

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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Are you replying as an individual or an organisation? Organisation	
On behalf of which of the following are you replying? National NGO	
Please specify the name of your organisation or institution Cúram, Irish Parent and Carer NGO	
Country where your organisation is based IE - Ireland	
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>Demographic trends should inform policy generally. Economic and social policy should involve a process of 'family-proofing': in other words, the potential and actual effect of policies on families should be an integral part of the process of policy development, implementation and evaluation.</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?

Women are not having the number of children they would like because their options around care are limited and often unviable, either from their own point of view or from the point of view of those for whom they care. All children need care and education and all children need access to their parents in order to allow them to bond and develop positive family relationships. If the focus is on encouraging people to choose to have the number of children that they want, access to labour markets needs to be made more flexible for parents, and social welfare and pension contributions should be continued for those on parental leave. Recognition for at-home parents and other relatives (such as grandparents) who care for children should take place at all levels. Those who take time off the workforce on a full- or part-time basis to take care of children should be included in the 'active' statistics of the ILO and Eurostat. Recent US and UK research shows that maternal care results in very positive outcomes for children. Mothers and other family carers are a resource in communities, for children, for schools, for elderly and disabled family members and neighbours and for voluntary and charitable organisations. They should be recognised as such and supported in their role. All who care for children should have access to income, on which they could be taxed. All who care for children should be recognised as reducing the social spending the government would otherwise be making to enable others to participate in the labour market. If 1. parental choice is recognised, 2. the skills and experience parents gain from caring are recognised by the labour market generally and 3. opportunities and support for continuing parental education are made available, parents will engage with the workforce more positively and have more children.

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?

It is clear from research carried out by the Austria-based demographer Wolfgang Lutz that immigration will not be able to counteract demographic ageing. For his report to the Irish Presidency conference in May of 2004, see http://www.welfare.ie/topics/eu_pres04/fam_conf/eu_pres_report.pdf. Migrants are exposed to the same economic and social conditions of existing residents. It is not realistic to expect the trends to change without coming to grips with the forces underlying the drop in birth rates.

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

1. Access to information 2. Physical access to courses or access to e-courses 3. Replacement care available 4. Timing of courses 5. Inclusion of parents, family carers and volunteers as providers and supporters in the school and university system would all work towards integrating learning with families and communities.

- 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?

If all child care and education were recognised, those who suffer from child poverty and poverty among single-parent families would be helped disproportionately. Solidarity between generations occurs through access, contact and inter-generational support. Until social capital is recognised as integral to economic and social welfare systems, practical solidarity between generations will be difficult to improve.

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?

More flexibility in working times and arrangements would suit all age groups, not simply parents, and attract immigrants. Flexibility in course timing and IT provision of educational opportunities would aid parents and those in the labour force to engage with life-long learning. Older people will not be available to work more if they are expected to provide care for grandchildren.

- 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?

The Irish social partnership process, and the Irish National Economic and Social Council and Forum provide some pointers to how stakeholders can positively take part. All groups in society, however, should be represented in such processes. Methods should be put in place for groups to register an interest in participation and ensure that all groups in society are represented and have input into discussions of relevance to them.

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?

Flexibility in workforce participation will encourage the positive participation of older people and work to attract immigrants.

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?

Family members available to provide care for elderly family members save the State the cost of providing and maintaining a place in an eldercare facility. All those who provide family-based eldercare should continue to have access to income, pension contributions and social welfare contributions and should be able to access respite and other reasonable supports.

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 EU should include a family-proofing process in all economic and social policy development, implementation and review and direct Member States to do the same. Policies which act to discourage parents from having the number of children they desire should be reformed. Regular demographic analysis and research is the only way forward if the EU truly wants to meet this challenge. Mothers are

the only people who can improve the demographic situation. Recognising in a practical fashion their (and their partners') caring and educational support for their children will help them to have the number of children that they desire, a number which would stabilise the demographic situation in Europe.

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations not met

Why?

Irrelevant in content