



United Nations

UNECE Weekly

Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 347 — 23-27 November 2009

UNECE LAUNCHES POLICY BRIEFS ON AGEING

Population ageing is one of the biggest challenges of our century. While working age adults currently make up the largest share of the population in the UNECE region and percentages of dependent children and older adults are relatively small, this situation is changing rapidly. In Europe, there are now 4.4 persons of working age per one person 65 or older. By 2025, there will be 3.1 and by 2050 only 2.1.

To help its member States make the appropriate policy responses, UNECE is launching a series of **Policy Briefs on Ageing**. Drawn from the latest insights in research, the **Briefs** highlight strategies for policymakers and offer good practice examples for the variety of policy contexts found in the UNECE region.

The series opens with four Policy Briefs:

Mainstreaming Ageing

Population ageing has far-reaching implications across all spheres of society. Ageing-related issues therefore need to be integrated into all policy fields to bring societies and economies into harmony with demographic change.

Among the tools and techniques suggested in this **Policy Brief** are comprehensive national ageing strategies and action plans.

The **French** plan “*Bien vieillir*”, for example, tackles ageing and its consequences from different angles simultaneously, suggesting strategies in the areas of prevention, health and living environments of older persons, including infrastructure, technical aids and urban development.

Information exchange between stakeholders is another crucial ingredient for mainstreaming ageing.

The LinkAge programme in the **United Kingdom** brings together local authorities with their partners in government, health and the voluntary and community sectors to jointly develop and test different methods of providing information to individual older persons and service providers. This approach has led to reduced duplication, better targeting and increased cost-effectiveness.

The **Brief** also explains the participatory approach, in which all age groups are equally involved in designing, implementing and evaluating ageing-related policies and programmes.

An example from **Lithuania** shows how this worked well in one research project: with the help of a heterogeneous drafting team, good coverage of the target group could be ensured, including older persons in both rural and urban areas, older persons living alone, with their families or in institutions.



Gender Equality, Work and Old Age

Elderly women outnumber elderly men in all countries of the UNECE region. As women live longer than men, many become widows and have little income after their partner's death. Their poverty in old age reflects gender disadvantages during their life courses.

Women have career breaks for childbearing or caring; they earn less and work shorter hours or do more informal work. All these factors contribute to their generally lower pension levels.

This **Brief** suggests measures to account for such differences when drafting pension laws.

The **United Kingdom**, for example, did a gender impact assessment when introducing new pension legislation in 2007 and 2008.

In **Germany**, mothers and fathers can have their child-rearing periods credited towards their pensions.



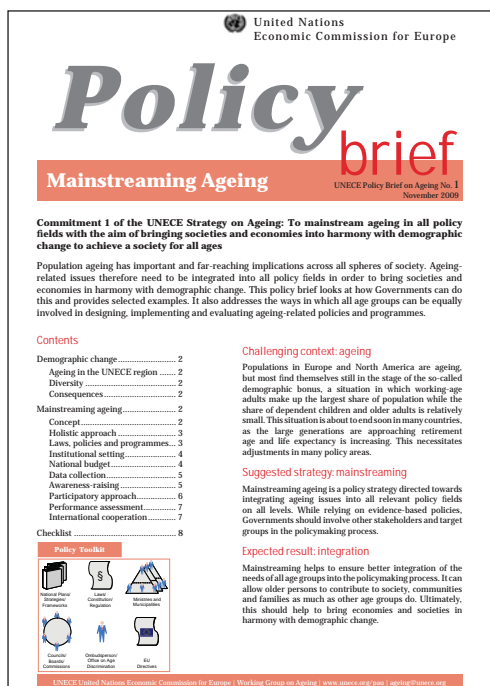


Other measures aim at increasing women's labour market participation through making it easier to reconcile work and family life.

Measures proven to be successful include greater flexibility of working hours and a tax system that offers incentives to women to earning an income. Access to high-quality child care is also important.

It has also proven helpful to provide assistance to women caring for older or disabled family members.

For example, **Austria** introduced a Family Hospice Leave programme in which persons providing care to dying family members or seriously ill children can be released from work for up to nine months. They continue to be fully covered in terms of labour and social law entitlements, and may receive partial compensation for lost income during that time.



Older Persons as Consumers

Given their accumulated income, older persons have significant purchasing power, which is backed up by the State pensions that all UNECE countries provide, although at greatly varying levels.

Companies across the region are encouraged to realize the potentials of products and services tailored to the needs of older persons. Products should be accessible and usable regardless of consumers' age, individual skills, education or cultural background. A "design for all ages" should apply as well to public transport, urban development and housing.

A number of good examples can be found in the region. The **Czech Republic** provides grants to carriers to acquire low-floor vehicles or vehicles with built-in facilities to make boarding easier for disabled persons and persons with limited mobility.

Romania has introduced tenant protection measures for older persons: they are specially protected from eviction and are entitled to wintertime allowances for maintenance and heating.

Representation in policymaking should also be taken into account: for instance, aided by the input of older persons, the **Austrian** Consumer Policy Forum has enhanced regulations to protect them against misleading or fraudulent sales practices.

Participation and Integration of Older Persons

To realize the overarching goal of a "society for all ages", countries need to enhance older persons' participation in social, political and economic life and improve their access to transport, appropriate housing and cultural activities. Older persons should be empowered to pursue their interests and hobbies and to engage with friends and relatives.

One priority should be addressing practical barriers to transport which is either too expensive or too difficult to access.

The Emeryt Pensioner Foundation in **Poland**, for example, provides transport at favourable rates to poor, older or sick persons to attend medical examinations and consultations, meet with public authorities, visit friends or go shopping.

Volunteering has proved to be a good way to enhance the integration of older persons. It should involve both volunteering for and volunteering by older persons, to allow all generations to receive assistance and to use their experiences and skills to help others.

Germany is using this approach in its multi-generation houses programme. These centres offer inexpensive services and support in daily activities, for example shopping and cleaning assistance for older persons as well as services to families, children and adolescents by older persons, including child care or help with homework.



The Policy Briefs can be downloaded from the UNECE website:
http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Policy_briefs/Welcome.html
 For more information contact Andres Vikat (pau@unece.org)