Challenging context

Faced with population ageing, countries in the UNECE region are preparing for growing numbers of older persons receiving pensions and needing health and long-term care services. An important societal adaptation to ageing has been to increase the labour market participation among women and older persons to ensure the sustainability of social security and protection systems. It is now time that regulatory frameworks, financial provisions and services support the equal sharing of paid and unpaid work in families, households and communities between women and men to close prevailing gender gaps in care, employment, earnings and pensions. Unless gender- and age-responsive reforms are addressing the multiple dimensions of gender inequality in ageing societies, women risk to be disproportionately disadvantaged by the consequences of population ageing, facing double and triple shifts of paid, domestic and care work at the detriment of their own health, earnings and savings which can accumulate to a greater risk of poverty, social isolation and unmet care needs in their own advanced age.

Suggested strategies

Advancing gender equality in ageing societies requires an age- and gender responsive societal adaptation to population ageing that focuses on:

Preventing the accumulation of gendered disadvantages over the life course by tackling inequalities at all levels to close gender gaps in education, employment, care, earnings and pensions;

Mitigating the risks resulting from gender inequality among older persons through redistribution and support;

Anticipating the impacts of current reforms on future generations of women and men by mainstreaming age and gender in societal adaptations to demographic change.

Expected results

A gender-responsive societal adaptation to population ageing will ensure that the opportunities and risks of population ageing will be equally shared by women and men, and that women and men can age more equally.

With good practice examples from:

Armenia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Israel, Malta, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.

This policy brief addresses Commitments 8 of the Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (to mainstream a gender approach in an ageing society) and Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).
Introduction

Despite significant policy progress made over the past decades, no country in the UNECE region has so far achieved gender equality. The gaps between women and men have narrowed, but progress is happening at a slow pace. Gender equality means ensuring equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys.

The demographic changes, the growing proportion of older women and men, and the related shrinking of the labour force, bring opportunities as well as risks to the goal of gender equality. An equitable and human-rights-based approach to population ageing cannot be achieved without being sensitive and responsive to the gender relations that shape the life course and the different experiences of ageing for women and men. Gender inequalities, that impact women’ and men’s lives in older age, often result from the disadvantages accumulated over the span of one’s life. A life course perspective is therefore needed to address them.

Building on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the goal of gender equality and the principle of gender mainstreaming in an ageing society were firmly integrated in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA/RIS) for the UNECE region in 2002. Commitment 8 of the strategy is to mainstream a gender approach in an ageing society. The objectives of achieving full equality between women and men in their contribution to the economy, access to social protection and social security systems and responsibility within their families that are enshrined in MIPAA/RIS are aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDGs 1, 3, 5, 8 and 10.

The demographics of population ageing, the derived policy challenges and the policy responses developed by member States in the region have different implications for women and men and there is a risk that gender inequalities might widen as a result. This new brief on gender equality in ageing societies focuses on the challenges that demographic change poses for gender equality and the need to take a gender-responsive inter-generational life-course approach to societal adaptation to population ageing.

Gender and the demographics of the population ageing

Demographic change affects countries across the UNECE region at different pace. While populations in Central Asian countries for instance are still relatively young and growing, the majority of the UNECE countries are ageing. Population ageing is a result of low fertility, growing longevity and, to varying degrees, migration. For instance, in the eastern part of the region, outmigration of the working-age population is an important factor. Persons aged 65 years and older account for almost 17 per cent of the population in the UNECE region in 2020. This proportion is projected to increase to 21 percent by 2030 and to 24 percent by 2050. The proportion of the population over the age of 80 is expected to double over the next thirty years from 4.5 per cent in 2020 to 9 per cent by 2050.

Women outnumber men among the growing proportion of older persons

Women across the UNECE region have a longer life expectancy than men and predominate among the older age cohorts. The gender gap is smaller (3-6 years) in countries with a high overall life expectancy at birth (countries in Western and Northern Europe such as Switzerland with a life expectancy of 86.2 years for women and 83.3 years for men in 2020) and larger in the Baltic states, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine (about 8 years). Presently, Ukraine (77.3 years for women and 69 years for men) and Turkmenistan (72.2 years for women and 66.6 years for men) are among countries with the lowest life expectancy for both women and men in the UNECE region.

---

1. UNECE, 2019a.
2. In 2009, UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 2 on Gender equality, work and old age looked at the commitment of mainstreaming gender in an ageing society with a focus on the link between labour-force participation and social security and reforms necessary to achieve gender equality in older age.
The gender gap in life expectancy is slowly closing, which over the next decades will lead to a greater gender balance among the population over 65 (see Figure 1). At present, women represent 58 per cent of the UNECE population over the age of 65, and 64 per cent of the population aged 80 and older. In 2050, women will represent the 56 per cent in both the population aged 65 and over, and 80 and over. So, in the next 30 years, the gender gap for the age group 65+ will decrease by 2 percentage points, while it will decrease by 8 percentage points for the age group 80+.

Figure 1
Population by age groups, UNECE region, 2020-2050

Families are getting smaller and more people remain childless

Fertility rates in the past decades have been persistently low in the majority of UNECE countries. The average in the region is 1.8 children per woman of reproductive age since 2010, and fertility rates are below replacement level in 49 out of 56 UNECE countries. Women and men tend to delay the birth of their first child and the average age of women at the birth of their first child is steadily increasing: it has gone up from 27 years old in 2010 to 28.3 in 2017. Childlessness appears as one of the insurgent demographic shifts in the region, although with individual and contextual differences. Women’s increased participation in the labour market, economic instability, constraints in combining parenthood and careers, as well as the decreasing number of marriages, are among the obstacles to the realisation of couples’ fertility aspirations. In 2019, between 6 and 9 per cent of older adults did not have children or a spouse in most European countries and the United States. This proportion is expected to increase in future cohorts of older people. Although having a child does not equal support in later life, being childless can affect the amount of support available in later life, as help from children is generally linked to health and well-being in old age.

The percentage of one-parent families is also increasing, due to higher divorce rates, among other reasons. Although men increasingly take care of their children after separation, women constitute the majority of one-parent households. Among the UNECE countries that reported on one-parent households with children in 2017, the percentage of single female parents was over 75 per cent. This is due to cultural and

---

6 UNFPA and UNECE, 2018.
7 UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 04 March 2020.
8 Verdery et al., 2019.
9 Quashie et al., 2019.
10 UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 28 February 2020.
Implications of adaptations to population ageing

Trade-offs between sustainability, intergenerational solidarity and gender equality in pension reforms

With the ageing of the population, countries in the UNECE region have to continuously adapt their social security systems to the growing proportion of people moving into retirement age. Governments have been undertaking a range of reforms to ensure the long-term sustainability of their pension systems, including implementing strategies to fully realise the potential of older persons, promoting active and healthy ageing and enabling longer working lives.

The increased cost of demographic ageing for welfare states – mainly caused by growing pension and health care expenditures – raises important questions for intergenerational fairness. A shrinking working age population contributing to public pension systems will have to finance most of the pension costs of a growing number of pensioners. The European Commission reported in its 2017 Annual Review on Employment and Social Developments that: “those who are currently young are likely to see their welfare affected by far-reaching changes to social protection systems by the time they reach old age. In particular, they can expect a higher retirement age, a less adequate pension and higher contribution rates to support the increased number of retirees”.

One consequence of adjustments made to control the growing pension costs will be a fall in public pensions. The European Commission, in its 2018 report on pension adequacy, states that for a man with average earnings retiring after a full career (40 years), the gross public pension theoretical replacement rates are projected to decrease in the majority of the EU countries in 2056. Women, who on average have shorter working careers than men and lower earnings and pension savings, will be more strongly affected by the risk of poverty in old age.

To counter the anticipated fall in publicly financed pensions, increasing weight is placed on occupational pensions and private savings to ensure adequate income in old age. However, the shift away from the first pillar to the second and third pillars in some countries disadvantages women and increases their poverty risk in older age. Women have less access to occupational pensions and are less able to save for retirement than men, given their shorter working careers, lower wages, shorter working hours (more women than men work part time to reconcile work and family responsibilities) as well as periods out of the labour market to provide care.

---

11 UNFPA and UNECE, 2018.
13 European Commission, 2018. The level of pension adequacy is nationally defined but international standards, such as ILO Convention No. 102 (C.102) on minimum standards in social security stipulate that the minimum replacement rate should be 40 per cent of previous earnings after 30 years of contributions.
14 Theoretical replacement rates are case-study-based calculation of the level of pension income of hypothetical worker in the first year after retirement, measured as a percentage of individual earnings at the moment of retirement (European Commission Social Protection Committee).
Work-care-health challenges for older persons

One of the measures taken in many UNECE countries to make pension systems more sustainable has been to encourage longer working lives by equalizing and progressively increasing statutory pension ages for women and men. Countries with the highest retirement ages include Iceland, Norway with 67 years for both women and men, while countries with the lowest retirement ages include Turkey with 51 years for men and 48 years for women (which will increase to 62 for men and 60 for women for those who entered the labour market in 2018).  

The labour market participation rates among both older women and men have increased since the introduction of these reforms but women’s labour market participation still remains lower than that of men (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Labour force participation rate by age groups and sex, UNECE region, 2000-2030](image)


The extension of working lives coincides with the life phase during which many women and men, in their late fifties to late sixties, are faced with care responsibilities for older parents in their 80s to 90s and become informal carers, sometimes in parallel with supporting their own children with childcare for grandchildren. According to European Social Survey data, women between the ages of 50 and 59 represent the largest group of caregivers.

A few decades ago, when men and especially women retired earlier and more women were not working, they were more readily available to provide unpaid care for family members and in the community. With the increased focus on promoting women’s labour market participation and longer working lives, women are likely to experience increased work-care pressure which can also have negative impacts on their health.

---

16 Verbakel et al., 2017.
Informal care provision needs to be more equally shared between women and men, and both women and men need to be enabled to provide family care while in employment, through a range of support measures such as care leaves, flexible working arrangements and day care services that facilitate the reconciliation of employment and care for working carers.

Enabling a longer working life for women and men requires also to change the organisational culture and restructure career paths, creating opportunities to re-enter the job market after periods of leave, whether related to care or not. Reducing stereotypes and prejudices towards older workers, especially held by employers, is an essential part of this process. Ageism is highly present in the workforce and it is a hinderance towards prolonging working lives and reducing gender gaps.

Growing needs of care

Increasing longevity and the growing number of older persons will most likely lead to higher demand for social and long-term care provision. Unless the current care-work patterns change, growing demand for care will disproportionately impact women who provide the majority of both paid and unpaid care and represent the majority of long-term care recipients in older age. It is estimated that 70 to 95 per cent of all care needs are provided by informal carers mainly in the family and it is mostly women who provide this care. They are 33 per cent more likely than men to provide care and 60 per cent more likely to provide intensive care. The gender gap among informal carers narrows post retirement age as older men often provide care to their spouses. Providing unpaid care for family members puts significant strain and the diverse challenges faced by informal carers are explained in detail in UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 22.

To alleviate the care burden falling on family carers and to meet this growing demand for care, investments in the care sector are needed. Moreover, the reduction in family sizes and the growing number of childless ageing adults will result in more people in need of care but without kin to support them. It is important to ensure training, fair wages and decent working conditions for professional care workers, the vast majority of whom are women, including many migrant women.

Women predominate among recipients of formal long-term care services over the age of 65, both at home and in institutional settings. In OECD countries for which data was available women’s share ranged from 56.7 percent in Portugal to 74 percent in Hungary and Spain for care recipients at home, and 55.1 in Latvia to 74.8 per cent in Luxembourg for care recipients in institutions (other than hospitals) in 2017. With regard to care recipients over the age of 80, women’s share in institutions is higher between 63.5 in Portugal to 83.2 per cent in Hungary, and among those receiving long-term care services at home women’s share ranged from 61.3 percent in Portugal to 78.2 percent in Hungary. Women may therefore also be disproportionately affected as care recipients by the consequences of care shortages, lower care quality, potential neglect and abuse if the growing demand for care is not adequately met.

Strategies to promote gender equality in ageing societies

A three-pronged approach is recommended to promote gender equality in the context of changing demographics and societal adaptation to population ageing:

A. **Prevent** the accumulation of gendered disadvantages over the life course by tackling inequalities at all levels to close the gender gaps in education, employment, care, earnings and pensions (*a life-course approach*);

B. **Mitigate** the risks resulting from gender inequality among older persons through redistribution and support (*targeting older persons*);

C. **Anticipate** the impacts of current reforms on future generations of men and women by mainstreaming age and gender in societal adaptations to demographic change (*intergenerational solidarity*).

Policy responses to population ageing need to be gender-sensitive and responsive to address the goal of gender equality at different stages of the life course with measures that are oriented at the short, medium and long-term.

---

17 UNECE, 2019c.
18 Verbakel at al., 2017.
19 See Figure 3 of UNECE Policy Brief No. 22 on Informal Carers.
Gender equality in ageing societies

Prevent the accumulation of gendered disadvantages over the life course ...

...through a more equal gender division of paid and unpaid work

Gender gaps in employment, care, pay, earnings and pensions illustrate the accumulation of disadvantages over the life course. They result from a range of factors, including different educational and professional choices, horizontal and vertical labour market segregation, the undervaluing of women’s work resulting in lower pay in female-dominated sectors, women’s under-representation in leadership, gender-based discrimination, and the unequal division of paid work and family responsibilities between women and men as well as difficulties in reconciling work and care responsibilities where care services are inaccessible and workplace cultures and practices unsupportive.

Women’s labour market participation rates continue to be lower than men’s, particularly when small children are in the household, even though gender gaps in employment have been closing over time. When comparing employment rates of women with young children (3-5 years) to those of childless women, mothers’ employment rates are on average eight percentage points lower. Variation across countries is however large with 20 percentage points difference in Czechia and Ireland, and more than 13 percentage points in Germany, Hungary, Poland and Switzerland, compared to only about 2 percentage points in Belarus, Estonia and Norway. In Finland, Iceland, Portugal and Sweden, the employment rate of mothers even exceeds that of childless women.

Time-use research in UNECE countries shows that in all countries for which data is available, women do more domestic and care work than men (Figure 3). While the gap has been narrowing over time, it remains large, including for employed women and men.

---

Figure 3

Hours per day spent on domestic work and care by sex

Source: UNECE Statistical Database, data retrieved on 05 March 2020.

---

22 UNECE, 2019b. Figure 15 and Paragraph 65.
As women take on a greater share of unpaid work, their working trajectories over the lifetime are more likely to contain periods of part-time employment than men’s. There is strong country variation as to the extent to which women engage in part-time work. As can be seen in Figure 4 above, around 3 out of 4 women in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom work part-time whereas this is only the case for less than 1 in 20 women in Belarus, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia.

Figure 5 below illustrates that women are much more likely than men to take breaks from employment to look after their children.

Note: Population in employment or previous employment, work interruptions for childcare are considered of at least six months.
Gender equality in ageing societies

The gender care gaps and resulting employment gaps can be detrimental to women’s career progression, earning prospects and pension savings. In Pensions at a Glance 2019, the OECD has estimated that women with average earnings taking 5 years out of the labour market to care for children will have a pension equal to 96 percent of that for a full-career female worker on average across the 36 OECD countries. To reduce care-related periods of absence from employment, comprehensive measures enabling the reconciliation of paid work and care responsibilities are essential. A combination of care services, leave entitlements, flexible working arrangements, financial support and supportive workplace cultures is needed to support working parents and carers. Currently, most support is targeted at new parents in the context of maternity and parental leave regulations. Some countries have provided a right to request flexible working arrangements for parents of older children. In Bulgaria and Italy for example parents can request flexible working arrangements until the child is 6, in Portugal parents can work flexible hours until child is 12, in Latvia until 14.

Leave and flexible working arrangements for working carers are not yet widely available across the region. An example is the Family Caregiver Leave Act in Germany (2015) that entitles working carers to time off work to provide short or long-term care to close relatives. The EU Work-Life Balance Directive adopted in June 2019 introduced individual rights to carer’s leave of 5 days per year and extended the right to request flexible working arrangements (reduced or flexible working hours and flexibility in place of work) to all carers. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom the right to request flexible working has already been extended to all employees.

Access to affordable, high-quality and employment-enabling child and elder-care services are among the most important measures enabling working parents and carers to remain in employment.

Childcare services to enable parents to work and train in France and Malta

Launched in 2014, the Maltese ‘Free Childcare Scheme’ is an initiative aiming at promoting female employment. It provides free childcare services for parents who work or pursue their education. Public and private nurseries participating to the project were 69 in 2014, but already 137 all throughout the island in 2019. Since its start, this initiative has allowed over 23,700 parents to keep working and training while having their 17,500 children looked after.

In France, a network of more than 100 nurseries (crèches à vocation d’insertion professionnelle) support the profession reinsertion of unemployed parents. In the establishments that participate in this programme, places are reserved for children whose unemployed parents need time to attend training courses and job interviews. Special attention is given to single mothers. Parents benefiting from the initiative were followed by counsellors of the employment services (Pôle Emploi) and 90 per cent of them went back to work within 6 months.

Source: Maltese Ministry for the Family, Children’s Rights and Social Solidarity, French Ministry for Solidarity and Health.

To close the gender care and employment gaps, barriers to equal sharing of work and care responsibilities between women and men need to be addressed. One way of doing this is to eliminate gender bias in entitlements and provide women and men with equal individual entitlements for care-related leave and other flexible working arrangements. Given cultural bias and practice, it is important to encourage men to make use of them. Men’s take-up rates of family-related leave and flexible working options lags considerably behind that of women. There are strong cultural barriers to men working part-time or taking parental / care leave which results in low take-up rates even where they have equal entitlements to women.

To encourage male take-up of parental leave entitlements, several countries have introduced special incentives such as additional leave entitlement if both parents share parental leave (for example in Austria, Canada, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden) or reduced leave if they do not (Romania). Other countries have introduced financial incentives in the form of higher or longer payment of leave if parents share (for example in Croatia, France).

---

23OECD, 2019.
24For more details on leave policies, see country reports prepared by International Network on Leave Policies & Research www.leavenetwork.org.
25Ibid.
Supportive workplace cultures that promote gender equality in diverse ways are needed to accelerate change. Governments can provide positive incentives to employers, including by rewarding good practice. In this spirit, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance in Cyprus established a National Certification Body for the implementation of Good Practices on Gender Equality in the Working Environment in 2014 which certifies good practices by employers in areas as diverse as equal pay, gender-neutral job classification systems, and measures to enhance work-family reconciliation.\(^{26}\)

After care-related career breaks, it can be difficult to re-enter the labour market, if ongoing care requirements require flexible working arrangements and pose constraints on what kind of job opportunities can be accepted. Some countries have developed measures to support re-entry to the labour market after periods of leave, which mainly benefit women.

**Labour market reintegration after periods of leave in Austria and Germany**

In Austria, labour market policy provides support measures for professional reintegration, in particular for women returning to work after parental or care-for-dependant leave. Those who come back are especially supported by the programme ‘Support return to work’ (Wiedereinstieg unterstützen). Special in-formation sessions for the specific target groups are offered by all regional offices of the Austrian labour market services (AMS) and are carried out by qualified counsellors. Furthermore, the AMS offers the training programme Return to work with future prospects (Wiedereinstieg mit Zukunft). Around 4,500 women take part in the programme each year.

In Germany, the action program ‘Perspective re-entry’ (Perspektive Wiedereinstieg) supports women and men who have withdrawn from employment for a number of years for family or care reasons and are seeking to re-enter the labour market. This broadly-staged initiative, implemented in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency, encourages local organizers in creating networks of women, helping them to qualify in different sectors, from start-up business to digital skills. The program aims at a better work-life balance by targeting the world of work as well as the households: it supports private companies in implementing measures for women wanting to return to work, while counselling women in their household-related services. All dimensions of the program are gathered on the portal PWE@online, providing abundant resources for women wanting to re-enter.

Sources: German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth; Austrian Beijing+25 National Report.

---

Women on average earn less than men in all UNECE countries. This is partly due to the fact that women tend to work in lower-paid sectors and are more likely to work part-time. The resulting difference in earnings is captured by the monthly gender pay gap.\(^{27}\) Among UNECE member States for which data is available, it ranges from 3.7 in Romania to 38.3 per cent in the Netherlands. But women also earn less per hour worked. According to the latest data available for the UNECE region, the gender pay gap per hour worked\(^{28}\) ranged from 3.5 per cent in Romania to 25.6 per cent in Estonia with an average of 15.2 per cent (see Figure 6).\(^{29}\)

Significant improvements to reduce the gender pay gap (GPG) have been achieved over time in some member States such as in Cyprus where the GPG in hourly wage dropped from 26 per cent in 2000 to 13.7 per cent in 2017, in Luxembourg where it dropped from 15 to 5 per cent and in Romania where it dropped from 17 to 3.5 per cent over the same period. Despite these advances, the gender pay gap has overall proven rather persistent over time across the UNECE region.

---

\(^{26}\) Policy example provided by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance of Cyprus.

\(^{27}\) The Gender Pay Gap in monthly earnings refers to the gender gap in average monthly earnings. This indicator aims to capture the variance between men’s and women’s earnings over a specific period of time. It reflects differences in the time worked and type of work performed which translates into gender differences in economic autonomy (UNECE Statistical Database).

\(^{28}\) The gender pay gap is the difference between men’s and women’s average earnings from employment, shown as a percentage of men’s average earnings. The Gender Pay Gap in hourly wage rates refers to the gender gap in average hourly earnings. This indicator aims to capture the difference between men’s and women’s overall position in the labour market. It measures the difference between men’s and women’s wage rates independent of the number of hours worked, the type of activity or the type of occupation.

\(^{29}\) UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 27 February 2020.
Figure 6
Hourly and monthly gender pay gap, 2017 (or most recent data)

Source: UNECE Statistical Database, data retrieved on 28 February 2020.
Note: Hourly gender pay gap data missing for Georgia, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Liechtenstein, Republic of Moldova and Albania.
The principle of “Equal pay for work of equal value” is enshrined in SDG 8 of the 2030 Agenda. It means that women and men delivering the same work should receive equal pay. It also means they should be paid equally when their work, even if different, can be shown to be of equal value, considering objective criteria such as skills, qualification, and effort.

Policies to achieve pay equity include employers and employees getting information on the principle of “equal pay for a work of equal value”, and special training for women in negotiating their salary. Removing unfair practices based on stereotypes also requires full transparency, with employers publishing comprehensive reports on wages in their organisations.

**Gender pay gap reporting in the United Kingdom**

In 2017, the UK introduced gender pay gap reporting regulations, requiring large employers (250+ staff) to publish the differences between what they pay their male and female staff in average salaries and bonuses. In the first year of reporting in 2018, and more recently in 2019, over 10,000 employers reported their gender pay gap; providing an unparalleled level of transparency and pushing employers to take real action to close the gap. The Government is advising and supporting employers to develop effective action plans to tackle their gender pay gaps. Consequently, the overall gender pay gap has fallen to a record low of 17.9 per cent in 2017, down from 19.3 per cent in 2015. The gender pay gap for full-time employees has decreased to 8.6 per cent from 9.6 per cent over the same period. The Government is committed to closing the gap entirely.

Source: Beijing+25 National Report

**Equal pay for work of equal value - Pay Equity Act in Canada**

The new legislation that was passed in 2018 will require federally regulated employers with 10 or more employees, including those in the federal public and private sectors, parliamentary employers, and the Prime Minister and Ministers’ offices, to proactively examine their compensation practices to determine whether there are differences in compensation between positions that are mostly held by women and those mostly held by men that are deemed to be of equal value. If differences in compensation exist, employers will be required to increase the compensation of affected employees and, then, maintain pay equity.

A Pay Equity Commissioner will be appointed within the Canadian Human Rights Commission and will play both education and enforcement roles with regard to the Act. The Commissioner, supported by a unit of subject-matter experts, will be responsible for assisting individuals in understanding their rights and obligations under the Act and facilitating the resolution of disputes related to pay equity. The Commissioner will have a range of compliance and enforcement tools, including the power to initiate audits, conduct investigations, and issue orders and administrative monetary penalties.

Source: Information provided by the Government of Canada

The reasons behind unequal pay are complex. Pay structures and job classification systems can be biased and typically female jobs tend to be classified at lower levels - a challenge that the new Pay Equity Act in Canada seeks to address. Women face multiple inequalities in the labour market relating to access to employment, wages, and career progression. They are over-represented in low-wage sectors and under-represented in leadership positions (see Figure 7). The causes of segregation and inequalities include gender differences in educational choices and choice of profession, gender roles and stereotypes, but also biases and barriers in organisational practices and collective bargaining.
Gender equality in ageing societies

.... by addressing gender segregation in education and employment

Gender segregation in education is considered a key factor for later wage differentials between women and men. While girls often outperform boys in educational attainment, women and men as a result of their socialisation and role models, differ in their career aspirations and educational choices preparing them for later career paths. Women typically are overrepresented in the social sciences and humanities which offer poorer labour market prospects and are underrepresented in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). In 2017, the share of women among Information and Communication Technologies students ranged from 11 per cent in Belgium to 33 in Greece, while their representation among students in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction ranged from 14 per cent in Georgia to 44 percent in North Macedonia. Strongly feminized professions in the health and service sectors tend to be lower paid contributing to women’s disadvantaged position in the labour market. Policy measures to address gender segregation in education and encouraging girls to consider careers in science and technology include targeted financial assistance, using role models and mentoring schemes to break down stereotypes.

Deconstructing gender stereotypes to tackle gender segregation

It is important to start deconstructing stereotypes related to education and career orientation at an early age. Several countries (including Austria, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland) in the region have implemented “Girls day, Boys day”, events during which children can have an hands-on experience of jobs that are traditionally not associated with their gender.

Israel introduced the “She – Space Project” (an initiative originated from the collaboration between the Remote Sensing and Planetary and Thermodynamics laboratory at Ben-Gurion University of Negev and Beit Yatziv in Beer-Sheva). The projects encourage girls and women to study science and approach the world of space. The success of this project is spreading globally and future collaboration is planned with Brazil, Germany and the United States, sustained by the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Armenia introduced in 2016 the “Bringing up at school: Issues of professional orientation” manual in schools. It is an instrument for teachers to overcome gender-based stereotypes when discussing professional orientation with young boys and girls. Targeted only at boys, Germany developed the “More men in early childhood education and care” (Männer in Kitas) to raise the numbers of men working in this field and supporting children in making choices that reflect their personal interests without the influence of gender stereotypes.

Sources: Beijing+25 National Reports, Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Opinion on how to overcome occupational segregation

Gender segregation in occupations and sectors are seen as one of the principal causes for unequal hourly wages. Women are more likely to work in the public sector where wages are lower whereas men are more likely to work in the private sector. Typical female occupations pay less well than typical male occupations which explains part of the pay gap but research has found that a significant proportion of the gap measured is unexplained, pointing to underlying discrimination. There are a range of policy measures that governments can undertake to tackle gender segregation in the labour market. The compatibility of certain professions/roles with family responsibilities is of central concern as the practice of long working hours can deter women from taking up certain better-paid jobs (due to incompatibility with family care) and deter men from taking on a greater share of family responsibilities.

30 UNESCO 2018.
31 UNECE, 2019b, paragraph 41
32 UNECE, 2019d.
33 UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 05 March 2020.
34 OECD, 2019.
Women are further under-represented in decision-making and leadership positions which contributes to their lower wages. In the UNECE region, the share of women among managers varied from 15 per cent in Turkey to 47.6 percent in Belarus in 2017.

There is a range of ways in which countries seek to break the “glass ceiling” and increase women’s representation in leadership positions. As voluntary measures did not achieve a closing of the gender gaps, a number of countries have moved to the introduction of legal quotas to increase the number of women on corporate boards.

The effectiveness of gender quotas to increase women’s share on corporate boards

In 2010, women made up only 12 per cent of the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU-28. To address the gender imbalance in decision-making, several countries have introduced legislation, introducing minimum quotas for the under-represented sex of 30 per cent in Germany and Austria, 33 per cent in Belgium, Italy and Portugal, and 40 per cent in France and Norway. Other countries, including Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain and the United Kingdom, have introduced softer measures such as the encouragement of self-regulation, quotas that only apply to state-owned companies or are applied without sanctions.

According to the EIGE Gender Equality Index 2019, binding quotas have proven most effective in increasing women’s share on corporate boards. In 2018, the share of women on boards in four countries with binding quotas (Belgium, Germany, France and Italy) had increased to 38 per cent, representing a rise in 28 percentage points since 2010.

Countries with soft measures had seen an increase of 13 percentage points over the same period, with women’s representation on boards averaging 27 per cent. In contrast, in countries where no policy measures had been taken, women’s representation was at 15 percent, with an increase of only 1.5 percentage points since 2010.

Source: EIGE Gender Equality Index 2019, Chapter 6.3. Note: Austria and Portugal were still included among the countries with binding quotas in the calculations above, as their legislative quotas in force since 2018 were still too recent to show an impact. They were included under soft measures. Norway was not included as the above calculation was based on EU-28.
Over the life course, women’s lower hourly earnings, lower monthly wages, part-time work and career breaks taken to care for children and relatives cumulate to overall lower lifetime earnings and savings for old age. This accumulated disadvantage is illustrated by the gender pension gap. In the UNECE member States for which data was available for 2018, the gap ranged from 0.1 percent in Estonia to 44.4 percent in the Netherlands (Figure 8).

In countries of the UNECE region where women’s full-time labour market participation has historically been high, for instance in countries of the former Soviet Union, and where pension income is mainly based on public pensions that account for periods of child-care related leave by mothers, the gender pension gap tends to be lower.

Shorter contributory periods to qualify for pensions benefit women with interrupted careers. In Belarus, for example, the contributory period to be eligible for a full pension was only 17 years in 2019 to be increased to 20 by 2025 which is still only half of the contributory period required in some other countries. This contributory requirement is further reduced to 10 years for persons providing long-term care for children or disabilities and to 5 years for mothers of 5 or more children or children with disabilities. Although women retire earlier than men and have a longer life expectancy, Belarus does not apply an actuarial pension reduction to women to reflect the longer years during which they are likely to draw a pension compared to men. As a result there is almost no gender pension gap in Belarus: women’s pension income is almost equal to men’s (98.9 percent in 2017). The average pension level however is low, with a replacement rate below 40 percent.39

Paragraph 25 of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration draws attention to the importance of accounting for periods of family care in the calculation of the old-age pension. Redistributive measures in public pension schemes, such as pension credits for periods of childcare that many countries in the region have incorporated recognize and value unpaid care for family members. The recognition of periods of unpaid care in public pensions is an important policy measure to reduce the pension inequality experienced by parents and informal carers who have shorter contributory periods due to unpaid care provided in the family.

The degree to which unpaid care is accounted for in pension systems varies. In the majority of cases, contributory periods are limited to care provided to young children and are credited to one parent only. Furthermore, the primary focus lies to date with recognition of childcare. According to data in the Women, Business and the Law Database by the World Bank, 46 out of the 52 UNECE countries included account for periods of absence from work due to childcare in the pension calculation.

To more fully recognize informal care provided in the family, it is important to extend pension credits to unpaid care provided to older persons and non-relatives to ensure social protection for all informal carers. Some countries in the region have put in place social protection measures for informal carers to address this policy challenge.40

---

**Caregiver credits to recognize unpaid care provided in families in Norway**

Norway introduced pension credits for parents and informal carers through its National Insurance Act 20-8 in 1997. Caregivers are credited with pension earnings equivalent to 4.5 basic amounts a year or 431,100 NOK in 2018 in the income pension. This corresponds to about 72 per cent of an average full - time wage.

Caregivers comprise parents caring for children below the age of 6 years and individuals taking unpaid care of disabled, sick or older persons in the home.

Parents with lower annual earnings than 4.5 basic amounts have these earnings topped up. Parents with annual earnings exceeding 4.5 basic amounts do not get any top up. The family may apply for having the pension earnings granted to the father instead of the mother, but only one of the parents may receive this kind of pension earnings in any given year. For the other group, pension earnings are granted on the basis of individual applications.

Norway is one of the few countries in the UNECE region that to date provide pension credits for other forms of informal care in addition to bringing up children.


---


40 See UNECE, 2019c for more info details about social protection for informal carers.
**Mitigate gender inequality in older age**

Inequalities in old age that result from accumulated disadvantages over the life course can be mitigated through redistribution via social protection and social security systems and through the provision of community-based services to reduce the inequalities experienced by older women and men.

**Identify gender gaps in opportunities for active ageing**

The Active Ageing Index (AAI) provides a tool to assess gender gaps in active ageing across a number of domains and indicators to help policy makers identify areas for action. It measures the level at which older people live independent lives, participate in paid employment and social activities as well as their capacity to age actively. The index is constructed from 22 individual indicators that are grouped into four domains (see Figure 9).

The latest AAI calculations show that older women, while having made most progress in active ageing over time, overall fare less well than men across all domains except social participation, where their higher scores are due to their greater involvement in caregiving.

The greatest gender gaps are in older persons’ participation in employment (between ages 55-74) followed by domain of Independent, Health and Secure Living which includes the indicators physical exercise, access to health services, independent living, financial security, physical safety and lifelong learning.

![Figure 9 AAI gender gaps 2018](source: 2018 Active Ageing Index Analytical Report)

---

*UNECE / European Commission, 2019.*
Older women have a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than men. Although the risk of poverty in inter-generational comparison is comparatively low for older age groups, Figure 10 shows that women are at greater risk across age groups and it is among older persons that the gender gap is most pronounced. Among women aged 75 years and older, the risk of poverty or social exclusion ranges from 12-15 percent in France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Slovakia to around 60 percent in Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia. The gender difference in the risk of poverty ranges from 0.2 percentage points in Denmark to 24.6 percentage points in Lithuania, the Netherlands being the only country where the risk of poverty and social exclusion is greater for men above the age of 75 (16.2 percent) than for women (14.6 percent).\textsuperscript{42}

Women retired today had lower levels of labour market participation, lower earnings and longer career breaks than younger cohorts of women leading to important gender pension gaps. Many older women depend on their husband’s income, and survivor pensions, for a decent standard of living. The risk of falling into poverty and social exclusion in advanced age is particularly high among older persons living alone, which includes many single women and widows given women’s longer life expectancy (Figure 11).

\textsuperscript{42}EUROSTAT data for 2018, accessed on 7 January 2020. Aggregate indicator on risk of social exclusion and poverty refers the sum of persons who are either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. Persons are only counted once even if they are present in several sub-indicators.
Figure 11
Proportion of older people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by household type, 2018

Source: Eurostat, data retrieved on 7 January 2020.
Across the UNECE region, about one in ten older persons live in a situation of severe material deprivation and one in ten live at risk of poverty. During the last regional MIPAA review UNECE countries reported on a range of redistributive measures to alleviate poverty and provide a minimum income to older persons. These include support with the cost of housing, essential goods and services such as food, medicine and health and care services that are provided to older persons who cannot meet the costs themselves. Czechia and Kazakhstan for example provide medicines at reduced costs or free of charge to people in need. Canada invested over 200 million Canadian dollars in 2016 to support the construction repair, and adaptation of affordable housing for more than 5,000 older persons on low incomes.

Social pensions and solidarity supplements for older persons on very low incomes provide a social protection floor. The ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No.102) had recommended this minimum level to be 40 percent of the reference wage after 30 years of contribution or employment. ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202 (2012) recommends countries to adopt financing mechanisms, eligibility and benefit conditions that offset gender inequalities in the labour market or due to interruption in the careers of women arising from their reproductive roles or care responsibilities.

Social protection floor - the guarantee pension and housing benefit in Sweden

In Sweden, old-age pensions are made up of three components: income pension, premium pension and guarantee pension. Although the core of the system is the income-based pension, which includes the two first components, this can be supplemented by the guaranteed pension if necessary. Even with recent reforms having strengthened the link between contributions and benefits, fairness, the negative impact this could have on those who have not contributed much, especially women, can be attenuated by the guaranteed pension. This type of benefit is residence-based and offers a basic coverage for those with a low or no income-based pension. In 2018, the guarantee pension amounted to SEK 96,912 (21 per cent of gross average earnings) for a single pensioner born after 1938.

There is also a housing benefit that covers housing costs up to SEK 5,560 per months for a single pensioner. The benefit forms an important part of the minimum living standards of pensioners as the guarantee pension on its own may not be enough to lift eligible pensioners above the risk of poverty.

Sources: European Commission, 2018. OECD 2019, and information provided by the Swedish Government.

Reduce social isolation and loneliness among older persons

Women are more likely than men to live alone in old age. Many married women are likely to outlive their husbands, given their longer life expectancy. Widows and single women living alone in advanced age face the risk of greater economic vulnerability, lack of support with daily tasks that those older persons living with a spouse can benefit from. Although women have a higher life expectancy than men, they are more likely to live their additional life years in poor health. Those experiencing declining health and independence need access to affordable and quality health and social (long-term) care services. Reduced mobility and impaired health or frailty also make older persons more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness.

These risks can be mitigated by ensuring access to health and social care services and financial support for those older persons whose income is too low to meet out-of-pocket payments that they may face to obtain needed services.

In addition to community-based social and health care services, community-based measures creating opportunities for social participation and social contact can counteract the risk of loneliness and social isolation experienced by many older persons. Policy Brief No. 20 on innovative services and supportive measures for independent living in advanced age reviews a range of possible approaches to enhance ageing with dignity in the community.

Civil society organisations play a crucial role in maintaining and enhancing the social ties at community level. An example of a multi-partner initiative to tackle the problem of social isolation is MONALISA in France.

UNECE 2017, p. 50 and Table 8b of the Annex.
Gender equality in ageing societies

Mobilising against the social isolation of older persons in France

An estimated 5 million people in France suffer from social isolation, of which 1.5 million are over the age of 75. About one in four older persons in France is affected by social isolation they have not chosen. In older age it can coincide with the onset of dependence and loss of autonomy.

Initiated in 2014, MONALISA is a network of organisations mobilized to fight against the social isolation of older persons. Since its launch, the number of associations, regional authorities, social action centres and pension and allowance funds that signed the MONALISA charter and joined the network has grown from 40 to over 500. They support 365 citizen groups in which volunteers are working with older persons in their communities, accompanying them in daily activities, and proposing a range of activities to recreate social ties.

Cooperation between members in the network facilitates the co-design of innovative tools and practices, such as a basic training for volunteers. A resource centre facilitates the sharing of good practices between all stakeholders.

MONALISA is included in the Law on the Adaptation of Society to Ageing (2015) which seeks to prevent the social isolation older persons and loss of autonomy.


Mainstream gender in societal adaptations to demographic change

The brief so far has pointed to the need for a range of reforms to adapt and prepare societies and welfare states to the transformations resulting from demographic change to realize the opportunities of longevity, ensure the long-term sustainability of social protection and social security systems in the UNECE region and ensure intergenerational fairness. In order to ensure that the impact of these reforms on current and future generations are both gender equitable and responsible towards future generations, the gender implications of changing demographics and reforms need to be anticipated in long-term strategies and planning.

Unless increased retirement ages and growing labour market partitication by women and older persons are accompanied by investments in care services and equal sharing between women and men, continuing “business as usual” that is relying on women’s unpaid informal care to absorb increased care needs will result in additional strain on women.

At the same time, certain risks related to old age are increasingly individualised, for instance when pension reforms erode public pensions and shift the emphasis onto individual savings. This disadvantages women whose ability to save has been lower than men’s. There is a risk that societal adjustments are disproportionately burdening and disadvantaging women unless the gender implications of reforms are assessed, and inequities prevented.

The costs of adaptation to population ageing and the benefits derived from increasing longevity should be equally distributed between women and men and existing gender gaps need to be reduced through a long-term and life-course oriented approach that prevents the accumulation of disadvantages over the lifespan.

Some disparities can be addressed with reforms of social protection and pension systems. Others need to transform current gender roles, redistribute the division of paid and unpaid work and more highly value women’s work.

Enabling longer working lives and realizing the potential of older persons...

Pension reforms have increased statutory retirement ages for all, and specifically for women whose retirement ages have traditionally been lower than men’s. While older women and men are now required to work longer, are they also equally able to? As discussed in Policy Brief #21 on ageism in the world of work, older workers can struggle with a range of discriminations and stereotypes held against them. Women who are already disadvantaged in the labour market, face the intersecting effects of sexism and ageism.
While older workers have greater job stability when employed, they are at greater risk of discrimination when looking for employment and long-term unemployment among older age cohorts is a challenge. This is of particular concern to older women who might reduce or leave employment when care responsibilities for spouses or older parents arise and might be particularly disadvantaged when trying to re-enter the labour markets after a period of care-related leave.

Measures seeking to enhance labour market participation of older workers need to be sensitive and responsive to the very different life realities and challenges of older women and men. Measures developed to support mothers to return to employment after periods of childcare could be adapted and tailored to older men and women seeking employment after periods of informal care taking account of the additional barriers of ageism that they may face in the labour market.

Encouraging adult education and training over the life course is one of the strategies recommended to ensure that older workers maintain and gain relevant skills in rapidly changing labour markets. According to Labour Force Survey data women are slightly more likely than men to participate in education and training. In 2018, 10.1 per cent of men and 12.1 per cent of women on average in the European Union indicated that they had participated in education and training in the past month. While participation is still relatively high among the younger age cohorts (18.5 per cent of women aged from 25 to 34 years and 17.2 per cent of men) it drops in the older age groups (12.6 per cent women and 10 per cent men aged 35-44; and 7.5 per cent women and 5.4 per cent of men between 55 and 64 years).  

Research has found that women participate less frequently in continuous professional development than men. Married women and mothers are less likely than men to participate in training. These findings point to the need for care services and measures that enabling those with care responsibilities to participate in education and training. Training costs may be another barrier to acquiring new skills which can be addressed through training allowances. Estonia, for example, introduced a study allowance in 2017 for persons who are unemployed, at risk of unemployment, who have to change career due to health reasons, are over the age of 50, or lack education or language skills and are on annual incomes below 15,492 Euros. in 2017 and 2018, women have made up two thirds of beneficiaries.

Re-entering the job market after a period of care-related leave or unemployment can be challenging for women as well as older people. Entrepreneurship can provide an alternative opportunity for women and older persons to realize their potential and use their skills and knowledge to earn an income.

Women are less likely than men to become entrepreneurs and age can also play a role in undermining the predisposition of starting a new business. Different countries have developed polices to promote women’s entrepreneurship, which includes training, support in making business plans as well as asking for loans (Albania, Austria, Croatia, Tajikistan, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Uzbekistan, among others). Tajikistan, for example, set up an Inter-Agency Group to support employment for women and entrepreneurs, offering a Presidential grant to create new jobs and easier access to micro credit. Similarly, in Uzbekistan women’s entrepreneurship centres were created.

The intersection of age and gender can be an additional challenge for older women, as age stereotypes hinder the access to services and, for example, loans. Therefore, the cumulative effect of ageism and sexism should be taken into consideration in developing policies that should be both age and gender sensitive. Economically empowering older women and realising their potential can have a positive effect on the labour market, not only by supporting these groups in being economically independent, but also in creating more businesses opportunities and therefore more jobs available to both men and women.

---

44 Eurostat, accessed on 10 January 2020.
45 Chuang, 2015.
46 Huber and Huemer, 2015.
47 Information provided by the Government of Estonia; https://www.tootukassa.ee/eng/content/prevention-unemployment/degree-study-allowance
48 Information reported in the respective Beijing+25 country reports (https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51017)
Gender equality in ageing societies

Gender-responsive reforms needed for the care sector

As the proportion of older persons in the population increases compared to younger age cohorts, relatively fewer women and men of working age will be available to provide unpaid care for older relatives. Yes, reliance on informal care provision remains high given the high costs associated with quality formal care provision.

As older generations tend to live longer while also increasing in numbers, informal carers may have care responsibilities for older relatives for a longer time period. At the same time, as higher and longer labour market participation of both women and men is pursued to ensure the long-term sustainability of social protection and social security systems, equal sharing and ability to reconcile informal care with employment need to be central pillars of gender-responsive policy reforms.

Long-term care systems in the UNECE region need to be reformed to be ready to provide affordable and high-quality care for growing numbers of older persons needing care to prevent informal carers from having to shoulder the additional care load and to provide access to long-term care services to those without family support.

Several recent ILO and OECD reports have drawn attention to coverage deficits in long-term care protection for older persons and the need to invest in the development of long-term care systems that meet growing demand without detriment to access and the quality of services provided.

To attract more people into the care professions, working conditions and wages need to be improved. The care sector is characterised by strong horizontal and vertical gender segregation. 76.8 per cent of the care workforce in Europe and Central Asia is female. In most UNECE countries, men predominate among the better qualified and paid physicians, while women aggregate among nurses and home carers: around 90 per cent of nurses are women.

Improved training and working conditions for the care workforce will enhance the working conditions for many women working in the sector as well as improving the quality of services for care recipients and social protection of informal caregivers – all of which will benefit women and contribute to reducing the gender gaps outlined in this brief.

Tackling staff shortages in the care sector – Nursing Professions Act, Germany

With the Nursing Professions Act (Pflegeberufegesetz) 2017 that entered into force in January 2020, Germany has responded to the shortage of carers. The reform aimed to modernize nursing care education, provide better training conditions free of charge and with adequate renumeration, raising the attractiveness of the care professions and the quality of care provided.

The reform merged the vocational training for nursing care professions, which hitherto was separated into three distinct qualifications for general nursing (Krankenpflege), paediatric nursing (Kinderkrankenpflege) and geriatric nursing (Altenpflege) into one qualification that provides generalist training enabling those qualified to work in all three professional branches, thus enhancing professional choice and mobility. A specialisation for paediatric nursing or geriatric care in the third year of training remains still possible. In additional to the vocational training a university degree in nursing was introduced raising the overall status of the profession.

The reform potentially increases the pool of skilled personnel to perform long-term care for older persons. While it does not address the difficult working conditions (non-standard contracts and working hours, high work intensity and low wages prevalent in the elder care sector), it empowers nurses by providing them with enhanced skills that better qualify them for the demands of the job and allows them, if they have chosen the generalist training, to more easily switch to other jobs in nursing (the qualification is recognized across the EU). This might contribute to improved wages and working conditions in the elder care sector to attract and retain qualified staff.

Source: https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/pflegeberufegesetz.html, accessed on 9 March 2020

---

50 ILO WESO database, 2015.
51 Ibid.
Gender-responsive and generation-just pension reforms

Pension systems continue to be oriented at typically male working careers (full-time and uninterrupted) considered the norm and penalize typically female career trajectories that include career breaks, part-time employment and employment in sectors and occupations and contractual conditions that provide lower social security coverage.

Rapidly changing labour markets in which atypical work contracts are on the rise, adjustments to social security and protections systems are needed to ensure pension coverage and adequacy for all. Pension-system reforms need to take full account of the different working life trajectories and related risks of women and men. This includes the recognition of periods of informal care for older persons and persons with disabilities as well as children towards pension entitlements.

A gender analysis of pension systems and gender impact assessments of new reforms are recommended. Such analysis can help to identify and address barriers to the equal sharing of care work, for example where care credits for leave and working time reductions can only be assigned to one parent, rather than this being an individual entitlement.

Reforms further need to assess the impact on future generations to ensure a decent standard of living in old age for generations to come.

Reforming pension systems to enhance both gender and intergenerational equity will constitute a long-term achievement for equality in ageing, benefiting future generations of women and men to age more equally.

Gender-based Analysis Plus: a tool for gender- and age-sensitive policy making in Canada

The Government of Canada began making commitments on mainstreaming sex and gender in the 1970s in its policy development. In 1995, the Government of Canada committed to using Gender Based Analysis (GBA) to advance gender equality in Canada, as part of the United Nations’ Beijing Platform for Action. Over time, GBA has shifted from a more specific gender-mainstreaming tool to one that focuses more broadly on how programmes and policies affect various groups of people differently, due to gender and other diverse identity factors, including age.

In 2011, Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) was introduced to highlight this shift. By incorporating age with gender-based analysis, GBA+ is contributing to mainstreaming ageing. GBA+ has been mandatory in all Memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions since 2016 and budget proposals since 2018. Guidelines also exist to apply GBA+ to a range of government activities including consultations and regulatory impact analysis. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an important tool for ensuring that both gender and age-sensitive analysis and policy development is embedded in the policy process across federal organizations.

Source: Canadian Country Note on Mainstreaming Ageing

Towards more gender and age-responsive policy reforms

The measures recommended in this brief require a mainstreaming approach to consider the implications of current and planned legislation, policies and programmes for men and women of all ages, now and in the future.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed a gender mainstreaming platform that highlights gender challenges in 19 policy areas and provides practical tools to help policy makers integrate a gender perspective into all stages of policymaking and strategic planning. Step-by-step toolkits guide users through the processes of gender analysis, gender audits, gender awareness and equality training, gender budgeting, gender impact assessments, gender planning, evaluations and monitoring, gender statistics and institutional transformation among others. The platform further provides country-specific information on gender mainstreaming and good practices from across the European Union.

It is important to integrate gender and age-mainstreaming processes in policymaking. In the UNECE region, a region-wide stocktaking of age mainstreaming policies and practice is currently being undertaken by the UNECE Working Group on Ageing to inform the development of new guidance on age-mainstreaming approaches that integrate a gender sensitive and responsive approach.

https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming
The collection and analysis of age- and sex-disaggregated and ageing-related statistics is an essential component of such an approach to better understand the ways in which the experience of ageing differs for women and men now and in future. More research is needed across the UNECE region that integrates gender, age and generation perspectives to build the evidence base for policy interventions, including research on the intersecting inequalities faced by many women and men in old age. The Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) provides a useful social science infrastructure for research on family and population dynamics focusing on the whole life course. Data is available for 20 countries and a new round of data collection has started (GGP 2020). Recommendations on ageing-related statistics are available on the UNECE website and the Active Ageing Index, based on 22 ageing-related indicators, helps monitor the situation of older persons and implementation of MIPAA/RIS.

At regional and international level, more needs to be done to systematically integrate gender and age mainstreaming approaches in the development, implementation, monitoring and reporting on key policy frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Beijing Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and human rights instruments such as CEDAW. A recent analysis of CEDAW reporting for instance found that less than 3 per cent of concerns, observations and recommendations made in the last 20 years by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women were related to older persons. The Beijing Platform for Action, while dedicating one of its 12 areas of concern to the girl child, did not identify the situation of older women as a specific area of concern. As a result, older women remain often invisible in monitoring and reporting. It is a welcome step that the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the European Commission has published an opinion dedicated to the topic of gender equality in rapidly ageing societies in 2019.

Conclusion

This policy brief considered the implications of population ageing for gender equality and highlighted the need for gender-responsive reforms adapting societies for population ageing. It is important to take into account that societal population ageing as well as individual ageing impact men and women differently. Their different gender roles in society shape their lifetime opportunities and experience of ageing.

The achievement of gender equality is a shared responsibility of all actors in society, including governments, policy makers, the private sector, social partners, researchers, organizations of and for older persons, NGOs and women and men of all ages. There is a need to tackle often intersecting discriminations that lead to inequalities accumulating over the life course, disadvantaging predominately (older) women.

Actions should be taken at every stage of life to improve equity within and between generations. To achieve this, it is recommended to integrate gender and age mainstreaming approaches across all relevant policy fields. The brief recommends a three-pronged approach to enhancing gender equality in ageing societies:

**Preventing** the accumulation of gendered disadvantages over the life course by tackling inequalities at all levels to close gender gaps in education, employment, care, earnings and pensions;

**Mitigating** the risks resulting from gender inequality among older persons through redistribution and support;

**Anticipating** the impacts of current reforms on future generations of men and women by mainstreaming age and gender in societal adaptations to demographic change.

It is important to analyze the gender implications of current and future policy responses to population ageing, to make sure that the opportunities and challenges of longevity in the UNECE region are equitably shared by women and men in current and future generations.

---

For more information on the GGP and GGP2020 visit [http://www.unece.org/population/ggp.html](http://www.unece.org/population/ggp.html) and [https://www.ggp-i.org/](https://www.ggp-i.org/)

For more information visit the AAI Wiki - [http://www.unece.org/population/aai.html](http://www.unece.org/population/aai.html)


References


EIGE (2009). Gender segregation in the labour market: Root causes, implications and policy responses in the EU. European Institute for Gender Equality
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3967bb83-852f-4f1e-b6a0-a8ffbb599b256


http://www.unece.org/ru/stats/publications/ageing.html

http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=48046&L=0


Acknowledgements

This issue of the Policy Briefs on Ageing series was prepared at the initiative of and in collaboration with the Government of France. It was developed in conjunction with the Opinion on Gender Equality in Rapidly Ageing Societies issued by the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the European Commission in 2019.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main areas</th>
<th>Areas of implementation</th>
<th>Key elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevention of accumulation of disadvantages over the life course</strong></td>
<td>Gender care gaps</td>
<td>• Equal sharing of work and care responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender Employment gap</td>
<td>• Childcare and daycare services for older persons and persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible working arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive workplace cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Care leaves (male entitlement and take up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Labour market re-entry after career breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender pay gaps</td>
<td>• Educational segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Occupational segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Equal pay for work of equal value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Pay transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women in leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender pension gap</td>
<td>• Pension credits for periods of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitigation of risks resulting from gender inequality among older persons</strong></td>
<td>Active Ageing</td>
<td>• Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Social Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty prevention</td>
<td>• Social transfers (social pension / housing benefits, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Health and Long-term care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social isolation and loneliness</td>
<td>• Community-based services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anticipation of gender impacts of reforms</strong></td>
<td>Gender and age mainstreaming</td>
<td>• Gender and age analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender and age impact assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender and age-responsive policymaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour markets</td>
<td>• Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Intersection of ageism and sexism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care sector</td>
<td>• Quality and affordable care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Occupational segregation in care workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future pensions</td>
<td>• Gender and genderation-just pension reforms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>