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## New research project launched Miraculous-Life for Independent Elderly Living

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A robot that is 'human' enough to communicate with, could be a great support partner for older people living alone. But is it possible? The recently launched EU-funded project Miraculous-Life for Elderly Independent Living will develop and test a Virtual Support Partner which will attend to the daily activities and safety needs of the elderly citizens (65+) in their everyday lives.

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"Based on the recognition of the emotional state of the user and the interpretation of their behaviour in the environmental context, we will develop and evaluate a new dialogue system which is using realistic 3D rendering of human-like avatars and which is emotionally responsive" says Andreas Hochgatterer, project leader from the AIT Austrian Institute of Technology.

Nine companies and research organisations from five European countries will develop and test the technology, in a consortium headed by the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT). At the heart of their work is an avatar interface: an electronic and digital persona that older people can connect with. When integrated in a robot, this promises to make daily life a lot easier for senior citizens. A crucial asset of the Virtual Support Partner (VSP) will be its capacity for behavioural and emotional understanding. Thanks to its Avatar-based interface, the VSP is able to fuse facial expressions, intonation, gestures and other contextual information of the user's environment to provide empathic responses and services. As such, it provides ICT services to support daily activities, in a human-like way. This in turn stimulates and motivates older people to stay active. In the longer term, the system will provide practical, psychological and social benefits enabling and motivating the elderly to remain active at home and thus prolonging their independence and improving their wellbeing.

To find out if the concept lives up to its promises, up to 100 elderly people in two test-bed locations in Switzerland and the Netherlands will try out the system over a six-month period.

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[2] <http://www.miraculous-life.eu/>

[3] <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/newsroom/all/projects-news-and-results>