



COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION



## **Council conclusions** **Reconciliation of work and family life in the context of** **demographic change**

*3099th EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH and CONSUMER AFFAIRS  
Council meeting*

*Luxembourg, 17 June 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 THAT

- 1) the reconciliation of work and family life is recognised at European level as an important means of achieving equality between women and men, as 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;
- 2) according to Article 153(1)(i) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Union should support and complement the activities of the Member States in the field of the equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work;
- 3) Article 9 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>1</sup> states that the right to marry and the right to found a family is to be guaranteed in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of these rights;

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C364, 18.12.2000, p. 1.

# **P R E S S**

- 4) Article 33 (1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union affirms that the family shall enjoy legal, economic and social protection;
- 5) it is the responsibility of the Member States to formulate policies for the support for families consistent with national public policy;<sup>2</sup>
- 6) the European Council in March 2006 stressed that in view of demographic change in the European Union employment rates had to be increased and the reconciliation of work and family life had to be promoted<sup>3</sup>; and in its Conclusions of March 2007<sup>4</sup>, the European Council established an “Alliance for Families” to serve as a platform for exchange of views and knowledge on family-friendly policies;
- 7) the Commission Communication of 12 October 2006 entitled "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity"<sup>5</sup> accorded importance to better adapting policies to new demographic realities and was followed by the Commission Decision to set up an expert group on demographic issues<sup>6</sup>;
- 8) the third Demography Forum in November 2010 examined the possible support to families so that they could ensure solidarity between generations, notably by taking stock of the activities developed in the framework of the European Alliance for Families;
- 9) the "Europe 2020" Strategy, the European Union's new strategy for jobs and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>7</sup>, will help the Member States and the European Union to deliver high levels of competitiveness, productivity, growth, social cohesion and economic convergence; the Strategy includes the headline target aiming to bring to 75% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64 and all actions that support the Europe 2020 Strategy are key prerequisites for delivery;
- 10) in 2004 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on reconciling professional, family and private lives<sup>8</sup>;
- 11) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an opinion on the family and demographic change on 14 March 2007<sup>9</sup>; and on the role of family policy in relation to demographic change with a view to sharing best practices among Member States on 4 May 2011<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Conclusions of the Council, 23 May 2007 (doc. 9317/1/07, p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> Doc. 7775/1/06, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Doc. 7224/07, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Doc. 14114/06 (COM (2006) 571 final).

<sup>6</sup> 2007/397/EC: Commission Decision of 8 June 2007 setting up an expert group on demographic issues; OJ L 150, 12/06/2007, p. 5-7.

<sup>7</sup> Conclusions of the European Council, 17 June 2010 (doc. 13/1/10, p. 1).

<sup>8</sup> 2003/2129(INI).

<sup>9</sup> SOC/245 - CESE 423/2007.

<sup>10</sup> SOC/399 - CESE 804/2011.

## TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THAT

- 12) the Council in May 2007 emphasised that changes in the composition of the population resulting from the demographic change will have consequences for the structure of social life and for the economy. It also stressed that the challenges arising must be met with coherent, long-term strategies. With full awareness of the diversity of families and of family policies in the European Union, better support for families, enhancing the well-being of children and allowing the reconciliation of work, family and private life for women and men with caring responsibilities are crucial to a better quality of life and to Europe's economic development;<sup>11</sup>
- 13) the Commission's strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 points out that reconciliation policies put in place by the Member States are resulting in high numbers of both women and men in work and in relatively sustainable birth rates<sup>12</sup>;
- 14) the Commission's Demography Report 2010 issued in 2011 and entitled "Older, more numerous and diverse Europeans underlines, in particular, that in spite of recent increases, fertility rates in the European Union remain low leading, eventually, to ageing and population decline;<sup>13</sup>
- 15) the Commission has financed the "FAMILYPLATFORM" project which, as a result of fruitful dialogue between stakeholders, provided significant input into the EU's Socio-Economic and Humanities Research Agenda on Family Research and Family Policies<sup>14</sup>;
- 16) the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) stresses the importance of promoting better work-life balance for women and men throughout the life-course, as to enhance equality between women and men, including to ensure that both women and men can participate in the labour market; and to contribute to meeting the demographic challenges<sup>15</sup>.

## EMPHASISING THAT

- 17) while the Member States are responsible for making appropriate sustainable family policies, European exchanges in this field could make a decisive contribution to achieving the goals set in the Europe 2020 Strategy;
- 18) social partners both at national and European level play an important role in implementing or contributing to policies to reconcile work, family and private life;
- 19) better support for reconciliation measures 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, the well-being of families and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and equality between women and men;
- 20) high youth unemployment and job insecurity in certain geographical areas of the European Union might have a significant impact on the decision of young people to start a family;

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<sup>11</sup> Doc. 9317/1/07, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Doc. 13767/10 ADD 1 ADD 2, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Doc. 8584/11 ADD 1 ADD 2 ADD 3 ADD 4.

<sup>14</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index_en.html)

<sup>15</sup> Doc. 7370/11 SOC 205, p. 6.

- 21) meeting the demographic challenge requires determined action to tackle barriers to reconciling work and family life which may prevent European citizens from realising their wishes to have children;
- 22) active participation and involvement of men in reconciliation measures is crucial for reaching the work-life balance, since both women and men could benefit from family-friendly employment policies and from equal sharing of unpaid work and of responsibilities in the household. In this regard, due attention should be paid to tackling gender stereotypes.

#### WELCOMING

- 23) the discussion at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Demography and Family Policy Issues held on 1 April 2011 in Gödöllő, Hungary, where the participants acknowledged that measures promoting equality between women and men and effective family policy measures may play an important role in the reconciliation of work and family life and in meeting the demographic challenge.

#### TAKING NOTE OF

- 24) the Declaration on the impacts of reconciliation of work and family life on demographic dynamics, signed on 1 April 2011 by the Trio Presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary together with the upcoming Polish Presidency, at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Demography and Family Policy Issues in Gödöllő, Hungary.

#### INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION

- 25) without prejudice to the negotiations on the future financial framework, to continue to carry out co-financed initiatives at European, national, regional and local levels in order to promote cohesion and employment opportunities for workers, including through promoting men's role in the family, equality between women and men and reconciliation of work and family life, for instance,
  - a) by promoting flexible working arrangements and various forms of leave for both women and men;
  - b) by improving the supply of adequate, affordable, high-quality childcare services for children under the mandatory school age with a view to achieving the objectives set at the European Council in Barcelona in March 2002, taking into account the demand for childcare services and in line with national patterns of childcare provision;<sup>16</sup>
  - c) by improving the provision of care facilities for other dependants;
  - d) by providing training and qualifications of care workers and;
  - e) by encouraging employers to offer their employees childcare and other appropriate family support services, including family-friendly labour market initiatives;

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<sup>16</sup> European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) (doc. 7370/11, p.8);

- 26) to take into consideration different needs and preferences of families, in particular vulnerable families, including large families and single parent families, when designing and implementing relevant policies both at European and national level;
- 27) to bring together the measures taken and progress made in the context of the existing instruments, resources and bodies in order to enhance mutual learning, in particular the exchange of best practices among the Member States in the field of family policies, notably within the European Alliance for Families.

#### INVITE THE COMMISSION

- 28) to support the promotion of the well-being of all families and equality between women and men in all aspects and flagship initiatives of the “Europe 2020” Strategy;
- 29) where appropriate, to further develop, through Eurostat, a common Europe-wide basis for obtaining timely, comparable, pertinent statistics and indicators on the reconciliation of work and family life, especially on childcare and dependent-care, flexible working-time arrangements, the use of family-related leaves and the changes due to intensified mobility of families, taking into account the demographic projection and the foreseeable impact of demographic changes on the current work-family life reconciliation schemes;
- 30) to continue to develop and conduct adequate research to discover the factors affecting women's and men's possibilities to reconcile work and family life, their wish to have children and related attitudes across age groups and generations;
- 31) to reaffirm the structures already established, in which the Member States, local communities, the social partners, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders can learn from each others' experience and use it to improve the conditions of families, in particular:
  - a) to fully utilise the capacities of relevant EU bodies, such as the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions to conduct research on the situation of families and on family-friendly policies and on the reconciliation of work and family life policies, with the view to enhancing knowledge of the effectiveness of such policies and their interaction with related policy areas;
  - b) in this regard to also utilise the relevant data and analysis provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality on the situation of women and men during the life cycle and on life cycle policies especially with regard to the reconciliation of work and family life;
  - c) to support the role of the Expert Group on Demographic Issues in the monitoring of demographic change and the implementation of the core policy directions set out in the Commission Communication of 12 October 2006 on the demographic future of Europe;<sup>17</sup>

The European Alliance for Families constitutes a platform for the exchange of views and knowledge and represents a sustainable commitment on the part of the European Union and its Member States to address issues related to family-friendly policies in the context of demographic change.

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<sup>17</sup> COM(2006) 571.

- 32) to continue evaluating progress achieved by the European Alliance for Families and present its findings on a regular basis;
- 33) to continue using efficiently the available resources of information provided by structures located outside of the EU institutional framework, such as the OECD Family Database and the Council of Europe Family Policy Database;
- 34) to consult the Member States to propose a European Year for Families in 2014.

INVITE THE SOCIAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE AND THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

- 35) to pay adequate attention, in the context of their respective remits and work programmes, to identifying effective support policies for securing adequate living standards for families and for reconciling work and family life.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES

- 36) to take appropriate measures to promote better work-life balance for women and men, as advocated inter alia in the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020);<sup>18</sup>
- 37) to improve the content and update the existing web portal of the European Alliance for Families which should bring together the measures taken, the exchange of views and knowledge and progress made and which could also include relevant information provided by the Member States, the social partners and NGOs."

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<sup>18</sup> Doc. 7370/11, p. 6.