Economic Commission for Europe
Working Group on Ageing
Ministerial Conference on Ageing
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Outlines of the keynote addresses to the panel discussions of the Ministerial Conference on Ageing

Note by secretariat based on inputs from keynote speakers*

I. Promoting Participation, Non-Discrimination and Social Inclusion of Older Persons

Clemens Tesch-Roemer, German Centre of Gerontology, Berlin (Germany)

1. Population ageing has a profound impact on societies. It affects educational institutions, labour markets, social security, health care, long-term care and the relationship between generations. Active ageing is a central political concept that takes in not only the challenges, but also the opportunities of long-living societies. This includes opportunities for older people to continue working, to stay healthy longer and to contribute to society, for example through volunteering. Active ageing should also promote societal participation, enhance social inclusion and prevent discrimination of older people.

2. Societal and individual goals for active ageing may change across the life course. In middle adulthood active ageing may be equated with continuous labour market participation of older workers, while for older people in retirement active ageing might be better described as productive volunteering and active participation in political, social and community life. Highly important throughout the life course – and gaining relevance with approaching very old age – is non-discriminatory access to social and health services for older persons.

3. Policies on active ageing intending to improve both individual quality of life and societal welfare might use different conceptual and practical tools to improve the opportunities for active ageing. First, societal discourse might reflect the multidimensionality of ageing processes, emphasizing not only risks, but also opportunities for active ageing. Media play an important role in this context and should be encouraged to

* Submitted late due to needs of consultations.
cover the diversity of old age and ageing. Life expectancy increases for both genders, possibly narrowing the gender gap in life span duration. This may induce a change in distribution of tasks over the life span (e.g. increasing labour force participation of women; increasing domestic labour force participation of men). Educational processes concerning life-long development starting early in life yield positive effects which will be visible throughout the life course. But also in middle and late adulthood interventions for active ageing are effective (e.g. changing health behaviour, stimulating volunteer activities). Intervention studies demonstrate that an increase in volunteering activities may lead to positive changes in health and social integration.

4. Active ageing needs a secure base. Health, integration, and participation in late life can be fostered by social policies. Results from comparative surveys show that the extent of welfare state support – through social security systems like unemployment protection, pension system, health care system, and long-term care system – seems to be connected to opportunities for active ageing. Although the instruments for building social security differ between societies, governments may provide regulation for the combined effects of different stakeholders. Promoting participation and social inclusion of older citizens might also help to increase their chances to take an active part in society.

II. Creating an Enabling Environment for Health, Independence and Ageing in Dignity

Susanne Iwarsson, Centre for Ageing and Supportive Environments (CASE), Lund University, Sweden

5. Traditionally, we mainly focus on the ageing individual and population – much less on environments and even less on the interaction between the person and the environment. Independence in daily functioning and the well-being of older European citizens in the future will be significantly enhanced through an improved understanding of the interrelations between ageing persons and their environments in areas such as home and out-of-home environments, intertwined with the impact of technology and products. In order to ensure full integration and participation of older people in society, the societal infrastructure must be accessible and enable activity and participation in areas such as housing, public facilities and public transportation. Based on current research on person-environment interactions, there is evidence that combinations of functional limitations as related to the environmental barriers present are the major contributors to the generation of accessibility problems. Actors in physical planning need more knowledge on functional capacity and how the process of ageing interacts with physical environmental barriers in the generation of accessibility problems.

6. The home is the major place for ageing and thereby also an important arena for the provision of social services and health care. While objective aspects of housing such as housing standard and accessibility are important, based on current research on home and health we know that perceived aspects of housing are crucial for activity, participation and health. There is a complex interplay between objective and perceived aspects of housing and health, with marked differences among sub-groups of older people. While our knowledge on such dynamics is insufficient, there is a need for more individualized housing counselling and housing provision. With this follows needs for the development of evidence-based social services and health care that can be provided in different forms of housing, carefully adapted to the individual situation.

7. Against the strong research evidence of the positive effects of physical and mental activity to support active and healthy ageing, there is an urge for foresighted health promotion and preventive strategies, going beyond those of housing and care provision.
Most important, mobility is often compromised by functional decline. Assistive technology that supports mobility and physical activity has seen much development, but in several European countries there is low awareness of what the use of mobility devices would add to quality of life and well-being, and the provision systems are not well developed.

8. Adding to the complexity of the process of ageing, with current medical advances larger proportions of the population will live for many years with chronic diseases and disabilities, coming with even larger challenges for society to create environments enabling activity, participation, independence, and ultimately - health.

III. Stimulating intergenerational dialogue and solidarity between the generations: a shared responsibility

Irene Hoskins, Immediate Past President, International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

9. Much has been written about the importance of the social contract and of fostering solidarity across and between generations by promoting intergenerational dialogue as well as by identifying those intergenerational factors that, instead of separating generations, firmly bind them together.

10. While the desire to enjoy and adhere to basic human needs and values, such as intra-family solidarity, care and love, continues to be a normal human response across families, societies and generations, the reality is often different when it comes to filling the needs of older persons where gender and age in particular plays an important role and may obstruct full participation in society.

11. A recent UNECE publication on Intergenerational Family Relationships in Ageing Societies (Pearl A. Dykstra, Department of Sociology, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 2010) concluded that population ageing is not only about older persons but differentially affects people of all ages and both sexes. Ageing societies are embedded in a complex web of vertical and horizontal ties... Further, it is important to address explicitly the ways in which legal and policy arrangements constitute differential opportunities and constraints for men and women across generations in families. While it is often presumed that intergenerational solidarity is based primarily on income transfers in the form of social security and pensions from the younger generation to the older generation, there is also evidence that both economic and non-economic transfers are occurring in the reverse direction.

12. Against this background of both vertical and horizontal ties as well as the gender perspective, there are four areas in particular which deserve attention: (1) optimizing opportunities and fulfilling the needs of different generations, including continuing education (life-long learning); (2) access to paid work without age discrimination as well as access to satisfying volunteer opportunities; (3) the rights, needs, and opportunities for older workers; and (4) intergenerational family relationships, voluntarism, and caregiving within and across generations. All of these areas are particularly sensitive to gender implications and it is necessary to apply both a gender lens and age lens when thinking about policies to address opportunities for older men and women across the generations.