



European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012)

European Implementation Assessment

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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Ex-Post Impact Assessment Unit

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In-Depth Analysis

On 5 November 2014, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) requested an implementation report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, which triggered an automatic implementation assessment from DG EPRS.

This analysis has been drawn up by the Ex-Post Impact Assessment Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, within the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services. It looks at the implementation of the given act (the Decision establishing the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012) on the basis of the existing documents, with special attention given to the Parliament's input and the Commission's report, based on an external evaluation.

Abstract

2012 was the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations - with objectives set by a Decision of the Parliament and the Council, adopted on 14 September 2011. Following an external evaluation, the European Commission presented its Report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of that European Year on 15 September 2014. This paper looks at the context and concrete initiatives that were undertaken before, during, and after 2012, and also considers the Parliament's input into the Decision establishing the European Year. It comes to the conclusion that the four specific objectives set by the Decision establishing EY2012 were largely met, while the creation of an 'active ageing culture in Europe' (the general objective) might still require further, additional efforts.

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Executive summary

Viewing an ageing European society as both a challenge and an opportunity, the European Union declared 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. The Decision adopted by the European Parliament and Council in September 2011 established the objectives, content of measures, and the budget for this initiative. It contained specific provisions on coordination with Member States, and at the Union and international level. It also obliged the European Commission to assess its implementation and results, especially with regard to any lasting effects which were to be produced for the promotion of active ageing across the Union.

Preparatory efforts involved public consultation with various stakeholders and resulted in the creation of the 'EY2012 Coalition', managed by a network called AGE-Platform Europe. During 2012, there were hundreds of separate initiatives at all levels in the European Union and beyond. At the European level, conferences were organised by the European Commission, special programmes such as 'Generations@school' and EU Awards were created, and publications intended to support other stakeholders were issued - from a special Eurobarometer Survey to guides and brochures. All of them were presented on a dedicated website, and partly managed by a communications contractor. At national and regional level, there was a wide variety of initiatives, covering conferences, debates, trainings and else (with examples indicated in a certain Roadmap, updated at the end of the year), including separate websites and other communication means. In accordance with the requirements of the original Decision, national coordinators were engaged in facilitating cooperation between those involved, and other EU institutions - such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions - which also contributed with opinions and events. Finally, attempts were made to ensure consistency with other Union policies and actions, either those already in place, or those launched during 2012.

The four specific objectives set by the Decision establishing EY2012 were largely met, even if it was not planned to indicate it in a quantitative manner. (1) The value of active ageing was successfully highlighted, solidarity between generations was promoted, and the potential of older persons was mobilised throughout the year, with significant positioning on political agendas at EU and national levels. (2) Multiple debates and exchanges of information were held, with more of the latter than the former, but the conditions were definitely created for enhanced mutual learning on how to promote active ageing policies, sharing good practices, and cooperating in the future. (3) The Active Ageing Index was developed with the aim of creating a consistent framework for commitment and action, , and the Council endorsed Guiding Principles for Member States to follow. Work is still under way on a Covenant on Demographic Change to bring together local and regional authorities and other stakeholders in order to support active and healthy ageing and develop age-friendly environments. (4) Promotion of activities helping to combat or overcome age-related discrimination, stereotypes and barriers, was assured throughout many of the initiatives and events.

The EY2012 general objective was formulated in a way which is difficult to measure. Without any doubt, relevant actors were mobilised in the promotion of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, consistent with the original Decision's legal base envisaging initiatives aimed at improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices. The extent to which it facilitated the creation of an 'active ageing culture in Europe' might still depend on the follow-up to at least some of the initiatives. In order to reach the goal of an age-friendly European Union by 2020, as proposed already in November 2011 by a Manifesto of the EY2012 Coalition, efforts could build on the success of the European Year 2012.

1. Background information

Before analysing the frame and content of the activities of the 2012 European Year's implementation (part 2) and their effects (part 3), a number of background elements should be presented to explain the context of these activities. This covers the institutional aspects, as well as such specific elements of the basic legislative act as the title and scope, financing issues and the legal basis.

1.1. Introduction

The issue of ageing European society, and multiple challenges that this process entails, has been a subject of attention of the EU institutions for a number of years. Multiple documents (including Parliament resolutions, Council conclusions, and Commission communications, among others) have proposed specific measures to address it in a number of ways¹. Following public consultations², the Council Conclusions from November 2009 (on 'Healthy and dignified ageing') and the Commission's legislative proposal³; the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (hereafter - **EY2012**) was established by [Decision 940/2011](#) (hereafter - **the Decision**) adopted on 14 September 2011 by the Parliament and the Council⁴.

As referred to in the Decision's recital 9, **active ageing is** - according to the World Health Organisation (WHO)⁵ - *the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing allows people to realise their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they need it.* In addition, the WHO underlines that interdependence with other people (family, neighbours, work associates and friends) and intergenerational solidarity are important tenets of active ageing.

A significant amount of work has been dedicated to the preparation of EY2012, especially after the adoption of the Decision. This is especially true with regard to the involvement of various stakeholders, which at the EU level took the form of an organised '**EY2012 Coalition**' managed by [AGE-Platform Europe](#) (a network established in early 2001) and comprising eventually more than 60 various organisations⁶.

In November 2011 the EY2012 Coalition called for an age-friendly European Union by 2020 in its joint [Manifesto](#), which included a list of recommendations on how to reach this goal at EU, national and local levels. Referring to the persistent economic and social crisis, amplified by demographic change, the **Manifesto** expressed a belief that EY2012 will be an

¹ Active ageing is also part of [Europe 2020](#) - *a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, which stressed the 'importance of the European Union's ability to meet the challenge of promoting a healthy and active ageing population to allow for social cohesion and higher productivity'.

² Including those described in the Commission's ex-ante evaluation - SEC(2010) 1002.

³ COM(2010) 462 final.

⁴ OJ L 246/5, 23.09.2011.

⁵ http://www.who.int/ageing/active_ageing/en/

⁶ <http://www.age-platform.eu/age-policy-work/solidarity-between-generations/campaign/927-list-of-contacts>

opportunity to encourage national and EU policy makers, together with other actors, to consider innovative solutions to address the impact of the crisis on European ageing societies. Signatories of the Manifesto called to make long lasting commitments to create an age-friendly European Union that would empower people to age in good health and to actively contribute to society in a way that is fair and sustainable for all generations.

1.2. Title and scope

The original proposal of the European Commission was to establish a European Year for Active Ageing. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), in its [Opinion](#) adopted on 20 October 2010⁷, considered that this short title was effective and that it implicitly included the principle of 'solidarity between generations' but also that it did not encompass the multiplicity of topics addressed. The EESC thus proposed a title 'European Year for active, healthy and dignified ageing' to convey the positive aspects of demographic change, benefitting ageing people themselves and society as a whole.

Following the suggestion of the Rapporteur, the Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs proposed to change the title of EY2012 into the '**European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations**', with a subheading 'Maintaining the vitality and respecting the dignity of all'. Eventually, following negotiations with the Council, 'Solidarity between Generations' was indeed added to the main title, and a supplementing phrase '*It shall promote the vitality and dignity of all*' to Article 1 (on Subject).

The geographical scope, described in Article 5 of the Decision⁸, was clearly aimed to cover - on a voluntary basis - all Member States, candidate countries, the Western Balkans and the EFTA/EEA countries. Of course, since participation was not obligatory, the onus was on the authorities and/or organisations from each country to take part in the EY2012; with the European Commission (or Union) representations often playing the role of triggers of activity. Moreover, only events from 27 EU Member States and Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein qualified for any EU financial support, so two points of the Decision's scope (candidate countries and those of Western Balkans - the latter introduced by the Council) remained largely unfulfilled. The highest number of EY2012 events was recorded in DE, ES, FR, IT, AT, PL and FI.

⁷ OJ C 51, 17.2.2011, p. 55.

⁸ Also added following an amendment proposed by the Parliament (AM44 in Kastler Report mentioned above).

1.3. The Parliament's input

It is worth mentioning that certain amendments proposed by the Parliament⁹ (reflecting also its [resolution](#) entitled 'Demographic challenge and solidarity between generations', adopted on 11 November 2010) raised the ambitions of EY2012 in comparison to the original proposal, by:

- stressing that **active ageing is not just about staying in employment** longer, but also being healthy and active in a number of ways; thus, it was proposed to strengthen or add - either among the overall or specific objectives - references to the need to provide better access to health and social services and to lifelong learning, to eliminating age-based discrimination, combating poverty and social exclusion and, in general, increasing awareness of the value of active ageing and of the useful contribution of older persons to society, family and economy¹⁰;
- transmitting the message to the widest public possible, and aiming at long-lasting effects, so that an '**active ageing culture**' is developed in Europe; eventually, this was reflected in an addition to the overall objective of EY2012: *to facilitate the creation of such culture, based on society for all ages*;
- ensuring specific, albeit limited, **budgetary means** from the EU budget to support the actions at all levels; the EMPL report introduced a specific budget for that European Year, with an amount of at least 6 million euro, out of which 4 were to come from the EU budget for 2012; the Committee on Budget submitted a favourable opinion assessing the financial compatibility of such a modification of the Commission proposal.

1.4. Financing

The original proposal did not envisage a separate budget for EY2012. The Parliament's report (based on EMPL amendments, and BUDG positive opinion - as mentioned above) asked for a 'financial envelope' from the EU budget margins, with a provisional amount of 4 million euro in commitment appropriations in the budget 2012. Following negotiations with the Council, part of the EY budget (2.3 million euro) was to be assured from the 2011 budget, and the rest (at least 2.7 million euro) from 2012¹¹. The destination of this support was eventually expressed in recital 29 of the Decision: '*Participation of relevant Union-level networks in the European Year should be encouraged and supported with adequate resources*'. Recital 28, which was added on the basis of Parliament's modified amendment (which in EMPL report was aimed at establishing 'simplified procedures' for some activities) introduced a specification that '*in order to ensure the participation of a diverse range of organisations, smaller scale events and operations should, as far as possible, be facilitated during the European Year.*'

⁹ As set out in [Kastler Report](#), adopted by EMPL unanimously on 16 March 2011.

¹⁰ Among the new specific objectives proposed by EMPL report, the last one (AM33 on structural fiscal policies in favour of non-profit organisations carrying out activities in support of ageing people and of the disadvantaged parts of the population) did not find its way into the final Decision.

¹¹ This was specified in a Joint declaration, which also clarified that both parts shall be used from existing resources without utilizing available margins.

The Commission's report pointed out¹² that the **total amount of 5 million euro** - lower than in previous European Years - was provided from existing financial appropriations, and mainly spent on communication activities (including support for those at national level), opening and closing events (see below), and the external evaluation contract. Interestingly, the external evaluation considered that lack of bigger funding resulted in less competition among the stakeholders - apparently considered normal in case of European grants available for civil-society organisations and possibly also authorities - which in turn allowed for more cooperation among them¹³.

The national, regional and local initiatives with EY2012 were mostly funded from government sources, as well as non-governmental ones, and only additionally from specific EU programmes and private companies.

The external evaluation noticed that 'in-kind and non-EU resources can be mobilised effectively and outcomes and impacts are not necessarily directly proportional to direct levels of spending'.¹⁴

1.5. Legal basis

The Decision establishing EY2012 has one principal legal basis - **Article 153(2)** of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (point "a" of which speaks of initiatives aimed at improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices [...], excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States) - but also makes other references, which can clarify its objectives (discussed in detail below). Interestingly, only the first two of the following articles were mentioned in the original EC proposal¹⁵:

- Article 147(1) TFEU on supporting and complementing actions of Member States, as well as encouraging cooperation between them, in contributing to a high level of employment;
- Article 153(1) TFEU on supporting and complementing activities of Member States on working conditions, the integration of persons excluded from the labour market and the combating of social exclusion;
- Article 3(3) of the TEU on combating social exclusion and discrimination, and on promoting social justice and protection, equality between women and men and solidarity between generations;
- Article 174 TFEU on particular attention for regions with severe and permanent demographic handicaps.

¹² COM(2014) 562 final, p 4.

¹³ Ecorys report, p. 97.

¹⁴ Idem, pp. 95/96.

¹⁵ EMPL report also proposed to add a separate reference to Article 156 TFEU on cooperation and coordination between Member States with regard to social policy.

The reference to Article 25 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (in which *'the Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life'*) was also mentioned already in the Commission's proposal¹⁶.

1.6. The Commission's assessment

In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the European Commission was obliged to provide an assessment report by 30 June 2014, in particular with 'details of implementation and results to serve as a basis for future Union policies, measures and actions in this field'. In addition to the specific requirements about gender mainstreaming and disabilities' accessibility, that report was also supposed to show 'how the European Year has produced lasting effects for the promotion of active ageing across the Union'.

Following a year-long external evaluation (undertaken by Ecorys, a consultancy based in Rotterdam, NL), the results of which were published in April 2014¹⁷, the European Commission adopted its [Report](#) on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations on 15 September 2014¹⁸. Specific elements of that evaluation and the Commission's report are being referred to below, in relevant parts of this In-Depth Analysis. It is worth noting here that most of the qualitative indicators suggested by the Commission's [ex-ante evaluation](#) back in 2010¹⁹ were not really developed - or replaced by different ones - in the monitoring exercise that eventually took place in 2013.

¹⁶ EMPL report proposed to add references to Articles 34 and 35 of that Charter, on entitlements to social security and services, and on health protection.

¹⁷ Available - in English, with [executive summary](#) also in [DE](#) and [FR](#) - on the Commission's [website](#).

¹⁸ COM(2014) 562 final, available in all languages.

¹⁹ SEC(2010) 1002, pp. 21-23.

2. Frame and content of the activities in 2012

In accordance with Article 3 of the Decision establishing the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012), **the measures** to be taken to achieve its objectives were the following:

- conferences, events and initiatives, with the active participation of all relevant stakeholders;
- information, promotion and educational campaigns, making use of multimedia;
- exchange of information, experience and good practice, for example through networks of stakeholders; and
- research and surveys on a Union, national or regional scale, and dissemination of the results.

All of these activities were to involve all generations, take into account **gender mainstreaming**, and - if addressed to the wider public - be easily accessible (including to persons with disabilities). With regard to the gender issue, it turned out that much more attention was paid to the situation of older women than men, including the level of representation among speakers and participants of all events. With regard to **disabilities** (apart from the fact that it was the subject of many debates as such), it was duly taken into account by most of the events' organisers, but the Commission admitted that the EY2012 website (which had options for larger fonts) 'could have been designed in an even more accessible way to a wider range of people'²⁰.

2.1. EU-level events

It was the European Commission's responsibility to implement EY2012 at the Union level, with a number of specific tasks set out in Article 6 of the Decision (such as: convening meetings for the purpose of coordinating activities; facilitating and supporting actions at national, regional and local levels; and making active ageing and solidarity between generations a priority theme in its representations in the Member States and in supporting EU-level networks).

As with any other major theme, or a European Year, two big **conferences** were held at Union level: the opening event on 18-19 January 2012 in Copenhagen (during the Danish Presidency in the Council), and the closing one on 10 December 2012 in Nicosia (Cyprus, whose Presidency followed). Additional conferences were organised in March (for journalists), April (on Innovation Partnership), June (on integrated policy-making), July (on the social potential of active ageing²¹) and November (on adult learning), most of them in Brussels.

²⁰ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 9.

²¹ A major publication "[Population ageing in Europe: facts, implications and policies](#)" was presented then, reviewing the outcomes of EU-funded research in social sciences.

Specific initiatives, outside the framework of a standard conference set-up, were:

- The [Generations@school](#) initiative to bring older people into dialogue with pupils, in which around 480 schools took part and which attracted significant public attention. It should be noted though, that this project was repeated - and managed again by the European Commission's communications contractor (P.A.U. Education) - only in the following year (2013);
- [EU awards](#) for Generations@school competition, social entrepreneurs, workplaces for all ages, journalists (in two categories: written and audio-visual), life-story challenges and age-friendly environments, with a final ceremony held on 13 November 2012 in Brussels; altogether, there were 1386 candidatures in those competitions);
- The **Seniorforce Day**, which was first planned as a pan-European event, marking the International Day of Older Persons (1 October), but was then replaced by separate national ones²², involving over 11,000 individual participants in total.

A dedicated [website](#) was established for EY2012, but it had ultimately less visitors recorded (212,822) than it was the case with the previous European Years. The website contained basic information in 23 languages, and references to national events in the relevant language plus English.

The Commission reported that five **publications** were 'released to support stakeholders'²³:

- [Eurobarometer Special Survey](#) on active ageing, including many interesting findings - such as the one that only 42% of Europeans are concerned about the ageing population, and as many as 53 % reject the idea of compulsory retirement age;
- [Eurostat portrait](#) on active ageing and solidarity between generations, providing details in relation to the ageing EU population, different stages and generations of people moving from employment towards retirement, demand for healthcare services and budgetary implications for national governments, the consumption patterns of the 'silver economy' as well as housing and living conditions, and the active participation of older generations within society with a particular focus on inter-generational issues, leisure pursuits and social activities undertaken by older persons;
- [Brochure](#) 'How to promote active ageing in Europe', co-produced with the Committee on Regions and AGE Platform Europe²⁴, which specifically showed what actions can local and regional actors take, and indicated the available sources of potential funding;

²² The dedicated [website](#) thus remained in the forward looking stage.

²³ EC report, p. 5.

²⁴ In the introduction, co-signed by Commissioner Andor and Presidents of the other two institutions, the EY2012 was said to raise awareness of the contribution that older people make to society, highlight many examples of good practice in facilitating active ageing and - most importantly - encourage and mobilise policymakers and relevant stakeholders, at all levels, to set themselves goals on active ageing and to take action.

- Social Europe [Guide](#) '*Demography, active ageing and pensions*', which - among other conclusions - stated that active ageing 'recognises what older people can do and identifies what they need in order to allow them to do more'²⁵;
- [Brochure](#) on '*The EU contribution to Active Ageing and Solidarity between generations*', presenting instruments that can support an active ageing policy, that is European legislation, funding through the Structural and Cohesion Funds, research and innovation initiatives, as well as numerous strategies, programmes, processes and initiatives designed to facilitate mutual learning between Member States and regions.

Finally, the main communication effort was outsourced to a contractor ([P.A.U. Education](#)) maintaining a network of media relations, that was also presented in a monthly newspaper.

2.2. National, trans-national and regional events

Throughout 2012, there were as many as **748 initiatives** recorded in a specially created database, available on the EY2012 website. 585 among them were identified as national initiatives, and 163 as transnational. An interesting 'preliminary consideration' given by the Ecorys evaluation is that 'since the EU did not provide any country-specific grant funding, it is difficult to distinguish activities promoted *because* of the Year and activities that were instead *framed* in the Year'.²⁶

Separately from the database on the official website, AGE Platform Europe provided a list of exemplary planned events in its **Roadmap** presented in January 2012, and complemented it with additional ones later. At the end of EY2012, an [updated version of the Roadmap](#) was presented, which also included multiple examples of key papers that the EY2012 Coalition members themselves produced in 2012, as well as a significant number of commitments and recommendations for the future.²⁷

In addition to the EU website mentioned above, 19 countries established national ones. Half from the 30 participating countries also appointed national EY2012 Ambassadors (115 persons in total, with precise numbers varying greatly among the 15 states), with personalities of various backgrounds to promote active ageing and intergenerational solidarity among wider public.

²⁵ Guide, p. 57.

²⁶ Ecorys report, p. 26.

²⁷ All of them available at the AGE Platform Europe [website](#).

2.3. Institutional aspects

It is also important to take account of the procedural requirements which facilitated the implementation of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012). Appointing a national coordinator in each Member State - which was an obligation under Article 4(1) of the Decision - facilitated coordination of activities in each country, and allowed to maintain necessary links with the European Commission and various stakeholders in other places. The **national coordinators** were in fact responsible for fostering the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, in the activities of EY2012.

Under Article 4(3), Member States were asked to inform the European Commission of their work **programmes on national activities** related to the European Year. These programmes - as reported later by the Commission - reflected different needs, priorities and resources that each country had for EY2012.

In accordance with Article 6(7) of the Decision, the European Parliament, Member States, and the advisory committees were to be associated in the activities of this European Year, as was the case with others before.

A special Coordination Group was created within the **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC), which held four public hearings on various topics related to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, concluded by a [conference](#) in Brussels on 3 December and a summary [report](#). In a separate [Opinion](#) on participation of older people in society, the EESC made a number of recommendations to decision-makers at different levels, as well as to stakeholders and other involved parties.

The **Committee of Regions** (CoR) contributed to EY2012 with a major [Forum](#) on 14 February, where representatives from various administration levels, institutions, social services and associations discussed how local and regional actors could improve the conditions for active ageing. On 4 May, the Committee of the Regions adopted its [Opinion](#) on Active Ageing: *Innovation, Smart Health and Better Lives*, which inter alia called for a Covenant to promote age-friendly environments across the EU (see below). The CoR was also involved in the preparation of one of the brochures mentioned above.

2.4. Coordination with other EU policies and actions:

As stated by Article 9 of the Decision, the Commission - together with Member States - was to ensure that measures taken to implement EY2012 were consistent with any other Union, national and regional schemes and initiatives that helped to attain the Year's objectives.

Eventually, the subject matter of European Year on Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations can be matched either with those policies and actions which were in place before 2012, or with activities that were launched during its operation.

2.4.1. Consistency with existing projects

In the first of the two cases mentioned above, it is worth noting the following policies and actions:

- Employment policies and guidelines - the Council's [Decision](#) 2010/707 on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, adopted on 21 October 2010, called for policies to promote active ageing, raising employments rates of older workers, as well as increasing their employability through up-skilling and participation in lifelong learning schemes;
- The Digital Agenda for Europe - the Commission's [Communication](#) of 19 May 2010²⁸, which stressed the importance of ICT (information and communication technology) for the ageing population;
- The Innovation Union - the Commission proposed, under this initiative, to launch a [European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing](#) (EIP-AHA)²⁹, with the aim of increasing by two the average number of healthy years of life by 2020. The priority actions set out by Commission's Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) to meet the challenge of ageing focus on three main areas: prevention, care and cure, and independent living;
- The [European Disability Strategy](#)³⁰ - within this approach, the actions to support independent living and inclusion in the community are of relevance to those older persons who are in need of special assistance. As pointed out in recital 24 of the Decision establishing EY2012, the EU and Member States are all signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that contains also provisions specific for old people;
- The [European Day of Intergenerational Solidarity](#) - celebrated on 29 April since its establishment in 2009, and referred to - following Parliament's and Council's amendments - in the Decision's recital 25. The *Generations@school* initiative, described above, was also built around this date. The AGE Platform Europe continues to support and coordinate actions in that respect³¹.
- As indicated in recital 27 of the Decision, various existing programmes, funds and action plans are also addressing active ageing.

²⁸ COM(2010) 245 final.

²⁹ COM(2012) 83 final.

³⁰ COM(2010) 636 final.

³¹ For events that took place in a number of countries in 2014, see <http://www.age-platform.eu/age-campaigns/solidarity-between-generations/campaign/2084-members-initiatives-in-2014> .

2.4.2. Consistency with additional projects

The European Commission's activities (managed by its various Directorates General) indicated by the external evaluator as complementary to EY2012 were:

- The publication of the [White Paper on Pensions](#)³² (DG EMPL);
- The [Demographic Forum](#), held every two years since 2006³³ (DG EMPL);
- [2nd Health Programme](#) (DG SANCO); and
- The planned [Accessibility Act](#) (DG JUST).

Other DGs of the European Commission (such as CONNECT, EAC and RTD) were also involved, and took part in the work of a specific Inter-service Group.

On a slightly critical note, it is surprising that in its assessment report, the Commission simply refers³⁴ to these activities (including the one to Accessibility Act, which has still not been published), without providing any details as to their real content and perspectives.

³² COM(2012) 55 final.

³³ In 2012, it was rather the [World Demographic and Ageing Forum](#) that took place.

³⁴ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 7.

3. The objectives and their effects

The objectives set by the Decision were 'generally uncontroversial'³⁵, in respect of the fact that social issues remain mostly a national competence. As the Commission stated in its final report, the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012) 'sought to address the challenges of an ageing Europe through active ageing in the areas of employment, participation and independent living, looking both at the needs and rights of older people as well as their potentials and their contribution to the economy and society.' This part of the In-Depth Analysis looks at each of the specific objectives separately (while being aware of the interlinks between them)³⁶, and then at the general objective, before providing a brief description of the external evaluation's findings.

3.1. The specific objectives:

3.1.1. Raising general awareness of the value of active ageing, ensuring its high position on political agendas, and promoting solidarity between generations and mobilising the potential of older persons.

Full text of **point a** in the second paragraph of the Decision's Article 2: *to raise general awareness of the value of active ageing and its various dimensions and to ensure that it is accorded a prominent position on the political agendas of stakeholders at all levels in order to highlight the useful contribution that older people make to society and the economy, raising the appreciation thereof, to promote active ageing, solidarity between generations and the vitality and the dignity of all people, and to do more to mobilise the potential of older people, regardless of their origin, and to enable them to lead an independent life;*

What has been done?

From the total number of 748 initiatives recorded in the EY2012 database, 158 (21%) were specifically devoted to information and awareness-raising, second only to exchange of experience, and followed by 143 events dealing with comprehensive strategy and action programmes. In addition, 83 trainings were held, and 91 identified as conferences, seminars and public debates.

The development of national policies, strategies and comprehensive programmes in a number of countries (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, LT, MT, PL, RO, SE, SI and SK) was identified by the external evaluation as evidence of the policy impact of the EY2012.

In its [Declaration on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations \(2012\): The Way Forward](#), adopted on 6 December 2012, the Council considered

³⁵ Ecorys report, p. xvi.

³⁶ Second paragraph of Article 2 of the Decision.

that demographic change in Europe can be 'successfully tackled through a positive life-course approach that focuses on the potential of all generations and particularly of older age groups', and agreed on a number of political measures to support that approach. The most general - and final one among them was that active ageing perspective 'should be mainstreamed across all relevant policy areas', which can be quite ambitious if taken seriously and in a consistent manner. Guiding Principles, which were annexed to that important Declaration, are described below.

The European Commission declared in its final report that various tools, which have been developed during EY2012 (see specifically those described below in point 3), will be supported, and that policy makers are invited to make the most of them³⁷. Some recommendations, such as longer careers and long-term care have been included in the framework of the European Semester.

How was it assessed by those involved?

On the basis of an extensive examination of national stakeholders' opinions, the external evaluation indicated that there is broad agreement that awareness raising was actually the best achieved outcome, but the detailed indications of various groups of respondents show that policy makers of all levels have been made aware of the importance of active ageing mostly 'to some extent' only.³⁸

As reported by Ecorys, 18 out of 24 national coordinators stated that the target groups of active ageing policies were broadened thanks at least partly to EY2012.³⁹ At the same time, also according to the evaluation, the majority of national coordinators considered for example that private businesses (which were added as a separate target of EY2012 during the legislative process) were not reached, although it is pointed out that a certain number (73) of the initiatives recorded in the EY2012 database was actually promoted by this group.

Was the objective reached?

The external evaluation provides data (based on the measurements of the communications contractor of the European Commission - P.A.U. Education) which indicate the number of mentions of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations in **media** outlets in three categories: print (6.162 articles), online (3.432 articles) and tv/radio (329 broadcasts). The specific numbers vary between countries, with print mentions being usually higher than on-line ones (the eight notable exceptions where it is the other way around are HU, MT, NL, PT, RO, FI, SE and UK), and a very low tv/radio coverage almost everywhere (apart from CZ, DE, IT, PL, SI, SK - but only DE and SI higher than 50). Limited success with media was attributed by some respondents to the lack of sufficient funding that would enable a sustained communication campaign.

³⁷ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 12.

³⁸ Ecorys report, p. 62.

³⁹Idem, p. 55.

Taking into account the scale of the activities undertaken, raising awareness among the general public might only be an effect following an increased activity of the stakeholders involved in the matter, as well as the increased importance attributed to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity by the relevant authorities. The Commission admitted that this specific objective has been largely achieved through EU-level and national initiatives and events, which were more often targeted to relevant organisations and civil society groups than individuals⁴⁰. Whether or not the potential of older persons was sufficiently mobilised, remains an open question.

3.1.2. Stimulating debate, exchange of information and mutual learning, so that active ageing policies are promoted, good practices are identified and disseminated, and cooperation is encouraged.

Full text of **point b** in the second paragraph of the Decision's Article 2: *to stimulate debate, to exchange information and to develop mutual learning between Member States and stakeholders at all levels in order to promote active ageing policies, to identify and disseminate good practice and to encourage cooperation and synergies;*

What has been done?

Most of the events, especially the opening conferences - both at EU and national level, qualify to have contributed to this objective. Success stories and examples were both debated throughout the year in all participating countries (with a specific highlight of granting special awards to the best ones in seven categories⁴¹, made available in the publicly available database). Exchange of experience was actually the most numerous (172) aim among the initiatives recorded in the EY2012 database. With regard to the significance of the intergenerational solidarity, it should be noted that from the total number of initiatives (748), the highest number (271) was in fact on 'bridging generations'.

How was it assessed by those involved?

According to the external evaluation, about 20% of national coordinators indicated that 'their EY2012 was inspired by practices from other Member States, and the same number applied to involving organisations from other States in their national events.⁴² But in more general terms, only 51% of national stakeholders considered this specific objective to be achieved to some extent.⁴³

⁴⁰ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 9.

⁴¹ For the winners, see <http://ec.europa.eu/archives/ey2012/ey2012main3bf2.html>

⁴² Ecorys report, pp. 54 and 55.

⁴³ Idem, p. 63.

The AGE Platform Europe acknowledged for example the value of establishing contacts with additional organisations, and EY2012 allowed many new ones to join this initiative at least for the duration of events.

The European Commission considered that this specific objective was achieved successfully, with a focus on good practice dissemination.

Was the objective reached?

Looking at the high number and wide variety of initiatives that contributed to EY2012, it is easy to see that debates were indeed held, information exchanged, and learning took place. Their organisers and participants either promoted or created active ageing policies, EU awards allowed for clear identification and wide publicity of best practices, and many of them engaged in cooperation which would be difficult to arrange without the momentum of a European Year.

At the same time, it could be said that the scope of activities remained mostly within a framework of people and organisations already involved in the matter of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, whereas a more ambitious goal would be to reach out outside that framework, in order to make a real difference. Ecorys came to the conclusion, for example, that key events of EY2012 were 'more aimed at information sharing than debate in strict sense'.⁴⁴

Another interesting observation of the external evaluation was that the EIP-AHA was the main networking activity of AGE Platform Europe at the end of 2013, where - probably due to a narrower scope - only a few of the Stakeholders' Coalition members were still present. This also shows that there is always a risk of low sustainability of activities launched and links created during the project (such as a subject-specific European Year), if care is not taken to establish mechanisms to maintain them afterwards.

3.1.3. Creation of a 'framework for commitment and concrete action', which would lead to innovative solutions and long-term strategies.

Full text of **point c** in the second paragraph of the Decision's Article 2: *to offer a framework for commitment and concrete action to enable the Union, Member States and stakeholders at all levels, with the involvement of civil society, the social partners and businesses and with particular emphasis on promoting information strategies, to develop innovative solutions, policies and long-term strategies, including comprehensive age-management strategies related to employment and work, through specific activities, and to pursue specific objectives related to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity;*

⁴⁴ Ecorys report, p. 63.

What has been done?

The most relevant stakeholders with regard to this specific objective were of course the Member States, who were encouraged to either strengthen, or develop policy agendas and strategies on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. Each Member State approached this in a different way, with some examples of high-level documents (such as the Austrian Federal Plan for Senior Citizens) and administrative structures (such as the Belgian Federal Advisory Council for older people).

The single most illustrative example of a concrete idea that was implemented during EY2012 and remains in use afterwards, is the [Active Ageing Index](#) (AAI)⁴⁵, developed by the European Commission together with the Population Unit of UNECE⁴⁶ and the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna⁴⁷. The AAI serves to promote the untapped potential of the older people, by analytically - with 22 indicators using available statistics, separately for each country - measuring the level to which they live independent lives, participate in paid employment and social activities. According to the external evaluation, a new calculation of the Active Ageing Index is planned in the future⁴⁸.

The Council endorsed, on 6 December 2012, [Guiding Principles](#) on Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations⁴⁹, indicated as the basis for preserving and further developing the legacy of EY2012 at European, national, regional and local level. The Principles comprise a preamble (starting with a reference to the projected 50% increase of the ration of people above 65 to those of working age [15-64] by 2050) and are divided into three parts:

- **Employment** (including continuing vocational education and training, healthy work conditions, age management strategies, employment services for older workers, preventing age discrimination, employment-friendly tax/benefit systems, transfer of experience, and reconciliation of work and care);
- **Participation in society** (including income security, social inclusion, senior volunteering, life-long learning, participation in decision-making, and support for informal carers); and
- **Independent living** (including health promotion and disease prevention, adapted housing and services, accessible and affordable transport, age-friendly environments and goods and services, and maximising autonomy in long-term care).

⁴⁵ See also <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1837&furtherNews=yes>

⁴⁶ United Nations Economic Committee for Europe

⁴⁷ <http://www.euro.centre.org/>

⁴⁸ Ecorys report, p. 22.

⁴⁹ Agreed jointly by the Social Protection Committee and the Employment Committee, and annexed to the Council Declaration on the EY2012 referred to above.

The use of both instruments mentioned above (Active Ageing Index and Guiding Principles) is among the recommendations of the [Social Investment Package](#) proposed by the European Commission⁵⁰, and which is guiding the use of the [European Social Fund](#).

A tangible follow-up to EY2012 is the selection of several grants to Member State authorities (managed by DG EMPL of the European Commission) to develop comprehensive strategies on active ageing⁵¹.

In order to achieve an age-friendly European Union by 2020, AGE Platform Europe and the EY2012 Stakeholders' Coalition proposed a **Covenant on Demographic Change**⁵² that would provide the necessary political framework to bring together a wide range of local and regional authorities and other stakeholders, in order to find smart and innovative solutions to support active and healthy ageing and develop age-friendly environments. This idea was further supported with the framework of a [virtual forum](#) on Age-Friendly Environments (AFE), set up in June 2013. Members of Parliament from three different groups tabled a [question](#) on that topic on 13 March 2013, and the European Commission [replied](#) two months later that it is 'preparing a joint project with the WHO to adapt the Global Age-friendly Cities Guide of WHO to the European context and to develop a monitoring tool'. At the time of writing of this Analysis, that project was still on-going. The results will feed into the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP AHA) and its action group on 'Innovation for age-friendly, buildings cities and environments'⁵³.

Within the framework of EIP-AHA mentioned above, the European Commission's DG SANCO and DG CONNECT were engaged, among other projects - also involving various stakeholders, and in the preparation of a European version of international guidelines for age-friendly buildings, cities and environments - to show best practices and stimulate innovation⁵⁴.

How was it assessed by those involved?

According to the Commission, the basic fact of civil society organisations' mobilisation for EY2012 should be regarded as an achievement, but it also noted that regional and local governments were not involved in all countries⁵⁵.

According to the external evaluation, the most widely confirmed result was that the existing networks were strengthened, and that new forms of working together were created between various stakeholders⁵⁶. At the same time, the objective of establishing new networks was 'rarely achieved'⁵⁷.

⁵⁰ COM(2013) 83 final.

⁵¹ Call for proposals [VP/2013/009](#). The projects are on-going.

⁵² The example given by the [Covenant of Mayors](#) committed to local sustainable energy.

⁵³ Nota bene, a draft written declaration (0048/2011) which called for such a Covenant, was proposed already in November 2011 but didn't get enough signatures of Members of Parliament within the required deadline.

⁵⁴ See http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/rs_catalogue.pdf.

⁵⁵ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Ecorys report, pp. 66/67.

⁵⁷ Idem, p. xvii.

Was the objective reached?

On the EU-level, the numerous initiatives (including innovative ones) demonstrate that an effort has been made for EY2012 to have a long-lasting effect, thanks to certain new structures and concepts. With regard to the individual Member States, the introduction of ageing-relevant elements into the European Semester process should also help not to lose the momentum.

It still remains to be seen how the Guiding Principles are applied throughout Europe, but the Commission was right to point out that they could contribute to the attainment of the employment and poverty reduction targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy⁵⁸.

On a more technical note, the external evaluation noticed the limited success of the Commission's plan to present policy commitments on the EY2012 website, suggesting that obtaining them from any level of governance always requires consultation which takes time, and that placing the results on an international platform may not have always been supported.⁵⁹

3.1.4. Promotion of activities helping to combat or overcome age-related discrimination, stereotypes and barriers.

Full text of **point d** in the second paragraph of the Decision's Article 2: *to promote activities which will help to combat age discrimination, to overcome age-related stereotypes and to remove barriers, particularly with regard to employability.*

What has been done?

Most of the EU-level and national activities could be listed under this specific objective, albeit in their content they would qualify as either awareness-raising (point 1 above) or debate and learning (point 2). Combatting age-discrimination was mentioned in many events and projects, including the aspect of employment opportunities.

The [Generations@school](#) project could be indicated as the single best example of how facilitating direct relations between generations can serve to overcome stereotypes related to age. According to the Ecorys report, this initiative 'promoted the concept that active ageing and youth empowerment can go hand in hand and do not represent conflicting policy priorities'.⁶⁰

The external evaluation's survey of national coordinators highlighted also a fact that from the publications prepared at the EU-level (see above), the highest demand was for the brochure 'How to promote active ageing in Europe'⁶¹, probably because it contained information on available EU funding instruments.

⁵⁸ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Ecorys report, p. 119.

⁶⁰ Idem, p. 118.

⁶¹ Idem, p. 32.

Also the fact that civil society organisations turned out to be the target group reached most during EY2012, could be considered positive in the long-run of this specific objective, as the activities mentioned by it are often best dealt with by social actors that have both the experience and knowledge in the area of active ageing, including necessary contacts with the authorities.

How was it assessed by those involved?

The European Commission considered this specific objective (added during the legislative process) as a general and horizontal one, and was thus not subject to separate analysis. In consequence, it was not singled out in questionnaires and assessment made by Ecorys and was not shown in that external evaluation's 'objectives tree'⁶².

Was the objective reached?

Although data was not available on the stakeholders' assessment of that objective, the overall implementation of EY2012 clearly shows that it has been reached. In fact, any activity related to active ageing and intergenerational activity - including all of those mentioned above - are *per se* elements that address and ultimately counter previously existing discrimination attitudes, stereotypes and barriers.

3.2. The overall objective:

General objective: Facilitating the creation of a sustainable active ageing culture in Europe, encompassing solidarity and cooperation between generations.

Full text of the **first paragraph** of the Decision's Article 2: *The overall objective of the European Year shall be to facilitate the creation of an active ageing culture in Europe based on a society for all ages. Within this framework, the European Year shall encourage and support the efforts of Member States, their regional and local authorities, social partners, civil society and the business community, including small and medium-sized enterprises, to promote active ageing and to do more to mobilise the potential of the rapidly growing population in their late 50s and over. In doing so, it shall foster solidarity and cooperation between generations, taking into account diversity and gender equality. Promoting active ageing means creating better opportunities so that older women and men can play their part in the labour market, combating poverty, particularly that of women, and social exclusion, fostering volunteering and active participation in family life and society and encouraging healthy ageing in dignity. This involves, inter alia, adapting working conditions, combating negative age stereotypes and age discrimination, improving health and safety at work, adapting lifelong learning systems to the needs of an ageing workforce and ensuring that social protection systems are adequate and provide the right incentives.*

⁶² Idem, p. 39.

*Has the general objective been reached?*⁶³

The answer to this question depends to a large extent on which element of Article 2(1) (especially from its beginning, while the definition of 'promoting active ageing' could have been separated by the legislator to facilitate the Decision's implementation) is considered as the real objective.

According to the Ecorys report, EY2012 '*succeeded in its ultimate goal of mobilising relevant actors*'⁶⁴. As the Commission pointed out in its report, these actors include the Member States, their regional and local authorities, social partners, civil society and the business community. But the European Economic and Social Committee's Opinion was correct that the measures 'should be capable of winning over the public and not be just for the initiated.'⁶⁵ Eventually, the European culture of active ageing (for all ages!) will only exist if it is reflected in the public sphere and throughout the whole society, and not only in minds of those directly concerned and/or ambitious documents, or even laws.

The EY2012 Stakeholders' Coalition declared in its Roadmap presented at the opening conference in Copenhagen that it will 'encourage the European Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and WHO-Europe to pool their resources and coordinate their action to launch a European Strategy on Active Ageing and an Age-Friendly EU to help the EU achieve its Europe 2020 objective to create smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the EU.'

3.3. Assessment of the external evaluation

The [evaluation exercise](#) contracted by the European Commission to Ecorys was quite substantial and elaborate. During the 12 months that it lasted, it used various tools - especially surveys of EY2012 national coordinators and stakeholders - in search for quantitative and qualitative data. Starting from 15 evaluation questions drafted by the European Commission, the evaluation analysed relevance, effectiveness and impact, complementarity, efficiency, gender and social inclusion mainstreaming, implementation and delivery mechanisms, as well as sustainability of EY2012.

From its **main findings**, it could be noted that:

- the types of activities undertaken were appropriate to the needs of Member States and EU citizens;
- the specific objectives were partly achieved, with best results on awareness-raising initiatives and events;
- the existing networks were strengthened, while new ones rarely established;
- the civil society organisations were mobilised around the EY2012 themes;

⁶³ In view of the general character of the main objective, this point skipped the 'What has been done?' question, and the assessment of involved actors is included in the answer.

⁶⁴ Ecorys report, pp. xvii and 40.

⁶⁵ [Opinion](#) adopted on 20 October 2010, point 3.3.1.

- the EU-level events made a strong contribution, but some of their potential was not realised due to planning issues;
- the issue of active ageing, previously dealt with in the framework of health and employment policies, should now be considered via multiple policy areas;
- the EY2012 was led predominantly by women;
- the management structures at EU level were appropriate and functioned satisfactorily.

The Ecorys report also noted that 'stakeholders were very satisfied with the coordination provided by the EC team', and appreciated significant and coordinated preparation of EY2012 at European level⁶⁶.

The single most interesting assessment of the external evaluator on the process of that European Year's preparation is the one that the contractor spelled out in the chapter on relevance and complementarity: that the '*existence of a series of long-term measures prior to the Year highlighted the need [...] to provide a short-term boost in overall awareness, hopefully leading to longer-term effects*'.⁶⁷

In view of the general objective as set out by Article 2(1) of the Decision ('facilitating the creation of an active ageing culture'), it is perhaps not surprising that the evaluation report narrowed it to 'mobilising relevant actors in the promotion of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity'⁶⁸. But the rationale - indicating the need to avoid overly ambitious and far-reaching policy objectives - should be applauded, as indeed only tangible and concrete aims can be reached and measured.

The external evaluation also provided a number of recommendations with regard to future European Years, such as⁶⁹:

- formalising mechanisms of title-selection;
- providing a proper ex-ante assessment;
- ensuring more time for preparations;
- prioritising activities with local implementation and impact, but with a transnational dimension.

⁶⁶ Ecorys report, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Idem, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Ecorys report, p. 30.

⁶⁹ Idem, pp. 119-121.

4. Conclusions and recommendation

The establishment of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012) brought about an increase in the number of initiatives promoting active ageing in the EU Member States (as well as in the three EFTA countries who took part). The Commission's report, published on 15 September 2014, underlined the fact that EY2012 mobilised numerous governmental and non-governmental actors, and that Member States and civil society organisations used it as an opportunity to develop new initiatives or strengthen existing ones⁷⁰. As noted by the Ecorys report⁷¹, it strengthened the knowledge and skills of stakeholders involved.

In its [Declaration](#) adopted on 6 December 2012, the Council (apart from welcoming the annexed Guiding Principles) considered that EY2012 'contributed to creating political momentum [which] goes beyond raising public awareness and changing attitudes towards ageing', and that this momentum 'is a call to build on these achievements [assuming in early December 2012 that both - raising awareness and changing attitudes - have actually been achieved] and translate them into a strong political legacy that delivers concrete results, ensuring social cohesion and prosperity and contributing to the well-being of all generations'.

As summed-up by the Secretary General and staff of AGE Platform Europe, 'EY2012 has not just been an awareness-raising initiative. The work that has started in 2012 will continue in the years to come with all the interested parties who were mobilised during the Year.'⁷²

The results of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012) broadly match the expectations expressed within the framework of public consultation which was done by the European Commission before presenting its legislative proposal, and referred to in the [ex-ante evaluation](#) published with it. Awareness-raising and increased focus of political and public-policy agendas was underlined, as well as 'recognition and support to people already working on these topics, sharing of good practice, innovative approaches, and new synergies between existing players'.⁷³

The specific objectives of EY2012 (promoting existing initiatives, raising political awareness, and creating concrete instruments in favour of active ageing and solidarity between generations) were achieved to the extent that could have reasonably been expected from the amount of human, financial, and organisational resources committed. The exercise holds lessons for how we can address complex social issues, relevant across Europe. The concluding recommendation, based on the evidence collected, would be to focus less on continuity with previous exercises of the same type (as EY2012 sought to do), and more on ensuring a legacy effect - continuing to support the new or enhanced activities and processes related, in this case, to active ageing and solidarity between generations.

⁷⁰ COM(2014) 562 final, p. 12.

⁷¹ Ecorys report, p. xviii.

⁷² <http://www.pliegosdeyuste.eu/n15/29-35.pdf> / <http://www.enargywebzine.eu/spip.php?article263>

⁷³ COM(2010) 462 final, p. 4.

2012 was the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations - with objectives set by a Decision of the Parliament and the Council, adopted on 14 September 2011. Following an external evaluation, the European Commission presented its Report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of that European Year on 15 September 2014. This paper looks at the context and concrete initiatives that were undertaken before, during, and after 2012, and also considers the Parliament's input into the Decision establishing the European Year. It comes to the conclusion that the four specific objectives set by the Decision establishing EY2012 were largely met, while the creation of an 'active ageing culture in Europe' (the general objective) might still require further, additional efforts.

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