



Declassified¹

AS/Soc (2026) PV04add

23 June 2026

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the hearing on “Towards a family-friendly Europe: policy recommendations for demographic renewal” held on Thursday, 4 June 2026 in Athens

Ms Saskia Kluit, Chairperson, opened the hearing held in the context of preparation of the report on “Towards a family-friendly Europe: policy recommendations for demographic renewal” by Mr Georgios Stamatis (Greece, EPP/CD) and welcomed guest speakers:

- Ms Domna Michailidou, Greek Minister of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs,
- Ms Niki Kerameus, Greek Minister of Labour and Social Insurance,
- Mr Stelios Maridakis, Vice-President of the National Youth Council of Greece,
- Mr Basil C. Tarlatzis, Professor Emeritus of Obstetrics-Gynaecology and Human Reproduction, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and
- Ms Alexandra Tragakis, Professor of economic demography at Harokopio University.

The Chairperson stressed from the outset the importance of hearing concrete experiences and drawing practical lessons for the whole of Europe.

Minister Kerameus described demographic decline as one of the major challenges for Greece and Europe, linking it to labour, income, equality, support for families and prospects for young people. Greece’s ageing population led to a growing share of people over 65 and a shrinking workforce, making policy action urgent from an economic angle. To this end, four policy directions were put forward in Greece: strengthening employment and social security, protecting maternity and paternity, improving work-life balance and encouraging return migration through “Rebrain Greece” and related programmes. The latter had helped to facilitate the return of 473,000 citizens out of 747,000 who had left the country during the years of economic crisis. Stable work and income were prerequisites for family planning, with higher women’s employment and reduced female unemployment being especially important in that respect. In recent years, maternity, paternity and parental leave had been increased, flexible work arrangements (including part-time and four-day workweek options) had been introduced for working parents with children under 12 years of age, and measures to better protect family life had been mainstreamed across various sectors.

In response to a question by **Ms Kluit** on lessons for other countries in Europe, **Minister Kerameus** argued that the key policy measure was creating a flexible work environment that made family life compatible with professional life and giving people a variety of options to make free choices about private life, especially as regards measures enabling women to return to work after starting a family.

Mr Maridakis spoke from the perspective of young people and described the demographic situation as a crisis. He noted very low birth figures, a fertility rate (1.24 children per woman) far below replacement level (2.1 children per woman) and the need for clear, practical action rather than statements of intent. Measures such as increased family subsidies, extended parental leave, housing support, free education, nursery care and efforts to counter brain drain were commendable. However, they were still not enough, because young people remained uncertain about employment prospects, housing and income to sustain family with children. It was important to link education and training to jobs. There were also growing concerns about the effect of social media on young people’s sense of life, relationships and commitment to care about others. Young people needed to be heard and supported through demographic policy that was stable over time rather than changing with each political cycle.

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 23 June 2026.

Mr Stamatis as rapporteur then described the political and strategic framework of his work, recalling reform efforts already launched in Greece over recent years in family policy, disability, Roma inclusion, housing and demographic planning. The creation of a dedicated ministry for social cohesion and family affairs three years ago signaled the seriousness of the effort to embrace demographic challenges. State policies should focus not only on financial support, but also on creating an environment in which young people would feel confident choosing family life with children. South Korea, for instance was spending almost USD 25 billion per year to support families but failed to achieve a desired effect. The existing policies and opportunities should be communicated clearly to citizens. The brain drain after the economic collapse in Greece was a sore point for the country. Repairing the country entailed policies and measures that would make its people eager to live there, such as through family-friendly cities, good living conditions, affordable childcare and stronger support for people with disabilities and parents with disabilities. The demographic challenge must be addressed over the long term, including by taking a pragmatic approach to immigration, age-friendly policies, action to curb deadly pollution and to improve the quality of life, as well as boosting living standards and inter-generational solidarity.

Minister Michailidou thereafter presented the Greek National Demographic Action Plan, stressing that demography should be treated as a central equality issue for Europe. Greece's efforts over the last seven years had combined fiscal and social reforms with what could be called "mentality reforms". Income support alone could not change decisions to have children. Greece's strategy rested on three pillars: direct support to households, indirect support through tax policy and service provision, supporting equal opportunities for all population. Concrete measures included the childbirth benefit, childcare benefits, reduced or even no taxes for younger people and lower tax rates for larger families, extensive nursery provision, afternoon day-centre vouchers and the "nannies of the neighborhood" programme for very young children. There were also active ageing measures, digital training for older people and major reforms for disability rights and independent living. In conclusion, families needed tools, services, and equality guarantees so that people, especially young people, could make free choices about family life. Very few countries in the world had fertility rate higher than 2.1. The global trend was therefore that of stable or shrinking population, increasingly concentrated in urban areas. In terms of policies, there was asymmetry, such as in Germany, between the perception of what should work and what really worked (such as the child benefit and support for nurseries).

Professor Tarlatzis shared a European perspective on the impact of the environment on human fertility, involuntary childlessness and related fertility treatment policies. Declining fertility was a global, long-term and multifactorial trend: the share of women living in countries below replacement fertility level had risen from 5% in 1950 to 48% in 2020, with projections of 77% and then 93% in the future. In Europe, the average number of children per woman was about 1.6, well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. Spain, Italy, Greece and parts of northern and eastern Europe were below the replacement threshold, while the situation in Turkey, France, Norway and Ireland was slightly better. Fertility was falling due to a rising age at first childbirth, environmental factors and socio-financial uncertainties that delayed decisions (by persons or couples) to start a family. The age of first childbirth had risen sharply: where childbirth was once mostly completed in women's twenties, it was now often delayed beyond 30 and sometimes toward the age of 40. Environmental pressures, including pollution, climate change and endocrine disruptors massively present in the food chain, affected women's and men's reproductive health, embryos, newborns and even led to the onset of premature menopause. Decisions to have children were notably impacted by the cost of raising children and access to adequate housing, employment insecurity, mental health and the difficulty of reconciling work and family life.

A major challenge was how to close the gap between reproductive health needs and the support available to couples who wanted but faced biological difficulties to have children. Medically assisted reproduction and access to fertility treatment could improve outcomes, though it could not by itself solve the demographic crisis. In countries where fertility treatment was fully covered by the health system, births through IVF (in vitro fertilization) were more common. For example in Denmark about 8% to 9% of births each year came through IVF. Other countries such as Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain also had a strong public coverage of fertility treatment procedures. Greece had made progress too, with about 7% to 8% of births being linked to IVF, but coverage was still incomplete, especially for the medicines needed before and after embryo implantation. As more and more people lived and worked away from the countries they were born in, comprehensive state assistance and information for families was becoming increasingly important to support decisions to have more children. The public needed to understand fertility, infertility and the real consequences of delay, uncertainty and reduced access to care. Public policies should aim to improve the quality of life for the population rather than focus only on birth counts.

Ms Kluit shared her personal experience of becoming a mother at 23 years and the avalanche of socio-economic problems she had to face as a result. None of her friends considered having a child before they were 29 or 32.

Professor Tragakis focused on the economic impact of demographic change and the limits of traditional policy responses. She explained that fertility decline with "ever fewer children being born ever later in the lives of mothers" had shifted over time from concerns about child-raising costs to broader pressures such as unemployment and unstable employment, the financial and economic crises, geopolitical uncertainties, the pandemics and housing shortages. Extramarital births had increased slightly in Greece (just by 10%) compared to the 60- 70% increase in other countries of Europe. Other factors of psychological wellbeing, mental and physical health should be taken into

account. Demographic policies should be well targeted and seek to improve the quality of life for all ages, not simply aim to raise birth rates numerically: high fertility did not mean demographic development while mortality figures increased in parallel. In fact, demographic growth or decline could not be explained by fertility and mortality rates alone, since migration and regional concentration also mattered. Public policies should do more to facilitate life of working parents and invest in developing a “silver economy” with cities and services designed for all ages, with accessibility, dignity and participation for older and younger generations alike, supporting intergenerational coexistence and improving daily lives for all the population.

Ms Kluit appreciated Ms Tragakis’s comments about the need to enhance the quality of life for all ages, including through more sustainable cities.

Mr Fazenda stressed the issue of social and territorial cohesion as a means of improving the living conditions for the population and asked the experts to comment on that. Southern countries - Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain – but also Germany were aging rapidly and need targeted measures to improve fiscal and territorial planning, bearing in mind rural depopulation and urban overpopulation. In Greece, one third of the country’s population lived in Athens; in Portugal, around 40% of the population was concentrated in Lisbon and Porto regions.

Baroness Coffey explained that in the United Kingdom there was increasing policy focus on trying to have healthy lives, not just long lives, which was proving challenging, particularly for mobility. A major question was how to keep people active throughout their lifetime.

Professor Tarlatzis and **Professor Tragakis** both reiterated that support for families must be accompanied by broader social measures supporting greater equality, decent work, accessible services, and giving people confidence in better society of tomorrow. Immigration option could also work well for demographic stability and resilience, resulting in a win-win situation for receiving countries and individuals. Longevity was only half a gift if it was not accompanied by good health, both physical and mental. Preventive medicine could accompany people of all ages, encouraging better choices about lifestyle, including as regards the way people ate, lived, moved and engaged with the community.

Mr Holownia explained his country’s (Poland) efforts to support demographic stability. Lower taxation was more useful than targeted payouts, while a rapid influx of migrants could create difficulties for labour markets and social welfare systems. Europe was in a nearly permanent situation of poly-crises, and it was not easy to address people’s fears about the future. People needed a bit more hope and confidence in their own and their children’s future.

Mr O’Reilly shared concerns about the high cost and availability of housing in Ireland, which made life very hard for the population.

Mr Amraoui spoke about the demographic situation in Morocco which followed increasingly the patterns seen across Europe: families were shrinking, and young people were ever more concerned about access to housing and the lack of employment opportunities.

Ms Chatziioannidou wondered if young people under 25 years were interested in health issues, in particular reproductive health.

Ms Arpa spoke about the difficulties women faced in finding the right partners in life and in enjoying genuinely equal rights, such as in terms of pension levels or maternity and paternity leave.

Mr Cingi raised the issue of spiritual and cultural values in family decisions to have children and in entertaining stable partnerships.

Ms Kluit, too, spoke about the living environment that influenced young people’s choices to have a family with children. Increasingly, parents could not properly take care of their children because they had very demanding jobs and were stressed about being able to pay for housing.

Professor Tragakis agreed that uncertainties about the future were a serious problem. Behaviours were changing, especially among young people, because it took ever longer to move to independent living. There was enough housing in most countries but a high share of it was unoccupied or financially inaccessible. Social media circulated images and examples of people without family with children. Fertility issues should be more connected with couples, not individual partners, nor just women alone.

Professor Tarlatzis supported the previous speaker and underlined that reproductive health was not about imposed choices but rather about free choices of couples. State should support those who faced difficulties in conceiving children, and society should value more families’ contribution to the overall prosperity.

Mr Stamatis thanked members and guest speakers for their contributions. As the European Union was spending nearly 1 trillion euros on weapons, politicians should speak out in favour of investing in peace and in family-friendly policies. States should ensure that the ideal of equality would be fully mainstreamed not only through policies but also practical measures to implement them. States should also invest more in people, notably their education, health and living conditions, showing that they hear the voice of the people and care about them.

The Chairperson in turn thanked all the speakers and closed the hearing.

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold /
Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras)

Chairperson / *Président·e*:

Ms Saskia Kluit (Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>)	
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Vice-Chairpersons / *Vice-Président·es* :

Ms Carmen Leyte (Spain / <i>Espagne</i>)	
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova (Ukraine)	
Mme Sophia Chikirou (France)	

Members / Membres	Country / Pays	Alternates / Remplaçant·es
Ms Ogerta Manastirliu	Albania / <i>Albanie</i>	Mr Ardit Bido
Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / <i>Andorre</i>	Mme Bernadeta Coma
Mr Armen Gevorgyan	Armenia / <i>Arménie</i>	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
Ms Claudia Arpa	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Doris Bures
Mr Andreas Minnich	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer
Mme Anne Lambelin	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mr Andries Gryffroy
M. Benoît Lutgen	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mme Véronique Durenne
Ms Darijana Filipović	Bosnia and Herzegovina / <i>Bosnie-Herzégovine</i>	Mr Šemsudin Dedić
Ms Atidzhe Alieva-Veli	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Mr Kostadin Angelov
Ms Maya Dimitrova	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Mr Ilian Iontchev
Mr Marko Pavić	Croatia / <i>Croatie</i>	Ms Rada Borić
Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / <i>Chypre</i>	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádllová	Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i>	Mr Ondřej Šimetka
ZZ...	Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i>	ZZ...
Ms Camilla Fabricius	Denmark / <i>Danemark</i>	Ms Charlotte Bagge Hansen
Ms Hanah Lahe	Estonia / <i>Estonie</i>	Ms Kadri Tali
Ms Minna Reijonen	Finland / <i>Finlande</i>	Mr Pekka Aittakumpu
Mme Sophia Chikirou	France	Mme Sabrina Sebaihi
M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
M. Alain Milon	France	M. Alain Cadec
Mme Maud Petit	France	M. Jean Laussucq
Ms Birgit Bessin	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Martina Kempf
Mr Vinzenz Glaser	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Christin Willnat
Ms Inge Gräßle	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Mr Julian Joswig
Mr Serdar Yüksel	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Franziska Kersten
Mr Georgios Stamatis	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Mr Dionysios-Charalampos Kalamatianos
Ms Maria Syrengela	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Ms Maria-Nefeli Chatziioannidou
Ms Mónika Bartos	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Mr Zoltán Bóna
Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Mr István Hollik
Ms Kolbrún Áslaugar Baldursdóttir	Iceland / <i>Islande</i>	Ms Ásthildur Lóa Þórsdóttir
Mr Joseph O'Reilly	Ireland / <i>Irlande</i>	Mr Rónán Mullen
Ms Elena Bonetti	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Roberto Rosso
Ms Aurora Floridia	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Graziano Pizzimenti
Mr Stefano Maullu	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Ms Domenica Spinelli

M. Andris Bērziņš	Latvia / <i>Lettonie</i>	Mr Edmunds Cepurītis
Mr Marc Risch	Liechtenstein	Mr Joachim Vogt
Ms Orinta Leiputė	Lithuania / <i>Lituanie</i>	Mr Zigmantas Balčytis
Mme Stéphanie Weydert	Luxembourg	M. Paul Galles
Mr Michael Farrugia	Malta / <i>Malte</i>	Mr Joseph Beppe Fenech Adami
Mr Ion Groza	Republic of Moldova / <i>République de Moldova</i>	Ms Ana Calinici
M. Régis Bergonzi	Monaco	Mme Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo
Mr Miloš Konatar	Montenegro / <i>Monténégro</i>	Ms Edina Dešić
Ms Saskia Kluit	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Mr Theo Bovens
Ms Carla Moonen	Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	Mr Felix Klos
Mr Bekim Kjeku	North Macedonia / <i>Macédoine du Nord</i>	Mr Sadula Duraki
Mr Per Vidar Kjølmoen	Norway / <i>Norvège</i>	Ms Seher Aydar
Mr Szymon Hołownia	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Ms Magdalena Biejat
Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	Mr Mirosław Adam Orliński
Mr Jan Filip Libicki	Poland / <i>Pologne</i>	ZZ...
Mr Nuno Fazenda	Portugal	Mr António Mendonça Mendes
Mr Carlos Silva Santiago	Portugal	Ms Sofia Carreira
Ms Georgeta-Carmen Holban	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Mirela Elena Adomnicăi
Ms Dumitrina Mitrea	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Mr Iulian Bulai
Mr Robert-Ionatan Sighiartău	Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	Ms Maria-Gabriela Horga
Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli	San Marino / <i>Saint-Marin</i>	Ms Alice Mina
Mr Vladimir Đorđević	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Mr Predrag Marsenić
Ms Tatjana Pašić	Serbia / <i>Serbie</i>	Ms Jelena Milošević
Ms Veronika Remišová	Slovak Republic / <i>République Slovaque</i>	M. Pavol Goga
Mr Dean Premik	Slovenia / <i>Slovénie</i>	Ms Iva Dimic
Ms María Fernández	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Luz Martinez Seijo
Mr José Latorre	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Ms Nerea Ahedo
Ms Carmen Leyte	Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	Mr José Antonio Bermúdez De
Ms Sofia Amlöh	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	Ms Annika Strandhäll
Ms Victoria Tiblom	Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	Ms Boriana Åberg
Ms Sibel Arslan	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mme Céline Amaudruz
Mme Valérie Piller Carrard	Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mr Niklaus-Samuel Gugger
Mr Murat Cahid Cingi	Türkiye	Mr Mustafa Canbey
Ms Gökçe Gökçen	Türkiye	Mr Namık Tan
Mr Berdan Öztürk	Türkiye	Ms Sevilay Çelenk
Mr Sevan Sivacioğlu	Türkiye	Ms Sena Nur Çelik Kanat
Ms Olena Khomenko	Ukraine	Ms Larysa Bilozir
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova	Ukraine	Mr Andrii Lopushanskyi
Ms Lesia Ziburanna	Ukraine	Mr Rostyslav Tistyk
Baroness Thérèse Coffey	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Dan Aldridge
Mr Mike Reader	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Leigh Ingham
Ms Elaine Stewart	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Kate Osamor
Lord Don Touhig	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Michelle Welsh

Partners for Democracy / Partenaires pour la Démocratie

Mr / M. Allal Amraoui, Morocco / Maroc

Mr / M. Hassan Arif, Morocco / Maroc

Secretariat of Delegation or of Political Group / Secrétariat de Délégation ou de Groupe politique

Ms / Mme Francesca Verginelli, Italy / Italie

Ms / Mme Francesca Albanese Arbogast, Socialists, Democrats and Green Group / Groupe des socialistes, démocrates et verts

Mr / M. Sabih Gazi Öztürk, Türkiye

Experts / Expert-es

Ms / Mme Domna Michailidou, Greek Minister of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs / ministre grecque de la Cohésion sociale et des Affaires familiales

Ms / Mme Niki Kerameus, Greek Minister of Labour and Social Insurance / ministre grecque du Travail et de la Sécurité social

Mr / M. Stelios Maridakis, Vice President of the National Youth Council of Greece / vice-président du Conseil national de la jeunesse de Grèce

Mr / M. Basil C. Tarlatzis, Professor Emeritus of Obstetrics-Gynaecology and Human Reproduction, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki / professeur émérite d'obstétrique-gynécologie et de reproduction humaine à l'université Aristote de Thessalonique

Ms / Mme Alexandra Tragakis, Professor of economic demography at Harokopio University / professeure de démographie économique à l'université Harokopio

~~Ms / Mme Dionysia Theodora Avgerinopoulou, Chair of the Special Standing Committee on Environmental Protection of the Greek Parliament / présidente de la commission permanente spéciale sur la protection de l'environnement du Parlement grec~~~~Mr / M. Scoullou Michael, Professor Emeritus, Laboratory of Environmental Chemistry / professeur émérite, Laboratoire de chimie environnementale~~~~Mr / M. Grigoris Konstantellos, Mayor of Varis Voulas Voulagmeni / maire de Varis Voulas Voulagmeni~~~~Mr / M. Khaled Quzmar, Executive Director, Palestinian Centre for Child Rights (PCCR) (online) / directeur exécutif du Centre palestinien pour les droits de l'enfant (en ligne)~~**Other persons present / Autres personnes présentes**

Mr / M. Armağan Candan, Representative of the Turkish Cypriot Community (*) / Représentant de la communauté chypriote turque (*)

(*) In accordance with Resolution 1376 (2004) / Conformément à la Résolution 1376 (2004)

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Ms / Mme Louise Barton, Director, Inclusive and Sustainable Societies and Co-operation Directorate / Directrice, Direction des sociétés inclusives et durables et de la coopération

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development /
Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

Ms / Mme Catherine Du-BernardHead of the Secretariat / Cheffe du Secrétariat

Ms / Mme Aiste RamanauskaiteSecretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission

Ms / Mme Jannick DevauxSecretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission

Ms / Mme Claire Dubois-HamdiSecretary to the Committee / Secrétaire de la commission

Ms / Mme Prisca BarthelEurope Prize Section / Section du Prix de l'Europe

Ms / Mme Xenia Birioukova.....Assistant/ Assistante

Ms / Mme Özgü Tan.....Assistant/ Assistante