

Ministerial Conference on Ageing: A Sustainable Society for All Ages: Realizing the potential of living longer

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Panel discussion between Minister and Civil Society representatives *Recognizing the Potential of Older Persons: Intergenerational perspective (22 September, 2017)*

DEAR MADAM CHAIR,
MINISTERS,
DELEGATES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMAN,

- Let me first thank you for the opportunity to participate in this conference and to speak about the potential of older persons from an intergenerational perspective.
- I would like to thank all the NGOs who have played a leading and relevant role in supporting the intergenerational cooperation by bringing together people of different ages. Everyone has to feel needed and important.
- Let me share with you Latvia`s initiatives and challenges to foster recognition of the potential of older persons.
- In our work we strongly agree with the motto “Nothing about us without us”, that comes from disability activists. Major policy decisions concerning older persons have been discussed in *Council on Senior Affairs* that is established under the Minister of Welfare. This is a significant platform where NGOs can influence the policy making process by expressing their views and position.
- In Latvia, a public consultation is mandatory prior any legislative project or national policy document is officially submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers. This is an important step when NGOs have the possibility to give their opinion about the proposed legal initiatives that strengthens cooperation. Every objection and disagreement has to be discussed.
- Moreover, we have taken substantial steps in bringing the potential of older persons into the focus of policy making.

- In 2016 government approved the Active Ageing Strategy for Longer and Better Working Lives. The Strategy was developed within international project where we gained experience and best practice examples from other countries. This Strategy is the first policy paper in our country that aims to address issues regarding different challenges older persons face in the labour market.
- There are also a number of activities to promote intergenerational cooperation. Municipalities and NGOs play a relevant role.
- Let me name one example. Since 2009 there have been implemented annual activities that are dedicated to the preservation of handicraft skills, their promotion and transfer. Within the project “Meet your Master” various masters all over the country transfer their knowledge, skills and traditions to other generations.
- I believe this is an excellent example how to recognize the potential of older persons, promote cooperation between generations, encourage longer working life and ensure ageing with dignity.
- Moreover, this is important also because changes in society have influenced our perception about ‘age’. Earlier ‘age’ and ‘wisdom’ were synonyms and we honored older persons because they were smartest to help us to develop.
- Today ‘wisdom’ is not necessarily synonym to ‘age’ and we have to look for other reasons to keep and maintain the role of older persons high. And I believe that there are many other reasons how to do this.
- Undeniably, we face also several challenges. We still have to work on reducing stereotypes towards older persons. These stereotypes impact the opportunities for work of older persons.
- We need to expand care services for promoting independent living.
- Active ageing is limited by disability and chronic diseases, as well as indirectly due to unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise and regular physical activity.
- At the same time there are significant inequalities in health status and doctor visits, depending on educational attainment and income level.
- All these issues are on our policy agenda and to a great extent Latvia has managed to target EU structural funds` investment towards these challenges.

- In conclusion, I truly hope this conference will give a new impetus to address the challenges we have identified – to promote the potential of longer and better lives by contributing to Ministerial Declaration to be adopted.
- I am convinced that during our next meeting we all will share our achievements and results regarding more inclusive society and better quality of life for all generations!

Thank you!