

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Welcome address
by**

**Ms. Olga Algayerova
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing

**21 September 2017
Lisbon**

Your Excellency Minister Vieira da Silva, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

I welcome you all, representatives from member States, experts of the scientific community and members of civil society, as well as colleagues from international organisations, to this Ministerial Conference on Ageing.

The theme of this meeting is: “*Realizing the potential of living longer to achieve a sustainable society for all ages*”.

It is an invitation to seize the opportunities of population ageing and respond to its challenges.

Over the next two days, our discussions will focus on three dimensions:

- Recognize the potential of older persons,
- Encourage longer working life and ability to work, and
- Ensure ageing with dignity:

Let us take a closer look at all of them. Recognizing the potential of older persons begins with recognising the enormous and often overlooked contributions that older persons make to our societies. Take, for example, the unpaid childcare that many grandparents and older family members provide. It enables parents to combine employment with family life. Outside the family, older persons volunteer countless hours to support the important work of charities, clubs and associations that strengthen our communities, democracies and economies.

Or consider the growing “silver economy”, where older persons generate wealth as entrepreneurs and employees. They stimulate innovation and new niche markets as consumers, in sectors as diverse as technology, travel and health. But it is not only about purchasing power. There is also the enormous wealth of knowledge, the insights and experience that older people hold on how to produce goods and services. To draw on this knowledge enhances quality of life and improves efficiency.

These are only a few examples of active ageing. However, recognizing the wide-ranging societal contributions of older persons is not enough. This is not a time for “business-as-usual”. We need to tap the potential for building a truly sustainable society for *all* ages. Much of it is underutilized or even undiscovered today.

We have barriers to overcome. The term “ageism” has become familiar to most of us. And yet, this type of discrimination receives much less public attention or action, compared to other types, such as racism and sexism. I therefore welcome the initiative of the World Health Organization to develop a Global Campaign against Ageism that we discussed over breakfast this morning, and invite all of you to join forces in this effort.

Another track of discussion will focus on encouraging longer working life and ability to work. This is at the core of adapting our societies to the implications of population ageing.

Postponing retirement is a first step. But our strategies need to go beyond pension reforms. All sectors and age groups must have an active role in creating the right conditions for a longer and satisfying working life. In the labour market, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. As countries define plans and strategies adapted to specific national contexts, we can learn from a wide range of enabling initiatives. The examples are many: Take for instance tailored assistance for older jobseekers; financial incentives to recruit and retain older professionals; and awareness raising campaigns that highlight the benefits of experienced older workers.

Another important strategy is to encourage flexible working possibilities that facilitate transitions between employment, training, caregiving, rehabilitation and labour-market re-entry after periods of absence from employment. Naturally, employers are central to making this possible.

Similarly, the promotion of lifelong training is essential to ensure that skills remain relevant over the course of a professional lifetime and changing demands of the labour market

Last, but not least, we will address the topic of ageing with dignity. To improve quality of life in later years, we must enhance the autonomy and self-determination of older people. This includes enabling independent living, continued social participation and connectedness, even as health declines. Age-friendly environments and better integration of health and social care services are important steps in this direction.

The dignity of older persons must be protected. This is particularly important where physical and cognitive decline make them dependent on the support and care of others. Unfortunately, there are many cases of abuse of older persons including acts of physical, psychological, sexual and financial harm or distress. WHO estimates that elder abuse affects nearly 16% of people aged 60 or older worldwide. Decisive action is needed to prevent abuse before it happens and to support its victims. The appointment of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons has been an important achievement by the international community. (We will hear her remarks on the human rights implications of MIPAA in a video message shortly.)

In 2012, in Vienna, UNECE member States endorsed the concept of active ageing. I am very pleased to see that many national strategies and policy frameworks have since been adopted to put this concept into action. We have convened in Lisbon this week to review what has been achieved over the last five years in implementing the goals of the Vienna Declaration.

Population ageing is a policy challenge that we all face. This task becomes easier if we work together. Regional cooperation facilitates cross-national learning and allows us to share good

practice on common challenges. I welcome your continued commitment to the regional cooperation mechanisms that we have put in place. The strong high-level presence here in Lisbon bears testimony to it.

The UNECE Working Group on Ageing, established nearly 10 years ago, provides a unique intergovernmental platform for international cooperation and exchange on effective policies and good practices in the implementation of MIPAA. One example is the series of Policy Briefs on Ageing. You will find a copy of the most recent Policy Brief on the USB stick that you received in your conference pack. It covers the topic of this conference.

UNECE also collaborates with national governments to assist with the mainstreaming of ageing. Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia have already prepared roadmaps on the issue.

In closing, let me say a word about the importance of measurement and monitoring that allows us to identify problems, but also discover untapped potential. UNECE is very actively engaged in advancing ageing-related statistics. Many of you are also familiar with the Active Ageing Index, which is a flagship project in this area. Two side events during this conference will update you on the work done.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Portugal and its Ministry of Labour, Solidarity, and Social Security for hosting this Conference. I would also like to thank the members of the UNECE Working Group on Ageing and all our other partners who share our commitment in working towards a more equitable society for all ages, including the Commission of the European Union, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization and the European Centre for Social Policy and Research.

I wish you all a fruitful and engaging exchange over the next two days, and look forward to the outcomes of the conference.

Thank you.