



# Demographic change

## What makes demographic change an opportunity for regions?

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### POLICY PAPER

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#### Thematic capitalisation

Over the last seven years the INTERREG IVC programme has been enabling public institutions all over Europe – over 2000 in total – to ‘learn through cooperation’ across 204 different interregional projects aimed at improving regional policies.

In June 2012, the programme commissioned a team of thematic experts to analyse, benchmark, and capitalise on the wealth of knowledge generated by projects working on similar regional development issues. Altogether, 12 policy themes, ranging from innovation to the environment, have been covered. 12 reports are now available detailing the insights and lessons from this capitalisation process for the benefit of all regions across Europe.

This policy paper distils the essential findings of the report into a ‘ready-to-use’ tool to convince policymakers of not only the need for change, but exactly what change is required.

**Most regions in Europe are affected by population loss, an ageing population or outmigration. The consequences often have a negative impact on public services, housing, the labour market and governance structures. WHAT then makes this demographic change an opportunity for a region? And maybe even more important HOW can it be turned into an opportunity?**

#### Ageing and population decline

The two developments affecting regions in Europe the most are ageing and population decline. Raising awareness on the consequences of these developments is essential. Demographic change affects a broad range of policies from social policy to infrastructure and housing and from health care to economic development. An integrated approach is therefore required and tailor-made solutions have to be implemented. As demonstrated by the INTERREG IVC projects, cooperation creates a possibility to experiment, find creative solutions and new strategies. These practical innovations offer important clues for future policies that allow European regions to face the consequences of population change.

**Demographic change can be defined as the process of population ageing and population decline - the overall decrease in a region's population over time.**

Demographic change is acknowledged by Europe to be one of the major current challenges and an increasing one in the future. Although there are strong variations across Europe and contrasts between rural and urban communities, the implications of demographic change have become apparent in the last two decades in many European regions.

#### Laboratory

Today's declining and strongly ageing areas are laboratories for policy development, for other regions in Europe that will be affected by this demographic change over the next decade to draw lessons from. The ‘paradigm shift’ from growth to decline offers opportunities for experimental, out-of-the-box thinking and innovation in local planning and governance, for example through community participation. In this context, nine INTERREG IVC projects that explore new approaches and practices to deal with demographic change have been analysed. The themes addressed are independent living, social and health care services, economic diversification and education, lifelong learning and labour market.



INTERREG IVC

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## Time for action!

Listed here are some good examples of strategies that were found to work to tackle the consequences of demographic change:

- investing in competences of the older population;
- developing centres for lifelong learning;
- increasing the access to and use of internet to develop and improve diversified and new businesses, especially in rural and remote areas;
- supporting diversification from traditional activities towards the creation of new products, supply chains or new activities and different marketing strategies;
- giving more attention to innovation hubs or labs where companies, research institutes and governments build on new entrepreneurial opportunities;
- planning facilities and services accordingly to people's needs and choices;
- taking steps to narrow the gap on the operational level between health and social services;
- making independent living more economically sustainable; and many more ways!

## Policy recommendations

It is important to be aware of the cross-sectoral character of demographic change. In the light of these challenges it is important, both at the European, national and regional level to review and adapt existing policies and practices. It is recommended to:

- Pay more attention to declining and strongly ageing regions within the European Union;
- Involve all stakeholders and stimulate cooperation between different levels of governance;
- Take a multidisciplinary approach with a long-term perspective in which all actors (government, social partners, universities, etc) share responsibilities;
- Encourage entrepreneurship development and the creation of new types of businesses;
- Improve relationships and build partnerships between businesses, schools, training centres and universities;
- Foster the use of ICT and promote Internet connectivity to enhance social inclusion and access to the labour market, lifelong learning and new types of services;
- Transfer knowledge in a tailored way according to each regional scenario, taking into consideration the failures and successes of other regions;
- Encourage an end-user approach;
- Involve politicians to create a higher degree of political commitment.

## Policy sharing, policy learning

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