



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG

Social Protection and Integration  
**Social and Demographic Analysis**

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# Questionnaire for a consultation in view of a possible designation of 2012 as European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity

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**Should this contribution be published anonymously?    No**

## 1. IDENTITY OF THE RESPONDENT

*Please identify yourself and the organisation on behalf of which you are replying to this consultation*

Name	Assembly of European Regions (AER), Social Policy and Public Health Committee
Organisation (including a short description of its mission and membership)	Assembly of European Regions (AER) The AER is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. It brings together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, and aims at promoting interregional cooperation.
Expertise (please precise the area)	The AER Social Policy and Public Health Committee has been focusing intensively on demographic challenges in the last past years.  Within its participation to the ALIVE project (a review of regional policy for care of the elderly to meet demographic changes) and the organisation of several conferences dedicated to demographic change, AER has acquired a lot of expertise in this area.  Besides, in 2005, the AER responded to the contents of the EC Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new

	<p>solidarity between the generations", welcoming the decision of the European Commission to address the problems and opportunities arising from an ageing society.</p> <p>The topic of demographic transition is still very present at the AER and evolved towards the search for proactive solutions enabling this unavoidable societal transformation to happen in the best conditions. In this perspective, the AER is organising a conference on "Social Innovation for Demographic Change" on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2009.</p>
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## 2. THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF AGEING IN RELATION TO INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

*Please explain briefly how your organisation perceives the challenges and opportunities in relation to intergenerational solidarity in a context of accelerating demographic ageing.*

In the AER's opinion, demographic change does not raise threats as such but rather a set of challenges, that need to be addressed early to avoid societal conflicts.

It is clear that demographic change will affect the balance existing between the different generations. This will have a number of consequences.

The unbalance between the number of pensioners and the number of working people is often named as a potential source of intergenerational tensions. Indeed, the financial effort of working people will need to be very high to enable the senior generation to get pensions.

The fact that individual political and economic priorities often differ according to their belonging to the age group they belong to may also generate conflicts. Mediation will be required to find an agreement on measures that satisfy the highest number of people and avoid a feeling of injustice for certain age groups. This feeling of exclusion from the decision-making process can be prevented by making sure that every generation is represented at the political level.

An additional challenge might arise from the way cities are organised. Indeed, urban development often did not take the upcoming demographic changes into account, and European countries may face a situation where the elderly and the younger people hardly ever come in geographical contact. This would naturally have negative consequences in terms of intergenerational solidarity and understanding. Avoiding the territorial separation of generations raises the question of socially sustainable urban planning.

Finally a higher proportion of elderly people may also have negative effects on the dynamism and innovation abilities of European societies. Raising awareness about the fact that ageing today is not the same as being old 50 years ago is an additional challenge. In order to avoid the social exclusion of what will become a large group of our

society, European citizens will have to reconsider the situation of elderly people and to perceive them as actors in their lives, and not as needy and passive.

But the AER also perceives the opportunities demographic change provides for intergenerational solidarity. In this regard, senior citizens represent a considerable social capital. The transmission of knowledge and experience from a generation to another is of an incontestable added-value for the community and could be improved through enhanced informal learning systems.

Moreover, the AER would like to stress the increasingly important role senior citizens can play in stimulating the economy (tourism, leisure activities) and reinforcing the social infrastructure, for instance through family care or voluntary work.

Demographic change also implies increasing needs in elderly care, and therefore opportunities for job creation in this domain. As far as the job market is concerned, population ageing could be translated into more women employment since a greater involvement of grand-parents in family life could ease motherly charges.

### **3. POLICY MEASURES REQUIRED TO AVERT SUCH THREATS OR EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITIES AND HENCE PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

*What policy measures would your organisation recommend to preserve or promote intergenerational solidarity? What obstacles need to be overcome to implement such policies; in particular, is there a lack of awareness and resistance to change?*

Overall, the traditional "school-work-retirement" pattern will need to be reconsidered, and this can be seen as a chance, just as it can raise difficulties. Policy measures, notably in family, employment, healthcare and social policy will be requested to accompany this change.

Although there is now a great level of awareness regarding demographic challenges, they affect all life domains, and taking policy measures to tackle them therefore arises various obstacles. At the regional level, it is however certainly more appropriate to speak about difficulties to change than about resistance to change. Regions don't necessarily lack political will to tackle demographic change, but need support to do so.

### **4. ROLE OF THE EU IN PROMOTING THE RIGHT POLICY RESPONSES**

*Is there a specific role for the EU in relation to intergenerational solidarity? What measures could be taken at the level of the EU in addition to the existing EU policies? In particular, is a European Year an appropriate instrument?*

The AER believes that the European Union plays an important role in creating a society that responds appropriately to demographic change. Therefore, the AER is glad that the European Commission is committed to seeking solutions to ageing and potential intergenerational tensions.

Actions undertaken by the European Union to promote intergenerational solidarity could include the establishment of a European funding programme that is oriented towards the opportunities resulting from demographic change, stimulates innovative projects in areas such as independent living or e-health, and focuses on young people as well as on senior citizens.

In the opinion of the AER, a European Year could be a useful instrument as it enables to

draw the attention of the stakeholders on a particular topic, and give them the incentives to search for creative solutions to the issues raised by demographic change. In the same time, the non-binding character of this instrument leaves to the national, regional and local levels of governance the freedom to take the policy adjustments they judge appropriate.

## **5. TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES FOR A EUROPEAN YEAR**

*Given the limited resources available for a European Year, what topics and types of intervention should it focus on? How could it achieve the greatest possible mobilisation of stakeholders at all levels (EU, national, regional, local, company, sector) and thus maximise the impact of the European Year?*

The AER is convinced that the current demographic trends will affect not only the labour market or healthcare, but also family relationships and solidarity between the generations. Therefore, according to the AER, the topics covered by the European Year should include:

- Health: the promotion of good health, the adaptation of healthcare to the needs of a changing society, formal and informal care;
- Family policy: tax advantages for families with children, access to more flexible childcare arrangement, independent living solutions (linked to ICT development);
- Social policies: deter social exclusion, reflections on urban planning to guarantee intergenerational peace, solidarity and European values;
- Immigration: launch a debate on immigration, integration of immigrants on the job market;
- Education and employment: changing work patterns, voluntary work, part-time work, senior employment, work-life balance, transition between the educational sphere and the job market, lifelong learning, digital literacy, promotion of jobs and studies in elderly care;
- Structural changes: transparency of public finances, debate on retirement age and retirement funding schemes;

Regarding the types of intervention, the AER would like to underline the importance of involving the regional level. Indeed, it is an ideal context in which to establish a platform for facilitating and stimulating the opportunities and challenges resulting from demographic change.

Launching a deep reflection on the sustainability of the way our society is built (3 life stages: education, work, retirement) is necessary. This thinking on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity at European scale could take place through a wide range of activities involving different actors: dialogue with citizens, conferences and stakeholder contributions through Web 2.0 tools for a participatory approach.

Although Europe is the continent where demographic change is the most topical, international cooperation could also be an interesting way to get fresh ideas on the issue.

## **6. YOUR ORGANISATION'S CONTRIBUTION TO A EUROPEAN YEAR**

*How could your organisation contribute to the success of a European Year? What activities could it develop?*

Within the framework of the activities of the ALIVE network (a review of regional policy for care of the elderly to meet demographic changes) and the organisation of several conferences dedicated to demographic change, the AER has acquired a lot of

expertise in this area.

In order to contribute to a European Year on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, the AER could:

- launch a consultation among its member regions to identify best practices in the area of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity and gather the results of this consultation in a report
- organise seminars to inform and exchange knowledge on the opportunities of demographic change
- organise regional debates on controversy topics relating to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity

**7. WHAT SUPPORT WOULD YOUR ORGANISATION REQUIRE TO PLAY A MAJOR PART IN A EUROPEAN YEAR?**

*Please explain what support your organisation would require from public authorities to make a significant contribution to the success of a European Year.*

AER's contribution to the European Year could be supported by some help in the identification of experts and speakers. A facilitated access to data and key research findings in the field of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity could also improve the impact of the contribution of our organisation.

Financial support would enable the AER to organise different activities and conferences on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, in addition to its usual events.