



Public Consultation on a Possible Designation of 2012 as European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity

Summary of responses received

1. INTRODUCTION

On 1 June 2009 the European Commission published an online questionnaire on the possibility of organising a European Year on the theme of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity for 2012, and invited stakeholders to respond by 31 July 2009. This document is a summary of the contributions received.

2. CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

The objective of this consultation was to collect views from stakeholders, including public authorities, social partners and civil society organisations, as well as experts and other interested parties, on the themes, design, and key actions to carry out during a potential European Year 2012 on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity.

3. RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

The European Commission received 132 responses to the public consultation within the deadline. There was a wide variety of responses to a theme that was large in scope; therefore, this document aims to summarize recurring comments, while also advancing certain original ideas raised by stakeholders.

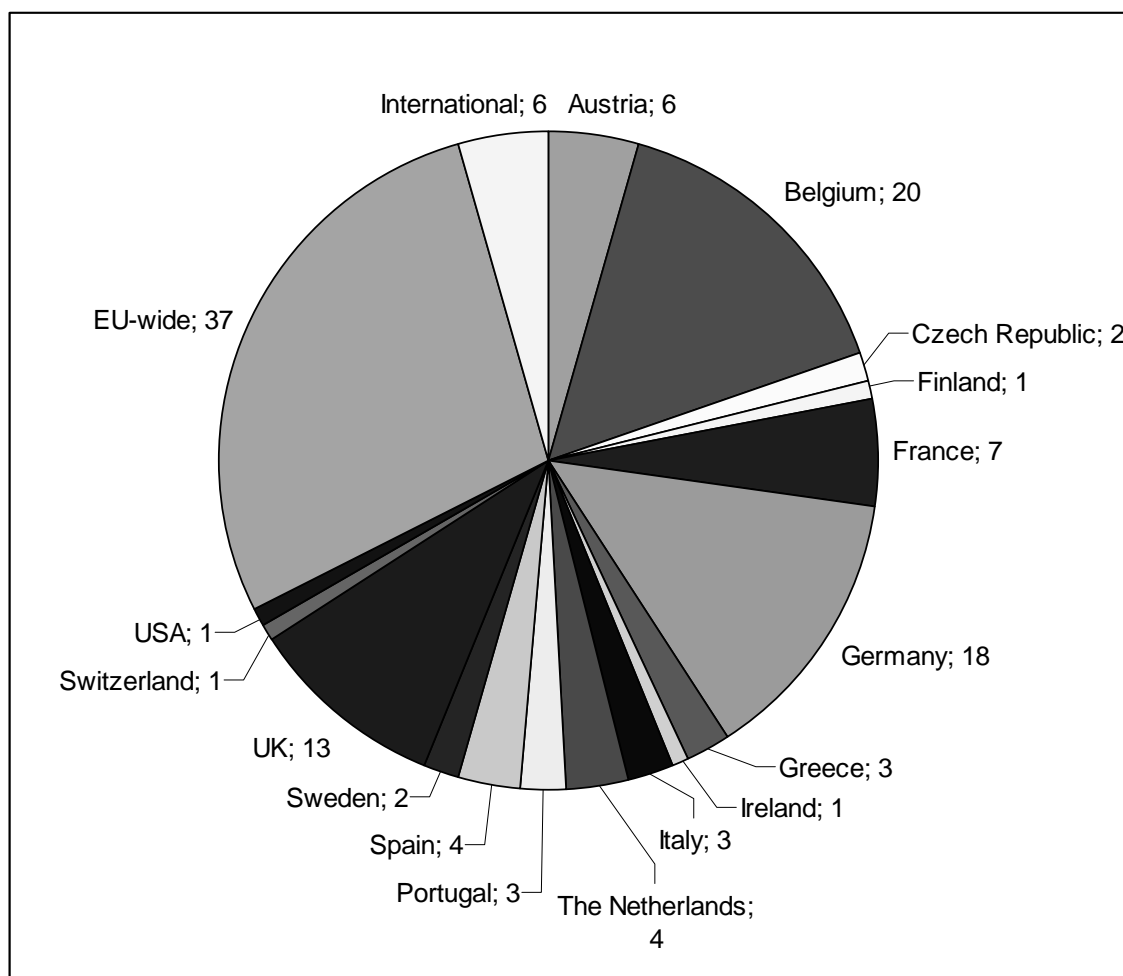
Almost half the responses came from civil society organisations, frequently operating at a European scale, but others came from public authorities, industry, professional associations, academics, think tanks, trade unions and individuals. In total, contributions

were received from stakeholders in 14 Member States as well as from representative bodies at EU and international level.

Table 1: Contributions received by stakeholder category

Stakeholder category	Number of replies	Percentage
Public authorities (local, national) & other publicly funded agencies	32	24%
Industry & professional associations	15	11%
Trade unions	2	2%
Civil society organisations	63	48%
Academic & think tanks	12	9%
Individuals	8	6%
All	132	100%

Graph 1: Contributions received by country and region



3.1. General

Respondents strongly supported the proposal of the year 2012 being designated a European Year on Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity. Increasing numbers of older people are considered to pose challenges to public policy in areas such as employment, pensions, long-term care and healthcare. People are retiring from work in good health more frequently, and many respondents agreed that the contributions of older people to family and community life deserved to be recognised, supported and further developed, as part of policies of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. The importance of developing volunteering and extending working lives in this age group was also accepted. Most respondents supported increased EU activity in this area in order to increase the visibility of the problem and to support national and local activities. Stakeholders affirmed the importance of the development of intergenerational solidarities in promoting social cohesion and supporting citizens' contributions to their families and communities throughout the life course.

3.2. Challenges and opportunities of ageing in relation to intergenerational solidarity

Stakeholders were asked to analyse this theme briefly.

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

Many respondents noted the **poor public image of older people** as well as of the ageing process. Respondents attributed the persistence of negative stereotypes in which older people are represented as vulnerable and as a financial burden to the narrow media portrayals of older people, as well as to public policy at national and European level that tends to highlight the problems associated with older people, such as the sustainability of pension regimes. It was argued that **greater longevity in European societies is a success story**, and that the concept of ageing as healthy and active needed to be promoted and supported. Healthy and active ageing extends opportunities for improved mutual enrichment and transmission of knowledge between generations, key features of intergenerational solidarity.

An important challenge for European societies with ageing populations is tackling the **isolation of older people**. Their exclusion from family and community life is explained by some respondents as the result of living in a society in which the physical environment is poorly adapted to older people and in which there is a lack of regular human interaction, due, in part, to families living apart. Respondents viewed this issue as a challenge that needed to be overcome in order to build societies that better include older people, in particular through developing neighbourhood and local solidarities.

The **welfare and economic integration of older people** in European societies is a subject that provokes certain tradeoffs. For example, active ageing policies that promote the maintenance of older people in employment generate concerns for some that the number of posts available for younger people may reduce in consequence. Another perceived trade-off is between investing in services for older people and investing in those for younger persons, although certain respondents cited the concept of the "silver economy", in which the development of services for older people spurs job creation in medical and social work sectors. It was noted that policies in the field of active ageing,

intergenerational solidarity and the sustainability of pension systems generally call for extensions of working lives while employers often offer early retirement and can be disinclined to recruit older people. Certain public authorities and civil society organisations noted the increasing impoverishment of older people, while others feared that the retirement of the baby boom generation would generate shortages of specialists working in certain sectors, including teaching, health professionals and leaders of small businesses.

In summary, respondents noted a variety of new opportunities as well as challenges associated with accelerating demographic ageing. Managing the impact of demographic ageing upon intergenerational solidarities requires careful planning and, to this end, the European Union was called upon to integrate intergenerational solidarities into its policies of sustainable development and social cohesion.

3.3. Policy measures required to avert such threats or exploit the opportunities and hence promote intergenerational solidarity

Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

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?

The responses to these questions divided into three broad themes: active ageing, intergenerational exchange and, lastly, healthy ageing and provision of good quality residential services for older people.

Intergenerational solidarity is an important tenet of active ageing, since maintaining autonomy and independence with increasing age occurs in the context of others, whether families, friends or communities. Some respondents recommend a more gradual retirement process, in which the numbers of hours worked diminish progressively over a period perhaps as long as several years. Such a transition would encourage activity to be prolonged to a later age and improve the conciliation of work and home life for older people. Exposure of workers to hazardous and difficult working conditions should be taken into account when evaluating the years of contributions required in order to receive full pensions. Stakeholders recommended that all retired people should have sufficient income to live in decent conditions, while being provided with means to participate actively in their families and communities.

For several respondents from non-governmental organisations, **intergenerational solidarity should be centred upon promoting exchanges between generations**. This could occur through public policies designed to promote intergenerational living spaces, such as programmes in which students live with retired people, for the mutual benefit of both parties. Several non-governmental organisations also call for increased communication between generations and, in particular, that the knowledge and experience of older generations is more highly valued.

Active ageing requires the **maintenance of good health** through prevention programmes, such as through encouraging higher physical activity levels in older persons. Certain respondents call for increased attention from public policy on elder abuse as well as on residential care of older people. In particular, they recommend the development of housing suitable for all generations, increased accessibility of public

places for older and disabled persons, and better quality of care for older people living in residential care homes. To a large extent, the independence and wellbeing that older people experience is linked both to technological progress and to finding social solutions that respond to specific needs that older people may develop.

Many respondents listed **obstacles** currently impeding further development of intergenerational solidarities as well as preventing older people from realizing all the possibilities of active ageing. Certain responses underlined diverse sources of resistance to change, including a lack of awareness among the public and policy makers of the importance of the problem, persisting negative stereotypes of elderly people and fiscal pressures. Some responses argued that it is not appropriate to speak about "lack of awareness and resistance to change", preferring to discuss instead the difficulties they have of generating change and finding support from other organisations to implement proposals. One particular difficulty is that intergenerational solidarity and active ageing are long-term cross-cutting issues that require the cooperation of many partners.

3.4. Role of the EU in promoting the right policy responses

Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

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?

Certain non-governmental organisations and governmental organisations invited the European Union to take measures in favour of the rights of older people by adopting or applying **legal instruments** such as Regulations or Directives, mainly to target age discrimination at work. These respondents also recommended that the reach of such European legislation be extended beyond employment policy to address social affairs more broadly.

The majority of respondents mentioned **other types of policy instruments** at the European Union's disposal. Certain respondents noted that, in the domain of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, the European Union could encourage research on the identification of good practices as well as benchmarking studies through the work of the Committee of Social Protection. There was a call for governments in Member States to tackle these issues through the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and for target-setting to be developed.

Some respondents hoped that the European Union could provide concrete guidance to Member States in developing programmes that relate to the themes of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity as well as leadership in promoting a timetable for reforms. This could even permit the development of convergent action between Member States. Respondents insisted that only the Member States, local and regional governments and non-governmental partners could effect concrete measures to improve the lived experience of ageing and the development of local solidarities.

Other measures suggested by stakeholders included the EU contributing to the application of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities by developing guidelines for standards in domains such as accommodation, accessibility and healthcare as well as the creation of a European network of experts on the theme of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. Certain non-governmental organisations and research

institutions called for the establishment of a European Alliance on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity.

Respondents appreciated current projects in the area of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity funded by various European programmes, calling for these programmes to be extended, but also for the programmes to be more closely coordinated in order to increase the visibility of the results of these projects. In addition, responses requested that these financing mechanisms should be better oriented towards the goal of encouraging networking between local actors, particularly across national frontiers. Respondents requested that initiatives developed in different European Commission Directorates-General be more coherently organized and visible. The majority of respondents requested that information about projects concerning ageing or intergenerational solidarity currently funded by any European Union institution be placed in a single online database.

Non-governmental organisations and local government organisations called for greater contact between local actors and the European Union in the form of conferences, site visits and financing, in order to promote and support their initiatives. Responses called upon the EU to promote volunteering, particularly in the baby boom generation, as well as to support a University of later life and other adult education programmes.

For most contributors, the EU has an important role to play in creating European labels of quality, such as for intergenerational architecture. Several responses called for the EU to facilitate mobility across member countries by harmonising the disability badges for parking or to recognize a European status of volunteering. Respondents also proposed that the EU organises pan-European citizenship programmes such as a European voluntary services, an ERASMUS programme for older people, and exchanges of older people in small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Most contributors called for a European Year 2012 on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity to develop and continue the results of preceding European Years on poverty and social exclusion (2010) and volunteering (2011). Positive mentions by several non-governmental and governmental organisations were made of previous European Years, including the European Year 2007 on equal opportunities and 1993 on older people and solidarity between generations, as well as the UN International Year of older persons in 1999.

Respondents expressed strong support for a European Year on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, considering it an **appropriate policy instrument** for a range of reasons. Most frequently, respondents emphasized the importance of a European year to raise awareness of those key themes which would be touched upon by the year, including the economic and social effects of an ageing population, the provision of services for older people, healthy ageing and activities promoting intergenerational solidarity. Several respondents appreciated the positive tone of such a European Year, while hoping that it would place the topics concerned more firmly on political and public policy agendas. Respondents frequently stated their desire for a European Year to leave a long-term legacy, in part by generating long-lasting initiatives. Some hoped that a European Year would provide recognition and support for those already working on these topics, and increase the profile of services currently provided for older people. Other respondents hoped that a European Year would promote public and political debate, support the sharing of good practice, and generate innovative approaches as well as new synergies between existing actors.

3.5. Topics and activities for a European Year

Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

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?

A European Year on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity could cross-cut many themes (employment market, social security, education, health, culture, accessibility issues, urban planning). Certain responses indicated that it would be necessary to determine in advance the core topics and activities of a European Year 2012.

The range of topics evoked for a European Year was wide. They addressed different aspects of *healthy, dignified and secure ageing* and the necessity of intergenerational solidarities to support active ageing. One important theme was maintaining health and well-being with advancing years and some specific issues highlighted were: the role of the family and institutions in caring for older people, as well as the issue of elder abuse. A second important theme that emerged from the consultation was active ageing, or the continued participation of older people in society. Key topics for this theme included: mobility of older people; accessibility of public services; the role for new information and communications technologies and civic participation of older people at local, national and European level.

In terms of the theme of *secure ageing*, intergenerational solidarity again emerged as an important element. Solidarity between generations is an important element of existing public policies in terms of retirement systems and the conciliation of work and family life. Older people can contribute to the economic and social cohesion of our societies through their market and non-market contributions to their local communities and wider societies. Protecting vulnerable citizens will require the challenge of an ageing population to be tackled, particularly in terms of the development of demographic imbalances at a regional level and a consideration of the roles of public policy in raising birth rates and managing immigration.

Respondents hoped that a European Year would mobilise stakeholders at all levels through a wide range of activities, targeted at the general public, national experts and actors at local level.

Responses most often proposed organizing conferences bringing together experts and field workers in order to **exchange good practices**, with the result of creating guides sharing experience gained across Europe. It was advised that the principal large-scale events should have a European dimension, with subsequent events taking place at local level in all the Member States in order to disseminate the results. General and technical publications on good practices should be distributed via local partners as well as from a central website. The conferences, seminars and workshops should principally aim to network actors in order to generate long-term momentum from the European Year.

It was proposed that **mobilisation of the general public** could take place through cultural forums and workshops focused on exchanges between generations and volunteering. The organisation of competitions for innovative technical ideas (intergenerational cities, accessibility) as well for the public (competition to design the

European Year 2012 logo) could encourage public and corporate participation in a European Year.

Several respondents called for **local management of community initiatives** in order to effectively target neighbourhoods and populations, and mobilise local and regional actors. However, policy experiments should be managed by the European Union so that the calls for proposals and project results can be used in comparing practices between Member States.

Most responses underlined the importance for the **European Union to provide a coordinating role** for information pertaining to the European Year, both in terms of generating information campaigns and in centralising information produced during the year. A European website for the European Year could catalogue all initiatives from Member States, European programmes and other projects in order to assist networking between actors and create a useful database of activities. Some responses noted that any information campaign aiming to change stereotypes of older people, managed by the EU, should make full use of new communications technologies.

3.6. Your organisation's contribution to a European Year

Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

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

While a wide variety of propositions were received, many contributors noted that it was still too early to indicate which events and initiatives they would be organising in 2012. They underlined the importance of clearly indicating the central topics of a European Year 2012 before deciding which activities would take place. Respondents from certain countries recommended coordinating the activities of a European Year 2012 with other events taking place in that year, such as European Heritage days opening up public and private buildings and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in London.

A wide range of respondents offered **assistance in distributing information and in organising events**, generally by mobilising their contacts and volunteers. Some respondents offered help in creating and printing physical communication materials, as well as in creating websites and blogs.

Respondents proposed creating travelling exhibitions of artistic collaborations or of visual and auditory materials on the theme of a European Year, as well as the production of short or documentary films. The objective would be to highlight the contribution of older people to the historical and current European project. Programmes could encourage older people to discuss their experiences of historical events in schools, as well as to encourage popular initiatives which breach generational divides and contribute to the development of spaces shared by different generations.

Several contributors proposed to carry out **research** connected to the topics of a European Year on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, particularly in relation to comparative studies of good practices in Member States. Various large non-governmental organisations proposed **their experts to participate in conferences or deliver training**. Some public administrations working in social protection at regional level proposed carrying out policy experiments in relation to intergenerational solidarity as well as sharing the results of pilot projects they are carrying out. Connecting different

actors working in the domains of intergenerational solidarity and active ageing through conferences and seminars could promote further technical partnerships and other cooperative activities.

3.7. What support would your organisation require to play a major part in a European Year?

Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

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

Respondents expressed their difficulty in outlining their needs for a European Year without better understanding on which topics a year would concentrate. They tended to primarily indicate their **need for funds to finance additional activities**. Requests were made for partial or full funding of a wide variety of projects, but also for logistical needs, such as the renting of additional office space.

Large non-governmental organisations **called on the EU to organise expert sessions** to prepare their managers for the activities of a European Year, who could afterwards train the large numbers of field workers and volunteers who would be needed. The presence of experts from the European Commission at events, to participate in reflection and debates, was requested, as were the creation of good practice guides for the organisation of events for a European Year.

The responses underlined the need for programmes to be centrally coordinated at the level of each Member State, with some respondents expressing willingness to assist in this coordination. Contributors demanded that the European Union provide a great number of communication materials, create readily identifiable visual symbols for a European Year, assure the participation of Member States in the promotion of local events, and organise the networking of actors concerned by the range of themes featured in a European Year.

Certain respondents suggested that a celebrity from each Member State should become their country's ambassador during the Year on the themes of intergenerational solidarity and active ageing. These figures could aid in the mobilisation of local initiatives and improve the publicity of events during a European Year on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity in 2012.