

## Healthy ageing in the EU: A new balance

Written by Lambert van Nistelrooij on 10 September 2018 in Opinion  
Opinion

Technology could vastly improve the lives of old people, but their access to it must be improved, writes Lambert van Nistelrooij.



Lambert van Nistelrooij | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

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Currently around 20 per cent of the EU population is aged 65 or over. This figure is expected to increase to 25 per cent by 2030. As life expectancy continues to rise, so too do the effects of so-called 'ageing-associated diseases and conditions' such as dementia.

Throughout my career, I have been fascinated by the constant emergence of innovative solutions, projects and programmes to tackle problems. These major changes are only one side of the coin.

The real giant is hidden in the new role of older people in EU societies. Therefore, 1 October, the International Day of Older Persons, has a special meaning for me.

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We need a new balance. Within the next decade, two Europeans will retire for each young person entering the labour market. Due to the shrinking population, all EU citizens need to contribute to keeping society afloat. Their contribution is in formal tasks like employment in combination with voluntary tasks. We have to unlock their full potential to maintain our standards of living.

Here the terms 'innovation', 'technology' and 'Internet of Things' might not be the first that spring to mind, however they will be key to further progress to a more age-friendly society. When it comes to active ageing and assisted technology, it is not simply a matter of helping people and giving them perspective on being independent for longer.

It is also about fostering the new technologies and the new innovations that are now in the public domain. Is this approach effective in the ageing shifts? Is there reasonable uptake of innovation in Europe? I don't believe there is. We need to deal with 28 different financial support schemes and an incomplete internal market. We simply aren't delivering at the speed that Europe needs.

In my role as President of the Parliament's intergroup on ageing and solidarity between generations, I have been involved in numerous promising programmes. These include Assisted Active Living (AAL), co-financed under Horizon 2020 for €700m.

The AAL programme is a funding activity that aims to create better living conditions for older adults and to strengthen upcoming industrial opportunities in services and communication technology.

The technology is available, however if you start in a region where basic connectivity infrastructure is lacking, how do you connect, raise awareness, make investments and share ideas?

The AAL programme is very much at the forefront of pushing the stories of the clients, the end-users and the innovators. Recent proposals from the European Innovation Council and the support of €9.2bn for the Digital Europe programme will make more of these programmes a reality.

This year the European Parliament adopted the European accessibility directive. This improves the functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services for people with special needs, by removing barriers created by divergent legislation.

In addition, it defines the existing, but undefined, obligation of accessibility as laid down in European law, particularly for public procurement and structural funds. This facilitates both the work of companies and brings benefits for both disabled and older people in the EU. I support the full implementation of the European accessibility act, a key factor towards a more age-friendly Union.

On 1 October, the International Day of Older Persons, Age Platform Europe will kick off a campaign to create awareness around issues such as ageism and our ever-changing society.

The campaign will end on 10 December, the 70th anniversary of International Human Rights Day.

More information can be found on Age Platform Europe's website.

## About the author

Lambert van Nistelrooij (EPP, NL) is President of Parliament's sub-intergroup on active ageing

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