

Executive Summary

Introduction

With the request for service n. 059 - VT/2012/082 ECORYS Netherlands was entrusted by the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion to conduct the ex-post evaluation of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (hereafter the 'EY2012' or 'the Year'). The evaluation exercise lasted twelve months (from January 2013 to December 2013). Its purpose was to undertake 'an overall assessment of the initiatives provided for in the Decision¹ with details of implementation and results' (art. 11 of the Decision). Several research methods were applied, quantitative and qualitative - interviews with EC officials, stakeholders such as representatives of networks of NGOs, local and regional authorities and social partners, the European Parliament and the communication contractor; a survey of National Coordinators; a survey of National Stakeholders; desk research on the EU and country websites and documents; case studies on Poland and Portugal and the Generations@school initiative; participation in the Meeting of National Coordinators and the EU Stakeholders Coalition organised by the Commission on 20-21 February 2013.

The Year was celebrated through a series of European events:

- Opening event of the EY2012 in Copenhagen;
- Closing event of the EY2012 in Nikosia;
- Journalists' Conference;
- Conference on good governance for active and healthy ageing;
- Generations@school Project and award (420 schools participating);
- Senior Force Days;
- Awards (Journalist award, Life story challenge award, Workplaces for all ages award, Towards age-friendly environments award; 1386 candidature submissions in total).

Moreover, two important outputs of the Year were:

- the Active Ageing Index;
- the Guiding Principles for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations².

National programmes were also designed and implemented by participating countries. Opening events involved on the whole 4,500 participants. A total of 748 national and transnational initiatives were implemented during the Year counting only those included in the EU database. In terms of thematic coverage, the focus was on bridging generations, support for social engagement and health promotion and preventative health care. Overall, participation in society appears to have attracted most interest amongst the three overarching themes (employment, health and independent living and participation in society).

¹ Decision no 940/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2011 on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012).

² Council Declaration on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012): The Way Forward, Brussels, 7 December 2012.

Main findings

Relevance

The **choice of promoting an European Year on Active Ageing** and Intergenerational solidarity was highly relevant. The relevance of the EY2012 is rooted in the following:

Long-standing identification of the importance of the issue;

- The high degree of relevance to Member States, all dealing with similar problems (albeit in different contexts);
- The multi-faceted nature of the issue, covering a wide range of economic, technical and social issues;
- The need to link challenges and opportunities and highlight benefits, not just negative aspects of ageing.

The choice of the **thematic priorities** – employment, health and independent living, participation, intergenerational solidarity – was consistent with prior thematic analyses and policy activity conducted on active ageing at EU level and internationally.

The relevance of the **objectives** chosen for the EY2012³ was generally uncontroversial. These objectives mirror the needs and policy priorities already agreed by Member States and set out in the various preceding policy documents. The objectives also link to those of the previous Years (EY2010 for example) and reflect the limitations on the EU's leverage on social issues which, by and large, remain a national responsibility.

The evidence indicates that the **types of activities** undertaken were appropriate to the needs of Member States and EU citizens. National Coordinators and stakeholders were able to choose and tailor initiatives to their own contexts and priorities, with support from the Commission's communications contractor.

Effectiveness and impact

Based on the information collected from National Coordinators, the plans made at the beginning of the EY in the National Programmes were respected "to a large extent" in a vast majority of countries. The only exceptions were France, Finland and UK, which delivered the programme "to some extent", and Malta, which did so "to a limited extent". Furthermore, all types of outputs considered in the intervention logic were produced in at least half of the participating countries. The outputs linked to communication and awareness raising (information campaigns, training and awareness-raising seminars, conference and events) were the most often delivered; two thirds of respondents also mentioned knowledge outputs like mutual learning seminars, reports, surveys; a similar share reported the delivery of outputs formalising policy commitments.

In our view the **immediate objectives**⁴ are to be considered partly achieved, according to the feedback from national stakeholders and the response of National Coordinators. The best results were achieved on awareness-raising through EU-level and national initiatives and events, which were more often targeted to relevant organisations and civil society groups than individuals.

³ With reference to the logic model, the specific objectives were aimed at raising general awareness, creating a framework (for commitment and action), and stimulating debate and exchange of information.

⁴ The awareness of policy makers of all levels, civil society, social partners and the business community has been raised, debate has been stimulated, information has been exchanged among policy-makers and stakeholders, mutual learning has been developed, and a framework has been offered to policy-makers and stakeholders to make public commitments and to take concrete action.

The Year achieved its **intermediate objectives** of strengthening existing networks, creating synergies and partnerships between government levels and policy areas, promoting policies and long-term strategies and making available technological, organisational and social innovations. The objective of establishing new networks was rarely achieved. The development of national policies, strategies and comprehensive programmes on active ageing in a number of countries (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, LT, MT, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK) provides evidence of the policy impact of the Year.

Overall, the Year succeeded in its ultimate goal of **mobilising relevant actors** around active ageing and intergenerational solidarity.

In terms of outreach to **different target groups**, the main achievement appears to be the mobilisation of civil society organisations. The involvement of regional and local governments was also significant, but did not happen in all countries - the dynamism and visibility of National Coordinators to local governments may have made the difference here. The involvement of social partners was variable - as is the landscape of social partner organisations and the tradition of industrial relations in Member States -, and the majority of National Coordinators considered that private businesses were not reached to any great extent (even though they appear as promoters of a moderate share of the initiatives included in the EY2012 database - 73 in total). Regarding outreach to the general public via the media, the picture is mixed, with countries equally divided between those that claim to have succeeded to a large or very large extent, and those that consider success as partial or limited. Limited success was sometimes attributed to lack of the level of funding required for a sustained communication campaign.

Overall, the various **EU level events made a strong contribution** to the achievement of the goals of the EY2012. The strongest contribution was from the opening event in Copenhagen, the Generations@school initiative and award and the EU awards for social entrepreneurs, journalists, age-friendly environments. The Seniorforce Day did not realise its full potential, as a result of the late approval of the Decision and the related contractual delays, and had to revert to a series of smaller, national events, which lessened its impact. Two of the awards (Age-friendly workplaces and Life-story challenge) would have required more time for preparation and stakeholders mobilisation and were not as successful as they could because of the delayed implementation schedule. The Journalists' conference was also affected by implementation difficulties, and although organised at short notice nevertheless had an impact. The EU website was widely appreciated as a cost-effective initiative, but the number of unique visitors was comparatively lower than for other Years (although we could not ascertain whether these was compensated by more visits to national websites). The degree of engagement with social media on the part of participants and stakeholders also appeared limited, at least at the EU level.

Complementarity

At **EU level**, there was strong complementarity between the Year and other on-going policy activities. In DG EMPL the EY2012 was complementary to the White Paper on Pensions and the Demographic Forum. Externally to DG EMPL, the Year had the strongest complementarity with the activities of DG SANCO (via its 2nd Health Programme and especially the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing), DG JUST (via the planned Accessibility Act, a legislative initiative to ensure that goods and service are accessible to people with impairments); and DG CONNECT (e.g. European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing). There was also interaction with DG EAC (high-level conference on adult education) and DG RTD (specific call for proposals). The consultation evidence suggests that the Inter-service Group established to facilitate collaboration between DGs worked well.

The evaluation found multiple instances where the EY2012 was clearly complementary to policies implemented in **Member States**. The EY2012 helped refining the national policy agendas on active ageing and stimulated the exchange of good practices between countries. The **EU added value** of the Year is demonstrated by the evidence of volume, process, scope, agenda setting, innovation and learning effects. The EY2012 increased the number of initiatives for promoting active ageing in the Member States and strengthened the knowledge and skills of stakeholders involved in the organisation of the Year. Furthermore, the EY2012 offered organisations and individuals from different Member States the opportunity to become involved in national activities of another country. In countries with an existing national agenda on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, the EY2012 strengthened the level of policy commitment and brought added value by introducing and disseminating innovations. The scope of active ageing policies was broadened in a large number of participating countries through the inclusion of new topics and a more holistic approach to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. Whereas the issue of active ageing was previously mainly confined to health policies and/or employment policies, the issue is now addressed via multiple policy areas.

Efficiency

In terms of the budget, the EY2012 falls within the lower end of the range of European Years, second only to the least funded Year in the series 2009-2012 (EY2009, which had no specific budget). Nonetheless the evidence suggests that a great deal was achieved by the EY2012, to some extent mirroring the findings of the EY2009 evaluation (i.e. that existing and non-EU resources can be mobilised effectively and outcomes and impacts are not necessarily proportional to direct levels of spending). It may therefore be argued that (at least) **comparable results were achieved using fewer resources than in other European Years**.

Gender and social inclusion mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming was considered from the start of the EY2012 and included in the activities promoted by the Stakeholders Coalition and several Member States. Gender-focused members of the Stakeholders' Coalition played an important role in this regard, although the gender approach as applied in practice focussed almost always on women's and not also men's specific needs. In general, the EY2012 was led predominantly by women and the main national events attracted and included women more often than men.

The EY2012 covered a wide range of issues that elderly people face related to **disability**, especially health and independent living. Both at EU and MS level, the initiatives addressed disability directly and indirectly. The activities of the EY2012 by and large ensured the **accessibility** of the built environment at events and provided facilitations such as sign language interpreters and transportation at various occasions. The EU website contained options for larger fonts.

Implementation and delivery mechanisms

Management structures and tools employed at EU level were appropriate and functioned satisfactorily. Working relationships between the EC, NCs, EC Representations, stakeholder groups and the communication contractor were strong and a high degree of collaboration and cooperation was achieved, which served to increase the effectiveness of the Year. The available data suggests that mechanisms at **national level** were also largely effective.

In terms of process, **timing** emerged as a significant issue: the EY2012 was relatively late in gaining final approval, although fortunately some valuable preparation activity had been carried out well in advance of the Year (even before 2011) and some key mechanisms were already in place (e.g. the Stakeholders' Coalition, meetings of National Coordinators). The timetable did however present some difficulties and this led to significant impacts, notably contracting delays resulting in

the lost opportunity to deliver the Seniorforce Day initiative at EU level and link it to the awards, and the compressed timeframe available to organise the Journalists' conference.

At EU level, **the involvement of stakeholders** was well organised, based on a partnership approach and highly valued by those concerned. An inclusive, open and joint approach paid dividends in terms of informing the development and delivery of the Year; and stimulating continuing partnerships and networks in future. There is ample evidence that stakeholders were very satisfied with the coordination provided by the EC team.

At national level, a range of stakeholders participated, as shown by the analysis of the initiatives in the EY2012 database: this included strong involvement of NGOs, national authorities (other than NCs), regional and local authorities and EC Representations. Social partners and private sector companies were also represented. This evidence suggests delivery mechanisms were able to involve a cross-section of appropriate stakeholders at national level; and facilitate the engagement of a range of regional organisations as well. The fact that almost all countries had some form of national stakeholder committee or coalition is likely to have played a role in achieving the result.

Sustainability

At **EU level**, there are some grounds to support the sustainability of the agenda-setting effects of the EY2012 in the various on-going and follow-up activities.

The Social Investment Package Communication produced by DG EMPL has kept the intergenerational approach alive. In fact, under the heading Social Investment throughout the individual's life the Commission urges Member States to implement the recommendations on Investing in Children and Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving, and to use the Guiding Principles for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations and the Active Ageing Index. The Social Investment Package is important because it also guides the use of the European Social Fund that is a major resource pool for the implementation of social policies. Furthermore, a report on long-term care was published in 2013 with clear connections to the knowledge developed during the Year⁵. Moreover, DG EMPL is awarding grants to Member States authorities to develop comprehensive strategies on active ageing⁶.

DG SANCO and DG CONNECT have continued to work with a large number of scientific partners and stakeholders on the EIP-AHA, the other important legacy initiative of the Year. Although mostly focused on health and independent living, the EIP-AHA has kept a link with broader social and environmental policies in its component on innovation for age-friendly buildings, cities and environments, which is led by AGE Europe. The European Commission and WHO are working together to produce a version tailored to Europe of the guidelines for age-friendly cities published by the international organisation. In summer, a brochure has been produced with good practice examples of innovation⁷.

Other DGs have followed up on specific aspects of active ageing, for instance DG JUST via its European Network of Experts on Gender Equality has published a study on gender gap in pensions⁸.

⁵ OECD Health Policy Studies A Good Life in Old Age? Monitoring and improving quality in long-term care, OECD/European Union, 2013.

⁶ Call for Proposals VP/2013/009.

⁷ European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing Excellent innovation for ageing A European Guide, <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/newsroom/all/brochure>.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/130530_pensions_en.pdf.

Based on the information collected **in the participating countries**, there are indications that the effects of the EY2012 are lasting beyond the Year itself and at least some of them will be sustained over a longer time period. A large majority of National Coordinators confirmed that at least some of the activities undertaken during the Year lasted beyond 2012 and 11 countries report that this is the case for at least half of the activities. Moreover, in certain countries comprehensive strategies and plans were adopted, while in other ones there were outputs at the level of concept papers, charters, pieces of legislation covering specific issues, or projects.

Lessons for future European Years

Preparation

The evaluation revealed the importance of choosing a “mature” theme for the success of a European Year. Active ageing was clearly such a theme. It is important to improve and fine-tune the **process leading to the decision of the Year’s theme**, to ensure that this is always the case. To achieve this, the EC could take the following steps.

- **Formalise clear mechanisms for selecting the theme of the Year**, with well-defined procedures, objectives and responsibilities for the management of a transparent, centralised, multi-annual process. This should include the setting out of the core criteria and characteristics that describe a ‘good’ theme for a European Year (based on the maturity of the policy theme aspect identified in this evaluation for example).
- **Consider ways in which the Year and associated decision-making processes and design and delivery procedures might be formalised and professionalized**, for example through standing guidance and centralised coordination by a single DG (DG COMM) or the Secretariat General, and by including a strong role for the European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Council, the Committee of Regions and the EU Representations in Member States;
- **Carry out a robust and systematic ex-ante assessment of the Year**, also including some form of empirical research/mapping of actors that are interested in the proposed theme and can potentially mobilise resources. The EY2012 was preceded by an extensive consultation where respondents were also asked about their potential contribution to the EY and that paved the way for their subsequent mobilisation. This could be repeated and strengthened for instance by opening a consultation on competing potential EY2012 themes, where interested stakeholders could propose in advance their commitment by responding to a structured questionnaire. EC representations and relevant EU policy committees should be involved in this process as well.
- **Consider choosing the theme in such a way that it is possible to exploit connections with the preceding and subsequent Years**. In the case of the EY2012, there was the advantage of working with overlapping groups of stakeholders. Moreover, the national teams were sometimes very close to those who had implemented the EY2011 and this facilitated the transmission of lessons. With thematic continuity, it is also possible to have the subsequent Year launched at the final event of the current Year in the presence of a relevant audience. Of course the search for continuity should not be to the detriment of the relevance of the theme and should not restrain from choosing innovative and least explored themes. In any case, the ex ante assessment could investigate if and how continuity with the previous and following Year can be exploited at EU and country level.

The evaluation also highlighted that a smooth and timely decision-making process is key. Certain initiatives lost momentum due to the belated **decision** approval. Also, certain EU level networks could have conveyed the message more systematically to their membership with an earlier decision. Drawing on these lessons, the EC, in agreement with the European Parliament, could take the following steps.

- **Commit to the EY process well ahead of time**, to allow for effective engagement of Members of Parliament, regional and local stakeholders and early establishment of the website.
- **Aim for the timely approval of the decision** (ideally one year in advance), or if this is difficult to achieve, prevent the impact of the late publication of the decision of implementation, especially in terms of contracting matters.
- **Consider outsourcing communication services under a main framework contract** for a multiple number of European Years. Having a contractor specialised in EYs allows experience and knowledge to be built on typical formats of activity of the European Years, lessons to be learnt and the establishment of a cooperation network with EC representations in Member States.
- **Ensure that cooperation is established among relevant services early enough** to allow spending programmes, and notably calls for proposals, which take into account the theme of the EY. In the EY2012 for example, early cooperation allowed the inclusion of a reference to active ageing in the call for proposals published under the Social Dialogue budget line. To have relevant projects implemented during the European Year, cooperation needs to be established two years in advance (so that calls for proposals can be launched one year in advance). This means that ideally the theme of the Year would also need to be known two years in advance.

Set up and implementation

The **collaboration between EC team and National Coordinators** was smooth during this Year and the mechanisms set up for this cooperation represent a good practice example. The qualities and level of commitment of National Coordinators were also crucial and made a difference in the attainment of certain target groups in some countries. At the same time, the Year also had a strong regional dimension. In setting up the governance structure and programme for the Year, the EY team, in agreement with participating countries, could take the following actions:

- **Create a stimulating mutual learning environment among National Coordinators** and between coordinators and Stakeholders, through periodic face-to-face meetings and regular communication in between meetings. The evaluation showed that regular face-to-face meetings of national coordinators with the EC team and communication contractor allows less experienced country officers to learn from the most experienced ones and facilitates cooperation at country level. Moreover, convening joint meetings of National Coordinators and EU stakeholders improves the coordinated cooperation between governments and civil society at country level.
- **Provide the option of developing regional programmes** where for any reason a National Programme cannot be developed, and sensitise the Committee of Regions and organisations of regional and local authorities in time, so that they have time to mobilise their members.
- **Encourage participating countries to pay particular attention to the personal qualities and skills of National Coordinators** – leadership, being known by stakeholders and having contacts across a range of relevant policy departments.

The choice of initiatives at EU level proved adequate in general, but the EU Awards did not all have the same rate of success. To maximise the impact of the Year, the EC could in future Years:

- **ensure strong partnerships are secured on EU awards well in advance**, and exploit key intermediaries and existing dissemination channels, recognising that this requires planning well ahead of time;
- learn from the success of Generations@school, and **prioritise activities with local implementation and impact, but with a transnational dimension** (e.g. award, exchange visit,

etc.); activities that are similar to what has already been done but in which the EU context adds some clear added value to participants.

The website was a powerful instrument for the Year, but the evaluation highlighted the need for better data on website access and more effective links between the EU level and national level management of websites and social media accounts. Also, the communication contractor appeared to have responsibility for the input/contents of the website but not really for the final outcomes of web and social media activity (that was run by the EC). In this respect, for the next Years the EC could:

- **make sure that the communication contractor also has targets related to the outreach of web and social media activities**, not only at EU level but also at country level if possible, via national correspondents providing technical assistance to National Coordinators (this was done in this Year for traditional media activity, could be extended in scope); a communication contractor with national correspondents could also keep a better overview of the overall social media impact of the Year;
- **improve ongoing monitoring of the outreach to the general public through the website**, by collecting more detailed website statistics (e.g. collect data on the country of origin of visitors via IP addresses; consider asking to register for the download of important materials or publications; etc.).

EY2012 demonstrated that it is possible to achieve good results without allocating a specific **budget** to Member States. In the next EYs, the EC could continue the approach of not providing separate grant funding for projects in Member States during the Year, advise on the use of existing funding instruments to support the theme of the Year, and provide assistance through the communication contractor and EC representations. The choice of providing grant funding only *after* the end of the Year, to develop comprehensive strategies on active ageing using the momentum created by the Year, represents an interesting choice to the Commission for the EY2012 that could be replicated.

Follow-up

The follow-up of a European Year is important to ensure lasting effects. A specific **legacy strategy** should be designed by the responsible DG preferably at the beginning, but at the latest before the end of the Year, to ensure that the built momentum be supported and accommodated by appropriate EU programmes and policy initiatives.