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Response of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC), the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and of Eurodiaconia to the Consultation Paper from the Bureau of European Policy Advisers on "Europe's Social Reality" and the Communication "Towards a new social vision".

We thank the Bureau of European Policy Advisers for initiating a consultation process on Europe's Social Reality and for the Commission's Social Vision Communication confirming this as an opportunity to feed into the mid-term review of the Social Agenda.

We welcome the wide-ranging scope of the BEPA paper and that it deals with some little-discussed issues at EU level. We hope that issues not picked up in the social vision paper will also be considered in reviewing the Social Agenda such as the significance of inequality and the impact of economic short-termism. We welcome the priorities of opportunity, access and solidarity in the social vision paper, but also point out that **solidarity is necessary for opportunities and access to be a reality for all**. We call for the social vision to be mainstreamed in all EU policies, aware that the citizens expect added value from EU cooperation and wish to see a more socially-minded Europe.

1. Key Messages

Investing in Inclusion

Churches, diaconal and related organisations working with migrants and refugees welcome the package of policies proposed in the Active Inclusion Communication referred to in the Social Vision Communication, but stress that **active inclusion¹ is a means, not an aim**. The aim should be social inclusion, and in general this should not only be for the most disadvantaged, but of all.

A key challenge is to ensure all people are supported in this changing environment to enable them to live a dignified life, particularly through the sustainable provision of quality social and health services, essential to ensure people are in a position to take up opportunities. CSC of CEC, CCME and Eurodiaconia call for a reliable operating environment at both EU and national level that enables providers to provide quality integrated services that meet differing needs, ensuring sustainability of the services and that the general interest is upheld in procuring and providing the services, which includes ensuring equal access to quality services for all.

¹ As understood by the European Commission to be made up of policies for minimum income, active labour market measures and access to quality social services (COM(2007) 620)

At the EU level, policies and rules that affect or regulate the functioning of social services should be carefully assessed and action taken to address negative impacts if necessary. The proposed biennial reports should be used for this. When formulating and implementing policy and legislation the valuable **experience and expertise of users and providers** should be taken into account at all levels.

As life risks are often structural and not only individual, public responsibility, and therefore financial commitment, is necessary at all levels of government to ensure access to quality services. Health and social services are not provided within a ‘normal’ supplier/consumer relationship and often those with the least financial means have the most needs. Therefore it is essential to ensure social and health services are provided on the basis of solidarity, as market mechanisms do not guarantee access to services for all.

As the Social Reality paper points out, there are institutional or structural barriers to the labour market, which must be addressed. **A balanced flexicurity approach should be taken, aiming for the participation of all**; we therefore welcome the development of “a tailored set of measures” for jobseekers. As employment policies do not only affect and are not only implemented by public authorities and social partners, we would like to encourage the European Union to involve stakeholders such as churches and diaconal organisations

As all existing flexicurity models are based on a very high level of solidarity, the EU’s mission to monitor the implementation of the flexicurity principles, should ensure that Member States’ strategies will not lead to an individualisation of risks. In our understanding a society based on solidarity principle also means a sharing of risks between employers and employees.

Along with implementing minimum income schemes, “Making work pay” should also be a priority as being in work is too often not sufficient to avoid being at risk of poverty.

Life long learning, the provision of training and re-training throughout the life cycle of a person, is essential to enable them to adapt and take up the new opportunities that the fast-changing labour market offers. This should be the responsibility of both government and business. Life long learning, however, should not be reduced to acquiring jobs-based skills, but also capacity building that empowers and facilitates engagement in society. Higher education must be affordable to ensure equal access whatever background a person comes from.

Investing in youth

We welcome the EU’s recent focus on fighting child poverty as background is too often a future determinant. Attention needs to be paid to supporting families with children and particularly single-parent families, in order to tackle the higher incidents of poverty found there. **Early intervention policies should be developed if necessary and access to education from a young age can help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty** and therefore increase life opportunities in general, as well as social mobility. As statistics show that children and youth from families with a migration background have more difficulties completing schools and training, a special focus ought to be given to prevent discrimination and exclusion from higher training and schooling.

To enable parents to earn their living and income for their families, extensive child caring facilities or alternatively benefits to enable them to take care of their own children must be provided. EU Member states should implement policies aiming to reach the Barcelona targets and provide the right to childcare coverage from an early age and ensure a **high standard of caring facilities**.

Gender Equality

We encourage EU Member States **to implement and monitor fundamental rights on equality between men and women** as if the framework conditions were responding to these rights, it would be much easier for men and women to find a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks. We regret the high level of the gender pay gap as highlighted by the Commission² as this decreases life chances and opportunities and ask the European Union and its Member States to effectively guarantee the fundamental right to equal pay.

More flexible working conditions for women and men, which enables them to make choices which will provide the best care for their children and optimal conditions for the family life as a whole, should be facilitated. “More flexible leave arrangements over a lifetime” could include for example individual working time options, reduced and increased working hours, care leaves, sabbaticals, educational leaves, and long term labour time accounts. This will require higher flexibility from employers as well as employees.

Investing in mobility and successful integration

Mobility and flexibility are generally supported and regarded as positive for the labour market the BEPA paper also refers to the positive and enriching aspects of diversity. Churches and related organisations share the presumption that diversity is generally positive, however, we observe that social policy, as well as education and health policies, are not yet equipped to address the risks attached to mobility. For example, migrant workers contribute to the social security assets, but their secure permanent residence status is dependent on them proving self-sustenance. Health and education are fields in which more opportunities and access will have to be provided for migrants and their family members.

Any policy on migration needs to take a holistic approach A holistic approach does not only consider the benefits or problems of migration for demographic developments, but also looks at the rights and needs of migrants, the challenges of migration for host societies and the effects, which migration has on countries of origin.

While migrants are moving in increasing numbers and across bigger distances, their legal status is still the subject of hugely diverging national legislation, which can lead to problems such as trafficking. We therefore reiterate the call that EU Member States should agree on a coherent and transparent migration policy, which recognises the rights of migrants such as **ratifying the 1990 UN Convention of the Rights of All Migrants**.

Investing in longer and healthier lives; Well-being

The social vision paper lacks real priorities to facilitate this. As well as physical health, **mental health is a fundamental part of the well-being of every human being and should therefore be a policy priority**. The EU’s mental health policy should not only be based on Art. 152 of the EC Treaty, but also on Art.13 of the EC Treaty and on the Charter of Fundamental Rights; actions to reduce the stigma and discrimination often associated with mental health problems should be

² Communication from the Commission COM(2007) 424 final: Tackling the pay gap between women and men.

pursued. The spiritual aspect of well-being should also be taken into account as research shows participation in religious practices and communities improves mental health³.

Perceived risk is a major factor in the well-being of the individual – risk of poverty, of losing peace and security, of losing jobs, shaping individuals’ – and families’ – outlook on their future prospects. Therefore, being able to cope with risk is necessary in today’s society, and for those unable to cope, it is necessary to give them sufficient support in ways highlighted above. Mental health problems as a result of social factors need to be addressed; through better social and welfare arrangements, work-life balance, the improvement in working conditions and the fight against substance abuse. We see preventative campaigns and actions in health as key in improving physical and mental well-being, the low percentage of health expenditure on preventive measures should be increased.

Solidarity

To facilitate a solidarity-based system, a sense of solidarity should be fostered among the public, through civil education and interaction, particularly between generations. **All generations should have opportunities to participate in society, through developing structures such as networks between generations, which support mutual help and cooperation between people.**

Given the commitment of the Member States “*to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action*”, and the reemphasis given by the European Council in March 2007 that the common social objectives of Member States should be better taken into account within the Lisbon agenda, we would ask the Commission to propose and promote changes to this effect, including a **better “feeding-out” of the Lisbon process and integrate social guidelines.**

Given that 78 million people are still at risk of poverty in the EU and the lack of effective measures to eradicate extreme poverty we call on Member States to support such changes to the Lisbon process and to take the OMC process in social protection and social inclusion seriously, committing themselves to concrete “common actions” to combat poverty and social exclusion and to deliver on their promises.⁴ Any mention of this key OMC process is missing in the social vision paper, but we call on the Commission to take a “more pro-active role” in this area too, **to make this OMC “more dynamic and more focused on implementation”, and hold Member States effectively to account on their promises.**

³ Mental Health from the perspective of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations. Contribution of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations to the Green Paper “Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union.” <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/GreenPaperMentalHealth.pdf>.

⁴ “I hear the message well but my faith alone is weak.” European churches and diaconal organisations ask EU Member States to deliver on their promises to combat poverty and social exclusion. <http://www.eurodiaconia.org/files/letter%20to%20German%20Presidency%20on%20Lisbon%20strategy.pdf>

2. Background analysis (with specific reference to the BEPA paper on “Europe’s Social Reality”)

From the perspective of churches, diaconal and migrant organisations, a key task to respond to the described transitional processes in European societies is to facilitate a **new quality of relationships in European societies**, which will need a reconsideration of principles and values in European societies and politics. A key challenge is to ensure all people are supported in this changing environment to enable them to live a dignified life, particularly through the sustainable provision of quality social and health services. In order to face the manifold challenges in Europe, a new effort has to be made **based on values, truly integrating ethical, social, environmental and economic dimensions**.

1. Trends

1.1 Transition to a post-industrial knowledge and service economy, Globalisation and Sustainability

Globalisation

Churches, diaconal and organisations working with migrants and refugees in Europe recognise globalisation as a process containing not only challenges but also opportunities. In this process, they believe it is possible, in mutual cooperation, to look for the means to expand human well-being, dignity and development of local communities. They stress the need for an **ethical basis in managing Europe’s transition processes**: *“Economic policies cannot create values on their own; solidarity cannot be created by market alone. Values cannot operate without a context. As a global actor, the European Union has an immense responsibility in the whole process.”*⁵

Sustainability

The earth has been entrusted to us as a heritage for all generations and we are called to be stewards of it. A society seeking short-term profit deprives future generations of their life resources and imposes burdens on future generations. **Good management of natural resources as well as sustainable economic and social policies have to guide thinking and action in politics, economics and society.**

Transition to a post-industrial knowledge and service economy

In Christian understanding, work is not just a productive factor. The right to work, to realise one’s own potential and to participate in society is an element of human dignity. Churches and faith-based organisations are concerned about the ongoing high level of unemployment in some Member States of the European Union and the increasing segmentation of the labour market. We believe that **employment policies should facilitate “good work” and its underlying principles**, such as workers’ rights and participation, equal opportunities, safety and health protection at work and a family-friendly organisation of work. The concept of “decent work” as developed by the International Labour Organisation can be used in this context.

⁵ Church & Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches: European churches living their faith in the context of globalisation. Brussels 2005. www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCGlobalisationENfinal.pdf

As the BEPA paper on *Europe's Social Reality* points out, there are institutional or structural barriers to the labour market, which member states must address, ensuring that employment policy is inclusive, also helping those furthest from the labour market to take up employment opportunities, aiming for the participation and social inclusion of all and not just improving conditions for “insiders”. We therefore welcome the development of “a tailored set of measures” for jobseekers: **Targeted, personalised “pathways” to employment should be developed.** A balanced flexicurity approach should be taken, involving all stakeholders in drawing up and carrying out the flexicurity strategy. As employment policies do not only affect and are not only implemented by public authorities and social partners, we would like to encourage the European Union to involve other stakeholders like churches and diaconal organisations.

All existing flexicurity models are based on a very high level of solidarity. Living in a society based on the solidarity principle should also mean a sharing of risks between employers and employees. Security of employment and the depending confidence into the personal future are a decisive factor for social peace and stability in European societies. **Flexicurity needs a very high level of mutual trust of the different stakeholders to avoid a feeling of insecurity in society.**

We are especially concerned about the impact of changes in the economic structure on the marginalised in the labour market, such as less skilled people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and people with a migration background, who would need additional help to enter into the job market and transition between jobs.⁶ Despite the emphasis on a knowledge based society, **continuous attention is also required to ensure job opportunities for people with fewer skills.** As well as further and higher education, vocational training should also be a focus, enabling people with different skills to enter into the labour market.

Creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities: informing and empowering

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland organises an annual Common Responsibility fundraising campaign, the proceeds of which are spent on an agreed target. The Common Responsibility Campaign (known in Finnish as 'Yhteisvastuukeräys') is Finland's largest annual fundraising campaign, organised by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and its Church Resources Agency (Kirkkopalvelut ry). First launched in 1950, the campaign's mission is to raise awareness of social injustice and deprivation, to influence politicians and policies, and to develop innovative working methods among communities and beneficiaries. The campaign is run by a small coordination unit in Helsinki. 40.000 volunteers and all parishes around the country participate in its activities each year. The Common Responsibility Campaign empowers people to help others and influence political decision makers. In 2008, the campaign highlights the need for employment opportunities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Finland and the need of training and jobs. An estimated three thousand Finnish adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities could and would go to work right away, but only two or three hundred have found employment on the open job market. Public officers, employers and family members of persons with disabilities need information about the tasks that can be done despite of intellectual disabilities and they need to know how employment can be arranged in practice. A job coach helps to design and assign work that suits the needs of both the employer and employee.

Further information: <http://www.yhteisvastuu.fi>

Education and vocational training are keys for the future of European societies, as their economic and social development depends on the knowledge and skills of its citizens. To ensure a high quality of education in the European Union, **learning systems must be accessible and affordable**

⁶ Cf. the contribution of CSC, CCME and ECG to the Green Paper on labour law (<http://www.ccc-kek.org/pdf/002507answertogreenpaperlabourlaw.pdf>) and Eurodiaconia's contribution [here](#).

for all members of a society, whatever the background of a person and irrespective of the contractual form of employment.⁷

European churches, diaconal and organisations working with migrants and refugees support the EU's commitment to "lifelong learning" and for a "knowledge-based society" as the provision of training and re-training throughout the life course of a person, is essential to enable them to adapt and take up the new opportunities that the fast-changing labour market offers. This should be the responsibility of both government and business, which benefit from a more highly qualified workforce. **Life long learning, however, should not be reduced to acquiring jobs-based skills, but also those that empower and facilitate engagement in society.**

The importance of integrated learning and individual "pathways" for social inclusion

Kofoed's School in Copenhagen, a social NGO and member of Eurodiaconia, is working with people furthest from the labour market. The School wants to underline the educational and learning aspects of help to excluded groups and to turn social clients into students. Kofoed's School is daily visited by 500 students, that can be trained in workshops with instructors and participate in education, working with instructors, teachers, social workers, social educators, job consultants, a lawyer and psychologists.

The workshops give the students tools to enter the job market, and to fortify the students' social and personal skills. Workshop training is individually organised for a short or long period, as activation, pre-rehabilitation or rehabilitation. Most workshops function as ordinary jobs with professional challenges and a good work atmosphere. Job consultants look into the students' possibilities of getting a job and they also co-operate with a great number of businesses. Through individual clarification and guidance the student and the consultant find the most realistic next step on the road to competence development and a job on the labour market.

The school offers more than 150 courses. The basic assumption is that people grow by making themselves skilful – and thus have the wish to learn more. Some of the courses are aimed at helping the students to find a job on the labour market, but the school is not focusing only on the labour market. The focus is on the need and the potential of the individual. This is the general starting point because it is also the point for motivation to participate on a pathway to the labour market.

Further information at: <http://www.kofoedsskole.dk/forside/omos/aboutus/english>

We are concerned that the **commitment to life long learning** will not be kept, as the financial framework (2007-2013) does not provide a more significant investment in education and research. European Structural Funds should also support the building up of educational centres in regions lacking infrastructure; rather than merely focussing on increasing the mobility of young people for both work and education, which could increase the economic gap between different European regions. While as a matter of principle churches and related organisations welcome support for mobility, the effects of emigration on economically disadvantaged regions, particularly the social and family life, ought to be considered seriously and addressed appropriately.

Life-long learning does not only mean capacity-building for the labour market and adaptation to technical progress, but also requires the **instilling of values, the acquirement of social competences and the development of a responsible personality**. Religious education often contributes to such an education of young people.

Inter-cultural learning and its benefits

The Churches' Pedagogical University (Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule) in Vienna is an ecumenically run university unique in Europe. Five Christian confessions (the Roman-Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church A. B. and H. B., the Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox churches as

⁷ Cf. the results of OECD Programme for International Student Assessment <http://www.pisa.oecd.org>.

well as the Old-Catholic church) are integrated in a common concept of formation, retraining and advanced training. They promote and represent the fundamental openness towards the other whilst preserving the respective identity in terms of an enlightened Christian perspective. The Churches' Pedagogical University is more than just the largest pedagogical training college in Austria. It is also a place where, through a permanent exchange with partners from universities and colleges in the country itself and abroad, churches, economy and society network on questions of advancement of training and research. Aligned to European quality standards, they strengthen students' core competencies in order for them to participate in the developments within the education system. The KPH in Vienna aims at articulating social, pedagogical, cultural and religious questions and introducing them in an open, discerning and sustainable dialogue, supported by mutual respect. Here inter-religious, inter-cultural and interdenominational learning acquire significant meaning. The work of the KPH in Vienna is based on the fundamental perception of freedom and individuality by people. They develop a college culture which is beneficial to learning and strengthen the right to co-designing as well as the co-responsibility for the institutions in all participants in an atmosphere of mutual esteem and acceptance.

Further information at: <http://www.kphvie.at>

1.2 Welfare state, social inclusion and poverty

New forms of collaboration between EU Member States (such as the common guidelines of the Lisbon strategy, the Stability and Growth Pact criteria, the Open Method of Coordination) as well as the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty lead to an increased impact of EU policies in areas of Member states' competences, including competition and market rules on social and health policies in the Member States. Given this increased impact, **citizens expect added value from EU cooperation and wish to see a more socially-minded Europe**. EU legitimacy is at stake, as the European Commission itself concluded: *"Our policies to sustain solidarity must be matched by a more effective means of ensuring citizen's existing rights of access to employment, education, social services, health care and other forms of social protection across Europe."*⁸

Given the commitment of the Member States *"to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action"*, and the reemphasis given by the European Council in March 2007 that the common social objectives of Member States should be better taken into account within the Lisbon agenda, we would ask the Commission to propose and promote changes to this effect, including a better "feeding-out" of the Lisbon process and integrate social guidelines.

We call on Member States to support such changes, and to take the OMC process in social protection and social inclusion seriously, committing themselves to **concrete "common actions" to combat poverty and social exclusion and to deliver on their promises**. Mention of this key OMC process is missing in the social vision paper.

Churches, diaconal and organisations working with migrants and refugees stress the importance of social rights for the development of the welfare state: *"Rights provide the firmest foundation for social policy. Rights put all members of society on an equal footing. With a basis in human rights, the action of the State in the social policy field is no longer a matter of charity or welfare directed at the less fortunate members of society; it is a question of guaranteeing rights that are the same for all."*⁹ **It is essential that the rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Social Charter are upheld in and form the basis of EU policy.**

⁸ Communication from the European Commission COM(2006) 211 final: A citizen's agenda. Delivering results for Europe.

⁹ Joint statement from CSC and Eurodiaconia: Ensuring Social Rights is essential for the EU's Future, quoting Council of Europe's European Committee for Social Cohesion on 31 March 2004 (CDCS (2004) 10, p. 4.

As modern societies are highly differentiated, social problems arise not simply out of material hardship. Rather, the reason generally is a kind of «dislocation» – a mismatch of needs and achievements in different areas of life.¹⁰ Social and health services are a means to tackle this dislocation. In addition, life risks are often structural and not only individual. Therefore, public responsibility, including financial commitment, is necessary at all levels of government to ensure access to quality services. Health and social services are not provided within a ‘normal’ supplier/consumer relationship and statistics show that often those with the least financial means have the most needs. Therefore, **it is essential to ensure social and health services are provided on the basis of solidarity, as market mechanisms do not guarantee access to services for all** and the most vulnerable categories of patients would risk losing out most in such a system. To facilitate a solidarity-based system a sense of solidarity should be fostered among the public, through civil education and interaction, particularly between generations.

The legal environment at both EU and national level should enable providers to provide quality integrated services that meet differing and changing needs, ensuring sustainability of the services and that the general interest is upheld in procuring and providing the services, which includes ensuring equal access to quality services for all. At the EU level, the **special characteristics of social services** should be recognized and policies that affect or regulate their functioning should be carefully assessed and action taken if necessary, particularly in the problematic area of tendering in public procurement. When formulating and implementing policy and legislation the valuable experience and expertise of users and providers should be taken into account at all levels.

When the legal framework and funding does not sufficiently support essential services

CrossReach is one of the largest voluntary social care agencies in Scotland, providing care and support for thousands of people in need every day of the year. Although CrossReach is part of the Church of Scotland, their services are available to people of all faiths or none at all.

Local authorities can use competitive tendering when social and health services are not provided in-house and in Scotland some use the tendering process to drive down costs in social care provision, as a tender can be based on cost alone. Many providers who take on services at these lower costs find it difficult to provide high quality care and support as they have to work with minimum staffing or resources and some go out of business soon after they win the tender, which means that there is disruption in care for the often vulnerable service user. CrossReach does provide the best care possible with lower funding as they make up the difference from their own charitable income, but this is not sustainable in the longer term. CrossReach is working to full cost recovery of its services and may have to consider pull out of providing services in some areas if funding is not sustainable.

Further information at: <http://www.crossreach.org.uk>

Voluntary activities make an important contribution to the personal development, particularly of young people, and they foster social inclusion and cohesion and increase interaction between generations. The skills and experience obtained through volunteering can enable the volunteer to take up further opportunities. Churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations provide a wide variety of opportunities for voluntary activities all over Europe and encourage the EU institutions to cooperate closely with churches, diaconal organisations, youth organisations and other not-for-profit providers of voluntary services in civil society. Access to networks and the support provided by churches, community groups and family are also important for social relationships and inclusion.

1.3/1.4 The impact of mass affluence - the citizen as consumer;

See chapter 2 on “well-being”

1.5 Gender equality and demographic change

The current demographic changes in Europe signify not only a quantitative development; they moreover reflect important qualitative changes of living conditions in European societies: As the quantitative demographic developments in a society can only be significantly tackled by a mid- to long-term process, societies need to find solutions **in a “network society” with more availability of time for care for others with a new quality of relations between generations, between family life and work and the participation of migrants.**

“**Equality between men and women** must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay.”¹¹ If the framework conditions were responding to these fundamental rights, it would be much easier for men and women to find a more balanced distribution of work and family tasks. We, therefore, encourage EU Member States to implement and effectively monitor fundamental rights on equality between men and women.

1.5.1 A family friendly society

European Churches, diaconal and migrant organisations strongly support a “**family friendly approach**” in EU policies; coherent policies taking into account the living conditions of families in all political areas. Politics and society should support a more intelligent and flexible balance between work and family and social life, giving parents, especially women, a better choice to shape their lives. Individual measures integrated with horizontal policy could significantly improve living conditions for families. **More flexible working conditions for women and men enabling them to make choices, which will provide the best care for their children and optimal conditions for the family life as a whole, should be facilitated.** “More flexible leave arrangements over a lifetime” should include for example individual working time options, reduced and increased working hours, care leaves, sabbaticals, educational leaves and long term labour time accounts. This would also be important support for single parents. A comparison of the experiences in different Member States shows that only consistent policies for a better combination of work and family life have a lasting effect on the fertility rate.

For example, the comparative analysis for all OECD countries reveals a strong positive relationship between institutional childcare coverage and fertility rate. Further research indicates that, in addition to availability and affordability of child care, the length and flexibility of opening hours are important.¹² Regarding the importance of child care structures, we also have to consider profound changes in living arrangements in European societies. An increasing number of children are growing up in single parent households. To enable these parents to earn their living and income for their families, extensive child caring facilities or alternatively benefits to enable them to take care of their own children be provided. EU Member States should implement policies aiming to reach the Barcelona targets and provide **the right to childcare coverage from an early age and ensure a high standard of caring facilities.** Providing access to care services for children and other dependent people allows parents and carers, who wish to do so, to take up employment opportunities, particularly women.

¹¹ Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights

¹² Cf. H. Krieger, Demographic changes in Europe and their implications for family policy. CoE May 2005, p. 23.

Particularly in European cities the percentage of migrants is tangible, and the increase in bi-national families in many EU Member States has an impact on family ties: Families are becoming more international and mobility is promoted, however, social and health services are still largely based on the length of stay and residence in a certain place. Flexibility and mobility is not honoured when it comes to insurance rates and benefits.

In many European societies, poverty is still inherited; nothing influences the future of children so much as their social deprivation. Family policy, social policy and education policy in Europe should ensure that the **social and/or ethnic origin of a child shall not determine its future**. We encourage EU Member States to fight child poverty by raising political awareness and by increasing the income of low income families with measures providing a better certainty of employment and direct social transfers, the reduction of expenditures (for example through providing free child care), educational support and practical help for the well-being of children (such as support for local family networks and child protection services). Particular attention needs to be paid to supporting families with children and particularly single-parent families as well as children with a migration or ethnic minority background, in order to tackle the higher incidents of poverty found there. Early intervention policies should be developed if necessary and access to education from a young age can help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and therefore increase life opportunities in general, as well as social mobility. At the same time stereotypes and discrimination on the basis of social or ethnic background need to be addressed more effectively to provide more chances and opportunity for education which is fundamental for active participation in societies.

For the churches and diaconal organisations, the education and care of children and youth is an important part of their service to the society. In all Member States, churches and diaconal organisations provide childcare facilities like crèches, nursery schools, all-day care for pupils in primary and secondary schools or boarding schools. The **close cooperation of public authorities with service providers of civil society** contributes to a high quality of caring services.

1.5.2 Care for the elderly

European societies are developing into societies of long lifetimes. It is necessary for Member States to consider this in the modernisation of their social protection systems. This should carefully take into account that living situations of very elderly people are not only depending on chronological age, but also on external conditions like education, work or the family situation. The expectations of the environment play an important role. Scientific research has shown that discrimination of very elderly people leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy; it means less activity and a stronger restriction from social life in anticipation of public expectations. **Old age may not be seen exclusively as a process of degradation**. Because ageing is not only a biological, but also a psychological and cultural process, it can have positive, growing elements, too. It is the task of all actors in a society to support these positive aspects of ageing, **develop policies to support “active ageing” and take action to fight discrimination of the elderly**.

As family life is changing due to the challenges of mobility, more flexible care systems involving and supporting the family members need to be developed and strengthened. Particularly for migrants these needs still need to be recognised, as their status depends on their self-sustenance, thus they may risk their status if they opted to care for elderly family members beyond parents.

1.5.3 Solidarity between generations

Solidarity between generations has to be facilitated by **ensuring participation and opportunities** for the different generations. A future task is to develop new participatory structures in European societies, which bring the potentials of all generations together, such as networks between the generations, which support mutual help and cooperation between people.

Because of the high mobility level and different living places of the different generations of a family, families can often no longer be the learning place for solidarity among generations. European societies need new places of encounter between the generations, which can serve as an occasion to exchange experiences and perspectives. Churches, especially their parishes, and diaconal organisations provide such meeting places of all generations.

1.5.4 Migration

In the debate around possible responses to the demographic challenge faced by European societies, migration has for a considerable period of time been identified as one element of a multi-faceted integrated approach. Spearheaded by the UN Populations Division and the Council of Europe, a considerable amount of enthusiasm was generated in the international policy debate with regards to the potential of “replacement migration” for stabilising the supply of manpower for the European labour market, and improving for example the age dependency ratio of social security systems or even fertility rates¹³.

In our view, it is essential that any policy on migration would take a **holistic approach** (trying to avoid a simplistic approach of “social engineering”). A holistic approach does not only consider the benefits or problems of migration for demographic developments, but also looks at the rights and needs of migrants, the challenges of migration for host societies and the effects that migration has on countries of origin.

While migrants are moving in increasing numbers and across bigger distances, their legal status is still the subject of hugely diverging national legislation. This leads to enormous problems, among which trafficking and new forms of slavery are only the most dramatic. We therefore reiterate the call that EU Member States should agree on a coherent and transparent migration policy, which recognises the rights of migrants. One of the most important tools of such a policy would be the ratification of the 1990 **UN Convention of the Rights of All Migrants** and their families by EU Member States and the EU once it has gained legal personality.

Integration policies and programmes continue to be necessary. Such policies must start from the assumption that migrants might at a certain point go back to their country of origin, or move on to an other one, but also that they might decide to stay. Any policy assuming that migrants (whatever their status is) will only be “guests” and leave at a certain point, seriously jeopardises **social cohesion**.

Integration policies need to start from the notion that integration **is not assimilation but a dynamic two-way process**: While integration policies should include the need for migrants to acquire language and professional skills, as well as a notion of culture and the political order of the host society, it is equally necessary that integration policies address the need of integrating societies. “Integrating societies” means among other things that it is necessary for host societies to

¹³ Cf. UN populations division: Replacement Migration: is it a solution for declining and aging populations ?, New York 2000; Ron Lestaege: Europe’s demographic issues: fertility, household formation and replacement migration, Paper for UN expert group meeting on population responses and decline, New York 2000, Aidan Punch/David L Parce for Council of Europe publications: Europe’s population and labour market beyond 2000, Strasbourg 2000.

adapt to changes that result from migration. This includes educating all in society about different cultures and facilitating mediation between cultures.

The BEPA paper points rightly to the enriching factors of diversity in society, however, social policies do not yet fully support such notions. There is a need to look more deeply into the reasons why migrants and members of their families are often less successful in the educational systems, acquiring quality jobs or why health risks are often higher.

The EU's perception of demographic changes is closely linked to the idea that a low birth rate is a threat for European societies and that a higher fertility rate and an increase of migration should tackle this challenge. **Policies for a shrinking population and economy should also be considered**, as the scenario of a shrinking population is already real in many European societies. In addition, the effects of emigration on family members left behind ought to be studied further and be considered; it may require new social and visa policy measures to redress some of the negative effects.

For further information please see our contribution to the Green Paper on demographic changes.¹⁴

1.6 The trend to individualisation and an inter-cultural society

Churches, diaconal and migrant organisations seek to **promote societies where people live together in justice and peace respecting each other's cultural and religious background**. Our vision upholds the right to be different and yet to be equal, as we believe that the principle of equality is rooted in the concept of *imago dei*, which implies that every human being is created in the image of God and that diversity should not lead to segregation as we strive to build inclusive and cohesive societies. We also cherish diversity as a source of enrichment and learning..

We welcome and are engaged in efforts to **integrate newcomers, migrants and refugees**, in a similar way as we fight against exclusion of any member of our societies. Integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation where all parties give and receive. In this sense, integration means respect for different cultural identities. Integration is also a process of reducing socio-economic barriers between people or groups of people, creating equal opportunities and enabling people to participate actively in the public, economic, social, and political as well as in church or religious spheres. It is a common effort towards a peaceful and equitable society. We wish to underline that faith can be an important factor for integration.

The described decline of religious practice in the Consultation paper does not give an accurate description of the **relevance of religious life for European societies**, as it reduces religious practice to the participation in religious services. It does not take into account the diversity of Christian life and work in Europe's social reality, nor does it reflect the significant contribution of churches and diaconal organisations to the common good in Europe's societies. Faith based organisations are still the biggest non-state providers of social services and churches and diaconal organisations play an important role in education and vocational training in most EU Member States. The Consultation does not reflect the contribution of churches to the cultural life in Europe, for example in music, art or the preservation of cultural heritage.

In recent years, a growing number of sociologists, political scientists and theologians in Europe have reflected on "**a comeback of religion**".¹⁵ And many seem to imply that religion is not coming

¹⁴ CSC, CCME, EYCE, Eurodiaconia: Strengthen a mutual sense of responsibility in European societies. Contribution of European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations to the EU Green Paper on demographic changes. Brussels, 15 October 2005. www.cec-kek.org/pdf/DemographyGreenPaper.pdf

back only as an individual phenomenon of people having an increased interest in religious issues and longing for spirituality. Religion is returning as a feature of society and in the public sphere, as a factor which can make a positive difference to society.

We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. Christian faith is one of the roots that has shaped Europe and will continue to shape it. EU Commissioner Figel emphasized the role of the churches and religious organisations in this way: *“Political Leaders are in worryingly short supply of ideas, at least in the West. It seems to me that modern politics has borrowed too much from marketing. ... Constant dialogue across ideological and other divides is a precondition to serve the public good. And I think this is a task for which Christian organisations and individuals are ideally suited. I am convinced that Christians can bring their testimony to European societies.”*¹⁶

We therefore welcome that in the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States and that it commits itself to an “open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations” as well as committing itself to dialogue with civil society.¹⁷

2. Well-being: “The hedonic treadmill”

Risks and perceived risks affect greatly the well-being of the individual – risk of poverty, of losing peace and security, of losing jobs, of losing a secure status, of losing out on opportunities. Risk shapes individuals’ – and families’ – outlook on their future prospects. Europe today is overall visibly more affluent than 50 years ago, and yet, there is an increasing gap between the rich and the poor in European societies – and regions. 78 million people live at risk of poverty, life situations can change quickly and as proposed in the paper, in an unequal society, losing out in a positional struggle is more likely to cause psycho-social stress as a result of greater personal insecurity and loss of self esteem (3.8/31). **Therefore, being able to cope with risk is essential in today’s society, and for those unable to cope, it is necessary for public authorities to ensure they are guaranteed sufficient support.**

The more prosperous a society becomes, the more important it is for social justice and community cohesion that nobody be left behind. Churches, diaconal and organisations working with migrants and refugees believe that **a social Europe must be based on fulfilling needs and not demands in order to ensure that all needs can be met** – that the demands of some reduce the capability for society to provide for all. Aiming for well-being through acquiring material goods and fulfilling demands, not needs, can cause problems, which, as already pointed out in the BEPA paper, may undermine the objective itself. Therefore, we would put more emphasis on a holistic approach to achieving well-being, including the spiritual side of well-being in order to help avoid the threat described in the concept of the ‘hedonic treadmill’. Although this concept is discussed in the BEPA paper only in the section “The citizen as consumer”, it also applies to other areas of life.

For example, the rise of divorce rates seems to be interpreted positively in the paper in a way, as proof of legitimate growing expectations in terms of well-being and individual satisfaction in the field of relationships. We would not agree with such a seemingly positive interpretation as relationships cannot be maximised in an unlimited way and unrealistic expectations in terms of personal happiness may strain relationships until they break down, as is the case in divorce, which can be counter-productive for well-being.

¹⁵ Cf. U. Körtner: *Wiederkehr der Religion? Das Christentum zwischen neuer Spiritualität und Gottvergessenheit* Gütersloh 2006.

¹⁶ Ján Figel: ‘The role of the Churches in Building the Future of Europe. Presentation at the Church Leader’s Meeting on “Values – Religion – Identity”, organised by CSC on 12-13 December 2006 in Brussels.

¹⁷ Lisbon Treaty art. 16c (Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) and article 8b (TEU).

Mutual commitment to others in relationships is essential for the well-being of the individual.

Any ethical reflection on prosperity has to begin with the inalienable dignity and infinite value of the individual human person, who, nevertheless, only thrives in community as in the Jewish-Christian tradition concept of “Shalom” which understands the well-being of people in relation to others. A supportive community – local, national, European and global – will be one in which individual and social rights and responsibilities are balanced, serving the general common good. There is a role and responsibility for all actors in society, including individuals themselves, for social inclusion and well-being, as seen in Professor Anthony Giddens’ concept of “Positive Welfare”, where also personalised responses to specific needs are given.

For most people, **healthy lives** are an important element of well-being. Whereas health has generally improved in Europe, there are still huge differences – particularly regional differences. As an example, one can look at recent British Government statistics,¹⁸ which show the difference in expected healthy life expectancy within the UK to be 30 years from the best to worst district. In the low-healthy life expectancy districts, a high level of unemployment and low levels of household incomes, of skills and number of home-owners are shared trends.

We see preventative campaigns and actions in health as key steps in improving health and physical well-being, for example prevention of alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, promoting healthy nutrition and lifestyles and the improvement of working conditions. Research shows that the work and social environment has a huge impact on the health condition. As well as physical health, **mental health is a fundamental part of the well being of every human being and should therefore be a policy priority.** Mental health problems as a result of social factors like poverty, work stress and economic pressure are increasing. They do not necessarily lead to mental ill health but nevertheless need to be addressed; this can often be done through better social and welfare arrangements, in bringing a new balance between life and work, and improvement in working conditions.

The EU’s mental health policy should not only be based on Art. 152 of the EC Treaty, but also on Art.13 of the EC Treaty and on the Charter of Fundamental Rights; actions to reduce the stigma and discrimination often associated with mental health problems should be pursued. Rather than unnecessarily medicalising certain behaviours (as discussed in 3.9), other strategies ought to be widely understood. Such strategies often require more time, but allow a much greater degree of acceptance and empowerment.¹⁹

The spiritual aspect of well-being is not addressed in the paper. Social services often address not only the physical and mental needs but also the spiritual aspect of care for each human being as the religious dimension of life is of importance to the majority of people²⁰. A number of research studies have shown that participation in religious practices and communities is a relevant factor in the promotion of mental health and its impact should not be left un-assessed at EU level²¹.

¹⁸ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/Males_Females_Persons%20_HLE.xls

¹⁹ Mental Health from the perspective of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations. Contribution of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations to the Green Paper “Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union.” <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/GreenPaperMentalHealth.pdf>.

²⁰ CSC, Eurodiaconia, Caritas Europa, Comece: Joint response to Social Services of General Interest Questionnaire. <http://www.eurodiaconia.org/files/SSGI%20Questionnaire.pdf>

²¹ Mental Health from the perspective of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations. Contribution of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations to the Green Paper “Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union.” <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/GreenPaperMentalHealth.pdf>.

Churches, diaconal and related organisations working with migrants and refugees will support political efforts to strengthen a social vision in all EU policies and actions, aware that citizens wish to see a more socially-minded Europe.

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***The Church and Society Commission (CSC)** is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's some 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters). Its task is to help the churches study church and society questions from a theological social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension, and to represent common positions of the member churches in their relations with political institutions working in Europe.*

www.cec-kek.org

***The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)** is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies in presently 16 European countries. CCME cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.*

www.cec-kek.org/English/ccmenews.htm

***Eurodiaconia** is a federation of 34 members - churches, non-statutory welfare organisations and NGOs in Europe - operating at national and international level. Our members are rooted in Christian faith within the traditions of the Reformation as well as in the Anglican and Orthodox traditions. We network diaconal and social work of institutions and church communities and co-operate with civil society partners.*

Our Mission: We link our members to serve for solidarity and justice. Our strategic aims are to ensure quality of life for all in a social Europe, to link institutions of diaconia, social initiatives and churches in Europe, to be and to enhance a network of competence.

www.eurodiaconia.org