

Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Opinion on

CHALLENGES FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN A RAPIDLY AGEING SOCIETY

*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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The objective of this opinion is to reflect on how to best ensure gender equality in a rapidly ageing society, taking into account the increasing life expectancy and decreasing birth rates in the EU, as well as societal changes in life patterns. In particular, the opinion focuses on the main challenges related to the social system for women and men in an ageing society from a gender-sensitive angle, takes into consideration some of the successful measures implemented at national level on the promotion of a dual carer-dual earner model able to combat the existing gender stereotypes on care roles within the family, and sheds light on areas where a European Union initiative might have strong added value to effectively address the numerous challenges for gender equality in a rapidly ageing society.

Introduction

According to Eurostat data¹, on 1 January 2019, the population of the European Union was estimated at almost 513.5 million, compared with 512.4 million on 1 January 2018. During 2018, more deaths than births were recorded in the EU (5.3 million deaths and 5.0 million births), meaning that the natural change of the EU population was negative for a second consecutive year. The population change (positive, with 1.1 million more inhabitants) was therefore due to net migration. According to 2017 data (510.3 million people living in the EU-28), almost 98 million people in the EU were aged 65 years and over and 57.1% of this elderly subpopulation were women.² Life expectancy at birth in the EU was estimated at 80.9 years in 2017; 83.5 years for women and 78.3 years for men³. According to Eurostat data, in 2018, nearly one fifth (19%) of the EU population was aged 65 and more. Furthermore, the share of people aged 80 years or more should more than double by 2100 to reach 14.6 % of the whole population.⁴

The change in the age structure of the population will have an impact on the sustainability of public finances and adequacy of welfare provisions. The increase in longevity, however, also comes with opportunities for individuals to contribute longer to society, particularly if active ageing policies and adequate healthcare are in place. In order to fully exploit the potential of the demographic change, policies must facilitate the shift from considering old persons as unproductive consumers of (pension and health) benefits to valuing their contribution to society alongside younger generations. The necessity of this change of perspective also follows from the fact that the longer time span of elderly life reflects a large variety of lifestyles, physical and mental conditions that require different levels of support.

The implications of demographic changes on gender equality are wide-ranging. Women represent the largest untapped potential reserve of work force. Indeed, even though women at the European level have on average higher levels of education than men and are increasingly participating in the labour market, in 2017 the EU employment rate for women was equal to 66.5% compared to 78.0% for men⁵. In addition, women so far still carry out the main bulk of unpaid domestic work, in particular care for children and other dependents,

¹ Eurostat news release - <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/9967985/3-10072019-BP-EN.pdf/e152399b-cb9e-4a42-a155-c5de6dfe25d1>

² Eurostat (2017) *People in the EU - statistics on an ageing society*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People_in_the_EU_-_statistics_on_an_ageing_society&oldid=417833#Elderly_population_structure_and_dependency_rates

³ Eurostat - Mortality and life expectancy statistics changes https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Mortality_and_life_expectancy_statistics

⁴ Eurostat – Population structure and ageing – Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing&oldid=423053

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_statistics

including in the extended family. They tend to adapt their working patterns more often than men to their private life by using flexible working hours, part time, etc... This tendency also has a potential impact on the timing of having children or the decision to leave the labour market, temporarily or prematurely, due to care duties. Although men are increasingly taking up their share of housework and childcare, the burden of household care is still mostly carried out by women possibly complemented by State support.

Work-life balance measures are essential tools to ease the care burden. For intensive care, however, they cannot replace quality care facilities that often are scarcely accessible or not always affordable for all persons and families, and especially for families living in vulnerable situations or persons belonging to disadvantaged groups⁶. An efficient welfare-state system promoting work-life balance policies, services and tools, involving governments at central, regional and local level and private companies is also necessary in order to empower families in vulnerable situations, such as particularly large families, families with long term care needs, families in conditions of poverty or low income, lone-parent families as well as family members experiencing domestic violence and foster families of children having witnessed violence and/or with children orphaned by domestic crimes.

This Opinion focuses on three main areas: 1) work-life balance and the promotion of the equal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities between women and men; 2) participation of women and men in employment and its consequences on pay and pensions specifically taking into account women's work in the care (including informal care) sector; and 3) the specific challenges and needs of older people, especially of women, in relation to participation in the labour market, poverty, health, and active ageing.

In this regard, the Opinion takes into consideration the data and recommendations formulated within the framework of, inter alia, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities Opinion on the Gender Dimension of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations⁷; the Active Ageing Index⁸; the 2018 Ageing Report: Economic and Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States (2016-2070)⁹; the European Commission's Initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers¹⁰; the Council conclusions on Reconciliation of work and family life in the context of demographic change¹¹; the Council Conclusions on Closing the Gender Pay Gap: Key Policies and Measures¹², and the European Economic and Social Committee Opinion on gender equality issues¹³.

Finally, considering the universality of the 2030 Agenda and in line with the EU's commitment, the "leave no one behind" principle together with the interconnection of the Sustainable Development Goals has been taken into account during the elaboration of this Opinion.

⁶According to EIGE, disadvantaged groups are groups of persons that experience a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and violence than the general population, including, but not limited to, ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, isolated elderly people and children. - <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1083>

⁷https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/list_of_previous_opinions_of_the_advisory_committee_on_equal_opportunities_for_women_and_men.pdf

⁸ <https://www.unece.org/population/aai.html>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/economy-finance/2018-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2016-2070_en

¹⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:252:FIN>

¹¹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/122875.pdf

¹² <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9804-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

¹³ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/gender-equality-issues-own-initiative-opinion>

1. WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND THE PROMOTION OF THE EQUAL SHARING OF DOMESTIC AND CARE RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

The challenges of an ageing population and shrinking working age population call for Europe to fully untap the labour market potential of all women by effectively encouraging them to become or remain active in the labour market. This can only be achieved by an integrated approach, combining measures to promote labour market participation with measures to ensure equal treatment in employment and actions to allow men and women to better combine professional and family responsibilities on an equal footing throughout their life cycle.

The care burden is currently one of the most serious restrictions to labour market participation faced by women globally. In the EU, the average amount of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work is more than three times higher for women than men, as women spend on average 32 hours per week on paid work but 39 hours on unpaid work, compared to men who do 41 hours paid and 19 hours of unpaid work per week.¹⁴ In addition, more and more frequently carers must provide at the same time for their children, for their older parents, and for other dependent relatives. Traditionally, women are taking up this role because of gender stereotypes deeply rooted in society and especially in the family environment. Indeed, women still perform most child and older people care work.

The challenge for policy makers is therefore to find ways to promote a dual earner-dual carer model by involving men in care work in equal terms to women. To this purpose, mutual learning and collaboration among Member States, social partners, public employers, and companies can enhance flexible working arrangements and help all working parents and carers strike a better work-life balance.

New technologies allow to adapt the organization of the work schedule and ensure its flexibility. Technologies such as web conferencing and video calling, and apps for the project management (to organize calendars, milestones, to-do lists, and share documents) are increasingly used to enabling collaboration between employees, wherever they happen to be based. Indeed, nowadays, private companies and public institutions can have offices all over the world, so it can be challenging to organize and communicate with all of employees in different time zones. Cloud technology is transforming the organization of work, so documents are simultaneously accessible and worked on from all over the world.

Besides the traditional flexible working arrangements (tele-working, part-time work, etc.), new company welfare measures include flexible workspace, co-working and job sharing, time-saving initiatives (e.g. company laundry and car wash service, baby-sitting services, sport services, support for personal administrative paperwork...), internal childcare facilities, summer camps for the employees' children, special leaves for emergency care of dependents and parental leave on an hourly base, paid leaves for the participation in courses for the preparation to delivery, internal initiatives for the prevention and monitoring of diseases, internal paediatrician service.

¹⁴ Report on care services in the EU for improved gender equality (2018) – European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0352_EN.html

Difficulties to combine work, personal, and family life are often also due to the lack of or insufficient affordable, accessible, and quality care facilities for children, dependent adults, and the older persons linked to poor public investments by Member States in social infrastructure. In particular, a full labour market participation of both women and men requires childcare to be available during the parents' working hours and school holidays. Similarly, long-term care services and community services, such as geriatrician, dementia, home help, physiotherapy services, home assistance, day-care services and respite care services, but also mobility and public transport solutions are particularly useful to meet the care needs of dependent adults and older people and allow working women and men to better balance their work and personal life. It is crucial that those services and infrastructures are available and affordable to all, in both urban and rural areas.

Policy recommendations

The Advisory Committee recommends the European Commission to:

- Adopt a high-level stand-alone Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2020-2025 at least as a Communication of the Commission, as an essential policy instrument with adequate resources and time frames, and reinforce the conclusions of the annual report of the Strategy, which can serve as a basis for a dedicated discussion on equality between women and men at the EPSCO Council and as an input for Council Conclusions. The new Strategy should be coherently framed within the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.
- Continue to adopt and strengthen actions to promote work-life balance and for the equal sharing of family care and household responsibilities between women and men. Indeed, although the European Commission Communication Initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers and the new Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU¹⁵ are a good starting point, stronger measures should be promoted, especially with reference to the equal and non-transferable paid parental leaves the provision of access to affordable care services and, the support to working carers in an ageing society;
- Promote and support cooperation between the Member States, European social partners, the public sector, and companies in order to facilitate mutual learning and the exchange of good and promising practices to better address the demographic challenges with a gender perspective, work-life balance policies and those related to care and domestic work;
- Strengthen the EU funding programmes and mechanisms for the financing of national and transnational projects on work-life balance also by involving private companies, with the aim of promoting a solid collaboration between the Member States and the business world.

¹⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELLAR:4119596d-a475-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1>

The Advisory Committee recommends the Member States to:

- Develop, enforce and monitor legislation to strengthen maternity protection, and to regulate appropriate leave arrangements for working fathers, including non-transferable paid parental leaves, and empower more men to utilize such measures;
- Take into special consideration the needs of persons and families in vulnerable situations or belonging to disadvantaged groups, and strengthen the provision of direct funding and incentives for them;
- Promote quality, affordable, and accessible care services in a life-cycle perspective, including educational services for 0-6 year-old children and complementary services for the care of children¹⁶, as well as care and household services for the older people and other dependents, and make further efforts to expand the provision of care facilities and services, possibly with the support of EU funds;
- Strongly promote the elimination of gender stereotyping on the roles of men and women within the family, in employment, and in educational curricula at all levels, while ensuring that professional paths and roles within the family are not gender-biased and not conditioned by cultural norms;
- Invest in awareness-raising, education and training initiatives on the benefits of equal sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men including for youngsters, teachers, public administrations, and companies;
- Support, including financially, and encourage companies to adapt their work organization to both their needs and those of women and men workers, by ensuring the carrying out of innovative flexible working arrangements, including work-life friendly time arrangements such as for instance time-savings accounts, and work-life balance measures.

The Advisory Committee recommends the European Commission and the Member States to:

- Make further efforts to raise awareness of policy makers, governments, companies and citizens on the opportunities and benefits of work-life balance and the equal sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men and its impact to better address the demographic challenges;
- Improve the collection of EU and national data on the take-up of family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements by women and men and their benefits for both companies and working women and men, including sex-disaggregated data on the duration and causes of career breaks, the amount of worked overtime per year, the

¹⁶ "Childcare facilities for children under mandatory school age include day nurseries and other day care centres such as family day care, professional certified child minders in the home of the child or the childminder, pre-school education or equivalent mandatory school education and centre based services outside school hours. Early childhood education and care and preschool education are equally used as synonyms" - Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the development of childcare facilities for young children with a view to increase female labour participation, strike a work-life balance for working parents and bring about sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe (the "Barcelona objectives") - <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8785-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

proportion of part-time work by sex and occupational category, the absence rates from work for caring reasons (not including maternity leaves), the number of long leaves (parental, sabbatical...), as well as on the employee services developed by companies and public administrations to contribute to work-life balance (assistance for child and older people care, assistance for transport difficulties, and conciergerie services), and improve the data collection on availability, affordability and quality of care services in collaboration with Eurostat and the national statistics offices, with the view to exploring possibilities of developing benchmarks at EU level;

- Enhance cooperation also with the private sector and social partners by exchanging information and best practices on how to better address the demographic challenges linked to the ageing population and care deficit.

2. EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN EMPLOYMENT AND THE GENDER PAY AND PENSION GAP

Women's participation in the labour market is lower than men's and the gender gap in employment is still persisting in all EU countries. Gender biases and stereotypes about what is an appropriate type of job also play a role. Indeed, horizontal and vertical segregation still affects women in the workplace: they are mainly concentrated in the low-paying female dominated sectors and face gender specific challenges to advance in their career. They continue to be overrepresented in the service sector, specifically within areas such as retail, health, care, social work, education, and accommodation and food service.

Furthermore, gender gaps in terms of participation (employment rate and hours worked) and pay (hourly earnings and life-time earnings) widen with age over the life-course. They translate into a significant lifetime pay penalty for women and a significant gender gap in pensions at retirement. The gap between the share of women and men at risk of poverty and social exclusion grows with age and is the highest among the oldest women¹⁷.

One of the reasons for these gaps is that women tend to adapt more their work patterns in order to provide care. Career breaks and/or part-time work and irregular contracts have a negative impact on their current earnings and might ultimately affect their pensions and render them less financially secure in old age. Indeed, even though identical careers for men and women would lead to similar pensions, the gender gap in pensions is 37.2 percent in the EU¹⁸.

The gender pay gap increases with age. The sector is also relevant: the gender pay gap is notably large (>30%) among older people working in trade, manufacturing, financial or scientific sectors, compared to younger workers.¹⁹

¹⁷ Report on Equality between Women and Men in the EU 2018. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/950dce57-6222-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1>

¹⁸ European Commission Pension Adequacy Report 2018. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f0e89c3f-7821-11e8-ac6a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁹ EIGE presentation on "The pension gender gap and structural barriers in the labour market" at the Labour Market Observatory (LMO) conference on "Solidarity between generations: a focus on ageing workers" (2019). Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/fr/node/69840>

Elder workers may compensate possible slower carrying out of working activities with more precision due to experience and better knowledge of their job, also because, in some cases, some mental characteristics, as learning motivation, improve with age²⁰. Adequate working conditions have a positive impact on physical and mental health and on workers' wellbeing, and it is therefore important to adapt working conditions to specific challenges of older workers, while taking into account the specific challenges and difficulties faced by older women workers. Indeed, women are more vulnerable than men to some conditions associated with biological difference, including arthritis and other autoimmune diseases and osteoporosis. Some forms of paid work, especially those that involve repetitive movement, are likely to affect women differently as a result. Furthermore, the adverse effects of stress on menopausal health should be taken into account. Stress in postmenopausal women also produces detrimental physical effects such as increases in heart rate and blood pressure. Experiences of menopausal symptoms may further increase difficulties for women in their paid work²¹.

In addition to potential health risks, elder workers face higher risks of long-term unemployment and discrimination in the labour market that intersect with other forms of discrimination, including the ones based on gender. These risks are, *inter alia*, perpetuated by negative stereotypes on older people in the media.

In addition, family structures have changed over the years. Households have become smaller and the number of lone-parent families is increasing. Together with the increase in women's employment these societal changes have resulted in an erosion of the availability of unpaid care work²². Additionally, care work, as a traditionally feminized work, is not always properly paid, recognized, measured, and valued. It is often invisible and provided by women as unpaid and/or irregular work. However, it would not be possible for most individuals and for society at large to afford to replace all informal care with paid care. Informal caregivers are in this context irreplaceable and therefore investing in informal care and promote work-life balance policies and measures is key.

Still, the need for paid caregivers is on the rise. According to the current trends, this need is mainly covered by migrant women from lower income countries.

Indeed, more and more women, especially migrant women, work in the care sector. They are frequently engaged by private households without full access to adequate pay, social protection and labour rights. Adequately addressing migration from a gender perspective²³, through the regularization and empowerment of migrant women workers, together with the professionalization and qualification of family care and of the work of domestic workers would be necessary in order to meet the increasing demand of care services and make sure that migrant women workers fully enjoy their rights in compliance with ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)²⁴.

²⁰ "Active Ageing. From Research to Action Oriented Policies" (INAIL, 2017) and "Aging Workers" (Juhani E Ilmarinen, p. 548).
[http://www.icohweb.org/site/multimedia/pubblicazioni/Active_ageing_-_opuscolo_DEF_\(002\).pdf](http://www.icohweb.org/site/multimedia/pubblicazioni/Active_ageing_-_opuscolo_DEF_(002).pdf)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1740170/pdf/v058p00546.pdf>

²¹ "Older Women, Work and Health" (Occupational Medicine, Oxford Academic, 2010). See
<https://academic.oup.com/occmed/article/60/3/172/1571867>

²² ILO Report "Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work" (2018) -
https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang-en/index.htm

²³ "Women on the move: Migration, care work and health" (WHO, 2017). See <https://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/knowledge/women-on-the-move/en/>

²⁴ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189

Policy recommendations

The Advisory Committee recommends the European Commission to:

- Support the implementation, where necessary and appropriate, by Member States of the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed²⁵, including people working in the care sector, which would help give visibility and value to this work and better address the demographic challenges associated with the rapidly ageing population;
- Invest in the care economy and effectively support focused smart investments in skills, including in care competences, driven by the existing demand and emerging trends. A lifelong learning and a gender perspective approach would help to support workers' employability and the full participation of women and men in the changing labour market;
- Support and encourage Member States to take initiatives to promote the creation of a culture oriented towards the formalization of informal care and the professionalization of the role of informal carers and domestic workers.

The Advisory Committee recommends the Member States to:

- Recognize the value of unpaid care work for society starting with measuring it and monitoring its economic impact, namely by collecting data on how women and men spend their time, also through context-specific surveys to recognize the multiple circumstances behind women's unpaid care work, with a view to implementing appropriate public policies; and promote a more equal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men through work-life balance policies as well as through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies;
- Effectively implement and monitor the Work-Life Balance Directive, especially the introduction of carers' leave to facilitate the reconciliation of work and caring responsibilities for carers of dependent adults;
- Strengthen and invest in the care economy, including by establishing adequate working conditions and adequate minimum wages, while respecting the labour market and collective bargaining systems, as appropriate, and promote measures to combat undeclared care work, such as voucher systems which can be used for household support, vouchers for cleaning and care services and/or tax deductions for such services;
- Develop, enforce and monitor legislation to guarantee decent work and the rights of women and men to equal pay for work of equal value also in the care sector;
- Promote the professionalization of care workers, including, for instance, by providing them with customized professional training and regular updates on specific topics (needs analysis and the methods to deal with specific diseases) and establishing

²⁵ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15394-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

local lists of accredited carers, as well as helpdesks for carers and care recipients' families;

- Revise tax and benefit systems in order not to disincentive second earners and expand non-contributory social pensions that provide basic universal income security for all regardless of individual labour market trajectories or contributory records;
- Promote measures to encourage men to enter female-dominated sectors, such as inter alia, education, care and social services;
- Promote the adaptation of the employment and work organization to the needs of older people, taking into account the specific needs of older women, with a view to allowing them to remain in paid work, before and after their pensionable age;
- Tackle discrimination of older people in the labour market, by applying a gender-sensitive intersectional approach and by collaborating with the social partners;
- Take the necessary steps to remove the elements of national pension systems, and of the related reforms, that cause gender imbalances in pensions, taking into account the gender impact of any future pension reform; any policy changes related to pensions should be measured against their impact on the gender gap, with specific analysis comparing the impact of the proposed changes on women and men, and this should be a feature of the planning, design, implementation and evaluation processes of public policy.

The Advisory Committee recommends the European Commission and the Member States to:

- Raise awareness among European citizens about the gender pay gap and about its causes and its consequences, including the gender gap in pensions and the higher risk of poverty among women in old age;
- Improve the collection of EU and national data on all aspects of informal and undeclared care work, including on the changing demographics and care needs, the indirect costs of informal and undeclared care work, and their link to the rapidly changing society and migratory flows, in collaboration with Eurostat and the national statistics offices;
- Promote the exchange of good practices on care and domestic work among Member State's national and local authorities, including by strengthening the tool of European Commission's Mutual Learning Programme;
- Promote programmes and policies that recognise and take account of the specific circumstances and needs of carers, particularly women, mothers and caregivers in precarious employment, so as to improve access to family-friendly measures, flexible and smart working arrangements for women and men.

3. CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIAL SYSTEM IN A RAPIDLY AGEING SOCIETY

According to the 2019 Report on Equality between Women and Men in the EU by the European Commission²⁶, more than 20% of older women are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU compared to around 15% of older men.

As women usually have less financial stability, poverty is one of the barriers older women face in accessing the care they need especially when Governments are reducing investments in public health and welfare. Women in general live longer than men but may spend a longer proportion of their lives in ill health. Indeed, older women are often more likely than men to suffer from diseases leading to chronic illness. Furthermore, lower or no income during the working age lead to lower levels of pensions, particularly as a result of widowhood or separation. Furthermore, older women often face extra-challenges and discrimination both because of their age and their sex.

Poverty and, more in general, the lack of economic independence, also put older women, who are often not active in the labour market, in a dependent situation to their partner. This results in a higher risk for gender-based violence as dependency limits the possibility to leave a violent situation.

Finally, lack of sufficient accessibility to affordable housing solutions for older people and persons with disabilities could prevent women's economic independence and the increase of birth rates in our countries, especially in large cities due to high demand and exorbitant prices.

In this scenario, smarter urban and rural planning policies are necessary, as well as to explore, analyze and invest in innovative solutions embracing and recognizing the value of intergenerational housing initiatives to improve the lives of people of all ages and communities, incorporating a gender perspective. Additionally, technological developments can provide an important contribution to urban accessibility. Innovative technology solutions, preferably integrated into the functioning of cities and regions, would facilitate the participation in social life for older people and persons with disabilities and should take into account the specific needs of women. Examples of such technologies could include, for instance, city social networking apps allowing seniors to be easily connected with other older people in order to fight isolation, as well as intelligent traffic systems using an app that gives pedestrians with restricted mobility extra crossing time, or micro-solutions for public transport in rural areas.

Last but not least, also initiatives to promote active ageing and maximize the capacity for home-based care are essential. Within this context, quality, affordable, accessible, and adequate (mobile) outpatient care services are crucial to allow home-based care in urban and rural areas. Additionally, smart home technologies can offer new models of positive ageing and empower older adults to maintain independence, functionality, well-being and higher quality of life. Smart homes incorporate smart medical care devices, wearable devices, security devices and better living smart devices specifically designed for the older people.

Environmental and wearable medical sensors, and modern communication and information technologies, for example, can enable continuous and remote monitoring of elderly health

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2019_en.pdf

and wellbeing and the home environment at a low cost. Platforms mainly accessible via natural language assistance software – for use with internet-connected sensor technologies - are particularly helpful. Such platforms can remotely monitor a person's condition in real time, predict any deterioration in their health, detect a medical emergency, and alert healthcare emergency services if help is needed. These systems can also include, for instance, smart glucose meter to measure, record and track blood glucose levels. It can also record carbs intake, insulin medication, and physical activity.

Hardware are also developed for home use to store the medication, to dispense it appropriately and to provide a reminder to the old person in the event of non-compliance. Smart homes may also allow older people to stay in their comfortable home environments instead of expensive and limited healthcare facilities. New smart technologies also allow to automatically regulate lights, for example when the user leaves the bed, a light comes on automatically. Indeed, lights can either be set to automatically turn off and on at certain times of the day or conveniently by voice.

Finally, with smart home security, it is possible to monitor many aspects of daily life, from who is at the door and if the door is locked, to whether or not the oven was left on by accident.

Policy recommendations

The Advisory Committee recommends the European Commission to:

- Support Member States and policy makers to take into account women and men of different age cohorts through an intersectional approach, when implementing policies and programmes;
- Support Member States in the carrying out of research and awareness-raising campaigns through appropriate funding to strengthen equality for older women and men. The compilation and availability of statistical data from an intersectional perspective is key;
- Foster initiatives for the exchange of information and good practices between the Member States and stakeholders, including women's rights organizations, older people organizations, and media, on how to promote active ageing;
- Carry out research and promote the exchange of innovative policies and practices on urban planning in order to expand knowledge on affordable housing solutions for older people taking into account the value of intergenerational initiatives.

The Advisory Committee recommends the Member States to:

- Facilitate the participation of older women and men in lifelong learning activities and ensure that information is available not only through IT, but also through traditional means to widen the accessibility of such information, foster their social inclusion and promote active ageing;
- Explore and invest in innovative housing solutions, recognizing the value of the intergenerational approach to improve the lives of people of all ages and

communities, and invest in smart urban and rural planning, public (mobility/care) infrastructures and smart homes;

- Provide training for healthcare providers to address the specific needs of older women, as well as high quality public long-term care coverage for women;
- Ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and make sure that national domestic violence legislation includes all forms of violence against older women and provides specific support services for older domestic violence victims;
- Strengthen intergenerational solidarity as one of the most important aspects to enhance social cohesion and the development of a participatory culture where women and men of all ages take part, through the carrying out of programmes and initiatives that support a better age mix and greater cooperation and solidarity between generations, such as intergenerational cohabitation, and intergenerational learning and mentoring;
- Promote volunteer and community-based initiatives as well as initiatives designed for intergenerational exchange for both women and men and volunteer activities of older persons, in collaboration with civil society organizations.

The Advisory Committee recommends the European Commission and the Member States to:

- Develop common principles for active ageing also from a gender perspective, which would help public authorities and stakeholders at all levels to pursue active ageing policies, while taking into account the growing diversity of older people;
- Carry out activities for raising awareness on the importance of active ageing and the need to mobilise the full potential of older women and men for their own and society's benefit;
- Strengthen women's organizations (older women, care-takers and public health) participation in long-term care debates and empower them as key stakeholders to find participatory solutions.