Welcome

This newsletter catalogues the achievements of the European Research Area in Ageing since it was established. In 2004 a group of seven partners, all funders of national programmes of ageing research, committed to form an ERA-NET in ageing, ERA-AGE. The consortium eventually grew to include 19 partners in 2012 from across the EU as well as Israel and Canada.

A European approach to ageing research has historically been hampered by a lack of systematic connections between centres of scientific excellence and between research funders and no concerted European perspective. This predictably resulted in duplication of effort, the failure to exploit the potential of the European research laboratory, among many missed opportunities, and ultimately made European ageing research less effective than North American research in the field.

ERA-AGE was the first project to focus on the Europeanisation of ageing research, which was reflected in its objectives:

- To facilitate coordination of existing ageing research programmes
- To promote multidisciplinary research activities between countries
- To share good practice in coordination and management of ageing programmes
- To develop European ageing research programmes
- To help break down the barriers between ageing research and policy and practice

With the support of funding from the European Commission’s Sixth and Seventh Framework Programmes, ERA-AGE not only met its aims, but exceeded them far beyond initial expectations. Its major achievements are:

- Europe’s first post-doctoral fellowship scheme: partners generated €5 million for 33 Fellowships
- Europe’s first joint programme of ageing research: 9 funders have supported 20 academic institutions in six projects in 7 countries
- Development of key research priorities
- Good practice guides in research management
- Creation of national research forums in partner countries (based on the UK model)
- Databases of research programmes and centres
- A key role in development of the FUTURAGE Road Map

This newsletter profiles these activities and stands as testament to the added value brought by the ERA-AGE consortium over the last eight years.
FLARE calls

FLARE is the first European post-doctoral programme on ageing research funded by the Member States themselves. It funds three-year Fellowships for exceptional early-career researchers in ageing, as the title – Future Leaders of Ageing Research in Europe – suggests.

FLARE has two innovative features: part of the fellowship must be spent in another country and involve a cross-disciplinary collaboration. These novel features reflect the strong scientific consensus in ERA-AGE meetings on the need to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to ageing research and also a European networking in this area. Another key priority for both scientists and end users is the support of the next generation of researchers on ageing, hence the focus on development implied by the programme title.

The first pilot project – FLARE 1 – created eighteen Fellowships in 2007. Fellows were funded by: the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria; Academy of Finland (AKA), Finland; Caisse Nationale de Solidarité pour l’Autonomie (CNSA), France; Projektträger des BMBF im DLR, Germany; Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR), Luxembourg; Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding (UEFISCSU), Romania; Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS), Sweden; and the UK Medical Research Council.

The second call - FLARE 2 – created fifteen Fellowships in 2011 with funding from: the Austrian Academy of Sciences; Academy of Finland (AKA), Finland; Caisse Nationale de Solidarité pour l’Autonomie (CNSA), France; Ministry of Health, Israel; Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR), Luxembourg; Ministry of Health and UEFISCDI, Romania, and; Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS), Sweden.

A total of €5 million of funding has been committed over the two calls.

The programme has been supported by a series of Summer Schools. Four in total, spread across Europe and shown on the map, have brought together FLARE Fellows (past and present) and other post-docs from ERA-AGE partner countries in a four day schedule of lectures, discussion groups, networking and social events.

Impact for FLARE Fellows

Feedback from the early career researchers who have completed their Fellowships have emphasised the completely unique nature of FLARE which provided them with opportunities not available anywhere else. In particular, the following features have been highlighted as providing most value:

- Opportunities to develop and extend networks globally, which have led to the development of future research projects
- The inter-disciplinary exchange of ideas through the FLARE Fellow community, especially during the residential Summer Schools
- The chance for in-depth focus on a personal research interests without any distractions
- Development of project leadership skills - at home and abroad – as FLAREs are PIs on their own project
- Research progression through publications, conferences and new research projects over the life of the Fellowship
Where are they now?

An update on the current activities of some FLARE 1 Fellows:

- Hans-Jörg Ehni, Deputy Director, Institute for Ethics and History of Medicine, University of Tübingen, Germany

- Dietmar Herndler-Brandstetter, Erwin Schroedinger Fellow, School of Medicine, Yale University, USA

- Chengxuan Qiu: Docent (Associate Professor) at Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm University, Sweden

- Blossom Stephan: Senior Lecturer at Newcastle University, UK

- Sandra Torres, Professor of Sociology, Uppsala University, Sweden

- Birgit Trukeschitz, Senior Research Fellow, Research Institute for Economics of Aging, WU – Vienna University of Economics and Business

- Jochen Ziegelmann, Research Scientist, German Centre of Gerontology (DZA), Germany

Good Practice Guides for Research Managers

ERA-AGE developed two good practice guides to support European research. The Good Practice Guide in Programme Management is intended primarily for those engaged in different aspects of research programme management. It was developed as a working document, which can be used as a starting point to evolve and be augmented in response to new information, especially examples of good practice. The guide covers: programme evaluation; dissemination and implementation of the programme and project findings; multi-/inter/transdisciplinary research; the involvement of research users; International collaboration, and; research ethics.

The Good Practice Guide to Involving Older People in Research: examples, purposes and good practice is intended to encourage those engaged in various aspects of research to consider and endorse appropriate approaches to involving older people in research. The guide seeks to encourage older people’s involvement in research processes in order to produce relevant outcomes for older people themselves. The good practice guide provides several European-based examples of older people playing successful significant and different roles in research in a variety of contexts. In addition, some general recommendations are made which are drawn from the collective experience of researchers from across Europe.
Joint Call for Research Applications in Active and Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course

On 1st June 1011 the European Research Area in Ageing (ERA-AGE 2) launched Europe’s first joint research programme in the ageing field by publishing a call for multidisciplinary research applications on “Active and Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course.

In total 35 applications were received; six applications successfully completed two peer-reviews and were recommended for funding in June 2012. The quality of applications was sufficiently high that a number of funding agencies agreed to increase their budget to accommodate additional projects; in some cases new funders are financing partners in consortia where other sources are not available. The six projects are profiled on the opposite page.

The call was dedicated to the achievement of enhanced and healthy ageing and, in particular, to address the major priority established by the AHAIP (Active and Healthy Ageing Innovation Partnership) of a 2 year increase in healthy life expectancy in the European Union by 2020.

Applications were invited from multidisciplinary research groups representing 3 to 5 funding countries. Stage-one pre-proposals were submitted between 1 June 2011 and 3 October 2011 to investigate specific research questions related to these three objectives of the call:

- Generate new knowledge on the biological, clinical, behavioural, social and environmental factors that enable individuals to live actively and healthily into later life.
- Explore comparatively different models, methods, approaches and good practices in societal responses to increased longevity which emphasise both social inclusion and sustainability.
- Engage in effective knowledge exchange activities that will assist European and other countries to achieve the goal of increasing healthy life expectancy by 2 years by 2020.

After a rigorous two-stage peer-review process, nine funders in seven countries have committed over €4 million to 20 different scientific institutions. The six funded projects reflect a diverse range of issues including continence, hearing, work and retirement, ambient assisted living technologies and environments of ageing.

Funding has generously been provided by:

- Fonds de recherche du Québec - Santé (FRQS), Canada
- Academy of Finland (AKA), Finland
- The Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS), Sweden
- Chief Scientist Office, Ministry of Health (CSO-MOH), Israel
- Fonds National de la Recherche (FNR), Luxembourg
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Canada
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), UK
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), UK

Partners from France, Norway and Denmark are also participating in funded projects.

The following funding agencies also supported the call, but are not funding any of the six funded projects:

- Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO), Belgium
- Caisse Nationale d’Assurance Vieillesse (CNAV), France
- Caisse nationale de solidarité pour l’autonomie (CNSA), France
- Latvian Council of Science (LCS), Latvia
- Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), Romania
- Ministry of Health, Romania
CONTINENCE ACROSS CONTINENTS TO UPEND STIGMA AND DEPENDENCY (CACTUS-D)
FRQS, Canada – Cara Tannenbaum, Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal
ESRC, UK – Eleanor van den Heuvel, Brunel University
CIHR, Canada – Adrian Wagg, University of Alberta

Partners with non-JCRA funding:
France – Xavier Fritel, CHU de Poitiers (funding from INPES and Agence Regional de Sante Poitou-Charentes)

HEALTHY AGEING IN RESIDENTIAL PLACES (HARP)
CIHR, Canada – Dr. Pat Armstrong, York University
FAS, Sweden – Dr. Marta Szebehely, Stockholm University
ESRC, UK – Dr. Liz Lloyd, University of Bristol

Independently funded partners:
Norway – Dr. Mia Vabø, NOVA – Norwegian Social Research

AMBIENT ASSISTIVE LIVING TECHNOLOGIES FOR WELLNESS, ENGAGEMENT, AND LONG LIFE (AAL-WELL)
CIHR, Canada – Alex Mihailidis, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute
CIHR, Canada – Andrew Sixsmith, Simon Fraser University
ESRC, UK – Arlene Astell, University of St. Andrews
FAS, Sweden – Louise Nygard, Karolinska Institutet

Independently funded partners:
France – Basile Chaix, INSERM (funding from Ministry of Transportation, the Syndicat des Transport de l’Ille de France (STIF), RATP, SNCF and conseil Regional de l’Ille de France)

DETERMINANTS OF HEALTHY AGEING IN WORK AND RETIREMENT: A CROSS-NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY BASED ON THE INTEGRATED DATASETS ACROSS EUROPE FOR AGEING RESEARCH (IDEAR) NETWORK
FAS, Sweden – Hugo Westerlund, Stockholm University
AKA, Sweden – Jussi Vahtera, University of Turku
ESRC, UK – Jenny Head, UCL

Independently funded partners:
Denmark – Naja Hulvej Rod, University of Copenhagen
France – Marcel Goldberg, INSERM

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF CONTRASTING URBAN CONTEXTS IN HEALTHY AGING: AN INTERNATIONAL STUDY OF DAILY MOBILITY AND ACTIVE LIVING USING WEARABLE SENSOR DEVICES ACROSS COHORTS (CURHA)
CIHR/FRQS, Canada – Yan Kestens, Université de Montréal
FNR, Luxembourg – Philippe Gerber, CEPS/INSTEAD

Independently funded partners:
France – Basile Chaix, INSERM (funding from Ministry of Transportation, the Syndicat des Transport de l’Ille de France (STIF), RATP, SNCF and conseil Regional de l’Ille de France)

HEARING, REMEMBERING, AND LIVING WELL: PAYING ATTENTION TO CHALLENGES OF OLDER ADULTS IN NOISY ENVIRONMENTS (HEARATTN)
CSO-MOH, Israel – Daniel A. Levy, The Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya
AKA, Finland – Anne Viljanen, University of Jyväskylä
BBSRC, UK – Antje Heinrich, MRC Institute of Hearing Research
CIHR, Canada – Bruce Schneider, University of Toronto
FRQS, Canada – Jean-Pierre Gagné, Université de Montréal
Networking activities

Throughout its life ERA-AGE has focused on joint activities as well as joint calls and these pages show a few key moments from the 18 European networking events the project has staged over its lifetime.

2005
- FORUM 1: Helsinki, Finland, 16 February
- FORUM 2: The Hague, The Netherlands, 9 September
- Scientific workshop – Quality of Life: London, UK, 1 December

2006
- FORUM 3: Stockholm, Sweden, 30 March
- Scientific workshop – Older People, Health and Social Care: Bucharest, Romania, 19 June
- Scientific workshop – User Involvement: London, UK, 22 November
- Scientific workshop – Research Priorities for Demography, Longevity and Genetics: Innsbruck, Austria, 1 December

2007
- FORUM 4: Rome, Italy, 13 March
- FORUM 5: Paris, France, 26 November

2008
- FLARE Summer School 1: Örenäs, Sweden, 22 June

2009
- FORUM 6 – The Future of Ageing Research in Europe: Brussels, Belgium, 2 February

2010
- FORUM 7 – FUTURAGE workshop: Brussels, Belgium, 11 May
- FLARE Summer School 2: Varna, Bulgaria, 27 September

2011
- FORUM 8: Vienna, Austria, 1 March
- FLARE Summer School 3: San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain, 5 September
- FORUM 9: Bucharest, Romania, 28 November

2012
- FLARE Summer School 4: Galway, Ireland, 6 August
- FORUM 10: Brussels, Belgium, 11 September
Participants at Summer School, Sweden, June 2008

FORUM 6, Brussels, February 2009

FORUM 7 in the European Parliament, May 2010

The well-traveled ERA-AGE 2 banner stand

Participants at Summer School, Bulgaria, September 2011

Participants at Summer School, Spain, September 2011

Lunch at Summer School, Ireland, August 2012

FORUM 10 and final conference, September 2012
During 2005 and 2006 a series of ERA-AGE scientific workshops were held across Europe to generate recommendations for European research. These built on the outputs of the FPS project “European Forum on Population Ageing Research” which reviewed research in the areas of Quality of Life, Health and Social Care Management and Demographics, Longevity and Genetics. The scientific workshops had multiple aims, to:

- Scrutinise FORUM recommendations
- Replace, revise, endorse
- Identify and prioritise main research topics
- Identify good practice, particularly in interdisciplinary and European collaboration
- Make recommendations about required support, infrastructure and cooperation

A summary of the outputs from these scientific workshops is contained on these pages.

Priority Topics for Quality of Life

- The importance of an interdisciplinary perspective in ageing research was emphasised and the single discipline approach was rejected.
- Subjective views on ageing and older people as well as the involvement of users of health and social care systems should be at centre of research.
- More longitudinal studies are needed but methodological issues such as choosing the right cohort and sequence need to be addressed.
- New comparative studies are needed on the quality of life of older people within the old Member States and the new Member States.
- There is a need for more inter-generational research and research on care systems, both formal and informal, as well as more studies on the risks of social inclusion and exclusion.
- Research should be focused on individual and societal changes in the second half of the lifecourse, including retirement and transition from work to retirement.

Priority topics for Older People, Health and Social Care

- Health in a rural and urban context and across different cultures
- The roles of clinical, social and environment factors which impact on the decline of frailty etc
- Abuse of older people
- Pharmacy and drug use
- Non-pharmacological responses
- Social Security as a guarantee to a minimum standard of living
- Older people from socially excluded groups (such as ethnic minorities)
- Socio-economic determinants of health and social care use
- The effects of new and end-of-life technologies
- Differences in health, and physical and cognitive status across different age groups
- The role of caregivers
- Strategies to develop a good care workforce
- Health promotion strategies
- Development, implementation and evaluation of appropriate social care interventions
- Diversity in the ageing process
- The implementation of good practices in Europe

User involvement priority topics for maintaining a dialogue between funders, researchers and end users of research

- Funders can successfully set conditions in their funding application criteria to stimulate dialogue.
- Researchers and end users should be encouraged to approach projects with open and objective minds.
- Researchers should receive training on approaches to involve end users of research.
- Funders, researchers and end users should establish common goals.
- Stakeholders should develop a collaborative culture.
- Researchers need to communicate the user involvement methods that they use and research findings clearly.
- A centralised body comprising of politicians, researchers and end users could be established to guide people on end user involvement.
Priority topics for Demography, Longevity and Genetics

The **demographers** examined how demography can profit from biogerontology and vice versa and identified the following:

- Demographers need input from other disciplines and a good data base on the elderly population including: socioeconomic problems, environment and geriatric medicine
- Joint projects need to be established, including a longitudinal study (to address the previous issue)
- Multidisciplinary training and working groups are required for both young scientists and established researchers

The **longevity** researchers identified the following key research issues:

- Coping, networks, lifestyle, income, education and gender issues may have a huge impact on healthy longevity, along with biological factors. An interdisciplinary longevity study is needed to enable comparisons and to identify important factors
- Longitudinal studies are needed though they require extensive resources and effort. Preparatory work is required to encourage different disciplines to talk to each other, to determine parameters before undertaking a large study. A platform for data collection is an essential tool but its design requires additional thought
- A pilot study on multidisciplinary interactions should be carried out which aims to define the terms of interaction between disciplines and to assess the quality of potential outcomes
- Biomarkers need to be developed

The **genetics** specialists identified the following as priorities:

- Longevity genes likely to be important but the phenotype and interactions are complex
- Large scale studies should be done, to minimise cohort effect
- Local effects might be identified in different human populations
- Animal models may identify key pathways
- Animal models are conceived in relation to specific conditions which do not mimic the human condition
- Gene effects in humans may alter depending on the age-related changes of the microenvironment of the individual
- Environment change in the last 100 years has altered gene exposure ie public health measures, electricity, harsh conditions, nutrition, pandemics, modern medicine; and this is different from current animal models and likely to be different for future studies on longevity
- Effect of environment is important
- Simple factors such as control of blood pressure, lipids/nutrition and smoking are making an impact
- Drugs/mimetics are of interest to drug companies in longevity studies but are longer term strategies
- Databases and longevity studies already in place should be a resource to inform on what biomarkers are important for quality longevity
- Management of a common biobank should be considered

FUTURAGE Road Map

The FUTURAGE Road Map for Ageing Research in Europe was supported by ERA-AGE members from its inception, and they helped to frame the research agenda in two ways:

- By generating these European ageing research priorities in 2005 and 2006
- By contributing national consultations to FUTURAGE during 2010/2011, which represented the first round of consultation specifically for the Road Map.

The final Road Map represented two years and eight rounds of consultation and review, with ERA-AGE inputs forming the starting point for the whole process.

ERA-AGE was formally represented at the launch event by **Prof Kenneth Abrahamsson**, **Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research** who presented the JCRA call during a section of the programme exploring linkages between the Road Map and other major European initiatives in the field.
As this is the last newsletter from ERA-AGE (at least in its current form) we are printing two of the commentaries we received from partners. We make no apology for the valedictory nature of these and thank the authors and those of all the other kind and supportive testimonials we received but cannot find space for here.

**Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS)**

With inspiration of ERA-AGE, FLARE and FUTURAGE, FAS has tried to find forms to strengthen the Swedish ageing research profile, result dissemination and public dialogue. It has really been an enjoying and developing learning experience. In all EU projects, you learn to handle work packages and milestones. For us, the work in the ERA-AGE family has resulted in many personal milestones and long-lasting learning experiences.

ERA-AGE and FUTURAGE have been a permanent inspiration and with the model of Open Forums and the meeting in the European Parliament, FAS has organised a Swedish platform, SWEDAGE. The first SWEDAGE conference was in Malmö 2010, the second in Stockholm at the Karolinska Institute in 2011, and the third one took place in Gothenburg, October 1, 2012.

The aim of SWEDAGE is to deepen the dialogue of knowledge between researchers and practitioners – both nationally and internationally – regarding research about older people and ageing in society. We wish to create an annual venue for funding agencies, researchers, government agencies, and organisations. Included in the task is also to disseminate information in various ways and to develop the contacts with ageing research in Europe as well as globally, for example in the projects FUTURAGE and ERA-AGE.

All our learning experiences have been warm, friendly and collaborative. We would also like to take the opportunity to endorse the professional leadership from Alan Walker and the Sheffield team. To work under the auspices of EU grants is both a challenge and a burden. The challenge implies the move toward new knowledge horizons and to work with leading scholars in the field. The burden, or more exact, the administrative burden has not always been easy to carry. It is not, however, models shaped by the coordinators, but partly of the EU grant allocation system as such.

In general, FAS participation in ERA-AGE and FUTURAGE has been very beneficial and it has also been useful in setting priorities for national calls and long-term investments. FAS is currently reviewing more than 50 grant applications for programme support on older workers and on active and healthy ageing as well as welfare regimes. In addition, the recent research bill in Sweden, to be decided on by the Parliament before Christmas, is giving very high priority and new fresh money to demography and aging as well as to caring research.

**The ERA-AGE Adventure – A Canadian Perspective**

The introduction of a collaborative scheme supporting transnational initiatives in Europe has been extremely attractive for Canadians since its introduction by the European Union Scientific Commission. The Canadian commitment to this approach has its roots in a strong belief in the importance of a collaborative research approach to the opportunities and challenges related to the health and wellness of the aging population. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), through its Institute of Aging, thus joined the ERA-AGE family as an associate member in 2009.

Since then, the Institute of Aging has benefited from our increased collaboration with all of the partners involved in the ERA-AGE adventure. For the CIHR Institute of Aging, the most extraordinary experience was the preparation, launch and processes defined in a collaborative manner for the Joint Call for Research on Ageing. Along with the other Canadian partner, the Fonds de recherche du Québec - Santé, the CIHR Institute of Aging has gained unique international experience and provided an opportunity for Canadian researchers to link with their European colleagues in the context of a meaningful global effort to contribute to the health and wellness of the aging population.

Throughout the ERA-AGE partnership, CIHR has always felt a strong and inclusive leadership from Prof Alan Walker and a superb support from all of the ERA-AGE team, starting with the efficient and important contributions of Juliet Craig.

The ERA-AGE adventure will remain a unique one in the mind of the CIHR Institute of Aging. It will inspire us in the future to pursue our support in linking the respective excellence and expertise of Canadian and European researchers through the new channels that will become available. We wish to thank ERA-AGE for this experience and we look forward to future collaborations between Europe and Canada to the benefit of an optimal life trajectory for all citizens of the world. A bientôt!

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