

The purpose of this article is to serve as a link between the activities of our Association's international structure and our approximately 15,000 members. It provides brief information on the activities of the International Bureau since 1 January 2025. This article replaces the InfoSections that were sent to the Management Board and were then supposed to be sent by each section to the members in their section.

2025 and 2026 Yearly Congresses

The Bureau analysed the 2024 Congress in Catania and found that, despite an interesting programme and an attractive destination, the number of participants remained below expectations. It was therefore decided to hold the 2025 Congress in Brussels as a test of participation. The latter was very high, not only in view of the programme, in particular the round table on human rights, but also the IT workshop on the abandonment of text messaging (SMS) as a method of EU Login authentication. On this basis, the experiment will be repeated in 2026 in Brussels.

My IntraComm / Pensioners' Portal

Changes to the Commission's IT applications are happening at such a rapid pace that many former staff members are unable to keep up. My IntraComm has been replaced by the Pensioners' Portal. The Bureau held several preparatory meetings with the PMO and DG HR, and volunteers carried out tests. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to postpone the introduction of this new feature. Once again, it appears that the Commission (= DG DIGIT) is introducing new features before the previous ones have been fully and properly finalised and “digested” by pensioners, in particular the abandonment of text messaging. The Portal in its current version will still require some adjustments to enable ordinary pensioners to find their way around and, above all, to find the information they are looking for.

Teams AfterEC

This social network, intended exclusively for pensioners from the institutions, is enjoying growing success. Numerous exchanges help to clarify many doubts or questions on the part of pensioners. It also allows for information and exchange sessions on video on various current topics. Small Ads and Commission en Direct are now accessible via Teams AfterEC. Members of the Bureau contribute regularly.

PMO Single number

The PMO's single number is a real disaster. Waiting times on hold are often unbearable and very expensive for calls from abroad. The Bureau has held several meetings with the PMO on this subject. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain a freephone number (00800) or a callback function (at least for the time being). The language problem (other than English and French) remains unresolved. One slight improvement is the choice of a separate channel for pensioners.

Abandonment of authentication by means of text messaging

DG DIGIT has decided to remove the option of authenticating by means of text messaging in EU Login for security reasons (which are certainly understandable). The Bureau's repeated requests to DIGIT have been met with a brick wall. The PMO and AIACE International, together with its sections, have made unprecedented efforts to help pensioners change their authentication method and install a second one. The vast majority of those concerned have succeeded; there are still some 1,100 pensioners to be convinced and helped, although there will always be some diehards. The paper route is, of course, still available.

National health systems

For several years, AIACE International has been launching initiatives to have the JSIS recognised by Member States' health systems. The Commission (DG HR and PMO) has begun negotiating agreements with certain Member States. An agreement has been prepared (but not signed) in Italy, which AIACE International is fighting with all its might, because although it allows access to the national system, it would make services payable by the JSIS instead of being free of charge. On the one hand, this could be very costly for the JSIS and, on the other hand, there is a risk of setting a precedent for other countries with similar systems. Following AIACE's insistence, an agreement has been signed with Luxembourg hospitals. The next countries to be considered for an agreement are Slovakia, France and Germany.

Seminars

The Bureau has organised and is currently organising a series of seminars aimed at promoting the exchange of experiences and information: Communication, Treasurers, Social Volunteers, Access to National Health Systems, Insurance.

Newsroom

The OIB has suggested that AIACE use the Newsroom tool to communicate with its members. This tool is already frequently used by the PMO to disseminate information to pensioners. This tool would make it possible to send invitations to the General Meeting, invitations to the yearly congresses and the VOX magazine, including the digital version (DigiVOX, see below), to all members with an e-mail address at the click of a button. The Bureau is in contact with the OIB and DG CONNECT to find a solution that suits AIACE, which will be the case very soon. Unfortunately, two sections are refusing to participate, as they do not wish to provide AIACE International with the email addresses of members in their section, thus depriving them of the information distributed to other members.

VOX and DigiVOX

The Bureau continues to publish three issues of AIACE VOX magazine each year. With the support of the OIB, a digital version of the magazine has been developed and is currently being tested with a view to going online with the next issue. The Newsroom tool will be used to distribute DigiVOX.

Sections' infrastructure

Despite reminders, there are still sections that do not have an office or are at risk of losing theirs in the short term (particularly Germany, Greece and Italy). The Bureau is in contact with DG HR and the OIB, which is now responsible for offices in the Commission's Representations, in order to obtain the space necessary for the proper functioning of the sections.

Meeting with the Commissioner

The President met with Commissioner Serafin's private office, in particular to emphasise that pensioners are statutory staff and must be treated as such, and to raise awareness of the need for an increase in the Commission's subsidy, given that social actions are currently only 50% covered by contributions from the institutions.

DG HR subsidy for social actions

In the current situation, subsidies from the institutions cover only half of the social actions carried out by AIACE on behalf of the institutions, particularly the Commission. Following a favourable opinion from the Commissioner's private office, DG HR has requested statistics on the number of people assisted and the time involved in order to determine the amount of the subsidy increase. The European Parliament has already spontaneously announced an increase in its subsidy; the Bureau will ask the other institutions to do the same.

MyCareNet

MyCareNet is the Belgian eHealth platform that enables the secure exchange of treatment certificates between doctors and insurance organisations in Belgium. The JSIS has just been integrated into it after a very long gestation period. The Bureau, which welcomed this initiative, organised successful tests of the system with the PMO. Initially, the system covers general practitioners and specialists; pharmacies and physiotherapists will follow gradually, and hospitals later.

Insurance policies

Thanks to the efforts of the Insurance Group, the Bureau has posted an overview of the insurance policies taken out by AIACE International with Cigna online. The Bureau, together with the Insurance Group, is in contact with Cigna with a view to improving the contractual provisions. AIACE has secured hospitalisation insurance cover for members' children. The Bureau has also requested that travel insurance be considered.

Bank charges

Following a reorganisation of DG BUDG's contracts with banks, it emerged that, contrary to the rule, in some countries banks charge fees for each payment received from the Commission (pensions and medical reimbursements) and some pensioners outside Europe had not received their pensions for several months. The Bureau has repeatedly urged the PMO, DG BUDG and DG HR to resolve the problem quickly (which has only been partially

done so far) and to reimburse the unduly collected amounts with interest for late payment as compensation. The situation appears to be returning to normal in Denmark; in Greece, the problem has been resolved thanks to the energetic intervention of the President of the Greece Section with the banks. The problem remains in the United Kingdom, but the solution is not clear as it is not/no longer part of the EU.

AIACE presentation leaflet

The Bureau has updated and revised the AIACE presentation brochure, which is given to future pensioners and will also be posted on the AIACE International website. It will also be made available to other institutions.

Departure pack for future pensioners

Future pensioners who visit the Commission's "departure desk" by appointment (around 70%) receive a whole series of documents (many of which from DG HR are no longer up to date), including several documents presenting AIACE and its sections. According to the information received, future pensioners who do not visit the departure desk were supposed to receive a box containing these same documents at their home address, but this has not been the case. The Bureau has therefore insisted to DG HR that this should be the case in future, as it is – along with the retirement preparation seminars – one of the few channels for reaching pensioners and encouraging them to join.

Revision of the AIACE Statutes

Following the bringing of the Statutes into line with Belgian legislation, a whole series of other proposed amendments has been put forward. A working group was set up to examine them. After an initial meeting on 8 January 2025, two further meetings are planned in December and January so that the proposals that have been selected can be submitted by the Management Board to the 2026 General Meeting.

Preparation of the PMO/HR/AIACE working group

The PMO/HR/AIACE Technical Group facilitates the exchange of information and questions that can be dealt with at operational level without the need for discussion by the Management Board. Despite improvements, the functioning of this group leaves something to be desired. The Bureau is in contact with DG HR with a view to a possible review of its format. A meeting is scheduled for spring 2026.