



**Age-Sensitive Analysis and  
Age-Responsive Policy  
Formulation  
to Advance Mainstreaming  
Ageing in Public Policies**

Reference Guide

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This guide is an adaptation of “*Mainstreaming Ageing in Public Policy: A Practical Guide for Policy Makers in the Republic of Moldova*”, 2016, developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, UNFPA Moldova and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It was adapted by UNECE in 2022-2023 as a *reference guide* for mainstreaming ageing trainings which introduce tools for age-sensitive policy analysis and age-responsive policy formulation presented in this guide.

## INTRODUCTION

Populations in the UNECE region are ageing. While there are currently about one in six persons over the age of 65, this will be the case for one in five persons by 2030, and for about one in four persons by 2050. Population ageing impacts all spheres of society and is taking place in the context of climate change and fast-speed digitalization. These complex and interlinked developments call for innovative solutions in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Societies need to anticipate and adapt to the social and economic implications of both population ageing and individual longevity to seize the opportunities and mitigate the challenges of this demographic transformation, which include fiscal pressures on social security and protection systems, changing labour market dynamics and family and intergenerational relations. In designing policy responses, it is important to ensure that everyone can realize their full potential across the life course and age equitably, in security and with dignity, leaving no one behind. The importance of policymaking that takes into account the needs and rights of different age groups and population groups (persons with disabilities, migrants, etc.) and assesses the potential impacts of new laws and programmes for them has become even more evident in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UNECE Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing<sup>1</sup> (2021) were developed to support member States in adapting to population ageing and creating societies for all ages by strategically considering and integrating ageing issues into all relevant policy fields and at all levels. Mainstreaming ageing is a strategy, process and multi-dimensional effort of integrating ageing issues into all policy fields and all policy levels. The importance of mainstreaming has been recognized in various international frameworks on ageing. Mainstreaming ageing is one of the core commitments in the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), 2002. In the past two decades of MIPAA/RIS implementation, many countries have introduced cross-sectoral ageing policies to adapt pension systems, health and care systems and labour markets, among others, to population ageing and improve the situation of older persons. But in many cases, there has been no emphasis on systematically ensuring coordination and policy coherence across policy areas and government levels. For mainstreaming ageing to be effective, this effort needs to be underpinned by political commitment and leadership, and effective coordination mechanisms. Age-sensitive analysis and impact assessments should systematically inform new laws, policies and programmes and be based on sound data and information. The Guidelines make suggestions on how these potential shortcomings and challenges can be systematically addressed.

Benefits of mainstreaming ageing include the development of government policy that is more relevant to society as it enables policymakers to respond more effectively to the needs of all

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<sup>1</sup> UNECE (2022): Guidelines for mainstreaming ageing, <https://unece.org/population/ageing/mainstreaming-ageing>

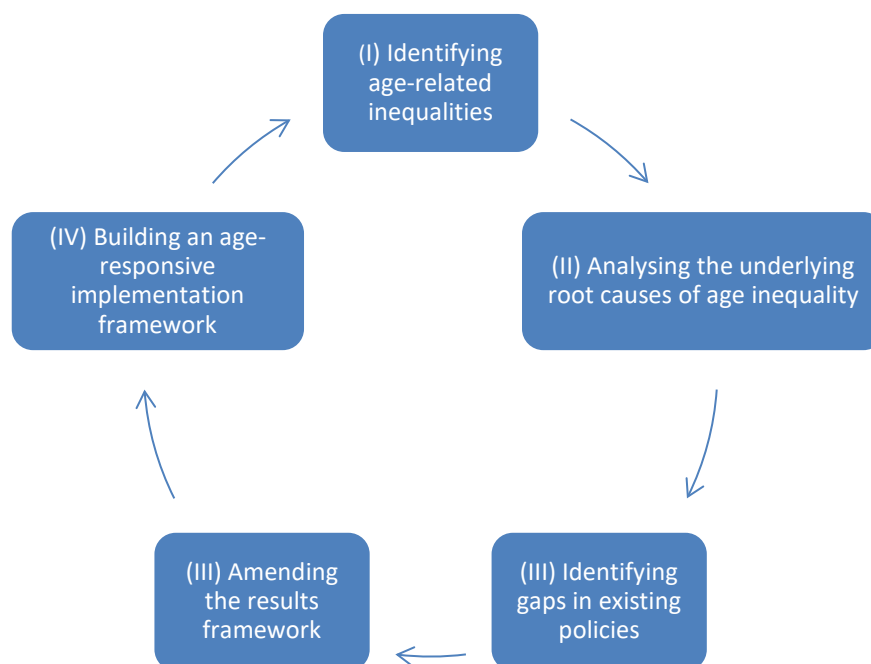
age groups. By taking into account all generations and recognizing the heterogeneity and diversity within and across age groups, mainstreaming ageing promotes intra- and intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion. While advancing policy coherence and integration through enhanced coordination and collaboration across policy areas, levels of government, and between different stakeholders, mainstreaming fosters higher quality and more effective public policies. The ultimate aim of mainstreaming ageing is to achieve a society for all ages in which more equitable development within society will benefit all age groups.

*Age-sensitive analysis* can enhance our understanding of the situation of different age groups across different areas of life, uncover existing inequalities between or within age groups, and point to priorities for policy action in view of achieving a society for all ages. This guide presents a simple to follow, step-by-step methodology for carrying out such an exercise with a focus on older persons.

## AGE-SENSITIVE ANALYSIS AND AGE-RESPONSIVE POLICY FORMULATION

Age-sensitive analysis provides a tool for identifying and understanding the causes of age-related inequalities that affect older men and women and for addressing them through age-responsive policy formulation. ‘Age-blind’ policies that do not take account of the specific situation and needs of different age groups can widen the inequalities that affect older persons. Undetected, inequalities can become more entrenched, more pervasive, and longer lasting.

Figure 1. Age-sensitive analysis and age-responsive policy formulation



**Step 1: Identifying age-related inequalities.** Age inequalities can be measured by comparing relevant policy indicators using age-disaggregated data. By comparing policy indicators for the general or working-age population and indicators for older persons one can better understand and appreciate the level of inequality. The larger the inequality between age groups, the more important it may be to develop age-responsive measures to address them. It is important to note any conclusions in terms of age-related inequalities should be based on credible data and a strong analysis.

**Step 2: Analyzing the underlying root causes of age-related inequalities.** One of the main assumptions of the proposed method of age-sensitive analysis is that inequalities between different age groups are the results of *underlying root causes*. The present methodology proposes an adapted human rights-based framework to define underlying root causes. One should look at (a) the relevant decision makers and their willingness and capacity to address the specific issues and interests of older persons, (b) persons adversely affected by age inequality (older men and women) and how empowered they are to fully benefit from a given policy and (c) the community or the marketplace and how any of the market forces may be functioning against the interest and benefit of older persons.

**Step 3: Identifying gaps in existing policies.** The point of identifying underlying root causes is to target them in a more coordinated and comprehensive way via policy interventions. Existing policies and programmes may perpetuate age-related inequalities if the root causes are overlooked or insufficiently addressed. To identify which aspects of existing policies and programmes require amendment, it is necessary to analyze them with an age-sensitive perspective.

**Step 4: Amending the results framework.** To strengthen the impact of policy interventions the *results framework* of a public policy document should state clearly what will be the expected policy outcomes. By introducing age-responsive targets and measures, policy interventions are more likely to effectively address the most relevant underlying root causes that contribute to reducing age inequalities.

**Step 5: Building an age-responsive implementation framework.** The fourth step is to anticipate implementation gaps and risks and making sure that there is an *effective implementation framework* so that age-responsive measures to address the root causes of age-related inequalities in the policy proposal are implemented as intended.

## STEP I: IDENTIFYING AGE-RELATED INEQUALITIES

### (I) Looking at data to identify age-related inequalities

Age-related inequalities, in the present context, can for example refer to the difference between the average prevalence of a policy outcome among the working-age population and the average of the same policy outcome for the population among the older persons (as illustrated in the figure below). Policy outcome refers to any benefit that a public policy intends to produce for a specific group of the population. When defining the policy outcome, one should think beyond the stated goal of the policy but also think of aspects like: services provided, payments, free goods and services, capacity building, opportunities to participate/be represented/influence decisions, access to relevant information, negative policy outcomes.

One way to establish age-related inequality is to look at two types of indicators: age disaggregated indicators (that disaggregate *data by age groups* and other criteria like gender, residency, ethnicity, etc.) and *ageing-relevant indicators* (indicators that directly or indirectly refer to older individuals, for example the access to long-term social care).<sup>2</sup> It is recommended to use detailed, timely and trustworthy statistics that are disaggregated by age and it is recommended to consider multiple indicators in the analysis.

*Figure 2. Example of how to assess age inequality*



When looking at data to determine age-related inequalities, one usually can define a desired (positive) policy outcome and calculate age inequalities that way (as illustrated with the

<sup>2</sup> See also UNECE (2016): Recommendations on Ageing-related Statistics, <https://unece.org/statistics/publications/recommendations-ageing-related-statistics>

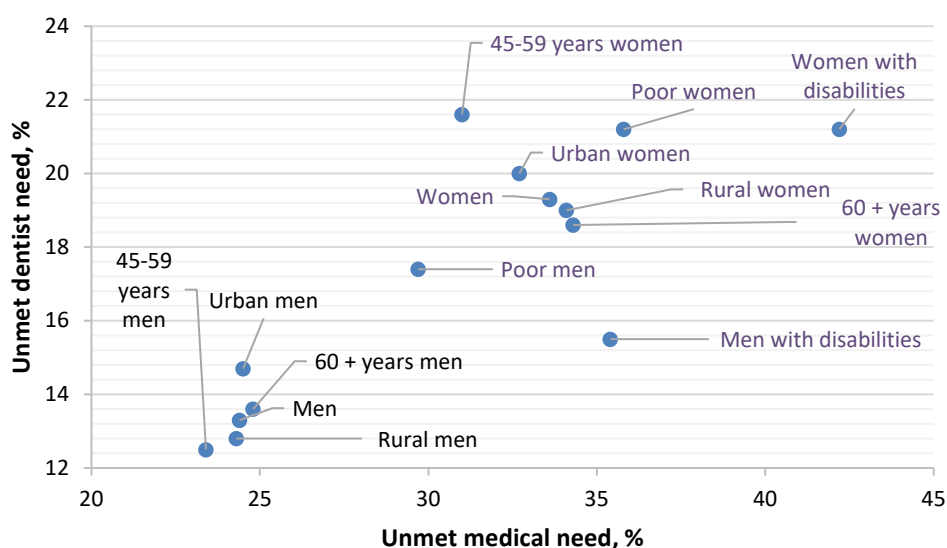
example of Internet use below) or choose a negative policy outcome that one wishes to reduce (as presented in the case of poverty rate in the table below).

Table 1. How to determine age-related inequality: an example from Moldova

Type of policy outcome	Example	Source	% Average for working-age population	% Older persons	Age inequality
Positive policy outcome	Share of persons using internet daily as a source of information 2022	Public Opinion Barometer	71%	30% (for persons 60+)	<b>41 p.p.</b>
Negative policy outcome	Poverty rate in 2021	National Bureau of Statistics	24.5%	39.7% (for persons 65+)	<b>15.2 p.p.</b>

These ageing gap calculations are intended to give a first impression on the extent of age-related inequalities in the sector, but the averages can be misleading since they can hide potential deeper inequalities concentrated among specific groups of older persons. As the figure below illustrates, there are significant inequalities among older men and women.

Figure 3. Unmet medical need in Moldova among men and women aged 45+



Source: Gender and Generations Survey for Moldova 2020.



**(II) It is always necessary to look at the gaps based on more than age**

Additionally, it would be helpful to add more context to the identified age gaps (age-related inequalities) as to clarify more contextual aspects by answering the following questions: (I) what was the dynamic of the age gap over the last five years? (II) Are there similar gaps in EU countries, Eastern Partnership Countries, other low- or middle-income countries? (III) What are other potential characteristics among older persons such as disability, income or level of education that are relevant to examine (see the table below).

*Table 2. Detailed mapping of age gaps*

Policy outcome	Older persons average	Older Persons with Disability				Older Female	Older Rural	Older Single	Older Roma
		Sensory	Physical	Mental	Other				
% of population among older persons									

After considering all potential age inequalities, one can move on to the next step in the analysis which is to analyze potential root causes for the inequalities identified.

**Practical tips:**

- Develop a database of all relevant indicators for the domain you are working with and start a process of disaggregating where possible by age.
- Inquire at the National Statistical Office if the domain data you need is available disaggregated by age.
- Make sure that time series are analyzed to contextualize any potential age inequalities.
- Try to find and study international and European studies and research on ageing in your domain of work. This will help you to better understand the relevance of age-sensitive analysis and age-responsive policies in a particular sector.

## STEP II: ANALYSING THE UNDERLYING ROOT CAUSES OF AGE-RELATED INEQUALITIES

The next stage of the process is to identify the main underlying causes that enabled age-related inequalities to appear and widen over time. The aim of the root cause analysis is to determine if there are structural determinants of age inequalities. This analysis is based on the assumption that the most effective and sustainable way to deal with inequalities is to target underlying causes.

### **(I) The most effective way to reduce inequalities is to target underlying causes**

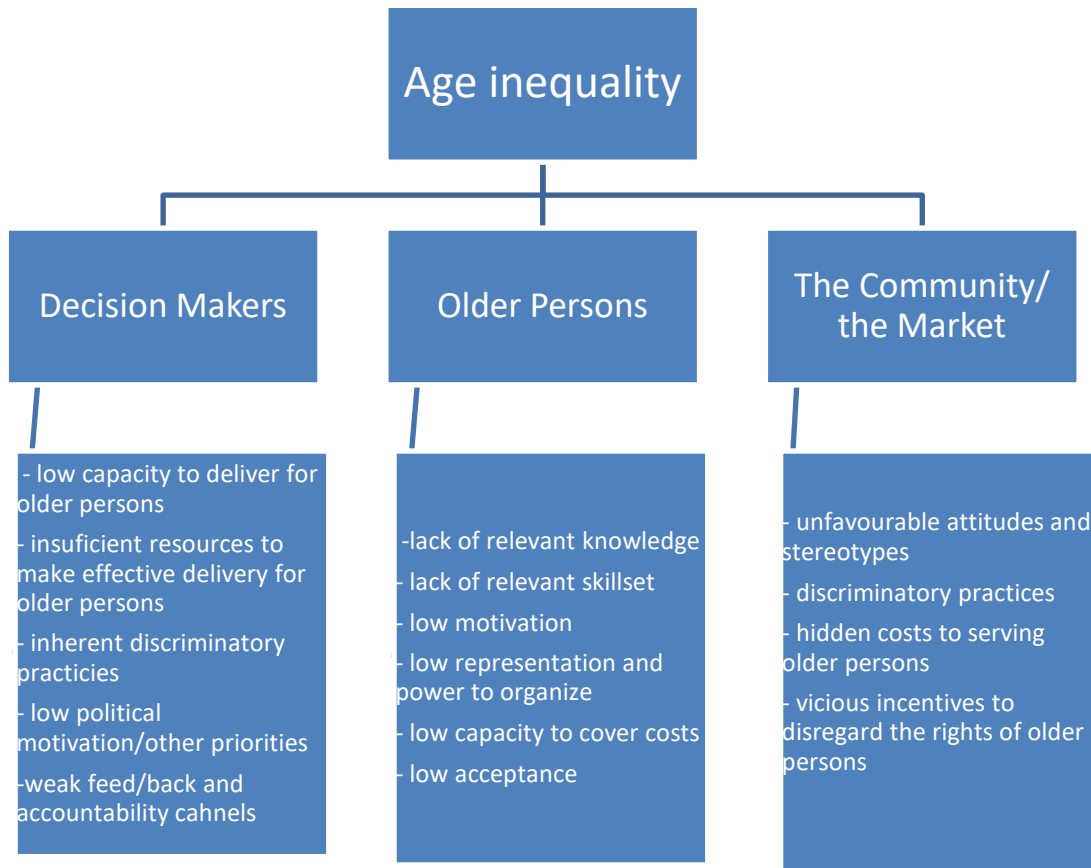
One way to define and identify the underlying causes is to use a “problem tree” analysis. The problem tree that one would use to identify underlying causes is an expanded version of a human rights-based approach. A human rights-based approach assumes that inequalities are the result of fault lines that appear between *duty bearers* (here: decision makers) and *rights holders* (here: older persons). We expand this framework with another dimension – *the community/the marketplace* – that shapes specific outcomes for older persons.

The human rights-based approach focuses on those who are most marginalized, excluded or discriminated against. This often requires an analysis of gender norms, different forms of discrimination and power imbalances to ensure that interventions reach the most marginalized segments of the population. The rights-based approach deals not just with outcomes but also with how those outcomes are achieved. It recognizes that people are actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of services. Informing, educating, and empowering them is essential. Their participation is central, not only to ensure they have ownership over the programme, but also to sustain progress.

*Source: United Nations Population Fund.*

**(II) Age inequalities sometimes appear because of low willingness and/or capacity of decision makers to enact adequate policies, the disempowerment older persons, or market failures**

*Figure 4. Causes of age inequalities*



To get a better understanding of how this framework works in practice it should be applied to the case of a concrete policy proposal that aims to reduce age inequalities.

To identify and prioritize the main root causes one would make a concerted effort to think of how policy makers are responsible for a given policy outcome: (a) Have they the adequate institutional capacity and expertise to reduce age inequalities? (b) How many resources are they capable of putting to use to effectively reduce age inequalities? (c) How do policy makers address specific needs of the older men and women as to help them gain employment?

The same analysis should be done with respect to older persons: (a) Do older persons have the necessary knowledge or skill set to respond to the labor market changes? (b) What is the level of motivation for the older men and women to remain in the labor market or learn new skills? (c) How do older persons respond to employment services provided by the national employment agency?

Ultimately, one source of inequality is what we call the market or the community (depending on the nature of the inequality and sector). The analysis in this case would focus on market failures that concern older persons: (a) Are there any general attitudes and stereotypes that make older persons less competitive on the employment market? (b) Are there any hidden costs that older persons might bring to a potential employer? (c) Are there any incentives for the employers not to hire older persons?

It is important to note that all assumptions made in terms of what causes age inequality should be as much as possible evidence-based and not reflect any institutional bias depending on who is doing the analysis. The second relevant note is that the line of questioning and reason is not strictly limited to the one presented below in this guide, one should feel safe exploring in more depth any issues depending on the sector and the availability of data.

**(III) Any judgment on underlying causes should be justified using data first**

Since this stage of the age-sensitive analysis is crucial it is important to provide a more detailed tool that can potentially help us better analyze the underlying causes. The following tables may serve to i where the root causes for age inequalities are located.

*Table 3. Root causes of age inequalities related to the State/public authorities*

Potential root cause	How to measure it	Potential sources of information	Findings/Conclusions
Weak institutional capacity to deliver for older people	The institution has a department or a focal point with the explicit task to deliver for the older population	Organizational set up of the public authority, job descriptions	
Little or no resources to deliver for the older persons	The institution has a dedicated budget to deliver for the older persons	Institution's budget and financial reports	
Inherent (direct or indirect) discriminatory practices during policy implementation	Number of petitions and documented cases of discrimination or malpractice for older people	Media reports, advocacy organizations, ombudsman office	
Hidden costs imposed on the older persons by previous policy	Additional effort, administrative burden for the older persons to benefit from the policy	Interviews and focus groups with older people, consumer NGOs, NGOs representing elderly	
Weak accessibility channels for older people	The physical presence of the service, public policy benefit, or ease of access for older	National and international statistical	

	persons as compared to other best practices in the country or outside, e.g., number of service providers per thousands of older persons	data on access to services for older persons.  Interviews and focus group with the older persons	
Weak accountability channels for the older persons.	Number of complaints from old people about malpractice and ease of access for the elderly to complain	Official records Interviews and focus groups with old people	

*Table 4. Root causes of age inequalities related to older persons*

Potential root cause	How to measure it	Potential sources of information	Findings/Conclusions
Insufficient knowledge among the older persons to fully benefit from the policy	Level of specific relevant knowledge on potential policy benefits, new service requirements, etc.	Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) surveys among representative older population sample	
Insufficient motivation to fully benefit from the policy benefit or service	Level of motivation to participate, get involved, take risks on potential policy benefits, new service requirements, etc.	KAP surveys among representative older population sample	
Low level of participation and representation of the older persons	Representation rate, of the older persons in the consultation bodies, representation bodies governing consulting the main implementing agency; Participation rate of the older persons in policy formation.	Internal records of governing/consulting bodies. Annual transparency reports	
Low capacity to cover eventual costs for the policy benefit	Ration between the costs for the older persons and potential benefit	Feasibility studies, statements on the costs of the policy on beneficiaries	
Weak capacity of the older persons to mobilize to claim rights	Strength and the number of elderly associations and how they can advocate for their rights and interests	Interview representative network organizations	

Low level of acceptance among older persons	Trust level among the older persons for the new service, desired policy outcome	KAP surveys among representative sample of older people	
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*Table 5. Root causes for age inequalities related to the community and the market*

Potential root cause	How to measure it:	Potential sources of information	Findings/Conclusions
Negative attitudes and stereotypes prevent older people from fully benefiting from the policy outcome	General prevalence of stereotypes among the general public and specific stakeholders for the policy	KAP surveys	
Hidden costs, barriers imposed to older people	Time spent, additional resources, administrative burden, additional costs spent by the older persons to benefit from the policy	Think thank policy analysis. Relevant analyses from other countries	
Discrimination practices or marginalization of older people	Rate of discrimination, mall treatment and marginalization among the older persons	Customer satisfaction type surveys among representative older population sample	
Unintended costs imposed on the marketplace that affect the older persons	Transfer costs from the state to private sector to benefit the older persons	Think thank policy analysis; Relevant analyses from other countries	

Having gone through this extensive checklist, one can identify and prioritize the most relevant underlying causes for the identified age inequalities. Given the intervention mandate, one will decide how many underlying causes to target in the policy process planning. It is worth pointing out that the concept of older persons in this chapter refers to a wider understanding of the older population. Where relevant, one will use gender, rural/urban, disability and Roma perspective.

#### **Practical tips:**

- The best way to identify root causes is to consult with the main stakeholders of the policy proposal in question. That is why it is strongly recommended to organize an inclusive and participatory consultation process involving groups and organizations of older persons.
- Make sure that root cause analysis is unbiased and evidence based.

### STEP III: IDENTIFYING GAPS IN EXISTING POLICIES

Having identified age-related inequalities and their underlying root causes, the next step is to analyze the relevant existing policies with an age-sensitive perspective to determine which elements need to be amended to address disparities. This activity will help to determine which aspects of the design, financing, implementation, or monitoring of existing policies and programmes need to be strengthened to address the root causes of inequalities. For example, the context or problem description of a policy document may explicitly acknowledge the unique needs of older persons, but the action plan may fail to consider barriers to access to the service or benefit for older persons. Or the action plan may include provisions to address these barriers, but the budget allocated for these activities is insufficient.

**(I) Age-sensitive analysis should be applied to all stages of policy formulation and monitoring**

The following table can be used to assess a policy document with an age-sensitive perspective and identify gaps that may be contributing to creating or perpetuating age inequalities.

*Table 6. Age-sensitive analysis of a policy document*

	Yes	No
In the description of the sector/context/problem, data/indicators are used that also refer to age groups.		
The description of the sector/context/problem describes the special problems/needs of older people.		
The problem addressed in the policy document affects older people to a greater extent than the general population.		
The policy document expressly refers to older people as a potential beneficiary group.		
The anticipated outcomes described in the policy document also refer to outcomes for older people.		
The implementation of the public policy will contribute to the reduction of inequalities for older people.		
The Action Plan foresees specific activities to achieve results for the benefit of older people.		
The public policy results framework includes indicators that will allow progress to be measured for older people.		

The public policy budget provides for the allocation of financial resources to carry out planned activities for the benefit of older people.		
The implementing authority has sufficient experience in implementing public policies from the perspective of older persons.		

Considered alongside the identified root causes, the information gathered in this exercise will help to determine whether and how existing policies explicitly or implicitly perpetuate age inequalities. Using this information, one can target the specific parts of the policy process with the potential to address root causes.

#### **STEP IV: AMENDING THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK**

One way to reduce age inequalities is to introduce age-responsive targets and measures in the results framework of a proposed public policy. Age-relevant targets and measures should be included at every level of the results framework intervention, from the general policy outcome to the action plan.

##### **(I) Age-sensitive analysis will enable us to shape the policy’s results framework**

For example, if a given public policy intends to increase the average employment rate, the proposed provisions may specify the desired increase of the employment rate among the older men and women. The most effective way is to be specific and to introduce a framework of targets and baseline. At a minimum one would need to propose provisions to make sure that there is: (i) impact for the older persons, (ii) a feasible framework of how the impact for the older persons will be measured, (iii) a baseline and (iv) a realistic target to be achieved within the implementation cycle.

*Table 7. Example of results framework for older individuals*

<b>Impact for the older persons:</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Baseline 2022</b>	<b>Target 2030</b>
Increased use of ITC tools by older men and women.	Share of persons using internet daily as a source of information 2022	30%	40%

In terms of policy objectives, one will need to decide how each objective relates to the decision makers, the older persons, or the community/market categories of root causes.



**(II) Each proposed policy objective will be analyzed through the main causes of inequality as they relate to decision makers, older persons and the community/ the market**

For example, if a new service is introduced, one would be able to propose amendments to make sure that the implementing authority depending on the underlying cause analysis has the adequate capacity to make the service model age-friendly, to strengthen the accountability channels towards older persons etc. On the other hand, one would make sure to propose provisions that will increase the skills of the older persons to benefit from the new service, provide enough information so older persons make an informed decision, etc. And lastly, one will propose provisions, if relevant, to make sure that there are right incentives for the stakeholder in the community or the market so the older persons will not be marginalized or discriminated.

*Table 8. Matrix for shaping the results framework*

<b>Objective 1 of the policy proposal</b>		
Provisions as related to decision makers: (1) (2) (3)	Provisions as related older persons: (1) (2) (3)	Provisions as related to the community/the market: (1) (2) (3)
<b>Objective 2 of the policy proposal</b>		
Provisions as related to decision makers: (1) (2) (3)	Provisions as related older persons: (1) (2) (3)	Provisions as related to the community/the market: (1) (2) (3)

The last important aspect of mainstreaming ageing in the results framework is to propose provisions to the action plan of the public policy.

**(III) Proposed actions will have to ensure age-responsiveness of the public policy.**

The provisions will follow the same logic – under each set of actions related to a specific objective, activities will be proposed to make sure that ageing-related provisions in the policy objectives will be fully implemented.

*Table 9. Amending the results framework*

Proposed provisions in Objective 1:	Action/Initiatives to make sure full implementation
Proposed provisions in Objective 2:	Action/Initiatives to make sure full implementation

**Practical tips:**

- The best way to learn what works and what doesn't is to identify and document best practices. One rich source of potential best practices can be identified by asking relevant Ministries, UN agencies or NGOs working in the area what worked best and what did not.

**STEP V: BUILDING AN AGE-RESPONSIVE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

To make sure that our proposed provisions (if accepted) are not just good intentions on the part of the implementing public authority and that an age-responsive perspective is at the core of the implementation effort, one needs to propose actions to strengthen the implementation framework from an ageing perspective. Once again, the analysis of the underlying causes will prove very useful for this stage.

**(I) Implementation of the ageing perspective can be strengthened by improving institutional capacity**

For the institutional component one needs to make sure that at minimum: (I) is a person/division with a clear mandate/authority for mainstreaming ageing and (II) that person/division has adequate expertise in mainstreaming ageing.

*Table 10. Interventions to increase Institutional capacities*

Who will be responsible within the institution to carry out all the ageing-related activities?	How strong is the mandate to mainstream an ageing perspective?	What is the level of expertise	What are the activities proposed under this intervention?

**(II) Implementation of the ageing perspective cannot be effective if insufficient resources are secured**

The second intervention pillar to consolidate the implementation framework is about making sure that sufficient funds are allocated for the mainstreaming ageing process. The first thing one should do is to have a proper costing of all proposed activities followed by calculations on how much these proposed activities will be covered, and for the remaining sum what is the proposed fundraising strategy? If there is not sufficient funding and the fundraising strategy looks unrealistic then one should prioritize most the important activities.

*Table 11. Interventions to increase financial sustainability*

How much will age-responsive actions cost?	How much can realistically be covered from own allocations?	What is the proposed fundraising strategy?

**(III) Measuring progress in terms of mainstreaming ageing will strengthen the implementation effort**

Strong implementation is always a byproduct of strong accountability, which is why it is important to propose a comprehensive accountability for the results framework. This aspect is important especially if mainstreaming ageing is piloted by the public authority. Making accountability for ageing more distinctive and independent will contribute to institutional learning and will keep the everyone’s focus on delivery.

*Table 12. Interventions to strengthen accountability*

Is it possible to make the accountability process more independent and inclusive? (Groups of experts to review the progress)	Is it possible to introduce penalties for under delivery and low performance?	Is it possible to make accountability for ageing equality more distinctive (separate report to be produced)

**Practical tips:**

- Effective implementation is also about political will and prioritization. It is quite likely that mainstreaming ageing will be met with a dose of skepticism and the idea that there are more important and urgent things to do. That is why it is important, at the first stages, to make this process simple and clear.
- Try to find a champion and a “sponsor” of the process. If there are any emerging benefits from mainstreaming effort try to publicize them to raise awareness and momentum.
- Encourage your colleagues to participate in training and workshops on the topic.