DREAM
Danish Research Institute for
Economic Analysis and Modelling

# Population Projection 2026

## Revised net migration, continued immigration from Ukraine, and other forecasting assumptions

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**Background note**
15 June 2026

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# 1. Population Projection 2026

In Population Projection 2026, net migration is revised upwards for both non-Western and Western foreigners compared to Population Projection 2025. For non-Western immigrants with foreign citizenship, the increase reflects both higher immigration and lower emigration propensities among those coming to Denmark with work and study permits. For Western immigrants with foreign citizenship, the increase is driven primarily by lower emigration propensities.

Migration is the main source of the differences between Population Projection 2026 and Population Projection 2025, while fertility and mortality assumptions remain broadly unchanged. As a result, a larger immigrant population is projected throughout the projection horizon. Over time, this leads to more descendants and increases the number of women in the childbearing ages. Consequently, the number of births is projected to rise despite slightly lower fertility assumptions for immigrants. The increase in births therefore reflects changes in population composition rather than changes in fertility behaviour.

## 1.1 Migration

Migration is projected separately for immigrants, descendants and persons of Danish origin, and further disaggregated by Western and non-Western origin and citizenship status. For persons without Danish citizenship, assumptions are additionally differentiated by residence permit category, distinguishing between labour migration, study migration, family reunification, asylum-related migration and other residence permits.

Immigration is projected using recent developments within each permit category and subsequently distributed by age and gender based on the latest available data. For persons of Danish origin, descendants and immigrants with Danish citizenship, migration is modelled using observed migration frequencies. Emigration is projected using observed age- and sex-specific frequencies, while transitions to Danish citizenship are modelled separately and influence future migration behaviour.

Figure 1.1 shows the projected net migration for foreigners of non-Western origin in the 2026 Projection and the difference relative to the 2025 Projection. Net migration remains positive throughout the projection horizon and is revised upwards compared with the 2025 Projection. The difference gradually declines over time but remains positive throughout the projection horizon.

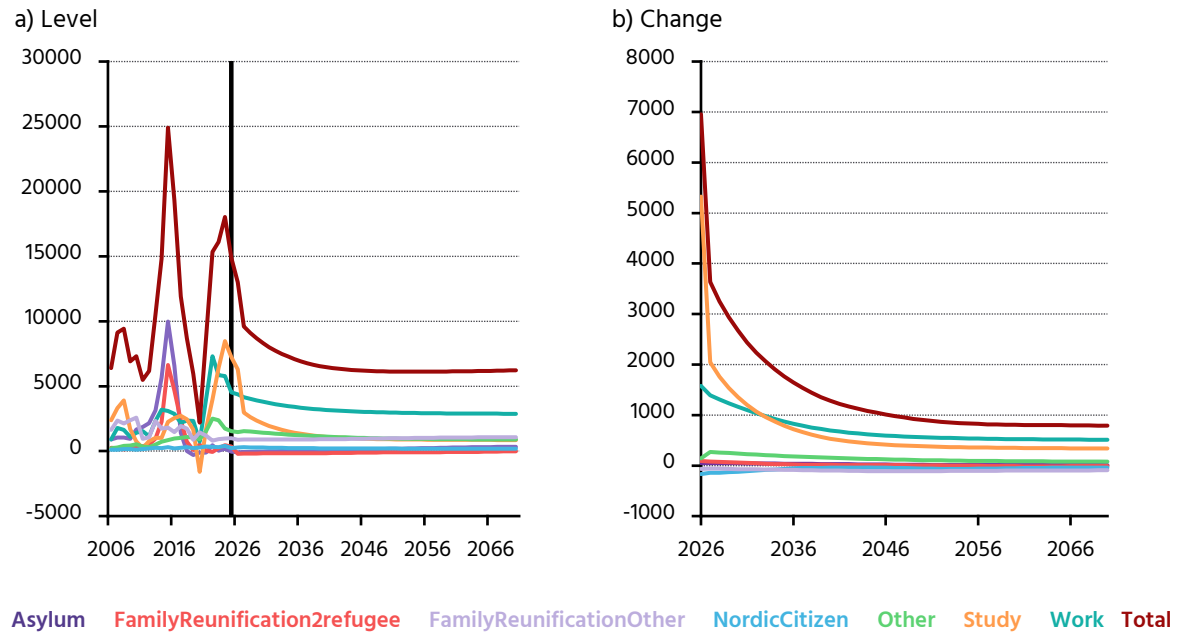
The upward revision in net migration is a continuation of developments already incorporated in previous projection rounds. The 2025 Projection had already adjusted migration assumptions upwards following the increase in non-Western immigration observed in recent years. The 2026 update reinforces this trend rather than introducing a new migration pattern. The increase is concentrated among individuals arriving on work and study permits, which account for most of the projected immigration among non-Western foreigners.

At the same time, a larger share of these migrants is expected to remain in Denmark than previously assumed. Emigration propensities for holders of work and study permits are revised downward across most ages. The drop in emigration propensity reflects the shift in the estimation window to include only post-COVID-19 years, during which emigration rates have

been lower than those observed before the pandemic. Consequently, net migration is revised upwards not only because immigration is higher, but also because more immigrants are projected to remain in Denmark.

Although the annual difference becomes smaller over time, the cumulative effect on population stocks remains substantial. The higher level of net migration leads to a larger population of non-Western immigrants than projected in the 2025 Projection.

**Figure 1.1**
**Net migration for foreigners of Non-Western origin**



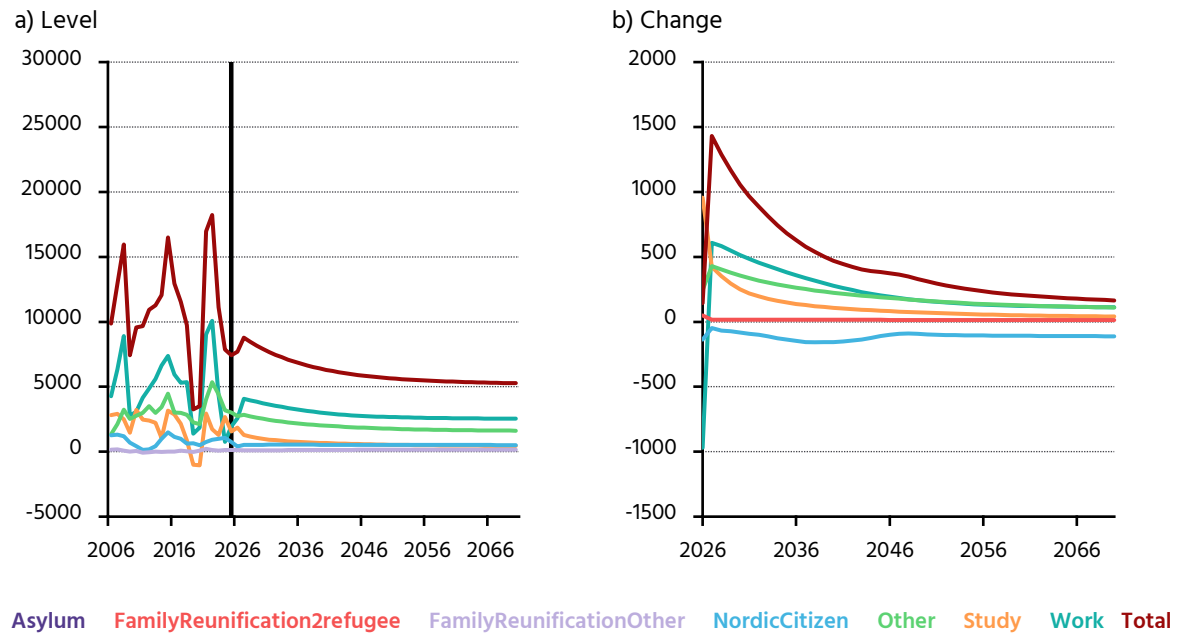

Note: Estimation of gross immigration flows is based on years 2019 and 2022-25 for immigrants without Danish citizenship. Immigration for asylum purposes is retrieved from the Danish Immigration Office (https://us.dk/nyheder/2025/maj/landstallet-for-2026/ and https://us.dk/nyheder/2026/maj/landstallet-for-2027/) and amounts to 600 individuals. Immigration of the individuals under the Special Act is not included. Estimation of gross immigration for persons with Danish citizenship is based on years 2023-25. Estimation is based on years 2023-25 for emigration flows. Figures until 2025 refers to historical data and from 2026 onwards to projections. The last historical year is marked with a black vertical line.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from Statistics Denmark and Population Projections 2025 and 2026.

Figure 1.2 shows the projected net migration for foreigners of Western origin and the difference relative to the 2025 Projection. As for non-Western foreigners, net migration remains positive throughout the projection horizon and is revised upwards compared to the 2025 Projection.

The mechanism underlying the increase differs from that of non-Western foreigners. While immigration among Western foreigners in the 2026 Projection is projected to be lower than in the 2025 Projection, net migration nevertheless increases. This reflects lower emigration propensities among Western foreigners, particularly among holders of work and study permits aged 30-40. As a result, emigration flows are revised downward and more than offset the reduction in immigration.

Although the annual increase in net migration is smaller than for non-Western foreigners, the effect remains positive throughout the projection period and leads to a larger population of Western immigrants than projected in the 2025 Projection.

**Figure 1.2**
**Net migration for foreigners of Western origin**




Note: Estimation of gross immigration flows is based on years 2018-19 and 2022-24 for immigrants without Danish citizenship. Estimation is based on years 2019 and 2023-24 for emigration flows. Figures until 2024 refers to historical data and from 2025 onwards to projections. The last historical year is marked with a black vertical line.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from Statistics Denmark and Population Projections 2025 and 2026.

As in previous projection rounds since 2022, migration under the Special Act for displaced persons from Ukraine is projected using dedicated assumptions reflecting the temporary nature of the protection scheme.

Based on the estimates available from Statistics Denmark for the inflow in 2025, net immigration under the Special Act is assumed to amount to approximately 8.800 persons in 2026. The age and gender distribution is assumed to mirror the pattern of Ukrainian net migration observed during 2025. During their stay, this population is assumed to be subject to the same mortality of the general population, not to give birth, obtain Danish citizenship or re-immigrate.

Following the extension of the residency permits until 2027, complete emigration for individuals covered by the Special Act is not expected to occur until 2027, totalling approximately 51.000 individuals. Hence, complete emigration is delayed on year compared to the projection of 2025.

## 1.2 Fertility

The 2026 Projection continues to use the cohort-based fertility methodology introduced in the 2024 Projection. Fertility for women of Danish origin is projected first and serves as the reference population for the projection of fertility among immigrants and descendants. The projection is based on matching incomplete Danish cohorts to international cohorts with complete fertility histories observed over ages 15-49.

The matching pool is constructed using the 2025 release of the Human Fertility Database. Fertility information is available for 39 countries and comprises 1.377 completed cohorts born between 1876 and 1976. Compared with the data used in the 2025 Projection, most of the countries have been updated with an additional year of observations. Furthermore, cohort 1976 is now observed through age 49 and can therefore be included in the matching pool for the first time.

The Danish data have also been updated with fertility observations through 2025 and extends the information available for all Danish cohorts that have not yet completed their fertility histories. Figure 1.3 shows completed cohort fertility rates (CFR) and total fertility rates (TFR) for women of Danish origin, comparing Projections 2024-2026.

The left panel shows that the updated information results in only minor revisions to estimated completed fertility. Most revisions are concentrated among cohorts born between 1989 and 1993, who were between 32 and 36 years old in 2025 and therefore the youngest cohorts to be completed by matching. Because childbearing has increasingly shifted towards older ages, a relatively large share of their lifetime fertility remains unobserved compared with older cohorts. Consequently, the matching procedure plays a larger role in determining their completed fertility, making these cohorts more sensitive to the addition of new information.

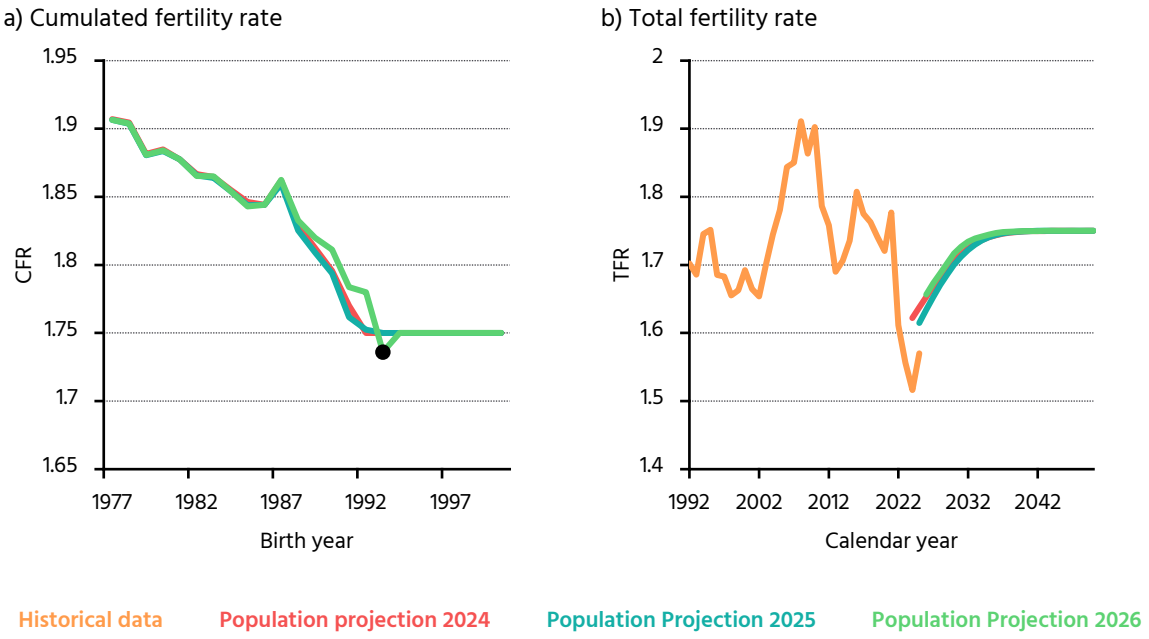
The revisions are predominantly upward. The additional year of Danish fertility observations, combined with the updated international matching pool, leads the matching procedure to assign slightly higher completed fertility to most cohorts that have not yet completed their reproductive histories. The upward revisions suggest that fertility at older ages has been stronger than previously anticipated.

The 1993 cohort has now reached age 32, which is the threshold age for entering the matching routine. The cohort therefore appears for the first time in the completed fertility estimates. Unlike the neighbouring cohorts, the estimated completed fertility of the 1993 cohort is revised slightly downward and is estimated at approximately 1,74 children per woman.

Despite these revisions, the overall fertility outlook remains largely unchanged. The completed cohort fertility profiles in the 2026 Projection are very similar to those in the 2025 Projection, confirming the robustness of the cohort-based methodology introduced in the 2024 Projection. Long-run fertility assumptions therefore remain unchanged and completed fertility for Danish-origin women born in 1994 and later continues to be levelled at 1,75 children per woman.

The right panel of Figure 1.3 shows the corresponding total fertility rates. The upward revisions to cohort fertility translate into a modest increase in projected fertility in the first years of the projection horizon. The effect is limited and gradually disappears over time.

**Figure 1.3**
**Fertility - population of Danish origin**




Note: The cumulated fertility rate is obtained completing the cohorts by matching strategy, and assuming a constant completed fertility rate of 1,75 children per woman for cohorts with missing information before age 32. The matching pool in the Population Projection 2026 includes additional cohorts compared to the Population Projection 2025. Cohort 1993 is marked with a black point.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from Human Mortality Database, Statistics Denmark and Population Projections 2024-2026.

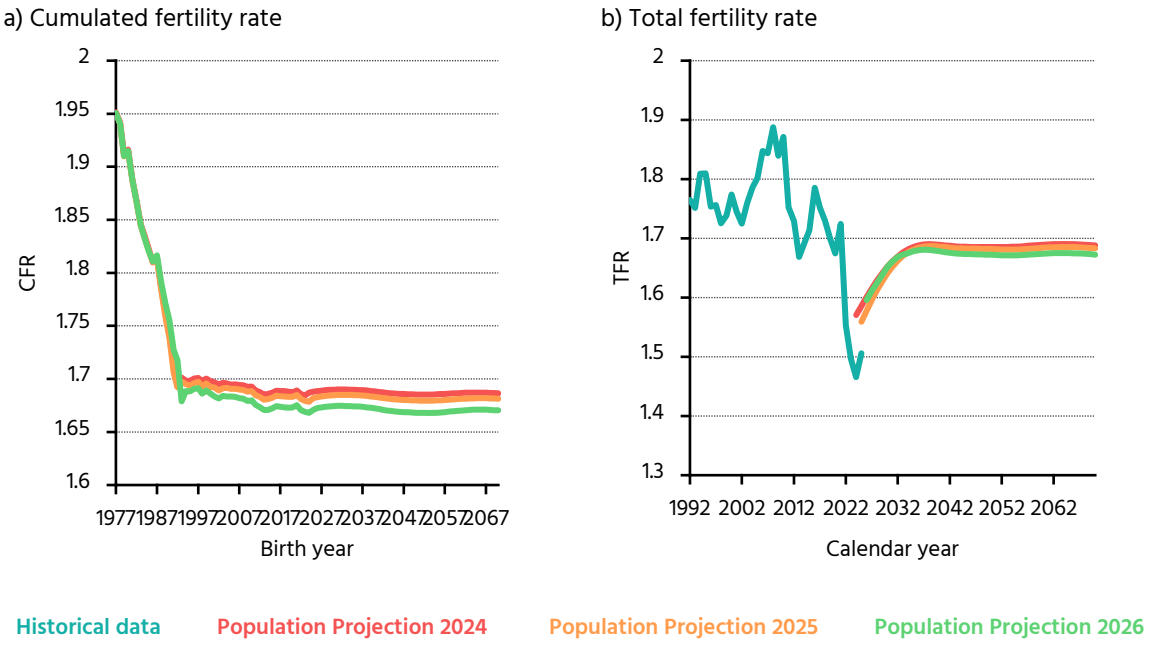
Fertility projections for immigrants and descendants are anchored to the fertility projection for women of Danish origin. This allows fertility to be projected separately by origin (Western and non-Western) and by citizenship status (Danish and foreign citizenship).

Compared with the 2025 Projection, fertility assumptions for both Western and non-Western immigrants have been revised slightly downward, while fertility assumptions for descendants and persons of Danish origin remain largely unchanged. As a result, aggregate fertility for the total population is revised downward.

Figure 1.4 shows completed cohort fertility rates (CFR) and total fertility rates (TFR) for the total population. The projected fertility paths in the 2026 Projection are very close to those in the 2025 Projection, indicating that the overall fertility outlook has changed little despite the updated assumptions. A downward revision is visible in both measures but remains modest throughout most of the projection horizon and fertility stabilizes at around 1,67–1,68 children per woman.

The lower fertility assumptions imply that immigrant and descendant fertility do not contribute positively to population growth relative to the 2025 Projection. Nevertheless, the projected number of births is higher in the 2026 Projection. The increase in births is not driven by higher fertility. Instead, it reflects changes in population composition arising from revised migration assumptions. Higher immigration increases the number of women in the childbearing ages, particularly among groups with relatively young age structures. Consequently, even if fertility rates remain unchanged—or are slightly lower—the larger number of women at risk of giving birth results in more births.

**Figure 1.4**
**Fertility – total population**




Note: The Population Projections 2024 and 2025 differ from The Population Projection 2023 (Hansen, 2023) in the implementation of the methodological revision for projecting fertility.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Human Mortality Database, Statistics Denmark and Population Projections 2024-2026

The increase in births should therefore be interpreted as a composition effect rather than a fertility effect. While long run TFR is marginally lower than in Population Projection 2025, the larger population of women of childbearing age more than offsets this effect. The higher number of births consequently reflects the upward revision of migration rather than a change in reproductive behaviour.

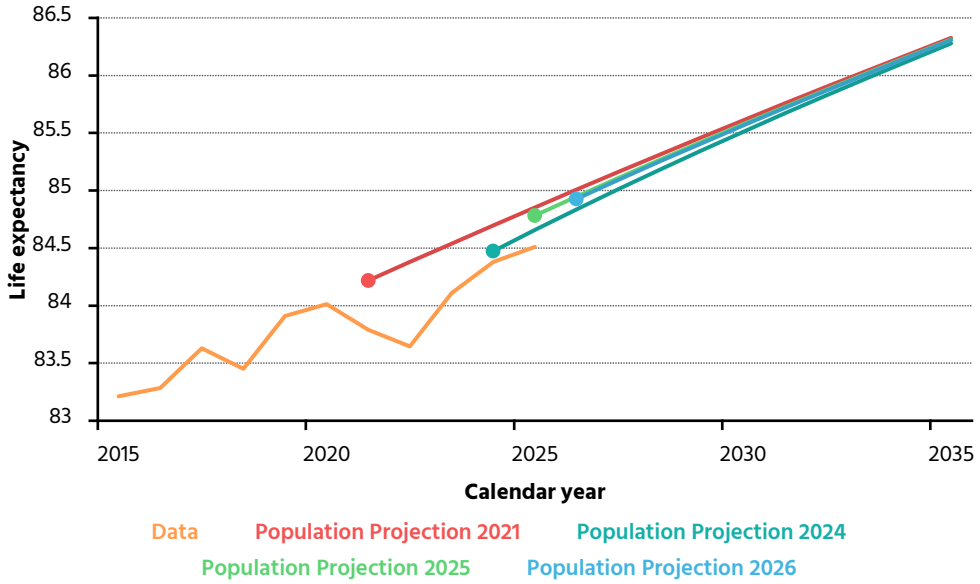
## 1.3 Mortality and life expectancy

Mortality assumptions have been updated to incorporate the latest observed mortality developments through 2025. Recent mortality experience indicates continued catch-up following the elevated mortality observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. For women, life expectancy increased from 84,4 years in 2024 to 84,5 years in 2025 (Figure 1.4). Similar developments are observed for men, whose life expectancy increased from 80,7 years in 2024 to 80,9 years in 2025.

The 2026 Projection continues to use the same mortality framework as the 2025 Projection. Life expectancy is assumed to gradually return to the long-run trend observed before the pandemic, as represented by Population Projection 2021. Consequently, the difference between observed mortality and the first projection year is phased out over time. This approach prevents temporary fluctuations related to the pandemic from affecting the long-run mortality trend.

Figure 1.5 compares projected life expectancy for women in the 2026 Projection with previous projections. The figure illustrates that life expectancy continues to converge towards the pre-pandemic trajectory represented by the 2021 Projection. In 2026, projected life expectancy for women is 84,9 years, compared with 85,0 years in Population Projection 2021. Although the difference is small, it indicates that the recovery from the pandemic has not yet been fully completed. Also note, that observed life expectancy in 2025 is somewhat lower than what was estimated for this year in Population Projection 2025, suggesting that recovery time was overestimated. By 2035, projected life expectancy for women reaches approximately 87 years in Population Projection 2026.

**Figure 1.5**
**Life expectancy, women**




Note: The estimation period for the three projections is from 1990 to 2020. The first projection year in each series is indicated by a point marker.
Source: Population Projection 2026, Population Projection 2025, Population Projection 2024, Population Projection 2021.

A similar pattern is observed for men. In 2026, projected life expectancy is 81,3 years, compared with 81,4 years in Population Projection 2021. While mortality has improved substantially since the pandemic years, life expectancy remains slightly below the level implied by the pre-pandemic trend. The gap narrows over time as mortality gradually converges towards the long-run trajectory.

The estimation period has not been updated. Although life expectancy has improved steadily since 2023, the recovery from the pandemic is not yet considered complete. Including the pandemic years in the estimation window at this stage would still introduce a downward level shift and risk understating long-run improvements in mortality. If future evidence suggests that the pandemic has permanently altered mortality patterns, the estimation window will be revised and the corresponding level shift incorporated into the projection framework.

Overall, updated mortality data affect the initial years of the projection horizon but have only negligible consequences for long-run mortality and life expectancy. Mortality therefore contributes only marginally to the differences between Population Projection 2026 and Population Projection 2025.

## 1.4 Changes in the population relative to Population Projection 2025

Figure 1.6 shows the difference in projected population stocks between the 2026 and 2025 Projections by origin group. The effects of the revised migration assumptions accumulate over time and lead to a larger total population throughout the projection horizon.

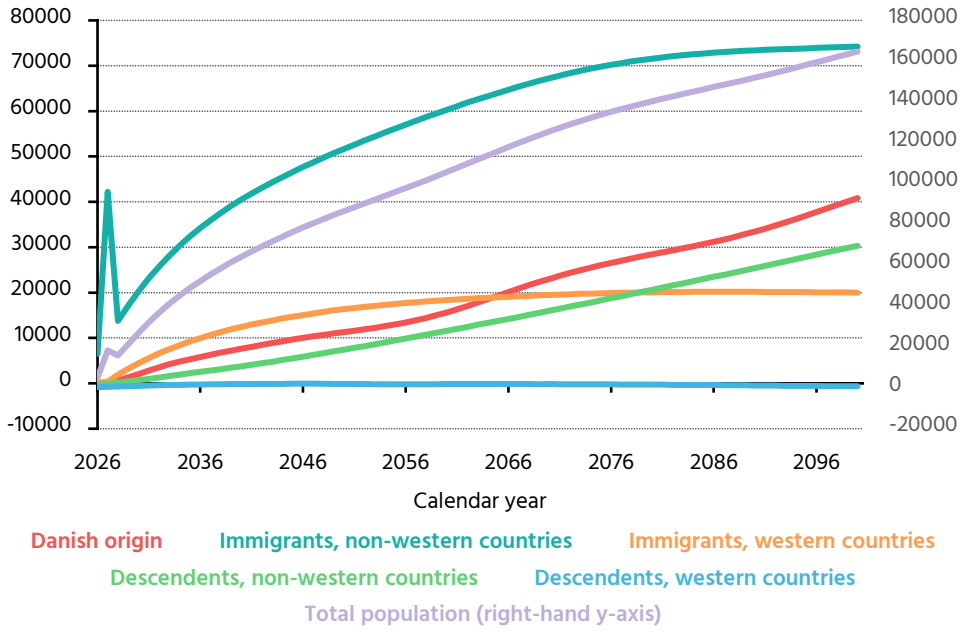
The largest revision is observed among immigrants from non-Western countries. The stock of non-Western immigrants is projected to remain substantially above the level projected in the 2025 Projection, reflecting the higher net migration. The difference increases rapidly in the first decades of the projection horizon before gradually stabilising.

The higher immigrant population also affects future generations. The stock of descendants from non-Western countries is revised upwards throughout the projection horizon. This increase reflects the larger number of women in the childbearing ages resulting from higher immigration.

The stock of immigrants from Western countries is also revised upwards relative to the 2025 Projection. Western immigrants contribute positively, reflecting lower projected emigration and resulting in a persistently larger Western immigrant population.

The larger immigrant and descendant populations also contribute to an increase in the population of Danish origin. Consequently, the upward revision gradually spreads across population groups as the effects of migration accumulate over time.

**Figure 1.6**
**Difference between the resident population by origin groups in the Population Projection 2026 and Population Projection 2025**




Source: Population Projection 2026 and Population Projection 2025.

Overall, the figure reflects that migration is the dominant driver of the differences between the 2026 and 2025 Projections. The direct impact is visible in the immigrant populations,

while the indirect effects emerge gradually through higher numbers of births and hence larger descendant populations and individuals of Danish origin.

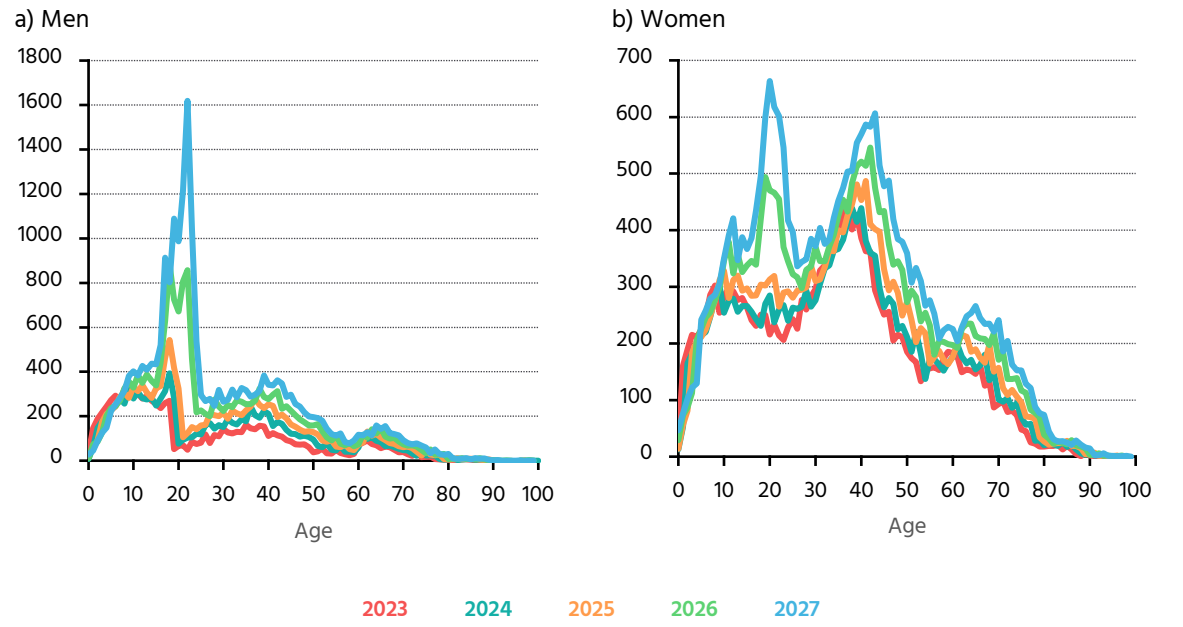
The initial peak in the stocks is to be attributed to the continued permanency of the individuals covered by the Special Law in 2026 and their emigration in 2027, which affects the number of non-Western immigrants. A similar pattern was observed last in last year's projection and is now shifted by one projection year.

Figure 1.1Figure 1.7 shows the age distribution of persons covered by the Special Act for displaced persons from Ukraine. The figures include observed stocks at the beginning of 2023-2026, together with the projected stock for 2027.

A distinctive feature of the age distributions is the emergence of new age concentrations in the most recent data. For men, the profile was characterised until 2025 by a single pronounced peak immediately below age 18. In the net migration data from 2025, a second peak emerged among men in their early twenties, resulting in a bimodal age distribution of new arrivals, which is reflected in the stock of 2026. The projected stocks in the 2026 Projection also inherit this feature. A similar, although less pronounced, development can be observed for women. While the main concentration remains among young adults, the 2025 net migration shows a new concentration of women in their twenties.

At the same time, cohorts already residing in Denmark continue to age, causing existing peaks in the age distribution to shift upwards by approximately one year in each successive observation and projection year. Consequently, the age distributions projected for 2027 reflect a combination of ageing cohorts from earlier arrival waves and the updated age profile of new net migrants observed in 2025.

**Figure 1.7**
**Immigrant population under the Special Act residing in Denmark by gender, age, and year**




Note: The population stocks at the beginning of the year are observed in 2023-2026. The stock at the beginning of 2027 is projected based on first projection year assumptions the net migration and mortality.
Source: Own elaboration based on data from Statistics Denmark and Population Projection 2026.

# 2. References

Hansen, M. F. (2022). *Befolkningsfremskrivning 2022. Indregning af merindvandring fra Ukraine, COVID-19 og andre fremskrivningsforudsætninger.* DREAM: København.

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