



**European Youth Forum**

**POSITION PAPER ON**

**SOLIDARITY BETWEEN GENERATIONS**

## **Introduction**

The demographic changes in Europe, characterised by an ageing population and at the same time by a decrease in fertility rates, are challenging the sustainability of the European social model as well as Europe's future economic development. More specifically, they challenge the current social and pension systems, putting at stake also an autonomous future for young people in society. Such changes impose challenges on people from all age groups across Europe and in this regard the European Youth Forum believes that a reflection on the sustainability of the social model for all generations in Europe is needed. The need for this reflection becomes even more crucial in a period of crisis, where the fair redistribution of wealth and resources is at stake.

The European Youth Forum has tackled this issue in its Policy Paper on Youth and the European Social Model<sup>1</sup> and throughout this paper elaborated on how and why an approach based on solidarity between generations is the sustainable way forward for a more equal and fair society, specially in a period of crisis.

## **Challenges...**

European demographic evolution is very challenging not only for the European Union's future economic development, but also for its social systems and communities. Between 2005 and 2030, the working age population (15-64 years) is due to fall by 20.8 million. Moreover, the demographic dependency rate, defined as the ratio of the population aged 0 to 14 and over 65 to the population aged between 15 and 64 years, will rise from a rate of 49% in 2005 to 66% in 2030<sup>2</sup>.

On the one hand, these demographic changes put at stake the sustainability of the current pension systems, which affects people from all generations and will foremost affect them in the decades to come. Additionally, young people also face an increasing burden in society when it comes to reconciling their work life, family life and ensuring support of older people in their families.

Another crucial issue which clearly highlights intergenerational responsibility is climate change and environmental issues in general as it is obvious that the lifestyles of the former and current generations can impact on the future of the younger and future generations.

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<sup>1</sup> See PP on Youth and the European Social Model (0098-08).

<sup>2</sup> European Commission Green paper: Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations", 16.3.2005, COM (2005) 94

All these challenges put the autonomy<sup>3</sup> of young people at stake. Young people face more challenges when it comes to achieving their full potential and living autonomously, face increasing difficulties in finding the necessary opportunities, support and resources to live independently, to run their own lives, and to be able to take independent decisions.

### **... and opportunities**

The European Youth Forum truly believes that it is necessary that society as a whole reflects on the sustainability of Europe's social model. The European Youth Forum further believes that such challenges need to be addressed in a framework of solidarity between generations in order to avoid that they are presented as a conflict between young and older people, but rather promoting social cohesion, notably between the different generations. Moreover, solidarity between generations becomes even more pertinent in a period of crisis, such as the one all generations are experiencing nowadays.

The European Youth Forum believes that intergenerational solidarity must encompass a fair re-distribution of wealth between generations as well as opportunities for people of all generations to acquire sufficient income to ensure their well-being. In this sense, the European Youth Forum believes that an intergenerational debate on the sustainability of pension systems is crucial in Europe.

This should be accompanied by the exchange of good practices and mutual learning between different generations. This exchange between generations would allow younger people to learn from older ones, who can share their life experiences and knowledge acquired through life, while older people can benefit from the youth's recently acquired and updated knowledge, energy, vitality and commitment. This mutual learning can occur in several manners, such as through voluntary activities, in the work place, within families or through house-sharing projects. The European Youth Forum is truly convinced that sharing schemes in the work place or through volunteering can contribute to an active ageing in Europe.

Every year, greater numbers of Europeans reach retirement age: the European Youth Forum believes that the retirement of older people without a useful transmission of their knowledge is a waste of valuable human resources. The European Youth Forum therefore calls for the design of an "intergenerational learning scheme". Such a scheme should accommodate job-sharing between older workers who want to move

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<sup>3</sup> See YFJ Policy Paper « Meeting young people's needs » A European Youth approach to Youth Policy (0590-06).

progressively towards retirement and younger people in the process of entering or moving within the labour market<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, the European Youth Forum believes that investing more resources in the integration of young migrants is a key aspect to the sustainability of social, economic and pension systems in Europe and it should also happen in a framework of intergenerational solidarity.

In order to also address the challenges to the future of the ecosystem, policy makers should take ambitious and concrete measures. So as to not compromise the future of young people in Europe and beyond, the modes of producing and consuming should evolve towards a low resource economy, while at the same time providing quality jobs.

Furthermore, the European Youth Forum urges policy makers from different generations to take into account the needs of young people when designing their policies. The European Youth Forum further encourages sharing discussions on the priorities and main concerns amongst decision-makers of all ages across Europe.

On behalf of young people in Europe, the European Youth Forum calls for the full inclusion of youth organisations in the debate and policy-making process regarding demographic change. In order to find responses to the challenges facing young people, their voices and interests need to be heard in the debate on policy and reform. In this sense, youth organisations need to be involved as key actors in the debate.

## **Conclusion**

All generations must be included in the debate and policy-making process regarding demographic change and its consequent challenges. This is no less relevant for young people, and in this context the European Youth Forum is ready to assume its responsibility and give its full contribution towards making the voice of young people count.

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<sup>4</sup> See PP on Youth and the European Social Model (0098-08).