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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	The role of family policy in the context of demographic developments in the EU
	- Presidency steering note

Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, in preparation for the lunch debate that will be held at the EPSCO Council on 8 December 2022.

EPSCO Council (Employment and Social Affairs)

Lunch – The role of family policy in the context of demographic developments in the EU

Families are the very basic building blocks of society, and their well-being determines the overall social climate. Supporting families is therefore essential for the development of society. Changes in society are enhancing the diversity of family life. Among the most significant changes are the increase in the divorce rate, in the number of children born outside of marriage and in single parent households. Division and sharing of responsibilities between parents is also changing. All this places high demands on inclusive family policies on the part of the state.

Although family policy is not an EU competence, the EU positively influences families through a range of legislative and non-legislative measures. These include, for example, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee. The recently published European Care Strategy emphasises the importance of high quality, affordable and accessible care services and the support of formal and informal carers. The Work-Life Balance Directive and the Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions aim to facilitate reconciliation of family and working life by making work more predictable, promoting more flexible working arrangements and strengthening incentives for fathers to participate in care. The Cohesion Policy Funds and the National Recovery Plans under the Recovery and Resilience Facility play an important role, e.g. for the establishment of childcare facilities or providing support for social services and care.

Many Member States have been experiencing a long-term decline in fertility and an increase in life expectancy, resulting in population ageing and in changing of the population age structures. In 2018, life expectancy at birth reached 78.2 years for men and 83.7 years for women. The trend is projected to continue, with men born in 2070 living to an average age of 86 years and women born in the same year to 90 years. By 2070, the proportion of the persons aged 65+ will be 30.3% of the population (20.3% in 2019) and persons aged 80+ will represent 13.2% of the population (5.8% in 2019). It will place a greater burden on social protection systems, including pensions, health and long-term care, with impact on funding and adequacy of benefits as well as demand for care workforce. The shrinking working-age population makes it crucial to tap the potential of all generations and promote their active participation in society.

In this context, work-life balance measures and support for childcare services, as well as various forms of financial support and a tax and benefit system that does not generate disincentives to work for second earners in a household, can have a positive impact on the decision to start a family and the number of children planned. Various measures to acknowledge the value of bringing up and caring for children, for example in the form of pension credits or a bonus for children brought up, are in place across Member States, while recognition of various forms of partnership and intergenerational solidarity in pension systems are also being discussed.

Against this background, the Ministers are invited to address following question:

What specific measures do you see as key in relation to families' decision to have a child and family planning, or to have two or more children? Do you focus on families in general or do you have targeted measures for young families, families with three or more children, etc.?)
