



Council of the
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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Council Conclusions on Ensuring work-life balance for all generations as a driver of demographic growth and gender equality.

Delegations will find attached a set of draft Council Conclusions on "Ensuring work-life balance for all generations as a driver of demographic growth and gender equality" prepared by the Presidency.

This document will be examined by the Working Party on Social Questions at its meeting on 16 September 2024. Delegations are encouraged to submit written comments already before the meeting wherever possible. Please send your comments to the following email addresses:

LIFE.social@consilium.europa.eu and equality.epsco.hupres@mfa.gov.hu

NB. The deadline for written comments will be on 16 September (COB).

Draft Council Conclusions on ensuring work-life balance for all generations as a driver of demographic growth and gender equality**ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:**

1. Gender equality and respect for human rights are at the heart of the Union's values. Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the Union laid down in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union ('Charter').
2. Article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ('TFEU') enables the Union to 'support and complement the activities of the Member States, in the field of equality between women and men with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work'.
3. Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union ('TEU') states that the Union "shall combat social exclusion and discrimination and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child."
4. Article 33 of the Charter affirms that the family shall enjoy legal, economic and social protection. It also provides that "To reconcile family and professional life, everyone shall have the right to protection from dismissal for a reason connected with maternity and the right to paid maternity leave and to parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child."
5. The principles of gender equality and work-life balance are enshrined in Principles 2 and 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
6. Progress on gender equality and in particular women's labour market participation is essential for achieving the EU 2030 headline target of a 78% employment rate for the population aged 20 to 64 set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and were endorsed by EU leaders at the Porto Social Summit in May 2021.

7. The Commission Communication on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 emphasizes that “improving the work-life balance of workers is one of the ways of addressing the gender gaps in the labour market. Both parents need to feel responsible and entitled when it comes to family care”.¹ The Strategy also stresses that gender stereotypes are a root cause of gender inequality.
8. According to the Work-Life Balance Directive, “Work-life balance policies should contribute to the achievement of gender equality by promoting the participation of women in the labour market, equal sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men and the closing of the gender gap in earnings and pay. Such policies should take into account demographic changes including the effects of an ageing population.”²
9. The European Care Strategy³ seeks to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the European Union and to improve the situation for both care receivers and the people caring for them, professionally or informally. The Strategy is accompanied by two Council Recommendations, on Early Childhood Education and Care: the Barcelona Targets for 2030 and on Access to Affordable High Quality Long Term Care, which promote measures to enhance accessible, affordable and high-quality care for children and other dependants over the life course.
10. Directive (EU) 2019/1152 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union aims, inter alia, at improving working conditions for all workers, notably those in new and non-standard employment, while preserving scope for adaptability and for labour market innovation.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

² Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, Official Journal of the European Union, L 188/79, 2019, (6).

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0440>.

11. The Commission’s Communication entitled ‘Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action’ states that “everyone should be supported to be able to choose both a career and a family. The choice to have children is a personal one. However, quality of life, availability of care and housing, as well as work opportunities and adequate income may shape these choices. There is a growing trend of young people to postpone the decision to start a family or limit its size.” “Key elements explaining the gap between actual and desired family size include the difficulty to reconcile work and care responsibilities and persistent gender inequalities, as well as economic and social insecurity linked to employment prospects, the cost of living and housing”.⁴ Overall, the Communication underlines that “Gender equality, non-discrimination and intergenerational fairness must be at the heart of policy choices”.
12. *[EESC opinion placeholder]*
13. *[CoR opinion placeholder]*
14. In its Conclusions on Demographic Challenges – the Way Ahead, the Council emphasized that effective demographic policies must be reliable and enduring. Investment in affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care can promote demographic renewal, benefit socioeconomically disadvantaged children, and create a more resilient future labour force while improving social outcomes.⁵
15. According to the Commission’s working document entitled “The impact of demographic change – in a changing environment,” in order to “ensure future prosperity and wellbeing in the EU, it is crucial to address the challenges brought about by the demographic transition. These challenges include an ageing population, a shrinking working-age population and population decline more generally, as well as increasing regional disparities, including a growing urban-rural divide”.⁶

⁴ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action, COM/2023/577 final, Brussels, 11.10.2023.

⁵ 8668/20

⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: Commission Staff Working Document: The impact of demographic change – in a changing environment. Brussels, 17.1.2023, SWD(2023) 21 final.

16. In its Conclusions on managing demographic change in Europe, the Council underlined the need for further action to manage demographic change in Europe by undertaking continuous efforts to reflect demographic change and its impact on competitiveness, human capital and equality”⁷.

CONSIDERING THAT:

17. Despite the progress achieved within the Union in terms of improving the reconciliation of work, family and private life, parents with young children still face difficulties in combining work with childcare responsibilities. While a growing number of fathers make use of their right to paternity and parental leave, the division of care responsibilities between parents is still highly gendered. Mothers still bear the lion’s share of unpaid care and household work, thus facing a double burden when returning to the labour market after childbirth.⁸
18. One way of facilitating mothers’ employment is through policies that guarantee or support access to flexible working for both parents. The Work-Life Balance Directive grants parents and carers the right to request flexible working arrangements. These might involve part-time employment, flexible hours and remote working but could also involve a reduction of working hours.⁹ In the EU, 29.1 % of women work part-time, while this percentage is only 9.2 % for male employees.¹⁰ This can often have detrimental consequences on their career advancement, salary evolution and pension credits. The implementation of the existing rights under the Work-Life Balance Directive is key to achieving a more equal sharing of care duties and to increasing the participation of women in the labour market.

⁷ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16754-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ EUROSTAT: Part-time employment as percentage of the total employment, by sex and age (%), 2022.

19. Given that the work patterns of women and men after the birth of a child still differ significantly, policies that promote a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work can be decisive in encouraging fathers' involvement in care responsibilities and women's employment..¹¹ Paid leave for parents, as well as protection from dismissal, helps new parents, especially mothers, to remain connected to the labour market and can facilitate the return to work.¹²
20. Since raising children is a long-term commitment, policies contribute to tackle demographic challenges affecting these decisions must be reliable and sustainable in order to be effective. Investment in affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care can help parents reconcile paid work and family life and bring about better social outcomes throughout the lifecycle. It can have a substantial positive impact, for socio-economically disadvantaged children, in particular, thus also helping to boost the future labour force.¹³
21. In the EU, around 7.8 million parents live alone with their dependent child or children, and 80% of them are single mothers.¹⁴ Single parents require comprehensive support systems that provide flexibility, in particular childcare support, adapted to the working hours of parents, in order to be able to participate in the labour market.¹⁵
22. In the EU, 25% of women report that the main reason for not being active in the labour market or working part-time is due to caring responsibilities, compared to only 5.1% of men.¹⁶ According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), about 56 % of women with children under 12 years old spend at least 5 hours per day on childcare, compared to 26 % of men.¹⁷ This imbalance is estimated to cost EUR 242 billion per year.¹⁸

¹¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action, COM/2023/577 final, Brussels, 11.10.2023.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 8668/20

¹⁴ Calculations by the European Institute for Gender Equality based on EU-SILC 2022 microdata.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ EUROSTAT: Main reason for part-time employment - Distributions by sex and age (%), 2022.

¹⁷ EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY: A Better Work–Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap, 2023, https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/better-work-life-balance-bridging-gender-care-gap?language_content_entity=en

¹⁸ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-care-strategy>

23. Women are more likely to work part-time, take more parental leave, and perform more unpaid domestic work than men. Mothers spend more time on childcare and household tasks, while fathers focus more on learning and leisure activities with children. The right policies can promote greater male involvement in caregiving, so as to balance parenting responsibilities.¹⁹
24. Higher income replacement rates incentivise and lead to greater uptake among fathers. When fathers do take parental leave, it promotes a more equitable sharing of caregiving and domestic duties.
25. The “sandwich generation” refers to individuals simultaneously caring for children and aging relatives with care needs, necessitating various support measures. New policies and resources are needed to improve employment prospects for informal carers, predominantly women over 50 with low employment rates, to balance work and family responsibilities and to foster intergenerational solidarity. This includes support measures such as training, counselling, healthcare, psychological support and respite care, supporting informal carers in balancing work and care responsibilities, and providing them with access to social protection and/or to adequate financial support. Eurostat reports that 50% of women and 45.9% of men aged 16-74 provide childcare and informal long-term care. Overworked caregivers, who also manage household chores and finances, risk providing poor-quality care. Moreover, providing informal care can negatively affect carers’ physical and mental health and well-being
26. Intergenerational cooperation and solidarity is mutually beneficial for all generations. Intergenerational relationships can invigorate and energize older adults as well as help to reduce the likelihood of depression and loneliness. These relationships can also support cognitive stimulation and provide an opportunity for older adults to acquire new skills.²⁰

¹⁹ UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE: Intergenerational family relationships in ageing societies, Pearl A. Dykstra, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/693335?v=pdf>.

²⁰ [Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe \(EPALE\)](https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/content/benefits-intergenerational-relationships): The Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/content/benefits-intergenerational-relationships>

27. Older generations can have an important role in supporting the better reconciliation of work, family and private life among parents with young children; at the same time, young adults also have a significant role to play as caregivers to their parents and grandparents in need.²¹ For parents, particularly mothers, with limited access to affordable, high quality childcare services, often the only possible way to enter or re-enter the labour market is to have older members of the family help with childcare responsibilities.²² Older family-members may also step into the role of a mentor, sharing knowledge and skills, and complementing family relationships or providing support where family links are fragile.²³
28. Throughout Europe, many children and young people are contributing to caregiving, providing emotional or practical support to family members who are older, who have care needs or disabilities, or are chronically ill. Young people who provide care can develop a strong sense of self-worth and enhanced self-esteem, empathy and maturity.²⁴ However, caregiving from an early age can also bear risks, as children and young people with a chronically ill family member tend to have more mental health problems and more adverse outcomes with long-term effects on their income and inclusion in society.
29. This set of conclusions builds on previous work and political commitments voiced by the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament and relevant stakeholders in this area, including the documents listed in the Annex.

²¹ UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE: [Advancing intergenerational solidarity. Policy Brief, No. 8, 2010, https://unece.org/DAM/pau/docs/age/2010/Policy-Briefs/8-Policy-brief_AIS.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/pau/docs/age/2010/Policy-Briefs/8-Policy-brief_AIS.pdf)

²² EUROPEAN COMMISSION: Caring for children in Europe: How childcare, parental leave and flexible working arrangements interact in Europe, 2014: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345022022_Caring_for_children_in_Europe_How_childcare_parental_leave_and_flexible_working_arrangements_interact_in_Europe

²³ UNITED NATIONS: Preparations for and observance of the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family: Report of the Secretary-General, 2022, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3998339?v=pdf>

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

**INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR COMPETENCES
AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO:**

30. SUPPORT employers in their efforts to develop, strengthen and implement family-friendly workplace policies, including breastfeeding-friendly policies, that meet parents' expectations and children's emotional, psychological and physical needs.
31. RAISE AWARENESS among employers about applying modernised work practices that adapt to worker's individual needs, such as telework, and flexible working arrangements as well as specific leaves and initiatives, as instruments for improving work-life balance, especially for parents with young children and workers with care responsibilities.
32. ENSURE Member States' timely and correct transposition and implementation of EU legislation on equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men in matters of employment and occupation, and on work-life balance for parents and carers.
33. ENCOURAGE measures to enhance upward convergence in the provision of accessible, affordable high quality care services for children and other dependants, that support both women and men with care responsibilities.
34. PREVENT discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or parenthood as well as for having taken care related leaves such as maternity, paternity, and parental leave, or carer's leave and for having requested flexible working arrangement.
35. WORK TOGETHER with employers in providing training to managers and staff regarding the value of employee retention.
36. PROMOTE campaigns against gender stereotypes fostering the involvement of fathers in caring for their children, in order to raise awareness throughout society about their role in this regard.

37. SUPPORT individuals who are raising children while also caring for older family members or relatives with disabilities or serious illness. These informal carers are especially in need of support in order to reconcile work, family and private life.
38. RAISE AWARENESS about the social importance of caring for older relatives, and support informal carers, including through work-life balance measures, respite care, training, health and safety, counselling, healthcare, psychological support and by offering financial support.
39. PROMOTE intergenerational solidarity by facilitating policies and measures that provide intergenerational activities and cooperation, with special particular emphasis on reciprocal support, ensuring work-life balance and a supportive community for all individuals.
40. SUPPORT local authorities in connecting young and older people through initiatives such as multigenerational spaces, and volunteering schemes and by sharing good practice in the area of family-friendly policies, as well as by promoting a better understanding between generations.
41. PROVIDE older people with opportunities to engage in activities aligned with their experience and knowledge, thus harnessing their potential and ensuring that they maintain a productive role in society and in their immediate community.
42. PROMOTE developing youth volunteering programmes that focus on helping older people with everyday tasks, thus fostering a culture of care and responsibility.
43. SUPPORT community initiatives and the establishment of educational programmes that equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to assist older people with caregiving and acquiring digital skills, thus promoting intergenerational solidarity.
44. CREATE conditions for active involvement of regional and local authorities and other stakeholders in the design of policy and investment responses adapted to specific regional or local conditions and tap into peer-learning opportunities facilitated by a range of financing and technical support instruments available at the EU level, so as to implement investments and reforms needed to effectively address demographic challenges.

**INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, IN
ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES, TO:**

- 45. ENCOURAGE collaboration between policy-makers, regional and local authorities, the social partners and civil society organisations to facilitate knowledge sharing on the subject of work-life balance for all generations as a driver of demographic growth.
- 46. IMPROVE job opportunities, working conditions, and active participation for older people, thus challenging the perception that they are a burden on society.
- 47. CONTINUE to encourage increased participation by fathers, partners and male informal carers in childcare and long-term care in order to achieve a more equal sharing of care responsibilities, thus facilitating women's access to the labour market.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

- 48. RAISE AWARENESS among employers and workers about the rights based on the relevant EU legislation to request measures respecting the needs of individuals, such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements as well as about the legal protection against dismissal and discrimination, and about rights regarding the provision of the same working conditions or any improvement in working condition and pay when returning from maternity, paternity and parental leave. To this end, improve data collection to adequately measure the effective coverage of maternity, paternity and parental leave protection measures and their outcomes.
- 49. SUPPORT research examining the needs of individuals in different life situations related to work-life balance, including the reconciliation of family aspirations and paid work, based on the Commission's Demographic Toolbox.

50. PROMOTE a more equal distribution between family members of responsibilities for childcare and long-term care, so as to alleviate the social and financial burden disproportionately borne by female carers.
51. REAFFIRM the European Commission's commitment to advance and protect the interests of older people, including by promoting healthy longevity through initiatives and programmes in all relevant policy areas.
52. CONTINUE to support policies at EU level for the better reconciliation of family aspirations and paid work as well as the empowerment of younger and older generations as a way of improving competitiveness, as foreseen in the Commission's Demographic Toolbox.
53. FACILITATE mainstreaming demographic considerations when designing relevant new policy proposals and, where appropriate, ASSESS their impacts on tackling demographic challenges, such as population ageing, the shrinking working age population and the growing urban-rural divide.

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