

LEON CONFERENCE on AGEING

Panel A: Creating Integrated Approaches to Mainstream Ageing

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Dear Delegates (Introduction)

Before starting my words, I want to thank to the chair for giving me the floor. It is a pleasure having the opportunity to speak to distinguished delegates of this Conference.

As we all have some statistical knowledge about ageing, and possible effects of ageing on many areas of social, economic and cultural life. In that limited time span, I will try to focus on two points about mainstreaming ageing. Firstly, I will focus more on some challenges of developing countries and secondly I will mention a few points about policy dimensions on ageing.

In Madrid (2002) population ageing has been stated as “a universal force that has the power to shape the future as much as globalization”. Now, ageing is a common agenda both for developed countries and developing countries. Often more visible in developed countries, ageing is an issue that needs to be appraised with much significance also in developing countries just like developed countries.

I want to attract the attention on developing countries by highlighting a few critical points. Generally developing countries are at the same time “ageing countries” rather than the “aged countries”. To mainstream ageing in developing countries and to accelerate the policies and programs covering ageing needs more efforts because of a few reasons.

The first reason is that in developing countries total fertility rate is decreasing sharply and so the demographic transition is faster than the developed countries. Developing countries have less time than today’s aged countries for having proper policies for ageing. The period in which the ratio of the population covering the age 65 and over to the total population between the age 0-64 will increase from 7 percent to 14 percent has been calculated for some countries. This period lasts 115 years in France, 85 years in Sweden and 27 years in Turkey. These examples indicate that, compared to the current industrialized countries, developing countries will face the risks and opportunities of ageing within a quite short period.

The second point is that; two major reasons hinder the urgent need for developing policies on ageing. One of the reasons for that is low percentages of elderly population. The developing countries have low percentages of elderly population. But even small percentages means millions of population. For instance, for 2007 the percentage of 60 + people in total population is 8,8 percent. However, the percentage of elderly seems quite low, it corresponds to 6.5 million people, which is bigger than the total population of some European countries. Another reason is that; since developing countries are mostly more traditional societies than advanced capitalist societies, community looks after their elderly through strong informal support mechanisms. So, needy or elderly people do not strike government’s eyes and as a result public sector has not been proactive in the field of ageing policies adequately.

The last point that I want to highlight is a challenge for developing countries. Countries such as France and Japan and other developed countries got a chance to grow rich before they grew old. Today, most developing countries are growing old before they get rich. Although the period for having a certain development level is short comparatively, developing countries have still the chance for using “demographic window of opportunity” by proper economic and social policies in order to be ready for managing the risks and disadvantages of ageing populations.

Dear Distinguished Delegates

After stating some critical aspects about ageing especially by focusing the developed countries, I want to say a few words about policy formulations on ageing.

The population of ageing is not phenomena just related with 60+ or 65+ population. It affects all facets of society, including economic growth, production patterns, health care systems, pension system and so forth. The fact that ageing affects all of the society one way or another enforces us to formulate social and economic policies with an integrated approach. This integrated and holistic approach should cover “productive, successful and independent ageing process” for the elderly, preparation of young population for “active ageing” and economic measures for facing the financial burdens of social security system.

I do not want to go in detail but I want to mention some major social policy options that come to prominence in Turkey as an example. In the coming decades, for education policies, thanks to the declining school age population, the opportunity to invest more on quality, increasing importance of university education and life long learning will be key elements. The employment policies will be formulated within the context of relation between education and employment, and flexible labor market practices will be one of the major policy options. Ageing will not only increase the demand for health services in quantity, but also it will change the demand for quality by transforming the national burden of diseases. So, health policies should take into account the outcomes of ageing, the need for re-organization of services and manpower. And also to focus on preventive health will ensure both more qualified lives for citizens and fewer burdens on health care expenditures. Social security policies will aim to increase the retirement age gradually and to prevent unregistered employment.

To conclude, it should be underlined that, to emphasize ageing policies do not mean to de-emphasize other social economic problems. We are not in a position to determine the trade-offs between ageing policies and other policy areas. The key element for better policy making for ageing societies is; to integrate an ageing perspective for all realms of social and economic perspective instead of having ageing specific policies, programs and budgets.

Before ending my words I want to reiterate my pleasure to speak to the valuable and distinguished experts, I believe that this meeting will end up with fruitful outputs.