

Demographic future of Europe

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PURPOSE: to propose a framework for the exchange of best practices, with a view to **promoting solidarity between generations**, based on the principles of the Lisbon Strategy and on the concept of the “European Alliance for Families”.

BACKGROUND: in its communication on the demographic future of Europe (see summary of 12 October 2006), the Commission had already stressed the importance of demographic renewal, by including the actions of Member States in the renewed framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment and the monitoring of the policy on gender equality. The debate that has taken place since then on the ageing demographic, has highlighted the importance of intergenerational solidarity, bearing in mind that, today, young adults take longer to fly the nest and are increasingly required to support dependant older persons. This results in a heavy burden for young and middle-aged people to bear, and especially for women.

Therefore, gender equality, and more broadly speaking, equal opportunities seem to be of utmost importance for establishing renewed solidarity between generations. This is why, even though Member States have exclusive powers in the area of family policy, the EU can, nevertheless, indirectly contribute to their modernisation and success, by highlighting the participation of women in the workplace, the need for a better work-life balance, as well as the employment and participation of young people.

It is in this context that the Commission proposes the current communication, calling for a framework of measures and the exchange of best practices to promote solidarity between generations.

CONTENT: to promote the revitalisation of family policies and to improve the work-life balance, the Commission proposes a two-tiered approach:

1) Promote family policies: bearing in mind the measures already taken by the Member States in this area, the communication shows what can be done within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy to further reinforce the current framework. Community law has long taken into account the demands of family life and the corresponding rights. In particular, since 1992, the *acquis communautaire* has benefited from a legislative framework for the protection of pregnant workers and the introduction of maternity leave. At the same time, one of the very first results of the European social dialogue concerns the right to parental leave. The importance of this balance, which is essential for the financial independence of women, can be seen in both the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010 (see [INI/2006/2132](#)) and in the European Pact for Gender Equality, approved by the Member States during the March 2006 European Council (annex II of the [Council Conclusions](#)). Other measures have been implemented to take the rights of children into account and to increase the participation of women in the workplace (notably via the “Open Method of Coordination” (OMC), which aims to draw particular attention to improving the situation of poor children and their families, modernising pension schemes to better reflect new working trends and career breaks, and promoting long-term care for dependant persons).

Considering that progress needs to be made in this area, the communication notes that, within the context of the Lisbon Strategy, there are several proposed initiatives to further promote a work-life balance. In particular, for 2007-2008, the Commission plans to:

- launch a second consultation phase on the content of possible legislative and non-legislative proposals, alongside the current communication, with the aim of contributing to a better balance;

- lead a series of activities (2007) in order to respond to the European Council's mandate to emphasise the fight against child poverty (also see [INI/2007/2093](#));
- reflect on the quality of services for dependant older people and on the protection against maltreatment, as well as on measures that could be taken at European level, in cooperation with Member States, to accelerate the development and modernisation of infrastructures and services aimed at meeting the challenges of an ageing population;
- monitor the consultation process, so as to better understand the social reality in European societies and to shed new light on the direction of Community policies in the area of equal opportunities and the access to care services for all generations.

2) **“European Alliance for Families”**: this concept, launched by the March 2007 European Council (point 20 of the Council Conclusions of 8 and 9 March 2007), will be finalised through a knowledge and exchange platform on family-friendly policies and best practices of Member States, with a view to responding to the challenges of demographic change. The measures planned by the Commission are as follows:

2.1 Establish a “European Alliance for Families” platform: from 2007, the Commission will develop tools to create a system for the exchange of best practices and research. This will involve:

- creating a High Level Group of government experts on demographic issues: the aim of this group will be to advise the Commission in preparing reports and organising biannual forums on demography and assisting it with the implementation of measures for the analysis and exchange of experiences;
- creating European, national, regional and local forums and networks: every 2 years, a **European Demographic Forum** will be organised by the Commission to review the demographic situation and the implementation of the guidelines proposed by the communication on Europe's demographic future. The first forum is planned for Autumn 2008;
- establishing an “observatory of best practices”: the Commission will invite the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions to establish an observatory of best practices in the area of family policies. The information gathered by this observatory will be used by both European and decentralised forums;
- reinforcing research topics through the 7th Research Framework Programme.

A Eurobarometer survey on the situation of families and their needs will also be carried out in 2008.

2.2 Develop partnerships aimed at promoting work-life balance by making use of new means provided for through Structural Funds. In particular, the Commission calls on Member States to ensure that operational programmes financed by the Funds promote family policies and work-life balance, through a practical guide that will be presented to local and regional stakeholders. Lastly, at the 3rd European Demographic Forum, planned for 2010, the Commission will report back on the achievements made under the European Alliance for Families framework.

Conclusions: by encouraging a better response to family needs, in terms of caring for children and dependant persons, as well as a more balanced sharing of domestic responsibilities, national family policies will reinforce intergenerational solidarity. New family policy guidelines will also contribute to supporting growth and employment, by facilitating female participation in the workplace, in particular.

By focusing on gender equality and, more broadly, on equal opportunities, the Lisbon Strategy is a relevant support framework for developing these family policies. Family policy is, however, the sole responsibility of Member States, even though the “European Alliance for Families”, a new concept established by the Spring European Council, will make a useful contribution to promoting the exchange of best practices and research in this area.