

Vice President for Democracy and Demography

Video Message for the event:

“Demographic transition and family life after COVID-19”

Recorded 8/3/2022

Dear Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to address you today. **Families form the core of our society.**

It is **through families that we live full and prosperous lives.** It is through the **support of families that we heal** in difficult times.

This is why it is crucial to keep **families at the center of our our policy making** as we reflect on life after the COVID-19 pandemic and other shocks and crises. As we observe with horror the unfolding aggression in Ukraine.

The European Commission strives to **balance our policy-making for all family members**, from the youngest to the oldest, across all policies. We must make sure we **leave no one behind.** We will certainly not leave any Ukrainian child without support and needed care, in line with the **Child Rights Strategy.**

A thriving family helps create a thriving democracy, environment, economy, and society, because they are interdependent. The **Commission continues supporting the wellbeing** of all types of families. We do this **through a variety of measures** on climate change, economic and social matters, including demographic change and intergenerational issues.

During **the pandemic** we have seen that students have suffered a gap in their education due to the lockdown period. We also know that our youngest citizens have paid a big price when it comes to socialisation and growth. This is why we have proposed this year to be **the European Year of Youth**, filled with activities for the participation of youth.

The **way we work has also changed as a result of the pandemic**, with teleworking becoming common for many of us. During the pandemic, unpaid and informal domestic and care work has exploded at the expense of grandmothers, mothers and daughters as the support from outside the families decreased.

To address some of these issues we have ensured that the **Social resilience pillar** plays an important role in the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Already **more than 150 billion Euros are dedicated to social expenditure**, amounting to 32% of the overall Funds that have been allocated for this purpose.

The possibility to balance work and family life is **key for modern societies where both women and men are professionally active and increasingly share care responsibilities**.

The **Work-Life Balance Directive** is a step in this direction. It introduces paternity leave and grants a right to **flexible working arrangements** and carers' leave for both men and women.

The availability of affordable and high quality care systems is key to enabling both women and men to combine work and family life.

The Commission will, under my leadership, present a European Care Strategy in September. It will focus on care at different stages in life, including both long-term care and childcare. It will highlight the vital role of quality care services for society and the economy as a whole.

The **European Child Guarantee** addresses specific aspects of **child poverty** and **social exclusion**. For every child at risk of poverty or social exclusion, the Guarantee **recommends Member States to provide free and effective access to early childhood education and care**.

Effective access should also be provided to **adequate housing** and **healthy nutrition**. This will **greatly help less affluent families** and will **directly benefit some 18 million children** across the European Union.

This brings me to my work on the comprehensive European **Strategy on the Rights of the Child**. We are talking here about the **rights of the most vulnerable children**, who have the right to the same protection and access to services. We look at **services such as education, healthcare and socio-economic support** and the necessary **protection online** for children in a digital age.

This Strategy forms the overarching framework of the Commission's support for Children. When we support one child, we are supporting their whole family. From a child's perspective, this offers hope.

The pandemic has also cast a different light on rural areas. More people see them as areas offering a better quality of life. This increase in teleworking may bring benefits to rural areas, by allowing high-productivity and high-income jobs.

Families are also places **where** a variety of **topics are discussed and deliberated**. This is similar to the Conference on the Future of Europe. I have been calling upon you in the past months to ensure that the **voice of all families, is being heard in the Conference**. Today it is not politicians alone who are shaping the future of the European Union.

Each family is a precious and unique environment, no matter how large or small they are, no matter their chosen composition. **Each family has its own story to tell**, so make sure that yours is also heard.

Thank you.

END

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