

# Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

## Opinion on the gender dimension of active ageing and Solidarity between generations<sup>1</sup>

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The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States

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<sup>1</sup> Although originally not part of the mandate, it is proposed to include this in the title of the Opinion in light of the European Year 2012 on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity

# 1. Introduction

The EU should celebrate the fact that due to healthy ageing policies of the past, coupled with an increased standard of living of the majority of Europeans, an increasing number of women and men can enjoy healthy, participative and active lives well into old age. EU Member States are all faced with responding to the requirements of an unprecedented number of older people. As life expectancy increases, we must improve our understanding of the implications of increasing longevity. Member states and policy makers must respond proactively to the social, economic, budgetary and policy challenges these demographic challenges bring. In these difficult economic times, when many Member States are looking to make significant savings and public sector spending reductions, it is important that we endeavour to protect and develop services for our ageing populations.

Active ageing is a way of maximising the opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people begin to age. The gender dimension of ageing is important, including the different needs and situations of women and men and the intersection of gender and disability, sexual orientation, religion, economic situation, marital and civil status, migration and belonging to ethnic minorities - which can often lead to multiple discriminations.

Different Member States will have different definitions of what is meant by active ageing, though all are committed to ensuring that ageing is a positive experience, and are striving to ensure that longer life should be accompanied by greater health, well-being and active citizenship.

The World Health Organisation, in its 2002 Policy Framework on active ageing, uses the following definition: *“Active ageing is the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age<sup>2</sup>.”*

We should seek out ways to utilise the skills, experience and energy of healthier, more active and dynamic older generations. In this context, active ageing must be seen as part of creating greater intergenerational solidarity, to ensure a fairer re-distribution of resources, responsibility and participation and to develop greater cooperation between genders and generations in all social and economic spheres. Enhanced solidarity between generations can play a key role in developing fairer and more sustainable responses to the major economic and social challenges. Intergenerational understanding and solidarity can significantly contribute towards building stronger and more cohesive civil societies.

2012 is the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity of Generations<sup>3</sup>, and it is hoped that this opinion will influence the strategy and activities associated with this.

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<sup>2</sup>World Health Organisation, 'Active ageing: a policy framework', [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/WHO\\_NMH\\_NPH\\_02.8.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The European Year 2012 was officially named 'Active ageing and solidarity of generations' following an agreement between the European Parliament and Council agreed on in Strasbourg on 11 May 2011

## 2. Context

### 2.1 General

Within the European Union the ageing population is increasing due to a combination of low birth rates and rising life expectancy. The number of people aged 60 and over is increasing by about 2 million every year, twice as fast as it did before 2007.<sup>4</sup> The EU27 population is expected to continue to grow older, with the number of people aged 65 years and over increasing from 17% in 2010 to 30% in 2060. The number of those aged 80 years and over is expected to rise from 5% to 12% in the same period.<sup>5</sup> Projections on life expectancy at birth in 2030 in the EU are expected to rise to 85.3 years for women and 80 years for men<sup>6</sup>. Changing demographics mean that a greater proportion of the EU's population will be composed of older men and women. Consequently, EU Member States will need to plan to accommodate this trend.

The age cohorts considered in the context of active ageing are not always defined in the same way across EU Member States and span from 50 plus to 90 plus. The needs of a person in his or her 50s is likely to be very different than those of a person aged over 90. In addition there are differences in the experiences of women and the experiences of men across these age cohorts. Therefore, planning will need to consider the specific issues for women and men across a range of age cohorts from 50 plus to 90 plus to ensure that the gender dimension of active ageing is taken into account and the goal of equality between women and men promoted.

Furthermore, the process of achieving linkages between national and EU policies in the area of gender equality and ageing is highly complex as gender and age cover a broad range of policy areas at European and national levels. As a result it is important to collate good policy and practice among Member States and by the European Commission so that learning and knowledge on how to support active ageing, taking into account the gender dimension, can be shared and put into practice.

Important areas of focus include labour market participation, training, engagement in the community and transport, health and care services. However there are a range of cross-cutting issues which raise challenges for older women and older men as they seek to live active and healthy lives and to age with dignity. These issues include changes in family and living patterns; longer working lives; the demand for an increasingly mobile, highly qualified and flexible labour force in the context of global competition, the current economic crisis; and the fact that retraining opportunities may not always be available.<sup>7</sup>

It has been emphasised that older people are exposed to a higher risk of poverty compared to the overall population<sup>8</sup> and that in a number of countries older people are particularly at

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<sup>4</sup> 'Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth', <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLETE%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%2020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat, 'EU27 population is expected to peak by around 2040, 80/2011', [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-08062011-BP/EN/3-08062011-BP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08062011-BP/EN/3-08062011-BP-EN.PDF)

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat News release, *A statistical perspective on women and men in the EU27*, 8 March 2010: International Women's Day

<sup>7</sup> Council Conclusions on 'Equal opportunities for women and men: active and dignified ageing': <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st10/st10412.en09.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> In 2008, 17% of the EU 27 population was at risk of poverty while for people aged 65 years and above the at-risk-of-poverty rate was 19%. SILC 2008.

risk of material deprivation. The at-risk-of-poverty rate is significantly higher for women over the age 65 than for men of the same age (21 % vs. 16% in 2008).<sup>9</sup> Poverty includes a lack of income and sufficient material resources to live in dignity, inadequate access to basic services such as healthcare, housing and education and labour market exclusion and poor quality work.<sup>10</sup> Gender differences and inequalities are both features of social exclusion and poverty, especially in old age. There are gender differences in how women and men experience stress and social isolation that old age can bring which have implications for their health and life expectancy.

Although the life expectancy of women is longer than men, the number of quality-of-life-years for women compared to men is lower.<sup>11</sup>, highlighting the need for health services to respond to the differing needs of women and men and to the challenge that more women than men will experience extended periods of ill health in old age. In this context, assumptions about high healthcare costs of older people need to be analysed. For example, a study of people aged 65 or more in the UK found that intensive healthcare costs were related to proximity to death rather than age.<sup>12</sup>

The impact of the current economic recession cannot be ignored, resulting in an increase in the number of people falling, or at risk of falling, below the poverty level.<sup>13</sup> These issues are societal in nature which require policy responses from Government. Gender income inequalities (notably the gender pay and pension gaps) expose older women to a greater risk of poverty and social exclusion and income inequalities in general expose both women and men in lower socio-economic groups to a greater risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>14</sup>

While an ageing population increases pressure on pension systems, including the gender pension gap, public finances and social and care services for older people it is also true that the potential of older people to contribute positively can be maximised with the aim of reducing the potential pressure on societal resources and services.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2 Specific issues

### Economic independence

In order to meet current and future demographic and equality challenges, there is a need for a sustainable approach to active ageing which emphasises the business case for and the

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<sup>9</sup> European Commission Staff Working Paper, *Report on the progress on equality between women and men*, 2010:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st06/st06571.en11.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> 'Commission Communication on the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion',

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0758:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>11</sup> Life expectancy at birth in the EU Member States was 82 years for women as opposed to 76 years for men in 2008. Healthy life years however were 62.3 for women as opposed to 61.5 for men in the 2007. European Commission, *Report on the progress on Equality between Women and Men in 2010*.

<sup>12</sup> 'Population Ageing and Health Care Expenditure: New Evidence on the "Red Herring"', *The Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance Vol. 29 No. 4 (October 2004) 652-666*, [http://www.genevaassociation.org/PDF/Geneva\\_papers\\_on\\_Risk\\_and\\_Insurance/GA2004\\_GP29\(4\)\\_Zweifel,%20Felder&Werblow.pdf](http://www.genevaassociation.org/PDF/Geneva_papers_on_Risk_and_Insurance/GA2004_GP29(4)_Zweifel,%20Felder&Werblow.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> 'The European Commission Progress Report on Europe 2020 Annual Growth Survey Annex 1', COM(2011) 11 - A1/2, [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/1\\_en\\_annexe\\_part1.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/1_en_annexe_part1.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> 'Active ageing and gender equality policies: the employment and social inclusion of women and men of late working and early retirement age', Final Synthesis Report, Network of Experts in Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Health and Long-term Care, 2010

<sup>15</sup> 'Active ageing and gender equality policies: the employment and social inclusion of women and men of late working and early retirement age', Final Synthesis Report, Network of Experts in Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Health and Long-term Care, 2010

economic opportunities arising from a focus on active ageing, taking into account equality between women and men and the need to reinforce protection against all forms of discrimination. Furthermore, the vast experience of older people, the diversity that exists among older people and their valuable contribution to society needs to be recognised and promoted.<sup>16</sup>

Economic independence in older age mirrors life-long economic opportunities which in general tend to be lower for women than men. Women's representation in unpaid work throughout their lives, coupled with patchy employment patterns in a gender occupational segregated labour-market marked by a consistent gender pay gap (between 17.1 and 18% EU average<sup>17</sup>) impacts on older women's economic independence, pension rights and entitlements making them vulnerable to poverty as they age. The average hourly pay gap between women and men in the EU is 17.1% across all occupation sectors. For example, in the area of scientific research it stands at an average 25% in the EU<sup>18</sup>. The average employment rate in the 20 to 64 years age category in the EU is 62.5%<sup>19</sup> for women against 75.8% for men.

For some older women and older men financial burdens result in a pressure to remain in the workforce. Conversely, for others there is a risk of becoming unemployed. Therefore, the emphasis on increasing retirement ages, which vary across Member States, and recruitment freezes in public sector organisations bring both opportunities and challenges for active ageing. In this context opportunities for retention and increased participation in the workplace need to be accompanied by opportunities to retrain and access to flexible work patterns. In addition, policy developments in the area of flexicurity need to take into account the gender dimension of active ageing.

The Europe 2020 objective of a 75% employment rate for both men and women places a particular emphasis on the participation of older women in the labour market<sup>20</sup>. In 2009 about 38% of women aged between 55 and 64 years were employed compared to 55% of men in the same age cohort.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, the economic engagement of older women contributes to their pension coverage/entitlement and can help them to avoid poverty traps in older age on the condition that they are not obliged to work to avoid such traps. It also contributes to economic growth and adds to the tax base. In particular any future proposals and/or reforms on adequate, sustainable and safe pension systems must aim to eliminate inequalities between women and men in the European Union.

Although there are differences between EU countries the employment rates for women in late working age in the EU-27 as a whole are more closely correlated with educational

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<sup>16</sup> 'European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012: Everyone has a role to play', [http://www.monitoringris.org/documents/strat\\_glob/2012\\_everyone\\_has\\_a\\_role\\_to\\_play\\_joint\\_leaflet\\_may\\_2011.pdf](http://www.monitoringris.org/documents/strat_glob/2012_everyone_has_a_role_to_play_joint_leaflet_may_2011.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Figures vary between 17.1/17.4/17.5 and 18%. It is likely however that the figure is higher. It should be understood as *the average difference between men's and women's hourly earnings* see European Commission website: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/index_en.htm)

<sup>18</sup> European Commission Staff Working Paper, Report on the progress on equality between women and men, 2010: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st06/st06571.en11.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Figures for 2009: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/economic-independence/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/economic-independence/index_en.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Employment Guideline Nr 7, Council Document 10907/10, 9.6.2010. Report on the progress on equality between women and men, 2010: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st06/st06571.en11.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Eurostat, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment\\_unemployment\\_ifs/data/database](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/employment_unemployment_ifs/data/database)

attainments than men in the same age cohort and women participate less frequently in learning activities than men in old age.<sup>22</sup>

Policy responses need to address the linkages between care, ageing, gender, and inequalities between women and men. Also the longer life expectancy of women compared to men coupled with pension related issues means that more older women will be at risk of poverty with implications for their long-term care.

### Discrimination

Discrimination experienced by older women and older men is often multi-dimensional reflecting the diversity that exists among older people. For women age discrimination is compounded by other forms of discrimination based on sex, gender, ethnic origin, disability, levels of poverty, sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant status, family status, literacy and other grounds.<sup>23</sup> Although the experiences for men are different, age discrimination experienced by men is also compounded by some of the same factors.

Equality legislation and equality bodies have a key role to play in tackling issues arising from discrimination and in promoting good practice in relation to active ageing. The Gender Equality Directives<sup>24</sup> provide protections regarding employment, vocational training, social security and goods and services. Directive 2000/78/EC<sup>25</sup> provides protection on a number of grounds including age regarding employment and vocational training. The Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. This proposal is presently under discussion in the Council.

## 3. Mandate of the working group

Against this backdrop, in January 2011, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men decided to set up a working group to prepare an opinion on the gender dimension of active ageing in preparation for the European year of Active Ageing and Solidarity of Generations.

Considering the political context and ongoing initiatives in the field of healthy, dignified and active ageing, the Advisory Committee was mandated to consider the following points:

- How could synergies between national and EU policies in the area of gender equality and ageing be maximised to address the specific challenges women and men face arising from an increasingly ageing population?

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<sup>22</sup> 'Active ageing and gender equality policies: the employment and social inclusion of women and men of late working and early retirement age', Final Synthesis Report, Network of Experts in Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Health and Long-term Care, 2010

<sup>23</sup> CEDAW General Recommendation No. 27 on older women and the protection of their human rights, C/GC/27 16 December 2010,

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/472/53/PDF/G1047253.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>24</sup> Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation; Directive 2004/113/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

<sup>25</sup> Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

- How could the Commission better cooperate with the Member State authorities, other European institutions, relevant international bodies and civil society organisations to ensure that gender equality considerations form an integral part of new developments on this issue?
- Make specific suggestions on how to take the gender dimension into account in a variety of themes falling under ageing policies.
- Make specific suggestions on how the Commission, Member States and civil society can tackle discrimination against older women in the employment and social spheres.
- Make specific suggestions for activities and objectives in the area of gender equality and active ageing to be implemented at EU or national level during the European Year for Active Ageing.

## 4. Gender issues in active ageing

### Economic independence

Due to women's working patterns and the absence of recognition of years spent out of the formal labour-market to care for children and family members, women may end up with no choice other than working beyond the age of 65 and above, in order to be eligible for full pension entitlements<sup>26</sup>. Active ageing policies should not become a tool to bridge the gender pension gap which would disproportionately impact on the economic independence and choice of older women. More evidence suggests that worldwide, as a consequence of the financial crisis, the issue of quality employment is becoming a crucial factor and in particular for women throughout their life-cycle.<sup>27</sup>

### The business case for gender balance

In its strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015<sup>28</sup>, the European Commission underlines that the proportion of women taking part to the decision-making process is still low, although they constitute about half of current workers and more than half of recent graduates from universities in the EU. According to the Commission's findings, the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies in the EU is currently on average 12%, and women are directors of only 3% of these boards.<sup>29</sup>

From a macro economic perspective, the increase in women's participation in the labour market has accounted for a quarter of annual economic growth since 1995. This positive development has contributed to greater recognition of the 'economic case' for gender equality<sup>30</sup>.

In line with Europe 2020 the guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States state that 'increased female labour force participation is a precondition for boosting growth and for tackling the demographic challenges in Europe'.

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<sup>26</sup> In a Peer Review on *Minimum Incomes and Women's Poverty* (Belgium 2006), it was pointed out that *EU comparative statistics only reflect elderly and retired people in private households and that institutionalised older people were absent from these statistics* (page 10)

<sup>27</sup> See International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Report, *Living with economic insecurity: women in precarious work*, March 2011

<sup>28</sup> COM (2010) 491 final

<sup>29</sup> The figure of women in boards has increased by 0.5% per year over the past seven years.

<sup>30</sup> OECD (2008) Gender and sustainable development. Maximising the economic, social and environmental role of women.

While some of the barriers which may impede women's career prospects have been removed through legislation there remain other structural factors such as tax policies, access to childcare and care for dependent persons as well as cultural factors such as persisting gender stereotypes and family-unfriendly business cultures.

Governments, social partners<sup>31</sup> and companies need to build on previous actions and work in partnership to develop comprehensive strategies and initiatives to continue to address this issue.

### **The economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures**

While the initial financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent economic recession impacted significantly on men by nature of the sectors of the economy that were effected (primarily the construction and car industries), the socio-economic recession that followed has failed to assess and monitor the gender impact of and subsequent gender responses to the recession. Research<sup>32</sup> indicates that older women, women over the age of 45, women with disabilities, ethnic minority and migrant women and those with short term contracts and low skills are more likely to be directly affected by the recession particularly if they were experiencing poverty and social exclusion prior to the economic crisis.

In its Opinion<sup>33</sup> on the Gender Perspective to the economic and financial crisis, the Advisory Committee points out that "*any changes in pension provision through restrictions on caring credits may promote further inequalities between women and men*" (page 8) and points to the lack of women in financial and decision-making that has *inter alia*, led the majority of Member States to characterise "*interventions to the economic and financial downturn (to date) as being 'gender neutral'*" (page 9).

Cuts in public services which provide support for older women and men, are likely to have a detrimental effect on the gender dimension of active ageing particularly in the absence of a gender perspective, in terms of analysis and responses, to the economic crisis and on how this impacts on both women and men at every stage of their lives.

### **The life cycle approach**

The importance of promoting a life cycle approach to work is widely acknowledged by most EU countries. The majority of the active labour market policies promoting gender equality are addressed to women and men in adulthood, often disregarding the disadvantaged position of young and old women compared with men of the same age<sup>34</sup>.

The gender differences along the three main stages of life cycle (youth, adulthood and seniority) vary both in terms of relevance and in terms of nature. According to EGGSI network experts, gender differences between young people are mainly due to different school to work transitions caused by qualification segregation. Few national reports of that

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<sup>31</sup> See Social Partners *Framework of actions on gender equality*, 2005 [http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/framework\\_of\\_actions\\_gender\\_equality\\_010305-2.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/framework_of_actions_gender_equality_010305-2.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Oxfam International/European Women's Lobby, *Women's poverty and social exclusion in the European Union at a time of recession: An Invisible Crisis?*, A Gender Works paper, March 2010

<sup>33</sup> Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, *Opinion on The Gender perspective on the response to the economic and financial crisis*, June 2009

<sup>34</sup> Gender mainstreaming active inclusion policies, Final synthesis report, EU 2010, p. 80

network contain information on active labour market policies for young people<sup>35</sup>. This is an issue to be addressed.

## Carers

Women continue to take primary responsibility for the care of children, dependent and/or elderly family members. However, in some countries research indicates that older men are as likely as older women to be undertaking caring responsibilities for elderly dependents<sup>36</sup>.

Some research indicates that men face barriers in the workplace when seeking time off/flexible working conditions for caring responsibilities<sup>37</sup>, primarily childcare. While father's working time has become more flexible over the years, flexible working options are less available in male dominated settings, hence indicating that entrenched gender stereotypes, which equate women as carers and men as workers, continue to be part of workplace culture. The same research indicates that '*fathers who work flexibly are more committed to their organisation*'.<sup>38</sup>

Council conclusions<sup>39</sup> recognise the importance of reconciling work and family life in terms of supporting families and solidarity between the generations. The Conclusions also take into account the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) which stresses the importance of promoting better work-life balance for women and men throughout their life-cycle, so as to enhance equality between women and men, including to ensuring that both women and men can participate in the labour market and contribute to meeting the demographic challenges. The Conclusions also highlight the need to promote men's role within the family and the importance of high quality, affordable child care.<sup>40</sup>

Policy responses need to address the linkages between care, ageing, gender and inequalities between women and men. Spending reductions in public services, including services for older people, are particularly at risk during times of economic recession.

## Health

According to the World Health Organisation, health is '*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*'.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the European Union (EU) Treaties<sup>42</sup> state that a '*high level of human health protection*', should be guaranteed for all.

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<sup>35</sup> Gender mainstreaming active inclusion policies, Final synthesis report, EU 2010, p. 8

<sup>36</sup> Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) Working Paper 2007-13 *Gender, older people and social exclusion, A gendered review and secondary analysis of the data*, June 2007

<sup>37</sup> Fatherhood Institute, *Fathers, mothers, work and family, research summary* 18 January 2011: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/fi-research-summary-fathers-mothers-work-and-family/>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid : page 5, referring to research by Lancaster University Management School/Working Families, 2010

<sup>39</sup> Council conclusions, 'Reconciliation of work and family life in the context of demographic change', 3099th EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH and CONSUMER AFFAIRS Council meeting, Luxembourg, 17 June 2011, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122875.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122875.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Council conclusions, 'Reconciliation of work and family life in the context of demographic change', 3099th EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH and CONSUMER AFFAIRS Council meeting, Luxembourg, 17 June 2011, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122875.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122875.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Preamble to the Constitution of the WHO, adopted 1946.

<sup>42</sup> Art. 168 TFEU (ex Art. 152 TEC).

Demographic projections on life expectancy at birth in 2030 in the EU are expected to rise to 85.3 years for women and 80 years for men,<sup>43</sup> a number of health and social factors combine to create a lower quality of life for women. Unequal access to information, care and basic health practices further increases the health risks for women.<sup>44</sup>

With regards to women's health, differences related to reproductive functions have long been recognised as of primary importance in health care<sup>45</sup>. However, women's health needs must not be reduced to these functions particularly for older women.

Due to the difference in life expectancy, more women than men are likely to live alone in later life. In later life, women are more likely than men to suffer from poor mental health<sup>46</sup>.

Particular experiences for men also give rise to vulnerabilities among older men and further research may be necessary in this area. The average gap across EU-27 Member States between female and male life expectancy at birth is 6.7 years.<sup>47</sup> In the context of research on health inequalities in Ireland, which identified a strong correlation between income and educational levels, it was found that men living in the poorest areas live on average 4.5 years less than men living in the most affluent areas, while the differential for women is 2.7 years.<sup>48</sup>

Other health issues which have implications for the health and well-being of older men include a higher prevalence of suicide among men compared to women, homelessness and stereotypes which inform attitudes to men's health by older men themselves and institutions delivering health and care services. In addition, notwithstanding the particular experience of women in the provision of informal and formal care, men's role in relation to caring is changing. There is some research to suggest that differences among older men and women in relation to service utilization, provision of informal care and participation in social networks are often the consequence of differences in marital status and living arrangements rather than gender differences *per se*.<sup>49</sup> As people age the informal care of older people is more gender balanced between women and men.

The economic recession also highlights particular vulnerabilities among some older men with a high risk of unemployment in certain sectors such as the construction sector. In some Member States the participation of men in training is lower than that of women and in the working age population across the EU-27 men participate less than women in training.<sup>50</sup> This has implications for older men, particularly those who become unemployed, as it limits their access to and participation in the labour market and contributes to their social isolation.

## Violence against women

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<sup>43</sup> Eurostat News release, *A statistical perspective on women and men in the EU27*, 8 March 2010: International Women's Day

<sup>44</sup> WHO *10 facts on women's health*, March 2011; <http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/women/en/index.html>

<sup>45</sup> Crepaldi, Ch. Et al., *Access to Healthcare and Long-Term Care: Equal for women and men*, 2009, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> *Active ageing and gender equality policies: the employment and social inclusion of women and men of late working and early retirement age*, Final Synthesis Report, Network of Experts in Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Health and Long-term Care, 2010

<sup>47</sup> Eurostat 'Population and social conditions', 8/1/2008, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-SF-08-081/EN/KS-SF-08-081-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-08-081/EN/KS-SF-08-081-EN.PDF)

<sup>48</sup> 'Eliminating Health Inequalities: A Matter of Life and Death', TASC 2011, <http://www.tascnet.ie/upload/file/HealthWeb.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> 'Gender, Older People and Social Exclusion. A Gendered Review and Secondary Analysis of the Data', ISER Working Paper 2007-13, [http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/iser\\_working\\_papers/2007-13.pdf](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/iser_working_papers/2007-13.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> *Active ageing and gender equality policies: the employment and social inclusion of women and men of late working and early retirement age*, Final Synthesis Report, Network of Experts in Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Health and Long-term Care, 2010

Existing research<sup>51</sup> points out that only in few countries data on violence against women go beyond women of 65-years of age. The absence of data makes it harder to tackle the phenomenon of violence against elderly women, and in line with the demographic trend, an increasing number of older women will potentially become victims of male violence if this issue is not addressed. Research also shows that the dependency factor - on carers and family members – makes older women more vulnerable to violence but also dependency due to *limited economic resources, constricted access to income and fewer avenues for obtaining financial independence as they age*.<sup>52</sup> Active ageing policies must address these issues.

### **Elder abuse**

Elder abuse is physical, sexual, mental and/or financial abuse and/or neglect of frail older people. With the ageing population more and more people may become dependent on the care of relatives or professional carers and be vulnerable to neglect or even abuse. Elder abuse affects both the mental and physical well-being of older people. It is thus an important public health problem. Further, preventing elder abuse is a question of safeguarding fundamental rights. Society has an obligation to preserve the rights of older people, which may be eroded by ageism. To overcome this, solidarity across generations needs to be strengthened and prevention programmes need to be put in place<sup>53</sup>.

There is at present a lack of data on the prevalence of elder abuse in the European Union, but some national studies give an idea of the potential scale of the problem. In a representative survey conducted in the United Kingdom in 2006, 2.6% of respondents (aged 66 and over and living in private households) reported that they had experienced abuse or neglect by a family member, a close friend or care-worker during the previous year.<sup>54</sup>

Research is needed to identify potential gender differences in the experience by older women and men of elder abuse. Such research should contribute to more targeted policy interventions to tackle this issue.

## **5. Recommendations**

### **5.1. How could synergies between national and EU policies in the area of gender equality and ageing be maximised to address the specific challenges women and men face arising from an increasingly ageing population?**

- Identify cross-cutting initiatives and insert a focus on the gender dimension of active ageing into those initiatives and collate best practice models.
- Ensure in the flagships initiatives<sup>55</sup> of Europe 2020 that the initiative on the gender dimension of active ageing is included as a key priority in the themes of smart growth, sustainable growth or inclusive growth. The issue of solidarity between generations should be included in the Flagship “Youth on the Move”.

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<sup>51</sup> Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, *Older women and domestic violence in Scotland*, Briefing 39, September 2008

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, <http://www.cfr.ac.uk/reports/rb39.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/144676/e95110.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/144676/e95110.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> *UK study of abuse and neglect of older people*, Prevalence survey report commissioned by Comic Relief and the Department of Health, June 2007 <http://www.comicrelief.com/elder-abuse>

<sup>55</sup> Name them 7 in total: Innovation Union, Youth on the move, a digital agenda for Europe Resource efficient Europe, An industrial policy for the globalisation era, an agenda for new skills and jobs, European platform against poverty.

- The European Social Fund should have a specific aim to support initiatives focused on older women and men particularly on promoting access to employment and skills for older people.
- Implement and renew Barcelona targets for childcare, and include targets for facilities for other dependent persons.
- The European Commission and Member States should consider ways of encouraging wider implementation of gender mainstreaming by public bodies and encouraging coherence between Government policy, planning and service delivery for older women and older men.

## **5.2. How could the Commission better cooperate with the Member State authorities, other European institutions, relevant international bodies and civil society organisations to ensure that gender equality considerations form an integral part of new developments on this issue?**

- The open method of coordination (OMC) for social protection and social inclusion which has been an effective instrument to bring forward common priorities for social policy at EU and national level,<sup>56</sup> should be used as a tool for focusing on the gender aspects of ageing, including for the exchange of experiences and best practices in the field of elderly care<sup>57</sup>.
- The European Commission should ensure that consultation and preparation of impact assessments in relation to policy developments on active ageing include bodies such as the European Institute for Gender Equality, Eurostat, the ESF Age Network, Age Platform Europe, the European Professional Women's Network and the European Network of Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy as well as a representative number of national Gender institutes.
- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and Eurostat should have a significant role in developing and disseminating EU-wide data on the situation of women and men. The EIGE could be asked to commission research specifically on the gender dimension of active ageing and to collate data on a regular basis to track changes in the situation of older women and men across Europe considering also existing national concepts dealing with issues of demographic relevance.
- All pension reforms should examine the gender dimension of pension provision, including in the follow-up work of the European Commission's White Paper on Pensions, which addresses the sustainability and adequacy of pensions in a post-crisis context.
- The European Commission should promote the inclusion of an agenda item on the gender dimension of active ageing at the *Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Councils (EPSCO)* preparatory meeting for the Spring European Council to agree cross cutting Council conclusions on appropriate policy responses for consideration at the Spring Council.
- The European Commission and Member States should ensure that Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Joint Employment Reports include the gender dimension of active ageing and the promotion of intergenerational solidarity.

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<sup>56</sup> 'The Future of the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) - Endorsement of the Opinion of the Social Protection Committee' 10405/11, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st10/st10405.en11.pdf>

One example for such a measure is the peer review "Effects of life courses on women's pensions", held on November 3rd / 4th 2011 in Germany, <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2011/effects-of-life-courses-on-women2019s-pensions>.

<sup>57</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on Healthy and Dignified Ageing', 2009, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/111553.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/111553.pdf)

- The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) should continue with its research in the area of the gender dimension of violence and include violence throughout the lifecycle.

### **5.3. Make specific suggestions on how to take the gender dimension into account in a variety of themes falling under ageing policies**

- Analyse policies and practices, using equality impact assessment equality proofing, to ensure that they do not adversely impact on the current and future generations of older women and men. Gender impact assessments should also analyse the impact of policies not only on the living standards of today's older women but also those of tomorrow's older women, to interlink active ageing and solidarity between the generations.
- Include gender equality as a cut crossing issue, in all fields, to eliminate barriers for women to access to education, professional training and work. Further work in educational settings for all ages must be done to foster the share of domestic work and care between women and men on an equal footing.
- Older people generally and older women in particular tend to have significantly lower than average employment rates, so there is a need for EU-wide policies on employment and skills development to include a specific focus on older returners and the need for them to have opportunities to access education and skills development.
- Launching of specific awareness raising campaigns to alert citizenship on the negative impact of the burden of care on women's careers and well-being.
- Ensure the integration of a gender perspective in all aspects of health policies, together with specific health prevention campaigns aimed to women growing older, programmes and research from their development and design to impact assessment and budgeting.
- The European Commission should support an extent of the mandate of the ESF Age Network, the official network financed by the European Social Fund, to commit the organisation to the gender dimension of active ageing.

### **5.4. Make specific suggestions on how the Commission, Member States and civil society can tackle discrimination against older women in the employment and social spheres.**

- Encourage activities, including awareness campaigns, to promote work life balance, the life cycle approach to work, flexible retirement options, addressing pension issues, balancing the participation of women and men in family and working life, sharing the caring responsibilities, challenging stereotyping in employment, education and the media, women in leadership and decision making positions.
- Coordinate<sup>58</sup> a European Strategy on active ageing and an Age-Friendly EU with the aim of achieving the EU2020<sup>59</sup> objective and targets particularly in relation to employment and reducing poverty.

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<sup>58</sup> Together with the European Parliament, the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the World Health Organisation-Europe, given that in September 2002, all EU Member States endorsed the regional Implementation Strategy for Europe of the UN's International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)

<sup>59</sup> EU Strategy 2020 for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the EU. five targets are set: 1) **Employment** 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed ; 2) **R&D / innovation** 3% of the EU's GDP (public and private combined) to be invested in R&D/innovation ; 3) **Climate change / energy** greenhouse gas emissions 20% (or even **30%**, if the conditions are right) lower than 1990 20% of energy from renewables 20% increase in energy

**5.5. Make specific suggestions for activities and objectives in the area of gender equality and active ageing to be implemented at EU or national level during the European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity<sup>60</sup>.**

- Develop 'age friendly' approaches e.g. Say No to Ageism campaigns The positive contribution of older people to society and in employment should be promoted with an emphasis on promoting opportunities for older women and men to re-train, access education, access voluntary work, share skills and engage in intergenerational activities and participate in mentoring, health promotion and healthy lifestyle activities.
- Ensure parity between men and women in all events related to the European Year.
- Ensure that older women and men have access to information on projects and activities that will be developed throughout the year.

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efficiency ; 4) **Education** Reducing school drop-out rates below 10% at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education ; 5) **Poverty / social exclusion** at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion

<sup>60</sup> On 7 July 2011, the European Parliament voted in favour (557 votes in favour, 33 against, 15 abstentions) for a *European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations*. See also European Commission website <http://ec.europa.eu/social/ey2012.jsp?langId=en>