

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
Name	Eleanor Dearle
E-mail address	eleanordearle@beeb.net
Are you replying as an individual or an organisation?	Individual
Gender	Female
Age	40-54
Country of residence	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>I think this discussion should take place at European level, but also at local and international level. We have an imbalance in the world. I think we need to ask ourselves whether or not we should aim to increase population growth? One of the reasons I've only had 2 children is the thought that we had too many people in the world already and we should manage an overall decline of populations, so that there is less strain on resources in the long term. We then manage the short and medium term consequences. Good jobs are now , and should increasingly be, far more productive and high value growth areas require less employees rather than more. The problem is getting these benefits into society as a whole where they can contribute to solving the medium term problems, rather than the extra GDP making individuals very wealthy. If we could solve this a lower proportion of high productivity workers should be able to support a higher proportion of retirees. We should look at how we manage population decline so that in the long term we reach a more sustainable equalibrian</p>	
1. The challenges of European demography	
1.1. The challenge of a low birth rate	
<p><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></p> <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?

Do recognise that some parents want to rear their children themselves. Perhaps this should be recognised financially and by status. After all if parents go out to work, then someone else does the job they were doing. Sick children cause a sudden disruption - could larger workplaces have rest areas for the children of sick employees (and employees who may feel sick, but could soldier on if they had a nap for an hour). Could areas of employment with SMEs have communal sick/chill out facilities? The other way of supporting your sick child and working is to be able to work from home. Fathers are parents too and there needs to be far more support and a higher profile for men who care for their children. Apart from leave directly related to the physical side of pregnancy, paid parental leave should be able to be undertaken by either parent. There should be more opportunities for high quality part time work so that parents, but particularly mothers, can retain their career path and progression whilst still caring for their children. Too many mothers end up having to do a little part time job, far below their capabilities. Employers should be taught that this actually gives better flexibility and higher productivity. If all jobs were part time or job share we would see an increase in productivity across the board. VAT should not be put on child and elderly caring services, it only serves to increase the costs to parents, increases complexity for providers and think how much tax is spent out on VAT in this type of service in the form of childcare credits. Much more flexible elderly care is required and an end to petty health and safety restrictions that mean the paid carer actually can't care for the person in their homes in case they get sued. The family and paid caring services should be able to contract a series of services which the carer will undertake "as if" they were family. Elderly people shouldn't have to be concerned about having to give up their houses in order to pay for nursing costs. For many the thought of being able to go home one day is a motivating factor to try and get well, and even if this is not going to happen, it represents an aspiration and a security for them if they are able to retain the home. Therefore more help within the home should be available, support for short term external caring and innovative schemes that would allow a local authority to gain an income from an empty home whilst an elderly person is in hospital or a caring facility. This income could offset caring costs, negating the need to sell the house and the house could be returned in its original condition when the elderly person is better, or to the estate when the elderly person dies. Get rid of the long hours "macho" culture its bad for employees male and female and organisations as these "presentism" hours are not necessarily productive. Organisations should reassess their staff's working hours and investigate long hours as a matter of course to see why people are working extra hours, and if it's because there is too much work, either the work should be prioritised and the less important not done or another person should be recruited. Also get rid of intrusive monitoring and performance work which reflects process rather than outcome. This gobbles up huge amount of time (especially senior management and especially in the public sector). Sector skills councils should be encouraged to provide continuing development training for parents caring for children. A free creche should be provided and plenty of time. During maternity or paternity leave parents should be encouraged to retain involvement in the workplace and should be kept in the communication loop.

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 can mitigate the effects of demographic ageing when immigrants are young, but with a more elderly population who are therefore more conservative and frightened of change this must be carefully handled. I noticed with my elderly and very elderly aunts and uncles that elderly people seem to be scared of any young person per se. A young person with very different culture and beliefs is really scary. Young people are the future - are we right to contemplate nicking another nation's future simply because we can't manage our own problems properly? Economic migrants should be able to communicate in the language of the host country before being granted a work permit. I don't think it's morally right to suck in the most economically able people into Europe without contributing to their development or at the very least backfilling them in their countries of origin. Refugees and asylum seekers should be given extensive and rapid support even before they get the right to remain, to give them the tools to integrate into the labour market. They should continued to be supported until they are able to cope effectively on their own. Mentors from both their own ethnic community and the host nation should be sought to befriend people and establish greater understanding between the host community and the Refugee or Asylum seeker. Children and their carers should be given especial support. Speaking for the UK, we should be more proud of our own culture and traditions and celebrate these. Diversity cannot be established if one community feels restricted in celebrating their own background as it breeds resentment, just as the same as the fact that you can't truly respect others if you have no respect for yourself. Where there is a conflict between the host community and the migrant community, it should be clear that the codes of the host country should take precedence as these are usually the same ethics and principles of the EU as a whole. In the UK there is a tension between respecting the rights of another culture and the deeply held ethics of the country, i.e. issues like female circumcision, forced marriages or the care of children v religious belief. Community instruments can focus on building capacity of individuals and companies to cope with diversity and on enabling individuals both host and immigrant to develop personal flexibility to behave differently in different situations. It's a thing humans have an instinct for and if we have a society in general where people cannot or do not adapt to different interpersonal situations then we are an autistic society. Just like technological change, societal change will continue and probably increase more rapidly, we have to learn to adapt and to discern what is positive change and what is negative.

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

South Yorkshire has pioneered improvements to the education of 14 - 19 year olds through the use of structural funds. This has not only raised attainment, but furnished our young people with high level ICT skills. We are seeking to strengthen progression routes from statutory schools through post 16 and higher education and to employment. We are working to offer the experience of vocational courses and work related learning to every young person. Non formal and voluntary activities are key to finding engaging ways to pass on key skills of literacy and numeracy, they develop higher motivational levels and student satisfaction. They also help to build social capital in the young. To be successful in the knowledge society, one needs to be self motivated and an active, thinking citizen. These activities foster this type of outlook and capacity. Young people need to be given a stake and responsibility in society at a younger age. Although they are not fully responsible at 13, they are no longer children and this half and half stage should be recognised and young people should be encouraged to participate in society on an equal footing, including self responsibility. Young people should have access to part time employment for a limited number of hours per week between the ages of 13 - 16. Young people need to be listened to and their ideas given sincere consideration, being taken up where possible. Young people need the freedom to be able to learn from their own mistakes. On the other side young people need to understand what is expected of them and not be given confusing or inaccurate messages.

- 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?

Child Poverty: Apart from what the UK is already doing I don't know Single Parent Families: Recognise the value of parenting as well as supporting single parents to go to work. See earlier comments on Challenge of the low birth rate. More support for couples when things begin to grow wrong to maintain supportive relationships centred on child raising - even if the marriage/partnership can't be saved an improvement in relations after the break up will enhance both parents and child. Something must be done about the paying of maintenance and the child support agency in the UK - Young people: Are we talking comparative poverty or absolute poverty? Can we accept that young people will be comparatively poorer when they start out because they won't have been able to build up capital, they don't have as much accumulation of knowledge and skills?. Other wise the best support for young people is a supportive network be this family or state. Homelessness of young people is a real concern and there should be funding to develop hostels which balance the young person's need for independence with the need to sensitive support and friendship. Solidarity between young people and elderly people: Housing should be integrated with recognition of the differing needs of the elderly and the young. Elderly people need to be encouraged to be tolerant of ordinary young people's behaviour and young people need to recognise the sensitivities of elderly people. Elderly people can be used as a mediation bridge between young people and their parents generation and projects of this sort should be established. There should be support for families of a low income who have become geographically scattered, so that the generations are able to relate to each other better.

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?

Flexible retirement ages, which also offer the opportunity for reduced hours at the same organisational grade. Support given to transfer of skills from older to younger workers. Recruitment based on competencies and merit rather than stereotyping of age groups. Tailored benefit packages to the mutual benefit of employee and company. Recognise that we still have groups of workers whose occupations have undermined their health and that they do not conform to a more healthy. living longer norm and enable them to retire at 60 with full pensions. Factoring the need to support health issues and disability across all age ranges, will enable both older people and disabled people to become more economically active. Couples: See notes above on low birth rate

- 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?

Reduce the number of less skilled jobs and ensure there are ladders of progression for young people. Create more attractive environments for diverse workforces and more flexible working practices to enable greater participation. Reduce the necessity for physical strength and health in jobs, so they are not reliant on being filled by young/fit people Open up training in apprenticeships etc for a wider range of people. Support those older people with family responsibilities to be able to access apprenticeships.

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?

No there should be no statutory retirement age, just a minimum and maximum guideline. Gradual retirement should be encouraged. Elderly people should be able to participate by combining wages, pensions and new forms of employment should be actively encouraged. Other financial incentives should not be used except to cover the additional costs of doing something. Companies could give time off to undertake voluntary work. If someone is taking an early retirement there could be a social contract whereby to be able to access a pension early they undertake some voluntary work. Its important to have phased retirement and the ability to work part time as otherwise no-one except the very elderly will have time to do voluntary activities. The voluntary sector (especially the community side) and Social Economy lack the capacity to manage the work they are increasingly being expected to do. The ability to have experience people work with them on a volunteer basis is very important. Barriers to participation such as the financial responsibilities of trustees should be explored so that people do not feel they are potentially risking their own built up capital when they give management support to a vol com organisation. Country of origin pays for healthcare and social protection. Healthy life expectancy: Of course, but one could be a cynic and say since caring for all of us who'll be elderly/very elderly in the future will be costly and problematic, maybe we should not invest in any more health promotion except to support the active lives of people under 75

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?

I've no answers to the above

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?

Take a much longer and far sighted approach over a further 30 or so years to 2080. Decide if we want to keep on increasing European and World populations or manage ourselves to a state with less strain on resources. If we are going to try and increase European populations, how will we cope with the extra need for resources, housing etc?. In certain areas of Europe such as the South East UK this is already an issue. How will we ensure sustainability and environmental protection with an ever increasing population. Structural funds should be based partially to manage demographic change effectively and ensure that we can maximise productivity and the benefits of the productivity from those people who are working. Other activity should be recognised and accorded social value apart from working, i.e. raising children, caring for relatives, contributing through volunteer work etc. People engaging in these socially valuable activities should not be penalised for doing so. At the same time there should be an expectation that people will do more than contribute through their economic activity. Employers should be supported to manage flexible and part time working and to use this more flexible method of working as a competitive bonus to offer better and more accessible services to customers by using staff talents more flexibly and recognising and using competencies.

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met