

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 3)	
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?

4. Improvement of care structures The comparative analysis for all OECD countries reveals a strong positive relationship between institutional childcare coverage and fertility rate. Further research indicates that, in addition to availability, affordability and the length and flexibility of opening hours are of importance (cf. Krieger, Demographic changes in Europe and their implications for family policy. CoE May 2005, p. 23). Regarding the importance of child caring structures, we also have to consider profound changes in living arrangements in European societies. More and more biographical situations lead to the fact that an increasing number of children are growing up in single parent households. To enable these parents to earn their living and income for their families, extensive child caring facilities or alternatively benefits for taking care of their own children must be provided. EU Member states should therefore provide a legitimate claim for childcare coverage from an early age onwards, in order to ensure a high standard of caring facilities for children. For the churches, the education and care of children and youth is an important part of their service to the society. In all Member States, churches and diaconal organisations provide childcare facilities like crèches, nursery schools, all-day care for pupils in primary and secondary schools or boarding schools. The close cooperation of public authorities with service providers of civil society contributes to a high quality of caring services. 5. Financial aspects of demographic changes A reduced VAT rate and subsidized services for children might help people to have access to affordable care services, but it is not sufficient to safeguard public responsibility for the provision of a high quality of services: To overcome the financial challenges of demographic changes it will be necessary, in some Member States, to broaden the financial basis of social protection systems by strengthening investments, employment, education and by an increased allocation justice in their societies. It should also be considered how the support of the nurturing of children can be shared by all members of the society. , A more just equalisation of burdens in a society would more significantly relieve families with children. 6. Young parents, the labour market, career and children It is becoming evident that one of the most important targets is the raising of awareness. Work with children and youth has to be accepted as being as valuable as other work. Education is not only an important service for society, but also enlarging the organisational, social and pedagogical competences of those who take this responsibility. This should be positively taken into account in job applications and career planning. The EU and its Member States could investigate how special support measures providing specific advantages for parents educating children (e.g. vocational training during parental leave) would help them to better combine career and family/social tasks. Tragic reality of many young women in Europe is that they are afraid to be pregnant because they then risk losing their jobs. What has been said earlier on work/life balance is of similar importance for the compatibility of vocational training and studies with family life. A temporary equalisation of working and family biographies would it make easier for young families to combine having children with gainful employment. This will need more flexibility in the education system, especially higher education (e.g. better opportunities for parental leave, more flexible time frames at universities and no age restriction in access to subsidies for studies). The fact, that parents with a higher education have a very low fertility rate shows that it is especially difficult for them to combine higher education and family life. (please confer 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?

(please confer part 1-2 of our contribution send to you by separate email) 7. Conclusions Migration is a fact. The better Europe manages political, economic, cultural and religious integration, the greater the benefit will be. The success of this process will not in the least depend on the readiness of public authorities to cooperate with civil society partners, like migrant organisations. Successful integration of migrants will need a shift of paradigm for European identity: Diversity must be recognised as part of the identity of European societies. The ecumenical process of “reconciled diversity” in the last decades might be an example for the intertwining of different cultures and traditions.

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

(please confer part 1-2 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?

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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?

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- 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?

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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?

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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?

(please confer part 1-2 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?

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The Questionnaire

How did you perceive this questionnaire? Expectations met