



FOLLOW-UP REPORT ON THE MADRID PLAN

2002-2007

Red Latinoamericana de Gerontología

Latin American Gerontology Network

<http://www.gerontologia.org>

Presentation

The *Red Latinoamericana de Gerontología* (Latin American Gerontology Network – known by its Spanish acronym RLG) is a non-governmental organisation that works on behalf of old people. It is supported by the Caritas organisations in Latin America and sponsored by Caritas Chile¹. Its main focus is on the process of ageing and old age itself and their links to the quality of life of old people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The work of the RLG involves building up and disseminating knowledge of specific issues as a means of facilitating reflection, dialogue, debate, connections and information with a wide range of bodies and individuals and promoting links between knowledge and daily practice in order to generate a positive image of ageing and old age and a better quality of life during old age. The RLG is made up of representatives from fourteen countries whose work is directly and indirectly connected to ageing, old age and old people.

The Latin American Gerontology Network was set up in May 1999 – the International Year of Older Persons – as a virtual network based on the organisation's Internet portal at <http://www.gerontologia.org>. As a virtual network its purpose is to promote communication and the exchange of ideas between individuals and institutions that work on behalf of old people in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a pluralist organisation that emphasises the positive aspects of old age, calling for the application of the *United Nations Principles for Older Persons* and of the measures adopted by the Second World Assembly on Ageing.

The central aims of the RLG are: 1) to act as a link between gerontological theory and its application in a variety of local situations; 2) to stimulate exchange, active participation and debate on gerontological issues; and 3) to act as a central point to which others can refer and which provides appropriate skills, training and up-to-date documentation.

The team charged with the task of meeting these aims is made up of a coordinator living in Chile, correspondents in five countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba and Mexico), a webmaster and a specialist adviser in gerontology. Funding is provided by Caritas Germany. The function of correspondent and gerontology adviser is assumed by highly qualified professional volunteers with a strong social commitment. The role of the RLG's correspondents involves working towards the fulfilment of the *Madrid Plan* from their various institutions. Furthermore, the RLG encourages all its visitors to play a part in meeting the objectives of the *Madrid Plan*.

In the same way, it can draw on a network of partners that allows it to disseminate up-to-date information from almost all the countries in the region. The RLG also has contacts with other networks and public and civil society institutions that work in the field of ageing and old age in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹ When it was first established, the RLG was sponsored by Caritas Uruguay. In 2004, it became part of Caritas (Latin America)'s Regional Programme for Old People (known by the Spanish acronym PRAM) which organises the project entitled "Social work for older persons in Latin America and the Caribbean". This programme is run in collaboration with Caritas Germany and is financed by the German Minister for Cooperation and Development. Following its integration into the PRAM, the Latin American Gerontology Network was sponsored by Caritas Chile, where it is now based.



The RLG's website <http://www.gerontologia.org> acts as its main platform for contacts and exchanges. The organisation also issues a monthly electronic newsletter with a subscriber list of around 1,600, 73% of whom then pass on the newsletter among their own contacts.² Both tools are available free of charge to those interested in the work of the RLG.

The RLG-users come from the entire region. With regard to its profile, they express the heterogeneous nature of those whose work is aimed at older persons in the region, both in terms of their experience and the variety of the work they carry out in relation to training, empowerment and motivation.³ All these factors serve to strengthen the pluralist nature of the RLG and help to explain its sustained growth and spread⁴.

ROLE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN GERONTOLOGY NETWORK (RLG) IN THE APPLICATION OF MEASURES ESTABLISHED IN THE MADRID ACTION PLAN

1. What has the RLG done to inform older persons and/or the general public about the Madrid Plan?

The work of the RLG is focused on providing information and training directed towards the creation of 'a society for all ages' while emphasising – both in theory and in practice – the challenges caused by ageing both at the level of entire populations and of the individual.

The RLG has published and placed great importance on the distribution of the *Madrid Plan*, the *Regional Strategy for the Application of the Madrid Plan on Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean* along with a plethora of documentation published by the United Nations and other international bodies on ageing and old age.

Through its editorials and electronic newsletters, the RLG has facilitated educational work on the active role to be played by civil society organisations and by citizens in general as well as on the need to create the right conditions for execution of the *Madrid Plan* in each country and community across the region. It has encouraged NGOs from developed countries to act as advocates with their own governments in order to expand international cooperation for the benefit of old people in the countries of Latin America⁵.

2. Where does the principal focus of the RLG lie out of the three main areas of the Madrid Plan (old people and development; health and welfare primarily in old age; creating accessible physical and social environments that help to provide quality of life during old age)?

The Latin American Network has mainly focused its work on the areas of: "Old people and development" and "Creating favourable and beneficial environments".

3. What has the RLG specifically achieved in these priority areas? How has it worked together with the government, other NGOs and/or others to meet its objectives?

The RLG has **facilitated the involvement** of a wide range of social and community organisations which act at a local level across all the countries in the region. This has made it

² According to data from a survey of subscribers to the monthly RLG newsletter in March 2007.

³ A study of the data on newsletter subscribers shows that 72% are women. In terms of trade and profession, 24% work in the field of health (doctors, nurses, kinesiologists, etc.); 14% are educators (school teachers, university lecturers, socio-cultural coordinators, etc.); 12% are gerontologists (graduates, including older persons who have graduated from universities of the third age); 12% are social workers; 9% are psychologists; 9% are civil servants (coordinating programmes at municipal level or state services, etc.); 4% are involved in communications (journalists, social communicators); the remaining 16% is made up of retired persons, carers, sociologists, anthropologists, lawyers, architects, directors of long-stay establishments, economists, etc. etc.)

⁴ Between 2002 and 2006, the RLG website received 407,980 visits. In 2007, the average daily hit rate has been over 800.

⁵ To this end the RLG has developed a strong alliance with Caritas Germany to help it approach a number of European NGOs with a Catholic background.



possible to go beyond the framework established by existing formal structures. It has established an **award for gerontological experiences entitled “A society for all ages”, which rewards projects that seek to involve older people in concrete solutions** aimed at improving their quality of life.

In alliance **with Caritas in Latin America** it promotes the *Regional Programme for Older Persons* which looks to improve the quality of life of old people, especially that of the most disadvantaged. Together with Caritas organisations in Latin America it **campaigns for the right to a universal pension** that guarantees a minimum standard of living for today's older generations, a demand it presented, for example, through the panel entitled “Poverty as a source of vulnerability preventing old people from exercising their rights” at the meeting of civil society organisations, held in June 2003 at the headquarters of the ECLAC. The RLG has taken on board the challenges set at the forum entitled “A new direction for social security in Peru” which was held in Lima, Peru on 18th October 2006 during the Third Regional Meeting of the Regional Programme for Older Persons organised by Caritas (Latin America and the Caribbean). It has **interceded both publicly and privately** with Catholic organisations to offer **solidarity with the old people of Guatemala** who have no social security cover and who are being suppressed in their fight for a viable pension.

The RLG has taken part in seminars, workshops and other events, working constantly to generate a **new social and cultural awareness** that overcomes inaccurate perceptions and beliefs that devalue ageing and old people.⁶

4. What other important work has the RLG carried out?

The RLG has succeeded in developing a decentralised and participatory gerontology network that operates on a permanent basis and that offers a platform through its website for the beneficial exchange of ideas between a wide range of individuals and organisations. The expansion of this network allows us to form an up-to-date picture of what is happening in the field of ageing and old age. The RLG's monthly editorials have made it possible to develop a space to give expression to a broader view of ageing that is more geared towards the specific conditions in Latin America. The RLG has facilitated the establishment of training and skills building processes in the field of social gerontology and has made information and studies available to foster the creation of broader perspectives that go beyond the field of geriatrics.

5. Each government was invited by the United Nations to review and evaluate, over the year 2007, the progress made in its own country in implementing the *Madrid Plan*, although there was no specific obligation to involve the general population in this process. As far as you know, has your government begun or committed itself to carrying out this review? If so, has the RLG been invited to take part? In what way?

The situation with regard to monitoring of the *Madrid Plan* is very varied. In general, only a few specific bodies have been established for this purpose in 2007. In some cases, they have been set up by governments (as in Chile), while in others it is the NGOs and civil society organisations that are seeking to create a space in which they can be involved in the assessment of policies (as in Peru). In Colombia, the Minister for Social Protection has invited a number of NGOs to take part in the process of establishing guidelines for public policy on ageing and old age – with due regard for the *Madrid Plan*. Several NGOs are already acting as advisers to the Ministry for that purpose.

⁶ By way of example, the talk delivered by Elisa Dulcey-Ruiz, RLG's correspondent in Colombia, entitled “Images of ageing: bringing us closer to its study and monitoring. To mark the International Action Plan on Ageing - Madrid 2002” organised by Eclac, Buenos Aires, November 2005; also the talk by David Zolotow, RLG's correspondent in Argentina, entitled “Images of old people. An analysis of skills training programmes with regard to the topic *images*” presented at the Second Regional Meeting of Caritas Latin America's Regional Programme for Older Persons, Mexico, October 2005.



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In recent years, many governments have held round table discussions and seminars that have been attended by some of the NGOs working in the field of ageing, old age and old people but, with just a few exceptions, old peoples' organisations have not been invited to participate. Many of the measures adopted were conceived without their involvement; the focus of these measures often lies on providing assistance, so they tend to reinforce a relationship of dependence. Except for Brazil, the countries of Latin America are still a long way from developing policies that include old people as fully entitled legal persons.

In her position as President of Brazil's National Association of Gerontology, the RLG's Brazil correspondent is currently involved with the committee organising the Civil Society Forum on Ageing to be held in Brasilia in December 2007.

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