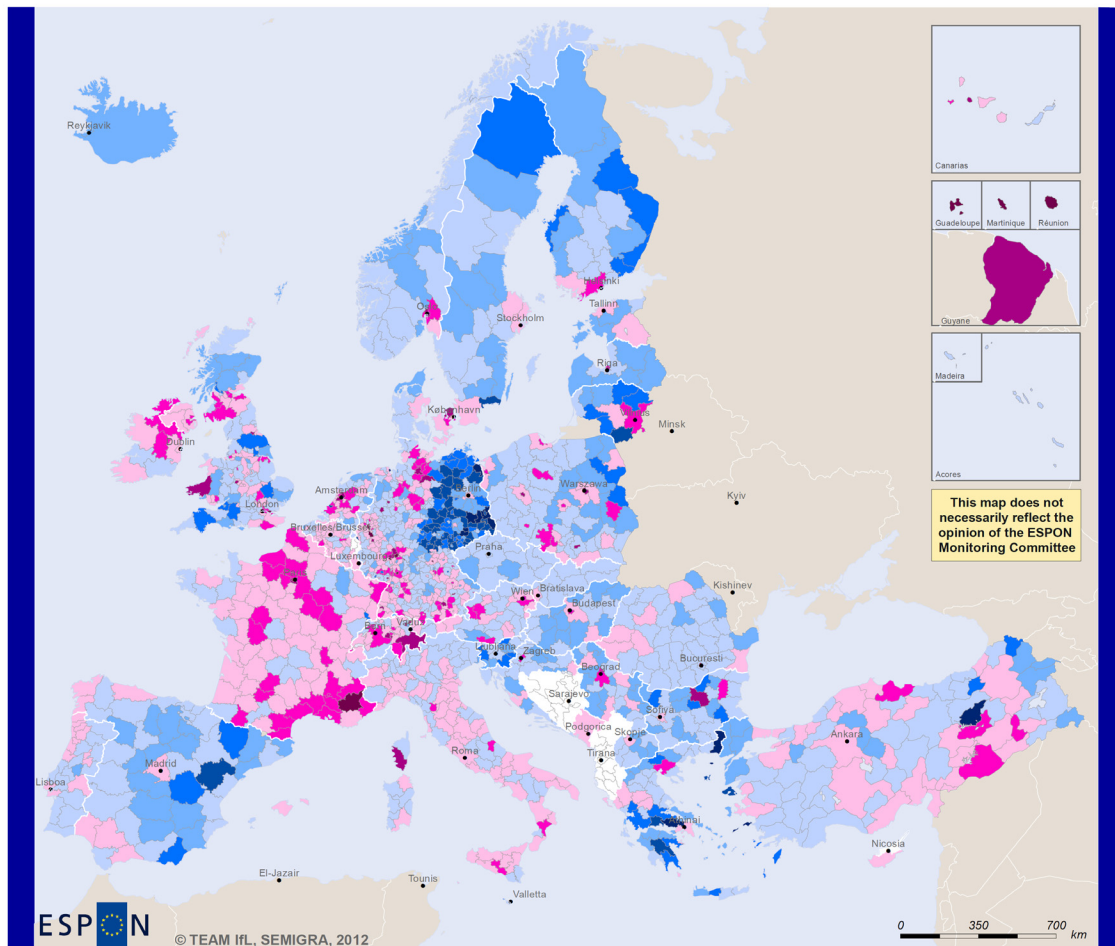


## ESPON 2013 Programme / Map of the Month

### Gender Imbalances in European Regions

Number of women per 100 men  
in the age group 25 to 29 in 2008



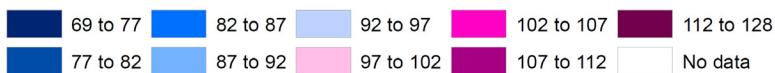
This map does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee

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Regional level: NUTS 3  
Source: Own calculations, 2011  
Origin of data: EUROSTAT and national statistical offices, 2011  
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#### Women per 100 men



**5 February 2013 - The Territorial Agenda 2020 highlights that Europe faces challenges with regard to aging and depopulation in several regions including rural and peripheral ones. On growth and social cohesion the Europe 2020 objective of inclusive growth is asking at the same time for the implementation of policies to promote gender equality and to increase labour force participation. Hence, gender imbalances are not only an issue for gender politics. They are both an effect of territorial developments and structures, and a condition for future growth of regions having an impact on social and territorial cohesion.**

Gender imbalances are in most cases a local phenomenon caused by selective migration processes. Considerable imbalances in a region are to some extent connected to deficits in economic development. In general, a “male-oriented” economic structure is an important explanation for gender imbalances.

To achieve employment targets of Europe 2020 it is necessary to observe the regions which are attracting or losing their young female population in order to better understand these patterns.

This month ESPON presents a map on gender imbalances in European regions from the ESPON Targeted Analysis SEMIGRA. The map shows the number of women in the age group 25 to 29 per 100 men of the same age group in 2008.

## Observations

The age group 25 to 29 is in a transitional period in their life. According to the ideal typical life course, young adults finish their education in their early 20s and enter the labour market, though certainly, this process is usually not that clearly structured and straightforward. However, professional and economic stability is an important pre-condition for forming a family for most people. The average age at first birth is between 25 and 29 in EU 27 + Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, with a minimum of 25.2 years in Lithuania and a maximum of 29.3 years in Luxembourg<sup>1</sup>.

At a European level, it appears that the European core area composed by mainly France, Benelux, Western Germany, Switzerland and to some degree even Italy is mainly characterised by a balanced gender proportion between women and men or even a female surplus. Same is valid for several NUTS3 regions in Ireland and also some outermost regions namely Tenerife, Gran Canary, Lanzarote, French Guiana and Reunion.

Regions with a surplus of males in early adulthood tend to be peripheral rural areas. A surplus of women is a predominantly urban feature, to be found e.g. in the capital regions of Norway, Denmark, Hungary, and most major German cities, some exception in this respect are e.g. Prague and Ljubljana.

Extraordinarily unbalanced sex ratios in a given region seem to be the consequence of specific local conditions. A high “surplus” of males can, for example, be the result of the location of important military bases in a rural region, like in North Yorkshire or Wiltshire in the UK. Regions in Eastern Germany are displaying an exceptional position.

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<sup>1</sup> Generations and Gender Programme (2012). Generations and Gender Contextual Database. Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (distributor). Retrieved from: [www.ggp-i.org/contextual-database.html](http://www.ggp-i.org/contextual-database.html) on 05/12/2012.

The “surplus” of women in the main urban centres and certain NUTS3 regions can be mainly explained with the location of educational facilities, but there are several reasons for them not to return to their home region. However, in the age group of 25-29 also a “re-feminisation” of the countryside, especially in France and Italy can be observed which is not the case for the age group of 20 to 24. The spatial patterns of this “re-feminisation” in other Western European countries, e.g. in Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands or the UK suggest that the suburban hinterlands of the metropolises are the initial points of this process. The situation in Hungary, Poland and the Baltic states is re-versed.

### Points for policy consideration

The mobility of young women needs to be understood as an important feature for local economic development. Age- and gender selective out-migration from rural regions works against the overall aim of territorial cohesion and balanced regional development. Potential consequences among others might be the intensification of demographic shrinkages arising from lower fertility rates as well as pronounced population aging due to the loss of potential mothers. The lack of human capacity and female workers as well as negative effects on the public and social life can be added.

In most cases there is a very high awareness of the loss of young people in rural regions. On the contrary, the shortage of young women is not equally noticed locally and often not considered as a key challenge. Population sustainability within communities is however not just a question of out- and in-migration but also of a balanced population structure. Monitoring these changes, within the local population, is crucial.

Actions that are targeted to improving the knowledge of young people about the current professional opportunities in their region are of importance as well as learning mobility. People leaving the region can be considered as potential economic partners and ambassadors for the home region.

Return and in-migration can bring new ideas, enthusiasm and changes to depopulating rural regions. In this sense, discouraging school leavers to leave, to get an education and to improve their human capital could be detrimental to rural areas.

Policy makers should focus on creating the conditions that their regions become or remain attractive places to encourage in- or return migration. Young out-migrants are building a specific target group which is worthwhile being taken into consideration by local policy makers. A place-based in-depth consideration of particular regions seems necessary to understand the specific migratory movements and reasons why young women and men are not returning to their home regions.

### Concept / method / measurement

The variables used are the number of women in the age group 25 to 29 per 100 men of the same age group in 2008.

The sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 100 males. In demographic literature, the sex ratio is usually defined as the number of males per 100 females. Since the focus of the ESPON Targeted Analysis “SEMIGRA - Selective Migration and Unbalanced Sex Ratio in Rural Regions” lies on the out-migration of young women from rural regions, it was decided to define the sex ratio the other way round. Hence, the lower the sex ratio the higher the “surplus” of men and the “deficit” of women in a given region. The average number of women per 100 men in the age group 25-29 is 97 in the EU 27. This “natural” imbalance can be attributed to the fact that slightly more boys than girls are born.

The data for the indicator displayed has been derived from EUROSTAT for Greece, Luxembourg and Romania as well as the national statistical offices for all remaining countries.

#### **More information**

- Most of the information and all the data used are based on available results from the ESPON Targeted Analysis "[SEMIGRA - Selective Migration and Unbalanced Sex Ratio in Rural Regions](#)".
- Information on the sex ratio on the age groups 20-24 and 30-34 can be found in the reports of the SEMIGRA project available under [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).
- Contact at the ESPON Coordination Unit: Ann-Gritt Neuse ([ann-gritt.neuse@espon.eu](mailto:ann-gritt.neuse@espon.eu)).

#### **Interested in ESPON?**

The ESPON 2013 Programme is part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. It shall support policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and a harmonious development of the European territory. ESPON shall support Cohesion Policy development with European wide, comparable information, evidence, analyses and scenarios on framework conditions for the development of regions, cities and larger territories.

The Managing Authority responsible for the ESPON 2013 Programme is the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures, Department of Spatial Planning and Development of Luxembourg. More information: [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).

Press Contact: [pierina.petruzzi@espon.eu](mailto:pierina.petruzzi@espon.eu), phone +352 42 59 91 4707.