

Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations"

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Please specify the name of your organisation or institution Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs	
Country where your organisation is based SI - Slovenia	
Explanation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you take the view that the discussion of demographic trends and managing their impact should take place at European level? • If so, what should be the objectives, and which policy areas are concerned? <p>- We consider that the discussion on this subject should take place at European level, because the demographic trends are an important indicator of anticipating the situation in the labour market, economic migrations and the economic development of the European Union as a whole. Every aspect of demographic change has to be focused on and integrated into EU policies and programmes, whereas Member States must – taking into account the Lisbon Strategy – establish an appropriate demographic policy aimed at creating proper conditions for a higher fertility rate and a social atmosphere encouraging child birth and favouring family, parenthood and motherhood, targeted to the growth of the working age population within all age categories, to appropriate action for better reconciliation of work and family life as well as to the provision of higher flexibility in the labour market and the implementation of effective social security system reforms. - The basic goal should be directed to seeking possible solutions and more efficient measures to improve the demographic image as well as confrontations with demographic changes that would provide sustainable development. Open coordination in all fields having the power of influence is an appropriate method emphasizing equal opportunities for women and men, employment, provision of adequate and sustainable pensions, active ageing, health, long-term care, migrations and social inclusion of vulnerable social groups.</p>	
1. The challenges of European demography	

1.1. The challenge of a low birth rate

Over many years, the Union has been making considerable efforts to achieve equality between men and women and has coordinated national social protection policies.

- How can a better work/life balance help to tackle the problems associated with demographic ageing?
- How can a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks between men and women be encouraged?
- Should the award of certain benefits or advantages (leave, etc.) be linked to an equal distribution of tasks between the sexes? How best to ensure an adequate income for both parents on parental leave?
- How can the availability of child care structures (crèches, nursery schools, etc.) and elderly care structures be improved by the public and private sectors?
- Can a reduced rate of VAT contribute to the development of care services?
- How can parents, in particular young parents, be encouraged to enter the labour market, have the career that they want and the number of children they want?

- Reconciliation of work, family life and family obligations is a very important measure to solve the problem of population ageing. Member States must create conditions for reconciling work, private life and family obligations at all levels by way of: (1) carrying out analyses and surveys to examine the needs of parents for easier reconciliation of work, private life and family obligations; (2) adopting and effectively implementing legislation laying down equal rights for both parents and encouraging the elimination of indirect discrimination; (3) mechanisms that will encourage employers to consider the needs of their employees related to private and family life; (4) mechanisms that will encourage services in the field of family work to make them more adaptable to the users' needs. - In order to balance the distribution of household and family tasks it is necessary to: (1) eliminate the existing stereotypes on the role of women and men in family and partnership (2) ensure responsible and good quality parenthood and partnership through education, counselling and therapeutic services for responsible and good quality partnership and parenthood. - Taking parental leave should be provided for under conditions that would be as equal as possible for women and men. Parents taking parental leave should be provided with a 100-percent parental leave allowance. - Pluralisation of all social services should be provided for (combination of the public, private and voluntary sector), in particular in the field of pre-school child care and the basic child care and social care programmes. The availability of child care structures could be particularly improved by child care programmes and services that are adapted to the different needs of parents and children, and of good quality and affordable. The improvement of elderly care structures could be achieved by introducing new, modern forms of non-institutional care. The development of activities and services enabling persons with long-term health and social problems to stay as long as possible in their domestic environment or to return as soon as possible to that environment from an institution is to be encouraged by different mechanisms and measures. In addition to the extension of the in-home care service network, daily centres and assistance at home, also new forms of individual assistance should be introduced, such as personal care aides and family aides. An individual, receiving such forms of care, should be strictly free to decide himself on the care service he would like to be given. - We take the view that the rate of VAT has an important impact on the accessibility and development of social care services. For this reason we endeavour to reduce the rate of VAT for social care services, including the services of homes for the elderly. - For various reasons, young people enter the labour market relatively late and statistics prove that at the time of entering the labour market they face worse working conditions and smaller social security, but in particular, they enter non-standardized forms of employment required by the dynamics of the modern world (such as non-voluntary part-time work or fixed-term employment). In order to integrate young couples, in particular women, it is necessary to: 1. prepare a strategy to combat discrimination at workplace and employment that would include the following measures: awareness-raising and education related to the rights of job seekers and employed workers; awareness-raising and education of employers; integration of trade unions into activities focused on the prevention and elimination of discrimination due to family obligations. 2. implement horizontal policies of equal opportunities for women and men within the framework of active employment policies.

1.2. The possible contribution of immigration

The Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003 declared that an EU integration policy for immigrants should help to meet the new demographic and economic challenges currently facing the EU. This is the debate initiated by the Green Paper adopted last January.

- To what extent can immigration mitigate certain negative effects of demographic ageing?
- What policies should be developed for better integrating these migrants, in particular young people?
- How could Community instruments, in particular the legislative framework to combat discrimination, the structural funds and the Employment Strategy, contribute?

- In the short term, immigration of migrant workers or foreign manpower could probably mitigate labour shortage in the domestic labour markets; however, it is not a long-term solution. Thus, the long-term political goal in this field should be to raise the work activity rate and to provide for renewal of population without any excessive migrant flows. For this reason, a long-term solution of the negative effects of population ageing should be sought also in other policies (family, employment policy) and employment opportunities for third country migrants coordinated at EU level. -The first thing is to provide socialization and integration of migrants. Within the framework of integrating migrants it is very important to enable young people the access to employment in order to exclude the possibility of social marginalisation. Migrants should have the opportunity to be educated, in particular to learn a language, get familiar with the social structure, democracy and in this way be provided with better chances for entering the labour market. -The policy of integrating migrants must be based on equal rights and equal opportunities. Integration policies should involve all social factors (institutions of the EU and the Member States, educational institutions, media, non-governmental organisations, social partners, political parties, religious communities, etc.) and within the framework of preparing these policies the needs of migrants should be considered. Structural funds could provide sources intended to awareness-raising, monitoring the occurrence of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, to financing non-governmental organisations offering help to victims of discrimination, to education and training of migrants etc. Structural funds could also support measures of the Employment Strategy by way of seeking improvements and finding solutions for their implementation, since the question of discrimination also includes discrimination related to the entry into the labour market, employment opportunities and relations at the workplace.

2. A new solidarity between the generations

2.1. Better integration of young people

European objectives have been laid down for the prevention of long-term youth unemployment, combating early school leaving and raising the level of initial training. The structural funds help to attain them at grass roots level.

- How can initial training and adult training schemes be improved? What can non-formal education and voluntary activities contribute? How can the structural funds and the instruments for achieving better access to the knowledge society contribute?
- How can the bridges between school and working life and the quality of young people's employment be improved? What role should social dialogue play? What can dialogue with civil society, in particular youth organisations, contribute?

-The improvement of initial training and adult training schemes means to expose to a larger extent the specific character of vocational training, the role of the regional level, evaluation of acquired occupational skills and employability of graduates at all levels. The aim of non-formal and informal learning, including public awareness-raising programmes, should be to provide better understanding of the links between social, economic and environmental issues in local and global environments. All the systems of formal education and non-formal learning programmes should include education for sustainable development. The ESF should seek possibilities to invest in constant upgrading of the teachers' and learners' knowledge within the system of vocational education and training, taking into consideration their specific learning needs and the changing role and development of vocational education and training, but in particular the pedagogic role of the teacher and the development of "horizontal knowledge". -The school system should be adapted to the needs of the labour market and young people should be given appropriate inputs for finding high-quality jobs on the basis of contemporary knowledge. The required supply and demand of certain vocational groups should be anticipated and monitored and the school system, programmes and enrolment terms and conditions adapted accordingly. Young people should be given the opportunity to enter the labour market in due time. The role of social dialogue is to adopt a work framework for lifelong development of competences and qualifications. Social partners, in particular employers, should take the responsibility for solving these problems. Companies and institutions must give much more consideration to the development and the increase in the scope of staff scholarships that would in return stimulate education, pre-

qualification or studies related to skill-shortage jobs with the aim to reduce the disparity in the labour market in the long term. In this way also the demands of the employers for future staff in specific fields could be recognized already in the framework of vocational education and training and consequently also in the framework of employment. Within the tax legislation education-related incentives intended to employers should be promoted. A legal framework should be set up to regulate the possibility of establishing funds to encourage the educational function of employers based on the solidarity principle (everybody pays, funds are received by those who carry out training of apprentices, secondary school pupils and students) at the regional and national level. The dialogue with civil society and in particular with youth organisations could contribute to easier transition, because these societies are supposed to be better acquainted with the problems of the youth and the problems young people are faced with, such as the choice of profession and the search for a job.

- How can Community policies contribute more to combating child poverty and poverty among single-parent families and to reducing the risk of poverty and exclusion among young people?
- What forms of solidarity can be fostered between young people and elderly people?

- Combating poverty demands an overall strategy at the level of the European Union and the Member States that must involve individual governments, social partners and adequate (also international) organisations. Community policies must be harmonized, support each other and be based on detailed analyses of causes as a precondition for high-quality professional assessment of solutions. The school system should also be adapted to these measures, i.e. through flexible forms of education that follow the demands of the modern labour market and are adjusted to the needs of individuals (and to the needs of vulnerable groups). -Solidarity between generations is essential for sustainable development. The most demanding task is to develop new mechanisms for a contemporary connection between generations and the provision of solidarity between generations. In particular, the following should be pointed out: - awareness-raising among population on quality ageing and coexistence at all levels; - a positive view on old age and ageing within the framework of educational programmes; - encouraging and expanding voluntary work that involves young as well as older people (to encourage reintegration of the elderly into society and a dialogue between generations); - establishment of local intergenerational centres where various programmes for the elderly would be carried out permanently in close connection to the younger generations on the voluntary basis and vocational management; such centres should take the role of a traditional three-generation relationship in the family, with relatives and in the neighbourhood; - social policy that would encourage family life of several generations.

2.2. A global approach to the “working life cycle”

In order to foster the transition to a knowledge society, EU policies promote the modernisation of work organisation, the definition of lifelong learning strategies, the quality of the working environment and “active ageing”, in particular raising the average retirement age. Demographic changes reinforce the importance of these policies, whilst raising new questions:

- How can the organisation of work be modernised, to take into account the specific needs of each age group?
- How can young couples' integration in working life be facilitated and how can we help them to find a balance between flexibility and security to bring up their children, to train and update their skills to meet the demands of the labour market? How can we enable older people to work more?

- It is essential that organisation of work takes into account specific needs of each age group and at the same time: - enables flexible employment (definite period, part-time, work at home, agencies...); - defines reasonably and motivates employment by guaranteeing social security to workers through conclusion of employment relationship; - enables flexible organisation and definition of working time while keeping appropriate balance between the needs and performance of employers, on the one hand, and motivation and needs of the employees on the other hand; - provides for reasonable protection from layoff (employee being a weaker party in this relationship) by previous encouragement and motivation for education and training or re-training of employees to keep the job). Flexible and family friendly forms of work guaranteeing social security to an individual and his family are of particular importance for young people. Different forms of flexibility should not be an element of discrimination, particularly in acquiring new knowledge and promotion. Older workers have acquired vast experience, which should be brought into use, appreciated and rewarded. Efforts should be made to retain older workers on the labour market. In addition to the adequate retirement policy, which may include permanent bonuses for longer employment and permanent maluses for early retirement, appropriate social attitude towards the elderly is important as well.

- How can work organisation best be adapted to a new distribution between the generations, with fewer young people and more older workers?
- How can the various stakeholders in the Union contribute, in particular by way of social dialogue and civil society?

--Organization of work should be adapted to the changed age structure of workers. Workplaces should be adjusted as well. Ageing causes functional declines in organ systems and/or organism as a whole. Physiologically aging can be partly compensated: velocity of movement can be substituted by adjusting postures, by more precise work motions. To compensate weak eyesight and hearing workers use more elaborated information strategies. The elderly have more routine and skills to replace velocity and power. This fact must be taken into account when shaping and adapting work to individuals. Operative area should be limited with regard to ergonomic angles of joint movements. It might be necessary to change work pattern and break times or shift work schedules. In any case, ergonomic measures for the elderly should be taken. - Various EU actors must take into consideration demographic changes in the field of their activities and exchange experience. Social partners and civil society can contribute practical experience, which should be taken into account when working out policies at national level and drawing up guidelines at the European level. European Union institutions may contribute substantially to integrate demographic aspect to all common policies and monitor their implementation in the Member States.

2.3. A new place for “elderly people”

The European coordination of retirement scheme reforms is promoting more flexible bridges between work and retirement.

- Should there be a statutory retirement age, or should flexible, gradual retirement be permitted?
- How can elderly people participate in economic and social life, e.g. through a combination of wages and pensions, new forms of employment (part-time, temporary) or other forms of financial incentive?
- How can activities employing elderly people in the voluntary sector and the social economy be developed?
- What should be the response to pensioner mobility between Member States, in particular with regard to social protection and health care?
- How should we be investing in health promotion and prevention so that the people of Europe continue to benefit from longer healthy life expectancy?

- It is our opinion that legislative change of retirement age is not yet needed. In any case, it is far better to motivate the elderly to prolong their employment and choose gradual retirement. Greater activity and vitality of elderly people require higher income, since they live actively for a longer period (social participation). -To ensure social and economic participation of the elderly, gradual retirement and adjusted new forms of employment must be introduced. Thus, the elderly may remain in part-time employment, a very suitable form with respect to the specificities of their age group. It is even more important that the employers do not urge elderly workers to retire, they should be able to decide themselves when to leave the labour market. It is for the State to create conditions motivating elderly workers to prolong service without risk. -To develop activities of the elderly in the field of voluntary work it is necessary to: – promote voluntarism as a specific value and status symbol; – ensure regulatory framework at national level; – provide for recognition and awards for voluntary work at national level; – ensure financial incentives to projects with high participation of voluntary work. We consider that the Regulation of the Council on the application of social security schemes to employed and self-employed persons and their families moving within the Community is also applicable to pensioners and responds appropriately to the greater mobility of the pensioners, who may go to another EU or EEA Member State, receive their pensions there and be covered by health insurance as well. Thus the existing secondary EU legislation regulates social security of pensioners moving within the Community adequately. - To maintain healthy ageing of the Europeans and thus enable higher quality of life during this period we estimate that particular stress should be placed on the aspect of demographic development in the EU documents and instruments, namely: – new EU Health Strategy; – Programme of Community action in the field of public health (2003-2008); – research within 7th RTD Framework Programme. Furthermore, formulation of healthy public policies seems to be an important goal. It is therefore reasonable to integrate the health aspect into all relevant EU policies or make arrangements, where appropriate, to assess effects of proposed policies on health through health impact assessment (HIA). Finally, healthy living should be promoted and awareness of the importance of the individual responsibility for health strengthened.

2.4 Solidarity with the very elderly

The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?

- The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?
- In particular, should a distinction be drawn between retirement pensions and dependency allowances?
- How do we train the human resources needed and provide them with good quality jobs in a sector which is often characterised by low salaries and low qualifications?
- How do we arrive at a balanced distribution of care for the very old between families, social services and institutions? What can be done to help families? What can be done to support local care networks?
- And what can be done to reduce inequality between men and women when they reach retirement age?
- How can new technologies support older people?

- Health protection and long-term care should be considered in close liaison with the Lisbon strategy aimed at the promotion of economic growth and employment. Increased needs for health protection and long-term care bring an opportunity for the creation of new employments in the health sector. Rapid technological progress provides new treatment methods, ensures the appropriate social security in case of sickness or other incapacities for independent life. A high level of health protection and long-term care has a positive impact on the employment in general. The improvement of health status of the population facilitates a higher level of attendance at work and lowers the extent of retirement on the account of disability. Accessibility of services involving long-term care of senior persons allows their relatives to perform their professional activities smoothly, thus indirectly enhancing the employment rate. We believe that legal regulation of long-term care of senior persons and those in need of assistance is of key importance in the management of social and health risks, i.e. the incapacity for independent life over a longer period of time. The coordination of the national social protection policies will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practice in seeking solutions to specific problems of a particular state, which will have positive effects on the elimination of problems created by demographic changes. - At any rate, a distinction should be made between old age pensions paid under the insurance principle and the attendance allowances provided. Entitlement to attendance allowances should not be bound to the entitlement to old age pension, in so far as the allowances are of a purely social nature. This means that individuals should be entitled to attendance allowances under the social security and not only under the pension insurance. - Transitivity between the activities and the employments should be increased, the regulated character of professions should be decreased and the national professional qualifications should be introduced. In order to enhance the competitive edge of labour on the market, lifelong learning and the obtaining of advanced knowledge and skills are required. -In view of the growing share of senior persons, the need for an appropriate and balanced cooperation of both the public and private sectors and the family and non-governmental organizations in taking care of the elderly has been increasing. The cooperation between the public and the private sector should be based on the principles of covering the costs (the price of the service should cover the costs, one part of the total cost should be paid by the customers and the other part should be subsidised by the state and/or the local community, or by a special budgetary or regulatory source); the cooperation of the family in providing care to the elderly should be stimulated by the appropriate material and non-material incentives (benefits, the possibility of sick leave, etc.). - Inequalities between men and women concerning their retirement age should be reduced by: 1. encouraging work activities of men and women after the retirement age; 2. gradual increasing and equalisation of retirement age of men and women while taking into consideration the real situation of men and women in the society and the burdening of men and women with unpaid work. The Union can contribute to the decreasing of inequalities between senior men and women by a comprehensive strategy of fight against poverty and by earmarking the resources from the Structural Funds for the elimination of ageism in the labour market.

3. Conclusion: what should the European Union's role be?

- Should the European Union be promoting exchanges and regular (e.g. annual) analysis of demographic change and its impact on societies and all the policies

concerned?

- Should the Union's financial instruments – particularly the structural funds – take better account of these changes? If so, how?
- How could European coordination of employment and social protection policies better take on board demographic change?
- How can European social dialogue contribute to the better management of demographic change? What role can civil society and civil dialogue with young people play?
- How can demographic change be made an integral part of all the Union's internal and external policies?

- Yes, at the time of increasing globalisation and unfavourable demographic changes, the European Union should monitor and analyse demographic changes both in the Member States and at the EU level, as well as at the global level. On the one hand, the above-mentioned analyses would provide for a balanced approach to the appropriate employment policy and on the other hand, they would represent an instrument in accordance with the envisaged increased mobility of workers, on the basis of which the labour force would seek direction in accordance with the employment possibilities and own preferences. - The financial instruments of the European Union in the field of employment and social inclusion provide for the financing of measures and policies. It is up to each particular Member State to evaluate whether this is one of the fields that poses a barrier to the normal operation of labour market and social inclusion. Structural funds should stimulate increased mobility of labour force within the European Union, particularly through more effective informing on employment opportunities in Member States and through the programmes of training and education that will "bring" other Member States "closer" to the citizens of the European Union (for example, intercultural education, training in intercultural communication, language courses, etc.). - Coordination of employment policies and social protection at the European level should adopt a lifecycle approach in the establishment of programmes and take into consideration demographic situation and trends. Consequently, a mechanism for a uniform monitoring of trends in the demographic field of individual Member States, regions and also at the EU level, should be established. - The European social dialogue may contribute to awareness rising concerning the current issues and encourage the integration of these issues into the social dialogue at the national and the local levels. All generations should be included in the dialogue and discussion on the ageing process. We believe that the issue of intergeneration coexistence should also become part of the school curricula in primary and secondary schools. - Adjusting and reacting to demographic changes should become one of the most important EU objectives and should be integrated in all the relevant EU policies. In working out these policies, the lifecycle approach should be adhered to. The open method of coordination is in any case appropriate for monitoring the progress in particular fields. However, it should be stressed that merely adapting to demographic changes is not enough; above all, we should look for ways to influence them.

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met