

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

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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	
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Are you replying as an individual or an organisation? Organisation	
On behalf of which of the following are you replying? Other	
Please specify the name of your organisation or institution Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC) Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) Eurodiaconia (part 2)	
Country where your organisation is based BE - Belgium	
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? (please confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email) 	
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?

2. A more balanced distribution of tasks between men and women Article 23 of the Charter of fundamental rights explains, "equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay." Statistics show that employment, work and pay are still not distributed equally in all European countries. If the framework conditions were responding to these fundamental rights, it would be much easier for men and women to find a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks. We, therefore, encourage EU Member States to take care to implement fundamental rights on equality between men and women. In some European societies, the negative image of working women especially during the first years of motherhood, makes it more difficult for them to achieve a more balanced distribution of tasks. While churches encourage both men and women to allow children into their lives and to take time for them, women who are in fully-paid employment should not be discriminated as "uncaring mothers". Equally, the way male citizens regard themselves and the way society regards their roles has a large influence on their preparedness to contribute to family life and care for children for a period of time, at home or in professional institutions such as kindergartens or primary schools. A positive attitude of this kind should be encouraged publicly, but without stigmatising women/men who choose for personal care of their children. The emerging trend of instability in adult partnerships leads to increasing uncertainties for a long-term commitment to children,, while a stable relationship between parents is an important help for a balanced distribution of tasks between men and women. Regarding the high divorce rates in European societies, couples and families should find counselling support in conflict situations. Long lasting experiences of diaconal organisations show that professional counselling can be of great help in shaping partnership and family life. We would encourage public authorities to extend the offers of practical help for families in cooperation with organisations of civil society. In Christian understanding, married life presupposes equal responsibilities and an equitable sharing of tasks in the family. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6,2) 3. Adequate income for both parents on parental leave The award of certain benefits or advantages should not be linked to a fixed distribution of tasks between the sexes in order to allow the partners to designate their individually suitable distribution of tasks. But the legal and economic framework in EU Member States should make sure that parents really have a choice. Many men do not make use of parental leave because the loss of income is bigger if the father stays at home. Families should be enabled to keep their standard of living also if the "bigger" breadwinner opts for childcare and so is forced to interrupt a professional career. Financial benefits and advantages should be child-related, not parent-related. In some European countries, pension systems are still not neutral regarding the sharing of parental tasks in the families. Only the parent, who is gainfully employed, will expect to claim a pension, while the parent, who is staying at home to educate the children, will not be able to claim a pension. This leads to a discrimination of (mainly) women in the relevant pension system. In connection with the ongoing differences of income between women and men this is an important factor for the unequal distribution of income between sexes. Generally, times of parental leave should be recognised in pension systems. The state should though recognise the special contribution to society of parents educating children. (please also confer the the other parts of our contribution send to you by separate email)

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?

4. The challenge of two-way integration process Continued policies on integration continue to be necessary. Such policies must start from the assumption that migrants might at a certain point go back to their native country, but that they also might decide to stay. Any policy assuming that migrants (whatever their status is) will only be “guests” and leave at a certain point, seriously jeopardises social cohesion. Integration policies need to start from the notion that integration is not assimilation but a dynamic two-way process: While integration policies should include the need for migrants to acquire language and professional skills, as well as a notion of culture and the political order of the host society, it is equally necessary that integration policies address the need of integrating societies. “Integrating societies” means among other things that it is necessary for host societies to recognise that they will change and need to adapt to this change as a result of migration. This includes the fact that the “traditional” population needs to be informed about and prepared for living in an increasingly multi-cultural society and that channels of mediation between different cultures need to be further established. Churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations support specific measures for migrant families facing social exclusion. They also support specific help for immigrant children to learn to get acquainted with the culture of their host country (e.g. language courses, bilingual classes, special remedial teaching) as well as other measures to avoid/overcome exclusion.

5. Anti discrimination as a litmus test True integration of third country nationals and social coherence is only possible when the obstacles for third country nationals on their way to full social and civic participation are overcome. Policies to combat discrimination are therefore as important as programmes to facilitate social advancement of immigrants. A political commitment to combat discrimination sends out a strong signal to both third country nationals and the traditional population of immigration countries and helps to facilitate necessary social change. While the anti-discrimination directives (EC/2000/43 and EC 2000/78) have provided a useful framework for anti-discrimination in the EU, the failure of a majority of Member States to transpose these directives and the deadlock on the framework decision to combat racism have in this respect sent out a very unfortunate signal.

6. Cooperation with countries of origin: on equal footing While the Green Paper primarily discusses the demographic situation in the EU, the aspect of immigration raises the question of the impact on other countries. The potential impact of immigration on third countries is many-faceted: on the one hand migrants’ remittances can play an important and beneficial economic role for countries of origin and migration can contribute to the transfer of knowledge and skills to countries of origin; on the other hand emigration can deplete countries of their most qualified skilled workforce and have a negative impact on the general demographic situation in these countries. Migration policy and in particular recruitment programmes therefore need to take an approach which respects the genuine interests of third countries and does not only see these countries as mere implementation agents of policies addressing the EU’s needs and interests. (please also confer the the other parts of our contribution send to you by separate email)

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

2. Bridges between school and working life and the role of civil society Youth unemployment in the European Union is on average double the overall unemployment rate (cf. Integrated Guidelines for growth and jobs (2005-2008) (COM (2005) 141 final), p. 27). This means a high risk for social freedom in Member States with a high unemployment rate among young people and for the future of whole societies. It might also mean a human rights abuse (cf. Art. 15 Charter of fundamental rights). Europe cannot afford to miss the contribution of 20% or even 25% of young people to the community (cf. Eurostat: Unemployment rate of population aged less than 25 years. Published 1.7.2005) Member States should provide specific support programs for young people in order to facilitate progress in employment, whether it is first time entry or a move back to employment after a break. The quality of jobs, including pay and benefits, working conditions, job security, access to lifelong learning and career prospects are crucial, as are support and incentives stemming from social protection systems. No young woman or man, who wants to work and is capable of work, should be unemployed. The contribution of civil society goes much further than being partner of a dialogue. Existing networks in society like churches, diaconal institutions and youth organisations, but also other organisations, do play an important role in the support of jobless people. Due to their natural link to the grass roots level, they are often more efficient than any public administration in relating people with each other and enabling them to find their way into employment. It is important to highlight that the European Youth

Pact can only be implemented successfully if it is based on direct dialogue with youth organisations. They have the expertise and the contacts to network youth and to bring the relevant themes of European Integration to the grassroots level, thus rooting the European Project directly in civil society on a grass roots level. (please confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

- 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?

(please confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

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?

(please confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

- 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?

(please confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

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?

4. Pensioner mobility between Member States EU should support a better coordination of the different social protection and health care systems between Member States within the Open Method of Cooperation. The well being of people is not only depending on their physical health. Pensioners in foreign states carry a high risk of age-related solitude and have special needs for pastoral care. More research on the possibilities to integrate foreign elderly people into European societies seems to be needed. 5. Health promotion and prevention Art. 35 of EU Charter of fundamental rights does

guarantee everyone's right "of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices. A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities." In our understanding this does include health promotion and prevention, which should be accessible to everyone in European societies. (please also confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

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?

4. A balanced distribution of care between families, social services and institutions Many EU Member States do not have enough trained people and face increasing financial problems to provide a high quality of care for very elderly people. Not-for-profit service providers like churches and diaconal organisations very often combine the work of full time professionals and voluntary persons. They train voluntary people to take over caring tasks in a very competent way. This is an important contribution for a balanced distribution of care tasks in a society. This special contribution of not-for-profit service providers and their added value to civil society should be recognised by EU Commission and EU Member States. Not-for-profit networks and providers, who integrate the work of volunteers, should be recognised in EU legislation and be supported by public authorities. 5. Inequality between men and women in retirement age. See above (2.3 a new place for elderly people) 6. New technologies to support older people The intention to improve the living conditions of the very elderly people should not only look for technical solutions, but also reflect the importance of social living conditions. On the basis of their extensive experience with caring facilities for older people, churches and diaconal organisations would like to encourage EU and Member States to invest more in social research on the improvement of living conditions of the very elderly people and to cooperate with service providers on this. We face, for example, the phenomenon of solitariness of very elderly people. European societies have to develop new ways of how to react to this phenomenon, to allow very elderly people to live in relation with others in dignity. 4. A balanced distribution of care between families, social services and institutions Many EU Member States do not have enough trained people and face increasing financial problems to provide a high quality of care for very elderly people. Not-for-profit service providers like churches and diaconal organisations very often combine the work of full time professionals and voluntary persons. They train voluntary people to take over caring tasks in a very competent way. This is an important contribution for a balanced distribution of care tasks in a society. This special contribution of not-for-profit service providers and their added value to civil society should be recognised by EU Commission and EU Member States. Not-for-profit networks and providers, who integrate the work of volunteers, should be recognised in EU legislation and be supported by public authorities. 5. Inequality between men and women in retirement age. See above (2.3 a new place for elderly people) 6. New technologies to support older people The intention to improve the living conditions of the very elderly people should not only look for technical solutions, but also reflect the importance of social living conditions. On the basis of their extensive experience with caring facilities for older people, churches and diaconal organisations would like to encourage EU and Member States to invest more in social research on the improvement of living conditions of the very elderly people and to cooperate with service providers on this. We face, for example, the phenomenon of solitariness of very elderly people. European societies have to develop new ways of how to react to this phenomenon, to allow very elderly people to live in relation with others in dignity. (please also confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

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?

4. Contribution of social dialogue and the role of civil society and of civil dialogue with young people
The current demographic changes reflect the increasing differentiation of living conditions in Europe. These are differentiated processes not only on national, but also on regional or even local level. An over-tightened regulation and standardisation on European level might interfere with the necessarily manifold and localised policy measures facing demographic challenges. The close cooperation with civil society could ensure a more appropriate policy facing demographic changes, taking into account the experiences of these organisations working in very close relationship with people. European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations are ready to contribute to a policy which cares about every single person with their distinctive gifts and needs. They are ready to contribute to strengthen a mutual sense of responsibility in European societies. Including youth in this dialogue is essential as their future is being discussed. Solidarity and cohesion in society can only be achieved by achieving an agreement of what society is like. Youth must be involved in formulating this agreement.

5. Demographic changes as integral part of Union's policies
If European societies want to overcome the demographic challenges in their societies, they need a new culture of solidarity between the generations. In recent time, EU policy has been more and more concentrating on competition and not on the social cohesion of a society. While we recognise the importance of enhancing EU efforts in the fields of economy and employment, we stress even more the importance of an overall coherence of EU policies. In order to face demographic challenges in Europe, a new effort has to be made on the basis of values truly integrating ethical, social and economic dimensions. We will therefore support political efforts to integrate concerns related to sustainability into all policies and actions of the EU. The earth has been entrusted to us as a heritage for all generations. A life style of dissipation and short-term profit seeking deprives future generations of their life resources and imposes immense burdens on future generations. The demographic challenges we face impose significant changes in policy on our societies. Sparing management of natural resources, sustainable economic and social policies have to be the guidelines of thinking and action in politics, economy and society. (please also confer part 1 of our contribution send to you by separate email)

The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met