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This submission is made on behalf of Cúram, Irish parent and carer NGO

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Cúram, Irish parent and carer NGO, welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation on the future of the European Union.

We are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but a focus limited to “growth and jobs” is more appropriate to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The European Union should focus on a broader spectrum of social and economic outcomes and develop evidence-based policies leading to the desired outcomes . It is necessary for the EU to have a strong economy, but that should not be at the cost of weakening families and society generally. Ultimately, a lack of support for social outcomes will result in a weaker, rather than a stronger, economy and society.

As the previous Commission itself recognised, it is not possible to have sustained growth without sustainable birthrates. Yet even at the height of the recent economic boom, most EU countries were unable to replace their populations; in some cases these countries also had historically-high numbers of immigrants of child-bearing age. The population across Europe is ageing. We as a people are not going to be able to manage these demographic challenges unless our social and economic policies support not simply labour-market participation but families and communities also.

Cúram requests that the European Union accede to all United Nations human rights treaties. It is a requirement for entry to the Union that candidate states accede to these treaties. The EU participates annually in the UN Commission for the Status of Women meetings, yet has not acceded to the treaties on which the work of the Commission is based. It is time for the EU to act responsibly and accede to all relevant human rights agreements, including the Beijing Platform for Action.

“Care and Jobs” is Cúram’s suggestion for the next Commission’s motto. Unless the European Union provides families with the opportunity to meet the care needs of their young, elderly and ill or disabled members, how will we be able to create the skilled workers we need into the future? The answer is not simply in increasing employment rates. The unpaid sector is either the largest or the second-largest sector of any given country’s GDP [Gross Domestic Product], according to the UN. It would be unthinkable for any state or any economist to ignore the Services sector, or Manufacturing for that matter, in the development of economic policy. Yet there is little recognition that the important unpaid sector contributes greatly, albeit off-balance sheet, to the economy and society and requires positive and active policy support. The importance of parents and other family members to the development and education of children is ignored by economic policy makers. But the investments of time and other resources made by families in children should not be undermined by the needs of today’s labour market: tomorrow’s economy should not be raided to sustain short-term needs. The system of Flexicurity should be developed to recognise periods of unpaid care and include unpaid caregivers.