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Subject:	Council Conclusions on ensuring work-life balance and gender equality for all generations in the context of demographic challenges

Delegations will find attached the Council Conclusions on the above subject approved by the EPSCO Council at its meeting held on 2 December 2024.¹

¹ Minor editorial corrections have been introduced into the text.

Council Conclusions on ensuring work-life balance and gender equality for all generations in the context of demographic challenges

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:

1. Gender equality and human rights are at the core of European values; equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union ('Charter').
2. Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that the Union shall, in all its activities, aim to eliminate inequalities, and promote equality, between men and women.
3. Article 153 TFEU provides that the Union shall "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."
4. 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."
5. Article 33 of the Charter provides 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."

6. The principles of gender equality and work-life balance are recognised in Principles 2 and 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights that was proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017.
7. Increasing women’s participation in paid and quality work is a prerequisite for economic stability, growth and competitiveness; therefore, measures should be taken to achieve gender equality with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work, notably by facilitating the reconciliation of work, family and private life for both women and men throughout the life course.
8. Increasing 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 endorsed by EU leaders at the Porto Social Summit in May 2021. This contributes to the advancement of gender equality. The Action Plan has been enriched with a sub-target to at least halve the gender employment gap by 2030 compared to 2019.
9. 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”. The Strategy also stresses that gender stereotypes are a root cause of gender inequality.
10. 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 men and women 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.”

11. The European Care Strategy highlights the importance of ensuring high-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. It is further complemented by Council Conclusions on the transition of care systems throughout life towards holistic, person-centred and community-based support models with a gender perspective. Those Conclusions also highlight the importance of facilitating independent living.
12. 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.
13. 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”. The Communication underlines that gender equality, non-discrimination, respect of fundamental rights and intergenerational solidarity and fairness must be at the heart of policy choices.

14. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) opinion entitled “Ensuring a needs-based work-life balance for all: How adequate flexible working conditions can support intergenerational solidarity and the empowerment of women” emphasises the role of needs-based work-life balance solutions regarding flexible working arrangements as well as affordable, available, accessible and high-quality care services that are beneficial for all stakeholders. The opinion recommends developing a Care Toolbox with indicators and targets for long-term care. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of examining the state of work-life balance policies in EU companies, because “supporting workers in balancing family responsibilities not only enhances productivity and worker retention but also boosts overall company performance”.
15. The opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Commission’s Demographic Toolbox underscores the importance of work-life balance and intergenerational solidarity as key solutions to Europe’s demographic challenges. It stresses that improving work-life balance through policies such as affordable early childhood education and care and flexible working conditions is essential for supporting families and enabling both men and women to participate fully in the workforce. Intergenerational cooperation is also highlighted, with a focus on fostering active ageing and skill transfer between generations, ensuring that people of all ages can live fulfilling and independent lives while contributing to society.
16. 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 (ECEC) can contribute to demographic renewal, benefit socioeconomically disadvantaged children, and create a more resilient future labour force while improving social outcomes.

17. As mentioned in the Commission’s working document entitled “The impact of demographic change – in a changing environment,” in order to “ensure future prosperity and well-being 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”.
18. In its Conclusions on managing demographic change in Europe, the Council welcomed the Commission’s Demographic Toolbox Communication, including its analysis and the call for a comprehensive approach to managing demographic change. It also 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”.

CONSIDERING THAT:

19. The Union has achieved great progress in terms of improving the reconciliation of work, family and private life. However, particularly parents with young children still face difficulties in reconciling work with childcare responsibilities. Due to persisting gender stereotypes and often insufficient support systems, parents, especially mothers, often face serious challenges in reconciling parenthood with a working career. While a growing number of fathers make use of measures such as paternity and parental leave, women still perform a disproportionate share of both unpaid care work and household work, thus facing a multiple burden when returning to the labour market after childbirth. Men do not adapt their paid working time to care responsibilities to the same extent as women. The resulting gender care gap has a negative impact on female employment rates and women’s careers, thus increasing other gender gaps, including the gender pay gap and women’s higher risk of poverty.

20. One way of facilitating higher employment rates among primary carers, who are mainly women, is through policies that guarantee or support access to flexible working arrangements. The Work-Life Balance Directive aims to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life for workers who are parents or carers. It 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. However, it is crucial to ensure that using such arrangements does not have detrimental consequences on employees' career advancement, salary evolution, income, economic self-sufficiency, working times and pension rights. This can be particularly disadvantageous for women if they avail themselves of flexible working arrangements more often than men. The rights created by the Directive are key to achieving a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men and to increasing the participation of women in the labour market. However, under the applicable rules, the right to request flexible working arrangements belongs to parents or carers only and not to the employer.
21. While flexible working arrangements are intended to promote work-life balance, they can also reinforce gender stereotypes and traditional gender norms, with women often taking on the majority of caregiving responsibilities. In the EU, 29.1 % of female employees work part-time, while this percentage is only 9.2 % for male employees. Moreover, there are significant differences between Member States, not only in terms of the proportion of women and men working part-time, but also their reasons for doing so, as well as regarding the possibility for workers to adjust their working hours if they so desire.

22. Given that the labour force participation, pay, working time and career progression of women and men after the birth of a child still differ significantly, inter alia due to gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles, policies that promote the equal distribution of paid work and unpaid care work are essential for involving men in care responsibilities. Adequately paid individual and non-transferable leaves for parents, as well as protection from dismissal and protection against discrimination in accordance with EU legislation, help new parents, especially mothers, to return to work. Such policies can help to rebalance the burden of care between parents, create a better work-life balance for both women and men and increase the employment rate among women. They can also facilitate women's career progression in terms of pay and advancement to decision-making positions, thus offering an important driver for gender equality.
23. Raising children is a long-term endeavour, and in order for demographic policies to be effective, they must be reliable and enduring. Investment in affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care can contribute to demographic renewal and have significant positive outcomes, in particular for socio-economically disadvantaged children, helping to make the future labour force more resilient in the face of demographic challenges, as well as achieving better social outcomes across the lifecycle.
24. In the EU, around 7.8 million parents live alone with their dependent child or children, and 80% of them are single mothers.² Single parents require comprehensive support systems that provide flexibility, including facilities at work and early childhood education and care services adapted to the working hours of parents, in order to be able to participate in the labour market.³

² Calculations by the European Institute for Gender Equality based on EU-SILC 2022 microdata.

³ Ibid.

25. In the EU, women bear a significantly greater share of caregiving responsibilities, with 25% reporting care duties as one of the reasons for not participating in the labour market or working part-time, compared to only 5.1% of men.⁴ As indicated in a survey by 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.⁵ This imbalance is estimated to cost EUR 242 billion per year.⁶ Thus, access to accessible, affordable and high-quality formal care services is crucial for reducing the burden of informal care on women and promoting gender equality, as women with young children who use ECEC services are more likely to be employed and less engaged in time-intensive childcare. Care activities are essential to the collective well-being of societies. Therefore, it is important that staff in the care sector be valued in society and offered sufficient career prospects and training opportunities. Ensuring adequate staffing levels is another important challenge. Women also predominantly care for older persons and dependent adults in need of long-term support, throughout the life course, often balancing work and care, a major social challenge that limits their labour market potential in the context of demographic ageing. Both women and men who provide informal long-term care and support face many challenges in reconciling work, family and private life.

⁴ Eurostat: Main reason for part-time employment - Distributions by sex and age (%), 2022.

⁵ 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

⁶ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-care-strategy>

26. Women are more likely to work part-time, to take more parental leave, and to be absent from work to care for sick family members, and they are also likely to perform more unpaid care work and domestic work than men. Moreover, women spend more time on childcare, informal care and household tasks, while men focus more on learning and leisure activities with children. This reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates inequality between women and men in both the workplace and at home. Therefore, targeted work-life balance policies are needed to promote men's equal participation in caregiving, in order to bridge the gender gaps and to combat gender stereotypes.
27. Paternity leave and non-transferable parental leave, increased flexibility and high income replacement rates during such leaves incentivise fathers and lead to greater uptake of leaves. When fathers do take paternity and parental leave early on, it contributes to an equal sharing of caregiving and domestic duties in general, including in the longer term.
28. The “sandwich generation” refers to individuals, mostly women, simultaneously caring for children, dependent adults and ageing relatives with care needs, necessitating various support measures. Renewed efforts are needed, including the improvement of existing policies and resources, to improve the provision of formal accessible, affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care and long-term care compatible with full-time employment. Eurostat reports that 50% of women and 45.9% of men aged 16-74 provide childcare and informal long-term care. Moreover, providing informal care can negatively affect carers' physical and mental health and well-being, in particular that of women, who are most frequently involved in family care.⁷ Intergenerational solidarity on a voluntary basis can complement and help to advance gender equality, provided that efforts are made to ensure that informal care work is shared equally, free from gender stereotypes and not imposed mainly on women and girls.

⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality: A Better Work-Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap. https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/better-work-life-balance-bridging-gender-care-gap?language_content_entity=en

29. Intergenerational cooperation and solidarity can bring benefits to 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. On the other hand, informal caregiving, carried out mostly by women, can have serious physical, mental, and financial costs, including reduced employment opportunities and lower pensions. Moreover, while intergenerational cooperation can offer valuable support, this should be based on voluntary engagement, alongside robust public care services and social protection systems that incorporate a gender perspective, and investment from governments is essential so as to ensure that the needs of both younger and older generations are met adequately. These principles and policies also need to be accompanied by economic incentives to participate in the labour market.
30. Formal early childhood education and care services and other care and support services provided by the welfare state are of paramount importance. However, when possible, older generations can also choose to play an important role in supporting the reconciliation of work, family and private life among parents with young children, who wish to re-enter the labour market, especially women. Young adults can also choose to support their parents and grandparents in need in old age. Older family or community members may also choose to step into the role of a mentor, sharing knowledge and skills, and complementing family relationships or providing support where family links are fragile.
31. As life expectancy continues to increase across Europe, ensuring the future adequacy of Member States' pension and welfare systems will require adjustments such as, for example, longer working lives for both women and men.
32. While the help of older generations in supporting the better reconciliation of work, family and private life could be beneficial for all parties, it is important to ensure that it does not have an adverse effect on the income, labour market position and mental and physical well-being of the members of the older generations involved.

33. Throughout Europe, many young people, especially young girls, are also contributing to caregiving, providing emotional or practical support to family members who are older, or 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. While such interactions can have mutual advantages, caregiving from an early age can also bear risks, as young people with family members in need of care tend to have more mental health difficulties and to underperform in school, and more adverse outcomes with long-term effects on their income and inclusion in society.
34. 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.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR COMPETENCES, WHILE RESPECTING THE ROLE AND AUTONOMY OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERS AND TAKING INTO ACCOUNT NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO:

35. PROMOTE the efforts by employers and the social partners to develop, strengthen and implement policies ensuring work-life balance for both women and men in all their diversity, mental health policies aimed at improving the well-being of workers, as well as family-friendly workplace policies with a gender perspective, including breastfeeding-friendly policies, and targeted information for fathers, that meet parents' needs and expectations and also allow children's emotional, psychological and physical needs to be met.
36. ENSURE affordable, accessible and high-quality early childhood education and care services for children, persons with disabilities, older people and other persons in need, including home care and community-based care that support independent living, in line with the relevant Council Recommendations.

37. PURSUE early childhood education and care policies in line with the Council Recommendation on Early Childhood Education and Care: the Barcelona Targets for 2030. Improving parental leave measures and ECEC services, as well as supporting single-parent families, inter alia through financial aid, is essential.
38. STEP UP the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, especially as regards the provision of effective and free access to ECEC for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
39. RAISE AWARENESS among employers about and SUPPORT them in applying work practices that adapt to workers' individual needs, such as telework, and flexible working arrangements including compressed work weeks or reduced hours, as well as in the provision of specific leaves and related protection, and in other initiatives, with a view to improving work-life balance for all, especially for those with young children and workers with other care responsibilities. TAKE INTO ACCOUNT the needs of workers with disabilities in this context. Moreover, it is important to recognise the lack of balance between work, family and private life as an occupational health risk and adopt preventive measures to address this risk.
40. RAISE AWARENESS of the fact that all parents, and notably mothers, may require support for improving their work-life balance, and that employers can play a positive role by actively attending to the individual needs of all parents and other caregivers in their workforce.

41. ENSURE 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, taking into consideration the unequal distribution of unpaid care work at the expense of women.
42. TAKE MEASURES to enhance the provision of inclusive, accessible, flexible, affordable, and high-quality ECEC services and care services for children and other dependants throughout the life course, so as to support parents with care responsibilities, while also ensuring a strong focus on positive outcomes for children and other care receivers. RAISE AWARENESS about the social and economic importance and value of care work which is essential to the collective well-being of societies. IMPROVE working conditions for workers in this sector so as to ensure that sufficient services are available.
43. EFFECTIVELY PREVENT AND COMBAT discrimination and retaliation in the case of pregnancy or parenthood as well as for having taken or requested care-related leaves such as maternity, paternity, and different types of parental leave, or carer's leave and for having requested flexible working arrangements, by ensuring compliance with EU legislation.
44. PROMOTE awareness-raising initiatives, particularly in education and training, highlighting the benefits of the equal sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men, including with a view to combating gender stereotypes.
45. CONSIDER policies and measures to improve employment prospects for informal carers, with particular focus on women over 50 with low employment rates. Such measures could entail, inter alia, the provision of training, counselling, and psychological support, as well as increasing the availability of high-quality long-term care services.

46. WORK TOGETHER, where appropriate, with employers and workers' representatives in raising awareness and providing training to managers and staff regarding the economic and social benefits of employee retention, and regarding the role of policies ensuring work-life balance for parents and carers in this context, underlining the importance of adopting a gender perspective and of avoiding gender biases, including with a view to retaining female talent.
47. PROMOTE the use of collective bargaining and social dialogue in the context of designing and implementing work-life balance policies, including flexible working arrangements, so as to address parents' and carers' needs.
48. RAISE AWARENESS about and COMBAT gender stereotypes and biases, starting from an early age, especially in education and employment as well as society at large, including in order to foster the equal participation of men in domestic work, in informal care and in caring for their children and other dependants, including through the use of parental, paternity and carer's leave. RAISE AWARENESS throughout society about the importance of the active and equal contribution of men in this regard. FOSTER the involvement of men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change and in bringing about gender equality in relation to paid and unpaid care work. ENSURE that information on the availability of and about the rules and legal entitlements regarding parental benefits is easily accessible.
49. PROMOTE a rights-based approach to support individuals, especially women and girls, who are raising children while also caring for older family members or relatives with disabilities or serious illnesses. In order to be able to reconcile work, family and private life, and to make their own choices in this context, these informal carers require particular support such as work-life balance measures, respite care, training, health and safety measures, counselling, healthcare and psychological support as well as financial support.

50. TAKE INTO SPECIAL CONSIDERATION the needs of persons and families in vulnerable situations, and STRENGTHEN the provision of incentives for them, in order to facilitate better reconciliation of work, family and private life. PROVIDE additional support to parents with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities or sick children, taking into consideration their specific needs in terms of support services, including personal assistance, and healthcare. CONSIDER the situation of single-parent families when designing policies to support parents.
51. PROMOTE intergenerational solidarity by facilitating policies and measures that provide intergenerational activities and cooperation, with special emphasis on mutual support, ensuring work-life balance and a supportive community for all individuals. RAISE AWARENESS, where appropriate, about the social value of caring for older people, including of the care provided by those close to the person in need of care.
52. 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 and inclusive policies, as well as by promoting intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.
53. PROVIDE older people with opportunities to engage in activities aligned with their experience and knowledge, thus harnessing their potential and encouraging them to maintain a productive role in society and in their immediate community. SUPPORT efforts to promote active and healthy ageing, thus laying the foundation for longer and more sustainable working lives in the context of demographic challenges. PROMOTE a rights-based approach and a life course perspective with regard to ageing, while addressing the diverse needs and potential of all persons in society.
54. PROMOTE youth volunteering programmes that focus on helping older people with everyday tasks, thus fostering a culture of care and responsibility.

55. SUPPORT community initiatives to promote awareness among young people about the advantages of assisting older people with acquiring digital skills, thus helping to close the digital age gap and promoting intergenerational solidarity, to the benefit of all.
56. EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITIES offered by the range of financing and technical support instruments available at the EU level for the design of policy and investment responses needed to effectively address demographic challenges, including the provision of accessible, affordable and high-quality ECEC and long term care services, while ensuring that these responses are adapted to specific regional or local conditions and creating conditions for active involvement of regional and local authorities and other stakeholders, including through peer-learning activities.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES, AND RESPECTING THE ROLE AND AUTONOMY OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERS, TO:

57. FACILITATE collaboration between policy-makers, regional and local authorities, employers, the social partners and civil society organisations to facilitate knowledge sharing on the subject of work-life balance and the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men as a driver of gender equality and the economic independence of women in the context of demographic challenges.
58. RAISE AWARENESS throughout society and among all relevant stakeholders, including employers and policymakers, about ageism, its consequences for individuals and society at large, and the need and possibilities to tackle it.
59. CONTINUE to encourage and support the European social partners in addressing work-life balance issues in their cross-industry and sectoral social dialogue committees.

60. ENCOURAGE THE IMPROVEMENT of job opportunities and incentives, as well as working conditions, for older people, foster their participation in society and raise awareness of their potential and of the contribution that they make, thus recognising them as an asset for society. STRENGTHEN the role that older people play in mentoring, sharing knowledge and contributing to the maintenance of social ties. TAKE MEASURES TO REDUCE loneliness among older people and SUPPORT efforts to improve their mental and physical health.
61. PROMOTE the equal sharing of unpaid care work and domestic responsibilities between women and men and CONTINUE to take measures, including the exchange of good practice, to increase the participation by fathers, partners and male informal carers in childcare, including through the use of parental leave, which is to the benefit of fathers and children alike, as well as their increased participation in long-term care, with a view to the equal sharing of paid work and unpaid care work between women and men, thus advancing gender equality and facilitating women's access to the labour market as well as their career progression and economic independence.
62. PROMOTE gender mainstreaming in the design, implementation and evaluation of measures adopted to strengthen work-life balance for all and to tackle demographic challenges.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

63. 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 individual, non-transferable parental leave and flexible working arrangements, as well as about the legal protection against dismissal and discrimination, and about employment 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, ENCOURAGE the improvement of the collection of data disaggregated by sex in order to adequately measure the effective coverage of maternity, paternity and parental leave protection measures, as well as measures relating to flexible working arrangements, and their outcomes.
64. SUPPORT research, taking a life-course perspective, to examine 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.
65. PROMOTE the exchange of good practice to encourage the equal sharing between women and men of responsibilities for childcare and informal care, so as to alleviate the social and financial burden disproportionately borne by female carers and to strengthen their economic self-sufficiency, including with regard to help for single parents (who are mostly single mothers) to combine care responsibilities and work.
66. REAFFIRM the European Commission's commitment to advance and protect the rights and interests of older people, paying attention, in particular, to the needs of older women and those of older people living with disabilities, while applying an intersectional approach, including by promoting healthy longevity through initiatives and programmes in all relevant policy areas, and taking into consideration a gender equality perspective and intergenerational solidarity.

67. CONTINUE to support policies at EU level for the better reconciliation of family aspirations and paid work, notably by ensuring work-life balance and access to high-quality ECEC, with a view to fostering gender equality, as well as for the empowerment of younger and older generations and positive outcomes for children, in particular as a way of improving competitiveness, as foreseen in the Commission's Demographic Toolbox.
 68. FACILITATE mainstreaming demographic considerations and apply a gender perspective when designing relevant 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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