

Adapting to an ageing population: the impact of the AAL Programme

We are on the verge of a longevity revolution! People aged 65 years or over make up the fastest-growing age group, while the share of the population under age 25 is declining. Between 2019 and 2050, the number of 'older adults' (those aged 65+) globally is projected to more than double. In the European Union (EU-27), the share of older adults is expected to grow from 20% of the population in 2019 to almost 30% by 2050.

These demographic changes will have far-reaching consequences, posing both challenges and opportunities for policy and decision makers, in cross-functional domains. The impacts of population ageing if left unchecked would lead to increased demand for both health and care systems, pressure on the working age population, skills and capacity shortages in the labour market and fiscal imbalance. However, growing old is a societal achievement that should be celebrated. The 'new old' want to live an active, healthy and independent life and continue to provide valuable contribution to their families, communities, society and economy as a whole.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caught Europe's stretched public health and care systems unprepared and countries went into lockdown. Thanks to the creativity and resilience of businesses, communities and public decision makers, the outlines of a new norm, a digitally enabled world, has quickly emerged. The pandemic accelerated a sluggish digital transition so that social interactions, daily life and remote work can resume ([see the support campaign of AAL on this](#)). Such digital transition holds the power to revolutionize all our lives, including the ones of the older population, but we need to steer the change so that is valuable for society and economy as a whole.



The AAL Programme

Since 2008, the AAL Programme has been developing innovative digitally-enabled products and services to address challenges we all face as we grow older. The programme, which is a partnership of Member States supported by the EC through its research funding programmes, has funded over 260 projects to date, with the aim to bridge the gap between research and market uptake of active and assisted living solutions. The projects have addressed

diverse issues including management of chronic conditions, ageing well at home and at work, social inclusion, skills, mobility, and supporting formal and informal carers. Project teams consist of researchers, businesses and end-user organisations from at least three partner countries, focussing on the needs and wishes of older people themselves.

The programme has progressively supplemented project funding with support activities to build up an ecosystem of experts and stakeholders and lay the foundation of a new market segment. These support activities include annual networking events, business training, pitching competition to investors and challenge prizes. The programme has been running for more than ten years and evidence was sought to assess the emerging impact of the portfolio of AAL projects and support activities.

Emerging impact of AAL activities

The AAL intervention logic has identified three main impact dimensions: improved quality of life for older adults and their networks; increased efficiency of health & care systems; and strengthened AAL industrial base in Europe. Each of the 200 funded projects, related to calls 2008-2018, was expected to address one or more of these impact dimensions. The impact assessment exercise carried out in 2019 and 2020 was able to collect detailed information on 85 unique projects and the following are derived from that dataset.

Quality of life was addressed from multiple angles. 23 AAL solutions were developed through funded projects that help older people feel safe from physical or emotional harm, especially in their homes, enhancing older people's level of

confidence. 20 AAL solutions were also developed to support participation in social life, often via a digital platform, to help maintain contacts with family and friends. One of the key areas for healthy ageing is active lifestyle (12 solutions), helping maintain and improve physical abilities through wearable AAL solutions and cognitive health and wellbeing through serious games applications. Finally, 13 AAL solutions also aimed to improve the quality of life of older people's support network (family and friends) who are in fact informal carers with significant social and economic consequences. These solutions were used by many thousands of people already across Europe with case studies and witness statements highlighting the myriad of social impacts on individual lives.

Active and healthy ageing contribute to maintaining autonomy and independence at home for longer, and thereby reducing pressure on the care and support systems. Nevertheless, care needs of older people are increasing with age, and become more complex and challenging to manage, eventually requiring long-term care provision. AAL solutions have therefore also targeted formal care settings, enabling those facilities to function more efficiently, and reducing the associated cost of care. Early detection of risk is one area where 6 AAL solutions have made significant progress. 13 AAL solutions that provide remote monitoring and alarm systems, coordination and information sharing platforms increase efficiency and sustainability of health and care systems, improve the quality of care older people receive, while supporting formal carers in their work. Formal assessment of cost-efficiency of AAL solutions in real-life settings is however currently lacking, hampering scale up efforts.



1 in 8 AAL-funded projects has led to market launch of a solution or component

Further, AAL-funded projects also directly contribute to monetisable and non-monetisable economic impacts. At least 1 in 8 AAL-funded projects (12%) has led to market launch of a solution or component in 13 different countries across Europe, generating revenue from providers of care, welfare and housing services, municipalities, and increasingly by individual paying customers. However, as with any innovation, not all solutions developed will ultimately be commercially viable. Nevertheless, by supporting the development of these solutions, the AAL

Programme has helped to lay the foundation of new market segments that are inclusive of the needs and wishes of older people and their networks.

The programme has created a proof of concept in Europe that ICT-enabled solutions can deliver real social and economic value for older people. The programme has progressed technologies and solutions relevant for older adults to market entry by providing funding that filled the gap between research and commercialisation. It introduced multi-sectoral and participatory approaches in the co-design, testing and implementation of innovative solutions. Through various support schemes, it also enabled knowledge sharing, built new skills, confidence and trust, and created value networks across stakeholder groups and private sectors. It also raised the profile for AAL solutions in the investor community via pitching events across Europe.



An outlook into the 'Decade of Healthy Ageing' 2020-2030

The learnings from the past decade of the AAL Programme about what works and where the key bottlenecks lie have put this fledging community in a prime position to enter with momentum the new Decade of Healthy Ageing, recently endorsed by the 73rd World Health Assembly. New market opportunities are opening up to address age-friendly physical, social and economic environments. 'Agetech' with its focus on the older person in the centre of the design process will also come of age. And finally, the social movements of the 21st century will link up the key issues of our time: health, social justice and climate change. The AAL Programme has already created the platform for partnership, in order to be ready for the challenges that lie ahead in this new decade.