

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Committee on Regional Development

2007/2156(INI)

24.10.2007

DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the demographic future of Europe
(2007/2156(INI))

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Notes that the impact of demographic change differs markedly from region to region and requires different adjustment strategies depending on whether the region concerned is a region of immigration or of shrinking population; notes that quality of life is defined differently in regions of shrinking population, which are mostly rural regions, than in growth regions and therefore different support strategies are needed;
2. Notes that all regions, including regions of net emigration, have specific potential in a variety of fields; calls for them to be given help in developing that potential to the full in the interests of their regional prosperity; calls on the Member States, therefore, as part of their regional policy, to give priority to independent development strategies in such regions, since experience shows that this can stimulate local and regional economic activity, thereby making shrinking regions more attractive again;
3. Notes that in shrinking regions innovative and decentralised infrastructure concepts, together with a high degree of active citizenship, improve the quality of life and are factors which strengthen economic stability and ties to the region concerned, including among young people; calls for support programmes to be set up for such development concepts;
4. Stresses that in shrinking regions voluntary work and social networks make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of local people; considers that this active citizenship must be recognised and the bodies involved supported as regional policy partners; stresses that this sets in motion learning processes that enable a region to meet the challenges of demographic change;
5. Calls on the Member States not to give up on regions of net emigration but to guarantee universal provision of basic services (e.g. postal and health services) and accessibility (e.g. of public transport and IT services) and to safeguard economic participation and skills (e.g. through training); calls for the practical framework for fulfilment of these tasks to be adapted to local needs and local actors and to be made more flexible;
6. Proposes to the Commission that it should promote, as part of the Interreg programme, Europe-wide networks in which regions and their government and civil society bodies can learn from one another in tackling the problems resulting from demographic change.