

**Rapporteur's summary/Marja Vaarama**

**Panel discussion between Ministers and Civil Society representatives on**

**“Stimulating intergenerational dialogue and solidarity between the generations: a shared responsibility”**

This summary of the deliberations of the session presents briefly the key messages that emerged quite uniformly from the statements.

Key messages:

**Ageing is a great achievement in human development and can create a positive social transformation**

Ageing is often seen as a threat but focus should be on its positive side and the positive opportunities it creates. The active ageing concept and strategies have proven to be effective elements in efforts to adapt to demographic change and fiscal constraints. It is also in line with the dignity and rights of older persons. Intergenerational solidarity enables individuals to reach their full potential during various stages of their life course, from younger to older ages.

**Intergenerational solidarity is well alive in ECE region but takes different manifestations at different societal levels and different cultural contexts**

Intergenerational solidarity is quite strongly present in the region but there is potential for improvement. It is useful and highly policy relevant to understand the nature of intergenerational solidarity at different societal levels, macro, meso and micro levels and their interactions.

At the micro level, the role of family has been, is, and will be central. Mutual exchange of support and care between generations continues within Europe but takes different forms. There are different contexts in this regard. In the Nordic countries much focus and investment has been directed to public services and home care in order to enable older people to continue living at their own homes. In the South of Europe the role of the family is more central. In both of these contexts the share of older people living in institutional settings is lowest in Europe (3.3%). The assumption that public provisions would decrease the interest in family responsibilities seems to be invalid.

At the meso-level, communities and CSOs have an important role. However, it must be asked to what extent the community, NGOs and families can shoulder more responsibilities during times of crises when the public sector tends to cut services.

## **The welfare state is a key instrument for distributing rights and responsibilities within and between generations fairly**

At the macro level, there is a need to redesign functional and functioning care regimes and pension systems. However, at the same time it is vitally important to take into consideration the gender dimension in order not to enforce gender inequalities. Similarly, policies should avoid solutions that are seen to be unfair to some age groups. Particularly the young and the old should not be put in interest conflict through policies that discriminate either groups in e.g. labor market and taxation.

However, social sustainability depends on the readiness of all generations to act in the spirit of solidarity towards each other. Sustainable development is an agenda for equity within and between generations. Inequalities threaten social cohesion and economic development. Economic development should not be evaluated on the basis of GDP growth only, but by measures that include the sustainability of natural resources and pension systems.

The welfare state has been designed to distribute rights and responsibilities within and between generations in a way that is recognized fair. This is the root of intergenerational solidarity. Both young and old people who are at risk of poverty are in need for social security and essential services and have thus the same interest to defend universalistic approach to social security and services. However, there tends to be a democracy deficit and the voices of the young and old is not heard properly.

## **Abolish all direct and indirect age-based discrimination**

There are forms of direct discrimination in some pension legislation. Direct social discrimination and violation of rights and dignity of older persons is also evident. Indirect discrimination results from environments, products and practices that are not adjusted to serve older people on equal basis as other population groups. Designing age-friendly environments would benefit all generations.

In the case of youth there are several age-related directly discriminatory practices e.g. in the labor market such as age specific minimum wages. Indirect discrimination of youth takes place through the massive unemployment and underemployment of youth. No job now - no pension later. This situation is not conducive to intergenerational, solidarity as youth feels their future is being stolen.

## **Need to evaluate (ex ante) the generation impacts of policies**

The graying of our populations resulting from falling birth rates and longer life expectancies will compel all countries in the Region to reexamine many of their public policies, including guarantees for retirement, universal access to health care, access to higher education and training, equal access to employment for both men and women, protection of the environment as well as policies in many other domains.

All ECE- countries should re-examine their public policies for their impact on the distribution of rights and responsibilities between generations. An intersectoral, intergenerational and holistic life cycle approach is needed as a framework. For instance, older women are at high risk of poverty as they tend to have shorter employment career because of family responsibilities during their life cycles. Pension reforms and other social protection system reforms must not enforce and worsen this inequalizing tendency.

### **Positive welfare policies should be inclusive of all generations**

An integrated approach to ageing as a natural sequence of human life cycle requires a longer term, intergenerational perspective. The vision of an inclusive and equitable society for all ages implies policies and practices for sharing responsibilities within and between generations through fair procedures.

### **Build social sustainability through coalitions, dialogue and partnerships**

There are too few opportunities and systems for intergenerational dialogue. However, dialogue between generations alone is not enough. Innovative models for participation and intergenerational coalitions for joint action are needed. A fair and sustainable social contract between generations calls for both dialogue and concrete action.

### **Act now for a sustainable future**

The session underlined that facilitating dialogue between generations is a necessity but dialogue is not enough. Action is needed now to create coalitions for change towards sustainable future.