

NEWS

Issue 2 Spring 2011

A better future for ageing

ERA AGE 2

European
Research
Area in
Ageing



The European Forum at the European Parliament

Welcome

Welcome to the second ERA-AGE 2 Newsletter, which reports on the seventh European Forum on Population Ageing in Brussels on 11 May 2010.



Introduction

The Forum provided a showcase for the interim results of the FUTURAGE project and provided those attending with the chance to contribute their own opinions on the ageing research priorities for Europe up to 2020.

Over 150 people gathered at two venues in Brussels, including the European Parliament, to contribute. The event was supported by the STOA (Science and Technology Options Assessment) panel of MEPs at an afternoon meeting in the European Parliament, which was webcast live.

FUTURAGE has responsibility for creating the definitive Road Map for Ageing Research which is intended to guide European research in this field over the next 10-15 years. The project is identifying the main priorities for research on ageing based on the widest possible consensus between key stakeholders ranging from policy makers to product producers and retailers.

The process started in October 2009 with a series of national consultations in the countries that form the European Research Area in Ageing (ERA-AGE 2). In February and March 2010 the first round of scientific and user workshops took place, to brainstorm research priorities across various disciplines.

The meeting on May 11th 2010 was the first time the preliminary results were opened to stakeholder consultation, and the input received on the day will form a key part of the FUTURAGE process. Over a full day attendees heard initial results from the four scientific and one user workstreams which form the building blocks of the Road Map (biogerontology, social and economic resources, environments of ageing and healthy ageing) and also examined the strategic importance of ageing research in Europe given the profound demographic change facing the continent. During some lively discussion and question and answer sessions, participants had the opportunity to provide comment and perspective on the Road Map.

We were very pleased to be supported by the STOA Panel of MEPs, who hosted the afternoon session in the European Parliament. I would like to thank STOA for giving FUTURAGE a unique opportunity to present our findings during this early stage of the Road Map development.

Alan Walker
Director, ERA-AGE 2



About the FUTURAGE project

FUTURAGE

A Road Map *for* Ageing Research

FUTURAGE is a two year project with twenty three partners, running from 2009 to 2011 to create a definitive Road Map for ageing research in Europe for the next 10-15 years. The project will identify the main priorities for research on ageing based on the widest possible consensus between key stakeholders ranging from policy makers to product producers and retailers. A key principle is the close involvement of older people in this process. The starting point was a series of national consultations in the countries that form the European Research Area in Ageing (ERA-AGE 2).

Following this, a series of extensive consultations took place among scientists and stakeholders within four broad themes:

- Biogerontology
- Social and economic resources
- Environments of ageing
- Healthy ageing and well being

In addition to the four scientific themes there is a parallel fifth theme on the engagement of research users, including older people.

Outputs from the consultation process will be explored at two stakeholder meetings of high-level research funders, policy makers and practitioners in the ageing field and representatives of older people.

A Council of Scientists, drawn from project leaders of these major projects, will provide advice for FUTURAGE to ensure the road map delivers a viable and realistic strategy for high quality European ageing research for the next 10-15 years.

The final Road Map will launch at a conference in Brussels in October 2011.

For more information, please see the website
<http://futurage.group.shef.ac.uk>



Overview of the Forum

The event's aims were:

- To present the results from the first round of FUTURAGE workshops
- To gather feedback about the key priorities in ageing research
- To examine the importance of ageing research for Europe's future
- To provide a strategic overview of the current state of play and the future requirements for European ageing research

Over 150 representatives from the European Parliament, European Commission, Member State government ministries, national research funders, academia, government research organisations, companies, and various non-governmental research organisations gathered in Brussels to attend this event.

The demanding schedule was split into two halves: in the morning participants reviewed detailed information on the research priorities generated by the first round of national consultations and scientific priority setting workshops, and; in the afternoon presentations sketched a strategic overview of the current state of play, and the future requirements for European ageing research.

Speaker summaries from the day follow.



STOA co-chairs: Mr Rubig MEP and Mr Correia de Campos MEP

FUTURAGE Themes

Biogerontology

Dr Efstathios S. Gonos, Director of Research at the National Hellenic Research Foundation and Executive Committee Member of the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

Dr Gonos represented the biogerontology theme and introduced three future research directions: to continue research investment in this area; to retain financial support for successful and incomplete projects, and; to invest in novel global technologies.

Using a projection of the size of the 65+ population in Europe in 2030 the presentation emphasised that ageing will become the most important social issue, partly due to the number of diseases, such as cancer, for which ageing is a major risk factor. The limitations of FP funding and the subsequent lack of continuity were highlighted with the description of two projects which have generated large biobanks and research material which, once funding has ended, are no longer accessible for analysis and research.

Dr Gonos highlighted two major achievements in biogerontology - the discovery of telomeres, and the impact of the accumulation of cellular damage - and described the development of “omics”, techniques for the study of gene expression processes, which can provide information about the diet that can modulate these processes.

He also observed that the model systems used in biological research do not take account of the differences between animals and humans; animals are bound to the process of “eat, survive, reproduction”, but humans have the ability to ask questions outside of these drivers; it was proposed that due to the complexity of human needs, ageing cannot be answered through biology alone and a multi-disciplinary approach is required.

Dr Gonos concluded that the main aim of ageing research is to add life to years not years to life, so as more and more people reach 90 they have the quality of life that they had at 40.

Social and Economic Resources

Dr Giovanni Lamura, Italian National Research Institute on Ageing.

Dr Lamura examined the role played by social and economic resources in an ageing society and the research priorities in this area. The presentation began with a review of the conceptual approach of the recent workshop for FUTURAGE, which gathered research priorities from scientists across Europe in four areas: older age and caregiving; older age and frailty; active ageing and; socio-economic needs in older age.

The importance of older people as caregivers was highlighted by the fact that over a quarter of those providing care for older people are themselves aged over 65, and this is under-recognised and under-supported. Where older people are recipients of care, greater research is needed on perceptions of dependency and independence.

Dr Lamura highlighted the large differences in types, levels, and quality of care across Europe, and the corresponding varying level of government expenditure in this area. Active ageing depends on the presence of a number of pre-requisites to enable people to maintain activity levels in the labour market, education and voluntary sector. The workshops also identified four socio-economic needs of older people: social; economic; cultural, and; vulnerability. The last item – vulnerability – is of particular importance due to the high levels mistreatment of the elderly which are believed to be particularly high in Southern and Eastern Europe.

FUTURAGE Themes

Environments of Ageing

Professor Hans-Werner Wahl, Heidelberg University in Germany

Prof. Wahl introduced the core research elements for the Environments of Ageing theme. He began by reviewing the key issues for ageing in Europe: how and where to live in old age; how to keep up with daily activities and social participation, especially with increased needs for support and care; rapid population ageing, most of all among the very old; the significant burden on public economy; mobility, and; technology solutions.

The presentation outlined what can already be done to address these issues in Europe, and then identified where additional research needs to be focused, particularly in relation to evidence on outcomes and efficient solutions and implementation of existing evidence into practice contexts.

Prof. Wahl concluded with an overview of the first FUTURAGE workshop to identify research priorities in this area that will inform future priority development.

The work included a review of the existing evidence base and recognition of gaps, before identifying research areas and cross-cutting themes for future development. Specific ageing and environmental research needs to consider home settings, mobility/transport environments, the role of technology and work environments, and should be complemented by consideration of the bigger perspective, such as how climate change will affect older people.

Healthy Ageing

Professor Carol Jagger, AXA Professor of Epidemiology of Ageing at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom.

Prof. Jagger discussed what is meant by healthy ageing for Europe's population, and identified the key research priorities and cross-cutting themes in this area. The presentation began by reviewing how the European population will age and the substantial inequalities in healthy life expectancy across Europe, and what effect this will have on the continent for the future.



Speakers (l-r) Prof Goodwin, Prof Jagger, Prof Wahl and Dr Lamura

FUTURAGE Themes and Additional Speakers

The presentation provided an overview of the first workshop to gather research priorities for this area which identified four key research topics. There is a need to agree what “healthy ageing” is and how to measure and monitor it and related concepts such as frailty, quality of life and wellbeing.

Effective definitions are complicated when used for the oldest old – those over 85 – who typically rate their quality of life as “good” despite suffering from an average of four diseases each. Prof. Jagger also highlighted the potential for the concept of healthy ageing to integrate biological, social, psychological and economic aspects of ageing.

It was also observed that Europe provides a unique opportunity to conduct research as it contains countries at many different levels of demographic profile and development; this variation in development is also reflected in the variations in capacity, knowledge and infrastructure in countries that have little experience in ageing research. The conclusion pointed out that research is needed to capitalise on rapid social changes as they occur; the population is living longer and the challenge is to find out how people can live longer more successfully.

The User Perspective

Professor James Goodwin, Head of Research at Age UK

Prof. Goodwin began his presentation by outlining the challenging task to align the needs of users with the research agenda across Europe’s 27 countries, a diverse user community and multiple scientific disciplines.

With the aim of creating one single model to bring those aspects together and serve the population’s democratic right to be involved Prof. Goodwin challenged everyone present to reflect on their own work and ask: “What are the potential benefits to users?”; “How can we bring the benefit to users?”

The presentation described the increase in longevity and the resultant increase in chronic disease, disability and ill health. The research solution to these challenges requires integration of investment, strategy and users, and to address an interactive model between users and researchers was proposed,

designed to stimulate knowledge transfer. Key issues that arose from the first set of FUTURAGE workshops included: enabling and empowering older people to become involved in research; developing the business case for businesses to invest in users; mainstreaming ageing by making products and services “age friendly” so they are not specifically designed for just older people (this is a clear reflection of the life course approach).

Additional speakers

Keynote: The New Science of Ageing

Professor Kaare Christensen, Head of Epidemiology at the Institute of Public Health and Director of the Danish Aging Research Center, University of Southern Denmark.

The first of the keynote speakers examined how the complex questions of ageing are being addressed through collaboration between different disciplines and how this approach can enable the elderly to live longer in better health.

The presentation outlined how life expectancy has increased dramatically in the last 400 years, with the most significant increase occurring during the 20th century, when life expectancy increased from 50 years to 80 years. Combined with a fall in mortality rates, if the trend continues half of children currently entering kindergarten will reach the age of 100.

Although this is acknowledged to be fundamentally a good thing, there is concern about the implications of “the fourth age” that results from exceptional longevity. The presentation asked if this could result in an “artificial” old age due to medical intervention; does exceptional longevity mean exceptional disability?

Prof. Christensen provided examples of some multi-disciplinary research already taking place that is exploring these issues. He also highlighted the large discrepancy between male and female life expectancy with the female half of the global population outliving men by up to 12 years due to a combination of biology, behaviour and culture.

Additional Speakers

Keynote: Ageing research in the Research Framework Programmes

Dr. Pēteris Zilgalvis, Head of Unit, Health Directorate Infectious Diseases and Public Health Research, DG RTD

The second keynote speaker reviewed the role of the Framework Programme in supporting ageing research in Europe. Dr. Zilgalvis outlined the strategic importance of research to the EU, as outlined in the Lisbon Treaty and the broad objective of Health research under FP7.

A short history of FP funding for ageing research was presented. Under FP7 funding €6billion has been allocated to Health to support cross-cutting issues and three specific pillars: biotechnology, generic tools and technologies; translating research for human health; optimising the delivery of health care to citizens.

A wide range of ageing related research has been funded, including immune reactivity in old age; participation of elderly in clinical trials; organisation of dementia care, and; patient safety. Dr. Zilgalvis provided an insight in the development of work programmes and factors influencing priority areas.

The presentation then provided an overview of the Joint Programming pilot initiative for combating neurodegenerative diseases which represents the first stage in an initiative focused on developing common strategic research agenda to major societal challenges.

Room for research on a new integrated care system for aged people

Dr. Inês Guerreiro, National Coordinator of the National Network Integrated Continuous Care at the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, Portugal.

Dr. Guerreiro showcased a project from Portugal which shows how integrated care systems can adapt in response to social and structural changes, and patterns and prevalence of ill-health and disability. Dr. Guerreiro outlined the structure and scope of the National Network for Integrated Continuous Care.

The project is a partnership between the public, private and third sector, to support development of new working methods and the provision of cost effective services in long term care, and to address quality and sustainability standards, as well as coordinate informal and formal care.

The presentation outlined the “bio psycho social” tool developed to enable holistic and longitudinal monitoring of patients; each patient is scored on 12 parameters to create both combined and specific scores, which can be used to measure for example: physical autonomy; incidence of pressure ulcers; cognitive and emotional status, and; incidence of falls.

Dr. Guerreiro concluded by observing that long term care is an increasingly important issue in Europe due to the widely different approaches in member states caused by differences in the split between formal/informal care, public/private funding, home care and residential care provision.

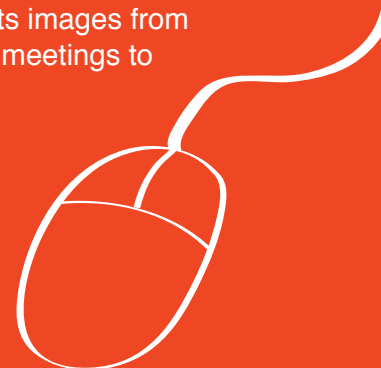
ERA-AGE has recently created online resources to showcase media from meetings and events.

Photographs from ERA-AGE events can be found on the Flickr stream. Currently it hosts images from the most recent meetings, although it will gradually be populated with photos from past meetings to create a more complete record of ERA-AGE activities over the years.

Visit us at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/era-age>

The YouTube channel hosts videos and multimedia presentations including an introduction to the project from the Coordinator, Alan Walker, and poster presentations from FLARE 1 Fellows about their FLARE funded research projects.

Visit us at <http://www.youtube.com/eraage2010>



Second FLARE Summer School

The second FLARE Summer School took place in Bulgaria in September 2010, and attracted 33 participants from a wide mix of nationalities and research interests. This Summer School was held to reunite the original FLARE Fellows and to provide an event where current FLARE Fellows, potential FLARE Fellows and early career researchers could get together and network. The aims were also to strengthen the network and community feeling among the post docs, to share their work and to extend the Summer School network in order to promote multidisciplinary interests and to focus on career planning and development.

Co-hosted by the Institute of Population and Human Research, part of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the researchers gathered at a hotel in Varna, on the Black Sea coast between 27th and 30th September 2010. Leading European experts were invited, covering fields such as demography, social gerontology and multidisciplinary research and the programme also paid attention to career planning and European research funding strategies.

The broad themes uniting the keynotes and lectures was the future of ageing research, European research priorities, ageing in Bulgaria and the challenges facing the New Member States, Eastern European researchers and east/west collaboration generally. During the two and a half days the attendees were challenged to discuss, debate, collaborate and build relationships to address these themes, as well as being asked to engage in some speculation to answer the question: "The dream: what would be the ideal scenario for European Researchers and how to make it happen?"



Attendees at the Summer School

Partner Profiles - Lithuania

Mykolas Romeris University

Representative to ERA-AGE:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sarmite Mikulioniene (Department of Social Policy, Mykolas Romeris University).

Other contacts: Professor Dr. Vida Kanopiene (Head of Department of Social Policy, Mykolas Romeris University).

Mykolas Romeris University is a multidisciplinary national higher education body - the 2nd largest university in Lithuania. Studies and research are carried out in the following fields: Law, Public Administration, Economics, Finance Management, Psychology, Social Work, Social Policy, Sociology, Education Science (more than 70 study programmes, about 21 thous. students enrolled). Traditionally the University has engaged in research in the area of social sciences and more recently, has initiated research in biomedicine, technology and the humanities. In 2008 Mykolas Romeris University completed implementing nine European Social Fund and Lithuanian government's general financing funded projects (totaling more than EUR 4.3 million).

Faculty of Social Policy of Mykolas Romeris University being a multidisciplinary academic body provides education for future experts in the field of Social Work, Sociology, Education science, and Psychology. The Faculty welcomes students at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level, from Lithuania and foreign countries. Each academic year about 2000 students are enrolled in the Faculty. The Faculty takes part in international EU Sixth Framework Programme (The Faculty has applied for research project under Seventh Framework Programme as well), European Science Foundation, COST, Erasmus, Jean Monnet, Grundtvig, Tempus, NordForsk, Nordplus HE etc. programmes.

A special field of Faculty staff expertise is social gerontology. The research is developed on: Active Ageing & Lifelong Learning; Demography of Ageing; Organisation and Delivering of Social Services for Older Persons; Wellbeing and Quality of Life of Older Persons. Faculty of Social Policy has one of the strongest academic potential in social gerontology in Lithuania. Research on population ageing, ageing policy, social services for older people and lifelong learning is one of the major fields of research at the Faculty of Social Policy. This research area is particularly promoted and supported by the university.

The topics of ageing covered are as follows:

1. Active ageing policy
2. Lifelong learning
3. Demography of ageing
4. Care regimes for older persons in EU
5. Organisation and Delivering of Social Services for Older Persons
6. Wellbeing and Quality of Life of Older Persons
7. IT for Ageing population (planned)

Publishing and organising scientific meetings on the ongoing ageing research are part of the Mykolas Romeris University research activities. Mykolas Romeris University publishes periodical peer-reviewed academic papers "Social Work", where papers on ageing issues are very welcomed. Mykolas Romeris University offers the very first study programme "Social Gerontology" (Master's degree in Social Work, a 2 years study programme) in the country. Besides these academic activities the university is committed to implementing innovations, which influence the overall progress of society, so the partnership with public administration institutions, including professionals involved in ageing policy formation and implementation and NGO-s of / for older people is established.

For more information about Mykolas Romeris University and its research activities please go to <http://www.mruni.eu>

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