



**Conference of European Churches - Church and Society Commission
Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)
Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)
Eurodiaconia**

Strengthen a mutual sense of responsibility in European societies

**Contribution of European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations to
the EU Green Paper on demographic changes**

Questions from the Green Paper

Introduction

Do you take the view that the discussion of demographic trends and managing their impact should take place at European level?

If so, what should be the objectives, and which policy areas are concerned?

European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations welcome the efforts of the European Commission to provide a better response to demographic changes in European policy and to take the challenges of demographic changes more into account. As the current demographic changes in the European Union have the potential to constrict the fundamental rights of many of its citizens, especially families with children and elderly people, we believe that **sustainable political measures are needed** to safeguard quality of life and social protection for present and future generations and social cohesion.

We expect the discussions to contribute to a **more coherent EU policy** facing demographic challenges. Demographic changes are affecting **all areas of EU policy**, not only family policy and social protection, but also the economic and cultural development of the European societies. This should also take into account the increasing multi-cultural dimension of society, a high degree of individualism, a loose social fabric consisting of

all types of temporary and more permanent networks, increased occupational mobility and a higher labour participation with less time for unpaid essential activities.

The actual demographic changes in Europe signify not only a quantitative development; they moreover reflect important qualitative changes of living conditions in European societies. As the quantitative demographic developments in a society can only be significantly changed in a long-lasting process, societies need to find solutions **in a network society with more availability of time for care for others with a new quality of relations between generations, between family life and work and in the integration of migrants**. This new quality of relations will need a profound reconsideration of principles and values in European societies and in European politics.

As some of the envisaged political measures might affect the most personal domains of European people, the quality of demographic policy is not in the least depending on the question as to how the manifold diversity of life situations of people is taken into account. The EU's Green Paper on demography refers to the fact that "many issues associated with demographic change come within the exclusive competence of the Member States or their regional authorities, or social partners". (p. 4) Considering the very person-related character of many political measures in this area, the quality of political decisions and actions is very much depending on the fact that they are taken by those, who are closest to the people. European coordination of demographic policies should therefore carefully respect the **principle of Subsidiarity** and take place in **close cooperation with the organisations of civil society**. Demographic challenges for European societies cannot be answered by "social engineering" policies, but in close cooperation between all stakeholders.

1. The challenges of European demography

1.1. The challenge of a low birth rate

Over many years, the Union has been making considerable efforts to achieve equality between men and women and has coordinated national social protection policies.

- How can a better work/life balance help to tackle the problems associated with demographic ageing?
- How can a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks between men and women be encouraged?
- Should the award of certain benefits or advantages (leave, etc.) be linked to an equal distribution of tasks between the sexes? How best to ensure an adequate income for both parents on parental leave?
- How can the availability of child care structures (crèches, nursery schools, etc.) and elderly care structures be improved by the public and private sectors?
- Can a reduced rate of VAT contribute to the development of care services?
- How can parents, in particular young parents, be encouraged to enter the labour market, have the career that they want and the number of children they want?

1. A better work/life balance

The raised questions are not only relevant in relation to low birth rate. Politics and society should support a more intelligent and flexible apportionment between work and family and social life, giving the parents, especially the women, a better choice to shape their lives. An integration of individual measures with a lateral policy could significantly improve living conditions for young families, such as individual working time options, reduced and increased working hours, care leaves, sabbaticals, educational leave, long term labour time accounts. EU Member States should provide a **legal framework to more flexible working conditions** for women and men, which enables them to make choices which will provide the best care for their children and optimal conditions for the family life as a whole. The comparison of the experiences in different Member States shows, that only stable and uninterrupted policies for a better combination of work and family life have a lasting effect on the fertility rate.

We want to point out a **lack of cohesion in EU policies** in this area: EU Commission's intention of "creating a real European labour market and a higher level of occupational mobility" (Green Paper p. 5) has the potential to aggravate the conflicts between the requirements of the labour market and the fundamental task to protect family life and to encourage families in their caring responsibilities and basic security (p.10). The potential effects of this policy should be very seriously investigated.

A better work-life balance needs awareness raising in all aspects of daily life. **Allying local people and enterprises** is one important way to reach a more family-friendly environment and to achieve a better work-life-balance. The principle of such "local alliances" is to ally local or regional enterprises with families working at them or living in their vicinity to help them achieve a better work-life-balance. This is mostly realised by more flexible working times or by additional kindergartens in or near the enterprise. In the same respect it is important that these new alliances do not replace well functioning social services on the spot. The initiative "local alliances" is one example how to achieve a change of awareness by increasing the number of persons responsible for better structures for family/social life.

2. A more balanced distribution of tasks between men and women

Article 23 of the Charter of fundamental rights explains, "equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay." Statistics show that employment, work and pay are still not distributed equally in all European countries. If the framework conditions were responding to these fundamental rights, it would be much easier for men and women to find a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks. We, therefore, encourage EU Member States **to take care to implement fundamental rights on equality between men and women.**

In some European societies, the **negative image of working women** especially during the first years of motherhood, makes it more difficult for them to achieve a more

balanced distribution of tasks. While churches encourage both men and women to allow children into their lives and to take time for them, women who are in fully-paid employment should not be discriminated as “uncaring mothers”. Equally, **the way male citizens regard themselves** and the way society regards their roles has a large influence on their preparedness to contribute to family life and care for children for a period of time, at home or in professional institutions such as kindergartens or primary schools. A positive attitude of this kind should be encouraged publicly, but without stigmatising women/men who choose for personal care of their children.

The emerging trend of **instability in adult partnerships** leads to increasing uncertainties for a long-term commitment to children,, while a stable relationship between parents is an important help for a balanced distribution of tasks between men and women. Regarding the high divorce rates in European societies, couples and families should find counselling support in conflict situations. Long lasting experiences of diaconal organisations show that professional counselling can be of great help in shaping partnership and family life. We would encourage public authorities to **extend the offers of practical help for families** in cooperation with organisations of civil society. In Christian understanding, married life presupposes equal responsibilities and an equitable sharing of tasks in the family. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6,2)

3. Adequate income for both parents on parental leave

The award of certain benefits or advantages should not be linked to a fixed distribution of tasks between the sexes in order to allow the partners to designate their individually suitable distribution of tasks. But the legal and economic framework in EU Member States should make sure that parents really have a choice. Many men do not make use of parental leave because the loss of income is bigger if the father stays at home. Families should be enabled to keep their standard of living also if the "bigger" breadwinner opts for childcare and so is forced to interrupt a professional career. **Financial benefits and advantages should be child-related, not parent-related.**

In some European countries, **pension systems** are still not neutral regarding the sharing of parental tasks in the families. Only the parent, who is gainfully employed, will expect to claim a pension, while the parent, who is staying at home to educate the children, will not be able to claim a pension. This leads to a discrimination of (mainly) women in the relevant pension system. In connection with the ongoing differences of income between women and men this is an important factor for the unequal distribution of income between sexes. Generally, times of parental leave should be recognised in pension systems. The state should though recognise the special contribution to society of parents educating children.

4. Improvement of care structures

The comparative analysis for all OECD countries reveals a strong positive relationship between institutional childcare coverage and fertility rate. Further research indicates that, in addition to availability, affordability and the length and flexibility of opening hours are of importance (cf. Krieger, Demographic changes in Europe and their implications for

family policy. CoE May 2005, p. 23). Regarding the importance of child caring structures, we also have to consider profound changes in living arrangements in European societies. More and more biographical situations lead to the fact that an increasing number of children are growing up in single parent households. To enable these parents to earn their living and income for their families, extensive child caring facilities or alternatively benefits for taking care of their own children must be provided. EU Member states should therefore provide a **legitimate claim for childcare coverage** from an early age onwards, in order to ensure a high standard of caring facilities for children.

For the churches, the education and care of children and youth is an important part of their service to the society. In all Member States, churches and diaconal organisations provide childcare facilities like crèches, nursery schools, all-day care for pupils in primary and secondary schools or boarding schools. The **close cooperation of public authorities with service providers of civil society** contributes to a high quality of caring services.

For elderly care structures please see below: 2.4 Solidarity with the very elderly.

5. Financial aspects of demographic changes

A reduced VAT rate and subsidized services for children might help people to have access to affordable care services, but it is not sufficient to safeguard public responsibility for the provision of a high quality of services: To overcome the financial challenges of demographic changes it will be necessary, in some Member States, to **broaden the financial basis of social protection systems** by strengthening investments, employment, education and by an increased allocation justice in their societies. It should also be considered how the support of the nurturing of children can be shared by all members of the society. , A more **just equalisation of burdens** in a society would more significantly relieve families with children.

6. Young parents, the labour market, career and children

It is becoming evident that one of the most important targets is the raising of awareness. Work with children and youth has to be accepted as being as valuable as other work. Education is not only an important service for society, but also **enlarging the organisational, social and pedagogical competences** of those who take this responsibility. This should be positively taken into account in job applications and career planning. The EU and its Member States could investigate how special support measures providing specific advantages for parents educating children (e.g. vocational training during parental leave) would help them to better combine career and family/social tasks.

Tragic reality of many young women in Europe is that they are afraid to be pregnant because they then risk losing their jobs. What has been said earlier on work/life balance is of similar importance for the compatibility of vocational training and studies with family life. A temporary equalisation of working and family biographies would it make easier for young families to combine having children with gainful employment. This will need more flexibility in the education system, especially higher education (e.g. better opportunities for parental leave, more flexible time frames at universities and no age

restriction in access to subsidies for studies). **The fact, that parents with a higher education have a very low fertility rate shows that it is especially difficult for them to combine higher education and family life.**

7. Conclusions

The economic and political framework plays an important role in setting conditions, which enable couples to get and raise the children they hope for. But demographic changes are also strongly influenced by individual and collective value systems, mentality settings and priorities. In Christian understanding, children are a Blessing of God. Churches are encouraging every couple to receive the children, God wants them to be blessed with. At the same time, they are encouraging everyone to contribute to a warm, open society, which welcomes children and elderly alike. The low number of children changes the cultural and empathetic climate in our societies and leads to a lack of consideration and respect for their specific needs in public life. Therefore “in all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, **the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.**” (Art. 24,2 Charter of fundamental rights) European Churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations strongly support a “**family friendly approach**” in EU policies, meaning coherent policies taking into account the living conditions of families in all political areas.

Two additional remarks:

The environment likewise plays an important role in the conditions for bringing up children in a healthy way. Clean air and water, nutritious food, good indoor climate etc. are all important aspects that need to be taken into consideration to bring down sick days and provide good living conditions. The environmental aspect is also relevant in connection with the discussion on fertility.

EU demographic policy must be aware of a high rate of **unintended childlessness**: WHO describes infertility and involuntary childlessness as diseases that put a heavy burden on the affected women and men (cf. WHO: Reproductive health strategy. Adopted by the 57th World Health Assembly May 2004). Any discrimination of people suffering from involuntary childlessness has to be avoided. Our societies should offer other opportunities for people who are unable to have children like godparent hood, adoption or opportunities for voluntary engagement, which enable them to make special contributions for the community out of their personal situation.

1.2. The possible contribution of immigration

The Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003 declared that an EU integration policy for immigrants should help to meet the new demographic and economic challenges currently facing the EU. This is the debate initiated by the Green Paper adopted last January.

- To what extent can immigration mitigate certain negative effects of demographic ageing?
- What policies should be developed for better integrating these migrants, in particular young people?

- How could Community instruments, in particular the legislative framework to combat discrimination, the structural funds and the Employment Strategy, contribute?

1. The possible contribution of immigration

In the debate around possible responses to the demographic challenge faced by European societies, migration has for a considerable period of time been identified as one element of a multi-faceted integrated approach. Spearheaded by the UN Populations Division and the Council of Europe, a considerable amount of enthusiasm was generated in the international policy debate with regards to the potential of “replacement migration” for stabilising the supply of manpower for the European labour market, and improving e.g. the age dependency ratio of social security systems or even fertility rates¹.

While the debate has in recent years become somewhat less enthusiastic, scholars still rightly maintain that “migration is the most volatile of the components determining population size...the number of people entering or leaving a country can vary significantly from one year to the next”². Taking into account the process of assimilation of demographic developments/fertility among migrants, **migration will have an immediate, but not cumulative effect on demographic changes**. Sustainable change of demographic developments through migration will require continued immigration.

The recent Green Paper on labour migration also further underlines the potential of labour migration for responding to the demographic challenges in the EU. Indeed immigration seems to be the instrument, which can be most flexibly applied to mitigate certain negative effects of demographic ageing. However, consideration should be given to the demographic challenges arising for countries of origin as well as within European countries, which encounter strong internal migration, which is often depleting whole regions. Due to internal migration, the service level in some regions is reducing to unacceptable standards.

2. Need for a holistic approach to migration

While the Green Paper mentions the challenges of integration and anti-discrimination, there is a potential danger of exclusively seeing migration as an isolated tool to influence demographic trends and not as a complex social phenomenon, which requires far-reaching efforts. In our view, it is essential that any policy on migration would take a **holistic approach** (trying to avoid a simplistic approach of “social engineering”). A holistic approach does not only consider the benefits or problems of migration for demographic developments, but also looks at the rights and needs of migrants, the

¹ For the somewhat controversial debate cf. UN populations division: Replacement Migration: is it a solution for declining and aging populations ?, New York 2000; Ron Lestaege: Europe’s demographic issues: fertility, household formation and replacement migration, Paper for UN expert group meeting on population responses and decline, New York 2000, Aidan Punch/David L Parce for Council of Europe publications: Europe’s population and labour market beyond 2000, Strasbourg 2000.

² Jan Niessen/Yongmi Schiebel: Demographic challenges and the consequences for Europe’s future: is immigration and option?, Brussels 2002, p. 4.

challenges of migration for host societies and the effects which migration has on countries of origin.

3. The migrant as a holder of rights

While migrants are moving in increasing numbers and across bigger distances, their legal status is still the subject of hugely diverging national legislation. This leads to enormous problems, among which trafficking and new forms of slavery are only the most dramatic. We therefore reiterate the call that EU Member States should agree on a coherent and transparent migration policy, which recognises the rights of migrants. One of the most important tools of such a policy would be the ratification of the 1990 **UN Convention of the Rights of All Migrants** and their families by EU Member States and the EU once it has gained legal personality.

4. The challenge of two-way integration process

Continued policies on integration continue to be necessary. Such policies must start from the assumption that migrants might at a certain point go back to their native country, but that they also might decide to stay. Any policy assuming that migrants (whatever their status is) will only be “guests” and leave at a certain point, seriously jeopardises **social cohesion**.

Integration policies need to start from the notion that integration is not assimilation but a **dynamic two-way process**: While integration policies should include the need for migrants to acquire language and professional skills, as well as a notion of culture and the political order of the host society, it is equally necessary that integration policies address the need of integrating societies. “Integrating societies” means among other things that it is necessary for host societies to recognise that they will change and need to adapt to this change as a result of migration. This includes the fact that the “traditional” population needs to be informed about and prepared for living in an increasingly multi-cultural society and that channels of mediation between different cultures need to be further established.

Churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations support **specific measures for migrant families facing social exclusion**. They also support specific help for immigrant children to learn to get acquainted with the culture of their host country (e.g. language courses, bilingual classes, special remedial teaching) as well as other measures to avoid/overcome exclusion.

5. Anti discrimination as a litmus test

True integration of third country nationals and social coherence is only possible when the obstacles for third country nationals on their way to full social and civic participation are overcome. Policies to combat discrimination are therefore as important as programmes to facilitate social advancement of immigrants. A political commitment to combat discrimination sends out a strong signal to both third country nationals and the traditional population of immigration countries and helps to facilitate necessary social change. While the **anti-discrimination directives** (EC/2000/43 and EC 2000/78) have provided a useful framework for anti-discrimination in the EU, the failure of a majority of Member

States to transpose these directives and the deadlock on the framework decision to combat racism have in this respect sent out a very unfortunate signal.

6. Cooperation with countries of origin: on equal footing

While the Green Paper primarily discusses the demographic situation in the EU, the aspect of immigration raises the question of the impact on other countries. The potential impact of immigration on third countries is many-faceted: on the one hand migrants' remittances can play an important and beneficial economic role for countries of origin and migration can contribute to the transfer of knowledge and skills to countries of origin; on the other hand emigration can deplete countries of their most qualified skilled workforce and have a negative impact on the general demographic situation in these countries. Migration policy and in particular recruitment programmes therefore need to take an approach which respects the genuine **interests of third countries** and does not only see these countries as mere implementation agents of policies addressing the EU's needs and interests.

7. Conclusions

Migration is a fact. The better Europe manages political, economic, cultural and religious integration, the greater the benefit will be. The success of this process will not in the least depend on the readiness of public authorities to cooperate with civil society partners, like migrant organisations. Successful integration of migrants will need a **shift of paradigm for European identity**: Diversity must be recognised as part of the identity of European societies. The ecumenical process of "**reconciled diversity**" in the last decades might be an example for the intertwining of different cultures and traditions.

2. A new solidarity between the generations

2.1. Better integration of young people

European objectives have been laid down for the prevention of long-term youth unemployment, combating early school leaving and raising the level of initial training. The structural funds help to attain them at grass roots level.

- How can initial training and adult training schemes be improved? What can non-formal education and voluntary activities contribute? How can the structural funds and the instruments for achieving better access to the knowledge society contribute?
- How can the bridges between school and working life and the quality of young people's employment be improved? What role should social dialogue play? What can dialogue with civil society, in particular youth organisations, contribute?
- How can Community policies contribute more to combating child poverty and poverty among single-parent families and to reducing the risk of poverty and exclusion among young people?
- What forms of solidarity can be fostered between young people and elderly people?

1. Training, non-formal education, voluntary activities and the contribution of EU instruments

Education and vocational training are a core element for the future of European societies, as their economic and social development depends essentially on the knowledge of its citizens. To ensure a **high quality of education** in the European Union, learning systems must be accessible and affordable for all members of a society (cf. the results of OECD Programme for International Student Assessment <http://www.pisa.oecd.org>).

European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations support EU's commitment to "lifelong learning" and for a "knowledge-based society". They are concerned that this commitment will not be put into practice, if the new **financial framework** (2007-2013) does not provide a much more significant investment in education and research. **European Structural funds** should support the building up of educational centres in regions lacking infrastructure. This seems to be the more appropriate solution than asking for a higher mobility of young people for both work and education purposes, which has the potential to increase the economical gap between different European regions. Despite the emphasis on a knowledge based society, however, a continuous attention is required for job opportunities for people with less intellectual or education abilities, for which society remains responsible.

Voluntary activities certainly make an important contribution to the personal development of young people as well as for social cohesion and interaction between generations. Therefore churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations provide a big variety of opportunities for voluntary activities all over Europe. We would strongly welcome the intensification of **EU cooperation with churches, diaconal organisations, youth organisations and other not-for-profit providers** of voluntary services in civil society.

A sustainability perspective for the future does not only include capacity-building for an efficient labour market and the adaptation to technical progress, but also requires the **procurement of values, the acquirement of social competences and the development of a responsible personality**. Religious education contributes to such education of young people. Since biblical times, people are aware that education is an essential precondition for the welfare of future generations. "Take to heart all the words that I am giving in witness against you today; give them as a command to your children, so that they may diligently observe all the words of this law. This is no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life; through it you may live long ..." (Deuteronomy 32,46f)

2. Bridges between school and working life and the role of civil society

Youth unemployment in the European Union is on average double the overall unemployment rate (cf. Integrated Guidelines for growth and jobs (2005-2008) (COM (2005) 141 final), p. 27). This means a high risk for social freedom in Member States with a high unemployment rate among young people and for the future of whole societies. It might also mean a human rights abuse (cf. Art. 15 Charter of fundamental rights). Europe cannot afford to miss the contribution of 20% or even 25% of young people to the community (cf. Eurostat: Unemployment rate of population aged less than 25 years. Published 1.7.2005)

Member States should provide **specific support programs for young people** in order to facilitate progress in employment, whether it is first time entry or a move back to employment after a break. The quality of jobs, including pay and benefits, working conditions, job security, access to lifelong learning and career prospects are crucial, as are support and incentives stemming from social protection systems. No young woman or man, who wants to work and is capable of work, should be unemployed.

The **contribution of civil society** goes much further than being partner of a dialogue. Existing networks in society like churches, diaconal institutions and youth organisations, but also other organisations, do play an important role in the support of jobless people. Due to their natural link to the grass roots level, they are often more efficient than any public administration in relating people with each other and enabling them to find their way into employment. It is important to highlight that the European Youth Pact can only be implemented successfully if it is based on **direct dialogue** with youth organisations. They have the expertise and the contacts to network youth and to bring the relevant themes of European Integration to the grassroots level, thus rooting the European Project directly in civil society on a grass roots level.

3. Child poverty, social exclusion and poverty among single-parent families

In many European societies, poverty is still inherited from the parents by the children. Nothing influences the future of children as much as their social derivation. Family policy, social policy and education policy in Europe have to be reformed so that the **social origin of a child shall not determine its future** anymore.

We encourage EU Member States to fight child poverty by raising political awareness and by increasing the income of poor families with **measures providing a better certainty of employment and direct social transfers**, the reduction of expenditures (e.g. by the provision of free child care for poor families), educational support and practical help for the well-being of children (e.g. support for local family networks and for child protection services).

Housing is of great importance for the support of families. The EU Commission and Member States should investigate how they can support young families in their housing conditions and how to promote new models of living together (e.g. houses of several generations, intergenerational communitarian forms of living together).

European indices show that especially single parent households often find themselves on the edge of poverty, facing housing problems and a lack of caring infrastructures. Churches and diaconal organisations are very concerned about the high risk of poverty for single parent households in some EU Member States. Therefore, we would like to encourage EU Member States to assure **better social protection and financial support for single parent households**. Children are a gift and a task for all (cf. Psalm 127,3). They enrich our lives and secure the future of the society. They should not be at risk from or a cause for poverty.

4. Solidarity between young and elderly people

Solidarity between generations has to be proved by **justice in participation and opportunities** for the different generations. Justice between generations makes it necessary to perceive the potential of every generation, to strengthen it and to bring it together. Solidarity between generations must be lived and must be supported. Sustainable pension systems and a just sharing of costs for health care are key elements of solidarity between generations. People of all generations should have a part in education and social protection and should be enabled to an active engagement in society. EU's intention to invest in a better education of young people, the ongoing qualification of older employees and lifelong learning should be endorsed with a more appropriate distribution of work in society.

The future task is to **develop new participatory structures in European societies**, which bring the potentials of all generations together. Therefore networks between the generations are needed, which support mutual help and cooperation between peoples. Because of the high mobility level and different living places of the different generations of a family, often families can no longer be the learning place for solidarity among generations. European societies need new places of encounter between the generations, which can serve as an occasion to exchange experiences and perspectives. Churches, and especially their parishes, provide such meeting places of all generations.

2.2. A global approach to the “working life cycle”

In order to foster the transition to a knowledge society, EU policies promote the modernisation of work organisation, the definition of lifelong learning strategies, the quality of the working environment and “active ageing”, in particular raising the average retirement age. Demographic changes reinforce the importance of these policies, whilst raising new questions:

- How can the organisation of work be modernised, to take into account the specific needs of each age group?
- help them to find a balance between flexibility and security to bring up their children, to train and update their skills to meet the demands of the labour market? How can we enable older people to work more?
- How can work organisation best be adapted to a new distribution between the generations, with fewer young people and more older workers?
- How can the various stakeholders in the Union contribute, in particular by way of social dialogue and civil society?

See above:

- 1.1. The challenge of a low birth rate
- 2.1. Better integration of young people

And below:

- 2.3. A new place for “elderly people”

2.3. A new place for “elderly people”

The European coordination of retirement scheme reforms is promoting more flexible bridges between work and retirement.

- Should there be a statutory retirement age, or should flexible, gradual retirement be permitted?
- How can elderly people participate in economic and social life, e.g. through a combination of wages and pensions, new forms of employment (part-time, temporary) or other forms of financial incentive?
- How can activities employing elderly people in the voluntary sector and the social economy be developed?
- What should be the response to pensioner mobility between Member States, in particular with regard to social protection and health care?
- How should we be investing in health promotion and prevention so that the people of Europe continue to benefit from longer healthy life expectancy?

1. Flexibility of retirement age

On the one hand, the actual praxis of statutory retirement age may lead to discrimination of elderly people and their capacities. Economically it does not make sense to exclude people from work, who would like to continue to work and to waste their competences, their knowledge and experience. In this context, churches and diaconal organisations support more flexible, gradual retirement procedures. On the other hand, changes in retirement regulations have to take very seriously into account the different workload of people during their working life. In many professional areas, an earlier retirement age meant big progress for the social and health protection of employees. **A higher flexibility of retirement should not lead to lower standards of social protection.** It should also be considered, that, according to demographic studies, a significant number of elderly people does not want to work longer, but to make use of the “third age” for other activities in family, leisure or voluntary work (cf. D. Avramov; M. Maskova. Active ageing in Europe Vol. I. Council of Europe population studies No. 41. p.63ff). Any deregulation of retirement age will have to consider the **current situation in the labour market**. It is not desirable that elderly people have to work longer while young people remain unemployed.

Changes in the retirement system will also need a **paradigm shift** in European societies regarding the prevalent mania for youth. We regret, that the Green Paper itself partly reflects a negative image of elderly people (cf. p. 2 “entails for entrepreneurship and initiative in our societies”). The ongoing tendency of big companies and - in some countries – even of government bodies to send elderly people into early retirement, not regarding their personal capacities and options, should not be supported by Member States anymore. We could imagine a EU campaign against discrimination of elderly people in working life.

2. Participation in economic and social life

One's own responsibility for social provision will be of growing importance. It is important to make clear that the state has a duty to care for those who are in need, but public welfare cannot replace private provisions.

3. Development of activities in the voluntary sector and in the social economy

Key elements for volunteer activities of elderly people are: Biographical competence and search for a new sense of life, practical organisation of daily life, (re-) discovery of creative competences and social engagement. In all churches and in all the diaconal, migrant and youth organisations a great number of people are engaged in voluntary activities. Caring about others is an essential part of Christian religious practice. We are convinced that the development of voluntary and social activities - not only of elderly people, but also of all members of a society - depends on the values the society is based on. If you want to strengthen the voluntary sector of a society, you have to **strengthen a mutual sense of responsibility in European societies**.

Experiences show that, in many cases, voluntary work is depending on the **support of well-trained professionals**, who provide infrastructure and organisational framework for the work of the volunteers. To invest in these infrastructures for voluntary work means an important contribution to European societies in solidarity.

4. Pensioner mobility between Member States

EU should support a better coordination of the different social protection and health care systems between Member States within the Open Method of Cooperation. The well being of people is not only depending on their physical health. Pensioners in foreign states carry a high risk of age-related solitude and have special **needs for pastoral care**. More research on the possibilities to integrate foreign elderly people into European societies seems to be needed.

5. Health promotion and prevention

Art. 35 of EU Charter of fundamental rights does guarantee everyone's right "of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices. A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities." In our understanding this does include health promotion and prevention, which should be accessible to everyone in European societies.

2.4 Solidarity with the very elderly

The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?

- The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?

- In particular, should a distinction be drawn between retirement pensions and dependency allowances?
- How do we train the human resources needed and provide them with good quality jobs in a sector which is often characterised by low salaries and low qualifications?
- How do we arrive at a balanced distribution of care for the very old between families, social services and institutions? What can be done to help families? What can be done to support local care networks?
- And what can be done to reduce inequality between men and women when they reach retirement age?
- How can new technologies support older people?

1. National protection policies

European societies are developing into societies of long lifetimes. It is necessary for national protection policies to consider this in the modernisation of their social protection systems. This should carefully take into account, that living situations of very elderly people are not only depending on chronological age, but also on external conditions like education, work or the family situation. The expectations of the environment play an important role. Scientific research has shown that discrimination of very elderly people leads to self-fulfilling prophecy; it means less activity and a stronger restriction from social life in anticipation of public expectations. **Old age may not be seen exclusively as a process of degradation.** Because ageing is not only a biological, but also a psychological and cultural process, it can have positive, growing elements, too. It is the task of all actors in a society to support these positive aspects of ageing and, by this, come to a new culture of living together in an ageing society.

In Christian understanding, a long life is seen as sign of mercy. Each period of age stands with its gifts and its tasks under God's blessing and God's commandments. The value of life is not depending on the utility for society nor its efficiency compared to other periods in life (cf. Genesis 1,27).

2. Retirement pensions and dependency allowances

3. Development of human resources

Very elderly people will, as a growing group in society, make new socio-political, caring, medical measures necessary. They will need care, but their need for care will be very differentiated (e.g. help for daily life care, active leisure time, temporary care after leaving a hospital, day-hospitals, short time caring homes, discharge help for caring families, ...). This will need a continuous development of infrastructures as well as the further development of human resources including enhancements of vocational training and the development of new professions. EU's programmes for quality assurance and development in vocational education and training (Copenhagen Process) and for a common framework in higher education (Bologna process) should contribute to a high quality of caring professions.

Churches and diaconal organisations have a centuries long and wide experience in providing social services. They started developing and providing social services

according to the needs of society long before the welfare state assumed its responsibility. In all Member States, they provide caring facilities for elderly people. The way in which they provide such services today depends upon the prevailing legal framework within each Member State for all welfare organisations as well as churches and diaconal organisations. A close cooperation of public authorities with service providers of civil society contributes to a high quality of caring services. (Cf. the joint answer from Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches and Eurodiaconia to the Questionnaire on Social Services of General Interest for the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission on 14 December 2004 and the joint statement by Eurodiaconia and the Church and Society Commission of CEC *regarding the Proposal for a directive on services in the internal market and the White Paper on services of general interest* on 17 January 2005, www.eurodiaconia.org or www.cec-kek.org).

4. A balanced distribution of care between families, social services and institutions

Many EU Member States do not have enough trained people and face increasing financial problems to provide a high quality of care for very elderly people. Not-for-profit service providers like churches and diaconal organisations very often combine the work of full time professionals and voluntary persons. They train voluntary people to take over caring tasks in a very competent way. This is an important contribution for a balanced distribution of care tasks in a society. This special contribution of **not-for-profit service providers and their added value to civil society should be recognised by EU Commission and EU Member States**. Not-for-profit networks and providers, who integrate the work of volunteers, should be recognised in EU legislation and be supported by public authorities.

5. Inequality between men and women in retirement age.

See above (2.3 a new place for elderly people)

6. New technologies to support older people

The intention to improve the living conditions of the very elderly people should not only look for technical solutions, but also reflect the importance of social living conditions. On the basis of their extensive experience with caring facilities for older people, churches and diaconal organisations would like to encourage EU and Member States to invest more in social research on the improvement of living conditions of the very elderly people and to cooperate with service providers on this. We face, for example, the phenomenon of solitariness of very elderly people. European societies have to develop new ways of how to react to this phenomenon, to allow very elderly people to live in relation with others in dignity.

3. Conclusion: what should the European Union's role be?

- Should the European Union be promoting exchanges and regular (e.g. annual) analysis of demographic change and its impact on societies and all the policies concerned?
- Should the Union's financial instruments – particularly the structural funds – take better account of these changes? If so, how?

- How could European coordination of employment and social protection policies better take on board demographic change?
- How can European social dialogue contribute to the better management of demographic change? What role can civil society and civil dialogue with young people play?
- How can demographic change be made an integral part of all the Union's internal and external policies?

1. Promotion of the analysis of demographic changes

EU should have an important role in the coordination and the facilitation of exchange of information and examples of “best practice” between Member States and between state and non-state actors.

The data basis on demographic changes has to be improved. To give an example: According to its own analysis, suitable and comparable data on child poverty do not exist in the European Union (cf. Preventing and reducing child poverty: Community Action Programme on Social Exclusion - Policy Studies Findings I. p. 1). EU activities in this area should be closely coordinated with the Council of Europe, taking into account its activities in this policy area. How research institutions, financed by the EU, can be opened up to an **enlarged cooperation with civil society** should be investigated.

2. The role of European Union's financial instruments

Apart from the question of reduced VAT rates for care services, we miss in the Green Paper any reflection on the financial consequences of demographic changes for EU, its Member States and the social protection of its people. But the low birth rate in European societies will lead to increasing difficulties for the financing of social protection systems. Moreover, the high debt rate in many Member States will easily lead to a financial overburden for future generations, if it is not reduced immediately and to a significant extent. **Justice and solidarity within and between generations demand sustainable economic and social changes, which do not postpone costs into the future.**

EU Commission's Green Paper on demography contains a number of suggestions how to react on the challenges of demographic changes. For its own reliability it would make sense if EU's financial framework did reflect the demographic changes in the forthcoming years (for further details see above: 1.1. the challenge of a low birth rate). Churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations would strongly support a **“family friendly approach”** of the EU's financial instruments, taking into account the suggestions for a network society and new quality of relations between generations and between family life and work made above. This should not intervene within the competences of the Member States or their regional authorities, or social partners and should be realised in **close cooperation with all stakeholders, not at least the organisations of civil society.**

3. Coordination of employment and social protection policies

EU's "Integrated guidelines on growth and jobs" should be revised, taking into account the challenges of demographic changes and the need for a better cohesion of economic, social and environmental policy in the "Lisbon strategy". (Cf. the letter of CSC of CEC and Eurodiaconia to EU presidency, Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, Brussels 18 March 2005, www.eurodiaconia.org or www.cec-kek.org).

4. Contribution of social dialogue and the role of civil society and of civil dialogue with young people

The current demographic changes reflect the increasing differentiation of living conditions in Europe. These are differentiated processes not only on national, but also on regional or even local level. An over-tightened regulation and standardisation on European level might interfere with the necessarily manifold and localised policy measures facing demographic challenges.

The close cooperation with civil society could ensure a more appropriate policy facing demographic changes, taking into account the experiences of these organisations working in very close relationship with people. European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations are ready to contribute to a policy which cares about every single person with their distinctive gifts and needs. They are ready to contribute to **strengthen a mutual sense of responsibility in European societies**. Including youth in this dialogue is essential as their future is being discussed. Solidarity and cohesion in society can only be achieved by achieving an agreement of what society is like. Youth must be involved in formulating this agreement.

5. Demographic changes as integral part of Union's policies

If European societies want to overcome the demographic challenges in their societies, they need a **new culture of solidarity** between the generations. In recent time, EU policy has been more and more concentrating on competition and not on the social cohesion of a society. While we recognise the importance of enhancing EU efforts in the fields of economy and employment, we stress even more the importance of an **overall coherence of EU policies**. In order to face demographic challenges in Europe, a new effort has to be made on the basis of values truly integrating ethical, social and economic dimensions. We will therefore support political efforts to integrate concerns related to sustainability into all policies and actions of the EU.

The earth has been entrusted to us as a heritage for all generations. A life style of dissipation and short-term profit seeking deprives future generations of their life resources and imposes immense burdens on future generations. The demographic challenges we face impose significant changes in policy on our societies. Sparing management of natural resources, sustainable economic and social policies have to be the guidelines of thinking and action in politics, economy and society.

Brussels, 15 October 2005

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 125 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 associated organisations. CEC was founded in 1959. Its Church & Society Commission has the task to help the churches study “church and society” questions from a theological and social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension, and to represent the member churches of CEC in their relations with political institutions working in Europe.
www.cec-kek.org

The Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies in presently 16 European countries. CCME cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.
www.cec-kek.org/English/ccmenews.htm

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) has member organisations in 25 countries throughout Europe. EYCE provides a forum for young people from all Christian denominations and all different social backgrounds to share their hopes and fears; to build bridges; to work for justice, peace and reconciliation; and to work together for Christian unity.
www.eyce.org

Eurodiaconia is a federation of 43 members - churches, non-statutory welfare organisations and NGOs in Europe - operating at national and international level. Our members are rooted in Christian faith within the traditions of the Reformation as well as in the Anglican and Orthodox traditions. We network diaconal and social work of institutions and church communities and cooperate with civil society partners.
Our Mission: We link our members to serve for solidarity and justice. Our strategic aims are to ensure quality of life for all in a social Europe, to link institutions of diaconia, social initiatives and churches in Europe, to be and to enhance a network of competence.
www.eurodiaconia.org