EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Demographic change

Demographic change is changing the shape of Europe. Rising life expectancy, combined with low fertility rates and complex patterns of migration, mean that while the size of the population remains stable, its distribution and average age is rising steadily. At the same time general health is improving, so that today's 65-year-olds are likely to be healthier and more active than their parents were at the same age, and the proportion of people aged over 80 is rising rapidly. As a result, for the first time in history, a substantial – and growing – proportion of the population is healthy and active but not in the workforce.

Demographic change is caused by three factors: rising life expectancy, an upward trend which has been consistent for over a century; low fertility rates, which vary between countries, but are overall below replacement rate; and migration, within Europe itself and between Europe and the rest of the world, which may help offset the effects of ageing in some counties or regions, but which brings its own challenges.

Alongside this change in the structure of the population, we are seeing a reshaping of the lifecourse, from a fairly simple one with three stages – childhood, working life and retirement – to one with four stages – childhood, mid-life, the new phase of active later life[4] and old age. At the same time, patterns of family structure, and intergenerational relationships, rights and responsibilities are all changing .

This is not happening in a vacuum. Changes in the nature of work – both paid and unpaid – are taking place, as are the expectations we have of government. The financial crisis which began in 2008 has led governments to question the viability of welfare models which had been relatively stable for a generation or more. Developments in biotechnology and assistive technologies are enabling people to live longer and healthier lives, but sometimes at a substantial cost. Communication technologies are transforming how people interact, how business is done and how public services are delivered. These changes have positive and negative dimensions and can present special challenges to some older people.

Demographic change affects people of all ages, but the changes affecting older people are particularly marked. In this paper we use the term "older people" generally to embrace all people over the age of 50. They include both the "young old" who are active and healthy, and the "very old" whose capacities are

4. Sometimes referred to as the "third age".

limited by medical conditions, frailty and disability. We recognise that the age of 50 is an arbitrary point, but in many countries the 50s is the period when health problems, disability and age discrimination become more common and begin to limit opportunities in life and work, and people begin to consider and plan for a new phase of life.

Opportunities and challenges

Demographic change provides a great opportunity: for all of us to live longer, more active and rewarding lives, to fulfil ambitions, to see grandchildren grow and to contribute to society through informal activities and voluntary work. However, it also presents us with significant challenges. Are social, economic and political structures created when 40 years of employment was sufficient to pay for the care of the young and old, still sustainable when "retirement" grows from five years to twenty or even thirty? What is a fair distribution of resources and wealth between generations? What about those who still die in their 60s, or whose longer life involves more years of illness and disability? Who will win and who will lose, and how far and when should the state intervene?

Systems and institutions designed to ensure the health and welfare of citizens are already changing and they will have to adapt even further in the future. Retirement ages are rising, pensions are being redesigned, and welfare benefits are being reshaped. In some places working practices are being changed to allow people to stay longer in employment, and technology is making this easier for some people, as well as enabling the very old to live more independent lives. Yet many of the changes, and their implications, are not well understood, and the evidence base for making good policy is uneven, both within countries and regions and across Europe.

A Joint Programming Initiative

Recognising the scale and importance of demographic change, many European countries are seeking better evidence to inform policymaking. In 2010 nine of them came together to explore the potential for collaborative and comparative research, using the EU framework for Joint Programming Initiatives (JPI)[5]. The work was supported by the European Commission as a Coordination Action of the 7th Framework Programme, through the J-AGE consortium of nine Member States.

This Strategic Research Agenda is one outcome of this work, developed iteratively by five scientific working groups, a Scientific Advisory Board and a Societal Advisory Board. It seeks to inform policy and to explore what it means to be born into, grow up in, and grow older in, a world where both five generation families and single person households are becoming increasingly common and where extending lifespan is challenging traditional notions of social and economic sustainability. Importantly it also recognises the diversity of individual experience: while many people are living beyond the age of 90, some barely survive beyond retirement.

Demographic change is not just about ageing: factors like fertility rates, rural depopulation, and migration are all significant issues. Furthermore, some of the problems, especially in health and social care, which arise in later life could be prevented by interventions earlier in the lifecourse. Since ageing is the largest of the changes, it is the principal focus of our work, but our research agenda also touches on the wider issues.

The Agenda has a particular focus on the kinds of research which can inform policy. The term is sometimes associated with the short term positions of particular political parties or governments. Here we take a broader view of policy: as the whole complex network of objectives set, at all levels, by governments and by commercial and third sector organisations. We are concerned with the major demographic issues facing some or all of these agencies. The questions we have addressed will remain important in the long term, whatever specific responses individual agencies and governments may adopt from time to time.

5. Initially there were nine countries, but the group later expanded to fourteen, including Canada.

Four research domains

Our work began with the creation of five expert working groups, drawn from all the participating countries[6]. Each prepared a report, and these provided the basis for the development of the current agenda. The ideas from the five working groups were grouped into a framework of four overlapping research domains (Figure 1., page 9). Each domain addresses a single broad policy issue and includes a series of more specific topics to be considered.

The four domains are:

Quality of life, health and wellbeing: How to ensure the best possible quality of life for all people, throughout their lives (including the final stages), recognising the diversity of individual circumstances and aspirations, and the role of social relationships in fostering individual wellbeing.

This is arguably the overarching objective which all Governments seek to achieve. We need to better understand what quality of life means for different people at different life stages and to use that knowledge to evaluate the impact of policies in all the other domains.

Key questions include:

- *How can we properly understand and measure quality of life and well-being?*
- *What is the role of health in quality of life across the lifecourse?*
- *How do we understand the social dimensions of quality of life, including social inclusion?*
- *How does paid and unpaid work affect quality of life?*
- *How can the physical and social environment be designed to secure quality of life?*

Economic and social production: How can economic and social production be maintained across the extended lifespan in ways that are sustainable, equitable, and efficient in the use of human and technical resources?

Production is a complex area. As our active post-retirement lifespan expands and young people take longer to enter the paid economy, the boundaries between paid and unpaid work are shifting.

Key questions include:

- *How do we understand and measure the changing social and economic value of paid and unpaid work?*
- *What models of labour market organisation, regulation and legislation support the effective use of individuals' skills and experience across the lengthening lifecourse?*
- *How should age management practices and policies be developed to better suit a more age-diverse workforce?*
- *How does health affect employability in later life?*
- *How can lifelong learning best contribute to maintaining productivity across the life course?*
- *What are the implications of greater population diversity (in age and background) for the workforce and its management?*

6. The five groups were: Health and Performance; Welfare and Social Systems; Work and Productivity; Education and Learning; Housing, Environment and Mobility

Governance and institutions: How might institutions and decision-making processes need to change, at all levels from local to European, to meet emerging needs and to ensure that all citizens can be full participants in decisions affecting their lives as the normal life course extends?

Systems of governance, through which decisions are made, have the potential either to empower or to exclude citizens, or particular groups of citizens, from control over their lives and thus over their wellbeing. Often the best, and most economical, solutions for older people require the integration of separate services, but, because institutional responsibilities and structures have evolved to meet the needs of society in the past, they are often structured in ways that make such integration difficult and expensive. Furthermore, not all the emerging needs are well met by existing institutional structures, especially in relation to learning and access to technology.

Key questions include:

- *How can we achieve better integration between policies and services, including those providing health care and social care?*
- *What factors support social, civic and economic participation across the life course?*
- *How can we ensure that people have access to relevant opportunities for learning at all stages of the life course?*
- *What are the implications for older people of the spread of – and routine use of – information technologies?*

Sustainable welfare: How is it possible to secure adequate levels of social welfare for all people, as the age balance of the population changes, and the proportion who are economically inactive grows?

Welfare systems, in the broad sense, have evolved differently in different countries, but all will be challenged by demographic change.

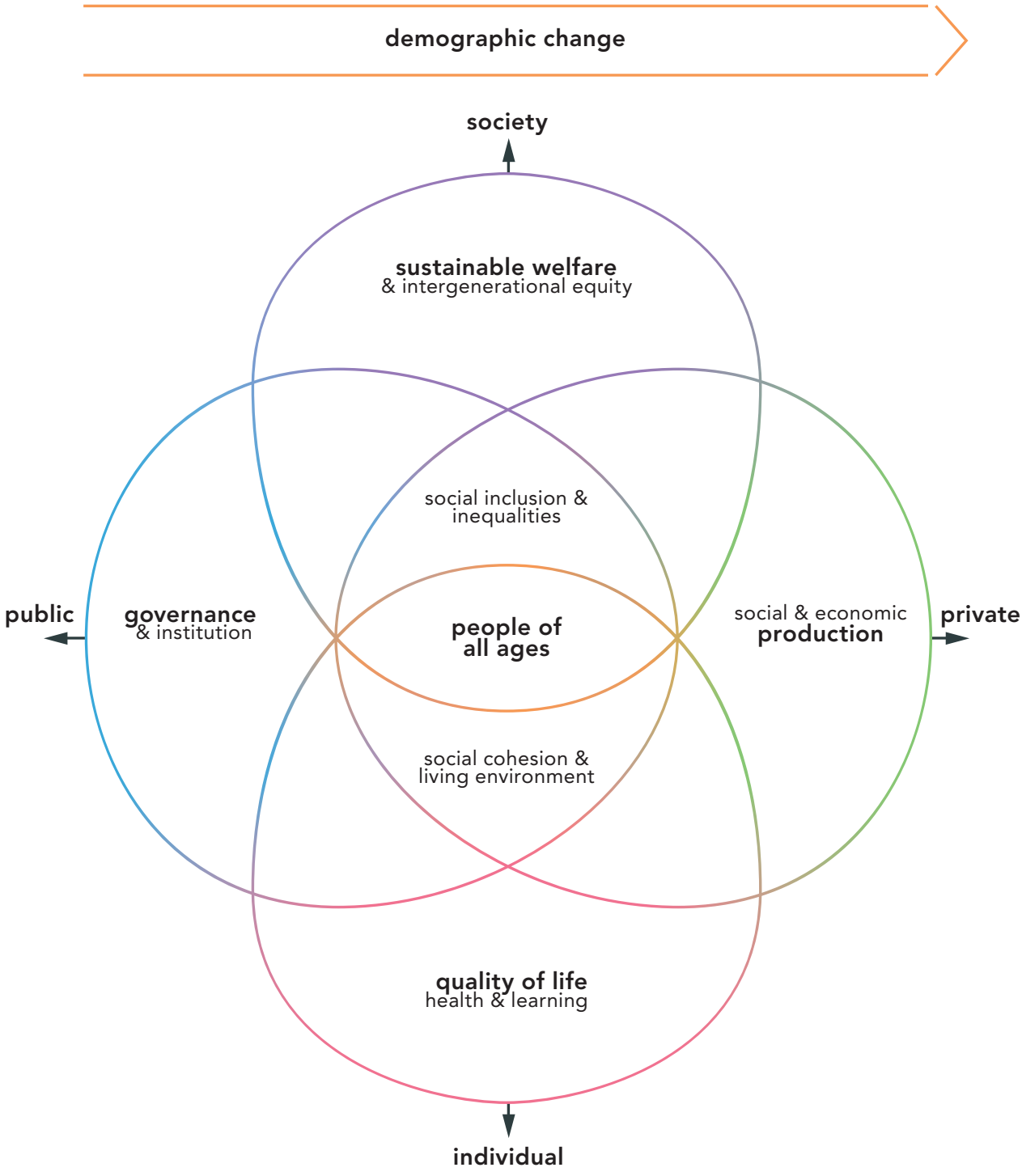
Key questions include:

- *What can we learn from comparative studies about the relative adequacy and sustainability of different welfare models?*
- *How can we develop fair and sustainable ways of distributing resources, rights and responsibilities between generations?*
- *How can we develop the potential contribution of informal services to the welfare of older people?*
- *How can we ensure that patterns of migration enhance, rather than damage, quality of life, social cohesion and social inclusion?*
- *What models of care are most appropriate and effective for people who are nearing the end of their lives?*

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the four domains and the broader themes of social cohesion and inclusion. As it indicates, they overlap with each other and some of the most important research issues are to be found in these overlapping areas.

Figure 1:
The four research domains

See also the more detailed Figure 2., page 37


demographic change
society
sustainable welfare
& intergenerational equity
social inclusion &
inequalities
public
governance
& institution
people of
all ages
social & economic
production
private
social cohesion &
living environment
quality of life
health & learning
individual
technological & environmental change

Our approach to research

The Joint Programming Initiative is a collaborative project between participating countries, not a European funding programme. Implementation will therefore depend on the willingness of national governments and funding agencies to take part. We believe that the research proposed would provide good quality evidence to inform policymaking, and that our arguments will also convince EU agencies and others to support work on particular issues from the agenda.

In choosing which of the many interesting issues identified by the scientific working groups, we have prioritised those:

- *Which could inform us about "what works": that is, with a potential application to policy and practice;*
- *Where demographic change is the central issue, as distinct from broader issues where demography plays a marginal role;*
- *Where a European comparative perspective is likely to add value to what can be achieved by the usual national research programmes;*
- *Which do not duplicate the work of other programmes, especially in the field of biomedical and technology research where much research funding is currently concentrated.*

In addressing these issues, we would expect to encourage research which:

- *Is innovative and interdisciplinary;*
- *Is of high scientific quality;*
- *Builds on previous work;*
- *Actively engages relevant end-users, including older people, as participants and co-researchers;*
- *Presents results both in conventional academic forms and in policy relevant ones;*
- *Balances the need for long term work with the shorter term priorities of policymaking.*

Some issues are particularly urgent, either because they address specific current policy priorities, or because they provide a necessary basis for future work. The JPI will therefore, from time to time, mount "fast track" projects to address such issues. The first of these was the JPI "fast track" project on data conducted in 2013.

In the early stages of preparing the Agenda, it became clear that, although quantitative data sources are critical to research on demographic issues, no one had an overview of the adequacy of existing sources of data. This is because of the large number of sources, they vary greatly between countries, and relate to very different scientific disciplines. Accordingly, twelve of the JPI members agreed to mount a "fast track" project to map data sources relevant to demographic change. Twelve national experts reviewed their own national data sources, coordinated by The Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, which also reviewed European and international sources.

The result was a critical analysis of 337 national and European quantitative databases. This is now publicly available online[7]. It provides an invaluable new resource for researchers and policymakers and particularly for those addressing the issues raised by the present Agenda. The project report also identifies ways in which the evidence base could be strengthened.

7. http://www.jpi-dataproject.eu/

The Agenda: eleven research topics

Many important and interesting issues were identified by our Scientific Working Groups, but because resources are necessarily limited we used the criteria listed above to identify eleven broad topics as our priorities for work in the short and medium term.

All are important, and we do not suggest that any one is more important than the others. At any given time, individual countries and agencies will select which to engage with, in the light of their own national priorities.

The eleven topics are:

1. **Quality of life, wellbeing and health**
   To develop agreed measures, to explore how these vary between individuals and groups and how best to use them to evaluate the impact of policies and practices.
2. **Learning for later life**
   To better understand how learning can contribute to quality of life across the extended lifespan and how opportunities for such learning can best be made available by public, private and third sector means[8].
3. **Social and economic production**
   To explore the nature, scale and value of the contribution of older people to society, in both paid and unpaid roles, and the relationships between the two.
4. **Participation**
   To explore what kinds of systems, institutions and interventions are most effective at engaging and empowering people, in particular individuals from groups which are traditionally excluded.
5. **Ageing and place**
   To understand what kinds of housing, transport and urban design policies are most effective at enabling people to remain independent and socially engaged throughout the lifespan.
6. **A new labour market**
   To identify effective and equitable ways of distributing employment across the extending healthy life course, including extending paid working life through governance, management and regulation.

8. The terms "learning" and "education" are not always used in the same way across countries. Often, "education" is identified as the most formal kind of learning, conducted usually in publicly funded institutions, for children and young people. We use "learning" as a broader term, embracing all forms of informal, formal and non-formal learning activity. "Learning" continues throughout life, with or without institutional support, and the less formal kinds are particularly important for older people.

7. **Integrating policy**
   To explore ways of integrating policy and practice across traditional institutional and professional boundaries, and to evaluate the costs and benefits of such approaches.

8. **Inclusion and equity**
   To identify who benefits and who loses, and in what ways, from demographic change; how inequities can be reduced, and solidarity supported.

9. **Welfare models**
   To understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of different welfare models, how sustainable they are in the longer term, and how countries might learn from one another.

10. **Technology for living**
    To explore how existing and emerging technologies can better contribute to the quality of life, contribution, and social engagement of people of all ages.

11. **Research infrastructure**
    To support researchers and institutions in developing interdisciplinary methodologies and expertise; to undertake systematic reviews on demographic issues; and to improve the quality and accessibility of data to support demographic research.

Conclusion: gathering evidence to inform policy

Demographic change presents Europe with a complex range of issues, challenges and opportunities. The "Europe 2020 Strategic Agenda"[9] commits all Member States to the pursuit of "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" across Europe. If policymaking is successful, it could result in both a sustainable economy and an improved quality of life for all people of all ages. It would enable older people to remain active and contributing members of wider society, and ensure the protection of those at greatest risk of poor health and social exclusion. This will not happen by chance and in the past the reverse has often been the case. Achieving this goal calls for long term strategic thinking and policymaking, based on good evidence. We believe that this strategy will ensure that policymakers and practitioners, at all levels, have the evidence needed to ensure that all citizens of Europe have the most satisfying and productive lives possible.

9. Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Brussels, EC 2010.