

## ***II Chairperson's Summary<sup>4</sup>***

***Ms. Amparo Valcarce García, State Secretary of Social Services,  
Families and Disability, Spain***

1. At the 2007 UNECE Conference on Ageing in León, ministers and delegates from 46 countries discussed the challenges and opportunities related to population ageing over three days, with the Ministerial Segment being held on the third day.

2. After the opening of the Conference, the first plenary session featured the presentation of the summary report on the implementation of the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) based on country reports from 31 member States (ECE/AC.30/2007/4). UNECE member States reported significant progress reported in all the 10 commitment areas of the Berlin Strategy. Priorities and actions were concentrated in the area of adjusting social protection systems, including health-care systems and labour markets; here, financial sustainability was very frequently emphasized as an important aim. A great majority of reporting countries had comprehensive national programme documents related to ageing or are drafting them. Member States also emphasized collaboration with civil society and NGOs, and had promoted participatory approaches, although not specifically for the purpose of review and appraisal of the Berlin Strategy and the Madrid Plan. International cooperation in the framework of the UNECE in implementing the RIS had increased.

3. The plenary session was followed by six panel discussions covering all the key policy areas of the León Ministerial Declaration.

### **Panel A: Creating integrated approaches to mainstream ageing**

4. Discussions in this panel recognized that mainstreaming could be defined as a strategy and a process leading to a greater social integration of older persons and to the inclusion of ageing into all aspects of social, political, economic and cultural life.

5. To succeed in mainstreaming, simultaneous actions have to be pursued by

policymakers and social partners, by Governments and civil society, by organizations and enterprises and by individuals progressing through the life course. International organizations have an important role to play in integrating ageing issues into their programmes and projects and to contribute to monitoring of the implementation of the RIS.

### **Panel B: Participation and social inclusion**

6. Active citizenship, a dynamic civil society, and interaction between citizens and government are vital for achieving a society for all ages. In this panel session, the panellists tried to answer the question: "Which kind of enabling environment should Governments create to guarantee independent living and full participation in society?"

7. The key policy areas that lead to such enabling environments are the development of services for long-term care. It was emphasized that focusing on the older persons of today would be too narrow an approach. A life-course view should be adopted instead. Active and healthy ageing starts with the youth of today.

8. Panellists concluded that participatory approaches could only be realized if Governments recognized them as a priority.

### **Panel C: Towards a balanced care strategy**

9. Panellists at this session recognized that a successful strategy for care should strive for a balance between paid work and family life as well as between care from different providers. With respect to the achievement of this goal, the panellists discussed how to improve collaboration between government, different care providers, civil society and other stakeholders, as well as collaboration between different governmental departments.

10. Systematic support to non-professional care providers, compulsory social insurance for

<sup>4</sup> ECE/AC.30/2007/2, annex II.

long-term care and better involvement of modern technology, including information technology, were emphasized in many presentations as suitable avenues for improving systems of care. Another common theme was turning away from institutional care as the primary care mode, and recommending it only where other options could not be applied in practice.

#### **Panel D: Living longer – working longer: Challenges for education, the labour market and social protection**

11. This session largely focused on the labour market. Panellists emphasized, however, that response to population ageing could not be limited to pension reforms. A move from economic discourse to a more holistic approach was needed.

12. In the context of the labour market, the panellists stressed the importance of combating age discrimination and eradicating forced retirement, as well as of helping to break age-related images or prejudices in the workplace and also in society. Life-course transitions between education, work and retirement must be more flexible, leaving room for individual choice with respect to family situation and social security.

13. As health is an important factor for economic growth and provides the foundation for a longer working life and a higher employment rate, promoting healthy living has major economic importance.

14. Panellists noted that an important objective of the RIS, namely prolonging the working life in the light of longer lives, had not yet been achieved.

#### **Panel E: Intergenerational collaboration**

15. This panel emphasized the fact that issues related to intergenerational collaboration cut across many policy areas and have many dimensions. Intergenerational solidarity is one of the important pillars of social cohesion and of civil society and must be promoted. Panellists noted that in moving ahead in this, policies focusing on one generation only should be avoided, as they could be detrimental to the others.

16. As specific important policy objectives, participants noted in this context the need for: (a) better access to the labour market for all generations; (b) family-friendly policies to better

reconcile work and family life; (c) education; and (d) shaping the attitudes of the media to change the many existing age-related stereotypes.

#### **Panel F: Focusing on opportunities: Active ageing**

17. Here, panellists discussed active ageing, which is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security to enhance quality of life as we age.

18. Promotion of active ageing is an important component in all areas of age-related policies. As in some other sessions, the shift towards the life-course approach could be noted as a key trend in this area. Continued participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs was emphasized, not just the ability to remain physically active. Ultimately, the demand for health care in an ageing population depends on the health status of the older citizens and not simply on age.

### ***MINISTERIAL SEGMENT***

19. The third day of the Conference was devoted to the ministerial panels and the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration. The two ministerial panels gave member States an opportunity to present the progress made in their countries within the framework of the commitments of the RIS.

#### **Ministerial Panel 1: A society for all ages: Challenges and opportunities**

20. There was a consensus among panellists on the need for comprehensive, horizontal policies in the region, in particular with respect to intergenerational solidarity and approaching the subject from a life-course perspective. The roles of economic growth and poverty were highlighted, emphasizing the importance of adequate social protection for the achievement of social justice and dignity. This discussion involved ideas of universal access and the continuation of care into old age. Furthermore, innovative suggestions from some civil society groups were reflected in some speeches. For policies to be effective, action must be taken now, not in the future.

### **Ministerial Panel 2: Adjusting social protection systems, work and education to population ageing**

21. Speakers discussed the role of social security and ageing. Overarching issues were poverty reduction, securing and extending universal social pensions coverage, health access and support for education in older age. The varying nature of the definition of social security was debated. Many pointed out that the rights of older persons must be a critical objective for all policymakers. It was also shown that in several countries, older persons form a disproportionate number of the poor. Finally, the sustainability of such social policy was shown to be important, illustrated by case studies and data sets from some panellists.

22. Panellists also pointed out that while employment and education help to alleviate social problems, they are not sufficient to combat the challenges of ageing. Educating the public about the positive contributions of older persons is important, but older people must also improve the image that they portray of their expectations and capabilities. To achieve this, structural changes must be made through public policy.

### **Concluding plenary session**

23. After the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration, the Chairperson of the Conference called for cooperation between the different actors, e.g. government institutions, research institutes and civil society, to implement the principles of the León Declaration, emphasizing that ageing should be considered an asset for society rather than a burden.

24. In his statement, Mr. Bärlund (Director, Environment, Housing and Land Management

Division, UNECE) emphasized that it is the actions that member States take in between such conferences that determine the success of such conferences and their adopted programme documents, and that population ageing will continue long into the future, requiring sustainable responses. He also expressed that the UNECE secretariat is prepared to continue assisting member States in fulfilling their commitments.

25. Following suggestions from Finland and Switzerland with respect to the monitoring of the implementation of the León Ministerial Declaration, Spain proposed to create a working group in the UNECE, open to all the member countries. This working group should have the possibility to meet periodically in Geneva, with the purpose of reinforcing and continuing the implementation of the Berlin Strategy and the León Ministerial Declaration.

26. Summarizing its achievements, the Chairperson concluded that the Conference had successfully reviewed the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy five years after the celebration of the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid and the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Berlin. This task of revision and completion should not stop here, however, but must remain on the agenda to advance the well-being of the population of the UNECE countries. Arising from demographic development, the consequences of ageing encompass a variety of economic and social issues, affecting the whole society and presenting new challenges and opportunities. The adjustment of societies to population ageing should therefore retain a long-term view.