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Demographic change is increasing inequality threatening the well-being of individuals; it's time to tackle this issue by developing new strategies and interventions.

13/02/2018 Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UNICATT)

The equity and well-being of European populations and the health and quality of life of all generations could be affected by demographic changes like the increasing aging of populations and migratory flow. Some of the potential dangers are the increasing gap in health and well-being between well-educated and low-educated people, in wealth between high and low-income people; and the unsustainability of welfare and health systems.

To address this issue the Joint Programme Initiative More Years Better Lives has launched the programme “Demographic Change: Equality and Well Being”, whose main aims are the promotion of a fairer society and securing a better quality of life, wellbeing and health for individuals of all ages.

The programme has been launched in Brussels at the conference “Increasing the Knowledge Base on Demographic Change”, held on the 13th of February in Brussels (Hotel le chatelain - Rue du Châtelain 17). The conference is organised by the JPI MYBL.

The inequalities derived from demographic change have already begun to appear, Stephen McNair, Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) says:

“Europe is a rapidly ageing continent. People are living longer and healthier lives, but fewer are being born. Very soon, for the first time, a quarter of the population of Europe will be over 60, making us the oldest continent in human history.

These changes open new opportunities for some people, but close down opportunities for others. The changing balance between working age people and the retired population puts strains on welfare and pensions systems, wealth can get unfairly distributed, and older people can get more isolated from the rest of society.

Old age is associated with anxiety about where to live, and about insufficient income in two-thirds of Member States, with 13% extremely worried about the prospect, and care services for an ageing population are unsustainable in most Member States.

In Europe the richest 1% of people receive 12% of total income, while the bottom half of the population receive only 20%.

In 2015 13% of retired people in the EU were in poverty (defined as 60% of national median income), compared to 9% of those in employment.

In the last decade, the quality of life of those in the lowest income quartile has improved less than for others.

Women continue to carry out most of the unpaid household and care work, with some of them appearing to pay a higher cost for this, such as women in lower income quartiles having a higher risk of mental health problems.

Older age groups continue to fare less well in some countries where social protection and care services are less developed. “

This programme aims to investigate what is known about these changes, how the risks can be reduced, and opportunities expanded. The aim is to identify research questions which need further investigation.

The programme hopes to produce evidence, in a relatively short timescale, on the relationship between demographic change, equality and wellbeing, to inform both the JPI and its Boards, and to a wider community of stakeholders, policymakers and researchers.

The JPI has identified eight topics to examine. They include: how attitudes to older people are formed; how well measures of “wellbeing” reflect the lives of older people (and especially those in the final years of life); how far immigration can help reduce the costs of a growing older population; and what policies help to ensure that older people remain active members of wider society.

On each topic an expert author has been commissioned (each from a different country) to work with an international expert group to prepare a short paper reviewing what is known about whether, and in what ways, an ageing society is increasing or reducing equality and wellbeing.

The aim is to help target future research on the most urgent issues. Such research may be carried out by the partners in the European Joint Programming Initiative “More years: better lives” (who are carrying out the programme), but also by universities, research agencies and government departments.

<http://www.jp-demographic.eu/news/jpi-mybl-2018-brussels-conference/>

Notes for editors:

The conference will stimulate dialogue in the area of Demographic Change by bringing together stakeholders including national policy makers, funders, scientists, health care professionals, industry representatives and NGO's.

The main themes of the conference “Increasing the Knowledge Base on Demographic Change” are:

- The role of JPI MYBL in creating evidence based policies The conference will give an overview of the latest MYBL achievements and their policy implications and present the future objectives of the JPI MYBL, including the upcoming work programme on equity and wellbeing. Achievements such as the Report on Demographic Change & Migration and the projects funded under the JPI MYBL joint calls on extended working life (2015), understanding welfare models (2016) and ageing in place in a digitizing world (2017) will be introduced (JPI MYBL calls).

- Reaching out to stakeholders and responding to societal needs in order to address the societal challenge of demographic change, the JPI MYBL is working towards sustainable alignment of research programs, stakeholder interaction over the entire research cycle, and enhanced impact through the translation of research results into evidence-based policies.

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