

## Spain's Families Are Struggling



A newly published report on the state of families in Spain revealed grave structural deficiencies and a lack of government support.

The Spanish Institute of Family Politics (Instituto de Política Familiar España) released its 2014 study on the evolution of the family in Spain to coincide with the May 15 International Day of the Family.

It started by looking at the low level of births in the country. The number of babies born each year has fallen by 116,000 compared to 1980 and would have fallen even more if it were not for the significant number of births to immigrant mothers - nearly 87,000 in 2012.

The average number of births per woman in Spain in her lifetime is only 1.32, well below the level of 2.1 needed to ensure a stable population. This places Spain below the average for the European Union - 1.58 - and is the third lowest in the EU, barely ahead of Portugal's level of 1.28, and Poland with 1.30.

If the current level of fertility continues without change by 2050 nearly a third - 32.1% - of Spain's population will be 65 years or older.

The report noted there are significant regional differences in the level of fertility, ranging from just over 1.5 children per woman to barely over 1 in some areas, with Asturias, the Canary Islands and Galicia at the bottom of the table.

The average age of women for the birth of their first child continues to climb and has now reached 31.56 years of age. This is the oldest age in the whole of the European Union and it would be higher if it were not for the younger average of non-Spanish mothers, which is 28.9.

Another notable change in the last decades is an eightfold increase in the percentage of births that take place outside of marriage, reaching 38.9% in 2012. This is just below the EU level of 39.3%. Nevertheless, the growth in births outside marriage in the recent past in Spain has increased at a higher rate than that of the EU.

## **Abortion**

Turning to the subject of abortion the institute's report said that in the period 1992-2012 there was a 150% increase, from 44,962 to 112,390 abortions. Abortion is now one of the main causes of death in Spain, with the total number of abortions since 1985, when it was first legalized, now at just over 1.8 million.

In absolute numbers Spain is at third place in the EU for the number of abortions, with France in first place, followed by the United Kingdom.

Around 20% of all pregnancies in Spain end in an abortion, and 36.2% of them were performed on women who had previously had an abortion.

With regard to family and marriage the report found that the number of marriages continues to decline, having gone from 220,533 in 1990 to 168,556 in 2012. It would have fallen even further if it were not for the high level of marriages with a non-Spanish spouse, at 18.2% of the 2012 overall total.

Not surprisingly the average age at first marriage has increased and is now at 36.3 years for men and 33.3 for women.

The number of those married only in a civil, and not a Church ceremony, has now reached 61.8% of the total.

## **Divorce**

Divorce has also increased, and combined with the number of separations the total in recent years, the level is at around 110,000 a year.

Other matters examined in the report were the workplace laws regarding maternal leave and welfare support for the family.

Only one of every nine in the workplace has the possibility of flexible hours the report said. Only Portugal among the 28 EU countries has a worse situation. Moreover, the number of those who benefit from maternal leave is on the decline.

The report concludes by commenting that the combination of low level of births, and high levels of abortion and divorce, family life is under serious threat.

The consequences of these trends include increased government expenditure on welfare and pensions, an increase in the number of persons living alone, and greater instability in family life.

The situation has been exacerbated in the last few years due to the difficult economic circumstances, with high levels of unemployment and declining family income.

The report finished with a look at how little the government is doing to support families compared with other European countries. Families are discriminated against in Spain compared with the rest of Europe, the institute declared.

A debate over abortion is underway in Spain at the moment, with the ruling Popular Party government proposing a bill to restrict abortions, thus fulfilling a 2011 electoral pledge. Reducing the number of abortions would be a step forward, but only one of many needed to strengthen family life in Spain.

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