

CHAPTER III - Observations of the field study and recommendations

A. Introduction

A fact-finding mission was carried out by Andres Vikat and Viviane Brunne (UNECE Population Unit) in June-July 2009. During the mission, 24 interviews were carried out, based on a semi-structured questionnaire (see annex 3), with representatives of all relevant stakeholder groups, including Government, civil society, the private sector, trade unions and international organizations operating in the country. Several project sites, including nursing homes, were visited. During those visits, informal discussions were held with the inhabitants of the homes regarding their living conditions and needs. In addition to several sites in Yerevan, the city of Gyumri was visited. The main results of the mission are summarized in the chapters below. The topics of the chapters were selected to reflect those areas identified as important in MIPAA/RIS. Taken together, they provide a good overview of the different themes relevant to understanding the situation with regard to mainstreaming ageing in the country.

The chapters in the Road Map provide a brief description of observations made. Recommendations drawn from these observations are summarized at the end of each chapter. Recommendations may refer to different levels of abstraction or detail. They remain faithful to what has been found in the course of this review and they represent the core of the suggested Road Map and constitute the outcome of this project as implemented by UNECE. All these recommendations have been integrated into the draft Strategy and Action Plan as annexed. UNECE has contributed to developing the Strategy and Action Plan based on insights gained in the research for the Road Map.

B. Ageing-related policies and their implementation

1. Integration and participation of older persons

A cohesive and stable society requires economic, social, cultural and political integration of all persons, regardless of age. Integrating older persons into society and providing them with opportunities to lead fulfilled lives is also important to build their confidence. Being integrated into various social networks helps them feel accepted and less lonely. Being more integrated may help to increase their self-esteem and thus empower them to become more active to improve their own situation.

Negative stereotyping and unequal treatment or even outright discrimination may negatively affect older persons' ability to participate in society. While older persons are generally treated with respect in Armenian society, they often feel bad about being financially dependent on their own children. Indeed, older people are too often found to be dependent and passive. To achieve full integration, older people must be enabled to be independent financially and in all other aspects, and actively to pursue different activities according to their needs and motivations.

Ultimately, the image of older persons will depend on their own actions. The way they are seen by others depends on how they see themselves. Ageing stereotypes are very often reproduced as self-stereotypes. Integration of older persons therefore has to be claimed by the older persons themselves and they should be empowered to do so on a daily basis.

(a) *Economic integration*

Older persons should be able to stay economically active for as long as they are willing and able — to allow them to capitalize on their experiences and to be integrated into professional networks. Currently, there seems to be a bias against older people's activity as employees, with their contributions not being fully appreciated by employers. In the formal sector, standard full-time employment is the norm and more flexible models such as part-time work, which may better accommodate the needs of older persons, are

not readily available. Administrative burdens and/or difficulty in accessing credit also impede the ability of older persons to become entrepreneurs. A culture of older persons' economic activity is not well ingrained in society and needs to be built. Similarly, there is no broad acceptance of the need for continuous learning that allows employees to keep abreast of new developments so that even older workers remain well adjusted to their changing workplaces. A new strategy on education and lifelong learning has been developed by the Ministry of Education with inputs from NGOs and experts. It is expected to provide new opportunities for lifelong learning which have to be embraced by the working age population. In fact, the classical differentiation between education, work life and retirement as consecutive phases of life — still very much the norm in Armenian society — is not well adjusted to the requirements of an ageing society. Learning and working will increasingly have to become overarching concepts of equal relevance to all age groups.

Older persons also take part in the economy as consumers. However, a market segment that specifically addresses the needs of older persons does not seem to be well developed. Older persons are not seen as possessing considerable purchasing power, although many of them do receive financial support from their children working abroad.

(b) Social integration

There is a danger that, with advanced age, the level of social integration may decrease because of functional impediments, such as lower levels of mobility, which prevent older persons from visiting family or friends. Policies should enhance older persons' autonomy so that they can achieve levels of social integration that they wish for themselves. Access to public transport is an issue for older persons and more public transport should be made available that provides easy access for the elderly or people with disabilities. A system of fee reductions specifically designated for older persons with little means should be in place. For older persons in remote areas, it may be necessary to make special provisions, for example making means of transport especially available to visit doctors or family and friends. Allowing older persons to remain in their familiar environments is important for them to stay close to their social networks. Given the small number of nursing homes in Armenia, having to move into an institution may mean being completely cut off from such familiar environments. Home-based care services are not available to the extent necessary to allow older persons to stay in their homes.

Some community centres offer older citizens participation in social activities. However, it would be useful to map such centres and establish alternative facilities where they do not exist. Volunteering is hardly developed as a means to achieve better participation of older persons. Volunteering should be both for and by older persons. Providing older persons with an opportunity to volunteer could help their inclusion, since they could pass on their skills to younger generations. For example, older persons could help pupils with their homework. At the same time, younger generations could volunteer to help older persons with small errands or accompanying them to places outside their homes. An effective approach to fostering integration of older persons is supporting the development of older people's self-help groups, based on a volunteering approach. Such groups can be organized around a specific community need, for example to provide childcare or home care to other more vulnerable older persons.

(c) Cultural integration

Older persons carry a rich cultural heritage and they should be provided with opportunities to pass that on to the next generations. At the same time, cultural manifestations, such as theatre or music, are a reflection of society's concerns, and older persons should be provided with opportunities to take part in such performances. Armenia has made some efforts to provide access to culture for older persons, for example by providing tickets at reduced prices. However, physical accessibility of buildings where cultural performances or exhibitions are held is often an issue for older persons with disabilities. At the same time, acknowledging the active contribution of older persons to cultural life, for example as actors or artists, is important. A media study¹⁰ showed that older artists and actors are indeed occasionally acknowledged in the

¹⁰ Meri Yeranossyan, The coverage of age-related issues in Armenian TV and print media, report submitted to UNECE December 2009.

news, for example on the occasion of their birthdays.

Access to modern means of communication is also important for ensuring participation. While television and telephones seem to be readily available and affordable to many older persons, Internet use is not yet widespread, especially not beyond the capital. However, enabling older persons to use the internet — which may also be offered in social centres — could be a good opportunity to empower these older persons to be better informed and to keep more frequent contact with people living further away.

(d) Political integration

Older persons have considerable experience and wisdom to contribute to political processes, as they have witnessed different historic phases and have seen how different strategies have been used more or less successfully in the past. However, they do not seem to be well represented as political actors. They have not formed a strong organization representing their interests and no regular political mechanism invites inputs from representatives of older persons.

No reliable data were available on older persons' representation in top positions in trade unions, political parties or other important organizations. As part of involving more older persons into political life it may be useful to collect data on their political participation and to make these data publicly available.

Older persons seem to be following political news actively and they also seem to be active voters. Nevertheless, the interests of older persons have not featured too prominently in election campaigns so far, although, given the growing share of the older population, they represent significant voting power.

Recommendations

1. *Organize outreach and public information campaigns to counter negative stereotypes of older persons.*
2. *Work with the private sector to facilitate the development of products especially designed for the needs of older persons.*
3. *Improve mobility of older persons by enhancing accessibility and affordability of public transport.*
4. *Organize a survey of existing community centres and establish alternative facilities where such centres do not exist.*
5. *Enhance integration and participation of older persons by promoting volunteering.*
6. *Continue providing opportunities for accessing cultural activities by older persons, both as spectators and as active participants.*
7. *Enhance access to modern means of communication and build capacities among older persons to use them (including the Internet).*
8. *Improve opportunities for older persons to be politically active, especially in policymaking in areas that concern them.*

2. The image of older persons

The role older people play in society depends on how they are seen by other generations, as well as how they perceive themselves. The image of older persons in society is difficult to measure. A proxy for public discourse is media reporting, since journalists try to capture in their stories what is thought and said by key opinion leaders as well as the broader public. At the same time, messages transmitted in the media reinforce public perceptions. They shape the images of older citizens in the minds of the people. A study to review media reporting on older persons and ageing-related policymaking was therefore commissioned.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid.

The study covered the television news programme Haylur, the daily 9 p.m. news programme of the main public television channel H1 and the two newspapers Haykakan Zhamanak (Armenian Times) and Aravot (Morning). The selection was done so as to cover a sufficiently broad audience.

The television news was screened for a period of three months (May–July 2009). During this time, 44 news items were identified as relevant. They were clustered into five topic groups: (1) “Health care and social services”; (2) “Workers’ day and appreciation of older persons”; (3) “Victories and veterans”; (4) “Remembering elders, birthdays”; and (5) “Obituaries”. In the first cluster, for example, there was a feature about the reopening of an older people’s home in Vanadzor. The reporting focused on diaspora philanthropists who funded the project, and older people were shown in the background as passive recipients of a charity with which the viewer was made to feel compassionate. The second cluster had, among others, a feature on a company organizing an event on the occasion of 1 May, Labour Day. Workers received medals and presents and two older employees expressed their gratitude for being valued. In the third cluster, older persons — veterans in this case — received insignia and were praised as heroes. Veterans were shown either in uniforms or sometimes in poor clothes, but no reference was made as to how they lived today. Cluster four mostly focused on celebrating the birthdays of those still alive or remembering famous people post mortem. Cluster five had a collection of obituaries of people with a role in society, including a writer and an ambassador, highlighting their merits.

The review of the selected daily newspapers for the period from March to August 2009 (six months) generated a list of 36 relevant articles which were grouped into seven clusters: (1) “Making ends meet, pension and income”; (2) “Older persons and relationships, loneliness”; (3) “Housing”; (4) “Positive ageing”; (5) “Active older people”; (6) “Birthdays”; and (7) “Obituaries”.

Stories in cluster 1 describe the difficulty of older people trying to survive on very little income, for example in the case of a painter who preferred not to eat for several days to be able to afford material for his paintings and who depended on support from his neighbours. A second cluster of articles focuses on the loneliness of older people missing their children who have migrated for work. Another story presented a desolate dormitory in the Shengavit community, where older persons lived largely forgotten by the outside world and only survived with the help of the Red Cross. Cluster three has contributions on housing, for example older people battling with the authorities to claim their property. Two articles highlighted positive aspects of ageing, one talking about the wisdom gained and being able to put things into perspective, another about falling in love in old age. Active older people are at the centre stage of cluster five, among them several artists and a 102-year-old candidate for political office. Cluster six has articles celebrating the birthdays of famous older people, both living and dead, as well as the birthdays of some less well-known older persons. Cluster seven has a collection of obituaries.

The analysis shows that reporting is rather polarized, either selectively featuring older persons who are celebrities in a specific field and who are particularly energetic, or showing older persons who are extremely poor, powerless and without hope. Portraits appear to be either too optimistic or too pessimistic and do not seem to provide a realistic view of the diversity of the lives of older persons.

Often older people are reported on in the spirit of honouring their contributions to society during special occasions, such as birthdays, Labour Day or special days for veterans. While sometimes their energy and positive contribution is highlighted on their birthdays, there is a tendency to show them as rather passive recipients of some acknowledgement or charity during big national celebrations. To provide a realistic image of their lives it could be more useful to feature older persons as subjects: as active members of society, helping in their families, earning a living, being creative, contributing their wisdom and experience.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to focus on older people who are famous. To provide a realistic picture of the realities of older persons it would be useful to feature more average older persons facing ordinary difficulties in life but also finding many creative ways of coping with them. It could be shown how older

people can be outstanding and special without necessarily being famous. Stories could show how average older persons are well embedded into networks of intergenerational solidarity in which they both give and receive.

Reporting about non-famous people often shows extreme cases of dire misery. In a considerable number of stories, older people are associated with a lack of hope for a decent life and sometimes even with a desire to die as the only way to escape. While it is important to acknowledge that such cases exist, they may become self-fulfilling prophecies if they are perceived by the public as the norm because of frequent media reporting. The audience may subconsciously adopt the view that older people should be treated according to this stereotype of them. It may be useful to balance such reporting with suggested strategies, i.e., showing how the Government or communities address the challenges. In fact, while older persons are occasionally reported on, ageing-related policymaking has been practically absent from media reporting. Inasmuch as the Government is in a position to provide more information to the media about its activities, such information should be used. The press work of the ministries should be intensified and the capacities of their public relations offices should also be enhanced so that they actually address the needs of the media, e.g., linking information provision with stories of real people the audience can relate to. More active outreach by the Government to the media, explaining ongoing activities and strategies may help increase the transparency of Government actions and ownership by the wider public.

The media might also have a stronger function in revealing dysfunctionalities in the system with regard to service provision to older persons. Spotlighting cases where access to health care, social services or decent housing have been denied to older persons could be a powerful tool to show those in the system who are misusing their powers that they cannot get away with it. At the same time, the media can help inform the public about their rights to services and about ways to claim their rights in cases where they are denied.

Recommendations

1. *Government and organizations of or for older persons should reach out to the media to enhance the frequency of ageing-related reporting and to enable the media to provide a more balanced picture of ageing issues reflecting the real diversity of the lives of older people and to:*

- *Substitute images of passive seniors with active ones;*
- *Bring older persons from the background to the forefront, give them a voice and make them central actors;*
- *Portray seniors as influential figures and show that they both give and receive;*
- *Diversify the reporting on older people by presenting various groups of older persons;*
- *Promote respect towards older people not only through awards, care and praise but also through stories that highlight their capabilities, potential and determination;*
- *Present success stories of entrepreneurship among seniors and show their contributions as volunteers.*

2. *The role of media in providing useful information to the public about the rights of older persons and services available to them should be strengthened. The function of the media as an advocate of older persons' rights, including by uncovering cases of abuse and neglect, should be strengthened by:*

- *Building the capacities of press offices in the Ministries to produce targeted information for the media, by informing them about ageing issues and by generating understanding of existing challenges for Government policies;*

- *Organizing an information campaign involving a diverse group of actors, including Government, NGOs and media professionals, facilitating public discussion about the realities of older persons' lives, the challenges of ageing societies and measures to help older persons to bring out their potential and live fulfilled lives. The campaign should equally seek to fight stigma and prejudice against older persons. The campaign could involve intergenerational aspects, for example by involving school children or workplaces.*

3. Social protection

The pension age has been set at 63 years for both sexes. The basic pension is AMD 8,000, and the average pension is AMD 26,000. While there is no official poverty line adopted in Armenia, the minimum consumption basket is calculated at AMD 41,000 (approximately 115 US dollars at current exchange rates) by the National Statistical Service. The pension provided by the State is insufficient for covering even the most basic needs. Women tend to receive a lower pension than men because they usually work fewer years in formal employment. Unregistered work — a widespread reality — is not credited towards the pension. Older people often depend on their children in order to receive financial support and for help in their day-to-day lives. Over the past few years, pensions in Armenia have been raised several times, but given the rapid increase in living costs, pension payments cannot ensure minimum subsistence levels. Implementation of the pension reform as adopted by the Government will therefore be of major importance.

Another important element of the current social protection system is the family benefits system, the largest social assistance programme in Armenia. It is regulated by the Law on Social Assistance and the Law on State Allowances, respective Government decisions and secondary legislation. Families that qualify for support receive a basic allowance to which additional funds are added for each child under the age of 18 in the family. Poor households that do not qualify for the family allowance receive emergency support from local administrations. The majority of recipients under this system are older persons. Furthermore, there is a special group of privileged recipients which includes war veterans and people with disabilities acquired in wars (“invalids of war”). These groups receive a number of privileges in the social system and are comparatively better off than average older persons.

Overall, the social protection system is very diverse and consists of various elements that are not necessarily harmonized. Important gaps exist for those just above certain income thresholds who are still in need but are not eligible for assistance.

Generally it appears that potential recipients are not always well aware of the services and benefits they can receive, and information is not easily available. For cases where potential applicants feel they have been denied services unjustly, an ombudsperson is available in the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues. No information was obtained as to how many cases this office deals with and whether it can provide sufficient remedies for all grievances brought to its attention. No other complaints mechanisms seem to be available.

Recommendations

1. *Implement the pension reform; monitor its progress and impact and make adjustments as necessary.*
2. *Introduce a consistent and integrated social protection system that provides targeted assistance based on level of need (low, medium, high) and defines thresholds of income so that vulnerable groups can maintain an income at least at the minimum subsistence level.*
3. *Provide easy access to information and create more transparency about available services,*

eligibility, application procedures and selection. Distribute brochures, flyers and posters and install a hotline, Internet platform and responsible focal points, or counsellors, at the local level where older persons and their families can seek advice. Independent advice could also be made available through NGOs such as Mission Armenia.

4. In case of grievances, complaints mechanisms should be in place in case applicants for social services feel unjustly treated. Strengthen the capacity of the ombudsperson and advertise and monitor the services the ombudsperson provides.

4. Health

Health care for older people is critical since people are more likely to be in need of health-care services in old age. In principle, primary health care and essential drugs, as well as care in cases of heart attacks or strokes, are currently supposed to be free for people aged 65 years and above. Older persons who qualify as poor or disabled may receive additional services free of charge. However, many secondary and tertiary services have to be paid for and older persons can rarely afford to pay for them. Quality of care and hospitals are considerably better in cities than in rural areas. In some provinces, open door events have been organized where doctors from Yerevan were available for eye treatments or other services on special days. Such ad hoc events are unlikely to cover the real need, however. It could be useful to consider deploying mobile services to meet actual needs in a more sustainable manner.

It was reported that older people were turned back from hospitals when they arrived alone because the personnel were unsure whether the patients could pay. Furthermore, older people are sometimes asked to pay additional fees and it is not always clear whether these are justified. A Caritas health-care centre in Gyumri was highly popular because it guaranteed free services to older people and also made some medicine available free of charge. Palliative care is currently not available and it may be useful to pilot a palliative care centre, for example in Yerevan.

The lack of specialized health expertise in health staff was of some concern. Medical staff, including doctors and nurses, do not receive training on how to interact with older persons. The speciality of geriatrics and gerontology is not developed in universities, nor are such specialized services available in hospitals.

Quality management plans for hospitals and other health-care facilities are not systematically implemented.

It appears that the potential of prevention activities as a means of avoiding certain non-communicable diseases in old age has not been fully exploited. In fact, non-communicable diseases have been on the increase. They can be seen as a consequence of unhealthy diets, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, as well as lack of physical activity.

Recommendations

1. Enhance skills among health-care staff to professionally serve older persons. Include modules on gerontology and geriatrics in the curriculum of general practitioners and nurses.

2. Consider making palliative care services available.

3. Enhance prevention of disease and accidents and promote healthy living (balanced nutrition, physical activity, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, avoidance of smoking and smoking cessation). Include prevention in school curricula and use public media to promote healthy lifestyles. Monitor and evaluate prevention programmes to find out whether they actually help to encourage healthy behaviours.

4. *Tackle the collection of unjustified fees in health care and social service provision. Ensure service provision to vulnerable older persons without additional unjustified payments. Set up complaints mechanisms.*

5. *Introduce quality management mechanisms to monitor service provision. Establish independent external committees to perform unannounced visits to hospitals to verify quality of service provision and demand improvements where necessary.*

6. *Examine and address the urban-rural divide in service provision, especially in health care.*

5. Institutional care

Traditionally, older persons are taken care of by the family of the son with whom they live. However, the model of multigenerational living and intergenerational support is undergoing rapid changes. Younger people are less willing to live with their parents or may be in less of a position to support them as much as needed. At the same time, moving to institutions is stigmatized and perceived as undesirable for older persons. The Ministry of Labour and Social Issues is responsible for assigning eligible candidates to those homes and certain groups, such as war veterans, receive privileged access. In general, potential clients for older peoples' homes are not necessarily aware of the procedure to secure a place in a home. There is no easy access to information about application procedures, eligibility criteria and selection processes, and this may discourage some people from pursuing this option.

There are seven nursing homes, of which four are public and three are private. It seems likely that the need for nursing home places is higher than the number of available places and demand will increase further. At the same time, older persons in need may refrain from applying out of shame. There seems to be no clear picture of the actual demand for such places. It appears, however, that significantly more services are available in cities while there is no comparable offer in rural areas. There was also an impression that some facilities in Yerevan were generously staffed and in some instances the ratio of staff to inhabitants could be downscaled in favour of providing services to more older people in need.

Supported by international funding, Caritas provided a day-care centre which was very popular. However, raising the necessary funds to maintain its work remains a challenge. Across the country, day-care centres are not readily available and there is no good measurement of the potential demand for such centres.

Quality management mechanisms have not been systematically developed and implemented for institutional care centres.

Recommendations

1. *Assess the number of places needed in nursing homes and day-care centres. Make additional places available as needed.*

2. *De-stigmatize living in institutions.*

3. *Create transparent rules and procedures about the accessibility of older peoples' homes.*

4. *Introduce quality management mechanisms to monitor service provision in institutions. Establish independent external committees to perform unannounced visits and demand improvements where necessary.*

5. *Determine an optimal ratio of medical and social staff to patients in institutions, according to international standards. Avoid over- and understaffing.*

6. Housing and independent living

Older people prefer to live in their homes for as long as possible. Although multigenerational households seem to be the preferred option, many older people actually live by themselves, as a couple or alone. Whether in a multigenerational setting or in their own homes, family members bear the brunt of the burden of providing care and support to older persons. However, it appears that so far the needs of caring family members — be it in a co-residential setting or not — have not been considered systematically. Sometimes, measures like respite care, day-care centres or financial assistance can help family members reconcile their care duties with their work life.

Given that pensions and levels of savings are very low, and that there are not many options to generate additional income, older persons find it difficult to pay for maintenance of their apartments. This includes repairs and refurbishments to make apartments fit to the needs of old age.

A problem of particular importance is heating. A large number of older persons are unable to afford the installation costs for a decent heating system and can also not afford heating material. This leads to the use of unsafe and inefficient heating devices. Given that older persons are generally less likely to cope with extreme temperatures, there is a serious health hazard involved.

Given the low levels of income, a number of older persons find it difficult to sustain good levels of nutrition and they are in need of soup kitchens or even food aid distributed by the World Food Programme.

Similarly, there seems to be no solid grasp of the need for home-based care services. Such services are key in allowing older people to stay in their familiar environment for as long as possible. Often, small services in the house help them to otherwise live independently. Home-based care services are neither well developed nor widely available. The labour market does not provide incentives for such professionals and there are hardly any attractive opportunities for their professional development.

The situation of older people who have been living in makeshift accommodation since the earthquake of 1988 is particularly desperate. The President has announced that they will be provided with solid accommodation as a matter of priority. A more general comprehension of the prevalence of homelessness among older people is missing and there is no good understanding of the number of older persons living in untenable conditions.

Recommendations

- 1. Support family members taking care of older persons, be it in co-residential settings or when living apart.*
- 2. Make provisions to allow older persons to stay in their homes, e.g., by providing assistance with costs of refurbishment and utilities. Make special efforts to provide affordable and secure heating to older persons.*
- 3. Appraise the needs of home-based care services and make them available accordingly. Provide more attractive career opportunities for home-based care workers.*
- 4. Assess the problem of under-nourishment and the need for food support. In cases where pensions do not cover minimum nutrition requirements, provide additional means either in kind or through financial support.*
- 5. Assess the prevalence of homelessness among older people or older persons living in untenable makeshift homes and take action accordingly.*

7. Education

The education system focuses on education at school and university, leading to a degree and the entitlement to carry out a profession. The National Unemployment Agency is the authority focusing on training people in areas with a lack of skilled staff. Apart from this, there is hardly any ongoing training available that would help people who have been working for a while to adjust to the realities of new technology. The idea of lifelong learning and following a life-cycle approach to education is so far not widespread. A few private providers are offering their services, as is the chamber of commerce. However, older people may find it difficult to afford such courses. Another issue raised in the interviews was that of quality assurance. Currently, there does not seem to be a functioning and reliable accreditation system in place. An independent monitoring mechanism that may help users to differentiate between providers is unavailable.

The Government has approved a social partnership concept where all social partners have agreed to make contributions to ongoing training. Most respondents felt that employers should more actively engage in training of their staff and that they should be made to understand the benefits of this. At the time of the research, a lifelong learning concept for Armenia had been prepared with the help of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International). Furthermore, there were some activities being undertaken to prepare a law on adult education and learning to improve policies in this area. This law is likely to address some of the issues just mentioned so as to help people to adjust to the labour market needs as they age.

Overall, learning offerings for older persons who are no longer active in the labour market could not be identified. Other countries have had good experiences with the concept of Universities of the Third Age, and the feasibility of this concept in Armenia should be explored. Such institutions could provide useful everyday life skills, for example, in gardening and growing their own food supplies, in refurbishing homes, in health and physical activity or in the use of modern means of communication.

Recommendations

- 1. Develop an integrated lifelong learning strategy to empower older persons to stay in their jobs longer.*
- 2. Establish an accreditation system for training institutions in continuous learning, and establish a system to monitor their quality on an ongoing basis.*
- 3. Ensure that affordable training opportunities are available and consider subsidizing the training programmes.*
- 4. Consider introducing Universities of the Third Age to address learning needs of pensioners.*

8. Labour market

Given low pension levels, older persons are in need of additional income during retirement. Being employed beyond retirement age is perceived as difficult, although the Constitutional Court has ruled that it must be allowed in principle. There does not seem to be a general awareness of such legal possibilities either among employers or among employees. According to the National Statistical Service, 82,500 out of 385,500 pensioners were working in 2008 (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2009). It appears, however, that more pensioners would like to work, and there is a perception that there is insufficient opportunity to do so. In a 2009 survey “lack of available jobs” and “employers avoid hiring retired people” featured prominently among the reasons given for unemployment (UNFPA 2009). The labour market is biased towards a younger workforce, which is considered better able to adapt and use modern technologies, and employers generally do not seem to be well aware of the advantages of a diversified workforce which also includes the experience of older workers. Possibilities to make special provisions for older workers, such as adapted workplaces or flexible or reduced working hours, also do not seem to be widely appreciated.

While employers often do not consider older applicants attractive, older persons themselves also do not actively apply because of anticipated rejection. Under these circumstances, pensioners often pursue informal gainful activities. Others may wish to become entrepreneurs to use their capacities to generate some income, but also to be their own boss and be able to organize their work life according to their needs and capacities. Older persons who want to become entrepreneurs face a number of hurdles, however, such as a complicated bureaucracy and difficult access to funding.

The trade unions have a high potential to support ageing employees or early retirees. Pensioners tend to retain their membership in the trade union to maintain contact with their colleagues. However, currently trade unions do not adequately address the specific needs of the growing number of older persons; they do not provide any specific training or counselling on how to find work or to remain in the workplace. They may be available in case of grievances or open conflicts in the workplace.

Recommendations

- 1. Encourage employers to provide a more flexible work environment to accommodate the needs of older workers and to train employees of all age groups to keep them well adjusted to a changing work environment.*
- 2. Facilitate entrepreneurship for older persons. Simplify and increase transparency of processes for registering and administering businesses. Provide counselling on start-ups and make funding available (for example, low interest credit).*
- 3. Enhance the ability of trade unions to act on behalf of their older constituency. This could include, for example, counselling on applying for jobs and defending employees' interests against employers.*

9. Gender

Although legally men and women appear to be in an equal position, the realities at the household level often seem to mean a double burden falls on women. Women often earn less or are employed less continuously or with fewer hours than men, which reduces their ability to save for old age or to contribute to pension schemes. The fact that men die on average several years earlier also adds to women's vulnerability because they are left with only their own low income on which to live.

Recommendations

- 1. Encourage a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women over the life-course, for example by increasing incentives for fathers to stay at home for childcare.*
- 2. Promote measures designed to facilitate reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, including, for example, increasing the availability and affordability of high quality childcare facilities.*

10. Monitoring and evaluation of ageing-related policies

Some initiatives to monitor and evaluate ageing-related policy practice have been put in place. In particular, nursing homes and institutions must respond to questionnaires from the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues at regular intervals regarding the composition of their inhabitants and the services provided to them. However, the questionnaires seem to have the character of a self-evaluation and no provisions seem to be in place to systematically translate their findings into adjustments in practice.

More broadly, capacities in the area of monitoring and evaluation within the ministries are not well

developed. However, there is a clear recognition of the importance of such skills as a prerequisite to acquiring international funding, and international support has been sought in designing such strategies.

So far, ageing-related policies have not had strong monitoring elements integrated into them. However, such components may be useful to structure implementation as long as they do not create a huge new bureaucratic burden but are streamlined with existing reporting activities. With the Ageing Strategy currently being developed, integrating an overarching monitoring and evaluation chapter into it may be a good opportunity to develop a scheme to monitor progress in implementing ageing policies.

Recommendations

1. *Put in place an integrated monitoring and evaluation strategy, for example as a component of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing, to oversee developments in all ageing-related policymaking. Establish a monitoring and evaluation system that retrieves meaningful data without imposing an excessive reporting burden.*

2. *Assign clear responsibilities for regularly reviewing the monitoring data and for generating advice on concrete actions suggested by the data. Have a mix of self-evaluation and external independent assessment.*

3. *Build capacities in ministries and other relevant institutions on monitoring and evaluation, among others, to enhance capacities to receive and manage international donor funding. Invite international partners to support capacity-building in this area.*

4. *Develop an integrated monitoring and evaluation component as part of the Ageing Strategy to systematically oversee developments in all areas relevant to ageing-related policymaking.*

C. Institutional arrangements and allocation of responsibilities

The main responsibility for ageing-related policies is with the Division for Older Persons' Affairs of the Department for the Disabled and Older Persons' Affairs in the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues. For specific issues related to health care or education, the line ministries would have responsibility. However, every ministry seems to be very focused on their immediate area of responsibility, which makes interaction on a complex issue such as ageing difficult and hinders the effective mainstreaming of ageing. Currently, there are no established inter-ministerial mechanisms which could facilitate exchange and coordination on a regular basis.

While the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues has the prerogative of implementing the National Ageing Strategy once it is adopted, much will depend on whether it will manage to involve other ministries to actively implement it in their areas of work.

The distribution of tasks between the national, provincial and local levels is currently not very clearly set out. There have been attempts to decentralize many elements of service provision, but these have not necessarily been accompanied by giving appropriate resources to these decentralized levels. It is largely left to the goodwill of the authorities at the local level to decide whether or not they choose to provide social services and to whom. This is handled very differently in different localities. There is no framework of reference that potential recipients could refer to in order to claim their rights.

There is not a lot of experience in systematically involving a diversity of NGOs or the private sector in service provision. Cooperation is mainly with Mission Armenia, which is not active in all regions of the country. It would be beneficial to have several NGOs or private sector companies providing services to older persons, to generate a minimum of competition and ensure coverage throughout the country. For

potential service providers which would like to be contracted in the social sector there seems to be some lack of clarity about the legal framework.

Recommendations

- 1. Clarify the distribution of tasks between the national, provincial and local level administration and empower each level to fulfil its respective functions.*
- 2. Make the provision of social services at local level to those most in need mandatory and set out transparent procedures for public monitoring.*
- 3. Provide a legal framework that facilitates service provision by NGOs and the private sector.*
- 4. Encourage formation of NGOs in areas of activity and in regions where they are currently not available.*
- 5. Strengthen inter-ministerial mechanisms of exchange of information on issues regarding older persons.*

D. Involvement of stakeholders

There is a great openness in involving stakeholders and it should be further enhanced. A social dialogue agreement commits the public and private sector as well as trade unions to contributing to ageing-related policymaking. Trade unions have so far not been very active in support of older workers. The great potential of trade unions for providing practical support and advice to workers approaching pension age on how to stay attractive for the labour market is little used. Trade unions may only assist in cases of concrete conflicts. Pensioners can retain membership in the unions, but do not receive any specific services. They would mostly choose to do so to stay in contact with former colleagues. Trade unions do not offer pensioners any support in finding or retaining employment, which for many of them is essential because their pension does not provide them with sufficient income. Trade unions also do not seem to seek to influence policy discourse very much. Although they are sometimes invited to comment on policy issues, trade unions do not seem to have the necessary expertise to make a meaningful contribution to defending the interests of older persons in the labour market. Employers have shown a bias towards younger employees and many do not see the advantages of a diversified workforce. Others, in certain branches, have found it difficult to find qualified staff and therefore have resorted to continuous employment of retirees. In general, there does not seem to be a good understanding of how workplace policies can be designed to accommodate the needs of older persons as well as those of the company. Chambers of commerce have been involved in designing policies to some extent, for example, on lifelong learning, but the full potential of a social dialogue where all parties bring in their expertise and contribute to making comprehensive policies has not yet been exploited.

In the NGO sector, Mission Armenia is the most active player. It has received funding from Government for some of the services it is providing. However, Mission Armenia is not active in all parts of the country and incentives should be created so that NGOs become active in those parts, too. Another NGO, Caritas, has been very active in support of older persons with the help of international funding. Among NGOs it is mainly Mission Armenia that has been involved in policymaking; they have provided important insights from their day-to-day experience.

The process of developing a National Ageing Strategy and Action Plan has started bringing stakeholders together more systematically. As both get adopted and are then implemented, the initiated stakeholder partnerships should be systematically expanded and consolidated to monitor progress and advice on implementation.

Recommendations

1. *Involve employers and chambers of commerce in policymaking. Inform them better about ageing-friendly workplace policies and encourage them to implement such policies.*
2. *Enact a more systematic tripartite social dialogue.*
3. *Provide concrete incentives for the establishment of NGOs engaged in social services or other service providers in geographical areas that currently lack such services.*
4. *Facilitate NGO inputs into policymaking. Assist capacity-building in NGOs, both in service provision and in providing policy advice.*
5. *Encourage partnerships between all stakeholders on all levels to address the challenges of the ageing society.*
6. *Consider establishing a multi-stakeholder consultative body consisting of both Government and non-governmental stakeholders. It could be built on the basis of the current working group in charge of developing the National Ageing Strategy and Action Plan, institutionalizing it to become a regular mechanism discussing ageing-related issues and strategies.*

E. Research and data collection

The National Statistical Service of Armenia has the main responsibility for data collection. It issues the poverty and social snapshot annually for which it has received an award from the World Bank. The Institute of Labour and Social Issues, affiliated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, is the authority in producing data relevant for ageing. For example, it is currently developing “age maps” to get a better overview of the distribution of the older population. UNFPA has also supported important data-collection efforts. It helped carry out and publish a survey on ageing in 2009 that provided policy-relevant data.¹²

It appears that more capacities — in terms of available qualified staff — would be needed to make use of existing data, to analyse them, draw conclusions and to translate them into evidence-based policies. Available data are currently not systematically used as elements of a monitoring and evaluation component of policy making.

Recommendations

1. *Strengthen research infrastructure and build capacities in data collection and analysis. Enhance national capacity to draw conclusions from existing data and use them to design evidence-based policies.*
2. *Systematically train demographers and social scientists with strong methodological skills at universities.*
3. *Build capacities to systematically carry out monitoring and evaluation activities.*

F. Integration into international processes

Armenia is involved in all relevant international processes and is regularly represented at international gatherings. The country works intensively with major United Nations agencies, many of which have country offices, including UNFPA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Currently, ministries do not seem to be present at theme-group meetings, for example, the theme group on social protection, although it may be useful to integrate

¹² Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs/National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia/UNFPA 2009.

the ministries actively into the discussions. Furthermore, Armenia is collaborating bilaterally with the United States, Swiss, Swedish and German development agencies.

In the area of ageing, Armenia has been an active participant in the follow-up process to MIPAA/RIS. Its country report submitted to the five year review of MIPAA/RIS provided a good indication of progress made and the draft Strategy and Action Plan on ageing systematically included the relevant issues mentioned in the 10 commitments of MIPAA/RIS. The national focal point on ageing, Ms Anahit Martirosyan, was the Vice-Chair of the UNECE Working Group on Ageing during its first biennium 2008–2010 and was re-elected in 2010. Armenia has also cooperated with other international partners on ageing-related matters, including the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Institute on Ageing in Malta. It has worked actively with the World Bank on the ongoing pension reform.

Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen collaboration with the United Nations structures at country level, including supporting participation in the work of the relevant expert group on social protection.*
- 2. Uphold the integration of national stakeholders into international processes and facilitate collaboration with international bilateral and multilateral partners on an ongoing basis.*

G. Outlook: the road ahead

Adopting the National Strategy on Ageing and its Action Plan (see advanced drafts in the annex) and seeing to their implementation will be the main challenges ahead. Most of the findings of the field mission have been directly reflected in the drafts of these documents. Some of the goals and objectives as well as actions set out there may require additional funding, and the international donor community is encouraged to support efforts in these areas. Many of the suggested actions, however, do not require additional financial resources but refer to areas where things may be done differently or more effectively. Tackling the issue of corruption and increasing transparency in service provision will be crucial to increase efficiency and reduce expenditures.

Implementing the pension reform and achieving levels of income beyond the poverty level will require enormous efforts and major financial inputs. As implementation progresses, the effects of the reform should be closely monitored to detect difficulties early on and to be able to make adjustments if necessary. The reformed pension system should ultimately become part of a more integrated social protection system that grants different degrees of financial assistance or social services in response to different levels of need.

National capacity-building involving all major stakeholders, i.e., Government, the private sector, trade unions and civil society organizations, is a cross-cutting issue and should be driven forward. Ultimately, it is the strength and competence of the people implementing the policies that will determine how much progress can be made. This is especially true for the area of monitoring and evaluation which requires certain skills that should be built up in collaboration with international partners.

Another overarching task will be to address the urban-rural divide and to ensure equal access to services for older persons regardless of where they live. Furthermore, home-based care services should be made available more widely.

In terms of institutional settings, administrations at the provincial and local levels should be empowered to provide services, since they are closest to the people. The central level should concentrate on coordination and standard-setting, thus guiding the process and taking action whenever problems occur. Much can be gained from better coordination between players at the national, provincial and local levels, as well as between line ministries.

Most important, however, is to keep up the political will at the highest governmental levels, as well as the commitment of all major stakeholders. Armenia has already made important progress in the area of ageing, driven by its high level of commitment and dedicated work at the operational level. It will be essential to sustain this momentum, given the numerous other challenges that require attention. However, ageing is here to stay and the better the country is able to fend off its most extreme consequences, the more it will be able to draw on a stable and balanced society to enhance prosperity on a broader level. Given the experiences the country has already gained, Armenia is invited to share them with other countries in the region currently facing very similar challenges, as it is expected that many of the recommendations for Armenia would be directly relevant to other countries as well.