



**EFA Briefing Update**

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**Briefing on EU Action on 'Active ageing' in connection to the  
"The European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations" (EY2012)**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this briefing is to provide an overview for the EFA board and members concerning EU action on 'active and healthy ageing' to feed into our work and policies.

**Overview:**

As a regional extension of the United Nations International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), the European Commission's designation of 2012 as "The European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations" coincides with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this international commitment. The Commission decided to use the opportunity in order to generate awareness for the social problems and challenges arising from an ageing European population. A rising life expectancy and decreasing birth rate across European countries implies the working-age population will shrink as people retire.

The Commission reveals that by 2060 there will be just "two people of working age (15-64) for every person aged over 65...compared to a ratio of four to one today."<sup>1</sup> Recent projections have estimated that by the same year "about 30% of the EU population will be aged 65+" while the population of people aged 80+ is expected to quadruple their population total in 1990.<sup>2</sup> EY2012 is therefore presented to the EU member states as an opportunity to generate mainstream awareness that highlights the potential implications for these trends.

One common perception is that an ageing European population will increase the strain on pension systems and services available offering care to older people. This potential exacerbation is feared to potentially trigger tensions between older and younger generations; however, this perception does not consider potential benefits 'active ageing and solidarity between generations' could contribute towards European societies. For patient groups like EFA, the concern is clearly access to care; the best quality care can be seen as a driver for active ageing, or "as much active ageing as possible."

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<sup>1</sup>European Commission, 2010;

<sup>2</sup>AGE Platform Europe, 2011;

The 'active ageing' process is known as "optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age."<sup>3</sup> The notion of 'active ageing' thus integrates the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and maintenance of opportunities to be contributing members of society and assuring the best quality of life possible while simultaneously preventing the social isolation of older people. The premise of 'solidarity between generations' is meant to tackle the "passage of poverty from one generation to the next" and to address the threat of poverty to all members of society, from children to adults and the elderly. The challenges brought by ongoing changes to European society and individual family units create new obstacles between generations that threaten to sever the most crucial threads traditionally holding society together.

## **Objectives:**

### I. Promote active ageing in employment

Across the European Union, employer attitudes conflict between their broader expectations for employee retirement at a national level and expectations within their own company. According to a survey conducted by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NiDi) on employer attitudes towards later retirement, a widespread opinion among business executives was the view that "people should work longer, but not here."<sup>4</sup> As such, there exists a gap between what employers expect from their society on a broader level than with their own employees, which can be expected to be even worse with regards to people having chronic conditions with special needs. In addition, the same survey identified employers' beliefs that an increase in 5 years to working time amongst older employees would cause a decline in productivity and an increase in costs to the company. The employers react most positively to the provision of incentives to combine wage-subsidization for older workers to offset the perceived loss of productivity and increasing costs as well as the promotion of "lifelong learning."<sup>5</sup>

The Council conclusions of the European Union from 2010 on active ageing included reference to how "...Europe's future economic competitiveness and prosperity depends crucially on its ability to fully utilize its labor resources, including through the extension of employment periods over the life course and through the adoption of appropriate policies to reconcile work, family and private life."<sup>6</sup> The promotion of active ageing in employment is seen as a key objective by the EU and primarily as an economic necessity; however, this is not an exclusive advantage to retaining older people in the workforce. Through continuation of employment come the benefits of social inclusion and an increased sense of self-worth. The maintenance of positive self-esteem may enable older people with chronic health conditions to manage their ailments with greater independence and success. The diversity of "knowledge, skills and experience that should allow them to make useful contributions to society" should enable an increase in active ageing as well as solidarity across generations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>European Commission, COM(2010) 462;

<sup>4</sup>Henkens, 23 November 2011;

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Council of the European Union, 2010;

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

II. Promote active ageing in the community including through active citizenship, volunteering and caring

At the present there is a huge demand for more civic contributions and baby boomers want to be able to influence their community. While older people's bodies may grow older, this does not necessarily imply a similar effect upon their minds; nevertheless, there appears to be a prevalent gap between their *willingness to participate* and *actual active participation*. Specific measures, such as allowing elderly people to visit primary schools and talk to children about their own childhoods – or indeed managing a chronic condition in everyday life, may assist to create a mutual appreciation for intergenerational relations while providing older people with a means to remain active in their community. While in the past neighborhoods were the venues for much intergenerational contact and exchange, at the present a more individualistic environment exists and these points of contact and exchange are significantly diminished. Measures must be adjusted to address the increasing number of older people living in isolation at the local, national and regional levels in tandem with the EU EY2012.

Stakeholders in local communities must encourage “citizen and volunteer initiatives...which support solidarity between generations and between different social, cultural and ethnic groups” in order to encourage active participation in society of older people.<sup>8</sup> In addition, efforts are required to remove barriers that may contribute to the gap of participation willingness and activeness. For example, existing barriers include, but are not limited to, national or local laws preventing older people from volunteering because of age limitations or an employed status, or indeed other barriers linked to special needs because of a chronic disease. In addition, attitudes leading to age classifications should be interrupted, as targeted advertisements can discourage participation instead facilitating its increase. Moving forward, it will also be crucial to the development of communities to avoid the construction of retirement communities, where there no diversity in age groups. Interaction between generations is vital to reinforce trust and maintain balanced bases for community growth.

III. Promote active ageing at home through enabling healthy ageing and independent living

There exists an important role for active ageing in the care for older persons, especially those with dementia and chronic diseases. In a 2008 Eurobarometer study, 49% of Europeans reported being “Not very satisfied” or “Not at all satisfied” with public support for people caring for dependent older relatives, such as people with severe COPD for example.<sup>9</sup> According to the Care Center for Research and Consulting (LUCAS) in Leuven, Belgium, the increasing number of older people requiring care creates demand for better options for the ageing populations in Europe. For example, small scale living arrangements (6-8 people living together) may diminish changes in negative side effects from nursing care (e.g. depression) and become an environment with a “home-like” feel.<sup>10</sup> However, in order to assure healthier and independent older persons, they must have a *choice* in the matter and consider what they *do* want and *do not* want in order to personalize their care. Ultimately, the longer older people are able to sustain an independent lifestyle, the greater cost reductions become in the long-run for themselves and society and this is especially so for people with chronic diseases.

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<sup>8</sup>AGE Platform Europe, 2011;

<sup>9</sup>European Commission, 2008;

<sup>10</sup>Declercq, 23 November 2011;

A general agreement exists among stakeholders that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can play an important role in promoting independent living for older people. ICT can contribute by enabling older people to have easier access to services and increase efficient home support. For instance, the ongoing development of Telemedicine and eHealth services can assist older people avoid difficult and inconvenient trips to medical centers, trips to the emergency room, consolidation of medical records and improve consistency in the quality of care a patient receives and feeling safer at home. Projects sponsored by the European Commission, such as the REgionNs of Europe WorkINg together for HEALTH ([RENEWING HeALTH](#)), demonstrate an ongoing trend to improve patient empowerment and independent living through taking advantage of ICTs. EFA is presently involved on the User Advisory Board for RENEWING HeALTH and one of the pilot diseases for the project is COPD. Real-time consultations provide valuable information to patients with shorter time commitments than office appointments, while the utilization of mobile units can provide valuable functions such as medication reminders, while never replacing but complementing personal contact with the patient-healthcare professional.

#### IV. Enhance cooperation and solidarity between the generations

Active ageing can be considered to be the process of optimizing opportunities, shifting from a focus upon economic production to one upon the well-being of individuals. Enhancing cooperation and solidarity between generations is highlighted in Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union, proving the changing demographics of the European population attracted significant attention from the EU over the past decade. The broader initiative of EY2012 calls upon individual member states and all stakeholders to enhance solidarity between generations. The economic crisis has strongly affected both older and younger people in societies, but the difficulties that confront them differ tremendously. The challenge of enhancing cooperation and solidarity between generations must be understood by policymakers, as new public policies cannot marginalize a specific generation and create negative long-term consequences. Poverty is often passed from one generation to the next, with women and children, especially migrants, as part of the most vulnerable populations to social exclusion while pensions are often essential to prevent poverty among elderly people.<sup>11</sup>

EY2012 presents an opportunity to counter misconceptions and stereotypes which are sourcing inter-generational tensions. A Eurobarometer study from 2009 reported that across the EU at least half of society at every age believed that generations do not easily agree on what is best for society, ranging from 50% in the Netherlands to 88% in Sweden.<sup>12</sup> An age barrier between generations unravels the fabric of a strong society and segregates generations based upon diverging interests and perspectives. For instance, expectations for the care of relatives increase intergenerational strains within families that may not have the resources to provide care on their own. In these cases, it is necessary for local or national governments to have support for families so care does not burden those who already struggle to make ends meet. In addition, the concept of 'lifelong learning' in the EU, which endorses "high quality, inclusive education [as] the basis of social integration of mobility," can provide opportunities to promote integration, diversity and self-development.<sup>13</sup> Together, such measures can contribute towards providing a basis for intergenerational solidarity and reducing the risk factors that can increase tensions between generations.

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<sup>11</sup>AGE Platform, 2011;

<sup>12</sup>European Commission, 2009;

<sup>13</sup>AGE Platform, 2011;

## **ACTIONS - What will the European Commission do and what can EFA do?**

For EY2012, Member States of the European Union cannot expect to receive direct funding from the European Commission as they did for previous European Years. In addition, the Commission has designated [national coordinators](#) to facilitate and support national EY2012 activities and initiatives at local and regional levels. EFA member associations are encouraged to become involved with such activities or initiatives in their respective nations when relevant to the objectives of their organization or patients. In this way, EFA network can participate in the Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity at local levels while simultaneously monitoring related events in Brussels.

Half of older people in EU Member States surveyed wanted to work past pension ages; to make this possible, the European Commission has designated three levels for national government actions. First, a national government may provide education initiatives and appeal laws that promote age discrimination. At the local levels, governments can create age friendly city programs as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Lastly, private companies and social partners can contribute to active ageing by providing flexible transitions for older members of a community into part-time work and community volunteer programs.<sup>14</sup>

The European Commission states its main responsibility is the ability to raise awareness in order to combat ageism, or measures discriminating against older people. In addition, the Commission views the identification and spread of best practices could aid the EU improve conditions and opportunities for active ageing and solidarity between generations. At the present, the life expectancy of women is averaging close to 80 years (62 of which healthy) and close to 72 years for men (60 of which healthy); it is important to note that the gaps between the life expectancy and total healthy years are where the costs of ageing become the highest.<sup>15</sup> According to Maria Iglesia Gomez, Head of Unit (European Commission, DG SANCO), the [European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing](#) exists as a means to **prolong the healthy life years of Europeans by +2 years**.

To achieve this target, several Action Groups were created to carry out selected actions identified within the [Strategic Implementation Plan \(SIP\)](#). Throughout 2012, EU Member States as well as regional and local authorities will be granted greater proximity to the Partnership to oversee the successful implementation of such actions. The Commission intends to host a Conference for interested partners of EY2012, which EFA can use as an opportunity to become more involved in supporting mechanisms for the Action Groups, where relevant to our mission, objectives and successful implementation of our respiratory allergy and COPD projects. The Conference, which is to be organized during 2012, serves an opportunity to monitor target progress and Action Group objectives, while dually presenting an opportune moment for partners to propose new actions.

The Commission's desired outcome of EY2012 is to keep the European population active and healthy. As such, the Commission's target of increasing the healthy life years of EU citizens by two years seeks to stress healthy lifestyle choices, while keeping people active and independent at an old age while simultaneously increasing sustainability and efficiency of social and healthcare systems. In addition, a healthier older population may increase competitiveness and market growth through fostering innovation in the ageing sector. EFA will closely monitor developments at the EU level within EY2012 and strongly encourages its members to participate in respective national initiatives when possible.

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<sup>14</sup>Matzke, 23 November 2011;

<sup>15</sup>Iglesia Gomez, 23 November 2011;

## EY2012 Coalition Partners:

- AGE Platform Europe – [www.age-platform.eu](http://www.age-platform.eu)
- AEIP – European Association of Paritarian Institutions of social protection – [www.aeip.net](http://www.aeip.net)
- AIM – Association Internationale de la Mutualité – [www.aim-mutual.org](http://www.aim-mutual.org)
- Autism Europe – [www.autismeurope.org](http://www.autismeurope.org)
- CECODHAS – The European Liaison Committee for Social Housing – [www.housingeurope.eu](http://www.housingeurope.eu)
- COFACE – Confederation of Family Organizations in the EU – [www.coface-eu.org](http://www.coface-eu.org)
- CSR Europe – European business network for corporate social responsibility – [www.csreurope.org](http://www.csreurope.org)
- EAHSA – European Association of Homes and Services for the Aging – [www.eahsa.eu](http://www.eahsa.eu)
- European Disability Forum (EDF) – [www.edf-feph.org](http://www.edf-feph.org)
- ENAR – European Network Against Racism – [www.enar-eu.org](http://www.enar-eu.org)
- EUFED – European Union Federation of Youth Hostel Associations – [www.eufed.org](http://www.eufed.org)
- Eurochild – [www.eurochild.org](http://www.eurochild.org)
- Eurodiaconia – [www.eurodiaconia.org](http://www.eurodiaconia.org)
- EuroHealthNet – [www.eurohealthnet.eu](http://www.eurohealthnet.eu)
- EWL – European Women’s Lobby – [www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)
- FERPA – European Federation of Retired and Older People – <http://ferpa.etuc.org>
- Mental Health Europe – [www.mhe-sme.org](http://www.mhe-sme.org)
- Red Cross EU Office – [www.redcross-eu.net](http://www.redcross-eu.net)
- YFJ – European Youth Forum – [www.youthforum.org](http://www.youthforum.org)

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