

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 4)	
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?

(please confer part 1-3 of our contribution send to you by separate email) 7. Conclusions The economic and political framework plays an important role in setting conditions, which enable couples to get and raise the children they hope for. But demographic changes are also strongly influenced by individual and collective value systems, mentality settings and priorities. In Christian understanding, children are a Blessing of God. Churches are encouraging every couple to receive the children, God wants them to be blessed with. At the same time, they are encouraging everyone to contribute to a warm, open society, which welcomes children and elderly alike. The low number of children changes the cultural and empathetic climate in our societies and leads to a lack of consideration and respect for their specific needs in public life. Therefore "in all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration." (Art. 24,2 Charter of fundamental rights) European Churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations strongly support a "family friendly approach" in EU policies, meaning coherent policies taking into account the living conditions of families in all political areas. Two additional remarks: The environment likewise plays an important role in the conditions for bringing up children in a healthy way. Clean air and water, nutritious food, good indoor climate etc. are all important aspects that need to be taken into consideration to bring down sick days and provide good living conditions. The environmental aspect is also relevant in connection with the discussion on fertility. EU demographic policy must be aware of a high rate of unintended childlessness: WHO describes infertility and involuntary childlessness as diseases that put a heavy burden on the affected women and men (cf. WHO: Reproductive health strategy. Adopted by the 57th World Health Assembly May 2004). Any discrimination of people suffering from involuntary childlessness has to be avoided. Our societies should offer other opportunities for people who are unable to have children like godparent hood, adoption or opportunities for voluntary engagement, which enable them to make special contributions for the community out of their personal situation.

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 1-3 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

(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 1-3 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