Gender Equality and Ageing
Changing demographics: Ageing and its implications for Gender Equality

Side-event to the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting
sponsored by Germany, Italy and France,
with the participation of UNECE-Working Group on Ageing and the European Commission

29 October, 13.30-14.45,
Room XXIII
Palais des Nations, Geneva

Objectives

• Highlight the implications of population ageing for gender equality
• Pinpoint what needs to be done to ensure that reforms undertaken to adapt to population ageing promote rather than reduce gender equality over the life course
• Establish a cross-border dialogue between administrations, in connection with civil society representatives, to share good practices for reducing gender gaps in old age

Speakers

• Ms. Silvia PEREL-LEVIN, Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing, Geneva;
• Mr. Michele PALMA, Director General, Department of Family Policy, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Italy;
• Ms. Anne-Sophie PARENT, AGE Platform Europe;
• Mr. Matthias VON SCHWANENFLÜGEL, Director general, Demographic Change, Senior Citizens, Welfare, Germany;
• Mr. Alexis RINCKENBACH, Head, European and International Affairs Unit, Secretariat of State for Gender Equality and fight against discriminations, France

Moderated by Ms. Lisa Warth, Associate Population Affairs Officer, UNECE

Context

Population ageing is a global phenomenon, caused by declining birth rates and increased life expectancy. Today, older women outnumber older men in all countries of the UNECE region. Although they tend to live longer than men, many are not able to enjoy their later years in a similar way because they are victims of multiple discriminations. Gender stereotypes and inequalities has led elderly women to suffer from discriminations and increased risks and hazards, especially regarding financial security and health.

In 2009, the 2nd UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing on gender equality, work and old age accurately identified the need to adopt a lifecourse approach when dealing with the interconnections of ageing and gender
with equality. In addition, the 8th commitment undertook by UNECE Member States in the Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) stated the objective of mainstreaming a gender approach to achieve full gender equality, realise full equality between women and men in their contribution in the economy, ensure gender equality of access to social protection and social security systems and promote shared responsibilities of women and men within their families. Such mainstreaming approach arises from the understanding that present circumstances of older people can be understood by references to their prior life course. This requires a break up of stereotyping, the linking of socio-economic position, roles and relationships in later life to the earlier biographies of men and women. Although progress has been made, women and men still experience old age very differently. The fact that women bear the primary responsibility for unpaid housework and family care is not yet extensively accounted for in pension systems and thus undermines women’s ability to accumulate social security entitlements for their retirement. This translates into the greater poverty risk women are facing compared to men: 20% of women aged 75+ are at risk of poverty or social exclusion versus 15% of men (Eurostat, 2019).

In line with the publication of the Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men chaired by Italy and of the Policy Brief on Ageing of the UNECE, this side-event aims at harnessing best practices from some UNECE Member States which support gender equality in old age. In a context of a foreseen vast demographic change, it appears that social protection tools will need an ambitious overhaul in order to promote effective gender equality at all ages.

**Event description**

This joint side-event hosted by UNECE, the European Commission, France, Germany and Italy aims at fostering an insightful discussion amongst UNECE Member States on good practices related to promoting gender equality in old age. Most importantly, it ought to be an additional step in the collective thinking process on how to mainstream gender equality in our social systems deemed to adapt to rapidly ageing societies. In the perspective of the reaching the Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda, UNECE Member States have indeed began implementing measures to achieve full gender equality.

Keynote speakers are to discuss the following questions:

- To what extent do current gender stereotypes at all stages of the life course contribute to the observed inequalities across genders in old age?
- What are the best practices regarding the promotion of gender equality amongst various welfare regimes?
- Does the larger proportion of women amongst the elderly impact the design of social protection mechanisms?

To what extent can regional cooperation advance a gender-responsive societal adaptation to population ageing?