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Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

2010/2157(INI)

19.4.2011

OPINION

of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

for the Committee on Regional Development

on demographic change and its consequences for the future cohesion policy of
the EU
(2010/2157(INI))

Rapporteur: Sari Essayah

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SUGGESTIONS

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

1. Notes that demographic projections concerning old-age dependency ratios indicate increasing polarisation between regions, as by 2020 there will be 40 regions where the ratio is at least 25% above the EU average, creating serious challenges not just to pension and healthcare systems, but also with regard to care of the elderly, the adequacy and training of the workforce, and many other social issues;
2. Notes that the ageing of European society disguises substantial regional inequalities; notes that, as national data on demographic change mask differing local realities, it is sometimes hard to identify needs in terms of infrastructure and financial transfers from central government; calls on the Commission to help improve the quality and reliability of data and statistics on demographic trends;
3. Notes that longer life expectancy, reduced fertility levels and migration have given rise to demographic change, with significant territorial variation across Europe and vast differences between Member States, between regions and between cities, sometimes also within cities;
4. Considers that prolonged life expectancy is a positive factor and should be seen as such; therefore asks the EU to ensure that Member States guarantee that pensioners, especially those at risk of poverty, unable to afford a home or to care for themselves, do not fall into poverty;
5. Considers that the recent economic and financial crisis has worsened the situation with regard to demographic trends in Europe, making it more difficult to find a solution to the problem;
6. 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;
7. Notes that addressing demographic change will be important if the EU 2020 goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth are to be achieved; in this context, ageing should be seen as an opportunity and not as a burden, with structural funding provided to offer possibilities to Member States, regions and cities;
8. 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;
9. Considers that there should be indicators which complement GDP as criteria for the

allocation of funds under future EU cohesion policy, most importantly from the point of view of demographic change the old-age dependency ratio; stresses, however, the importance of other social indicators in this respect, too, and notes that many important indicators are listed in the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on the report on 'GDP and beyond – measuring progress in a changing world' (2010/2088(INI)) as a way of responding to the challenges of Europe more effectively;

10. Notes that the impact of demographic change on individual regions is serious and requires different adjustment strategies depending on whether the region concerned is a region of migration or of shrinking population; notes that quality of life is defined differently in regions of shrinking population, which are mostly rural regions, than in regions with a growing population, and therefore considers that different support strategies are needed;
11. Stresses that the European Social Fund (ESF) should be regarded as an essential resource to support training opportunities to increase employment and improve career reorientation and the social inclusion of women, young people and senior citizens; calls for the ESF's full potential to be used in this area;
12. Notes that all regions, including regions of net emigration, have specific potential in a variety of fields; calls on the Member States, within their policy framework, to prioritise strategies that allow such regions to exploit their own development potential to the full, since experience shows that this can stimulate local and regional economic and social actors, thereby making regions with net outward migration more attractive again and reversing migration trends; notes the ESF's importance in this context, and calls for integrated programmes at regional level so that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the ESF work better together and in conjunction with the common agricultural policy and environmental policy, thereby making it possible to meet the needs of rural areas effectively, and considers that all cohesion policy measures should have a results-oriented focus on sustainable development, poverty eradication, competitiveness, employment and other EU 2020 Strategy targets; calls for cohesion policy to be conditional on results and to set measurable targets and outcome indicators so as to make ongoing evaluation possible; calls for evaluation and scrutiny of the results achieved through the allocation of ESF funding;
13. Within the framework of the ESF, calls for improvements in the working conditions and employment possibilities of older people and for incentives to continue working for longer than at present, calls for further training to be organised for employees, in order to meet the changing needs of working life, and urges that support be provided for older entrepreneurs;
14. Considers that ESF funding should be used to support the development of care services, including long-term care for the elderly, as a new potential growth sector for the services market and as an opportunity to achieve higher employment rates, particularly among women carers;
15. Proposes that greater use should be made of the opportunities offered by the ESF in order to make local social capital available for local services close to people, so as to take account of the particular needs of elderly people and enable them to lead an independent life for as long as possible; points out, in addition, that regions experiencing net outward

migration need to take measures to maintain a natural population mix as far as possible, in particular, by guaranteeing childcare provision, attractive educational infrastructure and universal access to other services of general interest;

16. Calls for the creation of favourable conditions for businesses, particularly SMEs, through the introduction and adaptation of innovative products and processes;
17. Takes the view that interactive links should be encouraged between research institutions and representatives of the business world;
18. Takes the view that peripheral regions ought not to exist in Europe in social and economic terms, and that to this end various policies and measures should be implemented, such as a policy which encourages young people to remain in or move to the peripheries and enables people living there to survive; notes that in regions with net outward migration innovative and decentralised social infrastructure concepts, together with a high degree of active citizenship, improve the quality of life and are factors which strengthen economic stability, also among young people; considers that regional economies and structures should be renewed in advance in preparation for coping with the impact of the ageing of the population and that those regions where population ageing will be most rapid could be used as testing grounds for experimenting with and funding innovative solutions to regional problems caused by rapid demographic change, bearing in mind that new social and services-related innovations are needed in many areas, for example:
 - reconciliation of family life and work, including financial and adequate infrastructure support, as well as recognition of care work;
 - supporting the employment of older persons by means of greater flexibility in employment relations,
 - halting marginalisation of the regions and developing regions which are lagging behind,
 - ensuring the adequate, universal provision of high-quality basic services of general interest, including care services for the elderly, as universal access to social services is a fundamental right and the principle of solidarity must be maintained, also when addressing demographic imbalances;
 - increasing productivity in healthcare and care for the elderly by using ICTs,
 - keeping the ageing population healthy, active and capable of living at home and mobilising the potential of older workers, entrepreneurs and volunteers, by promoting their employability, training and education; safeguarding the economic participation and skills development (e.g. through training) of an ageing population by means of a thorough reform of career management for senior employees aged 50 and above, who are currently often penalised through discrimination in recruitment procedures, inadequate access to training, including in new skills and technologies, and the failure to recognise the value of experience,
 - the Member States should take practical steps to ensure healthy ageing by:

guaranteeing equal access for everyone to basic healthcare and improving the quality and safety of medical treatment;

- responding to the phases of deterioration in the condition of elderly people, while providing relevant education, skills and training to ensure that older persons do not suffer social exclusion and that vulnerable groups, such as migrants, the disabled and the elderly, can participate in training courses to improve their access to ICTs;
- encouraging inward migration in order to meet regional labour market needs, since highly skilled migrants might be vital for some sectors of the regional economy;

19. Welcomes in this context the Commission's proposal for a Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, which could provide the coordination needed to develop the above innovations; calls for the cohesion budget to be made more flexible than at present, so that new ideas and approaches can be tried and risk-taking and experimentation encouraged;
20. Notes that, during the current programming period, regional and structural policy is based on fund-centred programmes, and considers that during the next programming period Structural Fund measures should be combined in a single programme document at the appropriate regional level;
21. Draws attention to the need for public spending on young children and large families, particularly for the provision of childcare facilities and for the protection of single mothers and one-parent families, who are at particular risk of social exclusion, isolation and poverty; stresses that such services are in the general interest and contribute to job creation and the development of the local and regional economy; calls on the Commission to showcase examples of the best practices of certain Member State regions;
22. Recommends, therefore, combined public-private investment in the childcare sector and the pre-school education system;
23. Stresses that adequate access to services for the care of children, the elderly, people with disabilities and other dependants is essential in order to enable men and women to participate fully and equally in the labour market; points out that this will have an impact on the level of informal care available;
24. Stresses the importance of active intervention by public authorities, in particular through the provision of social services of general interest (SSGIs), to help families and young children and also to provide facilities and care for elderly people and all dependants;
25. Stresses that in declining regions the voluntary sector and social networks make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of local people, but cannot replace the essential role played by the public authorities in providing services of general interest; 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;
26. Calls on Member States to reform their tax systems so as to ensure that people with interrupted employment histories as a result of their responsibilities as carers for children

or for the elderly are not placed at a disadvantage in terms of old-age pension and social security provision;

27. 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 to increase under the future ESF 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;
28. Recommends that Member States and the Commission set up user-friendly websites to enable members of the public to ascertain where EU cohesion funding is really going and what it actually achieves;
29. Calls for measures to raise awareness of the potential contribution vulnerable population groups can make to the strength of regions, as a source of social cohesion;
30. Calls for close cooperation between the Commission and the national statistical offices, which provide information on various matters, including population and migration numbers, in order to monitor data and analyse demographic trends, thereby contributing thus to the more efficient allocation of funds across Europe, in accordance with specific assets and needs.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	14.4.2011
Result of final vote	+: 41 -: 2 0: 3
Members present for the final vote	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Heinz K. Becker, Mara Bizzotto, Philippe Boulland, Milan Cabrnock, David Casa, Alejandro Cercas, Ole Christensen, Derek Roland Clark, Marije Cornelissen, Tadeusz Cymański, Frédéric Daerden, Karima Delli, Proinsias De Rossa, Frank Engel, Sari Essayah, Richard Falbr, Ilda Figueiredo, Thomas Händel, Marian Harkin, Roger Helmer, Nadja Hirsch, Liisa Jaakonsaari, Ádám Kósa, Patrick Le Hyaric, Veronica Lope Fontagné, Olle Ludvigsson, Thomas Mann, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Csaba Óry, Siiri Oviir, Rovana Plumb, Konstantinos Poupakis, Sylvana Rapti, Licia Ronzulli, Elisabeth Schroedter, Jutta Steinruck, Traian Ungureanu
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Tunne Kelam, Gesine Meissner, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, Csaba Sógor, Emilie Turunen, Cecilia Wikström
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Edit Herczog