Participation in a research and development programme: enhancing the quality of life of older people through the use of new ICT

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This report recalls that the 2008 Decision on the financial participation by the Community in the Ambient Assisted Living Joint Programme (AAL JP) required an interim evaluation by 2010, which has been carried out by an independent High-Level Expert Panel chaired by former European Commissioner Meglena Kuneva. The Panel elaborated advice on innovation and demographic ageing in general and provided specific recommendations on the AAL JP. This Communication analyses the key recommendations of the Panel and proposes, where relevant, actions for the European Commission to be pursued in cooperation with other EU institutions and stakeholders, and through the Commission's role in the AAL JP.

Panel observations and recommendations as regards innovation and demographic ageing: the Panel calls for the rapid creation of a dynamic market for ICT and ageing, able to deliver innovative products and services by combining research, market and deployment activities. The Commission supports this recommendation while emphasising, that this requires tackling important barriers which include market fragmentation and lack of economies of scale, lack of funding for innovation and investment to scale up from pilots and uncertainty about payment: Europe has a large diversity of ways to finance health and social care, which combine public sector, private sector and citizen interventions, and which are often not adapted to supporting innovative ICT-based solutions for active ageing or independent living.

Panel recommendations specific to the AAL JP:the overall assessment of the Panel is positive, even if the programme has been operational for two years only and projects have not yet been completed. The Panel considers that the AAL JP can provide highly relevant solutions to the challenge of demographic ageing and at the same time be a successful example of the use of Article 185 TFEU for innovative research cooperation between Member States with EU support. The Panel also acknowledged the responsive financial contribution of the participating countries, which has gone well beyond the legally required minimum (for the first two Calls the participating States raised their financial contribution respectively 30% and 50% above the required minimum), and a strong participation of SMEs of well above 40%.

The Panel, however, also recommends that the AAL JP urgently reinforces its operations. The Commission strongly supports this recommendation and urges participating States to pay close and immediate attention to this recommendation.

Progress towards the objectives of AAL JP: the key objectives of the AAL JP are (i) to enable the emergence of ICT-based products, services and systems for ageing well, (ii) create a sufficient body of research, development and innovation, and (iii) improve conditions for industrial exploitation. The Panel concluded that the AAL JP is contributing positively to the first and second objective, in particular as regards conditions for industry participation (as evidenced by the high participation of SMEs, i.e. 40%). The Panel recommends, however, putting more efforts on enhancing the actual exploitation of results. The actions which the Commission intends to undertake will promote the link between the AAL JP and deployment instruments, notably the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, providing market and impact evidence and analysis, and exploring new financing instruments for deployment. The Commission also intends to ensure that these actions will contribute to and leverage related work in the announced European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. The Commission will:

- work with the AAL JP to develop and share impact metrics between the programme and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (2011);
- launch a market observatory and business models study in ICT for ageing well, which will also address the work on business models of AAL JP projects (2011);
- together with the European Investment Bank and the AAL JP, mobilise appropriate financing modalities to bridge the investment gap for large scale deployment and uptake, taking the JESSICA investment scheme and ELENA technical assistance facility15 as reference points (2010-2011);
- propose to the AAL JP to continue supporting the AAL Investment Forum, and to open it up to innovators and innovations from FP7 and CIP ICT PSP (2011 and beyond).

Level of financial contributions by participating countries: the Panel concluded that the level of national financial contributions is a major success of the AAL JP. The Commission will continue monitoring key financial performance metrics (time-topayment, time-to-contract) in its annual reviews of the AAL JP and follow-up where necessary in particular to ensure timely payments (2010 onwards).

Performance of the AAL JP for the integration of national programmes: the Panel found that differing financial and funding eligibility rules across participating countries complicate the formation of international consortia and the effective participation of all relevant stakeholders. The Commission will work with the AAL JP Participating States to analyse funding approaches, with a view to exchange of practices and as input for the longer-term future of the AAL JP (2011).

Operational performance of the AAL JP: the Commission agrees with the Panel that the exchange of experience and creation of synergies with related Article 185 programmes, like Eurostars, EMPR and Bonus-169 can be instrumental in improving the management and operations of the AAL JP. The Commission will facilitate the exchange of Article 185 practices in the implementation of related programmes through exchange of operational experience and possible further cooperation.

European added value of the AAL JP: the Panel found that the AAL JP is already delivering a clear European added value in the balance between European efforts and national needs and inputs, and in the development of good practices. The current European efforts in addressing and removing barriers to the deployment of AAL solutions should, however, be strengthened as part of a joint effort with all stakeholders. The Commission intends to explore the continuation of the AAL JP beyond FP7, taking into consideration the reaction of the Council and European Parliament to the AAL JP evaluation results and recommendations. The Commission will:

- take into account the contributions to the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing that can be made by the AAL JP (2010-2012);
- perform an impact assessment on options for the continuation of the AAL JP beyond FP7, without prejudice to the preparation of FP8 and the EU Financial Perspectives and taking into account the evolution of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (2012);
- support technology road-mapping and consultation and provide guidance to more closely link FP7, AAL JP and CIP in ICT for ageing well (2011);
- address the potential for synergies between the AAL JP and the Joint Programming Initiative on "More Years, Better Lives" in a JPI Recommendation (2011);
- propose to the AAL JP to submit the AAL Conference as a contribution to the 2012 Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity, for enhanced visibility and reinforcement of commitment across a wide range of actors (2012);
- assess the adequacy of the "Action Plan on Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing", as part of the Digital Agenda (2012).

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to provide their opinion on the report and its analysis and recommendations and to support the implementation of proposed actions.