

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

Identification of case	
IPM Reference Number:	458323
Creation date	19-09-2005
Modification date	
Privacy statement	
Personal Data	
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	
Name Merseyside Brussels Office	
E-mail address nicola.while@merseyside-europe.org	
Are you replying as an individual or an organisation? Organisation	
On behalf of which of the following are you replying? Regional or local authority	
Please specify the name of your organisation or institution Merseyside Brussels Office	
Country where your organisation is based UK - United Kingdom	
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 problems associated with an ageing society are common to all EU Member States and affect the lives of all European citizens. It is thus relevant that discussion takes place at the European level in order to ensure that problems are tackled effectively. However, it is also important to recognise the principle of subsidiarity. Many actions in this area take place at the regional and local levels and these actors should have an input into the formulation of European policy. In this respect, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. The question of demographic ageing touches a number of European policy areas and thus it is important that the debate is mainstreamed across all European policy areas. Principle policy areas that are affected by the issue include: social integration and insertion, enterprise policy, youth, education, and immigration.</p>	
1. The challenges of European demography	
1.1. The challenge of a low birth rate	
<i>Over many years, the Union has been making considerable efforts to achieve equality between men and women and has coordinated national social protection policies.</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?

Despite recent legislation aimed at ensuring the equality of the sexes in both the home and workplace, inequalities still persist. The burden of care rests disproportionately on women and may discourage young career women from starting a family. A better work/life balance is likely to encourage a growth in the birth rate. Actions which can contribute to this include: • Flexible working – the growing use of ICT and the Internet should enable more opportunities for working from home • The often negative attitude of employers regarding maternity/paternity benefits must be removed • The so-called the 'glass ceiling' for women, especially women who have children, must be removed • Effective enforcement of equality legislation is essential if women are to feel that their rights are protected by the law It is acknowledged that the burden of household tasks also falls heavier on women than on their male counterparts. Media campaigns (both European, national and local) that promote the idea of sharing household tasks would be welcomed. The idea of gender equality needs to be targeted on men as well as women. In this respect we welcome the recent Gender Equality call for proposals which focused specifically on the role of men. High quality, affordable childcare is an essential element in bridging the gender gap and countering the trend towards an ageing population. European lifelong learning policies have a role to play in promoting childcare as a viable and rewarding career choice for both men and women. The low status of care workers in general needs to be addressed through media campaigns, high quality careers advice in schools and dedicated qualifications relevant to the care sector amongst other methods. Social enterprises have a role to play in this area – through the provision of targeted services to excluded people, re-training and lifelong learning. More innovative ideas such as tax credits for family members, particularly grandparents, who look after children, would also be welcomed.

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?

Immigration is an important and often untapped resource for employers. Immigrants bring new skills, innovative ideas and an entrepreneurial spirit that can often reinvigorate the domestic workforce. Higher birth rates in certain immigrant groups may also counteract some of the low birth rate trends in domestic populations. However, public perception must be managed – negative connotations of immigrants must be tackled through a combination of education and local integration strategies. The INTI programme is a good initiative in encouraging integration and there are also lots of positive local initiatives occurring throughout the EU. The exchange of best practice is essential. Structural Funds can also have a role to play by specifying the importance of integration, equality and active ageing initiatives in individual programming documents. Finally businesses must be effectively regulated and educated on the rights of immigrant workers. It is important that businesses do not take advantage of immigrant workers who are often more willing to accept lower wages and poor working conditions. Health and safety bodies as well as national business regulators have a role to play here.

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

Young people need to be made aware of the benefits of work. Negative role models either in the home or in the media may discourage them from working or cause them to fall into the 'benefits culture'. Voluntary activities, summer play schemes, summer courses can all help to instil a sense of fulfilment amongst young people and encourage them to engage in community. Schools need to incorporate more work-based learning into their curricula. This would enable young people to learn the skills that are relevant to the workforce. The curriculum should also give young people the opportunity to study for vocational qualifications and to equip them with practical skills that are currently in high demand such as plumbing and electrics. In brief, an emphasis on lifelong learning, re-training, and non-traditional educational opportunities would encourage young people from excluded areas to participate in the workforce. School career services should highlight the broad range of options open to young people who do not necessarily want to follow the traditional university route. One option may be for local entrepreneurs go into schools and speak about their experiences in starting a business. Specialist bursaries for young people who chose to start a small business could also be established. There needs to be a minimum wage for younger people. This would ensure that they do not feel exploited by employers who pay higher wages to older workers for doing an identical job. Youth organisations have an important role to play – youth parliaments in the UK have been successful in engaging young people and consulting them on local policies so that they feel they are important stakeholders in their community.

- 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?

Tax credit schemes for single working parents can help to combat poverty and reduce the risk of social exclusion. Effective careers advice in schools can give young people from excluded backgrounds the advice and encouragement needed to exit poverty. A skills mentoring system between the elderly and young people is one method of passing knowledge and expertise down the generations. This kind of dialogue can be encouraged through school projects and voluntary work.

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?

In this age of globalization, ICT skills are an essential part of the modern workplace. Specific training and lifelong learning qualifications aimed at older people (through formal educational establishments and also through voluntary or community organisations) can help to overcome the fear of ICT and the

stigma of not being able to operate new technologies and thus be pushed out of the workplace. Older people can also be encouraged to remain in the workforce by taking child care responsibilities for young working couples. Perhaps a tax credit scheme for pensioners who took advantage of this or a voucher scheme for working parents would encourage this. It would also bring the younger and older generations together and allow for the informal transmission of skills and life experiences between the generations and enable a better inter-generational understanding.

- 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?

A mentoring system in the workplace whereby older people pass down their skills to the younger generations may be an effective way of responding to the new distribution between the generations in the workplace. It is important that stakeholders contribute to the wider debate within the EU in particular through social dialogue and civil society. This links in to the active citizenship debate. The creation of a forum for the young and old to meet and debate current issues and then feed them into local government structures may be a useful tool in this respect.

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?

A statutory retirement age often forces active older people who have many healthy working years ahead of them to leave the workforce. A gradual retirement age is to be encouraged but it is important that this remains optional for the foreseeable future and that those older workers who are unable or unwilling to continue working into their seventies or eighties are not punished for leaving the market place. Workplace discrimination remains a problem that must be addressed. Workers are least likely to get training when they are over 50 and are least likely to be promoted. Hence there is no personal development for them. There should be training in place so that older workers can train in something new and improve their current skills. In the UK, if all of the older people who want to work found jobs, it would add around £30 billion to the UK's economic output - hence working older people are economically sound. Work, volunteering and lifelong learning all contribute to financial security, health and well being - which reduces the costs in the health sector. Finally, from a local authority perspective it would save on costs relating to home help, social housing etc. UK culture is that once you reach retirement you are completely redundant to society. Conditions need to be in place whereby we can change the culture and expect our elders to transfer into jobs post retirement or to remain in their current post. Part time employment and voluntary sector work is to be encouraged for older people as this work offers the flexibility needed for those who may wish to dedicate the remainder of their time to childcare etc. Health promotion is extremely important. Health care systems are increasingly burdened with the ageing population and often do not have adequate resources to provide high quality care. Educational programmes on health determinants such as tobacco and alcohol abuse need to warn of health risks and to promote healthy living. The urban environment is important for encouraging green spaces in cities. Environmental initiatives that encourage the reduction of pollution (such as car free days) are also to be encouraged. Local transport also has a role to play. Public transport to the workplace needs to be safe and accessible for all ages.

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?

The care work sector must be seen as a valuable part of society and as a rewarding and important career. Jobs that are mostly dominated by women tend to have a lower perceived importance therefore it is important that more men are encouraged into these careers and that anti-discrimination legislation is effectively enforced to prevent abuses. A living minimum wage is also needed. Lifelong learning can provide ongoing work-based qualifications for care workers and raise the skills level of this sector.

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?

It is important that the European Union continues to monitor demographic change and that it encourages the exchange of good practice as this policy area has a daily impact on the lives of EU citizens. Whilst demographic change impacts upon the ability of the EU to meet the Lisbon targets, it is imperative that social considerations related to demographic are not forgotten in the race to improve the EU's economy.

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met