

UNECE-Ministerial Conference on Ageing 2007

Panel 1: Creating integrated approaches to mainstream ageing

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Distinguished Ministers!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Dear Colleagues!

It is my honour to speak to you as governmental representative of Austria today.

Austria belongs to a long tradition in Mainstreaming Ageing, as the 1st World Assembly on Ageing took place in Vienna in 1982. But also in Austria, awareness building about the ageing agenda has needed a lot of time. Finally it was in 1997, that a special unit for ageing policies was set up. But from the very beginning it was understood as a “competence centre” with the clear defined mandate of mainstreaming ageing through all policy fields.

As you all know from your own experience, with Ageing things are different. It is like the Environmental or Globalization Agenda, an upcoming mainstream theme, concerning every one of us, but rather anybody wishes to imagine its effective consequences. The rising proportion of older persons has been starting to restructuring the socio-economic and cultural landscape of our societies in a similar dramatic way as the meanwhile visible implications of earth-warming-up.

Or as it is lead out in para 15 of MIPAA: “...Whereas specific policies will vary according to country and region, population ageing is a universal force that has the power to shape the future as much as globalization...”

And we think older persons as the most experienced age group can play a decisive role as active participants in this restructuring process, especially in the safeguarding of social cohesion.

Now it seems, 25 years after the 1st and 5 years after the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing, that Mainstreaming Ageing has just started to prevail.

In the last years it has been just seriously starting, that scientists in genetics, biomedicine, ethics as well as experts and practitioners in politics, economy, the private and the Non-profit sector begin to think on the manifold consequences of ageing for the individual and for society.

Preparing the National Report on the implementation of MIPAA and RIS we were very impressed about the manifold different studies and projects, which have been started in Austria during the last 5 to 10 years.

Let me shortly report some main aspects of Mainstreaming ageing in Austria along the different tools of an integrated approach as they were recommended by the UN:

1. Data collection and analysis

The first comprehensive “Report on the Situation of Older Persons in Austria” had been commissioned on the occasion of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. This year the second report about the special needs and potentials of very old persons, that are those above 80 years and the most increasing proportion of older persons in Austria, will be finished.

Different analysis observing the relationship between generations, with the aim of demonstrating the unpayable contributions of older persons to their families as well as to society, had been performed, the last one in 2004.

2. Awareness raising, advocacy and education

In the year 1998 the Austrian Federal Senior Citizens Advisory Board, at that time under the presidency of the Federal chancellor and today under the presidency of the Federal minister of social affairs and consumer protection was set up as an instrument for representing the interests of older persons within the policy field. In the year 2000 the Council of Senior Citizens' Organisations, the association of the three greatest organisations of older persons, was upgraded by law to the 4th social partner, which has the same rights as the representatives of employers, employees and farmers.

A network of governmental representatives of older persons on the level of the Austrian provinces had been founded in cooperation with our ageing unit for the exchange of experiences and common efforts in mainstreaming ageing, and meanwhile many local governments have their own councillor of older persons.

A media campaign on the potentials and future perspectives of the so called "youngest target group 50+" introduced the rethinking on Ageing in Austria. But what we definitely further need in this process is the media as a decisive stakeholder:

To present an active and positive view of the privilege of ageing as well as of the necessary framework as a counterpart to all forms of existing

ageism media-training and cooperation on different levels is further needed.

But it is great hope, that the growing initiatives of Life long learning will contribute to develop a positive attitude towards ageing. Adult education institutions already have discovered the fruitful market of older persons in Austria and adapted their programmes for these clients.

In the health field active ageing and life long learning has begun to be seen as a precondition for healthy life styles and preventing or at least delaying the need of care. There are different measures like the anti-smoking-campaign or the financing of early therapy of adiposity, that make us hope, that health insurance in future will invest more money in prevention than in much more expensive treatment of subsequent illness over the life-course.

Likewise we can see a rethinking in economy in recent times. After stopping early retirement in the pension system combating of prejudices and above all of discrimination on grounds of age in working life is needed. As a measure of awareness raising in companies we initiated an award for enterprises having successfully promoted and encouraged older workers, called "Nestor" after the wise old councillor in antique Greece. The goal is to improve the working climate for older workers in a sustainable way and to show the values, knowledge and dignity of older workers in a spirit of active solidarity of generations.

We could observe, that the climate in appreciation of the experience of older workforce changed within the last years in the same extent as enterprises discovered the future market of "silver economy".

Another field for Mainstreaming Ageing in Austria offered the International Year of Volunteers. In all policy efforts to improve infrastructures of volunteering, older persons play an important role as we are aware, that active ageing by volunteering is a manifold contribution to the volunteer itself as well as to society.

3. Tools for performance assessment

The review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA and RIS was the best opportunity for us to assess our policy performance and to define our future priorities.

At the same time the bottom-up approach is realised by the Senior Citizens Advisory Board, who is monitoring and likewise developing our work within a Senior Citizens Action Plan, which is under preparation.

4. Evaluation of current laws and mainstreaming of concerns into new legislation and policies

Age limits in various laws are under discussion in Austria, for example the question of driving licences for older persons. But the most important project and precondition in combating any discrimination on grounds of age is anchoring non-discrimination on grounds of age as a fundamental right within the Austrian constitution. Then nobody ever could be forced in retirement or excluded from participation in political or societal life.

5. Reflection of ageing in the social budget

This is a very difficult and ambitious undertaking. Now-a-days social budgets see older persons as burden and cost factor. But I think in that extent as the “social capital” as capital for social cohesion in society will be quantified and qualified, older persons’ contributions to social budget will become visible.

Austria therefore intends to participate in the OECD project on “social capital” for to assessing the social capital of its intergenerational centres for the cooperation of young and old.

6. National coordination and international cooperation

So I am coming back to the beginning and to the unit of ageing policies, which is responsible for the coordination of mainstreaming ageing in Austria. But we are happy about support and there is the establishment of a “Platform on Ageing” on the way, which is initiated by scientists with the aim of an integrated and coordinated approach of politics, science and practice and we will support this initiative with all our facilities.

Austria also since the 1st World Assembly on Ageing always has actively taken part in international cooperation on ageing and therefore decided together with the government of Spain to contribute to the strengthening of this upcoming challenging policy agenda and of the international cooperation in the follow-up to the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing in the ECE-region.

In the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the Government of Austria and the Executive Secretary of the UNECE agreed in 2003 upon support for the UNECE and its member states in the implementation of the MIPAA and RIS-goals in cooperation with the

UN-affiliated European Centre Vienna (ECV). Hereby it is the task of the ECV, in collaboration with the ECE-secretariat, to establish monitoring indicators as well as tools and networks for cross-sectoral, national and international Mainstreaming Ageing together with a Task Force of interested member states, governmental representatives, non-governmental experts and scientists.

The progress report will be presented to you by the European Centre itself and is available outside on its table as well as the comprehensive analytic publication “Mainstreaming Ageing – Indicators to Monitor Sustainable Policies” which was published on the occasion of this conference. The multidimensional cross-sectoral website www.monitoringris.org has been steadily filled by facts and figures and country profiles of the 56 UNECE member states.

On the official UNECE-Website the Link of the Population Unit to the background facts and figures about the implementation of RIS leads to that website.

According to para 4 of the MoU, “this initiative is initially planned within a time frame of five years of operation. During the fourth year of its initially five year period the UNECE together with all stakeholders will evaluate the status of the initiative and recommend whether it should be renewed, extended or scaled-back, or it should be phased out”.

Austria therefore invites interested governments to take part - on the basis of voluntary contributions - in a broad international cooperation to renew and extend that project, which could neither be managed solely by the ECE-secretariat and its few resources and staff members nor by the initial contributions of Austria and Spain.

Let me therefore invite all interested representatives of member states to contribute to the further development of this project by financial means as well as by substantial representation and participation in the Task Force as well as in the international exchange of experience and mutual support in Mainstreaming Ageing on the national and international level, in cooperation with all stakeholders and especially with the UNECE and the UN-affiliated ECV.

Thank you for your attention.