

V. *Summary of Contributions*

Panel A: Creating integrated approaches to mainstream ageing

Mainstreaming ageing is an important dimension of ageing-related policies and a crucial element in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). It can be defined both 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. The inclusion of older persons in policy implementation and evaluation allows them to become full partners in development. Thus, mainstreaming is also seen as a policy tool. However, mainstreaming should not be seen as an attempt to create separate or new programmes where implementation becomes hindered by lack of resources. Rather, it should integrate ageing into existing and future development planning and include older persons in policy design, implementation and evaluation.

In the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) of the MIPAA, a specific commitment is made to mainstream ageing concerns into all policy fields with the aim of securing gender-sensitive and evidence-based integrated policies to bring societies and economies into harmony with demographic change. The essential prerequisites of successful mainstreaming include: (a) well-founded knowledge, or evidence base; (b) political and public visibility of proposed policy measures; (c) sufficient resources; (d) monitoring and assessment of the mainstreaming process; (e) a multilevel and multisectoral character of policy measures; and (f) collaboration of different stakeholders as well as coordination of their activities. To mainstream ageing into policy debate and action, several policy areas have a particular relevance, including health and social care, social protection, employment, education, economy and migration.

Mainstreaming should be undertaken at different levels. The traditional level of mainstreaming efforts is national policy development. To succeed in mainstreaming, it needs to be designed as an inclusive process.

Simultaneous actions should be pursued by Governments, civil society and enterprises as well as by individuals throughout their life course. International organizations have an important role to play in integrating ageing issues into their programmes and projects and contributing to monitoring of the implementation of the RIS.

While promoting mainstreaming, it is important not to lose sight of the specific needs and expectations of older persons. Mainstreaming must not mean diminishing the funding of specific ageing-related programmes or reducing attention to the situation of older persons. A twin-track approach to policy and programmes on ageing is required that (a) addresses older persons' specific needs by designing ageing-specific measures, and (b) simultaneously fosters mainstreaming as an integrative approach.

Examples of mainstreaming efforts were presented during the session by contributors from Austria, Estonia, Serbia, Turkey, the European Commission and an NGO from Serbia. Efforts undertaken by UNECE member countries covered a wide array of issues, such as generating attention to the ageing, advocacy, awareness-raising and public education in order to promote the conviction that a sensitive approach to mainstreaming the concerns of older persons will benefit all age groups in society. Mainstreaming has proven to be a valuable approach for countries at different stages of their economic advancement and social development. Meanwhile, to mainstream ageing in developing countries and countries in transition, additional efforts are required to overcome certain limiting factors such as the low priority of ageing issues on the national policy agenda and, most significantly, insufficient national capacity to address ageing issues. Countries in transition may have to address particular challenges, as these countries' older persons face high levels of poverty because they have not always been able to save for old age. Mainstreaming efforts are thus particularly necessary during the demographic and socio-economic transitions currently under way in some parts of the UNECE region.

UNECE countries have, albeit to different degrees, implemented international strategies on ageing into overarching national plans and strategies and accumulated valuable experience in mainstreaming ageing and concerns of older persons into their national policies and programmes. In Austria, for instance, national surveys have included data collection and analysis on the issues of intergenerational relations and capacity-building initiatives have targeted decentralized levels, i.e. provinces and local communities. Media campaigns have been conducted to “rethink” the image and role of older persons in Austrian society, lifelong learning has been promoted, and measures have been taken to improve the representation of older persons. The inclusion of ageing issues in the national social budget, which has referred to older persons as social capital, can be considered a significant advancement. Attempts have been made to postpone early retirement by rewarding enterprises that support the employment of older persons. Equally, workplaces have been targeted to combat discrimination on the grounds of age. Older persons are also promoted in their positive roles as consumers or volunteers.

Estonia emphasized the role of the national focal point on ageing in coordinating mainstreaming efforts. Particular attention has been paid to improving the image of older persons through a very successful project to “share a picture of your grannies”. In Serbia, issues of ageing have been incorporated into policy measures aimed at implementing national poverty eradication strategies and education and employment strategies as well as the EU accession strategy. Issues of concern have been the reform of the pension system and the social welfare and health systems as well as the issue of addressing the changing disease portfolios that come with transforming age patterns in society.

NGOs have played a major role in designing and advocating new strategies on ageing. In terms of international collaboration, it was highlighted that the UNECE plays an important role in mainstreaming ageing into different policy fields in its member countries and in enhancing interaction between member States and also in increasing access to data.

Visions for the future include hard and soft measures such as the review of all drafted legislation with respect to age sensitivity and age discrimination and the extension of campaigns to destigmatize ageing in society. In some areas, more funding and better coordination have been called for, as have a sensitization of decision makers and the more systematic inclusion of civil society.

Panel B: Participation and social inclusion

Participation and social inclusion of older persons are important elements of a comprehensive strategy that addresses population ageing, since meeting the challenges of an ageing world requires involvement of all generations. Participation in society means being involved, responsible and informed. The empowerment of older persons and the promotion of their full participation are essential elements for active ageing. The abilities, experiences, expert knowledge and special skills of older persons are needed in society, and their potential should be used productively and seen as an opportunity for the societies they live in. The involvement of older persons in their communities is not just an asset to society in general, it also improves older persons’ quality of life.

A wide array of aspects pertains to participation and social inclusion. These aspects include an environment free of discrimination as well as political participation that goes beyond voting in elections. Older persons should be integrated into politics and political decision-making through suitable formal structures such as advisory bodies and consultation processes. Above all, older persons should be involved in processes that concern them. Older members in parliament can be assets in all the political domains, enriching the discussion with their experiences and perspectives not just in relation to ageing policies. Apart from the political domain, participation can be achieved through the extension of working life beyond retirement or by being active in the voluntary sector.

Another aspect is emancipation and gender equality. Dialogue between generations should be promoted. Furthermore, participation policies should include mobility, housing, education, fiscal and economic policies. Reducing poverty also means reducing the exclusion of older persons. The

potentials of technology should be used to enhance inclusion of older persons. Inclusive health and pension policies are important components of participatory approaches. Healthy environments should be established, involving physical, mental, and social activities as well as healthy nutrition. A policy for senior citizens has to maintain and increase the competence of senior citizens to prevent dependency and to secure healthy ageing with a high degree of quality of life. In particular, the deinstitutionalization of care is considered desirable. Social inclusion of older persons may help prevent isolation and at the same time help improve their public image. Productivity, participation, responsibility and the feeling of being needed have a favourable effect on health and quality of life.

UNECE countries have implemented several strategies to improve participation and social inclusion. Examples were presented from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Romania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Nations Population Fund, Fédération européenne des retraités et personnes âgées (based in Belgium) and the Resource Centre for the Elderly (Kyrgyzstan).

Greece, for example has two programmes (“Against Asylums”, part of the National Plan of the Ageing Population, and “Help and Care in the House”) that focus on social and financial support to medical services for older persons. Furthermore, the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity has established a solidarity network to coordinate the initiatives of different sectors working to promote social inclusion and participation of older persons.

In Ireland, multiannual macroeconomic and social policies have been developed through a programme of consensus-building between the Irish Government and civil society partners (e.g. employers, trade unions, the community and the voluntary sector) since 1987. The social partnership agreement “Towards 2016” outlines a new framework within which key economic and social challenges will be tackled using a life-cycle approach. While previous social partnership agreements placed a limited emphasis on older people, the groups identified for the current agreement include children, persons of working age, older persons and persons with disabilities.

The partnership agreement acknowledges the importance of alleviating poverty in older age and overcoming the challenges of ageism and negative stereotypes concerning ageing.

Portugal has set up a National Action Plan for Inclusion 2006–2008. It constitutes a strategic instrument to promote the social inclusion of all citizens by ensuring access to resources, rights, goods and services needed for participation in society as well as by participation in the labour market and fighting poverty and exclusion.

Alleviating poverty at old age is also a central goal in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where two strategy documents are under development: the National Development Strategy 2008–2013 and the Social Inclusion Strategy. These mainly address the areas of economic development and poverty reduction, with older persons as a main target group.

Romania has set up the National Council of Older Persons, an autonomous and consultative body with the main objective of institutionalizing social dialogue between public authorities and older persons. The Council is designed as an umbrella body for 12 organizations, associations and federations of older persons. It is financed by the constituent organizations and by public funds from the national budget.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia envisages reforms in the social protection system focusing on further improving non-institutionalized care and setting measures to increase the capability of older persons. Another aim is to enhance strategic planning aiming to improve social-service centres and the care of frail persons in their own homes.

Fédération européenne des retraités et personnes âgées has developed a “Charter of demands for the rights of older people”, which contains a catalogue of rights pertaining to, inter alia, the economic conditions of pensioners and older persons. The Charter also refers to the older people’s right to housing and, more generally, their rights to public services, to access credit and to health.

As an agenda to promote participation in the future, speakers called for lifelong learning and active ageing strategies. They advocated the enhanced use of modern information and

communication technologies to achieve civic participation. To address the needs of older persons as consumers, architects and designers are encouraged to develop strategies for an ageing world. Industry is called upon to acknowledge the ageing society and change some of its products to assist senior citizens in maintaining independent lives and to help facilitate their participation in society. Among the key future challenges will be reducing poverty amongst older people and combating negative attitudes and practices, both of which represent barriers to the full integration of older persons into society.

Panel C: Towards a balanced care strategy

The main function of care is to ensure that increased longevity is accompanied by the highest attainable standard of health, which must be understood not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity, but also as the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Issues of special concern are the demographic, economic and social pressures on the traditional family and the incurring challenges that come with the provision of care. While ageing increases pressure on the health-care system, longer lives are, at the same time, the result of better health-care services, higher standards of living, heightened health awareness and longer life expectancy.

Issues of common concern in most UNECE countries – as presented during the session – include the development of care services to address the special needs of older persons. These measures should complement family care and reduce the burden on the family. Unless family traditions of mutual aid and support are strengthened, a vast service infrastructure will be required to complement informal caregiving. Other discussed items included the rights, obligations and protection of care users and care providers as well as the monitoring and evaluation of care services.

Within the UNECE region, the general trend is moving away from institutionalized care towards care within the community. Studies show that older persons prefer to continue living in their own environments. Thus, older persons who depend on care should have the possibility to choose between different options of long-term care. When institutional care becomes unavoidable,

dignity of the older person should be respected. At the same time, education and training programmes should be made available to them, and also health-care professionals.

Strategies to deal with the challenges of ageing populations in the field of care were presented by representatives from the Czech Republic, Israel, Spain, Sweden, the United States and ZIVOT 90, a Czech NGO. Israel has established a special ministry dedicated to the issue of older persons. The Czech Republic prioritizes the development of human resources, the adaptation of health-care systems to meet the needs of frail older people and the transformation of residential facilities as well as the prevention of human rights abuses. ZIVOT 90 presented the AREÍON Emergency Care project as an example of good practice. The project offers services 24 hours a day, seven days a week to senior citizens or disabled persons living at home by themselves, linking health and social care and also providing emergency care if necessary. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of Spain presented the Act on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons. The system set up for its implementation is expected to create 300,000 jobs, to be deployed gradually, and thereby also contribute to the social cohesion of Spanish society. The Swedish Government has been promoting quality of care through investments in the education and employment of more doctors with geriatric skills. The country has also made efforts to improve collaboration between social and health-care services.

The speaker from the United States reported on activities with respect to modernizing and rebalancing the long-term care system in preparation for the baby-boom generation. The Department of Health and Human Services administers three of the four cornerstones of the U.S. public health and long-term care systems: Medicare, Medicaid and the Older Americans Act. A nationwide network of 29,000 public and private organizations is responsible for coordinating and providing direct community-based human services to help older people to maintain their independence and dignity and to remain in their own homes and communities.

A leitmotif for future action was the reconciliation of the needs of dependent older

persons with the needs of those who provide care, together with the idea of providing more support to relatives who care for their family members. Informal care was mentioned repeatedly at the session as an important pillar for supporting family carers without forcing anyone to take responsibility for ageing relatives.

Other points raised from the floor included the issue of migrants and whether Governments are adequately prepared to deal with elderly persons coming from a different cultural background, architectural measures in residences to address the special needs of older persons and actions to help the mentally ill and those suffering from dementia. Another subject was the importance of considering older persons not only as receivers of care, but also as caregivers. Lastly, the importance of the NGO sector was discussed with reference to its flexibility with respect to service provision and its ability to link social and health-care services.

The main future challenges raised by speakers included financing, integration and sustainability of long term care and the issue of finding and recruiting the right persons to work in the caring field as well as their training and retraining. Other challenges concerned the standards of care and the provision of good-quality care, of dignified care as well as of protective care for older persons and also for those with special needs such as the disabled, the mentally ill and those with dementia. Further issues of concern were the question of how to address abuse of older persons and how to ensure improved coordination between care providers, i.e. government, the private sector, the family and civil society.

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

Gains in life expectancy should be shared between employment and retirement, aiming at an ageing process with dignity and purpose. In order to achieve this, strategies should pertain not only to adjustments in the labour market itself to better integrate older persons, but also to pursuing a more holistic approach, including issues such as education and social protection systems.

After several decades of consensus on encouraging early retirement, often promoted as a

coping strategy with unemployment, the current challenge in many countries is keeping older workers in employment to relieve the strain on the social security and pension systems. A combination of different strategies can help increase the number of older persons in the labour market:

- Rewarding work, e.g. subsidizing the salaries of older workers or reducing the social security contributions
- Restrictive policies, e.g. raising the retirement age
- Improving employability, e.g. training
- Changing employer practices, e.g. promoting age diversity
- Regulatory means, e.g. introducing and implementing regulation against discrimination based on age
- Changing public perceptions, e.g. through positive image campaigns.

Moreover, the labour market should be adjusted to react to the needs of ageing workers more flexibly. A more gradual transition between active work life and retirement should be achieved and a voluntary postponement of the effective retirement age supported. At the same time, strategies should be inclusive of all ages and the extension of the work life of older workers should not be at the expense of the career opportunities of younger workers.

To prolong working life, coherent complementary policies to those directly concerning the labour market are needed. To improve employability of older persons, lifelong learning should be supported. This should include not only the updating of skills, but also facilitating the learning of new competences as well as providing education to people who have not obtained any degrees before.

Furthermore, social protection systems must be adjusted to encourage prolonged work lives. Incentives for early retirement should be replaced by policies to reduce unemployment of older persons. At the same time, social security policies need to be used as means of stabilizing our societies and of dealing with some of the extreme effects of an ageing society. Social protection systems – and pensions systems in particular –

have to be consolidated to make the pension system sustainable for the long term.

Participation of older persons should be encouraged. Mechanisms should be found to favour flexibility and choice in how older people structure their work arrangements in relation to other commitments such as family or education.

In the UNECE region, trends towards entering the labour market later and leaving it earlier have been observed over the past few decades, while lives have become longer during the same period. Although a growth in employment and migration may offset some of the consequences of these developments in the medium term, it is estimated that after 2018 the ageing effect will become dominant throughout region.

Robust progress regarding the commitment on labour markets has been reported. There has been a wide mobilization of all sectors, including government, business and civil society, towards a holistic response. However, the degree of activity still varies widely throughout the region. Some countries have proven to be exemplary, and others may learn from their experiences.

During the session, representatives from Cyprus, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and Spain presented their approaches, as did representatives of OECD, the International Social Security Association (ISSA) and AARP International, an NGO from the United States. Research results cited for the G7 by the NGO representative indicated progress on combating age discrimination and on promoting equality of treatment and opportunity in Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom, which have all implemented a related EU directive. Similarly, progress is reported on participation of older persons in the labour force. In France, Germany and Italy, measures to increase the minimum retirement age and reduce early retirement benefits either have been implemented or are envisaged. Spain reported on its support for workers who decide to continue to work beyond their retirement age with personal benefits. While the Russian Federation has decided not to raise the legal retirement age, it offers increased pension payments for older persons who decide to remain in the labour market on a voluntary basis. Several countries have integrated the demographic factor into their pension

calculation. Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden, for example, have introduced mechanisms that dynamically adjust pension rights to life expectancy. Austria, Norway and Spain have recently introduced phased retirement systems. The most common type of intervention has been to reform the pension system through policies that seek to cap expenditure by measures which are essentially restrictive and which have only a marginal impact on employment sector policies.

Positive examples are also coming from employers such as Deutsche Bank or Air France that have changed their organizational culture and have become active in hiring older employees. Several countries have embarked on lifelong learning campaigns to improve employability of their workers. Scandinavian countries have achieved rates of up to 32 per cent (Sweden) of participation in lifelong learning training and education programmes. In addition, a number of countries have launched public information initiatives to change age-related prejudice in the workplace and in society.

Speakers agreed that a comprehensive approach covering all involved policy areas must be envisaged. A response to population ageing cannot be limited to changing the retirement system. Interventions can be punitive but should above all function as incentives. An innovative approach to the new life course is needed that leaves room for the individual needs of older workers reflecting different educational and personal backgrounds as well as health and family situations. Enterprises can play an important role in encouraging older workers to stay in employment thus building a balanced workforce.

Panel E: Intergenerational collaboration

Intergenerational collaboration could be defined as three or more generations combining efforts for the benefit of three or more generations. The concept pertains to families as well as the society at the local and national levels and it is multidimensional, i.e. it affects everyday lives in all areas, including financial, emotional and social aspects. Intergenerational collaboration stimulates active ageing, reduces social exclusion and age discrimination and mitigates the demographic challenge of ageing societies. Intergenerational

collaboration is vital in support of the currently needed adjustments of social protection systems; it fosters social cohesion and helps to make best use of the potentials of older persons.

Nevertheless, intergenerational collaboration is under strain, even in countries where it has traditionally been very effective, due to changes in family patterns, poverty, conflicts and social protection systems. However, there is strong evidence to indicate that solidarity within the family exists, both financial and in kind, in the form of childcare or care for older persons. However, traditional solidarity patterns are coming under pressure with changing dependency ratios, which may be a source of tension between the younger and the older generations in the population. There may be a danger of older persons being seen as a burden in terms of finance, care and support, which may thwart intergenerational solidarity in practice.

Examples of policies and good practices to deal with this situation have been presented from Belgium, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, the Council of Europe and the United States-based OASIS Institute. The Belgian experience shows that up to age 75, older persons are themselves care providers rather than care receivers. They give instrumental, financial and emotional support to their children and provide a significant share of childcare. However, they also have an important share in intragenerational solidarity. Belgium is extending the possibilities of gainful employment and education in old age. In addition, there have been attempts to improve public opinion about the older population by providing unbiased information.

Positive examples were also given by the Dutch delegation on how to strengthen social cohesion through intergenerational collaboration based on research by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy. The Netherlands are currently pursuing a reintroduction of intergenerational and social cohesion aspects into their policy portfolio after a period in the past where insurance and care aspects of welfare were given priority. The aim is to withstand the danger of overly focusing on one part of the population (i.e. older persons) at the expense of other parts. However, it is acknowledged that government policy has to have a more facilitative character

while the actual intergenerational solidarity has to be expressed on an individual level.

Malta strongly relies on the family as a principle provider of care. Families are assisted in this role by complementary policies such financial assistance for persons taking care of a sick or needy older relative. Other services include meals on wheels or day-care centres. The NGO sector in Malta is large, diverse and very active.

Hungary offers a childcare allowance not only to parents but also to grandparents, and there is a care allowance available for family members who take care of a chronically ill person within the household. Furthermore, the country has a Silver Programme Fund for supporting intergenerational micro-projects. Hungary also organizes annual forums on the area of innovative intergenerational activity for clients of social services, and has distributed a best practice edition on this.

The Council of Europe focused on the human rights perspective of intergenerational collaboration and the protection of older persons, as reflected in the European Social Charter, discussing the right to social services and fostering intergenerational links as a way to improve social cohesion and access to social services for older persons. More specifically, the Council of Europe is offering a number of legal instruments and recommendations to facilitate the promotion of laws and social policies in favour of older persons.

The not-for-profit organization OASIS, founded in 1982, is dedicated to enriching the lives of older Americans. It focuses on lifelong learning, health promotion and disease prevention as well as civic engagement and volunteerism. For example, OASIS maintains an intergenerational tutoring programme in which older persons function as tutors in elementary schools to improve the reading and writing skills of children not at grade level. Other examples include the Active Generations Programme, in which older persons help combat childhood obesity by teaching healthy habits, and the Vital Visionaries programme, developed in partnership with the National Institute on Ageing. The aim of the latter programme is to bring medical students together with healthy older persons to improve their attitudes towards this age group, which will make up an increasing proportion of their future patients.

Speakers supported an international collaborative approach, facilitated by UNECE, the EU and the Council of Europe, to use synergies. The policy issues emphasized by speakers included a labour market for all generations, family-friendly policies as a way of reconciling family and professional lives, access to social services, exchange of good practices, involvement of civil society and local government, ensuring visibility to contributions of all generations and reshaping the attitudes of the media with the ultimate goal of combating ageism. Stimulating intergenerational collaboration is seen as a task for national and local government as well as civil society and individuals, who all have to take the initiative.

Panel F: Focusing on opportunities: active ageing

Active ageing has been defined as a process of optimizing opportunities for health, participating in social life and pursuing various commitments in retirement. Active ageing should follow the basic principles of individual choice, independence and dignity. The underlying idea is to redefine ageing as something positive and to start seeing retirement as a positive new beginning, one which should include plans for a new career, new opportunities and activities. Active ageing should involve all fields of life, including health (i.e. disease prevention, long-term care and better management of chronic conditions), housing, training and education, retraining and updating skills, financial security and self-sufficiency as well as active engagement. The latter may be achieved through creating movements and associations of older persons, volunteerism, culture, spiritual life or entertainment.

Ageing policies should reflect the fact that ageing is a process and the ways in which persons pass through their lives shape their situations when they arrive at old age. Persons who are active earlier and ready to take responsibility are likely to continue doing so in old age. Therefore, a new life-course approach is suggested, whereby education, work and retirement are no longer seen as clearly defined periods in life. There is no longer one period of being a senior citizen. Pension age may begin with a period when older persons are still physiologically young and able to contribute in work and learning. As periods in life are becoming

less distinct from each other, approaches such as lifelong learning are being increasingly applied.

In active ageing policies, it is considered important to take a comprehensive approach and to develop policies for all generations. Furthermore, local solutions are needed and implementation capacities of policies at the local community level should be enhanced.

During the session, active ageing policies were reported by Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Slovakia, WHO, the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organizations (BAGSO) and Second Breath for the Elderly (Balti, Moldova). In Denmark, for example, the Parliament has made a broad political agreement on welfare, with the main target of removing barriers to staying longer in the labour market. The agreement contained concrete proposals for an increase of the regular retirement age by two years over a three-year period from 2024. It has been recommended that a senior citizens' council advise local government on ageing policy matters and enhance active ageing.

Another positive example came from Finland, where the National Programme on Ageing Workers, launched in the 1990s, has made special provisions for improving the health and capability to work of ageing workers. The programme covers occupational health and prevention, in line with the idea that good health leads to increased labour productivity. The programme also works to promote favourable attitudes towards older employees, and aims to prolong working careers through a life-course approach and to delay retirement. The widely accepted long-term goal in Finland is to extend the average working life by three years. In this connection, the programme aims to modernize the pension system by improving the availability, quality and productivity of social and health-care services. Furthermore, a four-year policy programme for health promotion has complemented the National Programme on Ageing Workers.

Active ageing policies have also played an important role in France following the Plan national d'action concertée 2006–2010, negotiated between the Ministry of Labour and social stakeholders with the aim of postponing retirement. France sees active ageing as a countermeasure to passive ageing, which is associated with a number of negative connotations, e.g. that older persons are

not productive, not able to adapt to the modern world and are a liability because of the costs for illness and dependence. In this connection, France has adopted a national plan (Bien vieillir 2007–2009) reflecting a life-course approach. It is based on the idea that the situation of older persons is strongly related to the way they have experienced their work lives, i.e. whether they were satisfied and whether their transition to retirement was well prepared. In general, France encourages employers to employ older workers and promotes older persons' participation in cultural, political and social life, and the country supports the creation of an environment favourable to older persons.

Italy is also following the principles of a prolonged active life, an active retirement and a valuation of the resources presented by older persons. It is experimenting with a system of social credits which older persons can collect by doing social work and which give them access to other services either free of charge or at reduced rates. In this sense, the country is also seeking to strengthen the voluntary sector.

The Slovak Republic is pursuing an active ageing policy with its National Programme for the Protection of the Elderly, which aims to present requirements for achieving self-sufficiency, social participation and integration of the older persons. Its major principles are those of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

Germany presented the programme of BAGSO, a national umbrella organization of 97 senior citizens' organizations covering all aspects of ageing and giving advice and recommendations at all levels of welfare work and social affairs concerning the ageing population. BAGSO has been a strong advocate of ageing-related issues, demanding a comprehensive strategy, the participation and well-being of the ageing population and simultaneous operations at the individual lifestyle level, the organizational management level and the societal policy level. Among its activities is the organization of German Senior Citizens' Days.

Another NGO example was presented by Second Breath for the Elderly (Moldova). This organization has fostered active ageing approaches

by publishing a guidebook for developing and supporting older persons' organizations as well as a best practice manual for the integration of older persons into Moldovan society. Second Breath for the Elderly has organized self-help groups and volunteer work (e.g. home visits and social support of older persons to older persons). Another initiative, the Grandparents and Grandchildren Organization, brings together older persons and younger children in a particular town. The latter has also taken part in the drafting of the Moldovan national strategy on ageing.

Speakers agreed that all policy issues should be viewed through the lenses of gender and culture as well as intergenerational and multigenerational solidarity. This area was consistently highlighted as the key to building bridges among the generations, thus following a holistic approach that involves all stages of the life course.

Ministerial panels

Panel discussions in the Ministerial Segment of the Conference took place under two sessions: (1) A society for all ages: Challenges and opportunities; and (2) Adjusting social protection systems, work and education to population ageing. The two sessions are summarized below with outlines of the discussions on policy and good practice examples as highlighted by the speakers.

In both sessions, speakers expressed their appreciation of international exchange of experience and cooperation in strategy development as an important means for adapting to ageing. Countries perceive international cooperation to be of vital importance in order to be informed, learn and undertake comparative analysis. Some countries have dedicated additional resources to international collaboration; for example, Austria has supported the international project on mainstreaming ageing, in which indicators for the evaluation of progress in the implementation of the RIS have been developed. Other countries have directly profited from assistance provided by international organizations, as in the case of Armenia and the United Nations Population Fund.

Panel 1: A society for all ages: Challenges and opportunities

Policy trends

This panel discussion included ministerial statements from Belgium, France, Italy, Lithuania, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America as well as statements made on behalf of a minister from Israel, a minister from Portugal representing the European Union and by the Russian NGO Dobroe Delo.

Ministers saw ageing as an important challenge for the future. In the area of coordination of ageing policies, they underlined the importance of developing national ageing strategies, institutional arrangements (e.g. ageing issues have been included into an inter-ministerial conference in Belgium) and taking steps towards improving coordination between the central, regional and local levels.

General agreement was confirmed on the underlying values that should guide the development of ageing policies, reflecting the principles set out in the MIPAA RIS. There is broad subscription to the mainstreaming approach, i.e. the systematic integration of the ageing concerns in all policies. Respect for the rights of an individual, elimination of discrimination and maintenance of autonomy and independent living were all highlighted as priorities. Ideally, a society of all ages should be created and a concept of active ageing should be promoted, while at the same time, ageing in dignity should be ensured.

Much attention was devoted to the positive aspects of ageing, for instance the contribution of older persons to economic and social development. New possibilities being generated by the ageing of the population and should be fully explored. The ministerial statements, however, also highlighted the challenges that ageing is posing in many areas. One is the need to adjust health systems and organize adequate health-care and social services for older persons who can no longer be self-sufficient. Some countries placed special emphasis on diseases such as Alzheimer's. Other countries underlined the necessities of developing services according to individual needs and improving access to services in remote or otherwise disadvantaged areas. Still others emphasized prevention.

Another important policy area is the labour market. Here the stated goal is to increase the percentage of older persons in employment through a mix of employment and lifelong learning policies. There is a general trend towards making retirement processes more flexible according to the personal circumstances of the individual, which is complemented by a call for long-term family friendly policies to facilitate the reconciliation of work and personal life. More broadly, the economic implications of ageing and the maintenance of economic growth also need to be managed.

Information policies and public campaigns to raise awareness are both high on the agenda. Furthermore, some countries have declared it their policy goal to make communication and information infrastructure accessible to older people at affordable prices, so as to use older persons' own potential to improve their living conditions.

Other policy areas highlighted in the statements were transport and housing. Some countries, in particular those in transition, stressed the issue of combating poverty among older persons. Others underlined the importance of gender-sensitive approaches as well as of the need for security in old age. Some countries have made special provisions to address migration trends in their ageing policies, while others support the promotion of research.

Generally, intergenerational solidarity and better networking between the services related to older persons are being promoted. Dialogue with civil society and partnerships with volunteer organizations and trade unions are appreciated, and the volunteer work of older persons is encouraged.

Good practice examples

France has a programme of intergenerational living whereby students subscribing to a code of good conduct can live with older persons, creating a model intergenerational living community designed in a way that fosters exchange and mutual support. Young parents help older persons with simple tasks in everyday life, and in return the latter look after the young parents' children. The United States also promotes housing for seniors with limited means, by supporting community-based living opportunities.

In the field of care and support, Sweden cited the example of an older migrant from the Islamic Republic of Iran who, after living in Sweden for 28 years, lost her knowledge of Swedish as a consequence of dementia. She would only recall her maternal language. Swedish authorities follow an approach of dignity in ageing, allowing persons such as this to choose a care person with whom he or she would be able to communicate. France has adopted a policy whereby employees can take time off to care for a dependent parent, and also offers training to people who perform care tasks in their families.

In the field of work, Serbia has reformed its National Employment Service and established regional agencies that provide support to small and medium-sized enterprises. The reform is expected to affect the working situation of older persons in particular. In Switzerland, volunteer work of older persons involves transportation of patients, organized by the Red Cross, and providing language and conversation courses to migrants.

The NGO representative highlighted the issue of poverty of older persons in some countries. He reflected on the evolving phenomenon of poverty of working people who do not earn enough to sustain themselves and retired persons with pensions that do not cover their needs. In his view, civil society has an important role in representing the interests of older persons to government when alternative structures to translate their interests into policymaking more systematically are not available. Likewise, the capacities of NGO coalitions to disseminate important skills among their members were highlighted, such as developing and sustaining a voluntary sector, defending the rights of older people and fund-raising.

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

Policy trends

The second ministerial panel included statements from Armenia, Austria, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein and Moldova, one on behalf of the Bulgarian Minister, and statements from representatives of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) and HelpAge International.

The statements demonstrated an understanding that ageing in itself is not a problem, but its perception can be. It was considered important to appreciate the positive sides of ageing. Therefore, a positive image of older persons in society should be promoted; concurrently, the image older persons have of themselves needs improvement as well. Several underlying general values were emphasized as guiding principles of population ageing policies during the session. These included ageing in dignity, equal opportunities, the right of older persons to choose for themselves and cooperation rather than confrontation of generations. Overarching aims such as the reduction of mortality, the strengthening of the general health in the population, the strengthening of the institution of the family and the prolonging of an active life were emphasized.

With regard to social protection systems, work and education, several interlinked issues were raised during the session. Countries see the economy, employment and social affairs as inter-related issues. Most have taken steps towards restructuring their social security systems to address demographic changes. A two-tiered strategy is being followed. On the one hand, the general aim is to find a balance between the number of working people and those in retirement in order to improve the dependency ratio in solidarity-based social security systems. Incentives for women to return to the labour market after childbearing and for people to work beyond retirement age were suggested as means for achieving this. In this context, the European Commission has produced a Communication on the common principle of “flexicurity” in employment and social policies. The “flexicurity” concept comprises lifelong learning features, less strict employment protection legislation, modernized social security systems and activating labour market policies. The overarching aim is to encourage hiring and to discourage early retirement and welfare dependency. The concept also aims to motivate people to choose healthy lifestyles and use preventive health-care services.

On the other hand, while achieving a more favourable dependency ratio is one aim, steps are being taken to adjust social security systems so that they can handle the consequences of population ageing. Many countries have carried out pension

reforms that often involve extensive consultation processes, e.g. Malta. Countries are pursuing incremental and phased approaches and are making different arrangements for those age groups very close to retirement and others that can still make provisions for their pension periods. Similarly, those in manual labour who entered the labour market earlier may be allowed to retire earlier, for example once they have reached 40 years of pension contribution. Countries may also embark on a strategy to rely on second and third pillar pension investments more strongly. To prevent extreme hardship, means-tested minimum incomes are in place.

Regarding provision of care, similar importance is attributed to preventive measures, ambulatory and stationary services. Prevention and needs-based ambulatory services should help to obviate or delay dependency, thus deferring or averting costly nursing home placements. Persons requiring care should have the opportunity to maintain their independence and should be provided with the opportunity to stay at home as long as possible. The family is counted upon to provide care with many countries making special provisions to families to enhance their abilities to do so. Some countries provide social protection for carers, who are mostly women and migrants. Steps have been taken to transfer jobs from the illegal to the legal employment market. Furthermore, NGOs which may be supported financially by the State play an important part in the provision of care. Where professional services are needed, attempts have been made to improve effectiveness through better networking and an interdisciplinary handling of the cases. The International Social Security Association called for a broader, more dynamic concept of social security based on proactive and integrated approaches and highlighted the need to invest in health through increased health promotion and an increased attention to prevention.

Another issue of concern is the protection of older persons' rights. This can be addressed through anti-discrimination legislation or by giving recipients of institutional care certain rights set out in a contract.

HelpAge International raised the issue of older persons being disproportionately affected by poverty throughout the region, asserting that older persons may suffer more than average from the

restructuring of social service provision, e.g. in Eastern European transition economies, where they are sometimes not explicitly included in poverty reduction strategies. Women are considered particularly vulnerable, as they often take on care responsibilities within the family while not paying into the contributory schemes themselves.

As a strategy against this and poverty of older persons more generally, HelpAge advocates universal non-contributory pensions. The advantages would be that such pensions reach everyone and avoid the high costs of administration for means testing. These programmes should be complemented by affordable health care and anti-discrimination legislation. Furthermore, HelpAge International considered Governments' commitments to and implementation of MIPAA as critical for reducing poverty of older people across the region.

Good practice examples

References to several good practice examples illustrated that countries have already made considerable efforts to restructure social security systems as well as to adjust labour and education systems. Liechtenstein offers attractive packages of financial pension schemes. Andorra has developed a programme of benefits for older persons to guarantee the coverage of health needs and has introduced compensatory mechanisms in the pension system to guarantee equality in access to minimum income. Special efforts have been taken to avoid the social exclusion of older women. The Russian Federation is investigating financial incentives to encourage voluntary work beyond retirement, and in the field of health care, has established a national priority project ("Health") for the development of the health-care system. Its priorities are the provision of preventive services, the availability of standard contemporary equipment and the fulfilment of high-tech medical services. As a result, access of older persons to such services has already improved. Armenia offers free services to persons aged 65 and over, to whom it also provides medicine at reduced prices.

Increasingly, representatives of older persons are being included in policymaking processes on social issues. In Liechtenstein, for example, a senior citizen advisory council to the Government, consisting of senior citizens, was

created. Moldova made reference to an informal Council of Elders, which advises the prime ministers, as well as to intergenerational round tables. A number of initiatives have addressed the public perception of older persons. Moldova has introduced a public holiday, Grandmothers' Day, to improve the image of older persons and to highlight the important role they play in consolidating and educating society. Poland has instituted a special week with the motto "50 plus – an asset for business" for awareness-raising purposes. In terms of educational policies, Slovakia has an education system for older persons in place, and a University of the Third Age attended by pensioners.

The EU reconfirmed its special commitment to the implementation of the Berlin Ministerial Declaration of 2002. Recent EU initiatives have supported this process, for example with the EU Communication, "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity", which builds upon the Lisbon Strategy and introduces long-term perspectives based on demographic ageing. To support the development of social protection systems, the EU has extended the Open Method of Coordination to the area of health and long-term care as an instrument to improve the quality and coverage of care in the future.