Number 631
March 2025

Version française

Population & Societies

Is the French population on a path to decline?

Gilles Pison* and Laurent Toulemon**

Women in France are having fewer children. At the same time, deaths are rising and may soon outnumber births. Is this a warning sign of future population decline? Gilles Pison and Laurent Toulemon project population growth up to 2070 and highlight the importance of migration in future trends. They also examine why life expectancy is now increasing more slowly.

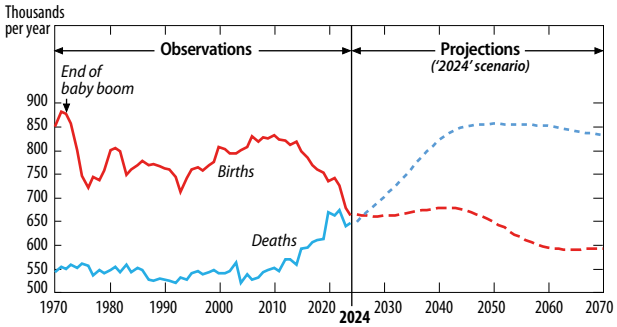
The population of France on 1 January 2025 was an estimated 68.6 million, of which 66.4 million in metropolitan France (mainland France and Corsica) and 2.3 million in the overseas departments and regions [1]. It grew by 169,000 in 2024 (+0.25%) (Table 1). One-tenth of this increase was due to a larger number of births than deaths (natural increase) and nine-tenths to positive net migration (entries into France minus departures, estimated at 152,000 by the French statistical office [INSEE]). With the decrease in births and the rise in deaths (Figure 1), the downtrend in natural increase is continuing. In just 5 years, it has fallen from 140,000 (in 2019) to 17,000 (in 2024). Does this decrease signal a future population decline? After examining this question, we will then analyse mortality trends and the reasons why progress in life expectancy is slowing.

In 2021, INSEE published population projections up to 2070 based on demographic trends of the previous years [2]. The baseline scenario assumes that fertility remains stable at its 2020 level of 1.8 children per woman, that mortality continues to decrease at the same pace as during the 2010s, and that net migration remains stable at +70,000 per year. Under this scenario, the population of France continues to increase to a peak of 69.3 million in 2044, then falls to 68.1 million in 2070 [3] (Figure 2).

What if the conditions of 2024 persist?

The changes observed since these projections were published do not match those of the baseline scenario, while remaining within the bounds of the 'high' and 'low' scenarios. This is not surprising, as all projections are inevitably challenged and sometimes contradicted by reality. The aim is not to foresee the future but to determine how it would look under different sets of conditions.

Figure 1. Births and deaths in France, 1970–2024, and projections up to 2070 ('2024' scenario)



Gilles Pison, Laurent Toulemon, *Population & Societies*, no. 631, March 2025, INED.

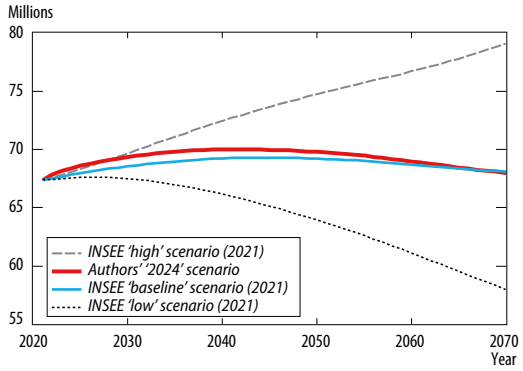
Sources: INSEE (observations); authors (projections).

We made a new projection based on a '2024' scenario which assumes that fertility remains stable at its 2024 level (1.62 children per woman rather than 1.8 as in the INSEE baseline scenario). Fertility may continue to fall in coming years, it may stabilize, as in some European countries, or move up again, as it did after the period 1993–1994 when it dipped to a low of 1.68 children per woman. The assumption that fertility will remain at its current level represents a compromise between several possibilities.

Thanks to a sharp decrease in mortality between 2022 and 2023, life expectancy recovered to the level recorded in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, and even exceeded it. Life expectancy continued to increase in 2024, but more slowly (Figure 3). The progress observed in the last few years is finally below that of INSEE's baseline scenario and is closer to the

* National Museum of Natural History and French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED).
** French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED).

Figure 2. Population of France up to 2070 under different scenarios



Gilles Pison, Laurent Toulemon, *Population & Societies*, no. 631, March 2025, INED.

Notes:

INSEE 'baseline' scenario (2021): constant fertility of 1.8 children per woman, constant net migration of +70,000 per year, mortality declining at the same rate as the average for the 2010s.

Authors' '2024' scenario: constant fertility of 1.62 children per woman, constant net migration of +152,000 per year, (76,000 females and 76,000 males) slow mortality decline: INSEE's 2021 low assumption for female life expectancy, assumption between low and medium for males (see online appendix).

INSEE 'high' scenario (2021): constant fertility of 2.0 children per woman, constant net migration of +120,000 per year, rapid mortality decline.

INSEE 'low' scenario (2021): constant fertility of 1.6 children per woman, constant net migration of +20,000 per year, slow mortality decline.

low assumption, for women especially. For the '2024' scenario, we apply this low assumption for female life expectancy improvement, and an intermediate assumption for males (see online appendix[1]).

For net migration, we assume a stable level of 152,000 per year (equal numbers of males and females), the provisional estimate for 2024, rather than 70,000 as chosen for the 2021 baseline scenario on the basis of trends observed in the 2000s.

Natural increase continues to fall...

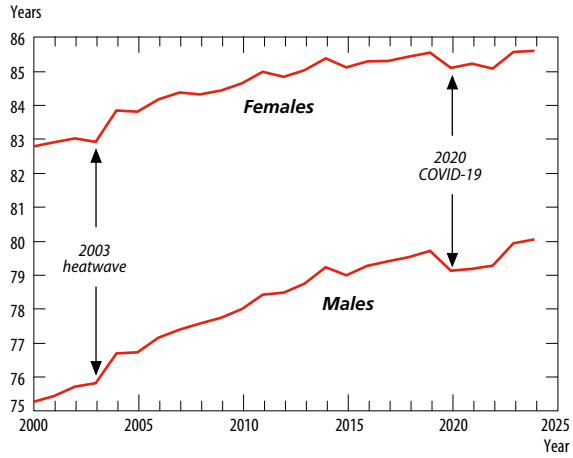
The 2024 projection up to 2070 sees a decrease in births and a rise in deaths, with natural increase becoming negative in 2027 (Figure 1). From then on, the deficit widens steadily, reaching –256,000 by around 2060 before stabilizing. The increase in deaths corresponds to the gradual extinction of the large baby-boom cohorts as they reach advanced ages. Meanwhile, births increase slightly in the next 2 decades as the large cohorts born around 2010 reach reproductive age (Figure 4).

... but population growth continues for 2 more decades

Although natural increase will soon become negative, the 2024 scenario projects that the French population will increase to 70 million in the 2040s before declining to 68 million in 2070 (Figure 2). This projection is very similar to that of INSEE's 2021 baseline scenario, although different factors are at play, with higher net migration in the 2024 scenario making up for lower fertility and the slower increase in life expectancy. The population ages substantially and in a similar manner under both scenarios,

(1) https://doi.org/10.34847/nkl.46b1159z

Figure 3. Life expectancy at birth in France since 2000



Gilles Pison, Laurent Toulemon, *Population & Societies*, no. 631, March 2025, INED.

Source: INSEE.

with slightly more males and slightly fewer children and older women in 2070 in the 2024 scenario than in the baseline scenario (see detailed projections in the online appendix).

A stalling of progress in life expectancy

Let us examine why progress in life expectancy is projected to stall under the 2024 scenario.

There were 646,000 deaths in France in 2024 [1], 7,000 more than in 2023 (639,000 deaths) (Table 1). This rise is due partly to demographic growth and ageing, which increase the number of older adults in the population. Calculating life expectancy provides a means to eliminate components of mortality linked to variations in population size and age distribution, so that only the risk of dying is taken into account. Life expectancy at birth increased by 0.1 years for males in 2024 and stagnated for females, reaching 80.0 years for males and 85.6 years for females versus 79.9 years and 85.6 years, respectively, in 2023 (Table 1 and Figure 3). As mentioned above, life expectancy increased sharply between 2022 and 2023, by 0.6 years for males and 0.5 years for females.[2]

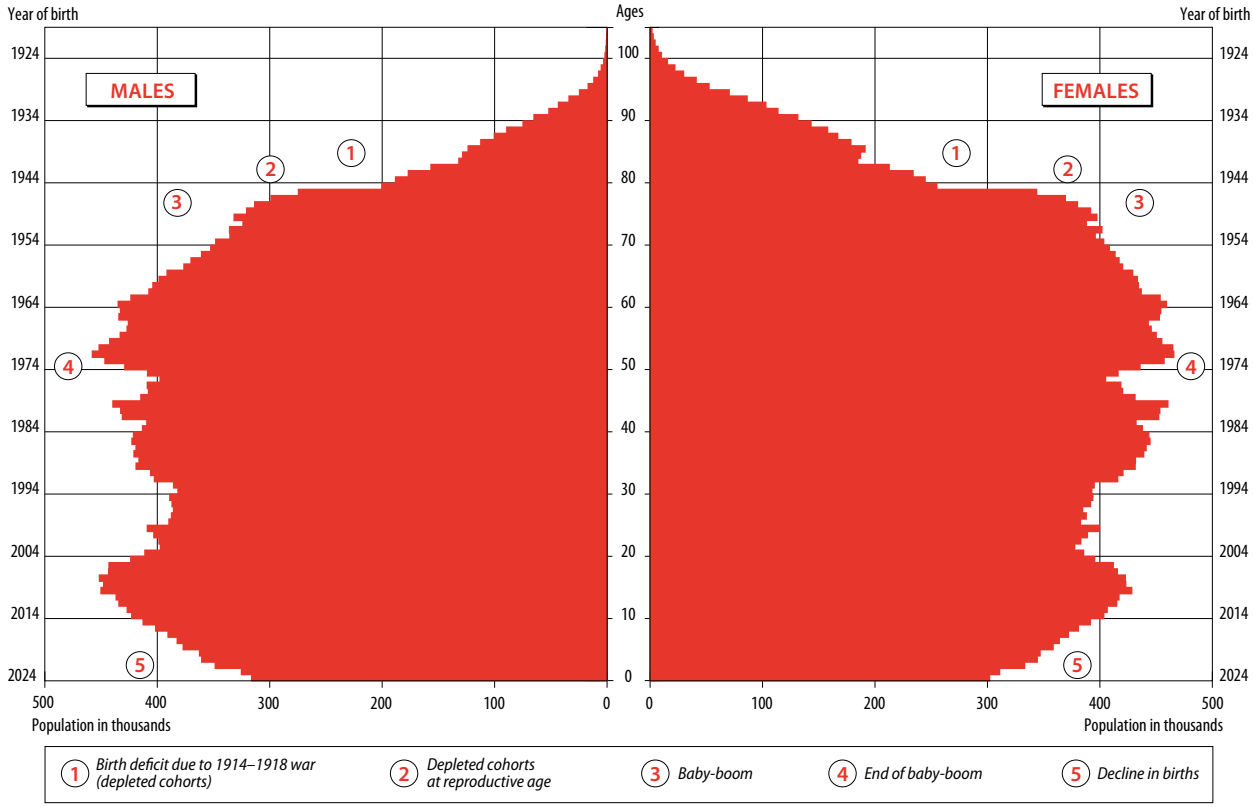
Viewed in relation to longer-term trends, the recent annual life expectancy fluctuations show that progress is slowing (Figure 3). For what reason?

Why was life expectancy increasing up to now?

Since the mid-20th century, life expectancy at birth has increased by around 3 months each year in France, rising from 66.4 years for both sexes in 1950 to 82.8 years in 2024. This upward trend is due mainly to progress in reducing adult mortality, especially at advanced ages when an increasing number of deaths occur. Child mortality, whose decline was

(2) With the gains of 2023, life expectancy has caught up with and exceeded the 2019 level for males, and equalled it for females. This followed a fall in 2020, and stagnation or only marginal increase in 2021 and 2022 due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with several severe winter flu outbreaks and summer heatwaves.

Figure 4. Population pyramid of France on 1 January 2025



Gilles Pison, Laurent Toulemon, *Population & Societies*, no. 631, March 2025, INED.

Coverage: Whole of France.
Source: INSEE, Population estimates.

Table 1. Demographic indicators 1950–2024, France[1]

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (p)	2024 (p)
Births (m)	862	820	850	800	762	775	802	770	759	753	735	742	726	678	663
Deaths (m)	534	521	542	547	526	531	540	606	610	613	669	662	675	639	646
Natural increase (m)	328	299	308	253	236	244	262	163	149	140	66	80	51	39	17
Net migration (m)	35	140	180	44	80	70	43	155	201	128	140	190	152	152	152
Total growth (m)	363	439	488	297	316	314	305	318	349	268	206	270	203	191	169
Adjustment[2] (m)	-	-	-	-	–53	94	-	–100	–84	–84	49	93	–17	-	-
Birth rate (t)	20.6	17.9	16.7	14.9	13.4	13.1	12.8	11.5	11.3	11.2	10.9	10.9	10.7	9.9	9.7
Death rate (t)	12.8	11.4	10.7	10.2	9.3	9.0	8.6	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.9	9.7	9.9	9.4	9.4
Infant mortality rate (r)	52.0	27.4	18.2	10.0	7.3	4.4	3.5	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.7	3.9	4.0	4.1
Total fertility rate (e)	2.95	2.74	2.48	1.94	1.78	1.87	2.02	1.89	1.87	1.86	1.82	1.83	1.78	1.66	1.62
Life expectancy:															
Males (a)	63.4	67.0	68.4	70.2	72.7	75.3	78.0	79.4	79.5	79.7	79.1	79.2	79.3	79.9	80.0
Females (a)	69.2	73.6	75.9	78.4	81.0	82.8	84.7	85.3	85.4	85.6	85.1	85.2	85.1	85.6	85.6
Marriages[3] (m)	331	320	394	334	287	298	245	234	235	225	156	219	242	242	247
Marriage rate (t)	7.9	7.0	7.8	6.2	5.1	5.0	3.9	3.5	3.5	3.3	2.3	3.2	3.6	3.5	3.6
Population[4] (m)	42,010	45,904	51,016	54,029	56,841	59,267	63,070	66,992	67,258	67,442	67,697	68,060	68,246	68,437	68,606
Under 20[2] (m)	12,710	14,991	16,772	16,380	15,605	15,068	15,440	16,313	16,287	16,213	16,119	16,050	15,960	15,860	15,734
65 and over[2] (m)	4,796	5,347	6,598	7,466	8,039	9,561	10,667	13,167	13,462	13,744	13,967	14,207	14,422	14,669	14,925
Under 20[2] %	30.3	32.7	32.9	30.3	27.5	25.4	24.5	24.4	24.2	24.0	23.8	23.6	23.4	23.2	22.9
65 and over[2] %	11.4	11.6	12.9	13.8	14.1	16.1	16.9	19.7	20.0	20.4	20.6	20.9	21.1	21.4	21.8

(a) Years – (e) Children per woman – (m) In thousands – (p) Provisional – (r) Per 1,000 live births – (t) Per 1,000 population.
(1) From 1950 to 2010: metropolitan France; from 2017: whole of France (including overseas departments).
(2) Population estimates for the years 1990 and 2000 and for the years 2017–2022 were adjusted to establish accounting consistency between the 1990, 1999, and 2006 censuses (for 1990 and 2000) and between the censuses of 2017 and the following years for the years 2016–2022 (see [1]).
(3) Including same-sex marriages from 2013.
(4) At year-end.
Source: INSEE, Division des enquêtes et études démographiques (https://www.insee.fr).

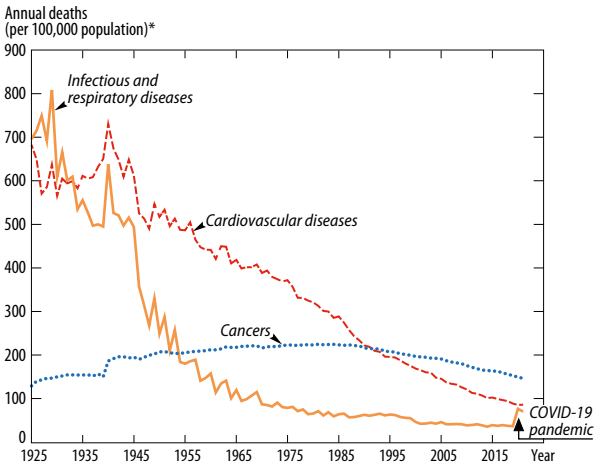
a key driver of life expectancy increase from the late 18th to the mid-20th centuries, has practically no effect today, as it has now reached an extremely low level.(3)

In the mid-20th century, it was the decline in infectious disease mortality that drove the rapid increase in life expectancy. But the share of these diseases in overall mortality has fallen sharply, so any additional gains resulting from their further decline will be small.

A decline in cardiovascular and cancer mortality

Cardiovascular diseases and cancer are now the leading causes of death (Figure 5). Progress in combating these diseases has reduced mortality levels since the 1970s and driven the steady increase in life expectancy.

Figure 5. Mortality trends by cause of death in France, 1925–2021



Gilles Pison, Laurent Toulemon, *Population & Societies*, no. 631, March 2025, INED.

* Standardized mortality rates calculated by applying the age-specific rates observed each year to a fixed age structure.

Sources : Inserm-CepiDc, Breton et al. 2024 [4].

Mortality from diseases of the heart and circulatory system has plummeted in the last half century thanks to the 'cardiovascular revolution', with major advances in the prevention and management of these pathologies [4]. Cancer mortality, which increased between 1925 and 1995, is now declining thanks to earlier diagnosis, improved treatments, and a reduction in risk behaviours such as smoking.

The slower increase in life expectancy over the last decade is perhaps a sign that the benefits of the cardiovascular revolution have now reached a plateau and that future progress may depend increasingly on the fight against cancers, now the leading cause of death. So far, the benefits of cancer reduction in terms of life expectancy have been less spectacular than those linked to the cardiovascular revolution. Male cancer mortality has fallen substantially, and the decrease is ongoing. Female cancer mortality is lower but has declined more slowly in recent years due to the rise in smoking-related cancers. Many women born in the 1930s were smokers between the 1950s and 1980s and are suffering the consequences several decades later [4].

(3) Infant mortality has stopped declining in France since 2010 (see Table 1). Even if it were to decline again, given its very low level, this would have practically no impact on life expectancy at birth.

***

The future is not written in stone, and the 2024 scenario projection is just one of many possible developments. Fertility may continue to decline, net migration may rise or fall, and new mortality crises may occur. This projection nonetheless shows that if fertility and net migration remain stable after 2024 and life expectancy continues to rise, the population of France should not start to fall within the next 2 decades. Until then, positive net migration should more than offset future negative natural increase.

References

[1] Thélot H. 2025. Bilan démographique 2024. En 2024, la fécondité continue de diminuer, l'espérance de vie se stabilise. *Insee première*, 2033.
https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/8327319

[2] Algava E., Blanpain N. 2021. 68,1 millions d'habitants en 2070 : une population un peu plus nombreuse qu'en 2021, mais plus âgée. *Insee première*, 1881.
https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5893969

[3] Toulemon L., Algava E., Blanpain N., Pison G. 2022. Continued population ageing in France over the next half century. *Population & Societies*, 597.
https://doi.org/10.3917/popsoc.597.0001

[4] Breton D., Belliot N., Barbieri M., Chaput J., d'Albis H. (forthcoming). Recent demographic trends in France: A singular position in the European Union. *Population*, 79(4).

Abstract

The population of France grew by 0.25% in 2024. Nine-tenths of this increase is attributable to net migration and one-tenth to natural increase, which has fallen in response to a decline in births and an increase in deaths. Assuming that fertility and net migration remain stable at 2024 levels and that life expectancy continues to increase slowly, the 2024 projection shows that natural increase will become negative in 2027 but that the population will continue to grow for 2 decades.

Keywords

population projection, births, deaths, fertility, life expectancy, mortality, natural increase, net migration, population growth, ageing, France

ined
INSTITUT NATIONAL D'ÉTUDES DÉMOGRAPHIQUES

INED: 9, cours des Humanités • CS 50004 • 93322 Aubervilliers Cedex • France
Director of Publications: François Clanché
Editor-in-chief: Anne Solaz
Editor: Christopher Leichtnam
Translator: Catriona Dutreuilh
Layout: Isabelle Brianchon
Printer: Mérico Delta Print, Bozouls, France
D.L. 1st quarter 2025 • ISSN 0184 77 83

Population & Societies • No. 631 • March 2025
DOI: 10.3917/popsoc.631.0001
Monthly bulletin of the French Institute for Demographic Studies
Download *Population & Societies* free of charge and subscribe at:
www.ined.fr/en/publications/editions/population-and-societies
Contact: edition@ined.fr