

**"Responding to the Demographic Winter"** - tabled by EPP & likeminded Group at the Parliamentary Assembly of OSCE together with ÖVP (Austria), European Solidarity (Ukraine), VMRO-DPMNE (Republic of North Macedonia), RMDSZ/UDMR (Romania)

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**Acknowledging** that demographic change is a defining shift and challenge with far-reaching implications for societies, economies, and governance structures which impacts labour markets, pension systems, healthcare services, and social stability: **We believe** that investing in the family is investing in the future of Europe;

**Recognising** that most countries in Europe and the OSCE region are experiencing aging populations, declining birth rates, and increasing unplanned childlessness, leading to a concerning worker-retiree dependency ratio necessitating urgent and coordinated political action;

**Recognising** that many countries in Europe are facing depopulation of vast rural areas and overpopulation of urban centres and cities, which has consequences for the European way of life and generational handover;

**Emphasising** the crucial role of policies that support families, parents and having children, that promote sustainable economies and intergenerational solidarity to maintain social cohesion and economic prosperity, and that enable the possibility to form a family while respecting individual decisions and personal choices;

**Concerned** about the long-term consequences of an aging workforce, population decline, and the increasing pressure on healthcare and pension systems, which, if left unaddressed, will undermine social stability, economic growth and regional security;

**Highlighting** the importance of fostering demographic policies that are comprehensive, proactive, and rooted in evidence-based research to ensure resilient societies and sustainable governance;

**Highlighting** the significant demographic challenges in Ukraine, as Russia's illegal and brutal war of aggression has led to a decline in birth rates, increased civilian mortality, violation of human rights, especially against women and children, as well as the forced emigration of millions of Ukrainians;

**Emphasising** that many policies touching upon demography are of national competence, including family policies, and that those policies should respect the principle of subsidiarity;

**The European People's Party commits to:**

**1. Address Declining Birth Rates and Ageing Societies and Depopulation**

- Encourage national governments to implement **family-friendly policies**, in order to create the best conditions for everyone to start a family, including financial incentives, tax benefits, and housing support for families with children, while respecting personal decisions and choices without discriminating against childless or single people of all age;
- Enhance the reconciliation between career perspectives and ever-changing working conditions, with personal family preferences and choices as well as care responsibilities, ensuring women do not have to bear solely the pressure;
- Support the inclusion of mothers in the labour market, and reinforce policies which support parenthood such as parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and adapted pension systems;
- Increase research and data analysis on the root causes, implement policies which empower and make it easier for people to have the desired number of children (which research shows is generally higher than the actual number) and to increase societal respect and openness to having more children;
- Increase **awareness of the impact of delayed parenthood** on fertility.

**2. Strengthen Social and Economic Structures**

- Develop and implement **long-term strategies for pension and welfare system sustainability**, inter alia to reconcile retirement age with life expectancy;
- Incentivise investments in key infrastructure, including childcare facilities, social day centres and retirement residences for the most vulnerable elderly and people with disabilities;
- Foster policies for **active aging**, encouraging older individuals to remain in the workforce and participate in society through flexible retirement models and lifelong learning;
- Stress the need to support certain regions to address depopulation and the loss of talents, particularly in regions facing significant and lasting demographic challenges, including brain drain; the future of these areas depends on promoting family-friendly policies and encouraging young talents to stay and build their futures there;
- Strengthen **community engagement** to improve local cooperation, foster **intergenerational solidarity** and mutual support between younger and older generations, leveraging longevity.

**3. Support Labour Force and Workforce Sustainability and Economic Resilience**

- Address actual and projected **labour shortages** and emerging job market needs **through strategic planning**, skills development — including **re-skilling and upskilling programs** — vocational training and educational reform aiming at fulfilling the demands in critical

- professions and to ensure that older citizens can continue to contribute to the economy and society if they want to.
- Reconcile labour market shortages with targeted immigration policies accompanied by integration capabilities as well as cultural proximity, respectful of the need to retain talent in the countries of origin for the development of societies.
- Encourage and invest in **technological innovation** and **automation** to enhance productivity while maintaining employment opportunities.

#### **4. Strengthen Healthcare and Social Care Systems**

- Expand and improve **long-term care services, including mental health care for the elderly**, ensuring affordability, accessibility, diversity and free choice where possible.
- Invest in **preventative healthcare measures** to promote longevity and healthy aging and to reduce medical costs.
- Improve **training and working conditions for healthcare professionals** to mitigate shortages and enhance quality of care.
- **Tackle loneliness** and its negative effects, encourage **community-based initiatives** that reduce social isolation and loneliness.

#### **5. Ensure Financial Stability**

- Encourage national governments to reform **tax and fiscal policies** to address demographic challenges while ensuring sustainable economic growth.
- Explore **alternative pension models** that combine public and private funding sources to secure long-term stability, ensuring accessibility and quality of care.

#### **6. Safeguard Security and Regional Stability**

- Recognise demographic decline as a key competitiveness threat facing our economies and national and international strategies and affecting Europe's position geopolitically;
- Strengthen democratic participation in **depopulated areas**, ensuring fair representation and accessibility to voting;
- Strengthen **immigrant integration, language and cultural education**, to ensure successful economic and social participation in host countries;
- At the national level, develop an efficient strategy to enable Ukrainian citizens to return home after the war, to avoid "brain drain";
- Facilitate post-war reconstruction based on inclusiveness, equality and the active engagement of civil society, believing that peace is a fundamental prerequisite for political, economic, democratic and demographic stability in Ukraine.

## **7. Enhance Research and Policy Development**

- Promote and invest in **demographic research** to better understand low birth rates, aging patterns, and migration dynamics, and support **evidence-based and tailor-made policymaking** by improving data collection on demographic trends and related socio-economic factors;
- Establish **demographic task forces** within regional and national governments and international organisations to coordinate responses to demographic shifts;
- Encourage **cross-border cooperation** on demographic policies within Europe.

## **8. Facilitate Technological and Digital Innovations**

- Encourage the use of innovative technologies, including AI, to mitigate labour shortages and enhance productivity.
- Explore new care structures, such as **telemedicine and digital healthcare services**, to improve access to care, particularly in rural areas.
- Promote **smart city and smart village initiatives** to ensure sustainable urban and rural development in response to shifting demographics, by working for robust digital infrastructure for access to telework, e-services, and digital education. Strengthening the digital transition in areas trapped in depopulation and a talent development gap is key to economic, social, and territorial cohesion in the EU.
- Foster digital literacy in order to exploit the possibilities offered by new technologies.

## **Final Commitment**

The EPP commits to prioritising demographic change as a **critical policy issue** and to **working together to implement sustainable solutions** that ensure economic prosperity, social stability, and long-term security across Europe.