

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Taking into account the needs of older people'

(2009/C 77/26)

On 18 February 2008 the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on

Taking into account the needs of older people.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 September 2008. The rapporteur was Ms Heinisch.

At its 447th plenary session, held on 17 and 18 September 2008 (meeting of 18 September), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 106 votes to 32 with 20 abstentions.

1. Summary and recommendations

1.1 Justification

1.1.1 The demographic changes that are taking place in Europe are hallmarked by sharp rises in the number of older people, while overall population numbers are falling ⁽¹⁾. The Council has made a number of statements on ageing. This trend varies from region to region. The European Union is thus facing some major social challenges ⁽²⁾. The Commission will adopt a communication by the end of 2008 offering proposals on how best to take into account the needs of an ageing population with support from the Structural Funds.

1.1.2 This opinion places special emphasis on the acknowledgement and appreciation of older people, as well as preventing discrimination against them and preserving their dignity. It must be recognised that older people are not a homogenous group in terms of ability, financial security or health and social needs, so that policies and services should reflect that 'one size fits all' or age segmentation are not appropriate.

1.1.3 Therefore, this opinion touches upon the spectrum of issues which affect individuals from formal retirement into very old age. This of course includes — without it being reiterated on every occasion — men and women, older disabled people and older people with an immigrant background.

1.1.4 This document does not examine the requirements associated with older workers and dependent, older people needing care because a large number of proposals have already

⁽¹⁾ See the information report of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship CES 930/99 final; SEC (2007) 638 Commission Staff Working Document 'Europe's Demographic Future: Facts and Figures'.

⁽²⁾ See COM(2006) 571 final, 12.10.2006; SEC(2007) 638 final; EPC & EC (DG ECFIN): 'The impact of ageing on public expenditure', Special Report No 1/2006.

been drawn up on these matters ⁽³⁾. However, the EESC would stress the importance of the 'life cycle' approach to an ageing society to prevent discrimination and stereotyping and the need for integrated policies across the generations.

1.1.5 In order for older people to continue to participate in society and to live a decent life, it is essential that they have financial security and voluntary access to opportunities for meaningful activities, including lifelong learning, employment and voluntary work and the use of new technologies. In addition, transport, energy, housing and health care should be available, affordable and accessible.

1.2 Recommendations

1.2.1 In order to ensure that the growing numbers of older people living in urban and rural areas have sustainable living conditions and access to activities at a time of changing circumstances, the Committee calls for the following measures:

- regular drafting of national and regional **situation reports**;
- **compiling and disseminating of examples of best practices** of Member States;
- promoting a **new image of old age**, which acknowledges the lifelong achievements of older people (including those of migrants) and respect for old age in politics, business and society;
- **media campaigns on active ageing**;

⁽³⁾ See, among others, EESC opinion of 16.12.2004 on *Strategies for extending the age of exit from the labour market*, rapporteur: Mr Dantin (OJ C 157, 28.6.2005); EESC opinion of 28.10.2004 on *Health care and long-term care for the elderly*, rapporteur: Mr Braghin (OJ C 120, 20.5.2005); EESC opinion of 26.9.2007 on *Patients' rights*, rapporteur: Mr Bouis (OJ C 10, 15.1.2008); EESC opinion of 24.10.2007 on *Elder abuse*, rapporteur: Ms Heinisch (OJ C 44, 16.2.2008); EESC opinion of 13.3.2008 on *Guaranteeing universal access to long-term care and the financial sustainability of long-term care systems for older people*, rapporteur: Ms Klasnic (OJ C 204, 9.8.2008).

- **measures** should be taken, particularly with regard to services of general interest, infrastructure, the supply of goods and services, financing, housing, health care services, the organisation of the end of life and participation in social life.

Target group: **Member States, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee.**

- establishment of an additional **Expert Group on Old Age** within the framework of the European Commission's expert group on demographic issues ⁽⁴⁾;
- establishment of a **European Alliance for an active life in old age** along the lines of the European Alliance for Families ⁽⁵⁾, which among other things organises workshops and conferences;
- establishment of a **European Centre for Age Research** to process, collate and exchange information, to ascertain a need for more extensive research and to promote research in this area;
- incorporation of an interdisciplinary **focus on older people** with its own budget in the 8th research framework programme;
- creation of a **European internet portal** providing the public with information from all directorates-general on initiatives relating to old age;
- creation of **local, regional and national internet portals** along the lines of the European internet portal;
- support for a **Demography Fund** ⁽⁶⁾ as part of the Structural Funds to provide financial compensation for regions which are taking active steps to deal with demographic change (e.g. active family policy);
- **inclusion of new priorities in the Lifelong Learning Programme** to train support workers to assist with the transition between various stages of life.

Target group: **EU council presidencies, European Parliament, European Commission.**

1.2.2 In order to achieve this, an approach to sustainable management must be pursued which is also capable of contributing to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy for economic growth and jobs.

⁽⁴⁾ Commission decision 2007/397/EC.

⁽⁵⁾ See http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/families/index_en.html.

⁽⁶⁾ See point 4.5.2 of EESC opinion of 13.12.2007 on the *Fourth Cohesion Report*, rapporteur: Mr Derrunie (OJ C 120, 16.5.2008).

2. General observations

2.1 This exploratory opinion focuses on the need for action in European regions. A redistribution of available resources is necessary in all countries ⁽⁷⁾, which will increase the burden on citizens living in urban and rural areas. At the same time, local infrastructure will be faced with significant demands to adapt ⁽⁸⁾. Innovative and integrated approaches are especially needed to ensure that regions and communes are able to respond to demographic changes.

3. The areas in need of action

Several fundamental requirements have to be met in order to ensure that older people have a secure, healthy and active life. These relate to the following areas:

3.1 Services of general interest

3.1.1 Services of general interest are an essential means of ensuring respect for human dignity and they safeguard the individual's right to comprehensive protection of his or her basic rights. They enable citizens to exercise their rights in practice. In concrete terms, these services affect, among other things, spatial planning and the environment ⁽⁹⁾, especially municipal infrastructures. Shrinking population numbers, especially in rural areas ⁽¹⁰⁾, mean that for economic reasons essential services will in future no longer be available or affordable, will be completely abolished or will be unable to meet new requirements. This is a question of providing basic services and ensuring that the whole population has access to them, while specifically taking account of the particular requirements of older people and those needing care. This concerns:

- energy supplies, in particular electricity, gas and heating;
- water management, waste management and prevention;
- safety and cleanliness of public spaces;
- public services administration.

⁽⁷⁾ See EESC opinions of 14.3.2007 on the *Economic and budgetary impact of ageing populations*, rapporteur: Ms Florio (OJ C 161, 13.7.2007) and EESC opinion of 15.9.2004 on *Research needs in the area of demographic change*, rapporteur: Ms Heinisch (OJ C 74, 23.3.2005).

⁽⁸⁾ See EESC opinion of 14.2.2008 on *An independent evaluation of services of general interest*, rapporteur: Mr Hencks (OJ C 162, 25.6.2008).

⁽⁹⁾ See EESC opinions of 18.1.2007 on *Structural Policy/Cohesion in the EU*, rapporteur: Mr Derrunie (OJ C 93, 27.4.2007) and of 25.4.2007 on the *Territorial Agenda*, rapporteur: Mr Pariza (OJ C 168, 20.7.2007).

⁽¹⁰⁾ For instance, rural areas in France, Spain and Portugal, eastern Germany, some Eastern European regions and outlying rural regions in Sweden and Finland; see 'The Spatial Effects of Demographic Trends and Migration', ESPON project 1.1.4, Final report 2002.

3.1.2 Transport infrastructures and the supply of goods and services to cover everyday needs

Independence and mobility are key requirements for quality of life and activity in old age ⁽¹¹⁾ ⁽¹²⁾. For this the following are necessary:

- shops that can be easily reached offering unfettered access and selling affordable goods for everyday needs as well as accessibility of key places such as the post office, the bank, pharmacy, cemetery, and public buildings and facilities, especially those of local and regional authorities which enable older people to participate in society, such as local authority offices, citizens' advice bureaux, etc.;
- availability, accessibility and affordability of (local) public transport;
- transport, especially in areas with low population density;
- availability and accessibility of public spaces (footpaths, places to sit, street lighting, transport safety, etc.).

3.1.3 Housing

The current housing supply may not meet the needs of an ageing population in Europe with the emphasis on continued independence in their own home. The design and standards for new-build housing need to take into account the loss of physical, sensory or mental abilities and to use energy and technologically efficient systems (e.g. *Ambient Assisted Living*) to enable continued independence. Such an approach would also be advantageous across the generations.

The authorities in Member States responsible for meeting housing needs should ensure that there are services in place to assist in adapting current houses as well as promoting new concepts in housing design and community living, including appropriate financial and legal measures.

3.1.4 Health services

Reliable health care located close to home and geared to older people's requirements becomes increasingly important as people get older ⁽¹³⁾. Such health care is seriously under threat in rural

⁽¹¹⁾ See EESC opinion of 29.5.2008 on the *Green paper: Towards a new culture for urban mobility*, rapporteur: Mr Hernández Bataller, co-rapporteur: Mr Barbadillo López (OJ C 224, 30.8.2008), the opinion of AGE — the European Platform of Older People — on this Green Paper (COM 2007) 551 final); http://ec.europa.eu/transport/clean/green_paper_urban_transport/index_en.htm; or Mollenkopf et al. (Eds.)(2005). 'Enhancing mobility in later life — Personal coping, environmental resources, and technical support'. Amsterdam: IOS Press.

⁽¹²⁾ Examples of additional measures to preserve independence exist in France (Hautes Corbières; CG VAL de Marne; France — conference speech ANDASS), in Germany (examples Berlin and Frankfurt/Main), UK (Newcastle).

⁽¹³⁾ See, for example, the DG SANCO publication on 'Healthy Ageing: keystone for a sustainable Europe' (http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_information/indicators/docs/healthy_ageing_en.pdf).

and/or remote regions with low population density as a result of a further decline in the population coupled with the fact that many of the doctors still practising are themselves ageing. There is an urgent need to further develop comprehensive medical care, with good regional coverage. This entails (including protection of the rights of the older people as patients ⁽¹⁴⁾):

- medical, especially geriatric care and rehabilitation by doctors and service providers trained in gerontology and geriatrics;
- out-patient care services and basic assistance through outreach services;
- palliative care and psychological support services to families;
- advice and information on patient rights and support options;
- advice and information services and facilities and incentives for prevention (enabling people to learn about healthy diet, physical exercise, preventing falls, and healthy lifestyles associated with special bonuses);
- technical assistance resources and support systems without replacing human assistance (see section on access to ICT);
- promotion or creation of formal and informal social support systems, including citizens' advice bureaux, self-help groups, groups for family carers and neighbourhood help arrangements.

Tried and tested models for such support systems already exist in various Member States ⁽¹⁵⁾.

3.2 Arrangements for emergencies and a dignified end to life

3.2.1 Emergencies

Precautions must be taken so that older people who are not able to help themselves can be offered timely assistance in the event of an emergency, such as a flood, prolonged heatwave or disaster.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Cf. EESC opinions 1447/2004; 1465/2007; 1256/2007; and 501/2008, footnote 3.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Preventive work in Jyväskylä — Finland.ppt; France: Poitiers.pdf; Strasbourg.pdf; *Le Guide de l'Aidant Familial* (the family carer guide).

3.2.2 End of life

The way in which people die is a controversial issue and subject to different rules in the various Member States (active and passive euthanasia). Legal certainty must be ensured here so that older people's wishes can be taken into consideration even in the event of progressive cognitive problems, such as cases involving use of life-prolonging measures. Advance directives may be one solution, but the especially vulnerable must be protected. Palliative medicine and the hospice movement play an important role here. In short, dignity to the last must be the guiding principle.

In a Union in which 25 % of the population is aged 60 or over, a framework needs to be put in place to encourage the Member States to enact national law measures providing the legal security needed to enable people to prepare for the end of their lives in a composed way.

The EESC would therefore encourage a debate amongst the Member States on the potential of developing a framework around end of life issues which might lead to the development of legal measures in the Member States.

3.3 Social integration and participation in society

Social integration and participation in society are basic human needs which concern various aspects of older people's lives. The most important of these include family and friends, gainful employment, voluntary work and meaningful activities as well as lifelong education and participation in cultural and social life.

3.3.1 Social integration via family and friends

Older people's social environment is changing dramatically⁽¹⁶⁾. The number of older people living alone is rising. In cities, this proportion is sometimes 50 % of households. As a consequence, social policy and/or organisational measures are needed as well as technical innovations for:

- supporting family and non-family networks, by means of appropriate measures to improve the work-life balance of those caring for older people⁽¹⁷⁾;

⁽¹⁶⁾ See EESC opinion of 15.9.2004 on *Research needs in the area of demographic change*, rapporteur: Ms Heinisch (OJ C 74, 23.3.2005); also EESC opinion of 16.12.2004 on *Relations between the generations*, rapporteur: Mr Bloch-Lainé (OJ C 157, 28.6.2005), EESC opinion of 14.3.2007 on *The family and demographic change*, rapporteur: Mr Buffetaut (OJ C 161, 13.7.2007); EESC opinion of 11.7.2007 on *The role of the social partners in reconciling working, family and private life*, rapporteur: Mr Clever (OJ C 256, 27.10.2007), and EESC opinion of 13.12.2007 on *Promoting solidarity between the generations*, rapporteur: Mr Jahier (OJ C 120, 16.5.2008).

⁽¹⁷⁾ See the activities of the Flemish association VVSG (Flemish association Ageing VVSG-Vergrijzing-GRV-2006.pdf) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sweden — care for the elderly in Sweden today.pdf).

- in this connection the EESC notes the work being carried out by the Commission in the context of the renewed social agenda, and by the European social partners as regards reconciliation of professional and private life;
- contributing to cross-generational activities⁽¹⁸⁾;
- people's own initiatives and civic commitment generally; and
- promoting the construction of multi-generational housing.

3.3.2 Integration and participation through meaningful activities

Both paid employment and voluntary work can help people to integrate and become involved in society. There is therefore a need for action in both areas if people are to remain socially active for as long as possible:

3.3.2.1 Participation through paid employment

In order to make this type of participation through work possible for people wishing to follow this course after retirement (for the target group see point 1.1.3), whether for financial reasons or for professional fulfilment, changes such as the following could be made:

- in accordance with the Employment Equality Directive⁽¹⁹⁾, strengthening the ability of individuals to make the transition from work to retirement more flexible, with appropriate adjustment of pension and tax systems as part of a jobs strategy covering all generations of adults⁽²⁰⁾, and securing compliance with the principle of equal pay. In principle, age limits in the Member States should only refer to the right to stop working, and not be construed as a ban on voluntary continuation of employment;
- gearing jobs and the working environment to older people, by reducing the physical demands and improving health, safety and working time patterns and arrangements;
- applying and, if necessary, adapting techniques for making working procedures easier and more ergonomic;

⁽¹⁸⁾ See the model programme of the German Federal Ministry for the family, seniors, women and young people *Generationsübergreifende Freiwilligendienste* (inter-generational volunteer services).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Directive 2000/78/EC.

⁽²⁰⁾ The example of Finland shows how positive incentives (instead of financial losses) and flexible age limits (between 63 and 68) enable people to organise their retirement according to their individual needs or to continue working.

- dealing with potential obstacles and promoting new forms of contract relating to the transition period between pre and post-retirement life, and offering legal security, to ensure that they do not create new forms of insecurity;
- cultural change in business geared towards a comprehensive jobs strategy which specifically promotes individual skills regardless of age ⁽²¹⁾.

3.3.2.2 Participation through voluntary commitments and meaningful activities

In order to make more effective use of older peoples' potential, and at the same time to provide them with meaningful activities that match their various skills, it will be necessary to:

- compile and safeguard knowledge acquired through experience, including knowledge about social behaviour and special handicraft and artistic skills;
- promote innovative forms of knowledge transfer, including support for other generations ⁽²²⁾;
- facilitate a flexible transition between employment and retirement or enable older people to engage in a mix of paid and voluntary work without any financial loss and on a voluntary basis;
- support voluntary activities in an honorary capacity ⁽²³⁾ through further education and involvement in local and supra-regional projects;
- open up institutions to enable older people to carry out more voluntary work without replacing paid jobs.

3.4 Education and moves to keep people involved in society

Key prerequisites for older people participating in society and being actively involved are education and lifelong learning and involvement in projects geared to the needs of older people. To this end, the range of activities on offer at local, regional and supra-regional level should be adjusted accordingly:

- lifelong training to maintain the skills of older workers. Businesses should facilitate and support relevant measures here. At the same time, incentives must be put in place (e.g. tax incentives);

⁽²¹⁾ See Naegele, G. & Walker, A. (2006): 'A guide to good practice in age management. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions', Dublin.

⁽²²⁾ For example, the ESF finances a project in the UK providing former managers aged over 50 with the opportunity to advise and mentor younger colleagues and postgraduates in over 200 SMEs.

⁽²³⁾ See EESC opinion of 13.12.2006 on *Voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact*, rapporteur: Ms Koller (OJ C 325, 30.12.2006).

- general further education opportunities ⁽²⁴⁾ throughout life at all levels (from readily-accessible options to university education);
- quality assessment and quality assurance of training courses;
- EU-wide recognition of qualifications ⁽²⁵⁾, skills and competences obtained also in old age in order to facilitate cross-border mobility ⁽²⁶⁾, and appreciation of knowledge acquired through informal channels;
- training courses to help people prepare for retirement;
- training of support workers to help older people prepare for a new stage in their lives ⁽²⁷⁾;
- studies directed at all generations, not divided along age lines (mutual give and take);
- training courses to promote inter-generational involvement (e.g. services provided by grandparents);
- training in basic financial and legal matters ⁽²⁸⁾ (to protect the interests of older people, especially with regard to Internet commerce);
- training courses on new information and communications technologies;
- availability and accessibility of information (newspapers, radio, TV, Internet);
- variety of sport opportunities to suit different abilities and interests;
- leisure activities and tourism ⁽²⁹⁾ taking into account specific cultural needs ⁽³⁰⁾.

3.5 Older people as consumers

Older people have a variety of needs, relating both to the provision of everyday goods (see 3.2.1) and durable consumer goods, and to technical help and assistance (see 3.6) as well as services of all kinds, which should open up new job prospects for younger people.

⁽²⁴⁾ Cf. EESC opinion of 9.2.2005 on the *Integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning*, rapporteur: Mr Koryfidis (OJ C 221, 8.9.2005); EESC opinion of 18.5.2006 on *Key competences for lifelong learning*, rapporteur: Ms Herczog (OJ C 195, 18.8.2006); EESC opinion of 30.5.2007 on the *European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*, rapporteur: Mr Rodriguez (OJ C 175, 27.7.2007); and EESC opinion of 13.3.2008 on *Adult learning*, rapporteur: Ms Heinisch (OJ C 204, 9.8.2008).

⁽²⁵⁾ Without prejudice to Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications.

⁽²⁶⁾ In connection with practical training or volunteering for older people, for example.

⁽²⁷⁾ The project *Transition — Ausbildung zum/zur Übergangsbegleiter/in für frühkindliche Bildungsprozesse* (Transition — training as transition expert in early childhood education), which is part of the Socrates Grundtvig 1.1 programme, could provide a model here (<http://www.elternverein-bw.de>).

⁽²⁸⁾ See Communication on financial education, COM(2007)808, 18.12.2007, p. 7.

⁽²⁹⁾ Cf. the project *Travelagents* (www.travelagentsproject.org).

⁽³⁰⁾ Cf. the project *AAMEE* (<http://www.aamee.eu/>).

To this end, the following is required:

- a general product design along the lines of 'Universal Design' and 'Design for All' ⁽³¹⁾ with readable and comprehensible instructions;
- prevention of discrimination on grounds of age and disability concerning the access to services, in particular financial services ⁽³²⁾;
- enforcement of consumer rights also for older people;
- the profile of retirement migrants has changed over the years. Many find themselves with fewer retirement resources and may have health and social care needs for which current health and welfare systems make little provision. Retirement migrants fall between the gap of national entitlements being no longer covered by their home country's policy and not covered by the host country. There needs to be a greater understanding and debate about this issue across the EU to effect change, for which the European level is relevant and beneficial for citizens.

3.6 Access to information and communication technologies (ICT)

As regards housing, health, participation in society and education, as well as access to e-government, the use of new technologies is increasingly becoming the key to living an independent, active life in old age. The same is true of services of general interest aimed at older people themselves and of related economic development activities at regional and supranational level ⁽³³⁾. Key to this are:

- moves to work at a very early stage of development on software to ensure maximum accessibility and on hardware to ensure optimum use of the functions of machines by people who are not (or are no longer) familiar with them;
- available and accessible information and communication technologies, including *Ambient Assisted Living* systems,

⁽³¹⁾ See the European Design for All e-Accessibility Network (EDeAN; <http://www.edean.org/>).

⁽³²⁾ Issuing small loans might be a useful way of providing older people with the basis for independent activity should they retire or become unemployed.

⁽³³⁾ See EESC opinion of 29.5.2008 on *Older people — new ICT*, rapporteur: Ms Darmanin (OJ C 224, 30.8.2008); EU Parliament Report RR\39694EN.doc, PE396.494v03-00; Malanowski, N., Özçivlek, R. and Cabrera, M.: 'Active Ageing and Independent Living Services: The Role of Information and Communication Technology'. JRC Scientific and Technical Report, EUR 2346 EN — 2008.

technologies for e-learning, e-health, e-care and e-rehabilitation. Technologies can help without substituting personal contact ⁽³⁴⁾;

- simpler access and use of relevant technical equipment and networks given the growing complexity of systems and adjustment to the specific needs of older people (e.g. sight problems, problems with sense of touch);
- considering the needs of older users and measures to boost interest in using such tools;
- involving all stakeholders and respecting ethical and legal points of view especially when it comes to the use of electronic monitoring systems in cases of dementia;
- accompanying measures such as integrated advisory, installation and maintenance services, as well as social services;
- considering the knock-on effects of social change and the new experiences and interests of the next generations.

3.7 Financial security

It is important to urge the Member States to create the conditions for the security and dignity of older people, whether they are contributing to the life of society or not, throughout their retirement.

Structural changes, the current reform of pension and social systems and rising living costs coupled with falling purchasing power mean that the proportion of people at risk of poverty in old age is increasing. It is predominantly older woman and those with a history of long-term unemployment who are living in poverty in certain Member States.

In order to ensure the long-term viability of social protection systems, the Member States must encourage people still in work to make use of collective or individual pension arrangements, and ensure that private operators active in this area are solvent. They must also guarantee a minimum level of income for all, enabling every older person to lead a decent life, whatever his or her personal circumstances.

⁽³⁴⁾ See the Action Plan on 'Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing' (COM(2007) 332 final), the *Ambient Assisted Living Joint Research Programme* (<http://www.aal-europe.eu/>), the research activities of the 7th framework programme for research and technological development (2007-2013) (http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/index_en.cfm), and 'Seniorwatch 2 — Assessment of the Senior Market for ICT, Progress and Developments' (http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/research/ageing/index_en.htm).

4. Specific comments and recommendations

The Committee calls for measures to be taken both within Member States and at European level to create a solidly-grounded basis for the restructuring and innovation strategies needed:

4.1 Measures within Member States

4.1.1 Compilation of national and regional situation reports

What is needed first and foremost is a precise analysis of the regional situations. The Committee urges the Commission to compile regular situation reports on the individual Member States accordingly, including information on the activity potential of older people.

4.1.2 Preparation and provision of information

The Committee believes it is vital that relevant information, knowledge and experience including previous research findings as well as newly acquired knowledge be made available to specialist committees, stakeholders and older people themselves. In particular, there should be better communication of research findings between the worlds of research, politics and users (older people and their representatives).

4.1.3 Processing and collating experience to date in the Member States

The Committee calls for regional best practice to be collated, compared and assessed to see whether it ties in with other areas and is transferable to other regions. The aim is to compile a list of *Best Practices* to be made available to others ⁽³⁵⁾.

4.1.4 Promoting a new image of old age

In an ageing society people can no longer be viewed as 'inactive' as soon as they stop work. A rethink at all levels (politics, economy, society) is required here. Countries and regions are particularly well-placed to undertake regular **campaigns on promoting active aging**.

4.1.5 The Committee proposes a **European media campaign** to promote an image of old age that acknowledges the lifelong contribution of older people to the life of society (including older migrants) and respect for old age.

⁽³⁵⁾ For example, in Wales there is a statutory Commissioner for Older People, building on the experience of the Children's Commissioner, who monitors policy and legislation and advocates and commissions research.

4.2 Measures at European level

4.2.1 **Establishment of an additional Expert Group on Old Age** within the framework of the European Commission's expert group on demographic issues.

4.2.2 **Establishment of a European Alliance for an active life in old age** along the lines of the European Alliance for Families ⁽³⁶⁾ with the goal of providing incentives for leading an active life in old age through the exchange of experience among Member States and promoting cooperation and mutual learning in the European Union. This alliance would be well-placed to organise European conferences and workshops.

4.2.3 Establishment of a European Centre for Age Research

Situation and experience reports will show which aspects and regional features require further research ⁽³⁷⁾. Findings from earlier research framework programmes and statistical data also need to be put together and disseminated more widely and incorporated into policy and practice ⁽³⁸⁾. A European Centre for Age Research along the lines of the US National Institute on Ageing would be a particularly appropriate means of consolidating, integrating and further developing bodies of statistical and other relevant information already available

4.2.4 Incorporation of an interdisciplinary focus on older people in the 8th research framework programme

The incorporation of an interdisciplinary focus on older people in the 8th research framework programme would bring together research activities.

4.2.5 Creation of a common European Internet portal

An internet portal of this kind should make available to the public and especially older people all measures taken by individual directorate-generals relating to old age. The information should be retrievable via special links.

⁽³⁶⁾ See http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/families/european-alliance-for-families-en.html.

⁽³⁷⁾ See the EESC opinion of 24.5.2000 on the *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — towards a European Research Area*, rapporteur: Mr Wolf (OJ C 204, 18.7.2000).

⁽³⁸⁾ A recommendation from the Sixth Framework Research Programme. See also EESC opinion of 15.9.2004 on *Research needs in the area of demographic change*, rapporteur: Ms Heinisch (OJ C 74, 23.3.2005).

4.2.6 Creation of local, regional and national internet portals along the lines of the European Internet portal

4.2.7 Support for a demography fund as part of the Structural Funds ⁽³⁹⁾

In view of the particularly precarious situation of regions with dwindling populations, the European demography fund should benefit rural regions and regions with below-average growth in particular and promote good initiatives.

Brussels, 18 September 2008.

4.2.8 **Inclusion of new priorities in the Lifelong Learning Programme** to facilitate the training of support workers to assist with the transition between various stages of life.

4.3 On the basis of the proposed measures, appropriate concepts can be devised for recommended courses of action and political measures. The EESC calls on the Commission to take account of these proposals in the planned communication.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

⁽³⁹⁾ See Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11.7.2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund (EC) No 1260/1999; see also EESC opinion of 13.12.2007 on the *Fourth Cohesion Report*, rapporteur: Mr Derrunine (OJ C 120, 16.5.2008).