

Statement

der Parlamentarischen Staatssekretärin bei der
Bundesministerin für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend

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I. Expert Panel der 4th UNECE-Ministerial Conference on
Ageing: "A sustainable Society for all Ages"

Subject: Recognizing the Potential of Older Persons

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"CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY"

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here and to share our experiences in Germany.

[1. New Images of ageing]

Politics for and with elderly people is one of the core topics for the future of our society.

Debates about demographic change indicate, that the future has already begun!

It truly is high time to act now instead of simply discussing opportunities and challenges.

This is why the German federal government has developed a comprehensive demographic strategy.

We need contemporary images of what age and life as a person of age, look like.

This is the only way to tackle opportunities and challenges of demographic change.

For far too long, we have viewed old age as consisting of illness, of a need for care and of imminent death.

For some time now, we have been getting used to seeing elderly people who are committed, who care for their grandchildren, who support refugees or assist as senior experts, who exercise or who discover their artistic talent.

Today we know that old age is as diverse as our society.

These positive, well balanced images of old age are becoming more and more popular.

I am thrilled, that the German government's regularly published reports on the elderly population played an important part in that process.

[2. Gaining Years for voluntary involvement]

Elderly people today get to enjoy a longer life.

They are sound in mind and body.

They are well educated and active.

They want to live a full and independent life.

They want to take part in our society and they want to have some influence.

Many elderly people use their life and professional experiences to volunteer for a variety of causes.

They pass on their treasure trove of knowledge to the younger generation by committing in voluntary activities.

In Germany, the best example for that are our voluntary services.

They are open and welcoming to all generations.

About 11 % of the volunteers are over 50.

They are involved in social, ecological, cultural fields as well as in sports clubs.

Thousands of volunteers helped to welcome the refugees in summer 2015 by collecting donations of clothes and other goods.

Many of them are still committed. They spend time with refugee children and also assist them and their parents in learning German.

They support refugees in finding housings and in dealing with the authorities.

The 2nd government report on voluntary commitment has impressively shown that elderly people do not just benefit from volunteer support.

No, in fact more and more frequently they are supporters themselves.

[3. Finding new ways to get involved]

This is why we need new and flexible ways of voluntary commitment with a framework which accommodates specific needs of elderly volunteers.

We have, therefore, established a round table on “Active Ageing – Organizing Transitions”.

We invited science, welfare organizations and representatives of the municipalities as well as representatives of organizations for the elderly, especially the Federal Association of Senior Citizens' Organizations.

This Federal Association is an umbrella association for over 100 organizations, which benefit our elderly population in Germany.

The participants of the round table develop and clearly define strategies for action in 3 working groups. ("Active Ageing Index", "Education in and for old age" and "Shaping Transitions").

We are very proud, that the European Commission awarded the round table with the price for "Excellence in promoting innovation for active and healthy ageing" in summer 2016.

The European Commission also accepted it as a reference site.

[4. Central fields of political action for a self-determined life and the rights of the elderly]

Many elderly people are excluded from essential components of digital services. In that area we have to act.

New ways and concepts are needed to raise elderly people's potential through digitalization and to improve the chances for a longer self-determined life.

Another important field of political action for an independent self-determined life even at a very old age is shared housing.

We also need more multi-generational living arrangements, where the generations support each other.

The Federal Ministry for Seniors supports about 30 projects.

Housing companies, associations, municipalities and other initiatives are working together.

They provide shared housing and/or intergenerational housing projects

which are inclusive and gender-sensitive

for property owners and for tenants, with higher, middle and lower income.

Besides more age-appropriate residential services, we need so called "caring communities" on a local level as an elderly-friendly social infrastructure.

This includes:

- multi-generational community centers,
- affordable care providers and household services,
- access to medical services, and
- the support of volunteers.

In doing so, we can ensure that the elderly can stay in their familiar surroundings without having to move out of their general neighborhood.

We need to create good living conditions within the municipalities.

Here is where the federal government, the states and municipalities have to work closer together.

This is important because the 7th government report on the elderly population clearly indicates, that the regional and social imbalance is increasing on a local level due to the shift in demographics.

Thereby, special attention also needs to be paid to the unequal living conditions of women and men.

For a long time, general research on ageing has not made it obvious, but the current government report clearly pointed out these gender inequalities:

- There are more elderly women than men who live alone.
- On average, fewer of the elderly women were gainfully employed.
As a result they have a lower retirement income.
- They raised children, ran their households and provided care for their own elderly parents and for their partners.

All these activities have little effect on pensions, despite a few compensation mechanisms within our social security system.

But also the social and regional imbalance in Germany has become so strong at this point, that several municipalities will no longer be able to guarantee social provisions in the future.

This is why the current government report on the elderly population recommends to boost support to the municipalities.

We can only take advantage of opportunities to the full potential when the federal government, the states and the municipalities tackle the demographic change together.

Thank you so much for your attention.