

MIPAA +20 UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, Rome Italy, 2022 06 16
Norah Keating, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics
Moderator Expert Panel I: Promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life.

Purpose: The first expert panel will discuss key elements of a life-course approach to active and healthy ageing across policy sectors. It will cover progress in combatting ageism, promoting lifelong learning, age-friendly employment and health promotion.

Emphasis will also be put on the inclusion of older persons through the creation of safe and enabling environments - digital, social and physical - that foster participation in the economy and society throughout life, including when functional capacity declines.

Moderator opening remarks

Acknowledge and thank Italy as the host for this meeting and the UNECE secretariat, Vitalija Gaucaite Wittich and her team. who have helped create this fine program
It is a privilege for me to be invited to this forum.

I am from Canada. I think that I can speak for my colleagues from Canada and the United States in expressing our pleasure at being here as the two most western countries in Europe. I must say as well, that that it is a bit lonely for us being at such a distance and we are grateful to be with all of you who are representatives of a broad set of physical, social and political environments—much like a large, extended family. I have personal experience with such families. My mother was one of 9 siblings and family reunions were filled with laughter and disagreements and grievances... but always with food.

Debates and disagreements are part of how we move forward on ageing. We will not always agree but we need to work it out, not least because the costs of opting out of the family are very high. I begin with a challenge for all us. Tonight we will sit down together for our family dinner. I'd like each of us to turn to the person beside you and say: "this is one area in which I am going to take immediate action on ageing".

So let us begin.

The first theme in the draft declaration to be released tomorrow and that frames our panel discussion is: **"That we commit to promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life"**. There are 18 items on the list specifying ways to do this. All have remained through the lengthy debates that have resulted in this declaration; but they cannot be addressed by each of us all at once. Cabinet Ministers responsible for specific government departments must set priorities; while members of civil society or in the private sector may be grounded in specific issues that will contribute to the over objective of promoting active and healthy ageing across the life course. The declaration comes from governments; yet all of us have a stake in its translation to action: public sector, private sector, civil society, researchers and everyone who is ageing.

I would like to make 2 points about the theme of this panel and some areas for action about before I introduce you to our panel members.

1. The first point is that the commitment made in this theme is based in life courses. We all know that lives evolve over what we hope is a long sweep of life. We know too that the diversities we see among older persons arise from the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage across people's lives. We must decide which of these inequalities is unfair and must be addressed urgently and how we will do so.

So how do we do this? We start with evidence that life courses are not singular but have several pathways. We know much about how physical and mental health diverge across the life course, leading to differences in risk of disease and healthy life expectancy. But other life course pathways have powerful impacts on wellbeing in later life.

Family life courses are one of these. A national NGO in Canada called the Vanier Institute of the Family, has identified three ways in which we can understand family diversity. Families are diverse in their *structure*, or how people are related to each other; in their *patterns of paid and unpaid work* or how members assign the paid and unpaid work that they do; and in the *identities* that they assume or that are imposed upon them. We call these the hyphenated families: aboriginal-families, and immigrant-families are examples. All change over time. All affect wellbeing of older members.

<https://vanierinstitute.ca/framework-family-diversities-canada/>

So where are the action opportunities? If we think about family structure, we need to ask questions like how laws in our countries determine who can form family relations; how parent status is determined; which family relationships can be dissolved; who has a right to claim 'family' assets; who is held responsible for care to older and younger members...and on how these might influence family connections of people in late life. If we look across the family life courses of older persons, we can see how their family histories provide a buffer against loneliness, abuse or neglect or increase their likelihood.

Work life courses include patterns of transitions between jobs, movement in and out of jobs and the overall timing of these shifts. There has been considerable interest across Europe in later life labor force engagement and in extending working lives. In each of our policy settings, questions we must ask are how does long term engagement in precarious work with little security or benefits and low pay, result in lives infused with uncertainty and instability? In what ways does lifetime occupational engagement in physically and cognitively demanding jobs limit work capacity later in life? Which workers are most advantaged by job flexibility and at what points in their employment life course? How do we account for work careers that are largely in the informal economy, marginalized and virtually invisible? Do they also carry disproportionate amounts of family care work? Have we paid sufficient attention to the unpaid *and* paid workers, disproportionately women, who are the backbone of the care economy and whose life courses of care may result in deep exclusion.

2. The second is that context matters. The draft declaration from Joint Forum of civil society and researchers states that, in a life-course and human-rights based perspective, several environmental, contextual and structural preconditions need to be considered.

We know this too, especially that social and physical settings—where one ages and with whom--frame the everyday opportunities in our lives. That's why we see an item on the life course theme to "create more age-friendly environments".

Environmental gerontologists have created a body of evidence about how "near environments" of home and community can be supportive, and much evidence of how they are not. Disparities among older

adults in the contexts where they live are increasing across countries and regions. The challenge here too is to 'see' disparities and to frame concrete actions. An example comes from the pandemic which has prompted a digital shift to online lives. It has revealed who benefits from digital environments that allow for connections with others in ways that were not previously possible. Whoever expected that access to broadband internet would be so important in leveraging equality?

Our age-friendly language has placed a lens on communities and their abilities to support older people. Like individuals, communities vary in the resources they have available. An action that I would put high on my list is to scan policies that affect the lives of ageing people but that are outside of community control. Acute and long-term care; roads and other travel infrastructure; family reunification immigration policy all influence the adequacy of physical and relational living conditions. And once we have completed our scan, how do we frame action around what communities can do and where responsibility for other policy interventions lies?

Finally, we also must remind ourselves that the broadest age-friendly contexts are those values and beliefs—ageism, sexism, familism—that are the backdrop for the policies and practices that we create. These days they are often implicit, but they are powerful drivers of how lives unfold.

We must ask ourselves what are the “concrete policy measures” to ensure “full enjoyment of human rights” that we will take in response to the first item on the *promoting active and healthy ageing across the life course* theme? **Having a vision focuses our attention. Taking action changes lives.**

I leave these issues in the hands of our panelists

Panelists:

Government representatives:

Ms. Elena Bonetti, Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family of Italy

Mr. Dan Juvan, State Secretary of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Slovenia

Ms. Christie Morreale, Vice-President of the Walloon Government, Minister for Employment, Training, Health, Social Action, Equal Opportunities and Women's Rights

NGO/private sector representatives:

Mr. Kiran Rabheru, Chair of the Steering Group of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP)

Dr. Arno Elmer, Managing Director, BeHome, Germany