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To the attention of:  
**Green Paper on Demographic Change**  
European Commission  
DG EMPL/E/1  
J-27 01/122  
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 13 October 2005

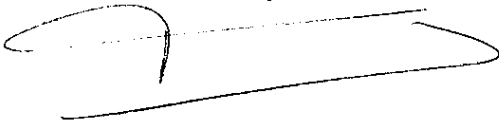
**Re: Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations", Position of Eurochild AISBL**

To whom it may concern,

Please find attached the Position of Eurochild AISBL to the European Commission's Consultation on the Green Paper on demographic changes.

Please do not hesitate to contact us in case you might have any comments or questions.

Yours sincerely,



Heidi De Pauw  
Secretary General

To the attention of:  
Green Paper on Demographic Change  
European Commission  
DG EMPL/E/1  
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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
**Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations", COM (2005) 94 final**

**Position of Eurochild AISBL**  
**Contribution to the consultation**

Eurochild AISBL and its members welcome the initiative of the European Commission to address the issue of "Demographic changes" in Europe and the challenges it will raise in the coming years, as well as to encourage participation of the civil society in the debate. The demographic changes as described in the Green Paper will be affecting all European citizens in everyday life: education, employment, health care etc. Therefore Eurochild AISBL considers that the discussion of demographic changes and managing their impact should be dealt with at European level.

**Vision of children and young people in the Green Paper**

Paragraph 15 of the Green Paper states: "*We will not only have to reach but to exceed the objective in the Lisbon strategy – an employment rate of 70% - to compensate for the expected drop in the working age population: employment participation will have to increase, and the retirement age will have to continue to rise.*"

Eurochild AISBL welcomes the proposal of the European Commission to implement the Lisbon Agenda, but takes this opportunity to stress the importance of implementing all of the three pillars of the Agenda:

1. Economic reforms
2. Employment
3. And, last but not least, **social cohesion**.

The Green paper though mainly focuses on the first two pillars. Eurochild AISBL is sceptical about the link between growth and jobs and achieving the social objectives for excluded children and young people. Over the last five years, a number of communications from the European Commission spoke about the multi-dimensional nature of **poverty**. This Green Paper takes the stand that if the economy is competitive and has a high productivity rate, the well-being of European citizens will be secured. Research as well as the increase of unemployment, poverty and homelessness over the last 15 years has shown that this paradigm is not correct.

Eurochild AISBL indeed believes that economic growth and innovation are important factors to ensure the well-being of the population; however the aspect of **social inclusion** must by no means

be left aside; especially because today 21% of Europe's children are living in poverty. Therefore Eurochild AISBL and its members are urging the European Institutions and Member States to work effectively towards the implementation of the objectives agreed in Lisbon and of course, monitor the progress made. Eurochild AISBL also calls on the European Institutions to make the fight against poverty and the promotion of social inclusion a top priority.

**Urgent actions** are required in the area of children and young people in order to fight without delay the inter-generational transmission of poverty<sup>1</sup> and also to fight the dramatic consequences implied by a long-term poverty on children and young people. How this could be done? By:

- Strengthening families and children's communities: Research shows that a child is more likely to tackle poverty if it has support from its family and community.<sup>2</sup>
- Recognising of professional support to excluded children and young people living in poverty, who face multiple difficulties and will require multi-dimensional support to have a chance of integration in society.
- Promoting the participation of children and young people in decisions that concern them - education, transports and recreational activities - in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Promoting child-friendly environments: housing, transport, schools (which offer proper and professional counselling and who listen to what children and young people feel and say).

Eurochild AISBL calls on the European Institutions and Member States to live up to the high expectations which are raised in fundamental texts, such as in the draft Constitutional Treaty: "*The Union shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. It shall promote scientific and technological advance. It shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child.*" (Article I-3, §3)

### **Reversing the demographic decline**

In paragraphs 2 & 3 the Green Paper notes that "*Europeans would like to have more children. But they are discouraged from doing so by all kinds of problems that limit their freedom of choice, including difficulties in finding housing. It is also the case that families — the structure of which varies but which still constitute an essential part of European society — do not find the environment in which they live conducive to child-rearing*".

The Green Paper explains that the fertility rate all over the EU is below the threshold to renew the population, meaning there will be less and less young people. But on the other hand, raising life expectancy implies that there will be more and more elderly, even very elderly people. This situation puts a heavy burden on the young people's shoulders and raises a number of questions:

- There will be raising numbers of elderly and very elderly people and as a consequence possibly dependent people. At the same time, both sides are encouraged to work. Therefore, we are moving towards a society with growing needs for **services**: for the elderly, the very elderly, for children and young people.
  - Will there be enough facilities to take care of the dependent elderly?
  - Will there be enough child-care facilities? Other support elements for parents: leisure possibilities and recreational possibilities etc.
  - Will there be enough trained people to work in those facilities?
  - Are the people working in these facilities recognised?

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<sup>1</sup> Study commissioned by the European Commission on entitled "A thematic study using trans-national comparison to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty", by Petra Hoelscher.

<sup>2</sup> "Whether a child will be able to cope or will be socially excluded doesn't depend primarily on individual characteristics. There is a range of mediating factors in the environment – family, school, friends – that are decisive. Strengthening these empowering factors is an effective approach to supporting these young people". (Ibid)

- What labour force is needed in the coming 30 years? It is important that schools, universities, anticipate social and economic changes in order to be able to have educated and trained people who can integrate into the labour market. **Education** and training systems need to be more oriented towards the economic sector.

In terms of research little attention has been paid to:

- The extent to which and under what circumstances, **women** will refrain from becoming mothers or having additional children.
- The effects children have on women's career advancement. Usually when the children are young, women will limit their number of working hours (part-time), refuse to work over-time, or even turn down jobs implying too much travel. It could also be that women trade off when their children are small, but then try to resume a career as they grow up. But research shows that a mother will be more likely to continue a full-time activity, the higher the potential earnings lost by ending or interrupting her full-time employment are.

### **Reconciliation of family and professional life**

Paragraph seven of the Green Paper states *"to meet this challenge (of demographic change), the Lisbon Agenda must be resolutely implemented, in particular those policies focusing on getting people into jobs - especially certain groups in the population such as women and both younger and older people – on innovation and increasing productivity"*.

Throughout the Green Paper, **youth is solely considered as a future labour force** which will carry the burden of taking care of a constantly older generation. The questions seem to be raised in the only economic prospect, without consideration for a rights-based approach and without considering the **fulfilment of children and young people**, nor of their families.

Unless couples feel that their children and themselves have a future it is not likely for them to have children. In addition, already today most couples must both work in order to be able to meet ends. So their choice to have children will be dependent on how they will be able to **conciliate professional and family life**. A whole range of services must be available to the families for the children. Above all the personnel in those services must be trained (now), benefit from life-long learning and their status must be recognised.

In addition, in terms of reconciliation of family and professional life one major challenge that needs to be tackled is the inclusion of the 13,5% European **single-family households**, which are above all headed by women (84% of single-parents in Europe)<sup>3</sup>.

According to Eurostat, the living standard of European single-families is:

- 11% lower than that of a family with children in which only one person is working,
- 23 % lower than that of households with children in general,
- 27% lower than that of the overall standard of households.<sup>4</sup>

*"Knowing about low income levels and high poverty rates for example may not normally provide any better understanding of how economic constraints influence various aspects of life of single-parents. One more or less obvious consequence of low income for instance is limited purchasing power, but how this affects everyday life and what other difficulties derive from these limitations remains somehow nebulous."*<sup>5</sup>

### **Education / School**

The Green paper underlines, that young people today are more educated: *"...in the EU 15, nearly 28% of 25 – 34 year-olds had been educated to degree level in 2003, compared to 16% of 55 – 64 year-olds"*. This figure however implies that a very vast majority (72%) of this age group was not

<sup>3</sup> Figures of 1996. « Les Familles monoparentales en Europe », Université de Rennes 2. LAPSS – ENSP Rennes. Dossier d'études 54. Mars 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Whitten. 1998. Chambaz. 2000

<sup>5</sup> Streil, 1999

educated to a degree level. In a more and more competitive economy this is a very worrying situation. What did those 72% young people do? What is their future going to be like, especially given that they are today's and tomorrow's parents?

If the EU does not take this into consideration and does not work towards the inclusion and well-being of today's children and young adults it is very likely that in turn their children will be confronted with poverty and exclusion. "...children are also at risk of poverty: this is the reality for 19 % of under-15s. The risk is even worse for those living in single-parent families. One consequence of this is that children are forced to drop out of school early, which may, in the medium term, accentuate the risk of poverty amongst young people." (Point 3.1.)

### **Conclusions:**

Presently the issue of children (0-18) falls into the competency of Member States whereas the EU institutions are competent for youth (15-30). "*Many issues associated with demographic change come within the exclusive competence of the Member States...*" (§14). The Rights and Needs of Children and Young people should be considered together as a horizontal issue, which must be mainstreamed in all policies of the European Institutions and Member States. The first step into this direction has already been made with the announced Commission Communication on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. According to Eurochild AISBL, the **fight against poverty** and the promotion of **social inclusion** is of utmost importance for Europe, in order to tackle the challenge of an ageing society. Unless Europe manages to answer those challenges there will always be a gap between the European Citizen's and the European Institutions and policies.

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**This opinion has been prepared by EUROCHILD AISBL, which is an active network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people. Eurochild's work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

For any further information and clarification, please contact:

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#### **Eurochild's activities concentrate on:**

- producing, developing and sharing information on policy and practice;
- monitoring and influencing policy development at the European level;
- developing interest groups and partnerships between members in European countries;
- developing partnerships with other European associations that share common goals;
- influencing and making recommendations to international institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the United Nations;
- supporting and developing the capacity of members;
- empowering children and young people to make their views heard;

#### **Child Poverty Work Programme:**

At the heart of Eurochild's activities is the Child Poverty Work Programme. 19% of children aged between 0 and 15 are at risk of poverty in the former EU 15, and 20% of them in the 10 new countries. Not only does poverty affect the development of the child in terms of health, education, psycho-social well-being, participation in culture, sport, recreation activities, but it also undermines its future prospects and lifetime chances.

A key element in the Child Poverty Work Programme is the assessment of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/Incl.) from the perspective of children and young people.