



UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing León, Spain, November 6-8 2007

NGO representative statement

Panel discussion: Creating integrated approaches to mainstream ageing

The previous political, social and economical situation in Serbia has severely affected the quality of life of elderly people. That, coupled with the rapid growth of the population of the elderly, emphasises the responsibilities of our society to create an environment where the quality of life of older people can be preserved and improved.

Thanks to the democratic changes in Serbia important reform documents, strategies and laws have been developed in recent years. Some of them really recognize older people's issues.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is a valuable example of mainstreaming of ageing, as well as NGO participation in such processes. Preparation of this document was one of the most participatory in our current practice with clear mechanisms for involving NGOs. As a result we were able to enhance mainstreaming of ageing in this document, while the PRSP recognizes the elderly as one of the most vulnerable groups. During the implementation a governmental body was created and given responsibility for the PRSP. Part of its work is on the integration of PRSP aims, including ageing, in planning and budgeting of 6 Ministries and 6 central institutions. This mechanism could potentially be used for mainstreaming ageing in different sectors such as the economy, health, social welfare, trade, labour, finance, infrastructure.

An NGO Focal point for elderly people, included in the PRSP was established in 2007, and now serves as a clear communication channel for our lobby and advocacy efforts to keep elderly people's issues as a priority in PRSP implementation.

The country follows a holistic approach in ageing policies and the **National Strategy on Ageing (NSA)** was adopted in 2006. Civil society organizations united in network HuamanaS strongly influenced bringing the idea of NSA onto the government's agenda.

In Serbia, elderly people's issues and ageing have only just started to be recognized. It is important to continue this process, and to push for the implementation of established policies into practice. In that sense, there are some very clear challenges:

- 1) Lack of funds for implementing the NSA
- 2) Coordination bodies such as the Council for Ageing and Old Age and National Focal Point for Ageing are not sufficiently recognized by policy

and decision makers and therefore it is difficult to keep their focus on the issue of ageing.

- 3) There are a few fields in which ageing is not sufficiently mainstreamed or not mainstreamed at all. Education is one of those as there are not enough programs adapted to elderly people's needs.

Thus, it is very important:

- To increase awareness on the National Strategy on Ageing and promote mainstreaming of ageing in all policies and fields of life, and at all levels.
- To use the process of decentralization and raise awareness about older people's issues at local level, to influence local stakeholders to mainstream ageing in local strategies and plans, and to enable older people participation in these processes. NGOs have created an NGO network, HunmanaS, that currently works on this issue.
- To translate successful mechanisms of NGOs involvement in monitoring and implementing of PRSP into future monitoring and implementation of the NSA
- Since Serbia is a country in the midst of transition, still suffering post-war effects, it is important to prioritise the mitigation of the problems of the most vulnerable among the elderly. However, it should not be forgotten that we deal with a group with differing needs, problems, potential and strengths that must be recognised and accepted. It is important to encourage and educate all stakeholders to extend the fields of their services and activities so that they are aimed at the different needs of older people.

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