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2008 UNECE Conference: **How Generations and Gender Shape Demographic Change – Towards Policies Based on Better Knowledge**
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Dear minister, high officials, scientists, organizers,

I am glad to participate at this conference because I believe that **research based scientific knowledge will help us to make better decisions** in the field of policy. And this is what Gender and Generation survey will provide us with.

Many countries face low fertility, controversial migration flows, change of population structure nowadays. On the light of these trends also policy makers face new challenges.

Low fertility, problems of integration of immigrants has been questions under concern for long time also in Estonia. Estonia gained independence at 1992. Already at the very beginning it was clear that population issues are among those the most important questions what governments need to deal with. Total fertility rate what used to be above level of 2 children dropped suddenly below 1.4 children.

Surveys showed that poverty, perception of insecurity and postponement of births because of behavioral changes was the main reasons for having fewer children at that time. Most striking was the feeling of insecurity, both from the side of men and women. In a new situation people were not sure, can they rely on public support or can they cope with raising up children themselves in a new situation? The **poverty** surveys conclude that families with more than two **children** and families only with one working parent were the most vulnerable group.

The other main concerns today are:

- Increasing number of childless households
- Increasing number of single-parent children
- Instability of family relations and low skill of parenting
- Unmet needs for childcare of these women who would like to combine work and motherhood
- Tendency towards individualization in modern society
- Competing values (family, career, easy life)

15 years ago it was appointed a special post of **minister responsible of demographic questions in Estonia – minister on population and ethnic affairs**. This minister is responsible for demographic policy issues and ethnic minorities. The minister is a cabinet minister without ministry, but with an office which belongs to the state chancellery - office of a prime minister. The everyday activities of the minister is to elaborate and implement integration policy for immigrants, coordinate elaboration of population policy documents and monitor the situation of families with children and ethnic minorities in Estonia. Once a year the minister presents a report to the government. Since April 2007 I have been appointed to this position.

Natural part of the work of that minister is **related to population data and research**. Scientists are important in the successful policy process. In order to be effective and carry out knowledge based policies we need continuous data about population and policy evaluations. We need to support different surveys and produce trustworthy population statistics. Estonia is building up a register based population information system. It takes time and efforts to solve all quality and legal issues related to this kind of data gathering, but we believe that this will produce the best result also in terms of research.

In Estonia we have decided to follow **knowledge based policy decisions process**. This is not only modern, but also the most effective way for policy making. That means that all policy decisions are based on internal and

international knowledge about the possible outcomes. All draft laws which will pass the parliament are analyzed from children and family point of view. Also all government bills must include evaluation of outcomes in my country.

This task requires **lots of good population data**. We need more high level research and knowledge in order to make good decisions. This research cannot be only ex- post – that means, results of evaluations of events what already occurred, but we need also ex- ante – pre-evaluation of possible changes. How can we obtain information about processes what have not occurred yet?

One possibility is to learn from the **experiences of other countries**. It requires international databases and international analyses. Gender and Generation survey is very important therefore that gives us international cohort and period data.

We know that there have been **lots of changes concerning fertility behavior during last decades**:

- Employment of women does not lead necessarily to the lower birth rates anymore;
- Religion is losing an influence to the fertility behavior, although is important family behavior predictor;
- We see that family types and family formation is becoming more heterogeneous in Europe.

There remains still lots of unanswered questions and many new questions are just emerging. Lots interesting, but also policy relevant answers need to be answered and solved. I hope that also the present conference will lead us closer to these answers. From all other population related questions belief to the **importance to have more children is most powerful** in my country. I would like to stress, that of course family policy matters to fertility decision. Perhaps for different families differently, but the influence is present.

What we have done in the field of family policy?

In 2000 first family policy concept was approved in Estonia. According to this document, Estonia's task was to create a stable and secure environment for all children and families. The aim was to ensure average well-being of families with children regardless where they live or the composition of the family. The second document was accepted by government in 2005. This document fixed the replacement rate as the main aim of population policy. At this spring we have started with the third policy document. Although we have not agreed yet the precise wording of a document it will stand for families with children and will be accepted by government hopefully at the end of this year.

What are the main mail stones of these documents?

1. First of all to guarantee **equal opportunities** for the families with children compared with families without children. Gender questions are important factor in this category. Child rising requires financial and psychological costs, as well as time. The objective of the state policy is to guarantee for both parents equal rights to work and participate at the family life. First of all it means developing children's daily care facilities and other services that would help the parents to raise the children. As a new initiative government supports local governments in building new child day care facilities with 1.4 billion Estonian kroons in coming years. Considering that children are the most important **investment into the future, the state shall support both directly and indirectly the activities related to children**.

2. Secondly we think that it is important to improve the **knowledge and awareness** of the members of society in the area of children and family related problems. That means family education at schools and continuous education also in other forms.

3. Years ago child-rich families were asked about the need from society, their responded that the moral support and appreciation would not be bad. So the third important aim is to create a **favourable** social and physical **environment** for children. This is lots to do with solidarity and acceptance between generations. The state shall favour **the solidarity among the family members and the members of society** in raising the children. The objective of the family policy in Estonia is **to raise the level of understanding and children-friendliness in all the spheres of life**.

4. And finally, **wise decisions and solutions** are basis of a successful policy. Therefore the state shall support appropriate research and the development of registers and statistics.

Dear friends, in coming days we hope to gain broader knowledge about the most recent development in field of demography in Europe. I wish all of you interesting conference.