

## Investing into active ageing: UNECE Working Group on Ageing meets to devise strategies for the region

National ageing focal points from across the UNECE region are gathering in Geneva for the Fourth meeting of the UNECE Working Group on Ageing on 21-22 November 2011. Active ageing and quality of life in old age will be the focus of a special in-depth discussion with latest research insights presented by Prof. Dr. Clemens Tesch-Römer, Head of the Berlin-based German Centre of Gerontology. Member states will share good practice examples and discuss strategies for regional cooperation and national action on active ageing.



With longevity rising active ageing has been discussed as a political concept to enhance quality of life in old age and to use opportunities of older people to continue working, to stay healthy longer and to contribute to society, for example through volunteering. Active ageing generally combines good health, good physical and cognitive functioning and societal participation.

### Policies for active ageing

In his study Prof. Tesch-Römer advocates for investments into active ageing at three levels - at the early stages in the life course, at later stages in adulthood and investments into societal frameworks for active ageing:

- Early investments in education status during childhood and adolescence have positive effects on health, social integration and participation in late adulthood.
- Education policies need to include health related knowledge and skills. Interventions for health, integration, and participation in late adulthood - such as physical activity, healthy diets, screening and avoiding risk behaviours - are able to change ageing trajectories.
- Finally, societal investments in active ageing concern opportunities for education, participation in the labour force and civil organizations and social security, health care and long-term care systems.

To provide opportunities for life-long learning, institutions and funding schemes need to be in place. Social security systems need to provide protection against social risks and poverty in old age. Active ageing policies should consider incentives for employees to retire later and for employers to hire and keep older workers. Volunteering opportunities are important to transfer skills and to ensure social integration. Health systems have to ensure good access to health care and care policies should give older persons and their families the choice of care, combining family and professional services. Information technology and innovative forms of residential accommodation can help to ensure independent living in old age. Strategies to enhance social integration need to take into account new diverse forms of families and private networks. Finally, avoiding purely negative and purely positive images of ageing may help to build more inclusive societies that embrace both the potentials and risks of old age.

### A broader understanding of active ageing

Research shows that investments into active ageing may delay the onset of chronic illness and disability. However, a substantial cohort of the oldest old will continue to need support because of multi-morbidity. Promoting an active ageing approach therefore needs to avoid discriminating against older persons who are no longer active and healthy. A one-sided focus on active ageing should not lead to the exclusion of frail older people. Ageing needs to be embraced in its diversities within countries and across the region.

### 2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

Discussions about active ageing strategies within the UNECE Working Group on Ageing take place on the eve of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, designated by the European Union. The aim of this year is to raise awareness and to encourage policymakers and stakeholders to improve opportunities for active ageing in areas as diverse as employment, health care, social services, adult learning, volunteering, housing, IT services or transport.

More information can be found at: [ec.europa.eu/social/ey2012.jsp](http://ec.europa.eu/social/ey2012.jsp)