

EUROAGEISM NEWSLETTER

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RESEARCH ON COVID AND THE IMPACT OF COVID ON OLDER PERSONS

COVID-19 pandemic has turned the world we are used to upside down, intruding into our private lives, encroaching upon our research, influencing each and every area investigated by EuroAgeism.

The **labour market** experienced structural changes associated with the transition to remote work, increased unemployment and lay-offs, the closure or

restriction of numerous enterprises' activities, reduced labour migration, the need to comply with new sanitary measures and taking decisions in the reality of the increased uncertainty.

"Research showed that older workers adapt easily to environmental changes (including working from home) during the pandemic. They utilise external and internal resources efficiently

to optimise their adaptation to changes (Kooij, 2020). Nevertheless, previous studies show that older workers use social support as coping strategies in a challenging situation, also to combat age stereotypes (Previtali et al., 2020). We might consider the effects that social isolation has on hinder in the long-term perspective for older workers". Federica Previtali, Tampere University.

The **health and long term care sectors** have to consider the equitable distribution of limited resources and ensuring access to health assistance and quality help in the face of a geometrical increasing load. The usual mechanisms of caring for patients with non COVID-19 diseases were disrupted. It took some time to ensure access to quality medical and long term care is granted equally again.

"Residential care homes in Western and Northern countries have not been able to bring foreign workers from other European countries and outside

Europe. Shortages in basic resources such as staff and protective equipment have affected the mental and physical health of older people residing in care homes (Doctors without Borders 2020)". Lola Casal-Sanchez, Robert Gordon University.

"... social isolation also affects prolonging working life agendas, and its long-term implications should be considered".

Federica Previatali, Tampere University

"Older persons on average take more medications than adults; thus, medication shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected the health of older people. The shortages affected older persons in two different ways: firstly, older persons are more vulnerable to non-availability of medications used in critical care due to higher COVID-19 morbidity and mortality among them; secondly, due to higher demand, stockpiling, disruption of supply chains many older persons have faced lack of medications that they use every day, which could have lead to hospitalisations, and other



adverse health outcomes".
Jovana Brkic, Charles University.

The image of ageing and older people in the media has undergone significant alterations. In many cases older people were regarded as one homogenised social group, pictured as frail, helpless and vulnerable and obliged or recommended to self-isolate and cocoon.

"Negative representations may adversely influence the way that we view and treat older people as well as the health and wellbeing of older people. While social media could be a powerful media to convey individualised experiences of ageing, it was mostly found as a constructor and distributor of age stereotypes in the existing studies examining online representations of older analysed tweets had ageist or potentially offensive content (Jimenez-Sotomayor et al., 2020)". Wenqian Xu, Linköping University.

"... medication shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected the health of older people"

Jovana Brkic, Charles University.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a sharp rise in the blanket description of the older population as vulnerable and consequently more susceptible to



the COVID-19 disease because of their age, which may be ageist. However, it is worthy to note that there are some examples of good practices on the age-inclusive approach to address the pandemic as well". Abodunrin Aminu, Robert Gordon University.

The area of **digital technology** received a powerful impetus to development due to the pandemic, although not all the actors and stakeholders were ready for. The growing share of day-to-day tasks started to be carried out primarily or exceptionally online deepening the digital divide and creating a barrier for online education and shopping, access to

"... older adults are increasingly using digital technology, and hold more positive (than negative) attitudes towards using technology"

Ittay Mannheim, Fontys University of Applied Science

"We should raise public awareness to resist the representations depersonalising, homogenising, and devaluing older people"

Wenqian Xu, Linköping University

telemedicine, teleworking, and even social connectedness with friends and relatives. The stereotypes about older people being less competent and interested in using and learning new technologies also flourished.

"On the contrary, evidence usually shows that older adults are increasingly using digital technology, and hold more positive (than negative) attitudes towards using technology, especially when it can meet their needs and serve a purpose (which contrary to stereotype is not mainly care and healthcare)". Ittay Mannheim, Fontys University of Applied Science.

IMPACT OF COVID ON ESRs RESEARCH PROJECT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a gripping effect on the research milestones on our Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) at different stages of their research projects. While the pandemic is still ongoing, we would like to share some areas where the pandemic impacted most and few tips/lessons on how we coped with it.

Challenges with data collection

One of the key areas impacted by the pandemic is the data collection for the individual projects of the ESRs. For most of the ESRs, the data collection was clearly delayed or impossible to achieve with the pre-pandemic research protocols already drafted by the ESRs. It was reported by one ESRs that there could be a potential bias to the questionnaires for data collection due to change in attitude of the of the research participants because of the pandemic. The data collection was also significantly impacted by the restrictions within and between countries that immediately followed the global spread of the COVID-19 virus. For instance, one of the ESRs who was supposed to pick up already collected data could not gain access to the building where that data was kept. For other ESRs, there were obvious challenges with recruiting participants for face-to-face interviews, focused

groups, and administration of questionnaires.

Impact on working environment

The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted some of the ESRs due to the restriction to access a suitable working environment. Due the rapidly changing strategies by different governments to control the pandemic, there have been national lockdowns instituted in several countries. During the period, individuals were expected work remotely. For some ESRs, they were expected to leave their host countries or expected to return to their home countries due to the changing regulations by the different countries. Also, one of the ESRs reported that the data for her project can only be accessed from the stand-alone computers at her workplace, and thus could not proceed with her analysis. Another ESR

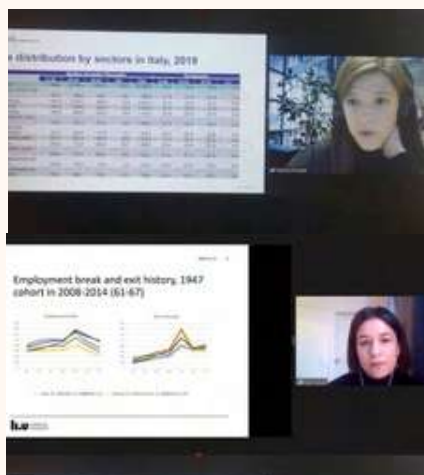
could not obtain full access to the software necessary to analyse the research data due to the lockdown. Although some of the ESRs found the remote working condition as an advantage to focus, others were largely constrained by the solitary situation.

Reduced working time

The ESRs reported the inability to work effectively due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. For some of the ESRs, it was a case of having to manage child-care and the research work at the same time. For other ESRs, they had to manage the proliferation of online-meeting attendance with the ability to focus on their projects.

Secondment programmes

The secondment programme is an essential part of the EuroAgeism project that was significantly impacted by the pandemic. This was largely due to the impact of the pandemic on the movement of the ESRs and the reduced activities at the host organisations. For some of the ESRs, they have had to cancel their secondment projects in the middle of the pandemic. For other ESRs, they simply could not proceed with their already planned secondments.



Deliverables and trainings for the ESR

Some of the expected deliverables in the project were delayed due to the impact of the pandemic. Also, the ESRs could not proceed with the expected face-to-face training on key areas including presentation of research findings, policy, and networking.

Innovative ways to cope with the disruption due to the pandemic

- Change of research focus to accommodate the unexpected reality of the pandemic.
- Change to flexible pattern of working to improve productivity.
- Switch to remote working for the secondment programmes.
- Completing some of the ESR trainings and meetings online.
- Having contingency plans to mitigate the effect of the pandemic.
- Seeking additional funding to extend the project timeline.
- Changing the data collection approach to include virtual platforms and electronic medium. such as telephone survey/interviews or video conferencing.
- Use of secondary data were available.
- Instituting ESRs monthly seminars to help foster cooperative ideas and feedbacks.



DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic not only impeded our research activities, but also limited the ability to disseminate previous results and findings. Although many conferences, meetings and seminars were cancelled or postponed, many of our ESR colleagues adjusted to the conditions and participated in a number of online conferences.

Among others, Köttl and Wenqian XU gave a talk about the relationship between positive self-perceptions of ageing, older people's internet use and the level of loneliness at the Aging & Social Change: Tenth Interdisciplinary Conference 2020. Also, on the topic of technology use in older age, Ittay Mannheim presented older person perspectives of co-designing digital technology at the International Society for Gerontechnology Conference 2020. At European Sociological Association – Research Network on Ageing Midterms Conference 2021 our colleagues Federica Previtali, Gülin Öylü, and Katri Keskinen shared their findings and result about ageism in the workforce. Attending World

interRAI Conference 2020, Jovana Brkic talked about inappropriate medication use in hospitalized older patients. Providing a critical reflection of the debate around a UN Convention on the rights of older persons, Stefan Hopf presented at the Gerontological Society of America 2020 Annual Scientific Meeting.

In addition, colleagues organized and participated in a series of webinars, workshops, and seminars. In addition to the EuroAgeism seminar series launched on 18.11.2020 and hosted by Liat Ayalon, our colleagues Federica Previtali, Laura Allen and Maria Varlamova presented their work on older adults, COVID-19 its implications





for aging Policy and practice in a webinar from the Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis. Sharing her research on ageism with the wider public Wanyu Xi gave an interview to the Chinese Professional Women's Society for Development.

During April and May 2021, ESRs are to deliver a series of webinars to disseminate our work. With the help of staff from Robert Gordon University, ESRs will conduct a webinar to industrial companies. Three webinars will also be delivered to members of and the University of Third Age' and thus contribute to their 'push back on ageism' initiative.

- April 6 - Ageism in the Workforce and in The Industry. Robert Gordon University. 15h00 CET. t.ly/2uNd
- April 26 - Ageism in the media. University of Third Age. 15h00 CET. www.u3a.org.uk
- May 12 - Ageism and Technology. University of Third Age. 15h00 CET. www.u3a.org.uk
- May 25 - Ageism in Health Care. University of Third Age. 15h00 CET. www.u3a.org.uk

INVITATION TO THE 3RD EUROAGEISM ITN TRAINING SCHOOL: "PERSPECTIVES OF AGEING IN EUROPE AND OTHER COUNTRIES AND FUTURE WAYS TO COMBAT AGEISM" - 3 TO 6 MAY 2021

This Training school (TS) will bring together ESRs, policymakers and experts from different scientific fields. During the 1st Day of the TS, expert lectures of European policymakers (Dr. Vânia de la Fuente Núñez (WHO, Switzerland), Dr. Kai Leichsenring (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Austria) and Dr. Michal Myck (Centre for Economic Analysis, Poland)) and top researchers (prof. Kieran Walsh, National University of Ireland Galway) will be held. ESRs will deepen their knowledge on future perspectives of ageing in Europe and ways to combat ageism in future decades.

In the following days of the TS, ESRs will be also trained in dissertation theses writing and defenses under the professional support of invited experts from different scientific fields and countries and will disseminate their first research findings to the scientific community. They will train also skills necessary for successful writing of postdoctoral fellowship MSCA research grants and for advanced proposals of EU Horizon 2020 grants invited speakers: Dr. Tuffano (Charles University Czech Republic),

Dr. Virtanen (Tampere University, Finland), Dr. Principi (NIHSA, Italy), Dr. Čapková (Technological Centre of Academy of Science, Czech Republic), Dr. Motta (Univ.Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy) and prof. van Hout (UMC Amsterdam, Netherlands).

There will be an affiliated **Discussion Day** to the 3rd EuroAgeism TS organized on 7 May 2021 (Friday) entitled "**Inappropriate prescribing in older adults in Europe and developing countries and availability of clinical pharmacy services for older patients in different settings of care**".

Scientists, policy makers, healthcare professionals, students and other colleagues interested in participation in "Open sessions" of the 3rd TS or on Friday "Discussion Day" are cordially welcome to register for free at our website! For more information please see programs of both events (after 7 April 2021) at the EuroAgeism ITN website (<https://euroageism.eu/>) and at the website of the organizing institution - the Faculty of Pharmacy, Charles Univ., Czech Republic (www.faf.cuni.cz/uckf).



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<https://euroageism.eu/>

