

Demographic change and its consequences for the cohesion policy

European Parliament resolution of 15 November 2011 on demographic change and its consequences for the future cohesion policy of the EU (2010/2157(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to DG REGIO’s Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, in particular pages 230 to 234,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Fifth Cohesion Report: the future of cohesion policy (COM(2010)0642) and the accompanying document (SEC(2010)1348),
 - having regard to the DG REGIO working document entitled ‘Regions 2020: an Assessment of Future Challenges for EU Regions’ of November 2008 (background document to Commission staff working document SEC(2008)2868),
 - having regard to its resolution of 11 November 2010 on demographic challenges and solidarity between the generations¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 21 February 2008 on the demographic future of Europe²,
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 10 May 2007 entitled ‘Promoting solidarity between the generations’ (COM(2007)0244),
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 March 2006 on demographic challenges and solidarity between the generations³,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 12 October 2006 entitled ‘The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity’ (COM(2006)0571),
 - having regard to the Green Paper of 16 March 2005 entitled ‘Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations’ (COM(2005)0094),
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinions of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A7-0350/2011),
- A. whereas demographic change in the EU and worldwide is a fact and dealing with it constitutes one of the core tasks for the future, and whereas the EU population is the oldest in the world;

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0400.

² OJ C 184 E, 6.8.2009, p. 75.

³ OJ C 292 E, 1.12.2006, p. 131.

- B. whereas demographic change is characterised by population ageing and substantial migration flows both from third countries into the EU and within the EU from east to west and from rural to urban areas;
- C. whereas demographic change is creating new tasks for some regions in particular, but, instead of being viewed purely as a threat, it should also be seen as an opportunity;
- D. whereas the study entitled 'Regions 2020' by the Commission's DG Regio has identified demographic change as a central challenge;
- E. whereas demographic change affects rural and urban areas in equal measure, with implications, inter alia, for the provision of good infrastructure and services,
- F. whereas, although meeting the full range of demographic challenges is principally the task of the Member States, the regions must be proactive, for which they need European-level support,
- G. whereas, under the 2007-2013 operational programmes, the Member States have earmarked EUR 30 billion in Structural Fund resources for measures linked to demographic change, and whereas regional and local authorities are central to the process of addressing this change, so that regional policy will be a key instrument among the EU's means of action,

General

1. Considers that the rising life expectancy in Europe is to be welcomed; believes that the public is often aware only of the dangers and not of the opportunities inherent in demographic change;
2. Considers that all opportunities should be carefully examined and exploited in an appropriate manner, including with the support provided by the cohesion policy instruments;
3. Believes that the impact of demographic change varies substantially from region to region, depending on whether it is rapid or slow and whether the region concerned is a region of net immigration or of shrinking population and therefore requires a different adjustment strategy, and must be tackled in a coordinated way by all European, national and regional authorities; notes that in regions of shrinking population, particularly rural regions, quality of life is defined differently from the way it is in regions with a growing population, and therefore considers that different support strategies are needed; takes the view that workforce migration accentuates the effects of demographic change and that population ageing is only part of the picture;
4. Considers that the ERDF and ESF can contribute to the task of addressing the challenges stemming from demographic change in the EU, namely the increase in the number of older people and the decline in the young population; advocates the use of ERDF funds to support the adaptation of housing to the needs of the elderly in order to guarantee a high quality of life for an ageing society; calls on the Member States and the regions to use the funding available under the ERDF and ESF to support young families;
5. Considers that a political framework for gender equality can help us to face demographic challenges; requests, therefore, that the issue of gender equality should be considered in all

debates on demographic issues;

6. Considers that the current worsening demographic situation in at least some Member States will stimulate discussions regarding pension-systems reform in the near future;

Structural policy reforms

7. Calls on the Member States and regions to consider the divergent development levels of the regions and also demographic indicators, for example the dependency ratio, when allocating and distributing EU structural funds and when defining impact indicators; points out that globally the EU has the highest proportion of elderly people among its population; believes that the Commission should also propose ways of addressing demographic change on a Europe-wide basis; considers it essential in terms of both access to infrastructure and services and environmental protection to assess not only workforce migration, but also the need to guarantee the conditions that keep people in their own regions, in order to avoid population concentration in certain urban areas;
8. Believes that joint solutions and synergies can be found by implementing EU policies, including where demographic change is concerned; calls on the Commission to include demographic change as a horizontal objective in the future cohesion policy; calls, further, on the Commission to insist that this issue is taken into account when concluding investment partnerships with Member States;
9. Encourages the Member States and regions to pay greater heed than in the past to demographic change and its effects, making measures to tackle it a horizontal objective in the shaping of the national strategic framework programmes (or any corresponding document) and in their operational programmes; considers, in that connection, that the flagship measures in the EU2020 strategy, including the active and healthy ageing partnership, could be directly linked to the preferences of the partners in these programmes;
10. Calls for proactive measures to prevent the negative consequences of demographic change and increase technical assistance to the regions suffering the most from depopulation and ageing, in order to ensure that they retain their absorption capacity and the ability to benefit from the Structural Funds;
11. Believes that public and private actors in Europe will have the opportunity to play a pioneering role in responding to the challenges posed by demographic change and ageing, employing social innovations and other means; points out that the costs generated by ageing will in future account for an ever increasing proportion of public and private investment alike; realises that the field is one offering growing potential to the business world and for innovations;
12. Highlights the fact that demographic change, especially population ageing, has a clear impact on the provision of social infrastructure, such as pension systems, nursing care and healthcare, with regional authorities having to meet changing demand from various population groups;
13. Calls for future ESF rules that are simpler to manage and therefore enable small organisations to benefit more from funding and develop and manage innovative social projects; calls on the Commission, under the future ESF, to increase funding for transnational pilot projects at EU level which address social and employment issues, in

order to facilitate innovative regional, cross-border and macro-regional cooperation and so meet common challenges arising from demographic change;

Urban development/infrastructure

14. Encourages the regions to use the Structural Funds to help address demographic challenges and to improve access to social and administrative services, including in small and remote towns and villages, by promoting the specific potential of each region and strengthening the factors that make people want to stay;
15. Calls on the Commission to create more flexible conditions in order to promote cross-financing between ERDF and ESF when devising and implementing integrated urban development plans/strategies;
16. Believes that, if depopulation is to be prevented, then child- and family-friendly towns and cities need to be developed and adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and with restricted mobility; considers that one feature of this design is that wherever possible distances between workplaces, housing and recreational areas should not be excessive; calls on the regions to ensure, in the field of urban planning, that residential, commercial and green areas alternate and are developed in a balanced and harmonious way and that connections with suburban areas earmarked as new residential areas are improved; urges, in addition, that teleworking opportunities should be developed further;
17. Notes that small towns in regions of net emigration have a particularly important role to play as service centres; calls for this anchor function to be taken into account in the future Structural Funds, in particular by improving the coordination of the EAFRD with the ERDF and the ESF; notes that rural depopulation has negative knock-on effects on urban areas and that economically and socially vibrant rural areas constitute a public good, which should be recognised in the form of an adequately resourced rural development programme; calls on the Member States, regions and municipalities to provide a comprehensive and functioning service network for their citizens of all ages in order to prevent rural exodus and depopulation;
18. Points out that ERDF funds can also be used to prevent the social exclusion of the elderly, for example by establishing dedicated infrastructure and services for the elderly and ensuring accessibility for all;
19. Considers that, in areas with a dwindling population, financial support should be provided for adaptation strategies; believes that urban and regional planning must take greater account of changing infrastructure uses, including by revitalising and restructuring inner cities, an area where cooperation with private partners is also important; notes that one of the priorities for urban policy should be to develop elderly-friendly towns and cities; calls for urban tourism potential and heritage objectives to be acknowledged and developed, as these present opportunities to attract new residents into areas at risk of depopulation;
20. Calls on the regions to develop innovative concepts for local public transport in order to address, among other things, the challenge of dwindling passenger numbers, particularly in rural areas; calls on the Commission to provide financial support for these types of project;

The elderly, children and families

21. Advocates that loans with low interest rates which could support the adaptation of housing to the needs of the elderly could be given priority under the ERDF; proposes offering the opportunity for financial resources to be provided under certain conditions for sheltered housing complexes and multi-generational housing, with a view to preventing the isolation of the elderly and harnessing their creative potential, in order to guarantee a better quality of life for an ageing society;
22. Encourages the Member States to bring welfare and healthcare benefits into line with the needs of everyone, especially families and children, and provide funding to ensure the availability of care at home and universal healthcare for elderly people, irrespective of their income, age and social status, so as to prevent the depopulation of rural areas and peripheral regions;
23. Considers that public investment in health and care systems is important for social cohesion in Europe; calls on the Member States to ensure good healthcare provision in rural areas as well, for example through the provision of regional medical care gateway clinics and health services which make it possible to combat 'medical desertification', and, in border regions, through closer cross-border cooperation between clinics and between stakeholders, and by considering the possibility of using the Structural Funds to promote additional measures in the field of telemedicine and care and to support active ageing; calls on the Commission to find innovative ways of providing financial support for these actions;
24. Warns of the danger of specific regional problems affecting the provision of services of general interest, in particular a lack of skilled workers in care-related professions in certain regions; believes that these regions should develop specific regional responses to the needs and difficulties of service provision, and use ESF funds to train care workers in order to ensure that a high quality of care is guaranteed and that new jobs are created, including through retraining programmes for the unemployed; points out that this makes a direct contribution to the EU2020 objective of creating more jobs;
25. Stresses the importance of creating conditions which enable people to achieve a work/family/private life balance and, for example, of providing, where feasible, universally available, reliable, all-day childcare facilities of high quality for children of all ages, including facilities and opportunities for pre-school-learning, in order to prevent depopulation; recognises, at the same time, the valuable role played by extended families in taking care of children;
26. Regards it as important that enough affordable housing space should be available for families, so that family and working life can be reconciled more effectively, because support for young families can help to increase the birth rate in Member States;

Migration/integration

27. Emphasises that the migration might give rise to certain integration problems;
28. Points out that the migration of qualified workforce from the new to the old Member States is one of the biggest demographic problems facing the new Member States and is having a negative impact on the age structure of their population; emphasises, further, that migration also concerns healthcare professionals and hence endangers the sustainability of the

healthcare system in regions which are less developed;

29. Recognises, however, that migration offers, in particular to regions experiencing net outflows, the opportunity to stem the negative impact of demographic change, and calls, therefore, on the Member States to recognise the integration of migrants as a strategically important policy measure;
30. Calls on the Member States to agree on a common strategy on legal migration, not least since Europe is, especially in certain given sectors, reliant upon the migration of skilled workers (both between the Member States and from outside the EU, particularly those bordering the Union) for demographic reasons; considers that the Member States must seek to ensure that skilled workers are retained, in order to contribute to the balanced development of the regions and to alleviate the effects of demographic change;
31. Proposes that more funding should be provided for the integration of immigrants in order to dispel prejudices, and that training and communal events to encourage exchanges could be promoted;

Employment

32. Calls on the Commission to gear the ESF in such a way that account is taken of people at all stages of life and to ensure that more use is made of professional and voluntary potential in meeting the challenges of demographic change; notes that the experience and know-how of older people should be utilised, for example for coaching projects, to facilitate generational changeover, and that appropriate solutions are required for this purpose; takes the view that intergenerational communication offers an opportunity that should be seized;
33. Believes that the regions should use ESF funds in a decisive manner to combat youth unemployment in order to ensure the social integration of young people and give them the opportunity to take up a suitable profession; points out that this could be achieved, for example, by supporting training measures for and entrepreneurship among young people;
34. Believes that support should continue to be given with a view to raising the female employment rate; calls, therefore, for more women to be given access to skilled jobs and lifelong learning programmes, provided that the qualifications obtained correspond to the needs of the labour market; recommends that the Member States develop systems for encouraging employees to participate in special projects to help them reconcile work and family life;
35. Stresses that, for European regions facing demographic challenges, establishing an environment conducive to a competitive and innovative private sector is central to creating new employment opportunities across all generations;

Analysis/best practice

36. Considers that demographic developments in the regions should be statistically measured; calls on the Commission to submit proposals to make local, regional and national databases on demographic development comparable, so that data can be evaluated at European level and that the exchanges of best practices between States, regions and localities can be fostered;

37. Calls on the Commission to improve the Demographic Vulnerability Index and calculate it every five years in order to show which regions in Europe are particularly vulnerable to demographic change; urges the Commission to devise pilot procedures with a view to charting the practices applied in the regions with the most exacting requirements;
38. Calls on the Member States and regional and local authorities to enhance cooperation with local and regional stakeholders on issues connected with demographic change; considers that in border regions this cooperation must also tie in with the wishes and scope for cross-border initiatives; suggests that training programmes be developed in this field in order to create a better understanding and awareness of the issues involved; urges the regions to exchange best practices relating to the challenges linked to ageing;
39. Proposes to the Commission that it should promote, as part of territorial cooperation, EU-wide networks in which regional and local authorities and civil society actors can learn from one another about tackling the problems resulting from demographic change;
40. Asks the Commission to find ways of reshaping the idea of an Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives in an appropriate form and to explain its idea for a summer or winter school in greater detail, so that representatives from the European regions can exchange good experience and approaches to solutions on demographic matters;
41. Calls on the Commission to produce a compilation of best practices, analyse them and share them with Member States and the regions so that they can be used as an example in devising policy to meet demographic challenges;
42. Calls on Member States and regions to exchange experience, best practices and new approaches to preventing the negative consequences of demographic change;

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43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.