

## Foreword

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This is a very important and timely monograph on fertility in Europe. The very low fertility levels in several EU Member States are a matter of public concern. An increase in fertility will not by itself stop demographic ageing but can contribute to decelerating current demographic trends.

It is therefore essential to understand better the reasons behind Europe's low fertility rates. The difficulty of reconciling private life with a professional career far too often compel women to postpone having a family or to have fewer children than they would desire. It follows that more and more couples reach an age where fertility problems become prevalent. Involuntary infertility is a serious medical condition with strong negative consequences on the wellbeing of the couples concerned and has a negative impact on demographic trends.

The Commission believes that policies that encourage couples to have their children earlier should be developed. Prevention is the most effective way to deal with involuntary infertility. But the general trend towards having children later in life is likely to continue. As a consequence, it is also essential to better investigate the access to, and quality of, assisted reproductive techniques.

This monograph brings together a number of important papers dealing with the medical, societal and demographic ramifications of fertility. It is a very valuable contribution to the European debate on fertility which I hope will enjoy a wide readership.

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