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Statement

by

Ms. Tatiana Molcean

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

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Interactive Dialogue with senior officials of the UN System:

“How to improve mainstreaming of social considerations in development frameworks?”

Thursday, 8 February 2024

Introduction

Good morning excellencies, esteemed delegates, colleagues and friends.

I'm honored to join you in this important and timely conversation about the challenges we continue to face in achieving sustainable development.

How can we ensure that people are at the centre of our development frameworks?

We often think about the 2030 Agenda in terms of three pillars: people, planet and prosperity.

This framing helps us understand the key aims of the 2030 Agenda. But it also sets apart social issues as somehow being separate from the real “meat” of economic development or the health of our planet.

We are in a context of devastating armed conflicts, large-scale humanitarian crises, widening inequalities, and setbacks in progress towards many of our global goals. It is more crucial than ever that we situate people at the centre of our development efforts and work to *integrate* rather than *separate* social issues.

I'd like to share some of our experiences in the UNECE region, working with member States to mainstream ageing in policymaking.

Why ageing?

Population ageing is one of the mega trends of our times. It is happening, at a varying pace, in all world regions. Worldwide, the population aged 65 and older is increasing more quickly than other age groups, and is projected to double by 2050.

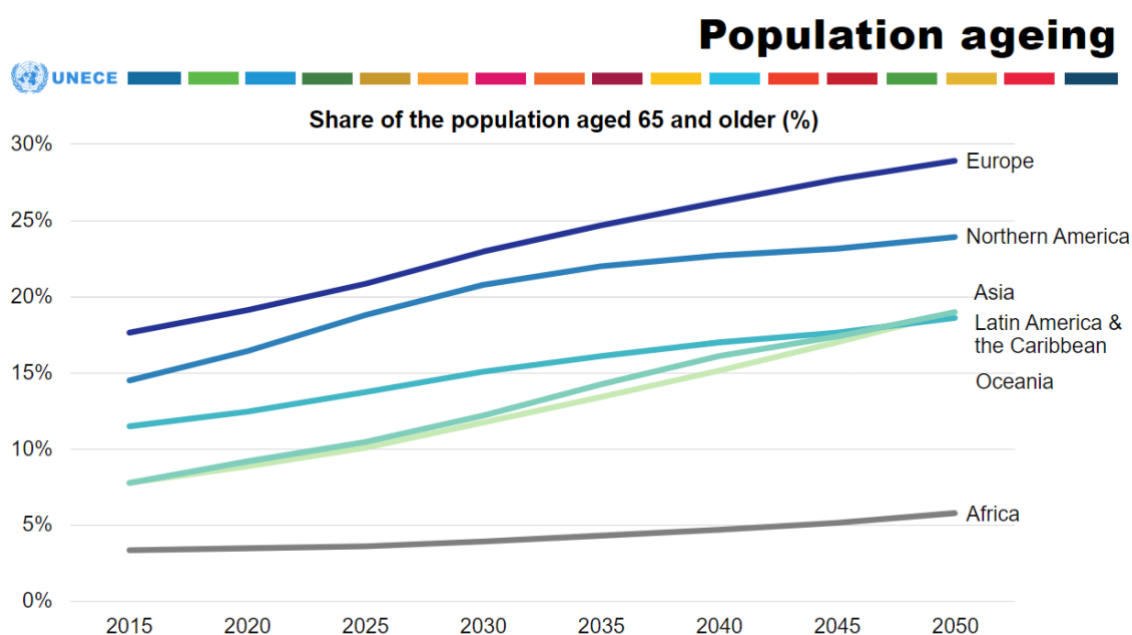
Countries in the UNECE region are already feeling the impacts of this demographic shift.

In global comparison, Europe and North America have the highest share of older persons, putting the UNECE region at the forefront of this global demographic transformation.

People aged 65 and over account for 17.6 per cent of the total UNECE population. They exceed 20 per cent in 24 of the 56 countries in the region. At

age 65, most people can expect to live for another 20 years.

[Optional - Slide 1 with graph]



Longevity is a triumph of human development. But as the proportion of older people in a society grows, pension systems are increasingly challenged. Health sectors face increased demand and costs. Long-term care systems need to be developed to cater for growing needs. Businesses start to face talent shortages. Longer working lives and ageing workforces require investments in lifelong learning, in order to keep workforce skills up to date in today’s fast changing world. These are just a few examples to illustrate the need for societal adaptation to demographic change. We need to turn these challenges into opportunities and enable every person to fulfill their full potential from youth to old age.

Population ageing touches nearly every aspect of societies, including families and intergenerational relations and has the potential to transform economies, labour markets, social protection, education and health systems.

The Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing was adopted in 2002 and remains our key international policy framework on ageing. Since its adoption, many countries have developed policies to improve the situation of older persons and initiated needed adjustments to pensions, health and long-term care, lifelong learning and labour markets.

Targeted, sectoral action is key – but not sufficient. Handling the transformative impacts of population ageing in the long run cannot be achieved without a whole-of-government (and whole-of-society) approach.

We have responded to this challenge in the UNECE region.

The UN system and governments across the UNECE region have made a lot of progress in institutionalizing the gender perspective. Building on the learnings from this gender mainstreaming, we have developed guidance to promote the mainstreaming of ageing across all relevant policy fields and at all levels of government.

Since 2011, we have formulated tailored, country specific roadmaps for mainstreaming ageing. Based on this expertise, our focus in the past 5 years has been the mainstreaming of ageing across broader policies.

The UNECE Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing, developed with member States in the UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing, provide step-by-step guidance for developing strategic frameworks, and strengthening commitment, communication, coordination and capacity.

So, how can we improve mainstreaming in our national and international policy agendas?

Let me highlight four determinants:

- 1) **First: political commitment.** Social issues often lack political attention – whether due to lack of awareness, limited public pressure, or the perception that these issues are less urgent. It's important to start by making the case for mainstreaming. To demonstrate the need for action, it's important to highlight not only the benefits of action, but also the consequences of *inaction*, using examples from different policy sectors.
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Climate change is an area where we have done a good job of showing the costs of inaction and conveying a sense of urgency. We can learn from this approach. Buy-in and political commitment at the highest level, and by all relevant stakeholders and decision makers, is needed to establish the necessary mandates, institutionalize mainstreaming through agreed processes, and to facilitate information sharing, coordination and collaboration between multiple stakeholders.

- 2) **Second: evidence.** Recent reports on progress towards the ICPD and 2030 Agendas in the UNECE region highlight significant data gaps on many social development issues, and for certain population groups including older persons and children and youth. We need greater investment in the collection and dissemination of data, in order to know who is being left behind. Different stakeholder perspectives are also important to inform decision makers about the benefits of social development as well as of the costs of inaction.
- 3) **Third: coordination.** We have a tendency to work in silos. To effectively mainstream, we need to address this fragmentation and strengthen coordination within governments and with other stakeholders. An example: within the UN, the recent initiative to strengthen the Inter-Agency Group on Ageing and nominate focal points on ageing across the UN system is a positive step to enhance information exchange and coordination across UN agencies. Actors from different policy domains often compete for political attention and resources. Mainstreaming can build bridges to foster cross-sectoral awareness, exchange, and collaboration.
- 4) Lastly, there is the need to **build capacity** for mainstreaming. Member States and actors across the UN system need knowledge, skills, resources, and practical support. We're committed to this in the UNECE region. Our guidelines and tools on mainstreaming ageing provide step-by-step guidance on raising awareness, strengthening the evidence base, and developing mechanisms for coordination and collaboration.

[Optional: Slide 2 on UNECE resources on mainstreaming ageing]

With the UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing, we have developed a range of resources to support mainstreaming ageing including technical

guidance, tailored policy recommendations, the exchange of good practices and peer learning through policy briefs and dialogues, as well as online or face-to-face trainings.

UNECE Resources for Mainstreaming Ageing



Conclusion

To conclude, sustainable social development cannot be effectively pursued through social policies alone. It requires people centred visions and actions, spanning all realms of development and actors involved.

We should strive for a holistic vision of people, with their diverse needs for peace and security, respect of their human rights, access to health and education, equitable opportunities for participation - to name but a few. Let us resist taking narrow views on youth or women or education alone – Let us integrate all elements for social development, to enable every human being to fully realize their potential throughout their life course.

With renewed commitment to working together across countries, sectors and levels of government, we can keep people at the forefront of national, regional, and UN agendas and ensure no one is left behind.
