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REPORT

On the outcomes of discussions by the third expert panel at the UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) Ministerial Conference on Ageing

Topic of the Conference: ENSURING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES: PROMOTING QUALITY OF LIFE AND ACTIVE AGEING

Brief summary of reports

The third expert panel discussed ‘Creating an enabling environment for health, independence and ageing in dignity’, given the experience and capabilities of the countries in priority areas of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The discussions took place on 19 September 2012 in Vienne, Austria.

The Expert Panel comprised of government officials such as departmental heads from the Ministries of Labour and Social Protection: Nadezhda Uskova (Russia), Reeli Sirotkina (Estonia), Dieter Hackler (Germany), Ministry/Department of Health: Edwin Walker (U.S.), representatives of research institutions: Susanne Iwarrson (Professor at the Lund University, Sweden), Olga Mikhailova (Executive Director, St. Petersburg Institute of Bioregulation and Gerontology, Russia), as well as civil society representatives: Dirk Jarré (NGO Forum Coordinator) and Saodat Kamalova (Director, Central Asian Gerontological Centre, Tajikistan).

Manfred Huber, WHO Coordinator in Europe, participated in the Expert Panel as moderator. His participation was essential and weighty as WHO is a guiding and coordinating organization in health sector which is responsible for setting health norms and standards, developing health research plans and is on top of health issues across the globe within the United Nations.

Susanne Iwarrson, Professor, Lund University, Sweden, was a keynote speaker. In her speech she noted the importance of the environment where a person lives and ages. Home environment is of special importance: it is a person’s home, environment, relationship in the family and beyond the family. It was also noted that home is the key arena where a person lives and ages, it is a place where he/she receives care, social and health services.

Older people want to live as in the young age though certain limitations emerge in elder age. Therefore people around and community should appreciate the importance and the need to put in place the infrastructure where an elder people will live. Satisfaction of a person with housing requires comprehensive approach which takes into account his or her needs, especially physical needs.

It is encouraging that in Europe there is a Plan of Action on Ageing, but the existing knowledge is insufficient in terms of complex interlinkage between the available and required aspects of housing and health. This dictates the need of individual consultation during construction and provision of housing, which will help to use additional technologies for maintaining physical activity and mobility of an old person and will also provide for reasonable social and health services which can be provided in different types of housing.

Olga Mikhailova, Executive Director, St. Petersburg Institute of Bioregulation and Gerontology, Russia, **presented the results of the Institute’s studies and their usage in practice.** She noted that population ageing was also a serious issue for the Russian Federation and has given occasion for **developing the Demographic Policy Paper on Ageing until 2025**

and the **Regional Policies** which are implemented through close contacts between public and business sectors. Programmes are ongoing to provide older people with **such services** as ‘Panic Button’ and ‘Social Taxi’. The International Forum ‘Elder Generation’ established under the aegis of the Ministry of Health has become important as it is a platform for experts representing the government, research institutions, community-based organizations and actively involves older people as well. Such collaboration facilitates sharing of experience and knowledge both at the national and international levels.

Nadezhda Uskova, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Russia, reported that a strong focus is now made in the country on creating enabling healthy environment in the society and for this there is **political will** and ongoing programme ‘Accessible Atmosphere’ which helps to make priority facilities and infrastructure fit for the needs of older and disabled people. **Health service standards** have been developed and are now operational and there are model apartments for elderly people.

In his speech **Dieter Hackler**, Director General, Department for Senior Citizens, Welfare and Engagement Policies, Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Women, Senior Citizens and Youth, Germany, informed that in Germany all conditions had been created for elder people to maintain their health, independence, economic security and dignity. There is a commission in Germany, Portraits of Ageing, which helps to form these pictures of ageing in people’s minds taking into account various forms of ageing. (This programme is under Angela Merkel’s control). The policy of **the Demography of Population Ageing** has been developed and is now actively implemented in the country. Each age is important for the government. There are over 500 houses of generations where people can take advice and receive responses to any question of interest.

Edvin Walker, Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, noted in his speech that *the U.S. laws maintaining health and economic security of older people are effective and that the laws support independence and dignity of each person in old age. A system of home care by unofficial assistants is well-established and the government supports these people in their initiative, which is very important to improve quality of home care. The National Programme of Individual Approach to Health Maintenance, Reduction of Chronic Diseases and Homecare has been developed.*

Reeli Sirotkina, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Estonia, believes that provision of money is not the most important element for ensuring health, quality of life, independence and dignity of older people. *The key element for active and quality longevity is the establishment of the system of social services for older people. To address the issue over 40 social services for older people are now provided in the country which are coordinated electronically.*

In his speech **Manfred Huber**, Coordinator, Regional Office for Europe, WHO, Copenhagen (**third expert panel moderator**) touched upon issues related to the importance of staying healthy as a person becomes older as well as prevention of disabilities. He emphasized the importance of arranging long-term professional care in old age and the need for relevant scientific research.

Dirk Jarré, NGO Forum Coordinator, Chairman of the European Federation of the Elderly (EURAG), made an interesting speech. Being a representative of the NGO Forum and working directly with the target audience, he believes that older people want to live as normal people do! They want and this is what should be done! Today is the time of deep transformations in the society and therefore both tangible and intangible needs of people should be taken into account. Tangible needs include housing, preservation of health, nutrition, economic support, health services, and life-long education. Intangible needs are about psychological and emotional

support, love and respect to these people. But all this should start in early childhood and continue throughout the life.

Summary

Thus, based on the reports made one can conclude that the most important factor for improving quality of life and active longevity is the availability of political will in ageing issues in the countries. Political will facilitates and will facilitate optimization of active lifestyle through the preservation of health, participation in social life, provision of social safeguards, prevention of disabilities and creation of enabling environment for successful life. In addition, political will envisages the development of standards for provision of quality services for health protection and creation of appropriate conditions for older people conducive to their independence, even if their have disabilities. Quality of life and dignity of the elderly is also promoted by legal protection, care, necessary health services as well as provision of high quality services through training of social workers and persons involved in unofficial care.