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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	
Organisation (including a short description of its mission and membership)	<p>Demographic Change Regions Network (DCRN)</p> <p>DCRN is a Brussels based network of various regions in several member states, facing demographic challenges. The aims of the network are sharing experiences and best practise examples on demographic issues and raising awareness of European institutions on the specific needs of regions affected by demographic change.</p> <p>As an example of the network activities, please find attached the joint response to the commission consultation on "Growing regions, growing Europe: public consultation on the future of EU cohesion policy" in January 2008.</p> <p>The following member-regions of the network participated in the generation of this contribution to the consultation on the EY 2012:</p> <p>- Brandenburg</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Castilla y León - Eastfinland - Mecklenburg-Vorpommern - Sachsen-Anhalt - Sachsen
Expertise (please precise the area)	demographic change (shrinking population, ageing population, integration of migrants)
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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.

Demographic Change Regions Network has been working on demographic change and intergenerational solidarity issues since its founding in 2006. When working together as a network we have come to realise the demographic differences and therefore the wide range of demographic challenges in network regions, which reflect general patterns across the EU. Our commonality is that we are all affected by the demographic change in some way, whether that is an ageing population, a declining population or the societal challenges associated with migration. We, the network, believe that future EU policies can play a major role in helping European regions adapt to these new emerging concerns.

The obvious opportunity that facing demographic change brings is Europe's position as the forerunner in this field. We can develop new and innovative solutions that can later be used as a competitive edge over the rest of the world. This may very well add up to our competitiveness and help Europe maintain its leading position in global economy. Elderly people are also a great resource for the society as they can not only participate actively in NGOs and volunteer work, but also have a substantial purchasing power.

However, ageing population strains the society by e.g. raising the health care costs and requiring increasing investment in adapted infrastructure. It will also be hard to find educated labour force to replace the ones retiring. All this will be a great challenge especially in rural and remote areas. All together the phenomenon creates many threats but also lots of opportunities that must be met with suitable policy measures. But it must be kept particularly in mind that demographic change is not just about the ageing population - also the needs of the younger generation must be addressed.

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?

Demographic Change Regions Network feels that more should be done to tackle the ahead challenges of a demographically changing Europe. The focus of the Commission is still concentrated on ageing, when it analyzes the consequences of demographic change. We as a network of affected regions request the Commission, to take all 3 main aspects of demographic change equally in focus: the shrinking population, the integration of migrants and the ageing population. Consequently, DCRN calls on the Commission to rephrase the topic of the theme year to make the challenges referring to all these aspects more visible.

Concerning political measures that should be taken, we refer to our network response to the Commission's public consultation on the future of cohesion policy "Growing regions,

growing Europe" from January 2008 (see attachment). For example, the European Union should care about the following issues:

- * ICT use to avoid the effects of a shrinking population
- * managing the discussion about different Member States policies in the field of family support
- * adjustment of the age of retirement
- * work-life balance
- * lifelong learning to adapt the needs of the labour market
- * opportunities for age-based jobs
- * adapt the financial means and the funding criterias in existing programmes to the requirements of demographic change

The network feels that the current challenging economic crisis takes away attention of the future challenges such as looming and in some cases already apparent demographic changes. Constant political awareness of the matter is crucial - Europe must be proactive, not reactive.

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 Commission did and does already a lot for raising awareness, e.g. the demographic forum in November 2008 or the ageing report from April 2009.

Demographic Change Regions Network sees that the European Year would be a timely initiative to gain more publicity and a wider audience for the cause. It is important to realise that policy measures must be set sooner rather than later as the European population is ageing rapidly and the societies must prepare themselves to respond to the situation.

DCRN calls on the Commission to take the next step now from awareness raising to concrete action and to support actors that are willing to tackle demographic challenges.

Therefore the Commission should organise and finance workshops for the exchange of experiences and project ideas by local, regional and national experts. Furthermore, EU-wide regional statistics as a contribution to crosslink regions who face the same demographic challenges are required.

Demographic change should be better acknowledged and mainstreamed in different policies. Demographic change should be stressed in the forthcoming European Commission reports with a transsectoral approach.

The EU should direct more financial support to projects and actors that deal with demographic change and intergenerational solidarity in the framework of existing programmes such as INTERREG IV.

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?

Important topics that the European year should concentrate on could be among others:

- 1) accessibility and investing in adapted infrastructure for a declining and ageing population,
- 2) implementation of ICT e.g. e-learning, e-health, e-government to ensure public services in regions with a declining population
- 3) adaptation of health and social care systems to an increased number of elderly people, ensuring an independent life as long as possible (including new forms of assisted living like 'more-generation-houses')
- 4) participation of the elderly in social and working life
- 5) Fight against elderly poverty (via flexible transitions between periods of life)
- 6) Integration of migrants

Especially in scarcely populated areas it is essential that all generations have means to reach services. Furthermore, the elderly should have the possibility to stay at their own homes as long as possible and this should be supported by relevant measures. It should however be organised in a way that it does not cause excessive strain to small communities and their budgets. Therefore new innovative solutions and suitable funding sources for regions going through demographic change must be developed. Moreover, voluntary engagement of the elderly can lead to a win-win situation: on the one hand it gives people the feeling of still being needed, on the other hand the potentials of the elderly might be made fruitful for the community, e.g. they may take over jobs for which money is lacking like advising younger workers, additional literature reading courses at schools, caring for small children et cetera. To prevent age poverty, which will increase in the near future, participation on the job market and on education should be guaranteed by an active labour market policy and vocational training through lifelong learning. Prolonging working lifetime could be a possible answer to disburden the younger generation. Individual solutions for an adapted transition from working life to retirement are needed.

Besides awareness raising that still has to play an important and visible role in the running of the campaign more projects with demographic change/intergenerational solidarity topic should be launched and funded by the European Commission. The Commission should think of financing pilot projects within the theme year.

DCRN suggests to link the Open Days in 2012 thematically to the European theme year.

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?

Demographic Change Regions Network could contribute to awareness raising and best practice exchange. Also events on the topic could be organised in Brussels and in the regions. The Network can also provide policy input and expert speakers for Commission events.

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.

There should be specific funding available for awareness raising activities in the budget of the European Year. Also, attention must be paid to organizing events and actions throughout the regions, not just in the national capitals. The commission should provide speakers for events in the regions and play a more active role out of Brussels.