

31. oktober 2007

Oplæg om active ageing til brug for konferencen i Leon, den 6. – 8. november.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ageing is high on the political agenda in Denmark. The focus is strongly on ensuring that we all have the opportunity to age under secure conditions and in a dignified manner as citizens in society.

Danish ageing policy is based on fundamental principles of security, respect for the individual and influence and autonomy. In Denmark, we have worked extensively according to these principles throughout a number of years. Quality and free choice of service provider and legal protection are also elements of Danish ageing policy.

Security

Security is a crucial element. Regardless of who you are and how you live your life you must be able to

embark on old age and feel secure. There is a safety net, when you can no longer make it on your own. I wish to underline that getting older does not automatically mean that you cannot manage on your own. In Denmark we have about 600,000 older persons who live independently and 220,000 who receive personal and practical help. So the number not receiving help by far outnumbers those who do.

Respect for the individual

The importance of respecting people's diversity and individual needs and wishes has been emphasised. Growing old is not synonymous with automatically belonging to a special group with special needs. On the contrary, focus must be on older people as individuals – just like any other age group: they are integrated people with very different life stories, needs and resources.

Influence and autonomy

Another focus area has been to keep older people active and thus to increase their influence on their own lives.

Older people enjoy greater autonomy and have more options of ways in which to organise their old age. Older people in need of care may for instance choose freely where in the country they want to live. And they have a legal right to reside with their spouses in a nursing home.

Rehabilitation, prevention and working longer

Assistance takes the form of support to self-help, but of course with supplementary assistance to those who are unable to manage on their own and to support active measures in order to enable and encourage the recipients in the best possible way.

There has also been a strong emphasis on training and prevention in recent years. Ensuring a satisfying old age begins long before the older person requires day-to-day help – it includes focusing on lifestyle, but it also focuses on the ability to remain party to the labour market.

For quite some time now it has been debated how older persons could best fulfil their day as active retired persons - also as working persons.

There is a lack of manpower on the labour market in Denmark, and in order to have an even higher level of employment than we have to day, it will be necessary to look out for alternative ways to find it.

All hands are needed on the labour market, also the hands of seniors that are approaching or beyond pensionable age, but who wish to make an active contribution – be it modest or moderate.

The alternative ways could include provisions that make it possible for older persons to continue working – if they so wish - without their pension being reduced - also those who have already retired, but wish to get a financial supplement to the pension by coming back on the labour market in one way or another.

In other words one thing would be to create greater financial incentives to remain on the labour market, another to develop policies that take senior's abilities and well-being into consideration.

It has been a prevailing theme in Europe for years how to make people work longer and thus retain a high rate of employment and secure the economy.

Measures should be implemented to make it attractive for people approaching 60/65 not to think of leaving the labour market “too early”, that is before the present ordinary pensionable age and to have those over 65 stay.

However, it is not only a matter of thinking in economic terms to be in search of labour among the older persons.

There is evidence that older persons wish to remain active on the labour market, preferably of course on special conditions as for example a stable level of social pension and - that the place of work pays attention to the working environment and create special working arrangements for the ageing workforce.

Last year the Danish Parliament acted on these trends and made a broad, political agreement on welfare - the main targets of which were to remove the barriers for people to stay longer on the labour market. The agreement contained concrete proposals for later withdrawal from the labour market. One of the concrete proposals now adopted was to increase ordinary

pensionable age by 2 years over a 3-year period as from 2024.

When it comes to active ageing outside the labour market Denmark is, we believe, very much at the front as regards initiatives.

There are many indications that tomorrow's ageing population will act on their own impetus. The current generation of older people is already showing a clear tendency towards becoming increasingly physically active. This trend will continue, and we do all we can to provide for good and viable options for continued physical activity.

Other aspects

But ageing policy encompasses other ways to retain the wealth of resources that older people possess and not only talk about what society can do for older people.

Getting old does not mean having nothing to offer. On the contrary! Older people are fantastic resources for their families, friends, acquaintances and for society in general. They possess valuable knowledge and experi-

ence. And we must allow them to make use of these resources, as for instance through participation in councils and associations that have been set up to enable older citizens to actively influence their everyday lives.

The “senior citizens council” is set up to advise the local government on ageing policy matters. The senior citizens council enhances co-determination and co-responsibility of the older citizens in the municipality. The senior citizens council gives older people a formalised access to discuss and supervise the contents and form of the local authority’s ageing policy.

The local government must also ensure that “complaints boards” are established. Through cooperation and dialogue with the local government, the complaints boards help ensure that all tasks are performed in keeping with the local government’s aims and standards.

There are also “user and relatives” committees, in connection with care homes and assisted living accommodation. They create a forum for cooperation between residents and management, and older active

residents may thus influence their every day life though these committees.

So in short - how do we make it possible for people in Denmark to stay active as they get older?

- by removing barriers to staying on the labour market
- through self-help, rehabilitation and prevention
- through influence on one's own situation within a secure framework.

Thank you for your attention.