

Policy
recommendations
for dealing with
**demographic
change**



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October 2014

Facing 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. The consequences often have a negative impact on public services, housing, the labour market and governance structures. Regions from all over Europe found creative solutions and strategies to deal with these challenges. Their results offer important clues for future policies that allow European regions to face the consequences of population change. While drafting policies for dealing with demographic change is not easy, we hope that the following recommendations will nevertheless be useful to policy makers and practitioners at regional and national level in Europe. The recommendations are grouped by sector.

Roos Galjaard was contracted by the INTERREG IVC programme to analyse, benchmark and capitalise on the wealth of knowledge generated by cooperation projects in the field of demographic change.

These policy recommendations are the result of a two-year analysis, providing targeted actions for those involved in this policy field.

1. Regional strategies for demographic change

Regional strategies should always take an integrated approach to fully grasp the cross-sectoral character of demographic change, but at the same time, be specific and tailored to the unique situation of each region. This leads to some crosscutting recommendations:

→ Our analysis showed the utmost **importance of involving all regional stakeholders** and stimulating cooperation between different levels of governance to be able to implement or change policies with regard to demographic change.

→ We advise the **use of a multidisciplinary approach** with a long-term perspective, whereby the stakeholders (government, social partners, community organisations etc.) are aware of their shared responsibilities.

→ To create viable communities, we believe that policies must seek to **support diversification** from traditional activities and encourage the development of entrepreneurship and the creation of new types of businesses.

→ **Regional smart specialisation strategies** may offer good starting points for implementing a regional innovation strategy and bringing stakeholders together.

→ One model does not fit all! We recommend **tailoring the transfer of knowledge** to each regional scenario, taking into consideration the failures and successes of other regions.

→ We advise regions to develop and **maintain good demographic databases** to help them shape demographic change-proof strategies.

2. Education, lifelong learning and the labour market

It is important to review and adapt existing policies and practices in the light of the demographic challenges. One way is to try to boost employment through more jobs and longer working lives of better quality. The nature of local, regional and national labour markets is fundamental. Policymakers need to create the right incentives, practices and legislation. In the light of the above analysis we think the following recommendations could be supportive of this goal.

→ We support the adaptation of working environments and working conditions for all employees, not just the elderly, to ensure that everyone will be able to work longer. Several projects in our analysis took steps to **create the right conditions for a better work-life balance** and more flexible working opportunities.

This resulted in more over-50s and women at work. For example, the *ESF6 CIA* capitalisation project developed the European Best Practice Guidelines related to the employment of older workers. The guidelines consider working hours and work/life balance, work organisation and workplace design.

→ Our findings show that schools, universities and training institutes should **offer education in a much wider variety of sectors**, allowing more young people to be educated locally and to find work in their home region, therefore partly preventing out-migration. The *PADIMA* project focused on education and training as methods to tackle depopulation in mountain areas. For example the secondary schools in San Blas, Spain, give training in nature management in an area with a highly-valued landscape, producing educated individuals who can make their living in the region.

→ In many regions there is a mismatch between the educational offer and businesses' needs. Regions could try to **facilitate the communication** between these parties to create a better match thus enhancing the economic development of the region.

→ We would also recommend incentives to **encourage the employment of older people**. As part of the *DART* project, the region of Brandenburg (Germany) helped highly qualified elderly people improve their chances on the job market through Campus for Generations. Unemployed graduates that are at least 50 years old, together with students from the University of Potsdam, are included in scientific and innovative projects at the university in collaboration with SMEs. For small- and medium-sized enterprises in particular, such participation may offer the possibility of discovering and using the potentials of the over-50 generation.

3. Economic Diversification

Diversification – of products, economic activities and markets – is one of the key factors for regional and local economic development. It mitigates the effects of population decrease or a growing number of elderly in a region. Several recommendations from our analysis we think are most relevant in this context:

→ **Access to broadband has proved essential** to many of the good practices, especially for peripheral and rural areas since ICT has the strongest distance-shortening effect. One effect is that existing and potential entrepreneurs will have better access to a range of services that are useful for developing and improving their businesses. Our advice, therefore, is to **increase broadband access significantly** and support remote working, start-ups and professional use of the Internet.

→ The recommendation from the *CREATOR* project that **SMEs could innovate their products by focusing on the needs of the elderly** is fully supported by our analysis. SMEs could, for example, take into account the clarity and readability of information labels, the nutritional needs of the elderly or the overall design for the development of new products.

→ We would like to stress the importance of innovation hubs or labs where companies, research institutes and the government can **build on new entrepreneurial opportunities** and develop new products at the same time. The *INN.O.V.Age* project in particular provided evidence for the value of this recommendation. One of its partners, the South East Health Technologies Alliance (SEHTA), launched a UK Health Care Innovation Hub - a centre of excellence where high-tech entrepreneurs, academics, researchers and policymakers meet, network and develop new and innovative health care concepts. It acts as a catalyst for bringing together people with the common interest of helping elderly people to live independently.

→ We strongly draw policymakers' attention to **support diversification from traditional activities** towards the creation of new products, supply chains or new activities and different marketing strategies.

4. Social Services and Health Care

Our analysis of project results revealed that there are many good examples to maintain or develop social services even in the context of population decline and ageing. Nevertheless, it also showed that there are still many barriers to overcome, especially to prevent exclusion of some of the

most deprived citizens in Europe from services. We advise taking a closer look at the following recommendations:

→ With the demographic developments at hand and the rising costs within the current health care system we recommend to **develop health care towards a more comprehensive, integrated system**, whereby all important stakeholders cooperate to deliver services of high quality, to support cost-efficient models and to support dynamic health systems and new technologies, including e-health solutions. The Veneto region in Italy, through the CASA project, developed strategies for the integration of health and social care, which at the same time strengthened the role of the municipalities in managing their services. This multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral approach proved successful, also with regard to centring the end-user and its existing needs.

→ With its strong economic incentives, the market is a proper place for the evaluation, adjustment and designing of profitable and efficient e-health models and systems, including telemedicine. But local and regional governments should **facilitate and support the development of innovative services** by adapting legal frameworks and through policy action.

→ The results from the DAA project indicate that it is important to **involve stakeholders, service designers and users, at an early stage**. Taking this approach ensures that solutions meet the needs and demands not only of the customers or end-users, but also, for example, of the staff who provide the services.

5.

Independent living

ICT helps older people to live independently longer, by making use of telecare services and social media opportunities. Therefore, an important recommendation is to foster the use of ICT and promote Internet connectivity to enhance social inclusion, with special focus on elderly people with reduced mobility.

→ We urge the improvement of patients' independence by training the patient and caregivers in how to use telemedicine services.

→ In order to bring telecare to a broader range of users, it is important to foster synergies between SMEs working on telemedicine projects and local and regional economic development policies.

→ We recommend exploring the new domains of home and assisted living equipment, software and services, considering both techniques as well as potential users' behaviour, organisational problems, and socio-cultural aspects.

→ To integrate research and innovation on independent living, we recommend that the cluster model as implemented by *IN.N.O.VAge* partners (see #3) could be explored.

Learn more, do more...

The full INTERREG IVC capitalisation report demonstrates how understanding demographic change should be the starting point for all EU policies and will assist policymakers working in the many fields for which demography matters. The report presents the most important aspects of demographic change the INTERREG IVC projects have been working on; common challenges and interesting or innovative practices or policies; the usefulness of practices and strategies for other regions and projects in Europe; and recommendations for policy makers and practitioners in Europe.

This publication is one of a series of twelve thematic policy recommendations. For more information and downloads, visit:
www.interreg4c.eu/capitalisation

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