

A society for all

The European year for active ageing must demonstrate the value of older people to society, write **Heather Roy** and **Laura Jones**

Investing in medical research and technology has led to increased life expectancy and increased autonomy for older people with care needs, but what investment do we put into ensuring older people live in dignity, free from poverty and social exclusion? How can we ensure all older people live “active” lives, whether in employment or retirement?

Eurodiaconia members, care providers for older people across Europe, report an increasing problem of isolation and social exclusion of older people. As chronic illness increases with age the prevalence of dementia is predicted to double globally by 2030. Those with care needs are often seen as a burden by society, and we refer to the ‘challenge’ of ageing in economic terms. Despite rising unemployment, some Eurodiaconia members report staff shortages in the care sector.

Eurodiaconia members therefore call on all stakeholders to take a holistic approach to “active” ageing in their actions and recommendations during the European year for active ageing and solidarity between generations. The “common principles on active ageing” that are planned as conclusions to the European year must include commitments and actions to tackle poverty and exclusion of older people, ensure that social and health services are able to support older people and to

demonstrate the value older people bring to society and their communities.

Changing public perceptions of older people so that society better values their contribution will help build support for actions to tackle poverty and exclusion and to guarantee access to quality social services so that older people can live in dignity. Investing in quality curative and preventive social and health services is essential to enable active ageing for older people, particularly those with care needs.

The year should build consensus on the need to carry on investing in quality care and develop proposals on how to do this. Discussions should examine how to bring about decent working conditions across the sector, to attract and retain staff, which will also improve the quality of care. Proposals must be made on working towards an adequate minimum income for all, sufficient for older people to live in dignity.

This year is an important opportunity to publicise concrete projects, develop mutual learning on promoting intergenerational understanding and promote practical solutions. Eurodiaconia’s members work in this area will be promoted through an award and exhibition.

Through the European coalition for the 2012 year we worked with the European parliament for the year’s priorities to go beyond narrow labour market concerns. MEPs will play a key role in the year. Many MEPs are already active in supporting stakeholders’ initiatives at European level and they can take part in national and local initiatives to raise the profile of the year and the topics it addresses.

Working with national governments they can advocate for common principles to be agreed by all member states that take into account the issues raised here. In the EU funding programmes for the 2014-2020 period MEPs should ensure initiatives related to active and healthy ageing can be financed, and not just the development of technological solutions.

Finally, MEPs can support the calls of the European coalition for the year for a European strategy for active and healthy ageing and an age-friendly European Union, and for local and national action plans. Eurodiaconia looks forward to cooperating with the European parliament in making progress towards a society for all ages. ★

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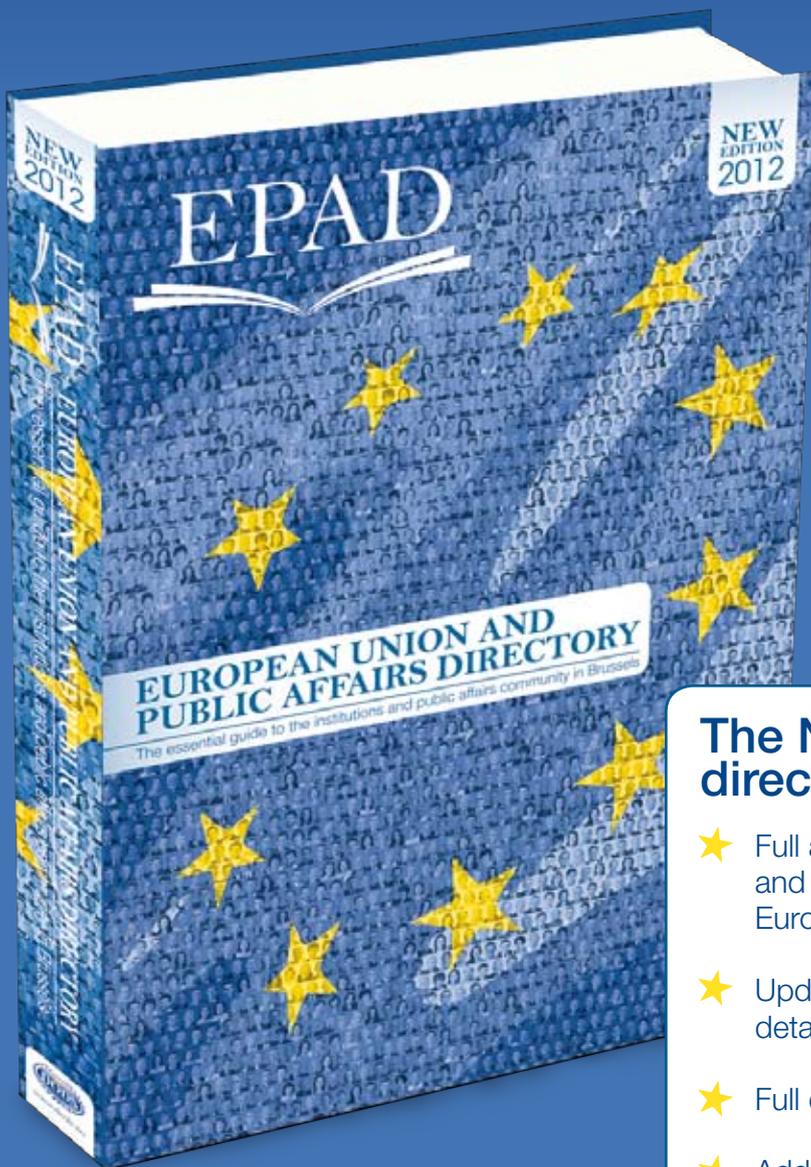


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