

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

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Do you consent to the publication of your personal data/data relating to your organisation with the publication of your replies to the consultation? Yes	
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On behalf of which of the following are you replying? Other	
Please specify the name of your organisation or institution Forum delle Associazioni Familiari	
Country where your organisation is based IT - Italy	
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>The text of the communication COM (2005) 94 does not expressly comment on the causes of demographic deficit in Europe. However, in order to develop suitable ways of combating this, an analysis of the causes is essential. It can be assumed that the general distribution of contraceptives can be seen as an important factor in the drop in birth rates. As the representative of Associations representing 3.000.000 of Families in Italy, the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI wishes to underline the significance of the principle of responsible father- and motherhood within the framework of natural birth control. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI demands equal treatment for organizations and projects that devote their attention to natural birth control and that these be supported by public subsidies to the same extent as those propagating artificial methods of contraception. In the area of sex education, abortion must never be mistaken for a method of contraception. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI holds the view that the European level is the appropriate one for the initiation of a discussion on demographic change and managing its impact. The aim has to be a policy of security for young families (employment, income, housing, child care, etc.); this affects practically all areas of politics, but especially economic and social policy including employment, family policy, housing and education.</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?

The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI welcomes the promotion of human assets by the European Commission, whilst at the same time demanding that greater attention be focussed upon the origin of these human assets, as they see in this a way towards answering the questions in 1.1. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI defines human assets as an increase in morality, solidarity and values. We are of the opinion that these values are the result of successful socialization and education, which are best achieved in a stable and sound family. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI observes that the only individual development that is socially encouraged at the moment is that which is aimed towards career improvement. By contrast, there are not enough opportunities provided to prepare people for partnership and parenthood. In some member states of the EU, the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI detects a lack of educationally adequate, financially affordable systems of child care that are subject to assessable quality control. Better compatibility of family work and gainful employment could be achieved through increased provision of child care that meets these criteria and would contribute towards solving the problems of demographic ageing. We note a continued imbalance in the distribution of household and family tasks between men and women. It is indispensable that people be made more aware; this can be achieved through the above-mentioned educational measures. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI is of the opinion that the availability of child care structures (crèches, nursery schools, etc.) and elderly care structures – both in the public and private sectors – can best be improved through public support and funding. Private care establishments should receive special support, to meet parents' individual care needs. We believe that a reduced rate of VAT for services in the areas of child care and elderly care can greatly help to increase the availability of such care structures. As family systems have been adapted to meet the demands of the economy in recent decades, it is now necessary to bring the economy into line with the needs of families. With regard to this matter, we demand more flexible working hours, European conformity on regulations concerning parental leave that include the best possible protection against dismissal for both mothers and fathers and the guarantee of appropriate child care (see above). The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI points out that in France, financial family benefits and child care structures are linked to tax and other advantages. At the same time, France has the second highest birth rate in the whole of the EU. The French model of family support should count as the "best practice" example for the other member states. We find that the problem of finding suitable housing is an important factor that plays a decisive role in people's having the children that they want to have. National, regional and local housing policies must be obliged to supply sufficient housing that meets demands with regard to both size and costs. Interest rates should be set that enable families to buy their own houses.

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?

The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI is of the opinion that immigration is not the right way to mitigate the effects of demographic ageing. Measures must be taken to change structures, for example the above-mentioned support for young families. We find that the setting up of a catalogue of rights and duties for immigrants and for the host country is a necessary political measure towards better integrating these migrants, in particular young people. Community instruments should create the respective framework conditions. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI demands a purposeful policy of immigration, whereby it must be taken into consideration that the birth rate of this section of the population usually adapts to that of the host country in the second generation.

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 FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI sees tax exemption on the minimum income of each family member, which could be included in the method of open coordination, as a decisive impulse in combating child poverty and poverty among single-parent-families. We observe that vocational training in general lasts too long, which means that young people are embarking upon their working lives later. European educational systems must be reformed in such a way that training modules are initially shortened and later integrated into working life. In this way, it would become possible for young couples to have children earlier and the chance of having further children would be increased. The dual system of vocational training has proved to be effective in some EU-countries. In this system, apprentices are trained on the job for most of the time, and trained at college for a smaller amount of time. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI suggests evaluating the experiences of this dual training system at European level as "best practice" examples and offering them for possible adaptation. In the area of adult education, the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI considers public subsidies for establishments of adult education, as well as individual support, to be necessary. With regard to the intensification of lifelong learning, as desired by the EU, individual requirements and interests must be taken into consideration, as a lasting learning process is only possible if based on positive personal access. At the same time there must be a focus on the quality of educational establishments, which can accompany a process of lifelong learning. In this area, too, the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI suggests the setting up of quality standards.

- 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?

The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI holds the view that the EU should structure dialogue with civil society regarding the bridge between school and working life, as youth organisations are best equipped to support a process of labour-market-related communication between young people and European institutions. Civil society can introduce innovative labour market ideas of European institutions to the target groups and achieve corresponding evaluation more easily. In the strengthening of family networks or in the sharing of housing by more than one generation which includes care service (e.g. by students), we see forms of solidarity between young people and elderly people.

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?

For the FAFCE, one way of offering older people more employment opportunities is to include them in systems of child care, for example as “surrogate grandparents”, or through job-sharing with other older employees. Full-time employment should be available for younger people, especially for strategic jobs.

- 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?

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?

For the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI, flexible, gradual retirement is conceivable, as long as legal rights are preserved. The participation of “senior citizens” in economic and social life can be made possible by job-sharing. To encourage the economy to make use of the experience of older employees and to keep them in employment, it would be useful if company audits were carried out by public offices (e.g. “Nestor” in Austria). The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI considers further development of health statistics to be a meaningful investment in health promotion and prevention, so that the people of Europe can continue to benefit from longer healthy life expectancy. Observations have shown that a vital bond is often established between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents give their grandchildren not only moral and material support, but also affection. For this reason, the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI suggests that public housing concepts include a certain amount of housing that can be modulated to enable the generations to be close together.

2.4 Solidarity with the very elderly

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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?

The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI would like to draw attention to the fact that in our society the so-called “hinge-generation” (middle generation) plays an important role. This generation not only takes on caring for their parents, but, on account of extended life expectancy, at the same time also looks after their grandchildren. This “hinge generation” must be entitled to support from society, in order to be able to maintain solidarity between the generations. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI thus welcomes the establishment of day care centres and homes for longer stays which give this “hinge generation” the possibility to temporarily reduce the strain. The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI calls for consideration of the fact that overburdening, underpayment and lack of qualification can become the main problems for the care of the very elderly. We therefore suggest that qualification standards be better controlled, that trained, competent staff be paid more adequately and that suitable initiatives be taken to encourage people to enter into care professions. As an accompanying measure, campaigns must take place to strengthen public awareness of the care sector, which should lead to higher recognition of this professional group. In order not to overburden families, carefully thought out support of families is necessary in the case of caring for the older generation. We must assume that “the economy of brotherly love” (Hazel Henderson, 1989) will no longer be able to cover all needs. As in the case of child care, a real balance must be created by institutions in the area of caring for the older generation (tax concessions, time spent caring for the elderly counting towards people’s own pensions, ...)

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?

The FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI is of the opinion that the Union should institutionalize the exchange of ideas and regular analysis of demographic change and its effects on societies and the relevant political areas. To this end, the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI suggests that a “generation institute” be founded with the task of constantly analysing the challenges that arise in the future relationship between the generations and the role of families. The Union’s financial instruments – particularly the structural funds – should take better account of this change by regularly evaluating the individual ESF-programmes to analyse their impact on families. If employment strategy does not lead to structural improvement of families, then its continued application must be questioned. By demonstrating the special effects on the individual areas in the form of studies and expert reports, the dimension of demographic change can be better integrated into all of the Union’s internal and external

policies. Convinced that - a family, recognized as social subject because natural society founded on marriage, is the best institution for children to grow up in; - today, families with children are at an economic disadvantage compared with singles and childless couples; - fertile and stable families make a distinct contribution to the common good; - the demographic catastrophe in Europe can only be avoided with the help of fertile and stable families; - without clear support for families, the Lisbon objectives cannot be met; the FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI demands that the following points be incorporated into European legislation: § To guarantee equal opportunities for all children, measures must be taken to secure the best-possible conditions for the raising and care of children in their own families. § Support for families must be organized in such a way that an increasing number of children does not put families at an economic disadvantage. § The imperative social, cultural and societal function of fertile and stable families should be acknowledged, both in the EU's political decisions which affect families and in the member countries' family policies, to avoid families being at a disadvantage compared with all other sections of the population. § It is necessary that the families associationism function will be recognized and structured for all decisions concerning families life in application of the subsidiarity principle.

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met