

The Impact of Climate Anxiety in Family Formation in Europe

Statement by 34 young European representatives from 8 universities in 6 countries

IFFD Briefing during the United Nations Commission for Social Development

United Nations HQ – New York, 7th February 2024

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I. [Background]

In recent months, eight student groups from various European universities across six countries investigated the impact of climate anxiety on family planning as part of their contribution to the 30th anniversary preparations for the International Year of the Family.

Drawing on a comprehensive study in *The Lancet*, which disclosed that 40% of Generation Z individuals globally hesitate to have children due to climate concerns, the groups met in Brussels on January 31st. There, they discussed their findings, formulated recommendations, and presented them in the European Parliament, engaging with representatives from the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, and field experts.

As members of one of the groups, we have been designated to convey the outcomes. We want to underline that young people's commitment to the environment extends beyond civic and political participation; it is intertwined with their concept of transitions. By challenging the current growth model and its environmental impact, young people question the economy's centrality in defining adulthood.

II. [Diagnosis]

The 2023 Eurobarometer survey underscores that 77% of Europeans consider climate change a highly serious problem, indicating a prevalence of eco-anxiety, as recognized by the American Psychology Association, with the consequent effects on mental health and resilience. This leads us to ponder the ethical, environmental, livelihood, and political considerations underlying concerns about climate change and reproductive decision-making.

Addressing climate change involves transforming practices to build a sustainable future. Imposing a draconian one-child limit in a country like France, as demonstrated by Emmanuel Pont in his Brussels presentation, would yield only marginal emissions reduction, similar to shutting down all coal-fired power stations. Additionally, research from the University of Leeds indicates that an individual living alone produces a comparable or higher carbon footprint than a household of at least four people.

To have a generation to save the planet for, we need to empower our society and not paralyze it. Moreover, while humanity poses a significant threat to itself, an anti-natalist narrative discouraging childbirth to protect the environment is discriminatory, especially considering

higher birth rates in the global South, while the majority of global warming is attributed to the actions of the global North.

III. [Recommendations]

Addressing declining birth rates requires a nuanced understanding of various factors, including climate change anxiety and shifts towards individualism in society. There's no one-size-fits-all solution, and potential secondary effects of simplistic approaches must be considered.

Economic challenges and climate anxiety undermine the family's role in social development. Restoring confidence in ourselves and our roots is crucial to overcoming fear and approaching the future with realism and courage.

We advocate for effective policies focusing on promoting family values, countering information overload, and fostering a commitment to building a future through family life. Practical measures, such as policies with economic incentives, equal job opportunities, and recognizing motherhood as a full-time job, can boost youth confidence in investing in a family.

Political entities should prioritize awareness campaigns for genuine sustainable living instead of endorsing unnecessary production. Governments should develop plans at all levels, fostering critical thinking, reframing narratives, addressing negative psychological impacts, creating supportive environments for parents, and providing economic compensations for families reducing their consumption.

Brussels, 31st January 2024.

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