

CONCERTED RESPONSE TO THE GREEN PAPER ON AGEING

Re.: Comments to the Green Paper on Ageing

To Whom it May Concern,

On behalf of the Europe-wide and multi-stakeholder community working for the wellbeing of older adults, including the representatives of the five EU research and innovation projects - [SmartWork](#), [Ageing@Work](#), [sustAGE](#), [CO-ADAPT](#) and [See Far](#) - that aim to develop smart, person-centred and technology-powered solutions to support health and wellbeing and thus workability and productivity of ageing people in working environments, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the newly released Green Paper on Ageing.

The fact that the European Commission takes the initiative to mainstream the topic of ageing in the EU policies is timely, relevant and well-structured. Appreciating this, we call for the better recognition of the potential and the role of new technologies in keeping the older people at work and in good health in the Green Paper and the future policy responses. New technologies relate here to the digital solutions and include the AI-based tools.

The European population will grow in the decade 2016-2025 by about 9.5 million, reaching nearly 450 million people. However, due to the increasing share of the older adults' age range, the available active labour force will be lower and older than in the past. The only workforce age group in the EU experiencing growth as a whole will be that over 55 years old¹.

¹ Publications Office of the European Union, "Future skill needs in Europe: critical labour force trends", 2016

For well over a decade now, Europe has been looking for strategies to effectively increase the labour force participation of older workers and reduce the rates of early retirement and labour market exit. However, unemployment amongst older people remains particularly high, with the EU employment rate of 55-64 year old reaching only 55.3% by 2016².

Ill health incapacity is a major cause of labour market exit before the age of 60³. Many physical changes associated with ageing including decline in vision, hearing and psychomotor coordination are estimated to start as early as the age of 50. Furthermore, health chronic conditions prevalence in the case of people aged 50+ is very high, with every second person having hypertension and/or some other chronic disease⁴. Older workers experience specific challenges from health conditions and increasing care needs to difficulties in adapting to the rapidly changing working environments to increasing accessibility needs.

Thus, the Commission proposal to embrace the life course approach that is based on healthy ageing and life long learning is very welcome, as it represents the concrete application of the “Making the most out of our working lives” chapter in the Green Paper. A wide approach taking into account different aspects of ageing and its impact on health and economy is needed, indeed. In particular, addressing the mutual exchange possibilities between different generations in working contexts also comes as a priority, in a world where we can expect to be working (and will be urged to be productive) later and longer than before.

However, we are left with the impression that the “wide range of solutions” that the Commission was striving for, excluded the number of ideas, tools, methods or approaches that are currently developed, applied, popularised and made available through e.g. initiatives and projects like ours - the technological solutions that can support health, wellbeing and workability of the older people.

The Green Paper says: “Despite recent increases, the employment rate among older workers in the EU remains lower than the average”. The ICT-enabled solutions (e.g. AI-based tools to address the challenges faced by older workers, and their employers), in a holistic way, are providing the tools and services to support an age-friendly working and living environment. They can actually help reach higher productivity, life and work satisfaction, and inclusion of the older workers in the labour market.

However, those technologies need to be implemented wisely, to avoid exclusion, segregation between young and old, and a potential abuse. While being attracted by the new technologies, we cannot forget that they might be a barrier for the older generation, and the AI-based tools, if not designed properly, might raise ethical questions by e.g. interfering with privacy or their adoption and practical use being influenced by digital gap between them.

² European Commission, Eurostat: Employment and unemployment statistics Url: <http://europea.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/main-tables>

³ D Sinclair, J. Watson, B. Beach “Working longer: an EU perspective”, international Longevity Centre - 2013

⁴ J. Liang, J M Bennett et al. ‘Gender difference in functional status in middle and older age: are there any age variations?’ J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci, 63(5), 2008

Thus, here are some principles we would suggest to be followed when promoting the technological solutions for “Making the most out of our working lives”:


- The technologies should be designed in such a way that they are based on the needs of the users and take into account their available skills and resources (in terms of financial, material and digital skills).
- As the office workers have a problem to re-enter the labour market because of their lack of digital skills to use technological solutions, adequate, specific and adapted training(s) should be offered.
- More effort should be put to promoting the positive aspects of a longer working experience and reskilling among the older people, including health and wellbeing, financial and social aspects.
- Cross-sectoral action and responsibility should be promoted, where the industry has a crucial role in not only providing but also adapting technologies and tools introduced to their working environment to the needs of older employees.
- The deployment of technologies should take into account the socio-economic aspects, i.e. the availability of the devices and the internet, and their cost, as well as health and digital literacy of the users.

We believe that with the wide engagement of different actors representing the older people, industry, health and wellbeing, as well as labour organisations and the developers of the technologies, we can bring the real change and ensure the bright future for the older generations in the European Union, as well as prosperity of the labour markets.


Your sincerely,
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CONCERTED RESPONSE BETWEEN THE PROJECTS:

