

No. 19/1980

May 7, 1980

THE EUROPEANS AND THEIR CHILDREN

A survey was carried out on attitudes towards children in the nine member countries of the European Community during the International Year of the Child.

The Commission's Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs is publishing the results of a sample survey carried out in April 1979 on representative samples of the population of 15 and over.

The survey covered, in particular:

- material and practical problems in bringing up children;
- time at work, time with the family and child-minding arrangements;
- attitudes to and problems encountered in respect of schooling;
- attitudes to the child, its upbringing and its place in society.

In analyzing the results the population was divided in such a way that the answers from "present parents", meaning those having at least one child in the home, were distinguished from the other answers (from "ex-parents" and "non-parents").

The most interesting results of the survey, are the following:

1. It is the largest families (more than two or three children) which have the hardest material problems to cope with (income, housing) and the largest families are to be found among those with relatively low incomes.

2. Two parents out of three find that they do not spend enough time with their children. Shorter daily working hours are accepted as the best way of reducing working time rather than less working days per week or longer annual holidays. The trend towards flexitime is generally regarded as a definite aid to family life. Moreover, the possibility of "parental leave", even unpaid, for two years, a year or even only six months, was thought to be worthwhile by the majority of parents questioned.

3. The survey clearly revealed that most parents felt that it was important that their children should have the opportunity to study further than they themselves had. But one parent out of five said that one of their children had had to cut short his or her studies, or might have to do so. The reasons most commonly given were financial; poor exam results or a dislike for school were cited less often.

4. The tendency to limit the ideal size of the family runs parallel with the importance still attached to the family: two thirds of those questioned agreed that parenthood was the ultimate fulfilment of men and women. The same number felt that to bring a child into the world showed faith in the future. But it is significant that a good quarter of men and women in the Community categorically or moderately disagree with the idea that parenthood is necessary for the fulfilment of the individual. The proportion is much greater among the under-40s, and particularly among those who have had an advanced education, especially women.

More than half of those questioned (52%) refused to consider that the future of our society was too uncertain to take the risk of having children; but 42% were found to take the opposite view (57% in Italy and 51% in France).

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Copies of the full survey will soon be available at the Washington Delegation.