***WEBSTORY***

#### **13 July 2016**

**Digital e-seniors and the silver economy**

**Some 25% of the EU population are older citizens, a growing market of economic and social players in the digital age. The European Union faces a new challenge: the coincidence of longevity and widespread digitalisation. Therefore, changing the approach to the "silver economy" is an imperative, says the EESC.**

In its opinion “*The digital pillar of growth: e-seniors, a potential 25% of the European population*” adopted at the plenary on 13 July, the EESC argues that indeed, on one hand, the increased number of elderly people can be an opportunity for the commercial sector providing tailored goods and services for this growing market, but mainly on second hand, to maintain included in real life 125 million of citizen will be compulsory for European economy. Indeed, by 2060, there will be two older people for every young person, and the number of very elderly people will exceed the number of children under five. While this is a potential burden for social protection systems, it could be in the same time a huge opportunity of development if 50+ people were considered as a positive strength linked to their competences, knowledge, and capacity of innovation.

"*Information technologies must become just as much a part of the lives of Europe’s 125 million older citizens as they are for others, and not limited to technical or medical aid"*, notes **EESC Rapporteur Laure Batut**.

**Ensuring access**

To achieve that, the opinion recommends the generalisation of internet accessibility as a right to a universal service, including for the poorest seniors. One approach would be to provide public spaces where people have free internet access with an assistance coming from local administration and to set up voluntary dedicated civic service. Member States could undertake awareness-raising campaigns to inform their citizens about the digital training possibilities on offer for older people. Another strategy, according to the opinion, could be to establish formal links with universities to facilitate older people's access to massive open online courses (MOOCs).

Ensuring access necessitates the development of a global system of governance to bring older people into the digital world. This would address both digital and demographic transitions and promote digital inclusion of all seniors, notes the opinion.

**Exchange for digital inclusion**

Furthermore, the EESC recommends adding a "senior" strand to Erasmus+, and call it, for instance, SENECA, a *'Senior Erasmus Programme’*. This could be an ideal platform for exchanging good practice and promoting further take-up of digital skills among this growing class of senior EU citizens.

**More information**

• [EESC opinion](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.38294) "The digital pillar of growth: e-seniors, a potential 25% of the European population" (13/07/2016)

* [Growing the European Silver Economy](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/silvereco.pdf)

• [Bridging the digital divide in the EU](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/573884/EPRS_BRI%282015%29573884_EN.pdf)