

The challenges of population ageing and migration in the French overseas *départements*

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The French overseas *départements* (DOMs) are generally perceived as young societies with rapidly expanding populations. Yet, with the exception of French Guiana, the opposite is true: Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion are among the French *départements* most affected by demographic ageing. As explained here by Didier Breton, Stéphanie Condon, Franck Temporal and Claude-Valentin Marie, head of an INSEE-INED sociodemographic survey in the DOMs, this ageing process will be very rapid, and represents a key challenge for these *départements*, alongside that of migration.

The population of the four French overseas *départements* (DOMs) is younger than that of the mainland. While the proportion of under-20s in metropolitan France was 25% in 2006, it stood at 34% in the DOMs. The respective proportions were 45% in French Guiana, 35% in Réunion, 31% in Guadeloupe and 29% in Martinique (Table). The population is ageing more quickly in the three island DOMs (Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion), however, under the combined effects of higher life expectancy, fewer births and the emigration of young adults (both men and women). The demographic transition has been very rapid on these three islands, and this explains why, as is the case in many Southern regions, population ageing is much more rapid than in the North [1]. The situation in French Guiana is very different, however. The population there is younger and is growing much faster due to high fertility and large-scale immigration. What is the demographic outlook in the four French DOMs?

◆ A two-fold increase in the over-60s by 2030 in Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion

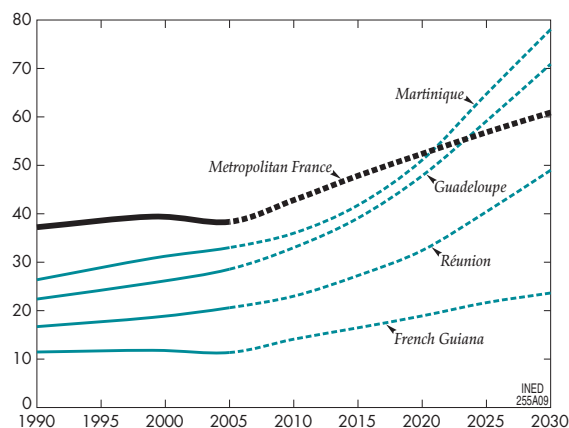
Contrary to the common belief that the French island DOMs are young societies with unbridled population

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Figure 1 - Old-age dependency ratio* in the DOMs and in metropolitan France, 1990 and 2030

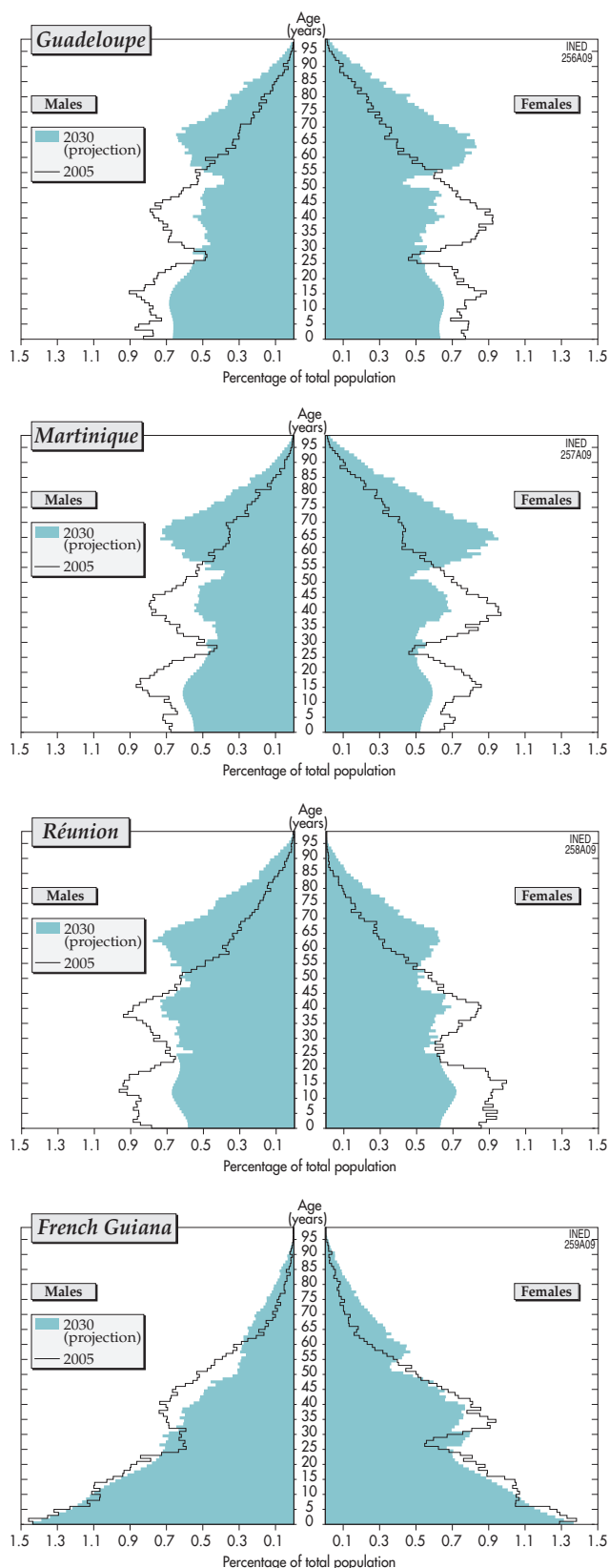


(D. Breton, S. Condon, C.-V. Marie, F. Temporal, *Population & Societies*, 460, INED, October 2009)

* Number of persons aged 60+ per 100 working-age adults aged 20-59. Source: INSEE (census and population projections, medium variant).

growth, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion are among the French *départements* most affected by population ageing. Under INSEE's medium projections, the share of persons aged 60 and above should double between 2005 and 2030, rising from 17% to 34% in Martinique, from 15% to 31% in Guadeloupe and from 11% to 24% in Réunion. Martinique and Guadeloupe will even overtake the mainland (29%), joining the list of French regions with the highest proportions of seniors.

Figure 2 - Population pyramid of French overseas départements on 1 January 2005 and in 2030 (projections)



Note: Relative numbers, for a total of 100 persons. The total surface area is the same from one pyramid to the next. The population increase in each DOM between 2005 and 2030 is "neutralized".

Sources: • Réunion: *Économie de La Réunion*, n° 134, dossier "les nouvelles projections" • Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana: "Les projections de population aux Antilles-Guyane à l'horizon 2030", les cahiers Antilles-Guyane, INSEE, November 2001.

(D. Breton, S. Condon, C.-V. Marie, F. Temporal, *Population & Societies*, 460, INED, October 2009)

A second indicator, the *old-age dependency ratio*, i.e. the ratio of over-60s to adults aged 20-59 in the population, could triple between 1990 and 2030 on all three islands (Figure 1). With around 80 persons aged 60 or over for every 100 persons aged 20-59 in Martinique in 2030, and 70 in Guadeloupe, the dependency ratio could be even higher on these islands than in metropolitan France (61%).

◆ The key role of migration

Migration has long been an important factor in the demography of the French DOMs, both in past centuries, with the arrival of settlers to develop the colonial economy and, more recently, in the second half of the twentieth century, with the emigration of young native-born adults looking for work abroad, and the immigration of French and foreign nationals (1).

In recent decades, migration inflows and outflows have been relatively well-balanced on all three island DOMs, and have not apparently modified the population growth rate, which is mainly attributable to the difference between births and deaths. Yet due to the departure of young, mostly native-born adults, net migration at ages 20-30 is now negative, while the arrival of new immigrants and the return of older or retired native-born adults has led to positive net migration at older ages. Migration has thus affected the population structure by raising the proportion of non-natives (mainland French nationals and foreigners)

(1) Here, "migration" signifies the departure and return of persons native to the *département*, and the entries and exits of non-natives, whether French or foreign.

Why is there a "dent" in the pyramid at ages 20-34?

The dent in the pyramid at young adult ages can be explained by:

- the emigration of young adults which is not counterbalanced by returning natives or the arrival of non-natives (most emigrants return after age 30). These migration flows accelerate population ageing.
- the fact that certain return migrants had children while living abroad (in metropolitan France or another country) and these children choose to remain abroad after reaching adulthood. These emigrants account for a shortfall of births in the DOMs among native-born inhabitants.

Assumptions of the INSEE medium variant projections

Fertility

In Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana, fertility remains at the level observed in 1999-2005. In Réunion, there is a steady decrease from the current level of 3.5 children per woman down to 2.1 (replacement level) in 2030.

Mortality

Life expectancy gains follow the trend observed over the last 15 years in metropolitan France. Differences between male and female life expectancies grow smaller. The death rates in the regions parallel this trend, under the assumption of stable mortality differences between regions.

Migration

Migration rates (by sex and age) are maintained at the estimated levels of 1990-2005.

Table – Sociodemographic indicators in the French overseas départements

	Guadeloupe	Martinique	Réunion	French Guiana	Metropolitan France	
Demography						
Population on 1 January 2006 (thousands of inhabitants)	401	398	782	206	59 672	
Projected population in 2030 (medium variant) (thousands of inhabitants)	548	427	1 026	424	67 204	
Annual population growth (mean over the period 1999-2006)	– natural increase (births minus deaths) (%)	1.0	0.7	1.6	2.6	0.4
	– net migration (arrivals minus departures) (%)	-0.5	-0.1	0.1	1.4	0.3
	– total increase (%)	0.5	0.6	1.7	4.0	0.7
Fertility in 2006 (mean number of children per woman)	2.3	2.0	2.4	3.5	2.0	
Life expectancy at birth in 2006 (years)	– males	75.0	76.2	73.2	74.4	77.3
	– females	82.7	84.6	80.9	81.0	84.0
Percentage aged 60+ in 2005	15	17	11	6	21	
Percentage aged 60+ in 2030 (projection, medium variant)	31	34	24	11	29	
Mean household size in 2006 (number of residents)	2.6	2.6	3.0	3.5	2.3	
Percentage of one-person households in 2006	29	29	20	20	33	
Percentage aged 50+ living alone in 2006	25	24	17	19	24	
Percentage of population born in France	92	97	96	68	89	
Percentage of population born in <i>département</i> of residence	79	85	85	56	53	
Percentage of population born abroad	8	3	4	32	11	
Older adults						
Number of permanent or temporary places in retirement homes (per 1,000 persons aged 75+)	15	51	45	95	121	
Number of home nursing care places (per 1,000 persons aged 75+)	20	8	16	21	17	
Number of nursing home places (per 1,000 persons aged 75+)	39	60	41	192	95	
Percentage aged 60+ receiving minimum old-age pension in 2006	31	27	32	20	4	
Unemployment and economic insecurity						
Unemployment rate, as defined by census (among persons aged 15+) (%)	– males	26	22	30	24	10
	– females	32	27	36	34	13
Unemployment rate, as defined by census (among persons aged under 30) (%)	– males	45	39	42	35	16
	– females	47	41	47	42	19
Percentage aged 20+ receiving welfare benefits (RMI, RSA) in 2006	28	25	29	20	7	
Percentage of population covered by the RMI (beneficiary, spouse, dependents)	18	16	21	15	4	
<i>Sources: INSEE, Annual census survey 2009 / DREES database.</i>						
<i>(D. Breton, S. Condon, C.-V. Marie, F. Temporal, Population & Societies, 460, INED, October 2009)</i>						

and accelerating demographic ageing [2], thereby affecting natural growth.

The situation varies considerably from one DOM to another (Table and Figure 2). Martinique and Guadeloupe were the first DOMs to be affected in the 1960s and 1970s by massive outflows of emigrants leaving the island to settle in metropolitan France. They were also the first to experience the return migration of retirees at the end of their working career on the mainland. The situation in French Guiana is very different. Here, the population is growing rapidly under the combined effects of a large surplus of births over deaths (which explains 60% of population growth between 1999 and 2006) and large-scale immigration

(which explains 40%). In 2005, 32% of residents in French Guiana were born abroad, and among the foreign-born, 12% had lived there for less than 5 years.

◆ Can family solidarity meet the challenge of an ageing population?

In Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion, no more than 1% to 3% of older adults were living in retirement or nursing homes in 1999. The vast majority live with their children in their own home. In these *départements* where residential and nursing facilities for the over-75s are scarce (Table), family solidarity still has an important role to play.

In a context of population ageing, increasingly individualistic lifestyles, less frequent intergenerational cohabitation and persistent social insecurity, is this situation sustainable over the long term?

In the DOMs, the inequality of access to social protection, which has long set these *départements* apart from metropolitan France, affects the older population in particular. This problem is compounded by the insecure labour market situation which often makes it difficult, or even impossible, to accrue adequate pension rights: in the three island *départements* (Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion), the share of over-60s receiving the minimum pension is currently much higher than in metropolitan France (Table). The outlook for the coming years does not look promising. In a society marked by endemic unemployment, job insecurity for a large share of the working population, heavy dependence on welfare benefits (RMI, API) and early withdrawal from the labour market of many middle-aged adults entitled to the RSO solidarity allowance (2), there is every reason to fear that living conditions will be difficult for people reaching retirement age in the coming years. Many will not be entitled to full pensions, despite longer contribution periods, while their children or potential carers, in a climate of economic insecurity, will be less able to maintain the tradition of intergenerational solidarity.

◆ An INED-INSEE survey of the French DOMs

The demographic transition, population ageing and migration are affecting the four French overseas départements much more radically than the other French regions, and far-reaching political and social measures will be required to accompany these changes. The problem is all the more challenging given the relative scarcity of data on these phenomena. To develop a better understanding of these issues, from autumn 2009 to spring 2010, INED and INSEE is conducting a sociodemographic survey on migration, families and ageing in the four DOMs on a sample of 21,500 people aged 18-79. Respondents are asked about their family, occupational and migration histories and their living conditions.

(2) The *revenu de solidarité* (RSO) is a benefit specific to the French overseas territories intended for unemployed persons aged over 50 who agree to withdraw from the labour market. It is paid up to age 65, until beneficiaries become entitled to old-age benefits (retirement pension or minimum old-age pension).

REFERENCES

- [1] Gilles Pison - "Population ageing will be faster in the South than in the North", *Population & Societies*, 457, June 2009.
 [2] Claude-Valentin Marie and Jean-Louis Rallu - "Migrations croisées entre DOM et métropole: l'emploi comme moteur de la migration", *Espace, Populations et Sociétés: Regards vers l'Outre-Mer français*, 2004, 2, pp. 237-252.

Demography of the French overseas départements

• Faster growth in French Guiana and Réunion

On 1 January 2006, the four French overseas départements had 1,786,384 inhabitants. Their populations are increasing at different rates: in Guadeloupe and Martinique, annual growth was 0.5% and 0.6%, respectively, over the period 1999-2006, slightly below that of metropolitan France (0.7%), while in Réunion it was higher (1.7%), and in French Guiana much higher still (4.0%) (Table). The rapid growth in French Guiana and Réunion is due to a relatively young age structure combined with high fertility.

• Strong and relatively early fertility

In French Guiana, the total fertility rate was 3.5 children per woman in 2006 (Table). It was lower in Guadeloupe and Réunion (2.3 and 2.4 children, respectively), which count among the most fertile French départements, alongside Mayenne and Val-d'Oise, among others, on the mainland. Fertility in Martinique is relatively low, slightly below the national average (2.0 in 2006).

There are far more births to young mothers in the DOMs than in metropolitan France*. The four overseas départements account for one in six of all births to mothers under age 20 in France, but just one in twenty-five of births to mothers of all ages.

• More single-parent families than in metropolitan France

The large proportion of single-parent families (around one-fifth of all households in 2006) is another feature of the DOMs which is more comparable with neighbouring countries than with the situation in metropolitan France (fewer than one-tenth of all households). In Guadeloupe and Martinique and in French Guiana, more than 40% of children live in single-parent families, and 29% in Réunion, versus 22% in metropolitan France. Most of these families comprise a mother living alone with one or more children.

• Life expectancy is catching up with metropolitan France

Life expectancy has increased considerably in the DOMs over recent decades. Martinique and Guadeloupe have practically caught up with metropolitan France, while French Guiana and Réunion are steadily narrowing the gap (Table). The life expectancy differential between males and females is still higher in the DOMs than in metropolitan France, which already has one of the largest gender gaps in the developed world.

* 5% to 12% of births in 2006 were to mothers below age 20, compared with 2% in metropolitan France.

ABSTRACT

The population of the four French overseas départements (DOMs) is younger than that of metropolitan France. In 2006, the under-20s represented 35% of the population in Réunion, 31% in Guadeloupe, 29% in Martinique and 45% in French Guiana, versus just 25% on the mainland. But, paradoxically, their populations are ageing more quickly due to the combined effects of longer life expectancy, fewer births and the emigration of young adults (both men and women). By 2030, the proportion of over-60s is expected to double in Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion. In a context of unemployment and job insecurity, living conditions for future retirees may be difficult, and they may receive less family support in old age than today.