

Roundtable 1:

Realising the potential of living longer: a longer working life and ability to work

Mr. President,

Madam Secretary General,

Ministers,

- First of all, let me convey the best wishes of the Austrian Minister for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Mr. Alois Stöger, who deeply regrets not being able to take part in this conference due to unexpected political developments at home.
- He regrets this all the more as he has just given the go-ahead for an innovative pilot project on the employment of people aged 50+, 50,000 of whom are currently in long-term unemployment in Austria. The new programme will fund 20,000 jobs for this target group in local government and non-profit organisations, enabling these employers to create meaningful jobs and provide important additional services, such as administrative support for schools, assisting older people in their everyday lives, and fostering social networks at local level.
- But let me start from the beginning. Based on the concept of active aging, there is a new level of public discussion on ageing in Austria, and the emphasis has, indeed, shifted from the shortcomings of older people to their potential.
- When it comes to full participation in all aspects of life, the **employment of “younger old people”** is of critical importance. Allow me to outline some of our activities in this context.
- Awareness-raising about “work and health” is promoted from an early stage in Austria, as are preventive health programmes. Since 2010, “**fit2work**” has been in place as a low-threshold counselling programme for companies as well as individuals. The programme aims to avoid long-term sick leave and prevent early withdrawal from working life for health reasons. Our Ministry is also engaged in the “Healthy Workplaces for All Ages” campaign, together with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.
- The **protection of mental health** in the workplace has recently been reinforced by focusing more attention on excessive mental stress during job evaluations; this is because early withdrawal from the labour market is primarily due to psychological reasons.
- Furthermore, a **campaign by our Public Employment Service** aims to eliminate prejudice about the potential of workers in the 50+ age group when it comes to recruitment practices.
- And the “**Employment Initiative 50+**” provides additional incentives for business to hire, or continue employing, older workers. Funding for this initiative has recently been increased.

- Finally, the Minister of Social Affairs confers a **seal of quality (called NESTOR^{GOLD})** on companies and organisations which are pioneers in intergenerational age management.
 - Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to make one more point here: the highest possible degree of integration of all age groups into the labour market is not only crucial for social inclusion – it is also the best guarantee for safeguarding our social security and pension systems.
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- Let's now look at **three other ways of empowering people to realise their potential**.
 - The first of these is **voluntary work**, an area in which participation is very high in Austria. While 46 percent of all people over the age of 15 are engaged in some kind of voluntary work, the proportion is as high as 55 percent in the 50 to 70 age group. Our ministry supports this growing trend, for example by means of Volunteer Fairs, which are very popular.
 - Secondly, we also see **lifelong learning** as an important tool for fostering social participation. As part of Austria's Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs is taking a number of measures to promote education and training in later life, for example in the field of information and communication technologies.
 - Thirdly, **active participation in the democratic process** is key to ensuring social inclusion. Older people have a strong voice in Austria through the Senior Citizens' Council, an umbrella association for different senior citizens' organisations. The Council is considered a social partner, just like other organised interests such as workers and employers. And like other social partners, it is consulted on new legislation.
 - It was on the initiative of senior citizens' representatives that our National Action Plan, entitled "Aging and the Future", was developed and adopted in 2012. This plan comprises an extensive package of measures to support the political, economic, cultural and social participation of older people. Its 14 key areas meet all recommendations under the four main goals of the Vienna Ministerial Declaration.
 - Ladies and gentlemen, towards the end of my statement, let me also mention the issue of **human rights**. The Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights for Older People, Ms Rosa Kornfeldt-Matte, stated in her 2016 report that the Madrid International Plan of Action, while containing a number of references to human rights, is not really a human rights tool. Addressing ageing issues mainly from a developmental perspective, it was not designed to comprehensively deal with existing protection gaps.
 - We therefore believe that the UN's Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing should work towards a **comprehensive and systematic framework** for the protection of all human rights in older age, based on the principles of the Madrid Plan and its Regional Implementation Strategy. Austria remains committed to the human rights of older people and will actively participate in the Working Group's 9th session next year.
 - Allow me to conclude by thanking the National Focal Points on Ageing for the progress made over the last 10 years. To strengthen this work and acknowledge the growing importance of demographic change, Austria would support upgrading the Working Group on

Ageing to a regular **sectoral UNECE Committee on Population**. This would be resource neutral for the Secretariat's budget but could secure stable working conditions during the 5-year review period.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for listening.