

Studentenforum im Tönissteiner Kreis e.V.  
in cooperation with  
Conférence Olivaint Paris  
Centrum Młodych Dyplomatów Warszawa

## Weimar Youth Forum 2010

Lost in Demographics?  
A Young Perspective on the Challenges of Demographic Change

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European Youth Education and Meeting Centre Weimar

### CONFERENCE RESULTS



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WEIMAR YOUTH FORUM  
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## Summary

Thirty participants from four countries, four speakers and an entire weekend of intense discussions: Summarizing the outcomes of the Weimar Youth Forum 2010 is no easy task. This summary will thus focus upon those considerations which are specific to the set-up of our conference.

Firstly, we were amazed to see how much the ways in which different issues were approached were contingent on participants' backgrounds. The best example is the discussion on migration policy: Poland has been a country with a negative net migration for the last two decades, but this is changing. The Polish students were very well aware of the fact that Poland may soon face a strong immigration flow, especially from its eastern neighbours, which they mainly see as a positive development proving the growing economic strength of their country. Despite this, we learned in the discussion that there is some doubt on whether Polish society is prepared for this and thus able to avoid the mistakes regarding migration and integration that have been committed in Germany and France. In addition, we learned that the the German "Multikulti-"approach is actually seen as positive in France, while it was only recently declared dead in Germany by chancellor Merkel.

Secondly we have noticed that the issues of demographic change are of great concern to every student from each of the Weimar countries. Above all we share concerns about the sustainability of pension schemes, but there is also very much reflection on changes in the family model and our own perspectives concerning children and careers.

Finally, we observed that the concrete propositions made during the meeting were predominantly inventive and courageous: From children's suffrage strengthening a generationally just policy over a compulsory parental leave for both parents in order to stop discrimination of mothers to mostly liberalized and open immigration policy, the proposals moved decidedly away from mainstream debate.



The participants are aware of the common challenge of demographic change for Europe's societies and their individual countries. We are not pessimist or desperate but we believe that we can successfully cope with these challenges. However, it is indispensable that action is taken now. We therefore support courageous and unusual solutions as proposed in our discussions: Raising the retirement age even above 67 years will be necessary, but not sufficient. We would like to experience a work environment which allows to combine having children with a successful career. And we hope that migration will soon be seen as an economic necessity and a cultural enrichment rather than a social problem.





## Introduction

Modern European societies are ageing as a result of growing life expectancy and declining birth rates. This situation generates several new challenges as it will result in the decline of the working age population and the overall shrinking of employment rates. This will make it difficult to maintain the high level of welfare standards of European social security models.

In the light of these challenges it is of vital importance to address the issue of demographic change from the perspective of the younger generation, which will be most affected by these developments. The Weimar Youth Forum provides a multilateral platform for exchange, adding a transnational and comparative dimension to a problem which is too frequently discussed only on a national level.

The conference aimed at approaching the issue from three different angles: intergenerational justice, family policy and migration. Each of these fields highlights different aspects of demographic development. The discussions revealed differences in international perceptions on the challenges of demographic change, on its impact on future generations as well as on the preferred approaches to coping with the problems effectively.

The paper summarises the insights of the workshops that took place during a three-day conference organised by the Studentenforum im Tönissteiner Kreis e.V. in cooperation with the Conférence Olivaint Paris and the Centrum Młodych Dyplomatów Warszawa. While every effort has been made to ensure that the notes reflect the outcome of the discussions, this report is the sole responsibility of the authors: Constanze Blum, Jakob Gleim, Turgay Saritas, Zsófia Tari and Mathis Weller.



Introductory lecture on demographic change

Eva Kibele, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

## Topic 1: Intergenerational Justice

Principles of justice only need to be considered if there are diverging interests of people – and consequently conflicts on desired scarce goods. Unfortunately, this is the case in many intergenerational issues. It is reflected in the weight given to present over future consumption in public finance and the sustainability of public debt, and in the organisation of pension schemes. The problem is also very obvious in the exploitation of non-renewable resources and treatment of the environment and in the question of how to ensure that democratic decision-making takes account of the problems faced by future generations.

We dealt with these questions in three different workshops:

1. How to avoid domination of present over future generations?
2. How to avoid domination of the elderly over younger generations?
3. What does Intergenerational Justice mean?



## Workshop 1.1: How to avoid domination of present over future generations?

The best way to avoid domination of present over future generations is to tackle the challenges of demographic change now: If no action is taken today, future generations will suffer, as current policies in public finance and social security are not sustainable. We agreed on the definition that avoiding domination in this context would mean that present actions should not constrain future generations, or as Prof. Tremmel put it: “[should be] making improvement possible for the next generation.”

We therefore see the necessity to use the current window of opportunity to take measures to cope with these challenges – the sooner action is taken, the less costly it will be. As soon as the baby boomer generation enters the pension schemes, there will remain less scope for policy action.

Consequently, we think it necessary to increase the employment rate, especially in fostering the participation of women in the labour market and through better education for larger shares of the population. Moreover, the increase in life expectancy makes it necessary to work longer, supported by preventive health programmes to stay healthy while ageing. Prof. Tremmel mentioned that as life expectancy in Europe increases by three months each year, the retirement age should be increased by the same amount annually. There should be a family policy setting incentives to increase the fertility rate, though we notice that this is an issue linked to a high degree to the overall feeling of security – or better insecurity – in the population. A higher employment rate and more children make it necessary to improve chances to combine work and family life – an issue discussed in a separate workshop.



## Workshop 1.2: How to avoid domination of the elderly over younger generations?

Recognising the increasing domination of the elderly over the young generation as a consequence of the demographic change, this workshop discussed the option of suffrage for children as a potential solution for addressing these concerns in the context of political processes.

One of democracy's most fundamental principles is the right to vote, which currently does not apply to children. Children's suffrage in connection with demographic change derives from the basic assumption that politicians would like to get elected. By giving children the right to vote, public figures would have more reason to care about families and issues relating to the younger generation, as the latter would also be recognised as potential voters. Thus politicians would need to consider all interests equally if they wanted to win over the electorate.

Taking into account the problem of identifying an age limit or even going all the way down with the voting age, concerns are raised over children's susceptibility to manipulation and populism. Moreover, the right to vote should be seen in connection with obligations and responsibilities. Therefore, we stress the importance of education and a certain life experience as the basis for reaching a responsible political decision. We are convinced that a step-by-step approach of familiarisation with political processes would contribute to a more mature deliberation. However, the establishment of institutions for consultation to enable the young to express their views and ideas needs to be seen with scepticism, as we are deeply concerned about their potential to be taken seriously.

Further, we note the difficulties of designing the voting system if children's suffrage were to be introduced. There are several options, from the child casting the vote over the involvement of parents to adults getting additional number of votes according to the number of infants. Amongst others, the question remains open what happens if there is an uneven number of dependants in a family with two adults.



Nonetheless, it needs to be pointed out that children's suffrage only means the *right* but not a *duty* to vote. The introduction of a registration system giving a vote to those under 18 who are actually interested in politics could present a feasible solution to the problems presented above.



Topic 1: Intergenerational Justice  
Prof. Dr. Dr. Jörg Tremmel, University of Tübingen

### Workshop 1.3: What does Intergenerational Justice mean?

The European Union forecasts a loss of 50 million of its current inhabitants by the year 2050 through an excess of death over birth: that is the population of Poland and Greece taken together. But worldwide the human population is growing and endangering itself by consuming resources and polluting the environment.

Before discussing if we are acting intergenerationally just we need to clarify what generation means to us. Is a generation all persons who belong to a specific period of life (e.g. youth, employee and retirement) or do we mean the entire population



alive today as distinct from past and future generations? Interestingly all members of our group unanimously understood intergenerational justice as feeling responsible for the future, as yet unborn generation and therefore included all living people in one single generation.

Our next question was what intergenerational justice meant in different situations: We discussed climate change as the most pressing issue concerning intergenerational justice at the moment. We asked if we had to choose between the rights of present generations (e.g. concerning direct economic gains) and the rights of future generations (e.g. clean air). How can we know what is good for future generations? Would they prefer a world with a high degree of biodiversity or highly developed industries? We argued that economic growth and sustainability do not exclude each other. Finding a compromise is possible, e.g. through green energies.

In order to respect the rights of the young or not yet born generations, their interests need to be represented. But is this possible in democracy? Are politicians too dependent on election terms? As the population gets older, elderly people have more leverage in political decision-making, which could endanger the interests of the young generation. A solution could be to anchor intergenerational justice in constitutional law. We need more awareness of the future damage to our children and grand-children that may be the consequence of today's actions.

As part of the young generation we agreed that we have to be patient, since there are already steps in the right direction: For instance, the Kyoto protocol, which is probably not perfect, but better than nothing as an active way to solve problems. Change needs time and progress can be observed, like in Poland where some wild parks are created.



## Topic 2: Family Policy

Family policy is considered another important pillar of demographics that has to be taken into account when talking about how to change the demographic structure of today. A state's policy framework on parenting, children and partnership, through means such as child benefits, education systems, parental leave etc., can contribute to higher or lower birth-rates, encourage or discourage the choice of individuals and couples to get children or not. However, an adjustment of those policies to social changes, such as the emancipation of women and respective economic conditions, is crucial.

In our discussions, we focussed on the economic perspective on the family, which means its function as a productive unit, as well as the role of the family in the value system of today's society. Taking into account the changes during the last decades from the traditional one-breadwinner-model to the growing importance of the two-breadwinner-model as well as increasingly diversified family constellations, family policy was discussed in three separate workshops:

1. What are the changes in the family model and its consequences?
2. What are the accompanying changes in the labour market?
3. How can we reconcile professional duties with family life?



## Topic 2: Family Policy

Ewelina Słotwińska-Rostańska, Centre for Demography, Institute of Statistics and Demography, Warsaw School of Economics



## Workshop 2.1: What are the changes in the family model and its consequences?

Considering the change in the family model during the last decades, the move towards a two-breadwinner model, a diversification of family constellations and a “democratisation” of the family in terms of the emancipation of women, we consider the following:

We observe positive as well as negative effects on family: Particularly the fact that working women still bear the biggest share in child rearing, and therefore have to deal with a “double duty”, has to be addressed. We therefore see the chance to combine work and children as one of the greatest and most urgent challenges to be addressed, not only by individual and isolated policy measures but through a wider approach combining family, social and labour market policies.

We value the fact that several initiatives have been put in place in all three countries concerning a more balanced parental leave, especially the legal right for fathers to take paternity leave. However, we would like to see a generalisation of the use of this practice. If paternity leave was more widely practiced and socially accepted, the vicious circle of female discrimination in job search, especially in private firms, could be broken. At the same time, we wish for more active and long-term changes in labour market policies. The focus should be on facilitating a quick reintegration of mothers into labour markets after the birth. Financial incentives (e.g. child benefit) are important but not sufficient, since they do not cover the costs of a child plus the opportunity costs of renouncing a job.

We believe that family and parenthood are still held in high esteem among young people today. Aware of the responsibility of having a child, we believe that “quality time” shared with one’s child is the important factor. Reserving such time for the child should not be an obstacle to professional success.

We stress that a coherent, holistic approach that combines financial support from the state, labour market policies and an increased social acceptance of young mothers and fathers that care for their children and have a career at the same time, will lead to a harmonisation of economic and personal needs. This strategy



could close the gap between wishes of the majority of Europeans that would like to have two children, and the reality that does not yet live up to those hopes.



Impressions Weimar Youth Forum 2010



## Workshop 2.2: Changes in the labour market

Both the prerequisites in hiring and the whole structure of the labour market itself have significantly changed over the last decades. Overall we consider this a positive development because opportunities in the pursuit of a personal career have broadened. The fact that women are nowadays often very high-skilled (even better than their male competitors) and that they increasingly claim their part in the business world, is a very big step in terms of emancipation and gender equality.

Still this new situation – a more stressful job life and the end of the traditional single breadwinner model – makes it very difficult to raise children. We therefore have to think about practical solutions to improve the compatibility of work and family life. The Scandinavian model may serve as a good example: First, social acceptance of combining work and kids must improve, which requires a social rethinking of the family model: Women who give their children to a crèche must not be considered bad mothers. Second, financial support should not be distributed directly to families, but used to create more and better day care, since we have noticed that increasing direct financial support (such as *Kindergeld* in Germany) has not affected the birth rate.

It is very conceivable that soon employers will begin to contribute to this, for example by creating company-specific day care programmes. In a shrinking society where highly skilled workers are extremely sought after, companies have a great interest in keeping their employees who want to have a family. Moreover, company day care may attract new highly trained employees. Such a solution of company-run or company-supported day care favours both economic and social interests and should be supported by public incentives.



## Workshop 2.3: Ways to reconcile professional duties with family life

A major reason for today's low fertility rate is the difficulty in combining a full-time job with raising children. We agreed that state-funded parental leaves can only be part of the solution: Children need quality time with their parents not only during the first years of their life, but thereafter as well. We therefore concluded that there must be a fundamental change in work culture, which endorses having children as a respected and desirable goal and not as a negative asset when it comes to advancing a career. Rather than extended presence at the workplace, the actual outcome of someone's work should be the benchmark for professional commitment. We discussed if a higher share of women – or more precisely: mothers – in leading positions would foster such a change in work culture. We did not reach a common position on this question, or on whether quotas for women in boards of directors etc. would be an appropriate instrument to achieve such a situation.

Another opportunity for child care might be to increase the involvement of the older generation: There is a growing number of pensioners who are in good health and eager to participate further in society. Grandparents often help to raise their grandchildren; this could happen without familiar ties, e.g. in multi-generation houses. Free child care, funded by the government, could do this job as well – but it is very costly. Consequently, it would increase the tax burden for all, including families. But higher taxes in combination with free child care may increase the incentive to take advantage of the child care offer and not to stay home. Both parents going to work would be necessary to keep the living standard of those within their peer group without children. In economic terms, you could speak of an increase in opportunity cost of raising your kids at home.



## Topic 3: Migration

The 2004-2050 Eurostat forecast demonstrates that EU population growth until 2025 will be mainly due to positive net migration. However, through an excess of death over births, the EU population will start to decline gradually and the effect of net migration will no longer prevail after 2025.

In the first workshop we tried to figure out the reasons for problems of integration and what could be changed to make migrants feel welcome and encourage them to integrate with society. The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs encourages more effective use of the migrant workforce. Most European countries are already using immigration as a strong contributor to population growth or stability. Skilled migrants from overpopulated countries can fill the continent's labour market gaps and thus ensure economic sustainability and growth. These economic issues were discussed in the workshops two and three. Guidelines and restrictions for controlling migration flows were also discussed.



### Topic 3: Migration

Dr. Hans Dietrich von Loeffelholz, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Head of Section: Migration and Integration Research.

### Workshop 3.1.: Experiences and perspectives of migration and integration

We mainly focused on our own experiences with people with a Turkish migration background. Half of the 2.8 million ethnic Turks currently living in Germany were born in this country. Studies have shown that people with roots in Turkey have the



greatest difficulties integrating with German Society. One disadvantage faced by this group is its very size: It encourages them to live with people who have the same background.

The participants agreed that the key to integration is the ability to speak German. Germany will need to adopt a mandatory pre-school year with educational personnel especially trained in remedial language instruction. Native and migrant children should ideally be educated in mixed groups to avoid the emergence of parallel societies. All-day integration centres that also offer activities during school holidays and educational opportunities for parents are necessary to mobilize hidden reserves. The participants agreed that TV or newspaper information causes many people to lose sight of all the immigrants that lead perfectly average or even better lives. The media will typically cover the case of a young man with Turkish roots who committed a crime with a clear reference to his ethnic background while this is not the case for young Germans doing the same. We need media reports presenting well-integrated migrants or idols to motivate young migrants and to dispel prejudice. The discussion group concurred that integration does not happen automatically. Integration means interaction for all of us – providing opportunities and using them. Social harmony depends on the native population being ready to use the potential that migrants have to offer and on migrants feeling welcome and needed and being willing to become a part of the society they chose to live in.

## **Workshop 3.2: Migration and demography in Europe and in the different EU-member states**

We agree that a certain degree of immigration will be needed in the future in order to face demographic change. However, we would like to see the general attitude moving away from the exclusive focus on economic gains that migrants may bring. Immigrants do not always act the way dictated by economic needs, since they are not only economic actors but also persons. We believe that the discussion about



immigration should not only be about economics, but also about cultural and ethical aspects. In order to create a win-win situation in the long run for both migrants and the host country, we cannot continue turning on and off the tap of migration depending on our internal economic situation. Rather, we need a long-term approach to match the needs of the European labour market with the needs of migrants and to better integrate the different communities into our respective societies.

In order to avoid leaving the subject to populism, we wish to see a better integration of foreigners into the culture of the country of destination. However, in order to achieve that goal, we should also take into account the culture of migrants and actively incorporate those communities in the process of finding a more successful strategy of integration. We see the problems with the integration of the European group of Roms, which were present in the news all over Europe this summer, as symptomatic of the conventional approach to integration: if we continue to look for ways to integrate a community into our society, we can no longer avoid consulting the group itself in finding a more successful strategy.

### **Workshop 3.3: Options and possibilities for managing migration according to demographic and economic challenges**

The increasing tendency of economies to increase the labour force by means of admitting migrants has serious demographic and economic consequences for a country. From the Polish perspective, especially the countries in Eastern Europe are affected by the negative economic consequences of emigration that result from the movements of young professionals to Western Europe. Although we emphasize the importance of meeting labour market needs in order to maintain the international competitiveness of the European Union, we also regard certain actions taken by the EU and by its member states as very controversial.

We recognise that highly qualified migrants are less likely to provoke negative attitudes in the country of destination, since they are actively contributing to its



economy and do not depend on its social system. Nevertheless, we believe that inviting only highly skilled workers is not a feasible solution to the problems listed above. As labour market shortages are hard to forecast, we cannot be sure whether shortages will not be experienced all over the economy, not just among IT specialists, doctors or nurses. Therefore, we would like to leave regulations and restrictions considering the admission of migrants up to the forces of the labour market. Immigration alone cannot cure all demographic problems, but we see the entry of large numbers of people of working age into the labour market, thereby boosting the economy, as a positive development.

Although measures aimed at stimulating circular migration intend to accomplish a win-win situation, we do not regard such policies as realistic. Not only do government efforts to ensure rotation often result in impractical enforcement mechanisms, it is also unacceptable to force an immigrant to pack up and leave right after the work contract expires. Instead, we should provide incentives for returning to the country of origin in appropriate cases. The enforcement of circular migration can also be seen as a disaster in the context of demographic change, since families are often separated as a result of it. Therefore, mobility should be regarded with caution when it comes to establishing ties between family and migration policy.

Alternatively, we think that focusing on students could be a more realistic solution. The promotion of exchange programmes and the recognition of foreign degrees are crucial in this respect. Foreign students educated in the EU would not only meet the standards of the EU qualifications, but they may also adapt easier to the language and the customs of a country. Thus, giving incentives to third-country nationals to stay in the EU after their education is an approach to be recommended.