

Demographic challenges and solidarity between the generations

European Parliament resolution on demographic challenges and solidarity between the generations (2005/2147(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 14 March 1997 on the Commission report to the Council and European Parliament on the demographic situation in the European Union (1995)¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 March 1998 on the Commission demographic report 1997²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2000 on the Commission communication "Towards a Europe for all ages - promoting prosperity and intergenerational solidarity"³,
 - having regard to the Commission communication to the Council and the European Parliament "Europe's response to World Ageing Promoting economic and social progress in an ageing world - A contribution of the European Commission to the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing" (COM(2002)0143),
 - having regard to the European Youth Pact adopted by the Brussels European Council of 22 and 23 March 2005,
 - having regard to the Commission communication entitled "Green Paper 'Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations'" (COM(2005)0094),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0041/2006),
- A. whereas demographic change, which is partly attributable to increased life expectancy, should not be treated just as a problem, but also represents a positive challenge to societies to engage people in all age groups and to offer opportunities which previously did not exist,
- B. whereas the Lisbon Strategy underlines the need for increased participation by women in the employment market in order to achieve the Lisbon objectives of full employment with high quality jobs,

¹ OJ C 115, 14.4.1997, p. 238.

² OJ C 104, 6.4.1998, p. 222.

³ OJ C 232, 17.8.2001, p. 381.

- C. whereas Directive 92/85/EEC¹ provides for measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding,
1. Welcomes the Commission communication entitled "Green Paper 'Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations'" (the Green Paper);
 2. Welcomes the fact that, in presenting the Green Paper, the Commission has addressed at European level one of the key political and social challenges; stresses, at the same time, that numerous issues relating to demographic change in society fall exclusively within the sphere of competence of the Member States and that, therefore, there is no general Community competence for establishing European rules in this area;
 3. Regrets that the Commission Green Paper does not systematically incorporate the gender perspective at either the macro or micro level of analysis, although this is essential to develop comprehensive reflections and actions;
 4. Considers that demographic change and its impact on society are crucially important for the future of the Member States and of the Union; therefore calls on the Commission to acknowledge demographic change as a horizontal task and to take it into account in an appropriate manner, in the form of mainstreaming, in all the Union's activities;
 5. Observes that demographic change plus low economic growth/continuing high unemployment will increase these challenges exponentially over time; concludes, therefore, that growth should be increased and high unemployment should be reduced in order to counter the adverse consequences of demographic change;
 6. Is surprised that the Green Paper makes only passing reference to the healthcare aspects of demographic change; emphasises that, with an ageing population, the demand for health and long-term care services increases qualitatively and quantitatively; is convinced that investment in measures for the life-long prevention of illness is important for coming to terms with the human and financial aspects of demographic change; states that the longer people are in a position to enjoy healthy lives, the longer they can remain active and work;
 7. Agrees that, with lowering rates of reproduction, economic growth can be maintained through measures aimed at higher employment, innovation and increased productivity, as well as by modernising social protection;
 8. Advocates, in view of the marked change in demographic circumstances, a new solidarity across the generations and the further development of the existing social models in the European Union, the main objective of which should be to ensure participation in society, social security and social solidarity for all, and to encourage the potential of all generations;
 9. Recognises that different Member States are grappling with common challenges in this area, and are exploring different solutions with varying degrees of success; considers that there are no single one-size-fits-all "right" answers, especially in a Union of 25 or more member States; stresses that the need for a varied approach in tackling demographic

¹ OJ L 348, 28.11.1992, p. 1.

challenges is further increased by the significant disparities experienced in the different regions and sub-regions; such disparities will require imaginative, non-uniform approaches;

10. Regrets that the Green Paper does not highlight the importance of reproductive and sexual health in demographic changes; points out that infertility, and particularly male infertility, is on the rise, especially in highly industrialized areas, and that in some European countries up to 15% of couples are now infertile, chemical pollution being one of the causes of infertility;
11. Regrets that the Green Paper does not give consideration to the growing number of single-parent families, 85% of which are headed by women and most of which are subject to a higher risk of poverty and should therefore be given special support;
12. Notes the experience of Member States in which there exists a 'guaranteed minimum income';
13. Is concerned about the difference in healthcare systems in the Member States, regions and social groups; states that the difference in healthcare (low life expectancy, widespread chronic illness, illness caused by living conditions), along with a low birth rate and emigration, can lead to a further increase in regional disparities and to a vicious circle which is difficult to break; asks the Member States to notify their differences in healthcare so as to achieve, with help from the Commission, a systematic exchange of best practice and to overcome this issue effectively;
14. Calls on the Member States to acknowledge demographic change as a common challenge and to decide on a more intensive exchange of views at the Spring European Council about the effects of demographic change and on proven practices, especially in areas such as active ageing, family living conditions and the balance between working life and family life;
15. Believes that all Member States can learn more from each other by exchanging best practices more vigorously, particularly with those Scandinavian countries where a high participation of men and women in the labour market is coupled with some of the highest fertility rates in Europe and where the availability of free or affordable childcare facilities, parental leave opportunities and the rules on maternity leave are contributory factors in the high participation of women in the labour market;
16. Welcomes the fact that the European Union, through measures aimed at improving the framework conditions, wishes to support the Member States in reducing the discrepancy between the number of children parents wish for (2.3) and the actual number of children (1.5) they have;
17. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to undertake and disseminate studies on population change in the individual Member States, taking account of the causes and the likely short-term consequences thereof;
18. Suggests that when comparing best practice regarding female labour market participation, comparisons are sought from, other countries;

19. Stresses that creating favourable conditions for couples to have the number of children they wish is one of the conditions for the existence and development of any society, given the social and economic challenges resulting from the declining birth rate, and that action should therefore be taken to support motherhood and fatherhood;
20. Considers that the decision by many women or couples to limit or delay having a child or children may not be their choice, but a preference forced upon them by the challenge of reconciling work, private and family life; considers that it is not just in the interests of parents to enable them to have the number of children they want and when they want them, but also in the interests of society as a whole given the declining birth-rate in Europe at present; urges, therefore, that Member States adopt measures to permit and support the establishment and operation of high quality crèches/day-care facilities for children, the elderly, people with disabilities and other dependant persons at a price affordable to all, regardless of income; stresses that this is essential in order to enable full and equal participation of men and women in the labour market, to enable women to adjust their participation in the job market to their rhythm of life and to help reconcile family life and work;
21. Urges the Member States to promote tax measures to encourage a higher birth rate and draws attention to the fact that women, in particular young single mothers, should be guaranteed special protection and support following the birth of a child;
22. Calls on Member States to study the costs and benefits of unpaid, voluntary and unstable work undertaken by young people as a means of entering the labour market; points to the possible links between such activities and low fertility levels through reduced access to housing and reduced stability; calls on private companies to review their policies in this regard;
23. Considers that gender equality and combating discrimination against women at the workplace, both at the level of employment and being entrusted with responsibilities, and at the level of pay, could and should play a crucial role in the creation of families, supporting them and, at the same time, reducing the birth shortage in Europe;
24. Calls on Member States to do more to identify and overcome all obstacles to promoting families, including obstacles outside the workplace, by taking such measures as:
 - i) permitting more flexibility at work, recognising workers' needs, so that they can better adapt their working time to their family and shopping requirements;
 - ii) improving the limited access to the housing market, for example by promoting easier access for mortgage finance so that more people can become property-owners and thereby gain their independence earlier;
 - iii) producing family-friendlier tax policies;
 - iv) promoting wider and more accessible childcare and dependent-care facilities;
 - v) promoting thriving local schools;
 - vi) improving compatibility of working hours with school hours, at the same time promoting flexibility in working time and combating a long hours culture;

- vii) the continued promotion of equality at the workplace;
 - viii) renewed efforts to promote equality at home, a fairer division of household and family obligations and the elimination of stereotypes through public information and awareness campaigns;
25. Calls on the Member States to increase the availability of proper housing for families, especially for one-parent families and elderly people, for example 'inter-generational projects', in connection with urban and rural development and town and regional planning;
 26. Calls for the modernisation and development of national social security systems, especially in the field of day care for children and dependent persons while recognising that this area is a Member State competence; notes that single parent families and lone elderly women are particularly endangered by social exclusion, isolation and impoverishment and hence particular attention should be devoted to improving the standard of living and social participation of this expanding section of the population when considering such reform;
 27. Wishes to see the Member States work towards cutting red tape associated with measures to support families with regard to childcare;
 28. Stresses that, despite the progress made by the Member States in terms of raising the rate of women's employment, other forms of discrimination linked to women's employment are persisting or becoming more marked; calls, in this context, especially, for Member States to implement properly Council Directive [75/117/EEC](#) of 10 February 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women¹; stresses that the pay gap between men and women and the fact that women continue to fill low-paid jobs for which they are overqualified diminish the necessary financial independence of women, which is closely linked to the decision to have children; recommends that the Member States encourage the development of female employment and women's access to quality jobs and to equal treatment as regards pay;
 29. Calls on the Member States, in accordance with the objectives set by the 2002 Barcelona European Council, in which it was stated that, by 2010, Member States should provide childcare for at least 90% of children between the age of 3 and mandatory school age, and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age; to put forward similar targets for facilities for the care of the elderly and people with disabilities;
 30. Considers that demographic change will require new and enhanced educational and social infrastructure for young and elderly people alike, including increased facilities for life-long learning, childcare, nursing care and care for the elderly; points out the need for enhanced social infrastructures designed to promote old people's vitality and reintegrate them more actively into societal life;
 31. Stresses that, in many Member States, there is the significant risk of public finance commitments becoming unsustainable in the long term, illustrating the urgent need for

¹ OJ L 45, 19.2.1975, p. 19.

reform; underlines the vital importance that EU decision-makers take into account the financial impact of new and existing social legislation;

32. Calls on the Member States to promote the quality of jobs and of the working environment so as to facilitate the implementation of lifelong professional training, enabling women and men to meet both their family obligations and labour market demands;
33. Calls on the Member States to identify equality of the sexes and a balance between work and private life as government priorities;
34. Notes that mounting social security costs will require dynamic economic growth to finance them; points out that this can occur only if innovation is encouraged; observes that fiscal methods such as increasing taxes to fund social security are less sustainable in the long-term given the falling tax base and higher dependency ratio as well as the urgent need to stimulate entrepreneurship in Europe; highlights therefore the need for a holistic policy approach when considering social security reform;
35. Believes that there is a need to develop beyond the concept of a 'welfare state', whereby the primary responsibility for welfare lies with the state, and more towards a 'welfare society' in which all stakeholders recognise that they too have responsibilities for looking after each other and that these responsibilities can be mutually reinforcing;
36. Submits that the improvement of work-life balance for individuals should be a perpetual priority for governments; considers that this balance can be threatened by rising unemployment and increasing individual workloads; points out that more flexible working hours for women and men, provided they result from a free choice and are not imposed under economic pressure, can help them combine work and family life more successfully; concludes that this should require governments to be enabling individuals to make genuinely free choices rather than making such choices on their behalf;
37. Calls on the Commission to consult both sides of industry on the issue of a better balance between working life and family life;
38. Considers that the business case for making work places more family-friendly should be made more strongly; recommends that Member States should establish guidelines for companies wishing to adopt such measures, taking into account the particular challenges for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
39. Calls on the Member States to implement rules establishing paid maternity/paternity leave following the birth of a child and to promote the use of the right to parental leave shared equitably between women and men; urges the Member States, to this end, to combat the economic, social and cultural prejudices associated with the right of parental leave for men; calls on the Commission to revise Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC¹; considers that parental leave, with a simultaneous guarantee of job retention, should be taken up by both fathers and mothers; advocates a system of incentives which will encourage partners to share parental leave, and recompense for the costs associated with bringing up children; calls on the Commission to consult both sides of industry on

¹ OJ L 145, 19.6.1996, p. 4.

possible changes to the reforms concerning parental leave which were introduced in 1996, the purpose of which might be to extend the minimum period of three months to six;

40. Reminds Member States of the third principle of the European Charter for Small Enterprises, namely that small enterprises could be exempted from certain regulatory obligations; calls on Member States as well as the Commission to translate this principle into action;
41. Cannot stress strongly enough the importance of access to education, skills development, technology and life long learning opportunities plus the promotion of a training culture that encourages participation by people of all ages, particularly those entering and re-entering the job market; stresses that real qualifications such as technical and language skills should be given higher priority to optimise individual mobility, adaptability and employability as well as self-fulfilment; stresses the importance of preventive early-school leaving interventions and the need to look at alternative means of assessment for access to further training; specifically highlights the need for training for older people in areas such as information technology to remove obstacles to their ongoing participation in the labour market; encourages the development of special education methods for older people to this end;
42. Calls on the Member States, therefore, to give older workers, in particular, the opportunity to pursue professional training programmes, so as to ensure that they may play an active part in the world of work until they reach retirement age; invites the Commission, in this connection, to approve the operational programmes for the European Social Funds only if they include a specific element relating to training measures for old people;
43. Advocates the conclusion of partnership agreements between governments and both sides of industry in accordance with national custom and practice to promote the employment of older workers through measures to combat age discrimination, more flexible working time and measures to reintegrate older workers who are unemployed;
44. Considers that European companies, especially in view of the need to protect those social groups most at risk (including old people, persons with disabilities and, in particular, young parents), to improve workplace safety and to promote forms of work organisation that can help extend accessibility, have a vital role to play in actively promoting and implementing equal opportunities, particularly in regard to family policy and combating discrimination on grounds of age, gender and family status; adds that companies should shoulder their Corporate Social responsibility and embrace the challenges associated with an ageing population by such initiatives as the promotion of flexible working hours and part-time work, for example especially in regard to parents, prospective parents and older workers;
45. Notes that EU legislation on age discrimination has so far been ineffective in achieving its aims and calls on the Member States to improve their efforts to implement existing EU anti-discrimination legislation in this field, in particular Directive 2000/78/EC on equal treatment in employment and occupation;
46. Endorses the Commission initiative for a framework directive to implement Article 13 of the EC Treaty;

47. Concludes that the business case for retaining older workers needs to be made more strongly considering the potential of this group; considers that the emphasis should be to encourage and enable people to work longer, and that employers should be led to realise that this is in the interest of both parties; considers that healthy older people should represent a positive resource for society rather than an economic threat; considers that more emphasis to the positive outcome of the European Year of the Elderly and of Solidarity between Generations (1993) should be given;
48. Appeals to companies to offer more flexible working time arrangements which take account of the different stages of life and open up, develop and design job opportunities consistent with the needs of parents and older workers, in particular;
49. Considers that Member States should encourage companies to develop the concept of "home-sourcing", whereby innovative companies employ individuals who choose to work at home at hours of their own choosing while being collectively "e-connected" to the main business;
50. Takes the view that the social partners should ensure that there is an adaptable labour market in order to create more flexible jobs, which ensures that there is a possibility of a place and a use for everyone on the labour market;
51. Notes that, given the mobility of European workers and the centralisation of the labour markets, it is now necessary not only to improve mutual understanding of the different social security systems, but also to ensure a smooth passage between one national system and another, in a form that applies to public, private and other forms of insurance;
52. Highlights the importance of knowledge-capture from retiring employees, particularly in the public sector where, in France for example, 50% percent of the public workforce will be eligible for retirement in the next ten years; urges Member States to encourage both the private and public sector to adopt proactive measures to avoid the loss of valuable experience and insight such as the mentoring of those entering the labour market, phased retirement and the implementation of lifelong-learning programmes; calls on Member States to afford special assistance to SMEs in this regard;
53. Believes that particular attention should be paid to the oldest age group (that is, the over-80s), 25% of whom are not self-sufficient, and calls on the Commission to submit a proposal aimed at achieving a reduction in that percentage by means of collective and individual measures and tackling the problems of state welfare provision and health and social services for those who are not self-sufficient;
54. Recognises however that labour-intensive professions such as roofing, construction and farming face greater challenges in harnessing the productive capacity of older workers and encouraging young recruits; encourages Member States to develop good practice for these professions so as to avoid staff shortages and skills loss;
55. Recognises the potential of assisted-living housing, which enables older people to live independently for longer by creating a community environment in which they can live among their peers with medical assistance and home-help provision where appropriate;
56. Encourages Member States and private companies to decouple higher ages and automatically higher wage levels, recognising that some pre-retirement people, while

appreciating some income, may not require the same level of salary or working hours as during their earlier years; highlights the importance of more flexible working opportunities, such as part-time working, in later years as a potential solution;

57. Encourages Member States to remove all disincentives for older people to continue working, particularly in relation to tax and pensions, and to explore possibilities for retirement age workers to withdraw part of their pension whilst continuing to receiving income from employment;
58. Points out that elderly people can play a positive role in providing child care, and that conversely younger generations often have to play a role in providing care for dependants; calls on Member States and employers to show that they recognise this more fully;
59. Observes that in some cases, such as anti-age-discrimination legislation, the law can on occasion be counter-productive in that it can discourage or even prevent companies taking on older workers; asks that Member States investigate more thoroughly the impact and application of such legislation in order to assess whether such measures are having the desired effect; urges that the spirit as well as the letter of such anti-discrimination legislation is observed;
60. Highlights that an ageing EU population is likely to lead to an increasing proportion of people having a disability; notes the persistent high levels of unemployment among this group; calls on governments and companies to facilitate the entry of such people into work by example;
61. Regrets that 'active ageing' is almost exclusively defined in the Lisbon strategy in terms of paid employment, whereas the concept should be applied more broadly to include unpaid activities such as work in civic, political and other voluntary organisations; recognises that such active engagement in society in unpaid work requires an adequate income from other sources; recognises that 'active ageing' is closely bound up with raising the retirement age and considers such a move to be one possible response to demographic change;
62. Recognises that pension systems are a Member State competence; considers however that with regards pension entitlements, workers in the public and private sector should be treated equally rather than those from one sector receiving preferential treatment; considers that steps must also be taken to promote phased and flexible retirement, taking account of increased life expectancy and better public health; recognises that as people are living longer they can also work longer and calls on governments to consider financial incentives to encourage people to do so;
63. Believes that all Member States can learn more from each other by exchanging best practices more vigorously as regards pensions reform;
64. Stresses, in view of demographic developments, the crucial importance of strong, financially viable social security systems, in particular pensions systems which promote appropriate, sustainable pensions, and health systems which are based on the principles of solidarity, fairness and universality, so as to improve access for all citizens to appropriate high-quality care in the event of sickness or a need for care; calls on the Member States to take the necessary measures to modernise pensions systems, so as to guarantee their

financial and social viability and enable them to cope with the impact of the ageing population;

65. Believes that reforms of national pension systems should not just concentrate on making such systems financially sustainable, but should also help make the lives of the elderly more financially sustainable;
66. Recognises however that it is difficult for state-funded pensions to fulfil people's income needs in retirement: considers that greater importance and energy should be committed by Member States to develop appropriate supplementary pension systems and to encourage personal savings;
67. Considers that national state-funded pensions, at whatever level determined by Member States, should be available equally to all as an entitlement and as such should not be subject to means-testing;
68. Recalls that owners of small enterprises are subject to demographic change in the same way as employed workers; is alarmed that in the next ten years a third of European small business owners will retire and encourages all actors to promote entrepreneurialism not only to capture the skills and knowledge of this group but also to offset the negative consequences for growth;
69. Considers that immigration policies which seek to promote the sustainable economic, social and legal integration of migrants are vital in order to achieve a balance between the respective rights and responsibilities of migrants and host societies, and that admission mechanisms for third country nationals must be managed effectively and transparently; prerequisites of the integration process are equal treatment through the elimination of all discrimination against migrants and their offspring and a close alignment with employment and social affairs policies; such policies should be encouraged in a bid to alleviate certain democratic challenges; recognises however that immigration in itself will not resolve all the problems associated with demographic change and also creates its own challenges;
70. Notes that in the regions of Eastern Europe there is huge migratory outflow of young women, and that a responsible economic and employment policy and the targeted deployment of European Structural Funds under the existing provisions for gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in the interests of women are therefore needed there;
71. Recognises that management of immigration is a Member State competence; considers that greater efforts should be focused on education and skills development specifically for immigrants and ethnic communities;
72. Considers that the proportion of ethnic minority people amongst those elderly requiring long term care is increasing substantially in some Member States; considers moreover that it should not be assumed that migrants and their offspring will prefer to return to their country of origin, particularly in old age, or where their offspring have been raised within the EU; adds that although the availability of quality childcare and elderly care is important to all ethnic groups, particularly for all women, it impacts on each ethnic groups differently and due attention should be paid to this in planning these services; stresses that anti-discrimination and equal treatment in the provision of such services is

also key; recommends that more attention be paid to this aspect, particularly as regards comparing best practice;

73. Notes that not enough attention has been paid hitherto to the integration of migrants, which is reflected, in part, in the low level of educational success and the continuing marginalisation of these new fellow-citizens; therefore calls on the Member States to step up their measures to promote integration, especially for migrants who have been living in the Union for some time;
74. Emphasises the important role played by migrant women, and calls on the Member States to give them the place they deserve in their integration policies and to guarantee them all their rights; highlights the trend towards undocumented migrant women increasingly being employed as domestic workers to care for dependent persons; notes that this group may be subject to exploitation and calls on Member States to address this issue;
75. Points out that immigrants arriving in their thirties and forties may well have no pension provision; calls on Member States to seek out best practice in dealing with this situation so as to avoid even greater pressure on pension systems;
76. Reminds Member States that demographic change also applies to Least Developed Countries, which likewise face challenges associated with ageing populations poverty and the unequal distribution of income as well as a burgeoning problem of youth unemployment; would encourage Member State governments and the EU to consider this factor when formulating aid and cooperation programmes;
77. Points out that policies which give immigration priority to skilled workers in order to strengthen EU economies also generate the direct opposite result of weakening the economies of those countries whence such skilled immigrants have come; considers that Member States should recognise their responsibilities in this regard;
78. Urges Member States to improve the provision of services of general interest in rural areas, thereby allowing older people to continue to live independently for longer, reducing the demand on health systems and social security systems and avoiding a culture of premature dependence;
79. Notes that care services must be safeguarded in the Member States as a result of demographic change, and calls for an enhanced exchange of good practice in this area; calls for care services to be protected as services of general interest and therefore calls on the Commission to incorporate such protection into the Green Paper on social services;
80. Stresses the importance of sharing of information and best practice among Member States on how health systems can prepare for the increased demands placed on them by an ageing population;
81. Recommends that the Member States implement policies to prevent the risks of exclusion, with particular reference to exclusion from school and becoming homeless, and points to the importance of giving priority to all measures aimed at maintaining family solidarity, in particular with regard to protecting the rights of children, while also respecting their parents' rights;
82. Stresses the importance of providing cultural and leisure activities aimed at the older

generation in recognition of the opportunities presented by the silver economy;

83. Recommends that more attention be paid to standardising the different assumptions used by different Member States in supplying information to EUROSTAT so that best practice can be more validly compared and also embraced;
84. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to use the future Seventh Research Framework Programme for matters relating to demographic trends, support for the family and strengthening health;
85. Within the context of the Community programme PROGRESS, calls on the Commission to carry out appropriate studies, analyses and peer reviews relating to demographic change and its impact on society and on the relevant policy areas;
86. Concludes that while the EU should continue to compare and contrast Member State performances, experiences and best practice in terms of dealing with the various challenges of demographic change, existing EU institutions are adequate for this purpose and no additional EU structures are required;
87. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States.