
EU Digital Agenda: Addressing the Challenges of an Ageing Population

The European Commission calls on EU Member States to develop and pursue a common vision on how to coordinate research at EU level in the field of ageing. This was the message of a Recommendation just adopted by the Commission entitled "More years, better lives - the potential and challenges of demographic change".

The Recommendation urges Member States to participate in a Joint Programming Initiative on ageing populations in research areas such as how to retain people in the labour market, how to help older people remain active for as long as possible, in good health and with a better quality of life and how to make our future care systems sustainable.

More than 30% of Europeans will be 65 or over in 2025 and the number of those over 80 will almost double in the same period. So far thirteen countries have committed to participate in the Joint Programming Initiative that brings the most prominent scientists in economics, social sciences, health and technology together with representatives from industry, policy making and user organisations in order to foster the development of better knowledge on the impact of ageing. This is the first time that Member States will work together to fund strategic research on the ageing population.

The initiative will provide a major contribution to the European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing (see IP/10/1288) and the Digital Agenda for Europe (see IP/10/581, MEMO/10/199 and MEMO/10/200). It complements ageing related research activities in the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), the Ambient Assisted Living Joint Programme (see IP/10/1726) and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.

Neelie Kroes, European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Agenda, said: "I congratulate the EU MS that have taken this joint initiative. It will develop new science-based knowledge on the effects of demographic changes. I look forward to further Member States joining so that we can look for new opportunities generated by an ageing society, and not be overwhelmed by its challenges."

The Recommendation calls on Member States to include the following actions, as part of their research agenda on ageing:

- Identifying and exchanging information on relevant national programmes and research activities as well as exchanging best practices, methodologies and guidelines;
- Identifying areas or research activities that would benefit from joint coordination or pooling of resources;
- Considering the changing needs of elderly people when defining the objectives for ageing research programmes;
- Sharing, where appropriate, existing research infrastructures or developing new facilities such as coordinated databanks or the development of models for studying ageing processes;
- Encouraging better collaboration between public and private sectors and between different research activities and business sectors related to demographic change and population ageing; and
- Creating networks between centres dedicated to demographic change and population ageing research.

The Joint Programming Initiative "More years, better lives, the challenges and opportunities of demographic change" will develop its common strategic research agenda on the ageing population over the coming months with the assistance of prominent experts. This agenda will then be implemented through joint actions and projects involving a substantial commitment of funding and participation from involved countries. The European Commission will provide financial support for the coordination of the initiative; which is expected to start delivering concrete results after 2012, such as science based recommendations for adapting pension systems based not only on age, as is currently the case, but on people's capacity to work.

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