



PRESS RELEASE

AGE platform Europe and ATHLOS co-organised the event in Brussels January 28<sup>th</sup>

## Demographic scenarios and healthy ageing policies

**Brussels, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020.** AGE Platform Europe and ATHLOS are hosting a meeting on demographic scenarios and healthy ageing policies at the European Parliament. The event considered patterns of healthy ageing trajectories, their determinants and how they can be used in public health interventions, providing an overview of the social determinants influencing health inequalities and of the policies that could more positively sustain healthy ageing. It also gathered researchers and policy makers around the most recent research findings in the field of healthy ageing and ensure they have all the right cards in hand to make the necessary change towards healthy ageing for all.

Sugar intake, smoking, alcohol consumption and inactivity are the most well-known causes affecting our health. By reducing these risk factors, most of our recent and less recent diseases (cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, and mental illness, among the most well-known ones) can be prevented. However, the most efficient tools to prevent and combat diseases are living in a healthy environment and being provided good education. Indeed, research shows that our environment and our education play a major role in the way we age and are essential components for healthy ageing as well.

Far from being a purely demographic phenomenon, ageing is a dynamic process amenable to influence by policy changes. ATHLOS has been designed to support a “healthy ageing strategy” at an international level, aimed, in a global sense, at reducing the prevalence of age-related disability. Decisions made now in different countries and by different settings, in particular the policy settings, will largely determine the future of ageing societies and how they can age healthily.

The ATHLOS project proposes a new definition of old-age that does not rely on traditional chronological thresholds, but is based on the health of populations. This provides countries, and thus policy-makers, with the opportunity to define country-specific health thresholds and to address the most appropriate interventions that are deemed to change the thresholds of old-age through interventions aimed to enhance healthy ageing.

ATHLOS’ approach to healthy ageing and to the definition of old-age therefore provides the opportunity for policy-makers to concretely enact health policies targeting healthy ageing through country-specific interventions. These interventions will be directed on those domains of health that are expected to produce the widest effects. This, in turn, will impact on country-specific health thresholds and, given ATHLOS new definition of old-age, on population healthy ageing.

“This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 635316”



### What are the implications of ATHLOS's work?

1. A single health threshold for all countries (to mark the onset of old age) does not work.
2. Country-specific health thresholds are needed.
3. Currently unexplained country differences in health are large compared to differences within countries with respect to education and other socioeconomic variables.
4. The health-based individual definition of the onset of old age can be used to study subgroup differences within countries.
5. By producing a unified database and a single measure of health, ATHLOS has shown the importance of studying country-specific differences.
6. In Europe there is a health longevity paradox. Some countries with the highest life expectancy have relatively low health scores, with a low healthy life year expectancy.

### What are ATHLOS's recommendations?

Three are the main recommendations that as the ATHLOS consortium we deem will have the most extensive impact on individuals' and population health, thus impacting on old-age thresholds.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Address education.** Increase the levels of population's education, which should be the main target of policy action, an increase in the years of education at population levels will have consequences on the population trajectories of health.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Plan primary and secondary prevention programs** and act toward the elimination or reduction of risk factors such as smoking or alcohol, and promote appropriate diet and physical activity. These interventions increase the trajectories of healthy ageing and should be the aim of health promotion and disease prevention at policy interventions for all ages. These interventions are expected to keep older adults in a better health state. This will offer the possibility for older adults to keep on working for a longer period and continue doing what they value most.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Mainstream health education into education programs and empower citizens** will increase a culture of health and magnify the effect of prevention programs. Enhancing the global education level of European population is not only a matter of formal school and academic education, but should mainstream education into health, thus education to primary and secondary prevention of diseases and to healthy habits promotion.

In a Europe-wide context, no single health threshold makes sense, due to differences in population composition and different prevalence of main health conditions. Furthermore, a health longevity paradox exists, which shows for example higher life expectancy, but with a poorer health, in southern European countries. Health thresholds are therefore to be defined country by country.

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## ATHLOS Project

ATHLOS (Ageing Trajectories of Health: Longitudinal Opportunities and Synergies) is a five-year project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement number 635316. The project officially began on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Experts from the areas of demography, sociology, clinical medicine, epidemiology and public health, health statistics, economics, data management, and policy are involved in this research.

The ATHLOS Project is coordinated by Dr Josep Maria Haro (PSSJD) and consists of 14 partners from 11 European countries; PSSJD, Spain; University College London (UCL), United Kingdom (UK); King's College London (KCL), UK; Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), Spain; Spring Techno, Germany; Internationales Institut Fuer Angewandte Systemanalyse (IIASA), Austria; Karolinska Institutet (KI), Sweden; Schweizer Paraplegiker-Forschung (SPF), Switzerland; Terveiden Ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos (THL), Finland; Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Neurologico Carlo Besta (FINCB), Italy; Uniwersytet Jagiellonski (UJ), Poland; Age Platform Europe (AGE), Belgium; University of Southampton (SOTON), UK; and Harokopio University (HUA), Greece. The Consortium includes the AGE Platform Europe, a European network of approximately 150 organisations of and for people aged 50 or over.

ATHLOS is a research and innovation action aimed at identifying the trajectories and determinants of healthy and active ageing, from early stages of development onwards. Since 2015, the EU-funded project has worked to create a harmonized dataset with over 411,000 individuals from 38 countries in five continents, inspired by the need to identify healthy ageing trajectories and their determinants in order to achieve a better understanding of the ageing process. Based on these data, ATHLOS has created a single metric of health to further understand the trajectories of healthy ageing, including critical points in time, with the goal to propose timely clinical and public health interventions to optimize healthy ageing. A set of guidelines was therefore created specifically for policymakers. Finally, based on their findings, ATHLOS researchers have proposed a new definition of what is considered "old age".

<http://athlosproject.eu/>

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## ATHLOS Dissemination

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### Age Platform Europe (AGE)



AGE Platform Europe is a European network of approximately 130 organisations of and for people aged 50+, representing more than 40 million older people in the EU28. AGE's work covers a wide range of policy areas that impact on older and retired people, such as anti-discrimination, employment of older workers and active ageing, social protection, pension reforms, social inclusion, health, elder abuse, intergenerational solidarity, research, accessibility of public transport and of the built environment, and new technologies (ICT). The Platform also takes an active part in several EU projects, mainly funded by the H2020 Programme.

The purpose of AGE's work is to voice and promote the interests of the 190 million inhabitants aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most. AGE seeks to give a voice to older and retired people in the EU policy debates, through the active participation of their representative organisations at EU, national, regional, and local levels, and provides a European platform for the exchange of experience and best practices. It also aims to inform older people on their rights as EU citizens or residents and on EU policy-making processes and recent EU policy developments.

<http://www.age-platform.eu/>

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