four scenarios for Western societies to 2075

Key findings

The West is not collapsing in any literal sense. It is going through the fastest change in population size, age structure and ethnic composition in its modern history, and its institutions are only partly adapted to it.

1.34

EU total fertility rate, 2024: a record low and 36% below replacement (2.1)

–47%

Fall in annual EU-27 births, 1961 (6.66m) to 2024 (3.55m)

14.4%

Foreign-born share of the EU-27 population, Jan 2025 (10.0% in 2015)

23.8%

EU births to foreign-born mothers, 2024; 32–36% in Germany, Spain, Austria, Belgium

47.5%

Non-Hispanic white share of US residents under 18, 2024 (73.6% of those 65+)

295_m

EU-27 population in 2100 under zero migration, against 447m in 2022 (Eurostat)

- 01 Population decline is real, structural and mostly locked in.** No EU country has had replacement-level fertility since the 1970s–90s. Deaths have exceeded births in the EU every year since 2012, and the gap passed 1.2 million a year in 2022–24. The UN projects Europe’s population will fall by about 20% by 2100. Without immigration, Eurostat projects the EU-27 would shrink by a third.
- 02 Ageing, not shrinking, is the main economic shock.** The EU old-age dependency ratio (people 65+ per 100 aged 15–64) rises from 33 in 2022 to about 50 by 2050 in every scenario. Migration softens this but does not reverse it: by 2100 the ratio is 58 under high migration and 69 under none.
- 03 Ethnic and national composition is changing quickly, and fastest among the young.** One in four people aged 15–29 in the EU is foreign-born or has a foreign-born parent; in Germany, Austria, Sweden and Belgium the figure is about 40% or more. In the US, children are already majority-minority. Immigrants accounted for virtually all of the EU’s population growth in the last decade.
- 04 Majority-minority cities are a present-day fact, not a forecast.** London, Birmingham, Leicester, Luton, Slough, Amsterdam, Toronto, New York and many Swedish municipalities no longer have an ethnic or native-origin majority. National majority-minority status is projected for the US in the 2040s and, under sustained high immigration, for the UK and some smaller European states in the second half of the century.
- 05 The “rapid reproduction” claim is largely wrong.** Immigrant fertility is higher than native fertility, but the gap is modest (typically 0.4–0.6 children per woman), shrinks across generations and is falling in the origin countries themselves. Foreign-citizen women in Germany have a fertility rate of 1.78, which is below replacement. US Hispanic fertility has fallen from about 3.0

in 2007 to 1.93. Composition is changing mainly because of migration flows and age structure, not high minority birth rates.

- 06 Integration is uneven, not uniformly failing.** Non-EU-born adults face employment gaps of 13–17 points in northern Europe and up to 25 points for women. Their children face poverty rates three to four times higher. But the second generation does better, mixed marriages make up 15–22% of all marriages in much of western Europe, and gaps vary enormously by origin and entry channel.
- 07 Cohesion costs are measurable but smaller than often claimed.** Meta-analysis finds a statistically significant but modest negative link between local ethnic diversity and social trust, mostly trust in neighbours. Crime and fiscal outcomes vary sharply by origin group and policy regime. Averages hide much of the story.
- 08 Politics has absorbed the shock first.** Parties campaigning mainly on immigration restriction now take 15–30% of the national vote across most of western Europe, up from low single digits in the 2000s. They lead or join governments in several states. This is the clearest evidence that the transformation is straining consent.
- 09 The outlook depends on integration capacity more than on immigration numbers.** Of the four scenarios we set out to 2075, the outcome closest to “collapse” (Fragmentation) requires high inflows combined with weak integration and economic stagnation. It is plausible in specific countries and cities, but it is not the central case for the West as a whole.

TABLE 1
Scorecard: the collapse thesis, claim by claim

CLAIM	VERDICT	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
Native European populations are in demographic decline	SUPPORTED	Sub-replacement fertility for 50 years, natural decrease since 2012, deep projected declines in southern and eastern Europe (§2).
Western societies are ageing to an unsustainable degree	SUPPORTED	Old-age dependency roughly doubles by 2100 in every scenario; pension and health systems face sustained pressure (§3).
Immigration is rapidly changing ethnic composition	SUPPORTED	Foreign-born shares of 15–21% in large western European states; a strong age gradient means change accelerates as cohorts turn over (§4–5).
Majority-minority cities are emerging	SUPPORTED	Already true of many large cities and municipalities in the UK, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Canada and the US (§5).
Minorities reproduce “rapidly” and will out-breed natives	NOT SUPPORTED	Fertility gaps are modest, below replacement in many groups and converging. Change is driven by migration and age structure (§6).
Ethnic diversity erodes social trust	PARTLY	Small, robust negative association, strongest for neighbourhood trust. Effect sizes are far below “dissolution” levels (§8).
Integration has failed	PARTLY	Large, persistent gaps for some non-EU groups, especially in employment of women and child poverty. Progress across generations and rising intermarriage (§7).
Western civilisation is collapsing	NOT AS STATED	States, economies and institutions are functioning. The real risks are fiscal strain, political fragmentation and localised social breakdown (§10–11).

01

The collapse thesis and how we test it

A claim this consequential deserves to be stated precisely and measured rather than asserted or dismissed.

The belief that the West is in terminal decline is as old as the West's self-image. Spengler's *Decline of the West* appeared in 1918. What is new is the demographic form the argument now takes. In the contemporary version, decline comes from a combination of forces that reinforce one another. The historic majority populations of Europe and its offshoots have stopped replacing themselves. Their places are being filled by immigrants from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and by those immigrants' descendants. Large cities are becoming "majority-minority." Shared language, religion, norms and trust are said to be thinning as a result. The end state, in the strongest formulations, is the dissolution of the societies themselves.

This argument circulates in very different registers. At one end are careful demographers such as David Coleman, who in 2006 described immigration-driven ethnic change as Europe's "third demographic transition," and political scientists such as Eric Kaufmann, whose *Whiteshift* (2018) analyses majority-group anxiety. At the other end is the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory associated with Renaud Camus, which attributes the change to a deliberate elite plot. That theory has been cited in the manifestos of several mass murderers. The fact that the change is discussed in such poisonous terms has often led mainstream institutions to avoid it. That avoidance has a cost: it leaves the field to those least interested in accuracy.

Decomposing the thesis

We break the collapse thesis into eight empirical propositions, scored in Table 1, and group them into four questions that structure this report:

1. **Size and age.** Are Western populations shrinking and ageing, and how fast? (Sections 2–3)
2. **Composition.** How quickly is the ethnic and national-origin mix changing, and what drives it: immigration, differential fertility, or age structure? (Sections 4–6)
3. **Integration and cohesion.** Are newcomers and their children converging with the majority on economic and social outcomes, and what happens to trust, security and public finances? (Sections 7–8)
4. **Consequences.** How are political systems responding, and what futures are plausible? (Sections 9–10)

What would “collapse” mean?

Collapse is a strong word with a technical meaning in the historical literature. Joseph Tainter defined it as a rapid, significant loss of an established level of socio-political complexity. Applied to modern states, we take it to mean some combination of the following, sustained over a decade or more:

- a sustained loss of state capacity: the inability to collect taxes, enforce law or deliver core services across significant territory;
- a breakdown of shared political authority: secession, persistent large-scale civil violence, or elections whose results are not accepted;
- a sustained fall in living standards on the scale of the post-Soviet 1990s;
- the replacement of common institutions by parallel, mutually hostile ones.

By these criteria no Western state is collapsing today. That does not settle the question. Each criterion can be approached gradually, and demographic change unfolds over generations. The useful questions are about direction and magnitude. Which trends are moving toward these thresholds, how fast, and under what conditions would they cross them? Section 10 turns those questions into scenarios and a set of measurable signposts.

A NOTE ON CATEGORIES

Most European statistics record country of birth or citizenship, not ethnicity or religion. A foreign-born resident of Germany may be Austrian, Polish, Syrian or Turkish. A native-born resident may be the grandchild of Turkish guest workers. UK and US statistics use self-identified ethnic or racial categories that are themselves changing as mixed-heritage populations grow. Throughout, we use the narrowest accurate description of what a number measures. We also flag where popular claims rely on categories the data do not support.

Why the West, and why now?

We focus on the EU-27 and EFTA states, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia, the countries usually meant by “the West” in this debate. Three developments since 2014 have sharpened the question. First, fertility has fallen again after a modest recovery in the 2000s and now sits at record lows across most of Europe and North America. Second, migration has reached historic highs: the 2015–16 asylum surge, the post-pandemic labour and student inflows to the UK, Canada and Australia, the arrival of more than four million Ukrainians under temporary protection, and record US border encounters in 2022–24. Third, political systems have reacted sharply, with restrictionist parties entering government in several countries. Together these make 2026 an appropriate point to take stock.

02

The demographic cliff: fertility and population decline

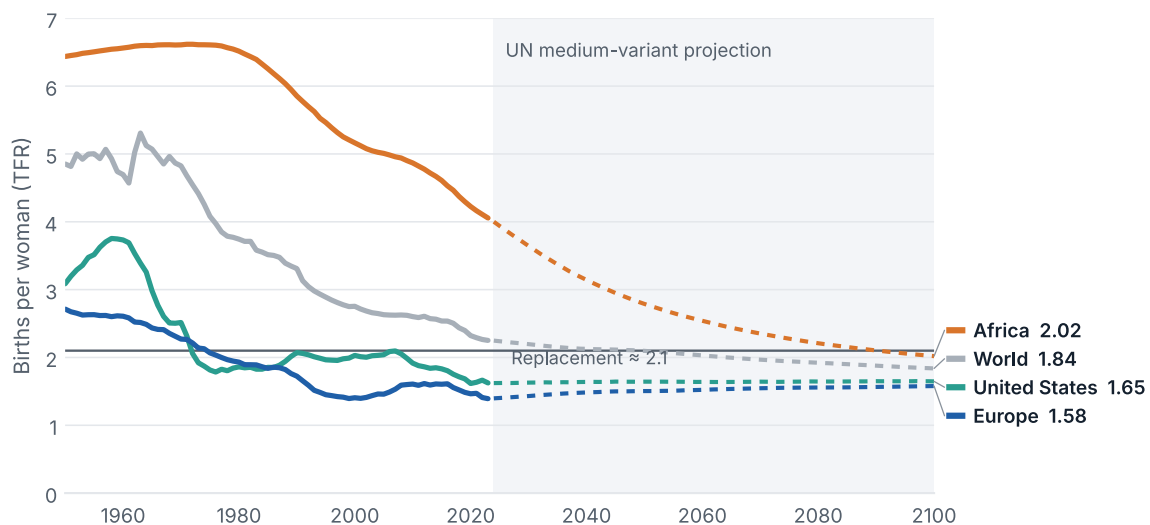
The core of the thesis is the strongest part. Europe has not replaced its own population for two generations, and the shortfall is growing.

A population replaces itself when women have on average about 2.1 children over their lifetimes, the extra 0.1 offsetting mortality before reproductive age and the slight excess of male births. Europe fell below that threshold in the mid-1970s and has never returned. The United States held close to replacement until the 2008 financial crisis and then fell steadily. Its 2024 total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.60 is the lowest on record. Even Africa, the last high-fertility continent, has started a rapid decline.

FIGURE 1

Fertility has been below replacement in Europe for half a century

Total fertility rate (births per woman), 1950–2023 estimates and UN medium-variant projections to 2100



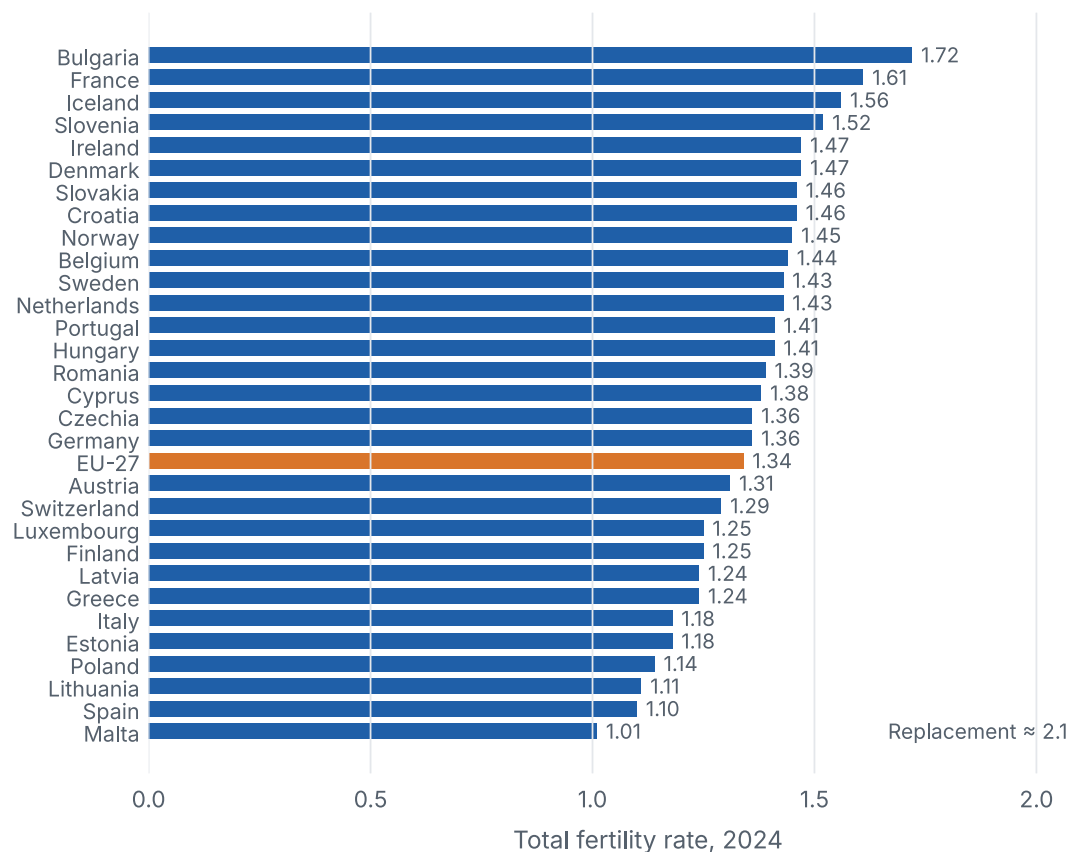
Source: UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2024*, via Our World in Data. Projections assume partial fertility recovery, which recent data do not yet show (see text).

The UN's medium variant assumes European fertility drifts back up toward 1.5–1.6. The most recent observations point the other way. Germany recorded 1.32 in 2025, England and Wales 1.39, Italy about 1.18, and Spain, Poland and Lithuania 1.10–1.14 in 2024. Malta reached 1.01. The EU average of 1.34 in 2024 is the lowest Eurostat has recorded. Even France, long the EU's demographic outlier, fell to 1.61. Projections built on a rebound are therefore more likely to overstate future births than understate them.

FIGURE 2

Every EU country is far below replacement fertility

Total fertility rate, 2024, EU-27 member states and EU average



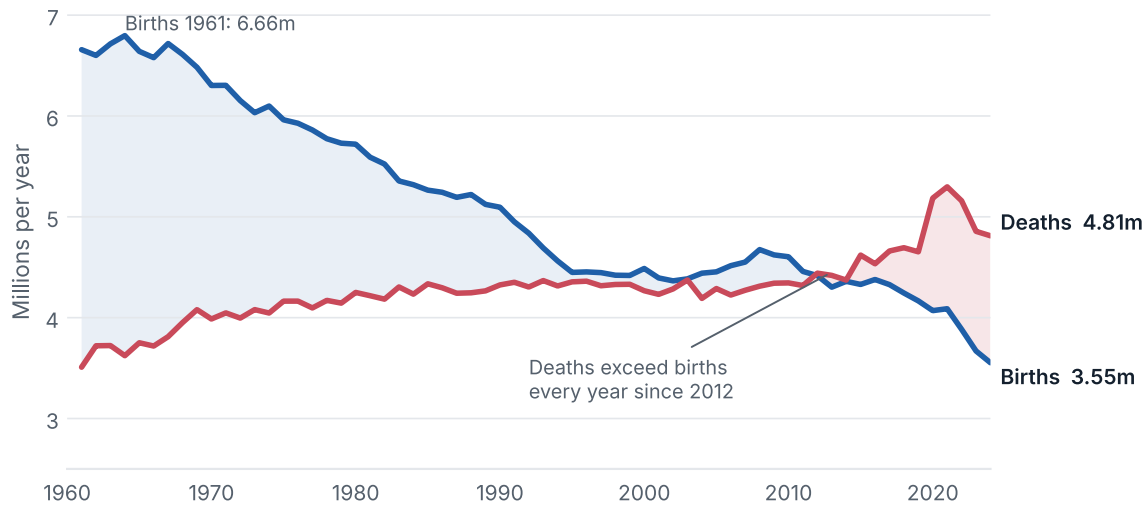
Source: Eurostat, Fertility indicators (demo_find), extracted October 2026.

Natural decrease has arrived

Low fertility works through the age structure with a lag. As long as the large baby-boom cohorts were of child-bearing age, even low fertility produced enough births to exceed deaths. That cushion has now gone. In 1961 the territory of today's EU recorded 6.66 million births. In 2024 it recorded 3.55 million, a fall of 47%. Deaths have risen as the population aged, and the two lines crossed around 2012. Since then the EU has had more deaths than births every year. The gap reached 1.27 million in 2022 and stayed above 1.18 million in 2023 and 2024.

FIGURE 3**Deaths now exceed births across the EU every year**

Live births and deaths, EU-27 (current composition), millions per year, 1961–2024



Source: Eurostat, Population change — demographic balance and crude rates (demo_gind).

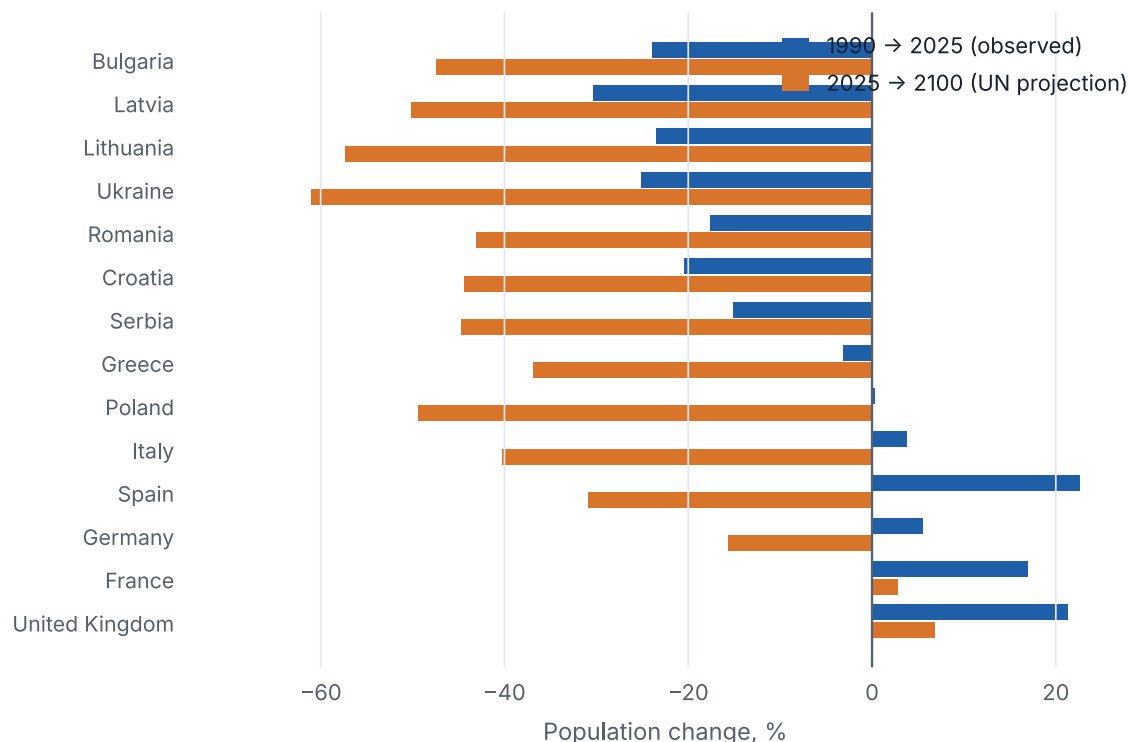
Every increase in the EU population since 2012 has therefore come from net migration. Between 2022 and 2024 alone, net migration added about 8.4 million people, including Ukrainian refugees, while natural change subtracted about 3.7 million. This is the arithmetic at the heart of the composition debate. Population stability in western Europe now depends on immigration.

The east is emptying first

The starkest declines are not in the western European heartlands that dominate the debate but in central, eastern and south-eastern Europe. There, low fertility has combined with heavy emigration. Since 1990 Latvia has lost about 30% of its population, Lithuania and Bulgaria about 24%, and Ukraine about 25% (around 15% before the 2022 invasion and the refugee exodus that followed). Croatia, Romania and Serbia have lost 15–20%. These countries have experienced population collapse in the literal sense, at least at regional level. Villages have been abandoned and school networks have contracted. The driver was not immigration but its absence combined with emigration westward.

FIGURE 4**Eastern and southern Europe face the steepest declines**

Population change, %, 1990–2025 (observed) and 2025–2100 (UN medium-variant projection)



Source: UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2024*, via Our World in Data. Ukraine figures are subject to high uncertainty owing to the war.

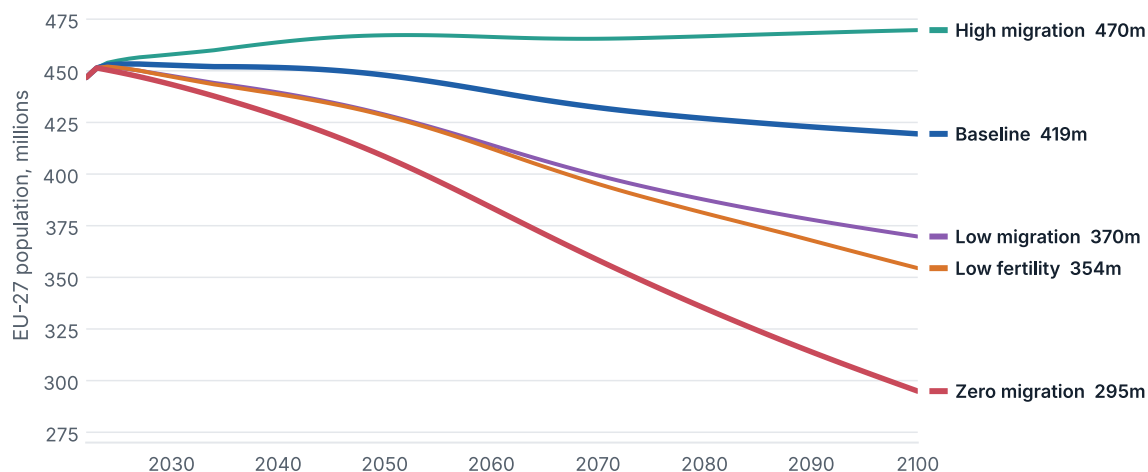
Looking ahead, the UN projects Italy falling from 59 million to about 35 million by 2100, Poland from 38 million to 19 million and Spain from 48 million to 33 million. Germany falls more modestly, from 84 million to 71 million, because of its higher assumed migration. Only countries with sustained immigration and relatively high fertility, such as France and the UK, are projected to hold or grow their populations.

The role of migration in the projections

Eurostat's EUROPOP2023 projections make the dependence on migration explicit. In the baseline, which assumes net migration of about 1–1.2 million a year, the EU-27 population peaks at about 453 million in the mid-2020s and drifts down to 420 million by 2100. With zero migration it falls to 295 million, a loss of one person in three. A low-fertility variant (about 20% lower fertility, closer to current observations) gives 354 million.

FIGURE 5**Without migration, the EU would lose a third of its population by 2100**

EU-27 population under Eurostat EUROPOP2023 projection variants, millions, 2022–2100



Source: Eurostat, Population on 1 January by age, sex and type of projection (proj_23np).

IMPLICATION

The demographic premise of the collapse thesis is largely correct. Native-born populations in most of Europe are shrinking, and they will keep shrinking for decades even if fertility recovers, because the cohorts of future parents are already smaller than their predecessors. The real policy choice is not between a stable native population and immigration. It is between managed decline, immigration-supported stability, or some mix of the two, combined with efforts to raise fertility.

Why has fertility fallen so far?

The research is extensive and not fully settled, but the main drivers are well documented. They include later partnership and childbearing, high housing costs in the urban areas where young adults live, long years in education, economic insecurity among young adults, the opportunity cost for women in labour markets that have not adapted to parenthood, and a decline in the share of adults who marry or live in stable partnerships. More recently, researchers have pointed to falling rates of partnership itself and to shifting preferences. Desired family size remains close to two in most surveys, so the gap between intentions and outcomes is large. Pronatalist policy has a mixed record. Generous programmes in Hungary, Poland and the Nordic countries raised fertility modestly or temporarily, but none has restored replacement levels.

03

Ageing and the arithmetic of dependency

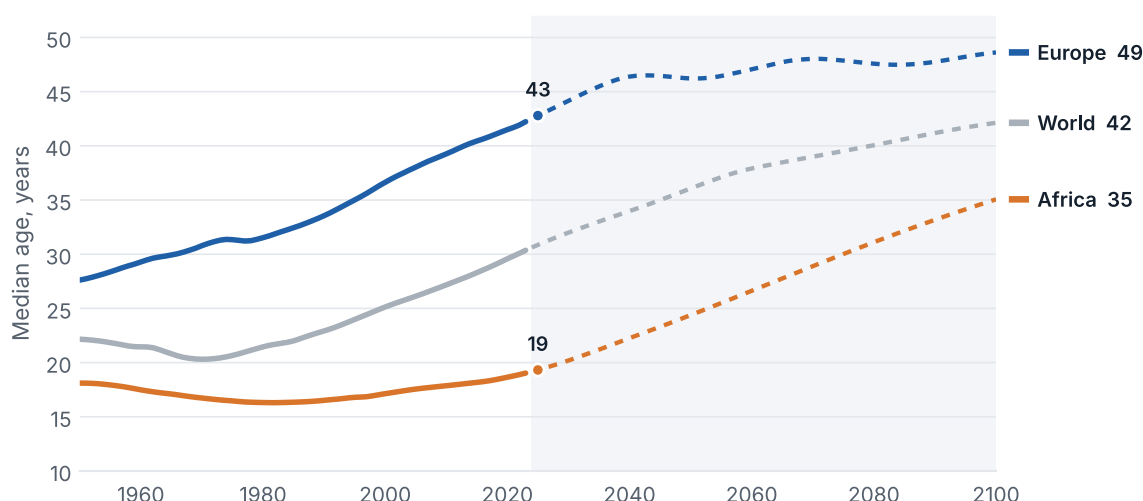
A shrinking population is manageable. A rapidly ageing one is harder, and ageing is the part of the transition no policy can avoid.

Europe is the oldest continent on earth and is getting older. Its median age has risen from 28 in 1950 to about 43 today and is projected to approach 49 by 2100. Africa's median age is 19. Across the Mediterranean, the difference is a full generation. This gap, between an ageing, shrinking north and a young, growing south, is the structural backdrop to every migration debate of the coming decades.

FIGURE 6

Europe is a generation older than its southern neighbour

Median age, years, 1950–2023 estimates and UN medium-variant projection to 2100



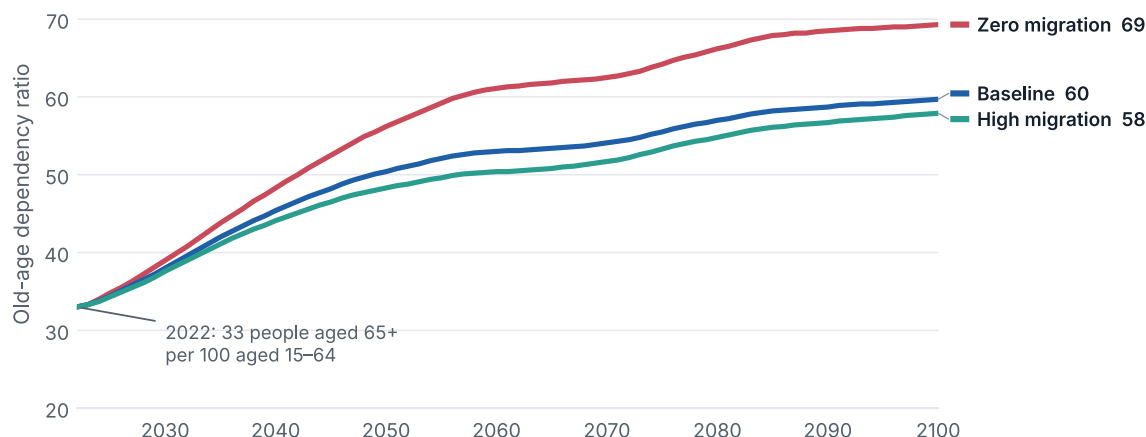
Source: UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2024*, via Our World in Data.

The dependency ratio

The old-age dependency ratio, the number of people aged 65 and over per 100 people aged 15–64, is a crude but useful measure of the burden on working-age taxpayers. In the EU it was 33 in 2022. Under Eurostat's baseline it rises to 50 by 2050 and 60 by 2100, meaning fewer than two people of working age for every person over 65. The share of the population aged 80 and over rises from 6% to 15%.

FIGURE 7**Migration slows ageing but cannot stop it**

Old-age dependency ratio (population 65+ per 100 aged 15–64), EU-27, Eurostat EUROPOP2023 variants, 2022–2100



Source: Eurostat, Demographic balances and indicators by type of projection (proj_23ndbi).

Migration helps at the margin because migrants arrive mostly in their twenties and thirties. In the high-migration variant (about 1.6–1.7 million net arrivals a year) the 2100 ratio is 58. With zero migration it is 69. But the difference between the extremes, roughly 11 points, is small next to the 27-point rise common to all variants. Immigrants also age. Using immigration to hold the dependency ratio constant would require inflows several times higher than today's, which the UN Population Division showed in its 2000 study of “replacement migration.” That conclusion still holds.

Economic and fiscal consequences

Ageing raises spending on pensions, health and long-term care while shrinking the share of the population in work. The European Commission's *Ageing Report* projects age-related public spending in the EU rising by around 1–2% of GDP by 2070 under current policies, with much larger increases in some member states. Labour shortages are already acute in healthcare, construction, logistics and hospitality, the sectors that rely most on migrant labour. Lower growth in the working-age population also means lower potential GDP growth unless productivity accelerates.

These pressures are the basis for the economic case for immigration. They are also the basis for a central dilemma in this report. The countries that need workers most are often the ones where public resistance to further immigration is strongest. The fiscal value of immigration also depends heavily on who arrives and whether they work (Section 8). Ageing is therefore both a reason the transformation is happening and a reason its management matters so much.

Ageing is the most certain part of the demographic future. Every person who will be 65 in 2090 has already been born.

04

Migration: scale, pace and the global backdrop

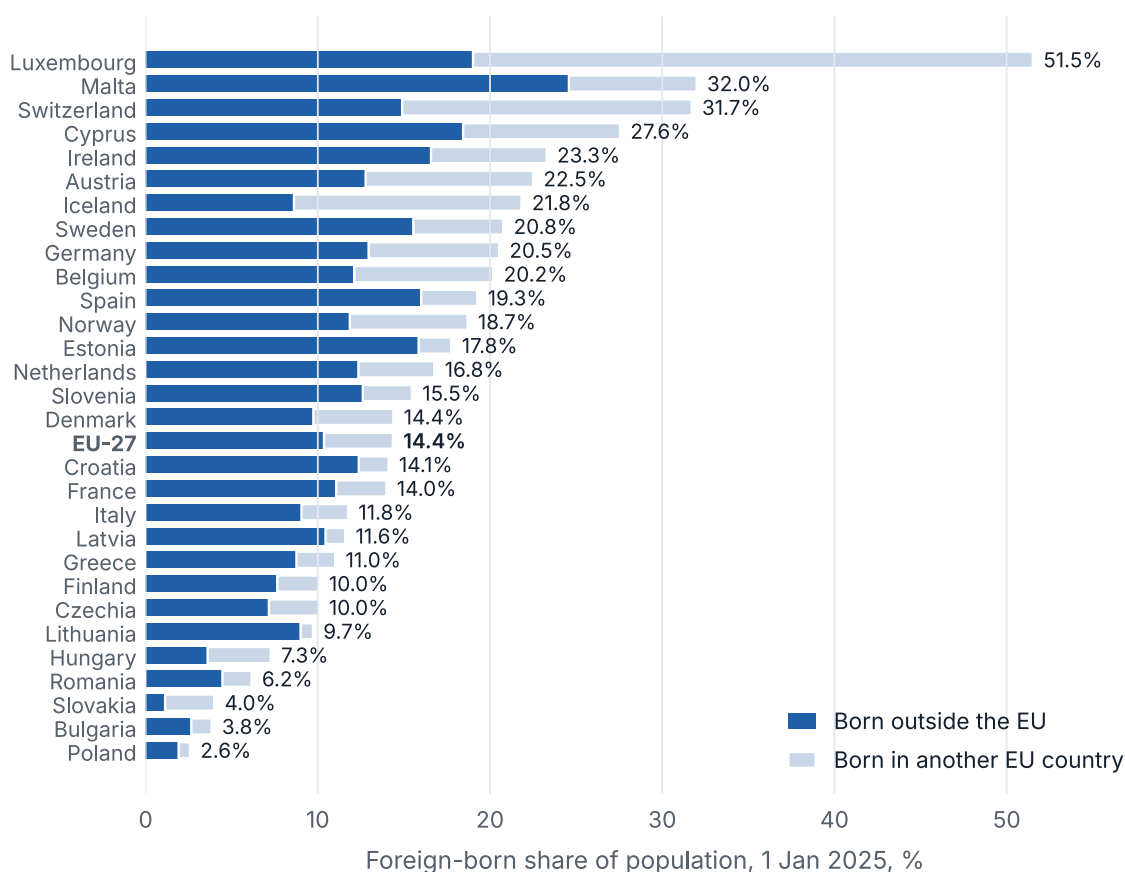
Immigration to the West is at or near historic highs, and the demographic gradient between Europe and its neighbours guarantees continuing pressure.

On 1 January 2025, 64.7 million people living in the EU-27 had been born in another country, 14.4% of the population. About 10.4% were born outside the EU and 4.0% in another member state. The share has risen by more than four percentage points in a decade, the fastest increase on record. Variation between countries is very large. Luxembourg (51.5%), Malta, Switzerland, Cyprus, Ireland and Austria lead. Germany, Sweden, Belgium and Spain sit at 19–21%, broadly comparable to the United States at its 1890–1910 peak. Most of central and eastern Europe remains below 10%, and Poland is at 2.6%.

FIGURE 8

One in seven EU residents was born abroad

Foreign-born share of the population by place of birth, 1 January 2025, %

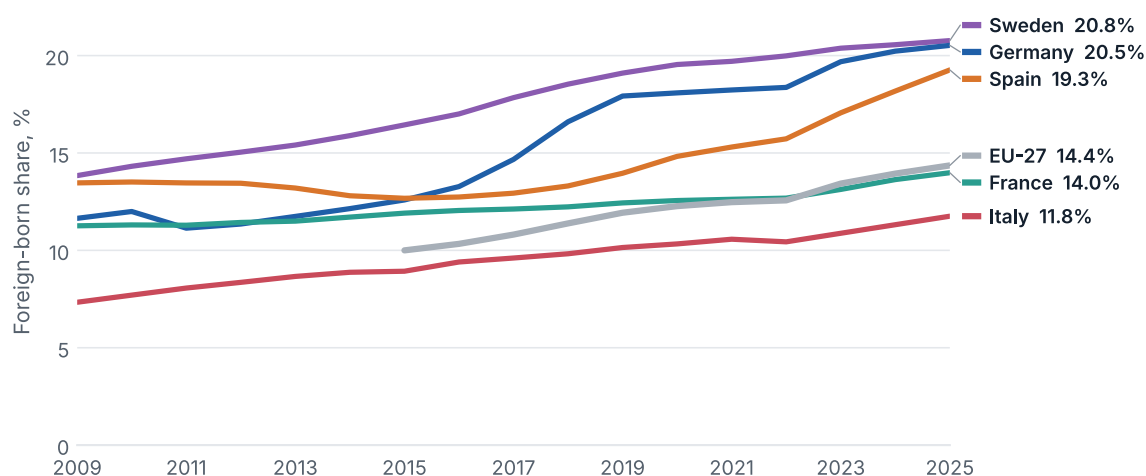


Source: Eurostat, Population on 1 January by age group, sex and country of birth (migr_pop3ctb). Switzerland, Norway and Iceland shown alongside EU-27 members.

The composition of these populations differs substantially. In Luxembourg, Belgium, Ireland and Austria a large share of the foreign-born are other Europeans. In Sweden, the Netherlands, France and Spain most come from outside the EU. They include long-established Maghrebi, Turkish and Latin American communities and, since 2015, large Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi and Eritrean populations admitted as refugees. Ukrainians admitted after 2022 now form one of the largest single foreign-born groups in Poland, Czechia and Germany.

FIGURE 9**The foreign-born share has risen sharply since 2015**

Foreign-born share of the population, %, selected countries, 2009–2025



Source: Eurostat (migr_pop3ctb). German series affected by the 2011 census revision; the EU-27 series begins in 2015.

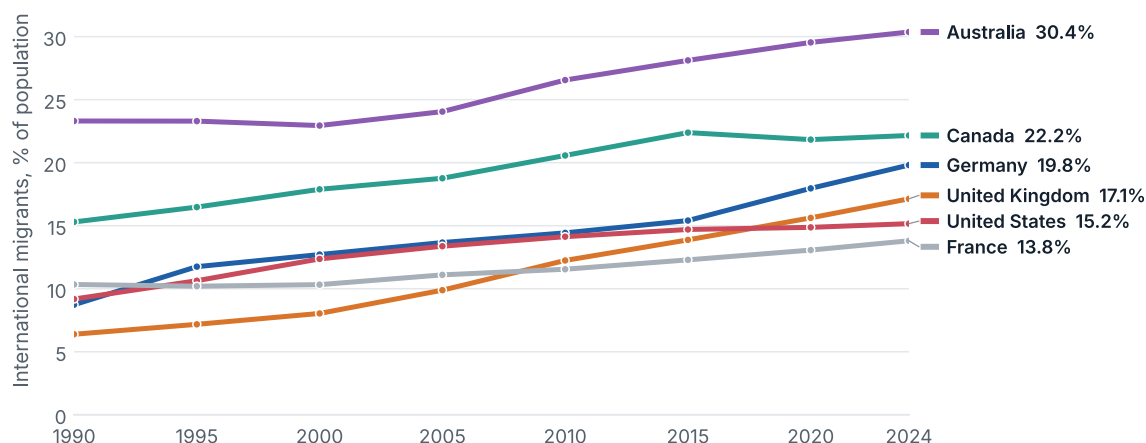
The Anglosphere

Outside continental Europe, immigrant shares are higher still. UN DESA estimates put the international migrant stock at 30% of the population in Australia, 22% in Canada, 17% in the UK and 15% in the US in 2024. National sources give higher figures for some countries: Statistics Canada counted 23% immigrants in the 2021 census, before a further surge in temporary residents, and the US Current Population Survey recorded a foreign-born share near 16% in 2024, the highest since the 1890s. The UK's net migration reached an estimated 944,000 in the year to March 2023, more than double any pre-2020 level, before falling to about 345,000 in calendar 2024 after visa rules were tightened.

FIGURE 10

Immigrant shares have risen across the Anglosphere and Germany

International migrants as a share of the population, %, 1990–2024



Source: UN DESA, International Migrant Stock 2024, via Our World in Data. Figures may differ from national sources because of definitional differences.

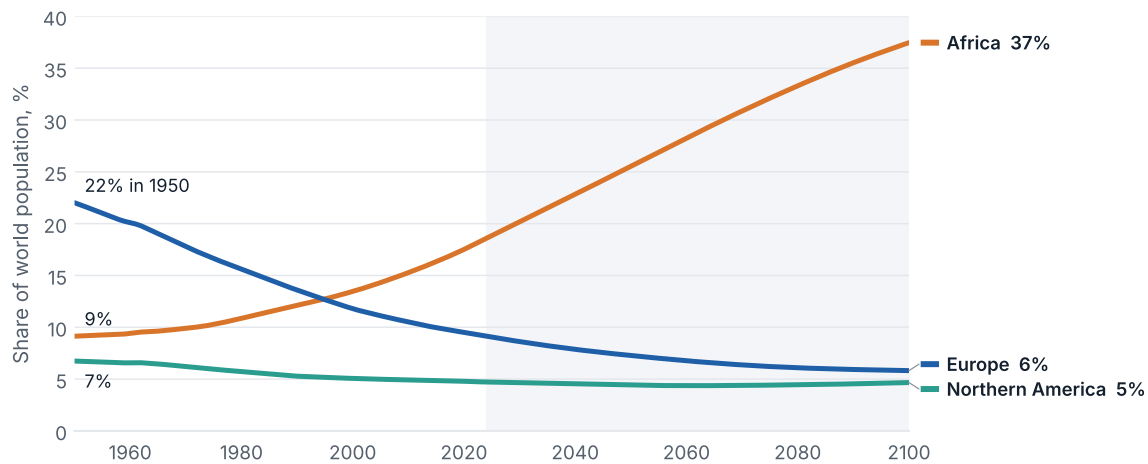
Recent US policy shows how quickly flows can reverse. After record border encounters in 2022–24, enforcement measures introduced in 2025 sharply reduced new arrivals and increased removals. Several estimates, including from the Pew Research Center, suggested the immigrant population fell by more than a million in the first half of 2025. Canada and Australia have also cut their temporary-resident targets. These changes are a reminder that migration, unlike fertility or ageing, responds quickly to policy.

The global gradient

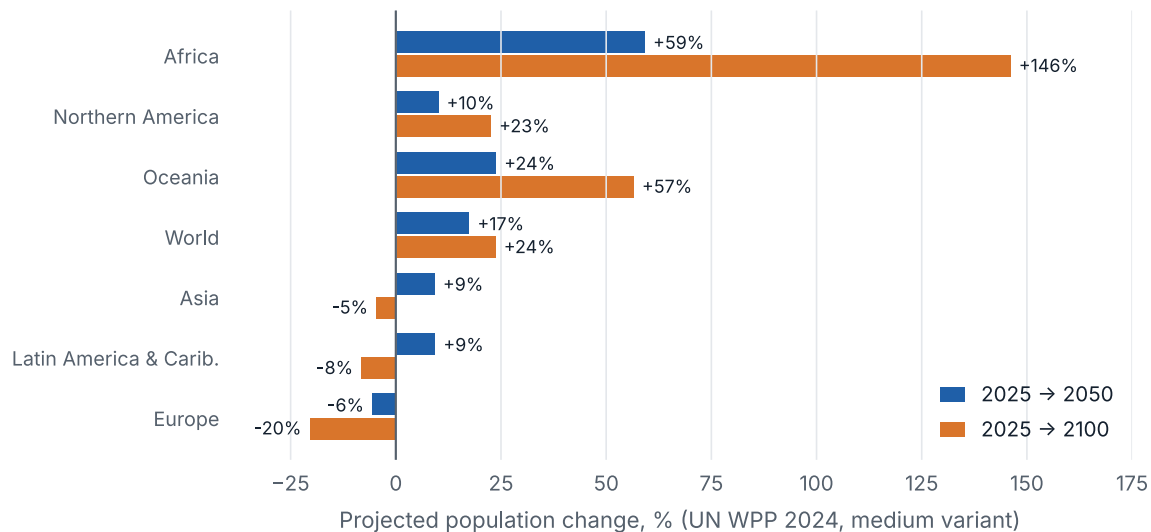
Whatever Western governments decide, the global demographic backdrop is changing in one direction. In 1950 Europe held 22% of the world's population and Africa 9%. By 2100 the UN projects Europe at 6% and Africa at 37%. Africa's population is projected to rise from 1.55 billion today to 2.47 billion by 2050 and 3.81 billion by 2100. Nigeria alone is projected to reach 477 million, more than the entire projected EU population.

FIGURE 11**Europe's share of humanity is shrinking as Africa's soars**

Share of world population, %, 1950–2100 (UN medium-variant projection from 2024)

Source: UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2024*, via Our World in Data.**FIGURE 12****Population growth is concentrated in Africa**

Projected population change from 2025, %, by world region (UN WPP 2024, medium variant)

Source: UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2024*, via Our World in Data.

Population growth alone does not produce emigration. The poorest people rarely migrate long distances, and emigration often rises as countries grow richer before falling again, the “migration hump.” But a young, growing and increasingly educated population next to an ageing, shrinking, wealthy one creates sustained pressure. Climate stress, conflict in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, and diaspora networks add to it. Any outlook that assumes migration pressure on Europe will ease is implausible.

05

Changing composition: generations, births and majority-minority cities

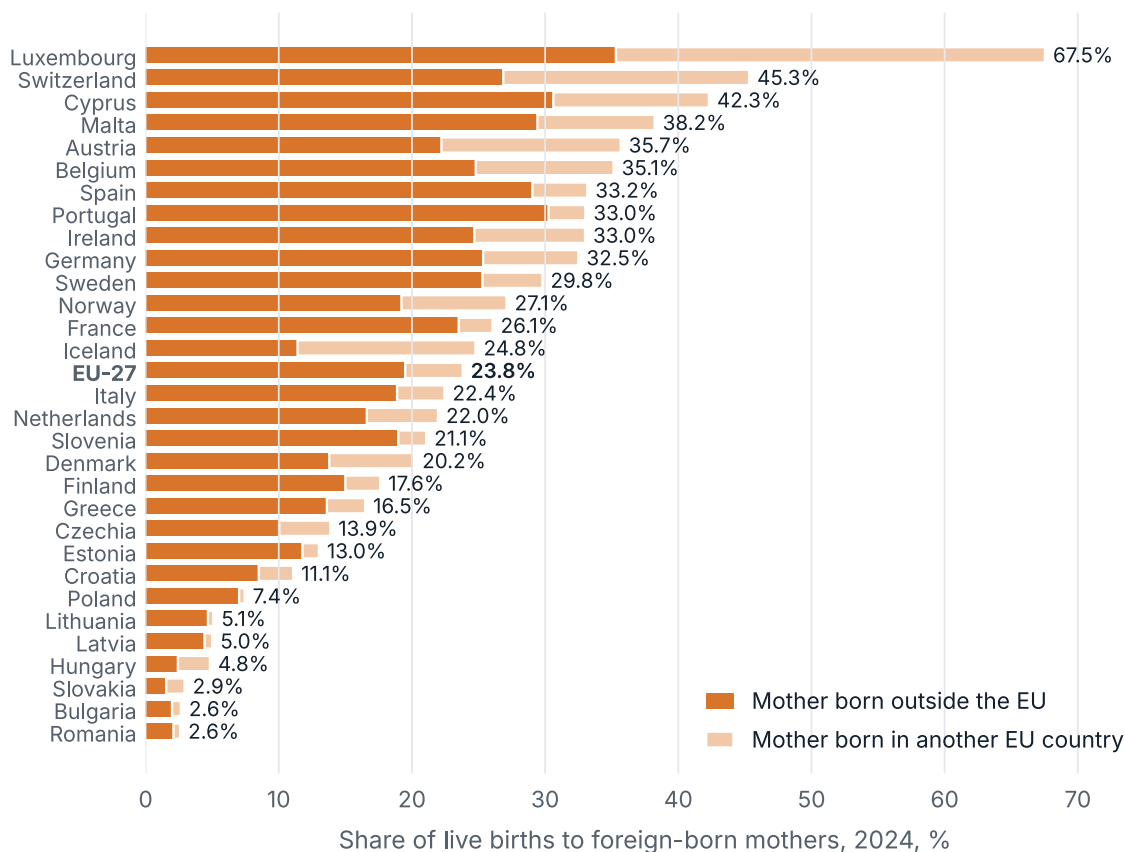
Composition changes fastest among the young and in cities. Today's national averages understate the future, and today's cities show it.

Births

A leading indicator of future composition is the share of births to foreign-born mothers. Across the EU it reached 23.8% in 2024, up from 17.8% in 2013. In Austria (35.7%), Belgium (35.1%), Spain (33.2%), Ireland and Portugal (33.0%) and Germany (32.5%), roughly one baby in three is born to a mother born abroad. In England and Wales the figure was 33.9% in 2024 and 34.6% in 2025. More than 40% of births in England had at least one parent born outside the UK.

FIGURE 13**One in four EU births is to a foreign-born mother**

Share of live births by mother's country of birth, 2024, %

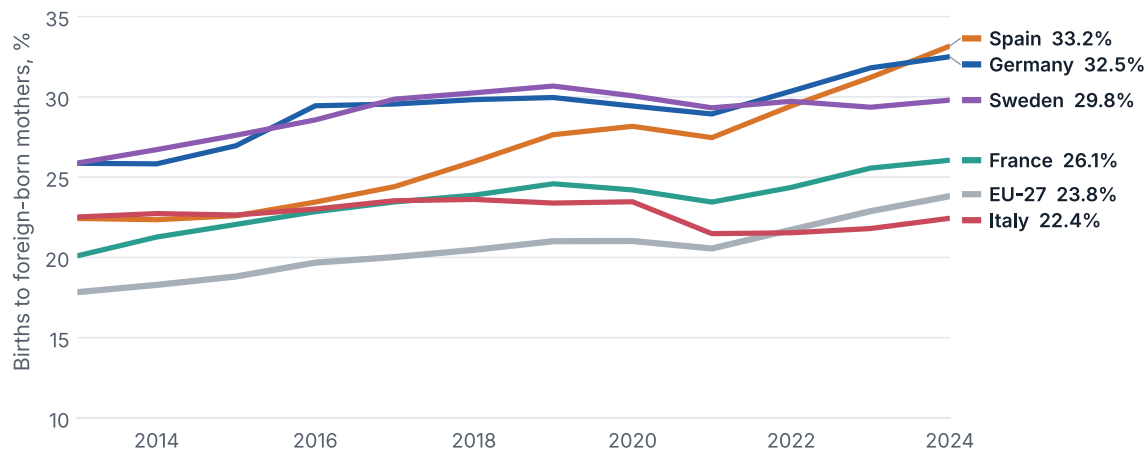


Source: Eurostat, Live births by mother's age and country of birth (demo_facbc). Luxembourg, Switzerland, Cyprus and Malta reflect large European expatriate populations.

This rise reflects three things: more foreign-born women of childbearing age, their younger age profile, and somewhat higher fertility. It also reflects falling native birth numbers. The number of births to native-born mothers has fallen faster than the total, so the foreign-born share rises even where immigrant births are flat. In Spain, which has some of the lowest native fertility in the world, the share rose by more than ten points in a decade.

FIGURE 14**The share of births to foreign-born mothers keeps climbing**

Live births to foreign-born mothers, % of all live births, 2013–2024



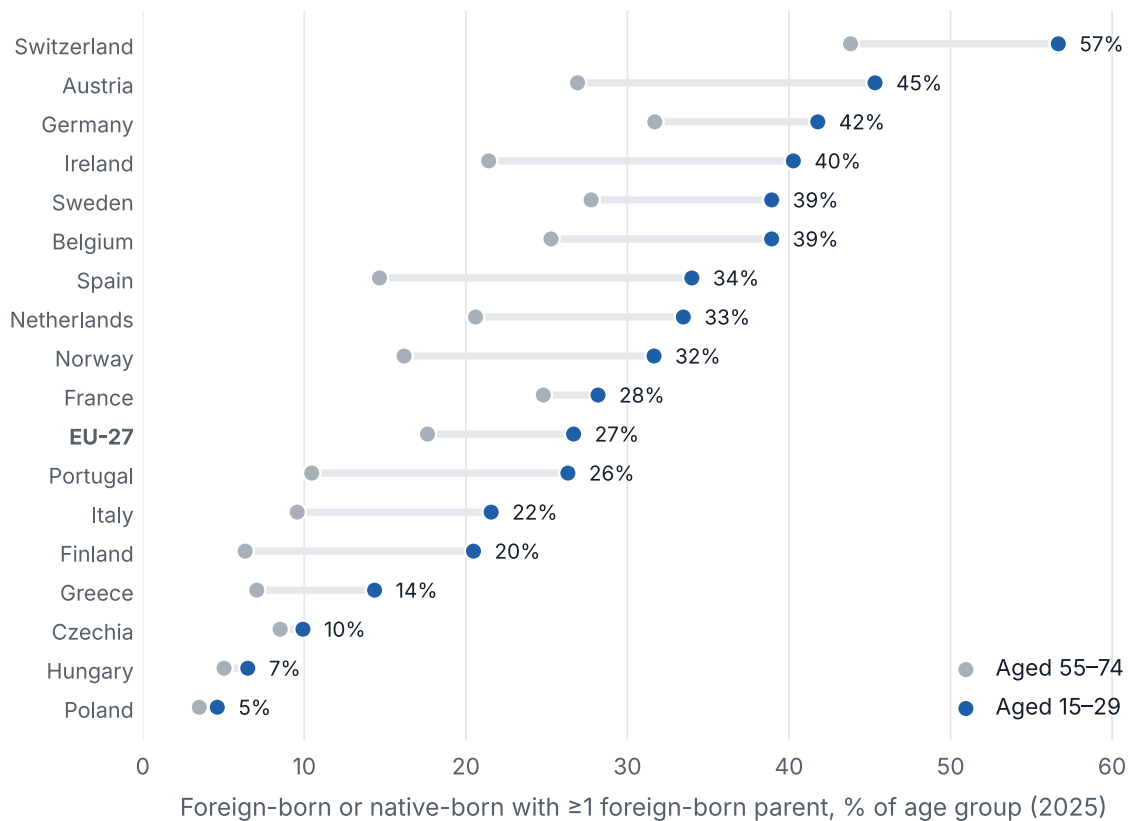
Source: Eurostat (demo_facbc).

The generational gradient

Because immigrants are young and natives are old, composition varies sharply by age. Eurostat's Labour Force Survey identifies people who were born abroad or have at least one foreign-born parent. In 2025 that group made up 26.7% of EU residents aged 15–29 but only 17.6% of those aged 55–74. In Switzerland the share among young adults is 57%, in Austria 45%, Germany 42%, and Sweden and Belgium 39%. Across most western European countries, today's young-adult share is a reasonable guide to the whole adult population a generation from now.

FIGURE 15**Young adults are far more diverse than their parents' generation**

Share of each age group that is foreign-born or native-born with at least one foreign-born parent, 2025, %



Source: Eurostat, Population by migration status (lfsa_pgaccpm), private households. Includes people with one native-born parent, and those of European origin.

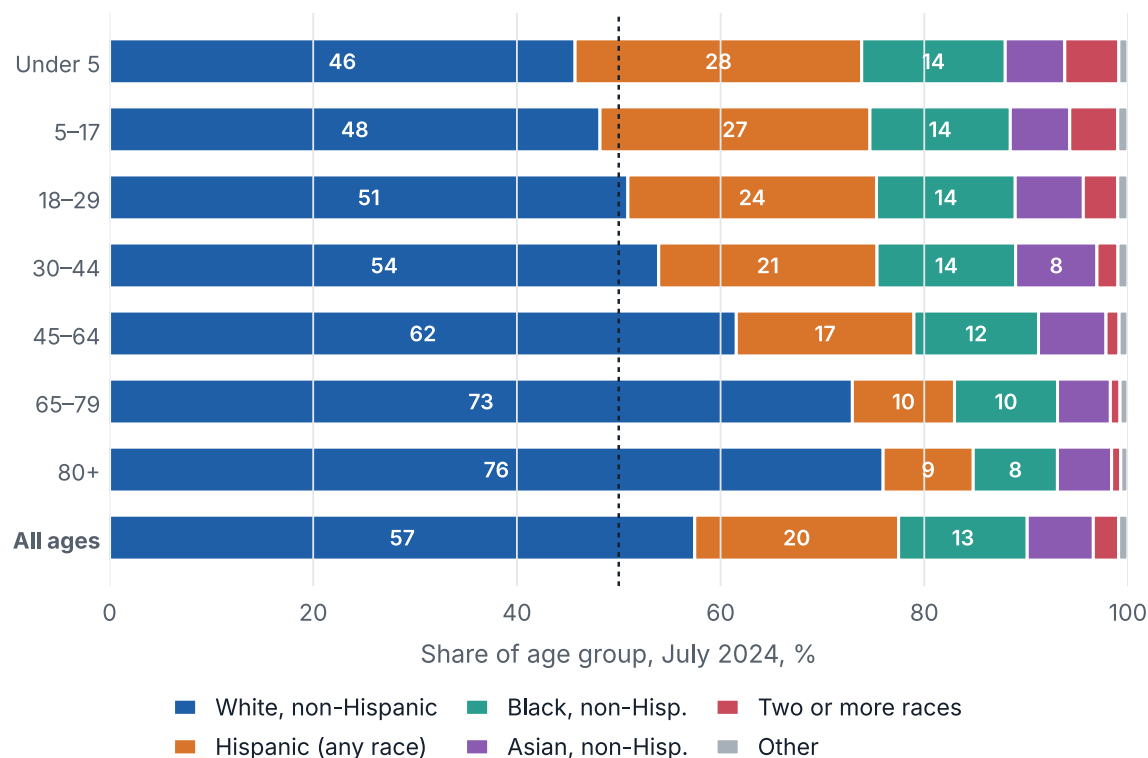
Two caveats matter. First, this measure includes people with one native-born parent, a growing group that the majority-minority framing ignores. Second, it includes intra-European mobility: many “second-generation” Austrians have German parents, and many Belgians have French or Dutch parents. The share of young adults with non-European origins is lower, typically by a third to a half, though precise cross-national data are limited.

The United States: a majority-minority generation

US Census Bureau estimates for July 2024 show non-Hispanic whites (single race) at 57.5% of the population but only 47.5% of those under 18 and 45.7% of children under five. Hispanics account for 26.9% of minors. Among Americans aged 65 and over, the non-Hispanic white share is 73.6%. The Census Bureau has projected since the late 2000s that the population as a whole will become majority-minority in the early-to-mid 2040s. Given the age structure in Figure 16, the result is largely determined already.

FIGURE 16**American children are already majority-minority**

US resident population by race and Hispanic origin, by age group, July 2024, %



Source: US Census Bureau, Vintage 2024 National Population Estimates by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin (NC-EST2024-ALLDATA). Race groups are single-race, non-Hispanic.

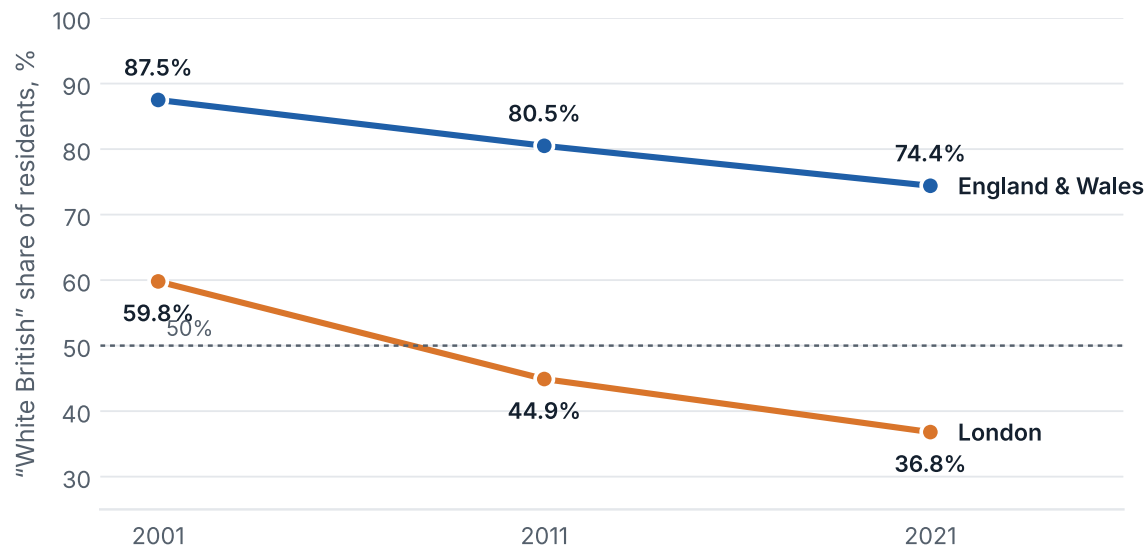
The categories themselves are shifting. In the 2020 census, 33.8 million Americans identified with two or more races, up from 9 million in 2010, partly because of improved question design. Many descendants of Hispanic and Asian immigrants who intermarry increasingly identify as white or multiracial. Whether the US “becomes majority-minority” therefore depends partly on how people choose to identify, a point Richard Alba has stressed. The mixed-race population is the fastest-growing group among young children.

Britain: from 87% to 74% in twenty years

The census of England and Wales asks about self-identified ethnicity. The “White British” share fell from 87.5% in 2001 to 80.5% in 2011 and 74.4% in 2021. In London it fell from 59.8% to 36.8% over the same period. Since 2021, net migration of more than two million, overwhelmingly from outside Europe, will have accelerated the trend. Coleman’s (2010) projections had the White British share of the UK population falling to around 56% by 2056, implying minority status around the 2060s if trends persisted. Net migration since then has run well above the assumptions he used.

FIGURE 17**London passed the majority-minority point before 2011**

Share of residents identifying as White British (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British), census years, %



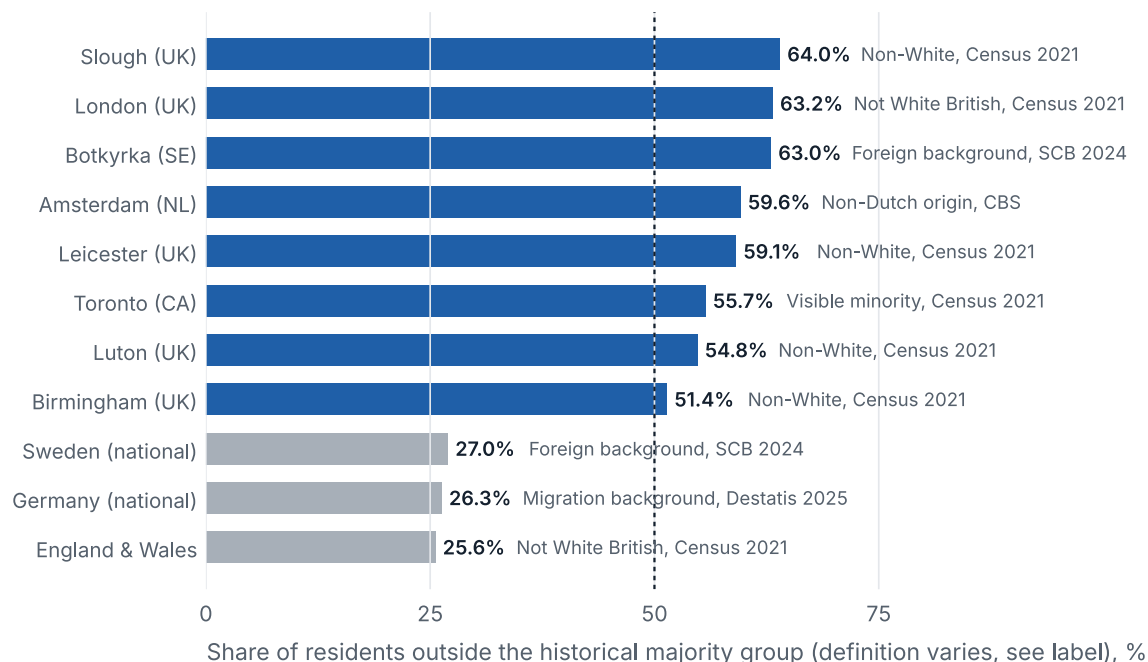
Source: Office for National Statistics, Census 2001, 2011 and 2021.

Majority-minority cities

At city level the transition has already happened in many places. In 2021 Slough (64% non-white), Leicester (59%), Luton (55%) and Birmingham (51%) joined London as UK local authorities without a white majority. Several London boroughs, including Newham, Brent and Redbridge, exceed 65%. In the Netherlands, about 60% of Amsterdam residents have a non-Dutch background, and The Hague and Rotterdam are also above half. In Sweden, 27% of the national population has a foreign background (born abroad or born to two foreign-born parents), rising to 63% in Botkyrka on the edge of Stockholm. In Canada, 56% of Toronto residents identified as a visible minority in 2021. In the US, non-Hispanic whites were about 31% of New York City's residents in the 2020 census, and similar or lower shares are found in Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago and Miami.

FIGURE 18**Majority-minority status is already the urban norm in many places**

Share of residents outside the historical majority group, using each country's official definition, latest available, %



Source: ONS Census 2021; SCB, Population statistics 2024; CBS, migration-background statistics; Statistics Canada, Census 2021; Destatis, Mikrozensus 2025. Definitions differ and are not directly comparable.

The urban pattern is the main reason the collapse thesis resonates. People experience demographic change locally, and in large cities it is now so complete that the language of “minority” no longer fits. City-level change does not by itself imply cultural dissolution. London is among the most economically dynamic cities in the world, and its second generation outperforms the national average in school results. But concentration does magnify integration problems where they exist: residential segregation, school segregation and, in some neighbourhoods, persistent poverty. We return to these in Sections 7 and 8.

06

Testing the “rapid reproduction” claim

Minority fertility is somewhat higher than native fertility. It is not high, it is not stable, and it is not the main engine of change.

A central element of the popular collapse narrative is that immigrant and minority populations are reproducing rapidly and will out-breed natives even if immigration stops. Our assessment is that the claim gets the direction right and the magnitude and mechanism wrong.

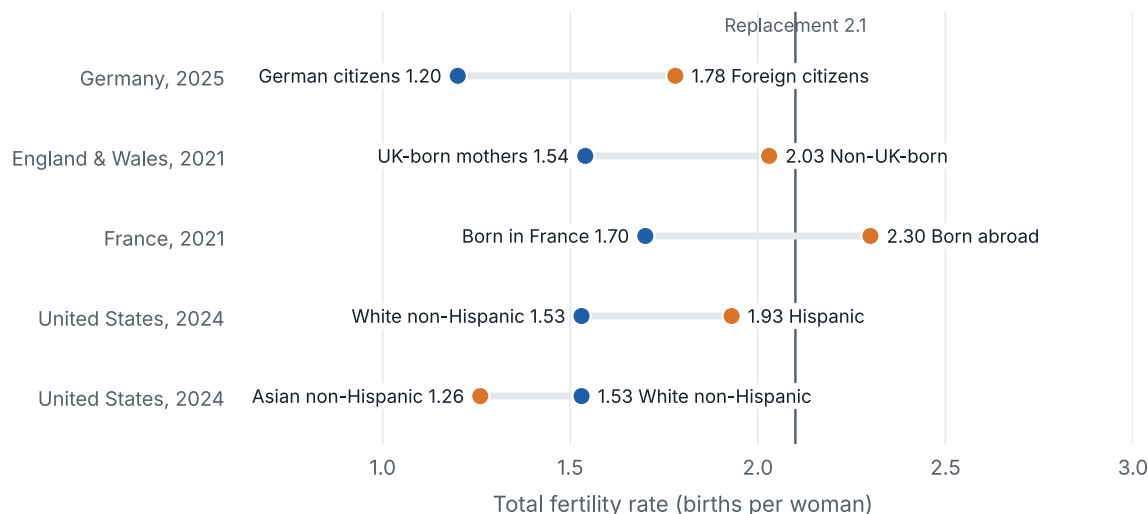
The size of the gap

Where official statistics allow a comparison, foreign-born or foreign-citizen women do have higher fertility than natives. The difference is typically 0.4–0.6 children per woman, and in several cases immigrant fertility is itself below replacement:

- **Germany (2025):** women with German citizenship 1.20; foreign citizens 1.78, down from above 2.2 in 2016. Both are well below replacement.
- **England and Wales (2021):** UK-born mothers 1.54; non-UK-born 2.03.
- **France (2021):** women born in France 1.7; born abroad 2.3, with large differences by origin (Maghreb 2.5, sub-Saharan Africa 3.3; INSEE notes standard indicators overstate immigrant fertility).
- **United States (2024):** non-Hispanic white 1.53; Hispanic 1.93; non-Hispanic Black 1.50; non-Hispanic Asian 1.26.

FIGURE 19**Immigrant and minority fertility is higher, but modestly so**

Total fertility rate by origin group, latest available year



Source: Destatis (2026), Births 2025; ONS, Births by parents' country of birth 2021; INSEE, *Immigrés et descendants d'immigrés* 2023; CDC/NCHS, *Births: Final Data for 2024* (NVSr 75-2).

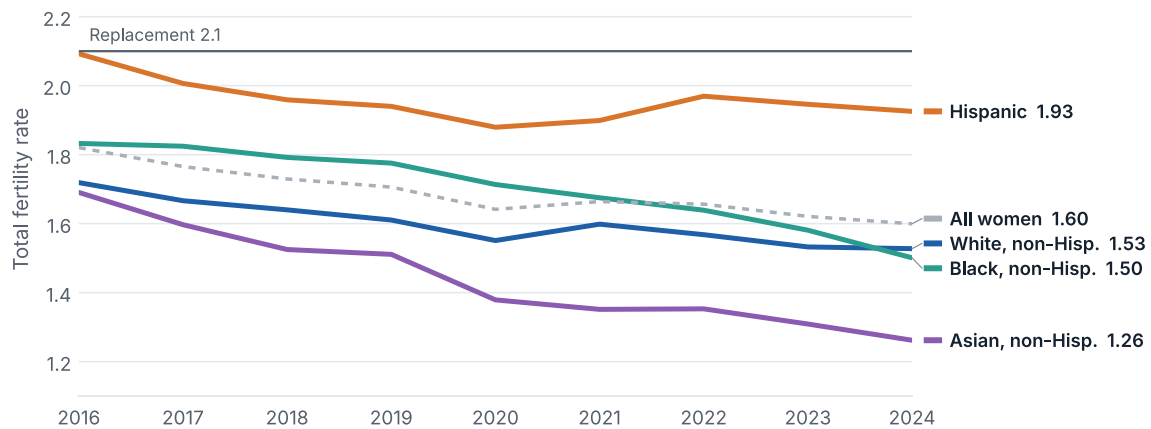
Measured immigrant fertility is also inflated by a well-documented artefact. Many women migrate shortly before or after forming a family, so their births are concentrated in the years just after arrival. Period fertility rates for recent immigrants overstate completed family size. Sweden's statistics office has shown that foreign-born and Swedish-born women end up with broadly similar numbers of children over their lifetimes despite higher period rates among immigrants.

Convergence over time and across generations

Minority fertility is falling, often faster than native fertility. US Hispanic fertility was close to 3.0 in 2007. By 2024 it was 1.93, below replacement, and Asian American fertility, at 1.26, is among the lowest of any group in the Western world. Non-Hispanic Black fertility has also fallen steeply, from 1.83 to 1.50 since 2016. Across groups, the trend is downward convergence.

FIGURE 20**US fertility is falling in every major group**

Total fertility rate by race and Hispanic origin of mother, United States, 2016–2024

Source: CDC/NCHS, *Births: Final Data for 2024*, National Vital Statistics Reports 75(2), Table 2, June 2026.

In Europe, the most comprehensive comparative study, by Kulu, Hannemann and colleagues (2017) covering the UK, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, found that the descendants of immigrants mostly have first- and second-birth rates similar to natives. Elevated fertility persists mainly at third births, and mainly among some groups: people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in the UK, Turkish origin in France and Belgium, and some African-origin groups. The second generation generally falls between their parents and the native population, and fertility is expected to decline further in the third generation.

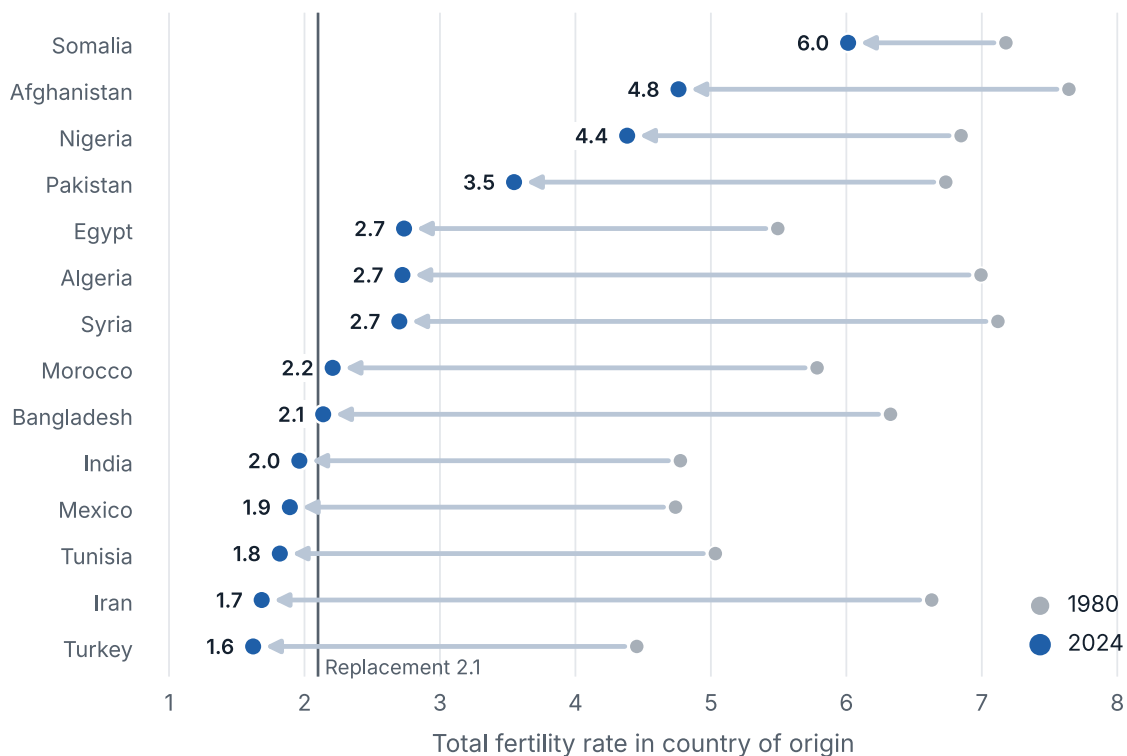
Origin countries are converging too

The fertility of migrants reflects partly the norms of their countries of origin, and those norms are changing fast. Turkey's fertility rate is now about 1.6, below France's. Iran's is about 1.7. Tunisia, Mexico, India and Bangladesh are at or below replacement, and Morocco is close to it. High fertility persists in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia, and immigrants from these countries do have markedly higher fertility in Europe. But they account for a minority of migrant stocks, and even there fertility is falling quickly.

FIGURE 21

Fertility has collapsed in many major origin countries

Total fertility rate in selected countries of origin of migrants to Europe and North America, 1980 and 2024

Source: UN DESA, *World Population Prospects 2024*, via Our World in Data. 2024 values are UN estimates.**What actually drives composition change**

If fertility differences are modest, why does composition change so fast? Demographic accounting points to three drivers, in rough order of importance:

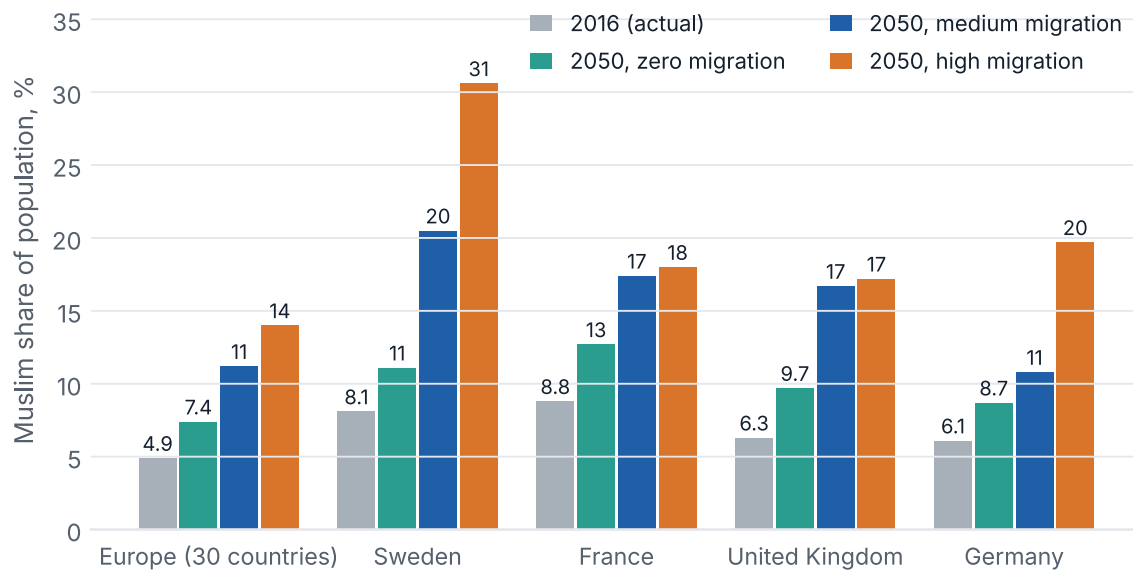
1. **Migration flows.** Net migration of 1–3 million a year into the EU, and similar per-capita rates in the UK, Canada and Australia, directly adds to the foreign-born population.
2. **Age structure.** Immigrant populations are concentrated in childbearing ages, so they produce a disproportionate share of births even at similar fertility. Native populations are concentrated in older ages and produce a disproportionate share of deaths. This momentum effect operates for decades.
3. **Differential fertility.** Higher fertility adds to the effect, but it is the smallest of the three in most countries and is shrinking.

Pew Research Center's 2017 projections of Europe's Muslim population illustrate the balance. Starting from 4.9% in 2016, Pew projected a 2050 share of 7.4% with zero migration, 11.2% with continued regular migration, and 14.0% if the 2014–16 refugee surge continued indefinitely. Fertility and age structure alone produce a meaningful increase. Migration determines whether the change is moderate or large. Even the high scenario does not produce a Muslim majority anywhere, although in Sweden it reaches 31%.

FIGURE 22

Migration, not fertility, determines the scale of religious change

Muslim share of population, 2016 and Pew Research Center 2050 projections under three migration scenarios, %



Source: Pew Research Center (2017), *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*. Europe = EU-28 plus Norway and Switzerland. Projections predate the 2022 Ukrainian inflow and recent policy changes.

VERDICT

The claim that minorities are “rapidly reproducing” and will out-breed natives is not supported. Fertility differentials exist, but they are modest, generally below replacement, falling and converging. Composition change is real and substantial, but it is driven mainly by immigration and age structure, which are determined by policy and history rather than by demographic destiny. That matters for the outlook. It means that the pace of future change depends mainly on migration decisions societies can still make.

07

Integration outcomes and intermarriage

Whether demographic change becomes “dissolution” depends less on numbers than on whether newcomers and their children join a common economic and social life.

Integration is the process by which immigrants and their descendants come to share in the opportunities, obligations and identities of the society they join. It is measurable in employment, education, income, language, residential patterns, civic participation and intermarriage. The evidence is mixed. It does not support the claim that integration has universally failed, nor the claim that it is broadly succeeding.

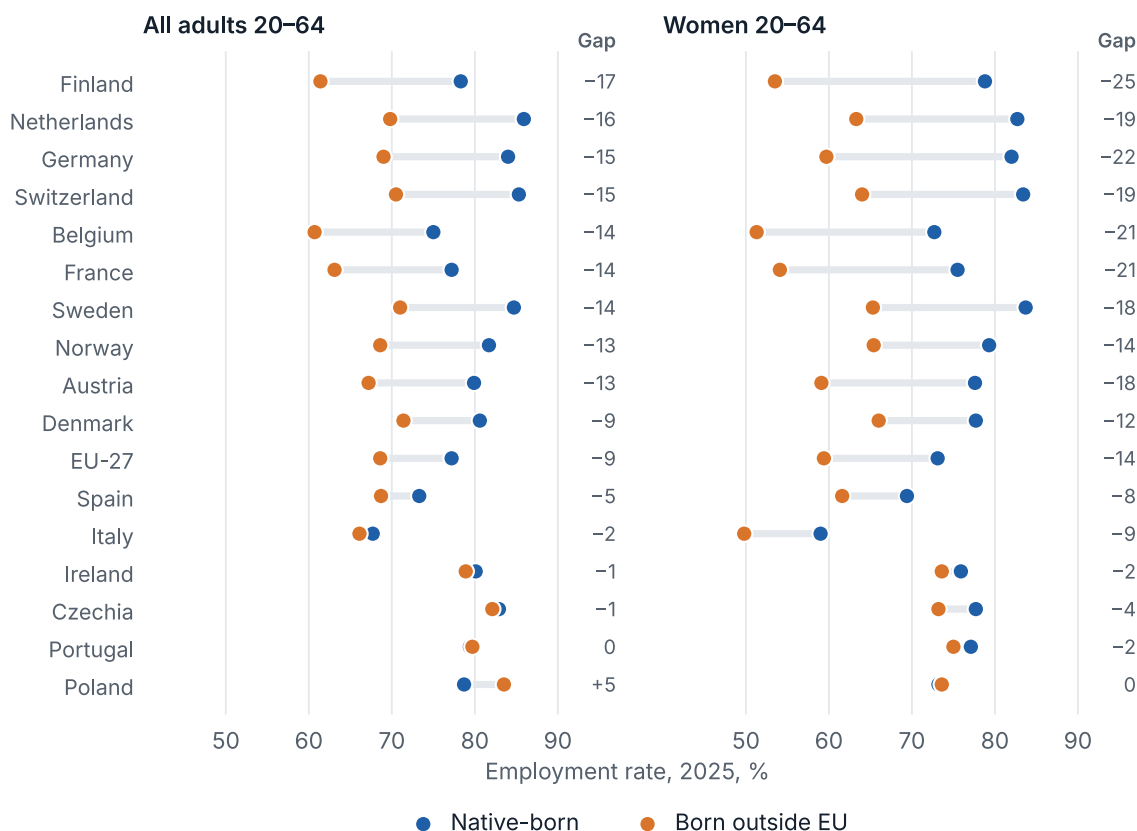
Employment

Labour-market participation is the foundation of economic integration and the most important single factor in the fiscal effect of immigration. Across the EU, the employment rate of people aged 20–64 born outside the EU was 68.6% in 2025, against 77.2% for the native-born, a gap of about 9 points. Averages hide the pattern. The gaps are largest in exactly the countries that have taken large numbers of humanitarian migrants into generous welfare states: Finland (17 points), the Netherlands (16), Germany and Switzerland (15), and Belgium, France and Sweden (14). In southern Europe and Ireland, where migration has been more labour-driven, gaps are small, and in Poland, Czechia and Portugal non-EU migrants work at higher rates than natives.

FIGURE 23

Employment gaps are largest in northern Europe, and for women

Employment rate of people aged 20–64 by country of birth, 2025, % (gap in percentage points)



Source: Eurostat, Employment rates by sex, age and country of birth (Ifsa_ergacob).

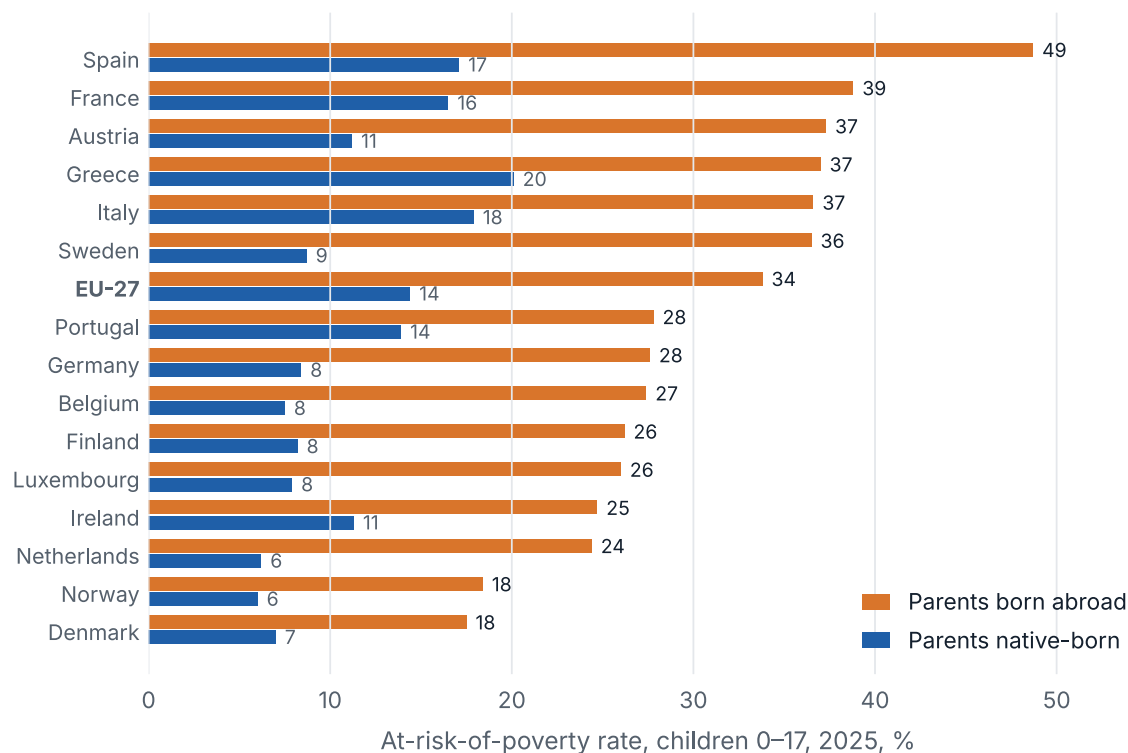
Gaps for women are much larger: 25 points in Finland, 22 in Germany, 21 in Belgium and France. They reflect a mix of lower education and language skills on arrival, family-reunification channels, child-care responsibilities, discrimination, and in some communities traditional gender norms. Female employment is one of the strongest predictors of second-generation outcomes, which makes this gap particularly consequential.

Child poverty and education

The economic position of immigrant parents passes directly to their children. In 2025, 33.8% of EU children whose parents were born abroad were at risk of poverty, against 14.4% of children of native-born parents. The ratio is highest in Sweden (36.5% vs 8.7%), Austria (37.3% vs 11.2%), the Netherlands and Belgium, all countries with very low native child poverty. In Spain almost half of children of immigrant parents are at risk of poverty.

FIGURE 24**Children of immigrants face poverty rates three to four times higher**

At-risk-of-poverty rate for children aged 0–17, by parents' country of birth, latest year, %

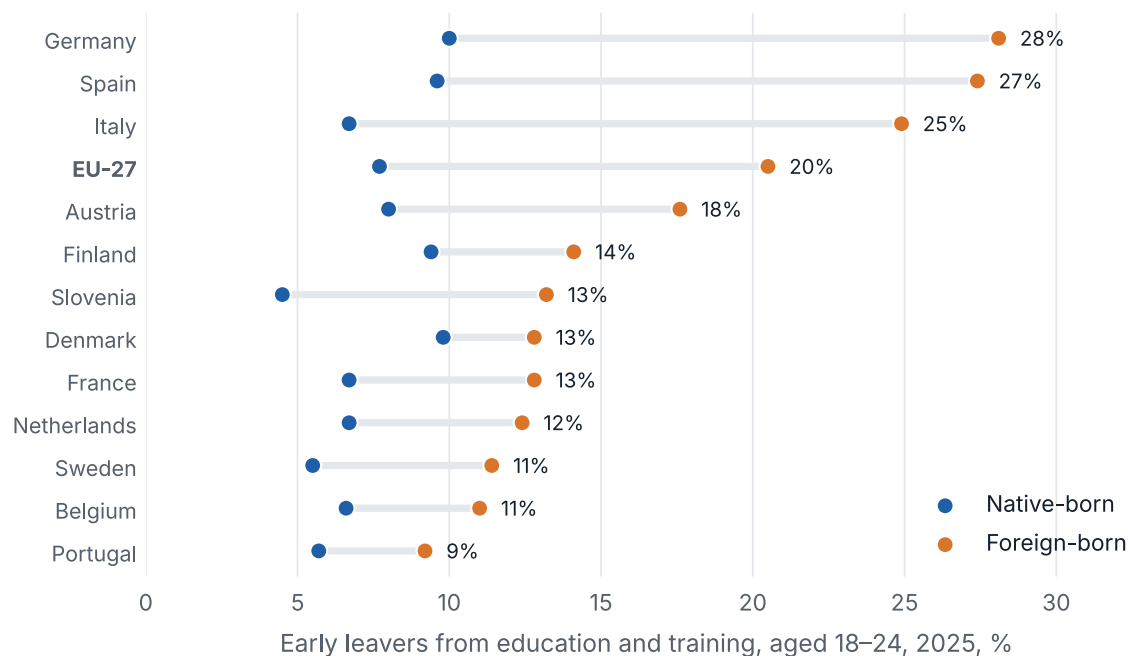


Source: Eurostat, At-risk-of-poverty rate for children by country of birth of their parents (ilc_li34).

Early school leaving shows the same pattern. Among 18–24-year-olds, 20.5% of the foreign-born left education and training early in 2025, against 7.7% of the native-born. Germany (28%), Spain (27%) and Italy (25%) have the widest gaps. These figures include young people who arrived as teenagers with interrupted schooling. Outcomes for those born in the host country are considerably better. The OECD's *Indicators of Immigrant Integration* find that native-born children of immigrants close much of the gap with peers but often not all of it. Results are strongest for children of Asian-origin and intra-European migrants and weakest for some groups of North African, Turkish and sub-Saharan African origin in continental Europe.

FIGURE 25**Early school leaving is two to three times higher among the foreign-born**

Early leavers from education and training, population aged 18–24, by country of birth, 2025, %



Source: Eurostat, Early leavers from education and training by sex and country of birth (edat_lfse_02).

Intermarriage: the blending that is actually happening

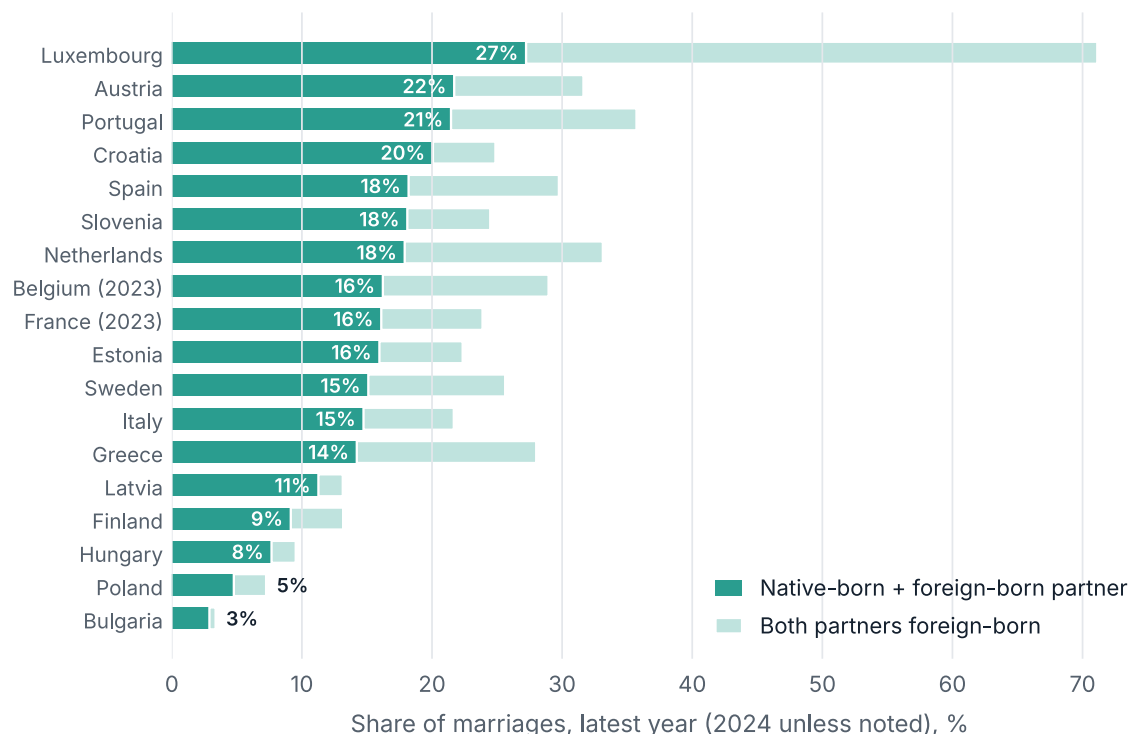
The collapse narrative often treats “ethnic blending” as a symptom of dissolution. Sociologists generally treat intermarriage the other way round, as the clearest sign that group boundaries are becoming less salient. Mixed families have historically been the main mechanism through which immigrant groups merged with the majority, as happened with Irish, Italian, Polish and Jewish Americans in the twentieth century.

Eurostat data on marriages by partners’ country of birth show that in much of western Europe 15–22% of marriages now join a native-born and a foreign-born partner. Rates are highest in Austria (22%), Portugal (21%) and Croatia (20%), and around 16–18% in Spain, the Netherlands, France and Belgium. These figures include marriages with European-born partners. In the US, Pew Research found 17% of newlyweds married someone of a different race or ethnicity in 2015, up from 3% in 1967, and the share is higher among Hispanic and Asian Americans born in the US. In the UK, one in ten households with more than one person already contains people of different ethnic groups.

FIGURE 26

Mixed marriages are now common across western Europe

Marriages by partners' country of birth, % of all marriages, latest year



Source: Eurostat, Marriages by country of birth of bride and groom (demo_marcb). Excludes countries with incomplete reporting (incl. Germany, Denmark).

Intermarriage is uneven. Rates are high between natives and European, Latin American and East Asian migrants and lower for some Muslim-majority origin groups, where in-group and transnational marriage remains common. This variation is one of the best indicators of which groups are converging and which are not. It is more informative than headline foreign-born shares.

WHAT PREDICTS INTEGRATION SUCCESS?

Research across OECD countries consistently points to a small set of factors. The most important is the entry channel: labour migrants integrate fastest, family migrants more slowly, and refugees most slowly but with steady improvement over 10–15 years. Next come language acquisition and early labour-market entry, skills recognition, residential dispersal versus concentration, school quality and early-childhood education for children of immigrants, and, increasingly, the size of a group relative to the receiving society's capacity to absorb it. Policy can influence most of these.

08

Cohesion, trust, security and public finances

The hardest questions concern cohesion: whether diverse societies can sustain trust, safety and a shared fiscal settlement. The evidence shows real costs, but costs that vary enormously with context.

Diversity and trust

Robert Putnam's 2007 study of US communities reported that residents of more diverse areas “hunker down”: they trust both their neighbours and people of other groups less. The finding started a large literature. The most comprehensive synthesis, a 2020 meta-analysis by Dinesen, Schaeffer and Sønderkov of 1,001 estimates from 87 studies, confirms a statistically significant negative relationship between ethnic diversity and social trust. The effect is stronger for trust in neighbours than for generalised trust and stronger when diversity is measured locally. Controlling for income and other factors changes it little.

The effect is real but modest. Living in a more diverse neighbourhood is associated with somewhat lower trust in neighbours. It is not associated with a collapse of generalised trust or institutional confidence at national level. Highly diverse countries such as Canada and Australia report trust levels well above the OECD average. Contact research suggests that sustained, cooperative contact, as at work, school and in mixed families, reduces prejudice over time. Rapid change and segregation tend to increase it. The data therefore support the argument that pace and concentration matter, more than the argument that diversity as such dissolves societies.

Parallel societies

At neighbourhood level, problems are more acute. Denmark's 2018 “parallel societies” legislation identified housing areas where more than half of residents had non-Western backgrounds and unemployment, crime and low education were concentrated, and required their restructuring. Swedish police publish a list of roughly 60 “vulnerable areas” where criminal networks affect local life, and they rate a subset as “particularly vulnerable.” French governments have long struggled with the *banlieues*, where riots in 2005 and 2023 exposed deep alienation among some second- and third-generation youth. These areas are where the collapse narrative is most concrete: places where the state's authority and common norms are contested. They cover a small share of national populations, but they shape national perceptions.

Crime and public safety

Crime is the most contested area of the debate, and the evidence differs sharply between Europe and the United States.

- **Europe:** Several European countries report substantial over-representation of immigrants and their descendants among crime suspects. Sweden's National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) found in 2021 that people born abroad were about 2.5 times as likely as people born in Sweden to two Swedish-born parents to be registered as suspects, and the native-born children of two foreign-born parents about 3.2 times as likely. Adjusting for age, sex and socioeconomic factors reduces the gap substantially but does not remove it. Sweden's gang-related shooting crisis, concentrated in vulnerable areas, became one of the defining political issues of the 2020s. Germany's police crime statistics similarly record non-citizens as a share of suspects well above their population share, even after excluding immigration-law offences. Over-representation is concentrated among young men from particular origin groups and those with insecure legal status.
- **United States:** In contrast, US research consistently finds immigrants are *less* likely to be incarcerated than the US-born. Abramitzky and colleagues (2023) show that immigrants have had lower incarceration rates than the US-born in every census since 1960, with the gap widening over time. Studies of undocumented immigrants in Texas reach similar conclusions.

The contrast shows that the link between immigration and crime is not fixed. It depends on who migrates, through which channel, and into what labour market and policy setting. Selective, work-based migration into a flexible labour market produces very different outcomes from humanitarian migration of young men into welfare systems with high barriers to employment.

Public finances

Fiscal studies show a similar pattern of large variation. The US National Academies (2017) found first-generation immigrants are a net cost at state and local level, mainly because of the cost of educating their children, while the second generation is among the strongest net contributors of any group. The Netherlands' *Borderless Welfare State* study (2021), using administrative data, found lifetime net contributions ranging from strongly positive for labour and student migrants from rich countries to strongly negative, several hundred thousand euros per person, for asylum migrants from some regions. Denmark's Ministry of Finance has published similar estimates by origin. The UK's Office for Budget Responsibility (2024) concluded that high-wage migrants make large positive lifetime contributions while low-wage migrants are net costs.

The conclusion is consistent across countries. The fiscal effect of immigration is overwhelmingly determined by employment and earnings, which are in turn shaped by the selection of migrants and the effectiveness of integration. Immigration can relieve the fiscal pressure of ageing, or it can add to it.

The same headline number, 15% foreign-born, can describe a fiscal asset or a fiscal burden, a safe society or a troubled one. Composition and integration explain more of the difference than scale does.

09

The political response

If any part of Western society shows signs of strain, it is democratic politics, where immigration has become a dominant issue and party systems have fragmented.

Public concern about immigration rises and falls with inflows. In the 2016 Eurobarometer, immigration topped the list of issues EU citizens considered most important for the Union, cited by 45%. Concern eased afterwards but rose again with the post-2022 inflows. In autumn 2024, 28% named migration as one of the two most important issues facing the EU, second only to the war in Ukraine. In the US, immigration was among the top two issues in the 2024 presidential election. In the UK, it has ranked at or near the top of YouGov's issue tracker since 2024.

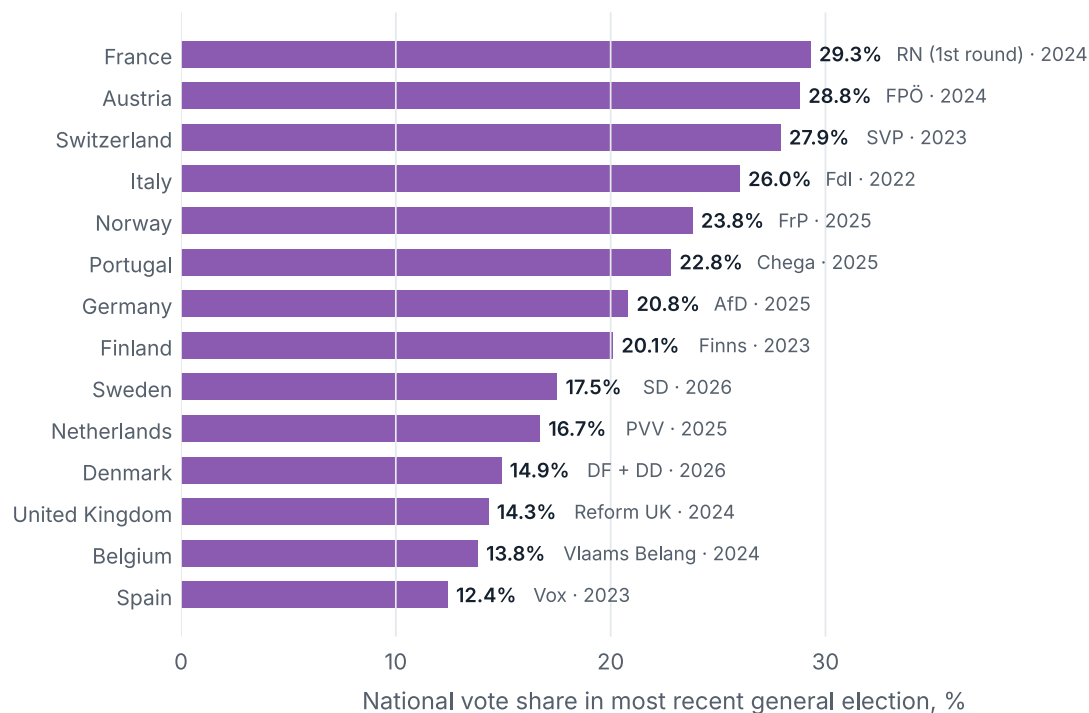
The rise of restrictionist parties

Parties that campaign mainly on reducing immigration, often described as national-populist or radical-right, have gone from the margins to the mainstream. In the most recent general elections, they won 29% in France (RN, first round 2024), 29% in Austria (FPÖ, which came first), 28% in Switzerland (SVP), 26% in Italy (Brothers of Italy, which leads the government), 24% in Norway (Progress Party), 23% in Portugal (Chega), 21% in Germany (AfD) and 20% in Finland. In Sweden the Sweden Democrats fell back from 20.5% to about 17.5% in September 2026. In the Netherlands the PVV dropped from 23.5% to 16.7% in 2025. Both remain large forces.

FIGURE 27

Restrictionist parties now win 15–30% across western Europe

Vote share of principal immigration-restrictionist party in most recent national general election, %

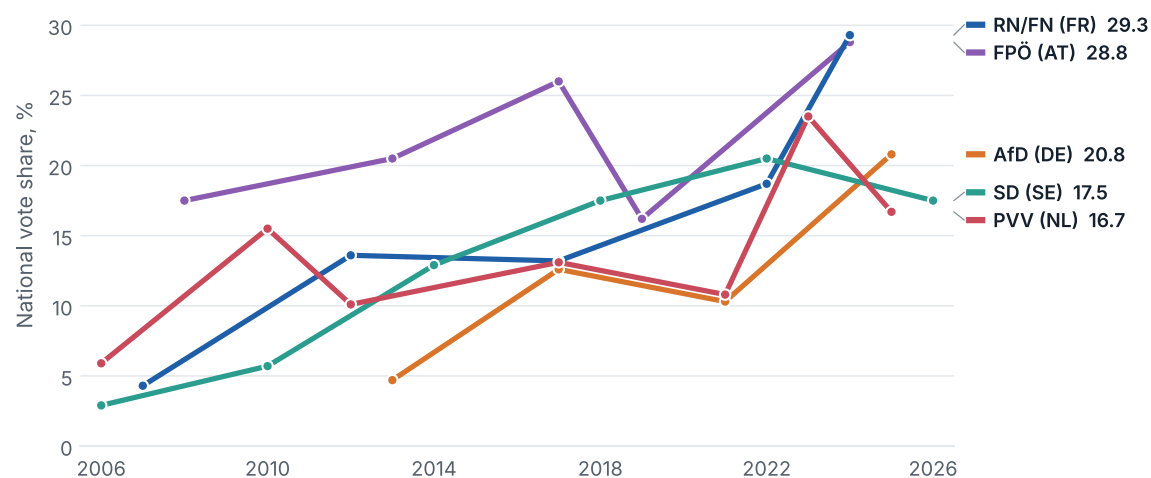


Source: National election authorities; compiled by H Heuristics. RN = first-round legislative vote 2024 (RN alone); Denmark = Danish People's Party + Denmark Democrats, 2026; UK = Reform UK, 2024.

FIGURE 28

The long rise of the restrictionist vote

National general-election vote share, selected parties, %, 2006–2026



Source: National election authorities. RN/FN: first-round legislative elections. Sweden 2026 based on preliminary final count.

Mainstream convergence

The more important change may be the shift of mainstream parties. Denmark's Social Democrats adopted some of the most restrictive asylum policies in Europe from 2019. The EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum, which comes into application in mid-2026, tightens border procedures and creates a system of mandatory solidarity among member states. The UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy have all tightened rules since 2022. Italy and others have experimented with offshore processing. In the US, the 2025–26 enforcement campaign represents the largest reversal of immigration policy in decades.

From a stability perspective, the record is mixed. Democratic systems are responding to voter preferences, often by changing policy. That is evidence of functioning institutions, not collapse. But polarisation over immigration and identity has also contributed to fragmented parliaments, unstable coalitions and declining trust in mainstream politics. In some countries, debates over national identity increasingly coincide with divisions of age, education and geography, which deepens them. The political system is the channel through which demographic change will either be managed or allowed to become destabilising.

READING THE POLITICAL SIGNAL

Electoral support for restriction is a measure of the perceived pace of change relative to a society's capacity to absorb it. It is not a direct measure of integration outcomes. Restrictionist vote shares rose fastest after sudden, visible inflows such as 2015–16 in Germany and Sweden and 2022–23 in the UK and the Netherlands. They tend to plateau or fall when inflows are reduced and governments are seen to be in control, as in Denmark after 2019 and in Sweden and the Netherlands most recently.

10

Outlook to 2075: scenarios and signposts

The future is not fixed. Ageing and population decline are largely locked in. The pace of compositional change and the success of integration are not.

What is already locked in

Some features of the next fifty years are effectively certain, because the people involved have already been born:

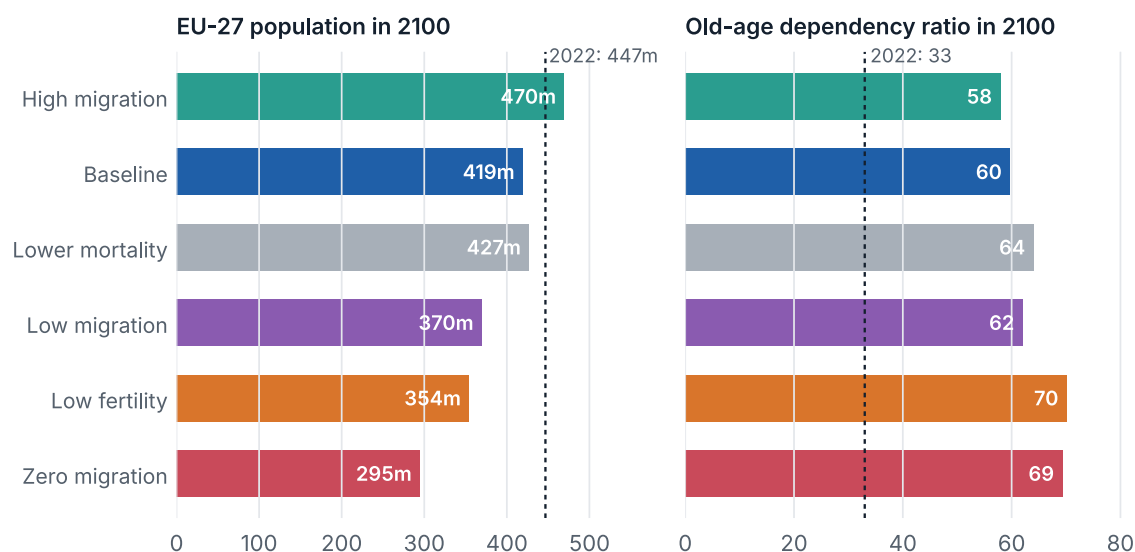
- **Continued ageing.** The EU old-age dependency ratio will reach about 50 by 2050 in every scenario. The share of the population aged 80 and over will roughly double.
- **Native population decline.** Native-born populations in most European countries will shrink for decades even if fertility recovers to 1.6–1.7, because cohorts of future parents are already small.
- **Diversification of the young.** Today's children and young adults are substantially more diverse than older generations. As cohorts turn over, national populations will come to look like today's young people, even with low future migration.
- **External migration pressure.** Africa's population will grow by about a billion by 2050. The pressure to migrate north will persist.

What remains open

The main uncertainties are the scale of future migration (a policy choice), the success of integration (partly a policy choice), the path of fertility (largely outside policy control), and economic growth, particularly whether productivity gains from automation and AI reduce dependence on labour migration. Eurostat's variants show that migration choices alone produce a difference of more than 170 million people in the EU's 2100 population, from 295 million to 470 million.

FIGURE 29**Policy choices on migration shape population size far more than ageing**

EU-27 population (millions) and old-age dependency ratio in 2100, by Eurostat EUROPOP2023 variant



Source: Eurostat (proj_23np, proj_23ndbi). Lower mortality = higher life-expectancy variant.

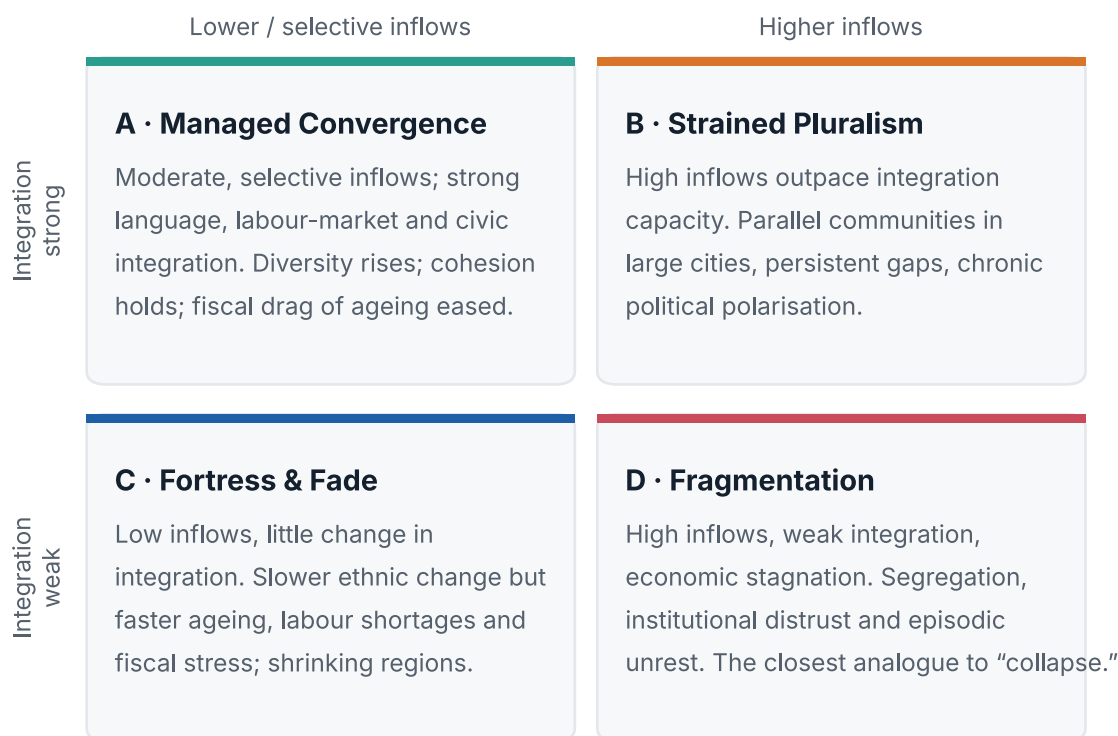
Four scenarios

We combine the two most decisive open variables, the scale of migration and the capacity to integrate, into four scenarios. They are archetypes, not forecasts. Different countries, and different cities within them, may follow different paths.

FIGURE 30

Four scenarios for Western societies to 2075

Scenario framework: migration volume vs integration capacity



Source: H Heuristics scenario analysis.

A · Managed Convergence

Inflows are moderate and increasingly selective, weighted toward labour and education migration and accompanied by stricter asylum procedures and orderly legal routes. Governments invest heavily in language training, rapid labour-market entry, school quality in high-immigration areas and residential dispersal. Second-generation outcomes converge, intermarriage continues to rise, and identities become more hyphenated but shared. By 2075 most western European countries have populations in which 35–50% have recent foreign origins, but these differences carry little more social weight than regional differences do today. This is roughly the path of the Irish, Italian and Jewish integration in the twentieth-century US, or of Canada since the 1990s. **Probability (West as a whole): moderate.**

B · Strained Pluralism

Inflows stay high, driven by labour shortages, conflict and family migration, but integration capacity does not keep up. Large cities become super-diverse and segregated. Gaps in employment and education persist into the second generation for some groups. Politics remains polarised on immigration, with restrictionist and mainstream parties alternating in power and policy oscillating. Societies function and remain broadly prosperous, but cohesion is chronically contested and trust is lower. **Probability: moderate to high. This is closest to the current trajectory of several northern European states.**

C · Fortress & Fade

Political pressure produces sharply restrictive policy: low net migration, limited family reunification, active return programmes. Compositional change slows to the pace set by today's age structure. But ageing accelerates, labour shortages become severe, rural and peripheral regions empty, and the fiscal burden of pensions and health care rises steeply. Without large productivity gains, growth stagnates. This is the path several central and eastern European states and Japan have already taken. It points to a different kind of decline, of size, capacity and vitality rather than identity. **Probability: moderate in eastern Europe; lower in the west.**

D · Fragmentation

High inflows combine with weak integration and economic stagnation. Segregated communities with high unemployment become entrenched. Criminal networks, political violence or communal unrest periodically challenge state authority in specific areas. Trust in institutions collapses among both majority and minority populations. Elections become increasingly polarised along ethnic and religious lines, and some groups reject outcomes. This is the scenario closest to the collapse thesis. It is plausible in specific cities and regions, and some indicators in some places already point toward it. It is not the central case for any Western country as a whole, and it is not driven by demography alone: it requires sustained policy failure and economic stagnation. **Probability: low for national level; material at city or regional level.**

Signposts to watch

Because the outcome is contingent, it is useful to track indicators that distinguish between the scenarios. Table 2 lists ten that we consider most informative, with current readings and the direction that would signal drift toward Fragmentation.

TABLE 2
Signposts: indicators that separate the scenarios

INDICATOR	LATEST READING	WARNING DIRECTION
Employment gap, non-EU-born vs native (20–64)	EU 8.6 pts; FI/NL/DE 15–17 pts (2025)	Widening, or no closing among those resident 10+ years
Female employment of non-EU-born women	EU 59.4% vs 73.1% native (2025)	Stagnation below 60%
Second-generation education outcomes	Partial convergence (OECD)	Second generation no better than first
Child poverty ratio (immigrant vs native parents)	EU 2.3×; SE 4.2× (2025)	Rising ratio
Intermarriage rate (native + foreign-born)	15–22% of marriages, W. Europe	Falling, or stalling for specific groups
Residential and school segregation	High in large cities; rising in some	Increase in high-concentration areas
Generalised and institutional trust	Stable to slightly declining	Sharp falls, especially among the young

INDICATOR	LATEST READING	WARNING DIRECTION
Net migration vs integration capacity	EU ~2.4m net (2024)	Sustained flows above integration-programme capacity
Electoral polarisation on ethnic lines	Rising in some states	Voting increasingly by origin group
Organised violence and no-go claims	Concentrated, e.g. Swedish gang violence	Spread of areas where state authority is contested

Wildcards

- **Automation and AI.** If AI and robotics sharply raise productivity in care, logistics and services, the economic case for labour migration weakens and Scenario C becomes more viable. If not, labour shortages will push governments toward higher inflows regardless of public opinion.
- **Climate and conflict shocks.** A major war, state collapse in North Africa or the Sahel, or severe climate events could produce sudden inflows far above any planned level, as Syria (2015) and Ukraine (2022) did.
- **A fertility turnaround.** A sustained recovery toward 1.8–2.0, unlikely on current evidence, would reduce long-run dependence on migration.
- **Large-scale return or “remigration” policies.** Increasingly discussed on the radical right. Implemented at scale, they would raise acute legal, economic and social-cohesion risks of their own.
- **Identity change.** Rising intermarriage and mixed-heritage populations may blur categories so much that the majority-minority framing loses meaning. This has happened before, with the incorporation of European immigrant groups into the US majority.

11

Conclusion: collapse, transformation, or fragmentation?

The West is not collapsing. It is being transformed, faster than at any time in its modern history, and whether that ends in renewal or fragmentation remains open.

The evidence in this report supports a more precise conclusion than either the collapse narrative or its dismissal.

The demographic premises are largely correct. Europe's native populations have not replaced themselves for fifty years and are now in natural decline. The West is ageing to a degree without historical precedent. Immigration has become the sole source of population growth in much of Europe, and it is changing the ethnic, national and religious composition of Western societies quickly, most visibly among the young and in the largest cities. Many large cities have no majority group. National majority-minority status is a matter of when, not whether, for the United States, and plausibly for several European countries within the lifetimes of today's children if current trends persist. People who say these changes are happening are describing reality. People who deny them, or attack those who describe them, damage public trust.

The mechanism is often misunderstood. Change is not driven by runaway minority fertility. Immigrant and minority birth rates are modestly higher than native rates, mostly below replacement and converging. The engine is migration combined with age structure. That has an important implication: the pace of future change is largely a matter of choice. Societies that want slower change can have it, at the price of faster ageing and labour shortages. Societies that want to sustain population and labour supply can do so, at the price of faster compositional change and a greater integration burden.

The outcome depends on integration, not on demography alone. The same demographic trends produce very different results in different settings. Canada and Australia have among the highest immigrant shares in the West and have long combined them with high social trust and broad public support for immigration, largely because their systems were selective and their governments were seen to be in control. Tellingly, that support fell sharply when temporary inflows surged after 2022, and both governments cut their targets in response. Parts of northern Europe have taken large humanitarian inflows into labour markets and welfare systems ill-suited to absorbing them. They now face persistent employment gaps, concentrated poverty, segregated neighbourhoods and, in places, serious crime problems. They also face a political backlash that is reshaping their democracies. The difference is not demographic. It is institutional.

“Collapse” is the wrong word for the West as a whole, but not for every place. No Western state shows signs of the loss of state capacity, political authority or living standards that define collapse. But specific neighbourhoods, and in a few cases larger urban areas, show some of its local features: contested

authority, parallel institutions, persistent exclusion. The risk is less a sudden civilisational collapse than gradual fragmentation, a slow erosion of the shared institutions, norms and trust that allow diverse societies to function. That risk is real, and it is greatest where high inflows meet weak integration and economic stagnation.

The West's historical record offers both warning and encouragement. Past waves of large-scale immigration produced decades of conflict, nativism and discrimination. They also ended in the incorporation of groups once considered unassimilable into a common national identity. Whether the current transformation follows that path depends on choices about the scale and selection of migration, the investment made in integration, the expectations placed on newcomers, and the honesty with which these questions are debated. The worst outcome is not demographic change itself. It is demographic change that societies refuse to discuss honestly, fail to manage, and leave to the extremes.





Annex: country indicators

Core demographic and integration indicators for the EU-27 member states, latest available year.

COUNTRY	POP. 2025 (M)	TFR 2024	FOREIGN- BORN %	NON-EU- BORN %	BIRTHS TO FB MOTHERS %	MIGR. BACKGROUND, 15-29 %	EMP. GAP, PTS	CHILD POVERTY RATIO
EU-27	450.6	1.34	14.4	10.4	23.8	26.7	+8.6	2.3×
Austria	9.2	1.31	22.5	12.8	35.7	45.3	+12.7	3.3×
Belgium	11.9	1.44	20.2	12.1	35.1	38.9	+14.3	3.7×
Bulgaria	6.4	1.72	3.8	2.7	2.6	1.9	+15.5	–
Croatia	3.9	1.46	14.1	12.4	11.1	22.1	+6.1	1.4×
Cyprus	1.0	1.38	27.6	18.4	42.3	48.9	+6.7	2.2×
Czechia	10.9	1.36	10.0	7.2	13.9	9.9	+0.8	1.6×
Denmark	6.0	1.47	14.4	9.7	20.2	15.3	+9.2	2.5×
Estonia	1.4	1.18	17.8	15.9	13.0	19.2	+2.7	2.5×
Finland	5.6	1.25	10.0	7.6	17.6	20.5	+16.9	3.2×
France	68.9	1.61	14.0	11.1	26.1	28.2	+14.1	2.4×
Germany	83.6	1.36	20.5	13.0	32.5	41.8	+15.0	3.3×
Greece	10.4	1.24	11.0	8.8	16.5	14.4	+2.1	1.8×
Hungary	9.5	1.41	7.3	3.6	4.8	6.5	+5.7	0.5×
Iceland	0.4	1.56	21.8	8.6	24.8	35.1	+5.9	–
Ireland	5.4	1.47	23.3	16.6	33.0	40.3	+1.2	2.2×
Italy	58.9	1.18	11.8	9.1	22.4	21.6	+1.6	2.0×
Latvia	1.9	1.24	11.6	10.4	5.0	15.4	+7.2	1.2×
Lithuania	2.9	1.11	9.7	9.0	5.1	7.2	+4.2	–
Luxembourg	0.7	1.25	51.5	19.0	67.5	75.1	–0.4	3.3×
Malta	0.6	1.01	32.0	24.6	38.2	41.4	–	1.0×
Netherlands	18.0	1.43	16.8	12.4	22.0	33.5	+16.1	3.9×
Norway	5.6	1.45	18.7	11.9	27.1	31.6	+13.1	3.1×
Poland	36.5	1.14	2.6	1.9	7.4	4.6	–4.8	1.9×
Portugal	10.7	1.41	–	–	33.0	26.3	–0.3	2.0×
Romania	19.0	1.39	6.2	4.5	2.6	1.0	+4.2	–
Slovakia	5.4	1.46	4.0	1.1	2.9	2.5	–6.5	1.6×
Slovenia	2.1	1.52	15.5	12.6	21.1	21.9	+2.0	3.0×
Spain	49.1	1.10	19.3	16.0	33.2	34.0	+4.6	2.8×
Sweden	10.6	1.43	20.8	15.5	29.8	38.9	+13.7	4.2×
Switzerland	9.1	1.29	31.7	14.9	45.3	56.7	+14.8	–

Definitions and sources. Population and foreign-born shares on 1 January 2025 (Eurostat migr_pop3ctb). TFR = total fertility rate, 2024 (demo_find). Births to foreign-born (FB) mothers, 2024 (demo_facbc). Migration background = foreign-born or native-born with at least one foreign-born parent, aged 15–29, 2025, private households (Ifsa_pgaccpm). Employment gap = native-born minus non-EU-born employment rate, ages 20–64, 2025 (Ifsa_ergacob); positive values mean non-EU-born adults are less likely to be employed. Child poverty ratio = at-risk-of-poverty rate of children with foreign-born parents divided by that of children with native-born parents, latest year (ilc_li34). “–” = not available or unreliable (small samples).

Methodological notes and references

Methodological notes

Data vintages. Eurostat datasets were extracted through the Eurostat dissemination API in October 2026. EU-27 aggregates refer to the current composition. UN figures are from *World Population Prospects 2024* (estimates to 2023; medium-variant projections thereafter) and UN DESA *International Migrant Stock 2024*, accessed via Our World in Data. US population figures are Census Bureau Vintage 2024 estimates for 1 July 2024 (single-race, non-Hispanic groups). US fertility rates are from CDC/NCHS final 2024 birth data.

Definitions. “Foreign-born” follows the country-of-birth concept used by Eurostat; it includes nationals born abroad. “Migration background” in Figure 15 follows the Eurostat LFS concept (foreign-born, or native-born with at least one foreign-born parent), which differs from national definitions (e.g. Destatis requires that the person or both parents immigrated). Figure 18 deliberately labels each definition; values are not directly comparable. Election results are national vote shares from official sources; the 2026 Swedish figure is from the preliminary final count.

Projections. Eurostat EUROPOP2023 variants: baseline (BSL), high and low migration ($\pm 33\%$ approx.), zero migration, low fertility (-20%), lower mortality. Projections are conditional on assumptions and do not forecast policy changes. Recent observed births (EU 3.55 million in 2024) are already below the baseline’s assumed path, suggesting downside risk to population totals.

Limitations. Cross-national integration indicators are affected by differences in migrant composition, legal regimes and survey coverage (LFS-based migration-status data under-cover some groups). Fertility comparisons by origin rely on different bases (citizenship in Germany, country of birth in the UK and France, race/ethnicity in the US). Crime and fiscal figures cited are drawn from the cited national studies and are not harmonised.

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