



Policy

brief

Mainstreaming Ageing

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Commitment 1 of the UNECE Strategy on Ageing: To mainstream ageing in all policy fields with the aim of bringing societies and economies into harmony with demographic change to achieve a society for all ages

Population ageing has important and far-reaching implications across all spheres of society. Ageing-related issues therefore need to be integrated into all policy fields in order to bring societies and economies in harmony with demographic change. This policy brief looks at how Governments can do this and provides selected examples. It also addresses the ways in which all age groups can be equally involved in designing, implementing and evaluating ageing-related policies and programmes.

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Challenging context: ageing

Populations in Europe and North America are ageing, but most find themselves still in the stage of the so-called demographic bonus, a situation in which working-age adults make up the largest share of population while the share of dependent children and older adults is relatively small. This situation is about to end soon in many countries, as the large generations are approaching retirement age and life expectancy is increasing. This necessitates adjustments in many policy areas.

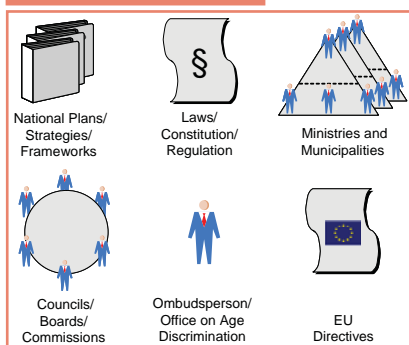
Suggested strategy: mainstreaming

Mainstreaming ageing is a policy strategy directed towards integrating ageing issues into all relevant policy fields on all levels. While relying on evidence-based policies, Governments should involve other stakeholders and target groups in the policymaking process.

Expected result: integration

Mainstreaming helps to ensure better integration of the needs of all age groups into the policymaking process. It can allow older persons to contribute to society, communities and families as much as other age groups do. Ultimately, this should help to bring economies and societies in harmony with demographic change.

Policy Toolkit



Demographic change

As the world population is passing through the demographic transition – the transformation of a population characterized by large families and short lifespans into a population of small families and long lifespans – the distinctive trait of this century is going to be ageing, with the share of older individuals in the population increasing.

Ageing in the UNECE region

While demographic transition is universal, its timing varies greatly both between and within world regions, as does the onset and pace of ageing. Populations in Europe and North America are ageing, but most find themselves still in the stage of the demographic bonus mentioned above, with working-age adults making up the largest share of population and the share of dependent children and older adults being relatively small. This situation is due to end, as the large generations born during the baby boom retire and life expectancy is further increases. In Europe, there are now 4.4 persons in the working age per one person 65 or older. By 2025, there will be 3.1 and by 2050 only 2.1¹.

Diversity

Although many Eastern European countries are currently witnessing a stagnation in life expectancy and even its decline among men, they are also ageing rapidly as a result of past fertility decline. Several countries of Central Asia are only coming to the stage of demographic bonus, with their large young cohorts now entering the labour force. Their populations are ageing, too, but their age structure is currently still much younger than in other subregions of UNECE. Their challenge is to make good use of the demographically advantageous period that they are entering.

Consequences

Ageing represents a triumph in terms of medical, social, and economic advancement. It also presents challenges for existing systems of social support, and affects virtually all domains of society.

In the context of longer lives, the meaning of conventional and legally set age-markers of life-course transitions such as the age of retirement at 65 (a legal standard in many UNECE countries) is changing as the proportion of the population surviving long past that age is increasing. This represents a great opportunity. As people remain fit and healthy for longer, they can continue to contribute to economic, social and family life during more active years and can also bring more experience. Will these opportunities be used effectively? Will older people find new occupations to remain active and to be helpful to others? Will they be treated equally? What will their economic status be? How will their needs change? All these and other questions are important when thinking about the consequences of ageing.

Mainstreaming ageing

All age groups make equally important contributions to society and to their communities and families. Older persons can make their knowledge and experience available. They can serve as repositories of a collective memory in society. To ensure that they can remain active and independent for as long as possible, policies supporting their social and economic integration in all spheres of society are necessary. To achieve this complex goal, a holistic approach, whereby ageing is integrated in all policy fields, is needed.

Concept

Mainstreaming ageing is a strategy, process and multi-dimensional effort of integrating ageing issues into all policy fields and all policy levels. The ultimate objective is to achieve a more equitable development within a society that will benefit all social groups. Successful mainstreaming means including all relevant stakeholders in decision-making, to ensure that the needs of all age groups are met in all policy fields. Mainstreaming can be seen as an important tool for achieving a society for all ages.

¹ United Nations, *World Population Prospects*, 2006 revision. New York, 2007. Europe in these statistics includes the whole of Russian Federation, but excludes Caucasus and Central Asia.

Holistic approach

A holistic approach in this context means that the concerns of different age groups, including older persons, are systematically considered in all areas and levels of policymaking. A national action plan on ageing or a similar strategy document may provide an overall framework of action. It should include the identified national priorities concerning older persons relative to other generations, suggested procedures and concrete targets for developing mainstreaming efforts at all levels. Furthermore, the strategic framework should take account of the special needs of vulnerable groups, for example older migrants. It should also reflect internationally agreed policy standards such as the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA/RIS). To implement such a strategic framework, its importance needs to be recognized by countries' political leaders.

"Bien vieillir": avenues towards good ageing in France

An important area of mainstreaming is the development of national plans and policy frameworks. The French plan, *Bien Vieillir* (Good Ageing) for 2007-2009, is one such case. Jointly adopted by several ministries, the plan pursues a holistic approach on good ageing while at the same time focusing on certain priority areas. It promotes healthy living and advocates prevention and seeks to improve the environment and quality of life for older persons (including infrastructure, technical aids and city development). The plan also advocates older persons' participation in social and cultural life and promotes intergenerational solidarity.

In the field of health, the plan suggests activities for preventing accidents in daily life, dealing with hearing and visual disability, cancer or dental problems. Furthermore, it foresees a comprehensive campaign to communicate incentives for older persons to adopt habits that consciously take into account a healthy diet, physical activity, healthy sleeping, good use of medicine and the general frame of mind. To promote older persons' integration in social life, the event *Semaine Bleue* (Blue Week) sensitizes the public to the contribution of older persons to economic, social and cultural life. The plan suggests intergenerational living arrangements to improve older persons' quality of life and promotes intergenerational solidarity. Research and innovation are encouraged by offering research grants for innovative ideas of how to achieve good ageing. The plan also foresees experimental activities in providing special living arrangements for ageing homeless people and older migrants. Finally, the plan makes special provisions regarding the role of the local level and takes into account the international dimension through participation in EU-level projects on ageing.

Sources: Ministère de la Santé et des Solidarités Ministère délégué à la Sécurité Sociale, aux Personnes âgées, aux Personnes handicapées et à la Famille, Ministère de la Jeunesse, des Sports et de la Vie associative, PLAN NATIONAL "BIEN VIEILLIR" 2007 – 2009, http://www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/presentation_plan-3.pdf; Questionnaire pour le rapport de suivi de la mise en œuvre du plan international de Madrid (2002), http://www.unece.org/pau/_docs/age/2007/AGE_2007_MiCA07_CntrRprtFRA_f.pdf

Laws, policies and programmes

Laws, policies and programmes are important tools for achieving a holistic approach in mainstreaming ageing. Existing policies and programmes as well as laws and regulations should adequately reflect the concerns of persons of all ages, and a general framework of non-discrimination should be provided. This means that the concerns of older persons should not be seen in isolation or in competition with other social groups. New laws, policies and programmes should be streamlined with internationally agreed standards, based on the MIPAA/RIS framework.

The implications of any planned legislation, policy or programme, for different age groups, including older persons, can be systematically assessed through an impact analysis. Guidelines may help to screen new laws, policies or programmes for their relevance regarding ageing societies. Screening may also analyse how to implement national priorities, and what the indicators of success should be.

Integrated policymaking for older persons: the Slovak Social Services Act

The Slovak “National Programme for the Protection of the Elderly” (NPPE) provides a comprehensive framework for policymaking related to older persons. Its overall aims are to achieve self-sufficiency, social participation and integration for older persons and to enable them to fulfil themselves and live in dignity. The NPPE covers a broad range of areas, including social security, employment and family policy, education, safety, health care, housing, culture and media, taxes and fees, transport, postal and telecommunication services, legal protection, the economy, agriculture and the environment.

To address the increasing need for social services specifically, the government of Slovakia has adopted a new Social Services Act, which entered into force in January 2009. The Act addresses the efficient provision of services to severely disabled and older persons, among other target groups. It regulates the competence of government bodies, introduces a system of community planning provides for the interlinking of social services and health care, including the financing of social services. It sets out requirements necessary for performing work in the field of social services and introduces a system of quality control. Service providers now have to register in order to operate. They have to comply with a clearly defined set of procedural, personnel and operating conditions which are monitored by independent inspection bodies. The Act offers a comprehensive approach to social service provision, as one crucial component of a wider strategy on ageing and older persons.

Source: Information provided by the Slovak Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, personal communication July 2009.

Institutional setting

The institutional setting is another important tool to achieve a holistic approach to mainstreaming ageing. It should be designed so that all age groups, including older persons, are considered in all policy areas. National consultative bodies on ageing issues, councils, boards or commissions, should ensure that older persons are represented in decision-making. At the same time, younger persons are also important stakeholders. They are today’s contributors for the pension system and will be affected by the demographic changes in terms of their pension once they reach retirement age. In addition, the participation of other relevant stakeholders, NGOs, the private sector and trade unions should also be institutionally prescribed. An office on age discrimination or an ombudsperson can assist in overseeing adherence to this non-discriminatory framework.

Interdepartmental or interagency working groups, councils or commissions, or assigned focal points on ageing could help to achieve the streamlining of policies and reduce duplication. Such coordination is necessary at the national level, but also at the regional and municipal levels to the extent that policy decisions are made on those levels.

Equal Treatment Authority in Hungary scrutinizes laws and regulations

An Equal Treatment Authority was set up in December 2004 by the Hungarian Government. It is an independent organization with nationwide authority, that verifies the compliance with the law of equality and non-discrimination. The Authority deals with complaints related to direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, segregation, sexual harassment and retribution. Once the Authority receives a complaint, it will conduct an administrative procedure to examine if the principle of equal treatment has been violated. If this is the case, the authority takes a decision to apply sanctions specified by law. The Authority receives several hundred complaints each year, most of them concerning age and ethnic discrimination at work.

Sources: Country Report Hungary 2007, <http://egyenlobanasmod.hu>

National budget

A national budget reflects in monetary terms the government’s commitment to specific policy areas and is therefore another indicator of and instrument for achieving a holistic approach to mainstreaming ageing. The budget should be systematically evaluated as to the benefits of different age groups. With respect to ageing-related actions, priorities would need to be established so that the limited resources can be directed to cost-effective interventions in areas likely to have a significant impact. Within a finance ministry, a focal point or an office could be entrusted with mainstreaming ageing. Consideration should also be given to the tax code and its influence on people of different ages.

Data collection

An evidence-based policy framework requires the availability of data disaggregated by age. Such data can be collected through censuses, civil registration and/or household surveys. Participatory methods for collecting qualitative information, such as focus group discussions, should complement the quantitative data collection methods. Available academic infrastructure should be actively included or bolstered.

German Centre of Gerontology

The German Centre of Gerontology was established in 1973 with a mandate to collect, expand and disseminate information about the living situations and needs of ageing and older persons. The centre has a bibliographic database, GeroLit, which has been available to the public via the German Institute for Medical Documentation and Information (DIMDI) since 1995. The Centre houses the largest social gerontology library in Western Europe and a statistics database. A combination of applied research and documentation enables it to fulfil its political advisory role as well as that of an educational institution. The Coordinating Office for Nursing Care (Leitstelle Altenpflege) is also part of the German Centre for Gerontology. It serves to implement the Charter of Rights for People in Need of Nursing Care and Assistance and to facilitate exchange between professionals on questions relating to nursing care and quality management in institutions. The German Centre of Gerontology is located in Berlin and is financed by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

Source: Information provided by the German Federal Ministry Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, personal communication June 2009.

Awareness-raising

Issues concerning ageing societies and older persons relative to other age groups may suffer from a lack of attention and resources. Advocacy campaigns may help to sensitize the public to the concerns and conditions of older persons. Advocacy campaigns should help to overcome negative stereotypes and ageism. Newly collected data should be disseminated to contribute to the overall knowledge of society regarding ageing and older persons, and thus to overall awareness-raising.

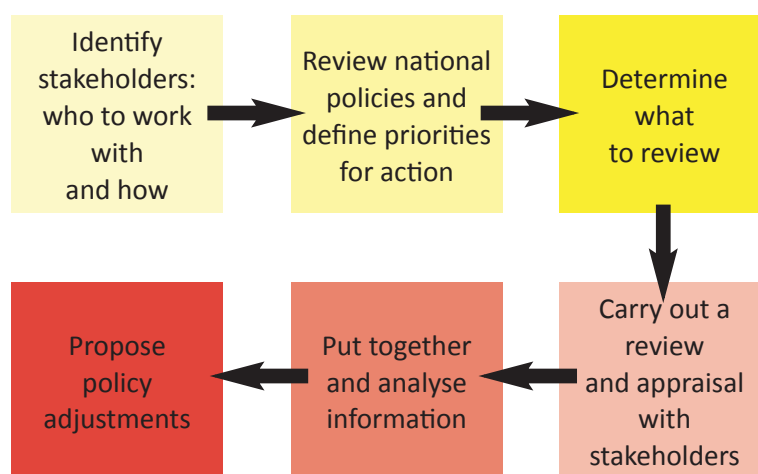
Austria: Ministry of Social Affairs facilitates media workshop on images of ageing in the media

The Madrid Plan assigns the media a lead role in building a positive attitude towards older persons and enhancing recognition of their importance in society. A study commissioned by the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs showed that attitudes in the media needed to be changed first. According to the study, older persons often found themselves depicted as either deficient, in bad health and in need of long-term care or as still unusually young and beautiful. Such polarizing images excluded many aspects of ageing, especially the diversity and differences of people aged between 55 and 100 years (or even older). To address this issue, the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs organized a workshop in which media experts and scientists were invited to develop strategies and instruments to create sustainable and modern images of ageing and older persons in the media. The workshop aimed at defining strategies to reinsert this diversity into media reporting. Participants defined undesirable terms that contribute to ageism – such as “excessive ageing” or “inmates” instead of “residents in older persons’ homes”. They also identified images that reinforce stereotypes, such as an old couple sitting on a park bench. Among the measures suggested by the participants was the development of a pool of good practice examples as well as an easily accessible database to facilitate research by journalists. It was also suggested that articles should not specify the age of a featured person. Publishers were encouraged to assign retired or older free-lance journalists to prepare articles on older persons. Overall, workshop participants agreed that more role models were needed to help communicate a positive image of ageing and older persons.

Source: Information provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and consumer protection, personal communication June 2009.

Participatory approach

Mainstreaming ageing is connected with a participatory approach. Bottom-up participatory data collection should inform policymaking as well as monitoring and evaluation. Besides the information it provides, another important purpose of the participatory approach is to ensure that older persons get involved in the policymaking process on issues that concern them, including policy design, implementation and evaluation. In this sense, mainstreaming ageing represents a shift from developing policies for older persons towards the inclusion of older persons in the policymaking process, taking into account their views and opinions when developing and implementing policies that affect them. At the same time, younger persons are also important stakeholders, as they have certain responsibilities towards today's older generations while being the older generations of tomorrow themselves. The participatory approach may include the following steps:



Source: Adapted from: *United Nations. Guidelines for Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*. New York, 2006, p. 18.

Stakeholders might include some of the following:

- Older persons and their families
- National government officers from ministries and departments, such as those responsible for finance, statistics, health, social welfare, the interior, gender, housing, agriculture, education and legal affairs
- Local government officers, including municipal authorities
- Existing committees on ageing or national networks of older people
- Community members
- Local health workers and other service providers
- Research institutes and universities
- Geriatric and gerontological societies
- Organizations (governmental, non-governmental and private) working in the area of prevention of elder abuse
- Local NGOs working with older people
- Local NGOs working in the areas of development and human rights
- Women's and men's organizations
- International NGOs
- United Nations organizations and donors
- Private sector organizations, such as business, pension and insurance companies and private utility (e.g. power, water) providers
- Labour organizations and trade unions
- Media, such as the press, television and radio

Source: United Nations 2006, p. 23.

Identifying stakeholder groups in Lithuania shows that participatory approach works

During the development of participatory research with older persons in Lithuania (2000), a meeting was organized for a group of older persons, leaders of older persons' organizations, service providers and local government officials. At the meeting, participants drew up a list of the stakeholder groups they wanted to participate in the research, and specified the categories of older persons whose involvement was needed. For example, older men and women aged 80 years or over, older persons in rural and in urban areas, older persons living with their families or without them or older persons in institutions. The exercise was carried out under the auspices of the Elderly Woman's Activity Centre, Kaunas, Lithuania.

Source: Guidelines for Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2006. p. 18.

Performance assessment

The process of mainstreaming would need to be monitored and evaluated as to progress made in different areas. Developing benchmarks and introducing appropriate indicators to measure the level of mainstreaming ageing and its impact are important. Performance indicators should be both quantitative and qualitative. They can attempt to measure improvements in individual well-being of older persons (quality of life indicators) relative to other age groups and the success of overall policy. Progress should be reviewed periodically and outcomes should be acted upon accordingly. In the event that outcomes fall behind expectations, efforts should be made to identify the root causes, before taking action.

LinkAge: a UK programme to increase effectiveness of services

Eight LinkAge Plus pilot programmes are bringing together local authorities and their partners in the government, health and the voluntary and community sectors, to improve access to information and services for older persons. The pilot programmes are testing different methods of providing information to individual older persons, service providers and other professionals who work with older persons to identify and meet the latter's needs by bringing together local information and services. The pilots have worked with different local authorities, with voluntary and community sector partners and in some cases with health-care providers to increase the number of points of access to information and services, pursuing a range of activities to promote well-being and independence. In some cases, this has led to a reduction in duplication, better targeting and improved cost-effectiveness.

Source: Department for Work and Pensions, UK, <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/2008/jun/pens073-240608.asp>.

International cooperation

Preparation of integrated national policy frameworks on ageing can benefit greatly from international cooperation facilitated by international agencies. The Madrid Plan specifies that the United Nations Commission for Social Development is responsible for the follow up and appraisal of its worldwide implementation, with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) as the focal point on ageing for the UN system. The UN regional commissions, of which UNECE is one, are turning the overall provisions into regional action plans (the Regional Implementation Strategy in the UNECE region), and are assisting national institutions to implement and monitor action on ageing.

UNECE is providing a platform for policy discussion on ageing-related issues. Recent events that covered mainstreaming ageing include the Ministerial Conference on Ageing (León, Spain, 2007) and the Conference on How Generations and Gender Shape Demographic Change (Geneva, 2008). Materials are available from the UNECE Population website: www.unece.org/pau. Through its Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), UNECE contributes to the knowledge base for evidence-based policymaking.

Checklist : Mainstreaming ageing

Mainstreaming tools and techniques	Purpose	Elements	Stakeholders
Strategic framework	Systematic consideration of ageing-related concerns in all areas and all levels of policymaking. Provide an overall framework of action.	National action plan on ageing, a similar strategic document or a set of linked documents covering the area.	Government, interagency bodies, other relevant stakeholders.
Laws, policies and programmes	Evaluation of existing laws and policies, making necessary adjustments with respect to needs and concerns of all age groups.	Guidelines on mainstreaming ageing concerns into new laws, policies and programmes. Impact analysis regarding ageing societies and older persons relative to other age groups.	Legislative bodies, government agencies, consultative bodies on ageing.
Institutional setting	Ensure exchange between departments and agencies, to avoid duplication and achieve coordination. Achieve a clear distribution of tasks. Ensure representation of all age groups and relevant stakeholders in decision-making. Adherence to a non-discriminatory framework.	Interdepartmental or interagency working groups, councils or commissions, national consultative bodies, focal point on ageing, office on age discrimination or ombudsperson.	Government national, regional, municipal, representatives of different generations, NGOs, the private sector and trade unions.
National budget	Ensure annually that the budget process takes the concerns and problems of all age groups into consideration. Increased equity in national resource allocation. Fair and progressive tax system.	Budget. Tax system.	Finance ministry. A unit or focal point on mainstreaming ageing may be established.
Data collection and analysis	Availability of socio-economic data about ageing and different age groups as knowledge base for policymaking. Involvement of all stakeholders in the policymaking process through participatory methods.	Quantitative and qualitative data collection: e.g. census, civil registration, surveys, focus group discussions.	Governments. Research institutions. NGOs.
Awareness raising, advocacy and education	Increased visibility of the topic. Sensitization of the public to concerns and conditions of all age groups, including older persons. Overcoming negative stereotypes.	Dissemination of data. Advocacy campaign on local, provincial and national level.	Representatives of groups of all age groups, including older persons, civil society and faith-based organizations, educational and research institutions, media, political parties and government officials.

Checklist : Mainstreaming ageing

Mainstreaming tools and techniques	Purpose	Elements	Stakeholders
Participatory approach	Ensure that all groups, including older persons are involved in all phases of the policy process on ageing, that policymaking corresponds to the needs of the target groups and that all age groups have ownership for the policies that affect them. To shift away from developing policies for older persons towards the inclusion of older persons in the policymaking process; include other generations as stakeholders as they are affected by ageing dynamics.	Bottom-up participatory approach in data collection, monitoring and evaluation. To ask for views and opinions of older persons and other age groups as they are affected.	Target groups of policies, older persons as well as other generations and government.
Performance assessment	Development of benchmarks in relation to which to measure progress. Introduce appropriate indicators to understand progress and ensure continuous accountability.	Quantitative and qualitative performance indicators.	All actors and donors.
International collaboration	International coordination of multi-level efforts in policies and practices. Learning from each other.	Exchange on good practices. Capacity development and training of focal points on ageing and all staff working on social inclusion. Technical cooperation provided by the United Nations.	Governments, NGOs, international organizations, donors.

Partially based on R. Venne, *Mainstreaming the concerns of older persons into the social development agenda*. Available at United Nations Programme on Ageing at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/mainstreaming/positionpaper.pdf>.

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Listed materials of the United Nations are available on the website of the Programme on Ageing: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing>.