



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Managing demographic challenges through better reconciliation of work and family life

**- Conclusions of the Council of the European Union and the
representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting
within the Council -**

*3114th EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH and CONSUMER AFFAIRS
Council meeting*

Luxembourg, 3 October 2011

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

**"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL**

RECALLING:

1. Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 145 and 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which prescribe *inter alia* that the European Union should focus its attention on sustainable growth, a competitive social market economy aiming at full employment and social progress, a high level of social protection of citizens and intergenerational solidarity — and bearing in mind that these objectives cannot be achieved without addressing the demographic challenges affecting Europe;
2. Articles 150 and 160 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which establish the tasks of the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC), which include promoting exchanges of information, experience and good practice, preparing reports and formulating opinions;

P R E S S

3. Article 148 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which provides for ways of coordinating the Member States' employment policies within the context of the European Employment Strategy, in particular by defining employment guidelines;
4. Article 156 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which provides that the Commission is to encourage the Member States to cooperate and facilitate the coordination of their activities in relevant areas of social policy;
5. Article 159 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which mandates the Commission to prepare an annual report on the implementation of the objectives set out in Article 151, including the demographic situation in the Union;
6. that the reconciliation of work and family life is an important means of achieving equality between women and men, which is a fundamental value of the EU enshrined in Articles 2 and 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union and in Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
7. the establishment of the "European Alliance for Families" by the European Council in March 2007¹ and the Council Conclusions of 30 May 2007 on the importance of family-friendly policies in Europe and the establishment of the European Alliance for Families, which call on the High Level Group on Demography to support the SPC and EMCO in addressing demographic challenges and in exchanging good practice on family-friendly policies;²
8. the Commission Decision of 8 June 2007 setting up an expert group on demographic issues³, whose role is to assist the Commission in fostering exchanges of good practice and to enable the Member States to give their opinions on the broad responses required to meet the demographic challenge, thus complementing the activities of other advisory groups and committees, such as EMCO and the SPC;
9. the Commission Communication of 16 March 2005 — the Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations"⁴, which sets out the demographic challenges facing Europe and affirms the need to respond to these challenges;
10. the Commission Communication of 12 October 2006 on "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity"⁵, which shows that tackling the expected decrease in the active population and the prospect of slippage in public finances calls for policy reforms;

¹ European Council Conclusions, 7224/1/07, p. 8.

² 9317/1/07, p. 7.

³ 2007/397/EC.

⁴ COM(2005) 94.

⁵ COM(2006) 571.

11. the Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, which state that work-life balance policies, with the provision of affordable care and innovation in the manner in which work is organised, should be geared to raising employment rates. The Member States should also remove barriers to labour market entry for newcomers, promote self-employment, entrepreneurship and job creation in all areas, including care; and social protection systems should be modernised and fully deployed to ensure adequate income support and services, whilst remaining financially sustainable;⁶
12. the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 2011 on the future of the labour market in Europe – in search of an effective response to demographic trends⁷, which calls on the Member States to strengthen cooperation between the High Level Group on Demography, EMCO and the SPC;
13. the information presented in the Commission's Demography Report 2010, "Older, more numerous and diverse Europeans," *inter alia* on the recently observed small rise in the birth rate in the EU, indicating that "the emerging evidence reinforces the case for having better policies that can help parents to cope with the constraints of a modern society"⁸;
14. that it is the responsibility of the Member States to formulate policies in support of families, in line with national policy;

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION:

15. that tackling the various facets of demographic challenges is one of the main priorities of the Trio of Presidencies in office from 1 July 2011 (Poland, Denmark and Cyprus), as it was for several previous Presidencies;
16. the opinion of the SPC on the Future of the Open Method of Coordination which states that, in providing inputs to the Council, the SPC "will also rely on improved cooperation and coordination between EU Committees (SPC, EMCO and the Economic Policy Committee - EPC in particular) and other relevant high-level groups", *inter alia* in the area of demography and gender mainstreaming;⁹
17. the declaration made by the Trio of Presidencies (Spain, Belgium and Hungary) and Poland in Gödöllő on 1 April 2011, inviting all relevant actors to increase efforts at EU and Member State level in order to better reconcile work, family and private life, to achieve gender equality and reduce poverty, and to intensify efforts to improve cooperation and the exchange of good practices among Member States;
18. the European Pact for gender equality (2011-2020), which affirms the need to promote better work-life balance for women and men throughout the life-course, so as to enhance gender equality, increase women's participation in the labour market and contribute to meeting the demographic challenges;

⁶ Council Decision 2011/308/EU of 19 May 2011 (OJ L 138, 26.5.2011, p. 56) maintaining the guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, as set out in the Annex to Council Decision 2010/707/EU of 21 October 2010, for 2011 (OJ L 308, 24.11.2010, p. 46).

⁷ SOC/400 - CESE 1171/2011. (See also SOC/399 - CESE 804/2011.)

⁸ 8584/11 ADD 1 ADD 2 ADD 3 ADD 4, p. 2.

⁹ 10405/11, p. 3.

19. the Council Conclusions of 17 June 2011, which stress that better support for reconciliation measures, such as family-friendly employment policies, flexible working arrangements and various forms of leave for both women and men, will enable women and men to exercise greater choice in balancing work and family life, and will also contribute to achieving major policy objectives of the European Union, notably regarding growth and jobs, reducing skills shortages, enhancing the well-being of families and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and equality between women and men. The Council also invited the Commission to consult the Member States on the possibility of designating 2014 as the European Year for Families;

WELCOMING:

20. the achievements of the European Alliance for Families which serves as a platform for exchanging information and good practices regarding policy support for families;
21. the achievements of the High Level Group on Demography which develops knowledge on the demographic challenges Europe faces, their social and economic effects and the policies implemented by the Member States in response to these challenges;
22. the designation of 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations;
23. the fact that people in Europe are living longer lives, which constitutes an important social achievement, notwithstanding the challenges arising from demographic change;

EMPHASISING THAT:

24. the Commission's Communication on the Europe 2020 Strategy identified the acceleration of ageing of societies, involving more older people and fewer economically active people, as one of the three structural weaknesses of the EU, posing additional strains on welfare systems and prospects for economic growth;¹⁰
25. the low birth rates currently seen in many European countries may not always reflect the personal wishes of women and men,¹¹ but could result from their social and economic situation. Better support for the reconciliation of work and family life with a view to increasing labour market participation throughout the life cycle is needed; it can be achieved, for example, by increasing the availability of affordable quality care services and by promoting the equal sharing of family responsibilities and domestic tasks by women and men;
26. effective responses to demographic challenges require integrated, comprehensive and long-term policies and adequate financial resources and administrative capacity, while remaining financially and socially sustainable and fully respecting the need for fiscal consolidation and the conditions in each Member State;
27. the policy objectives set out in the Commission Communication "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity"¹² are still relevant, including the objective of promoting demographic renewal in Europe; the Communication identifies, in particular, the need to tackle the problems of access to accommodation, to facilitate access to affordable and quality childcare, to improve work-life balance, and to tackle child poverty;

¹⁰ 7110/10.

¹¹ See Special Eurobarometer, European Commission, October 2006.

¹² COM(2006) 571.

28. there is a need to ensure appropriate cooperation between the work of the High Level Group on Demography on the one hand and initiatives on demography, taken at the EU level, on the other, *inter alia* within the European Alliance for Families; such cooperation can include organising demographic fora, seminars and workshops, as well as contributing to the European Demography Reports presented regularly by the European Commission;
29. while it is the responsibility of the Member States to develop and implement effective and sustainable family policies, the exchange of experience and best practices in this field at European level may significantly contribute to achieving the goals set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy;
30. there is a need to improve the impact and visibility of the open method of coordination in the field of social policy (making a decisive contribution to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion; providing adequate and sustainable pensions; and ensuring accessible, high-quality and sustainable health care and long-term care), *inter alia* through better learning from Member States' best practices in addressing demographic challenges;

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION to take the following actions within their respective competencies, with due regard to the subsidiarity principle and taking into account their institutional structures:

31. facilitate information exchange and possible cooperation in particular of the SPC, EMCO and the EPC with the High-Level Group on Demography and the High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming, as well as other relevant bodies, in order to enhance synergy;
32. consider how to take best advantage of the Open Method of Coordination in the field of social policy and of the implementation of the European Employment Strategy to collect and channel information about the Member States' policies addressing the demographic challenge, including support for families in order to reconcile family and work life for both women and men, active participation of young and older persons in society and the labour market, and about actions in support of an equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, taking into account the initiatives presented in the framework of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012);
33. strengthen existing methods of cooperation and knowledge-sharing in the development of care systems for dependent persons, including childcare and long-term care, which support women and men at different stages of their lives and in the advancement of their careers (life course approach);
34. intensify actions to improve awareness of the possibilities of reconciling work and family responsibilities of women and men, and highlight the positive aspects of combining such responsibilities;
35. take full advantage of the complementary potential of NGOs and other third sector institutions in promoting opportunities to balance career and family responsibilities, while recognising that accessible, quality services offered by public and/or private providers are important for this purpose;
36. use the European Social Fund more effectively for activities to promote inclusion and progression in the labour market at different stages of life for women and men with family responsibilities;

37. encourage the social partners to contribute at all levels to dealing with the consequences of demographic challenges;

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES to:

38. take due account of demographic challenges in their National Reform Programmes, drawing where appropriate on best practices developed and made available through EMCO and SPC mutual learning programmes, and on the research and information produced *inter alia* within the framework of the European Alliance for Families;
39. promote, with the participation of the social partners, as appropriate, the reconciliation of work and family life in all sectors of the economy, and raise awareness of the fact that family-friendly workplaces improve productivity;
40. explore ways in which reconciliation policies might be further upgraded by encouraging employers to eliminate the tension between workers' commitment to their careers and to their families by making those two spheres of life mutually compatible;
41. support improving institutional cooperation at the national level among government bodies, including employment services, research institutions, the social partners and civil society organisations in order more effectively take into account demographic challenges in national employment and social-policy strategies, particularly as regards family policy and the continued participation of women, young people and older persons in the labour market;

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION to:

42. adequately reflect relevant aspects of the demographic challenges in the Annual Growth Surveys and in the assessment of National Reform Programmes within the framework of the European Semester as well as in future proposals for Integrated Guidelines;
43. organise in 2012 as part of the European Employment Research Dialogue a seminar on research projects conducted by the European Union and Member States concerning demographic challenges and effective responses thereto;
44. integrate issues relating to demographic challenges and ways of tackling them into the various relevant mutual learning programmes under the Open Method of Coordination in the social field and within the European Employment Strategy;
45. report on the Member States' performance with regard to childcare facilities as foreseen in the "Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015";
46. explore the issue of career and family compatibility as an aspect of the reconciliation of work and family life, in particular how employers have developed family-friendly work environments in order to attract and retain workers (especially women) and facilitate their commitment to work by making those two spheres of life mutually supporting."