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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL
AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

**Europe's response to World Ageing
Promoting economic and social progress in an ageing world
A contribution of the European Commission to the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This communication constitutes the contribution of the European Commission to the **2nd World Assembly on Ageing** organised in Madrid on April 8-12 2002, by the United Nations and the Spanish Government. It represents an input from the European Commission to the international debate on the new International Plan of Action on Ageing to be adopted in Madrid. As such it is intended to support the efforts of the Belgian and Spanish presidencies to develop a common EU position on the plan.

When the first International Plan of Action on Ageing was agreed in Vienna in 1982, it was almost exclusively for the most developed countries that ageing was emerging as an important concern. Since then, the ageing process has begun to touch several parts of the developing world also. In the 21st century rapid ageing will progressively become a global phenomenon.

The European Commission agrees with the United Nations that a greater global awareness will be necessary in order to meet the challenges for all our societies raised by the ageing process. International co-operation can improve the ability of countries to respond to these challenges. Policies that take due account of the ageing challenges in the future have to be prepared now.

With this Communication the Commission proposes to share the experience from co-operation on ageing issues at EU level, which illustrates the need for a policy approach encompassing the economic, employment and social dimensions of ageing. The Commission is fully aware of the diversity of the ageing challenges across the world and that its experience cannot necessarily be transposed to other contexts. Nevertheless, it is convinced that its experience can be used to develop ideas. Responding to ageing issues in the world calls for a collective effort of international collaboration to promote sustainable development at global level.

1. INTRODUCTION

This communication constitutes the contribution of the European Commission to the **2nd World Assembly on Ageing** organised in Madrid on April 8-12 2002, by the United Nations and the Spanish Government. It has the aim to contribute to the international debate on the formulation of the new International Plan of Action on Ageing to be adopted in Madrid.

The international action plan on ageing, adopted at the first UN Conference (Vienna, 1982), put a particular emphasis on older persons and resulted in, among other things, a proclamation of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, which addressed the independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people. Subsequently, many UN events have helped advance the global policy agenda on ageing. The General Assembly decided to observe 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons and to call a 2nd World Assembly in 2002. UN ageing initiatives have furthermore been shaped by the Millennium Declaration.

When the first International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted in Vienna in 1982, it was almost exclusively for the most developed countries that ageing was emerging as an important concern¹. Now, the ageing process will soon begin to affect several parts of the developing world also. In the 21st century rapid ageing will progressively become a global phenomenon.

The second World Assembly is expected to adopt a revised international action plan on ageing including a long term, global strategy for a society for all ages.

The sustained growth in longevity and our increased ability to control reproduction represent some of the great achievements of human kind of the last 50 years. That people in general can expect to live longer lives opens great new opportunities for individuals to fulfil their potential. The combined effect of these achievements in the form of population ageing also presents us with new challenges. In the course of the new century ageing will affect the social and economic foundations of societies in many parts of the world. Our societies will have to provide an appropriate framework for people living longer and longer while ensuring social and economic sustainability in an ageing world. Conditions and opportunities for the presently old, men and women, are an important concern at any time, but adjusting well to population ageing is an issue for everybody and the aim must be to arrive at a society for people of all ages. Ageing policies should therefore adopt a broad life-course and society-wide approach, taking into account the UN global initiatives and guiding principles.

2. AGEING AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS: A MAJOR ISSUE FOR THE WORLD

The ageing of societies essentially results from falling fertility rates and increased life expectancy. An additional impact stems from the so-called baby-boom, which has led to large differences in the size of age groups. Migration movements can also affect the ageing process. While ageing will become more of a universal trend in the coming decades there is a wide diversity in terms of the timing and speed of demographic change, the social and economic contexts, and the perception of the challenges posed.

This diversity is particularly evident when examining the ageing phenomenon in **the developed and the developing parts of the world**. Although populations of developing

¹ In 1980 the percentage of people aged 60 or more was only 6% in the less developed countries, compared to 16% in more developed ones (UN estimations).

countries are relatively young today, many developing countries are projected to experience ageing of an unprecedented speed² due to a sharp drop in fertility levels and a rapid increase in longevity. By 2050 the number of older people in less developed countries is projected to more than quadruple (from 374 million in 2000 to 1570 million). This age group will form 19% of the less developed countries' population in 2050 as opposed to 8% today, and the median age is projected to increase 11 years reaching a value of 35 years. In the developed countries, where the share of older people is already much higher following a rapid growth, particularly over the post-war period, marked population ageing will continue but at a slower pace than in the less developed countries. Older people will constitute 33% of their population in 2050 as opposed to 19% today, and the median age will increase by 9 years, reaching 46 years in 2050.

Furthermore, a diversity of situations is present *within* both the developed and developing parts of the world.

Among the developed countries, Europe³ and Japan will experience the most pronounced ageing trends up to 2050 - the share of the above 60 age group will be around 37% in Europe and even more in Japan, compared to only 27% in North America, where population growth will continue to be relatively strong. Within the 60+ age group, there will also be significant growth in the number of "very old", i.e. people aged 80 years and over. Whereas the very old constitute 3% of the European population today, 11 of the current EU-15 Member States will have at least 10% of their population aged 80 or over by 2050. Gender differences in ageing are considerable. In Europe women's life expectancy is currently more than 6 years higher than for men. In the age group of 60 years and over, there are 50% more women than men. Of people living alone at the age of 75+ more than 70% are women.

The process of enlargement of the European Union is not expected to have a significant impact on the ageing process of the Union's population. Though the proportion of older people in the Central and Eastern European countries today is lower than in EU-15, it is expected to increase rapidly attaining the EU average levels by 2050. Presently most of the applicant countries are experiencing particularly low fertility rates and to the extent this trend continues it will impact even further on their ageing process.

In the developing world there are significant differences in the ageing process⁴. For the least developed countries, the median age is only projected to increase from 18 years in 2000 to 26 years in 2050. In contrast the less developed countries as a whole can expect an increase from 24 years to 35 years.

² As an example, in France it took 115 years for the proportion of older people to double from 7 to 14 percent. In China the same increase will occur over the course of just 27 years.

³ Within Europe, the ageing trend is presently not so pronounced in the Central and Eastern countries (CEECs) as in the EU Member States.

⁴ Asia and Latin America are ageing most rapidly, and will reach 20 to 25 percent of older persons by 2050, whereas for example sub-Saharan Africa, which continues to struggle with the HIV/AIDS pandemic in association with economic and social hardship, is projected to reach only half that level.

3. THE EU POLICY APPROACH TO AGEING

3.1. The European Union's general approach to ageing

As one of the first areas to be affected by ageing Europe has developed a wide variety of policy responses⁵ to the population ageing which occurred in the course of the 20th century. For a long time policy deliberations took place only at the national level. However, awareness that the challenges ahead were in many ways common increased rapidly in the 2nd half of the 1990's⁶ and recent years have seen major developments in EU co-operation on ageing issues. When the European Commission in 1999 presented a communication⁷ on sensible policy responses to ageing as its contribution to the UN International Year of Older Persons and hinted that Member States would benefit from closer European co-operation on these issues, it was still a vision of what could be. But in the few years since Member States have committed themselves to work on ageing issues in the context of sound public finances⁸, employment, social protection and sustainable development while maintaining these as national policies and taking into account the diversity of ageing situations. Moreover, combating discrimination on the grounds of age has become part of the EC Treaty as well as of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which also refers to the rights of the elderly⁹.

Ageing is not a separate issue to be tackled in isolation from other ones. The European Union's response to ageing is therefore developed **as part of the overall strategy of mutually reinforcing policies** launched at the European Council meeting at Lisbon and confirmed at subsequent European Council meetings in Nice, Stockholm Gothenburg and Laeken¹⁰. As set out in the Economic Policy Coordination and the European Social Agenda¹¹ it encompasses the economic, employment and social implications of ageing. The Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, which are the key instrument for economic policy co-ordination and provide the framework for policy recommendations and for monitoring the implementation of these recommendations, call for Member States to develop comprehensive strategies for addressing the economic challenge posed by ageing populations. The Social Policy Agenda, which lists EU policy priorities in employment and social affairs, outlines how Member States through mutually reinforcing employment, social protection and economic policies can deal with the wider social and work life related implications of ageing.

The EU approach to ageing aims at **mobilising the full potential of people** of all ages. The basic assumption is that adequate responses to ageing must go beyond attention to the presently old. Adjusting well to population ageing is an issue for people of all ages and a life course approach can help the development of adequate policy responses taking account of the related age and gender specific issues.

⁵ Europe has pioneered a variety of institutional responses to ageing populations (retirement, pension systems, specialised health services, residential and institutional care, activity centres etc.) and it is in European countries that older peoples policies generally have been developed to the greatest extent.

⁶ The increasing attention to ageing issues in Commission analyses and documents contributed to this. For a list of these please see the annex.

⁷ "Towards a Europe for All Ages", COM (1999) 221 final.

⁸ Common forecasting and monitoring activities form an integral part of this work and has resulted in a number of seminal analyses covering EU-15. For details see list in Annex.

⁹ Art. 13 of the EC Treaty as revised further to the Amsterdam Treaty and articles 21 and 25 of the Charter proclaimed in Nice on the 7th of December 2000.

¹⁰ For details please consult the relevant parts of Presidency Conclusions to these European Councils listed in the Annex.

¹¹ See Annex to Presidency Conclusions from the Nice European Council, Dec 2000.

This results in an orientation towards **active ageing policies and practices**¹². Core active ageing practices include life long learning, working longer, retiring later and more gradually, being active after retirement and engaging in capacity enhancing and health sustaining activities. Such practices aim to raise the average quality of individual lives and at the same time, at societal level, contribute to larger growth, lower dependency burdens and substantial cost savings in pensions and health. They therefore represent win-win strategies for people of all ages.

Similar orientations were proposed by the Commission in its contribution to the 1999 International Year of Older Persons. Their implementation requires the **involvement of all stakeholders** in a spirit of dialogue and partnership. In its various initiatives to improve and modernise the EU Social Model, in particular in the area of social protection, social inclusion and employment, the Commission encourages the co-operation of all the relevant actors, including NGOs, Social Partners, etc.

3.2. Key challenges and policy responses in Europe

Within the overall framework of the EU approach to ageing some common key challenges for the European Union and its Member States have been identified: managing the economic implications of ageing in order to maintain growth and sound public finances; adjusting well to an ageing and shrinking workforce; ensuring adequate, sustainable and adaptable pensions; achieving access to high quality health care for all while ensuring the financial viability of health care systems.

3.2.1. Maintaining growth and sound public finances

Given its impact on the demand for public pensions, health care and long-term care ageing presents a considerable challenge to the long-term sustainability of public finances. Beyond the immediate financial impact, the ageing of populations also has wider implications for economic growth, inter alia, as a result of the shrinking of the potential workforce and potentially important effects on the level of aggregate savings.

Projections of future public expenditure for the period 2001-2005 indicate that increases in most EU-countries could amount to 3-5 percentage points of GDP for pensions and 2-3 percentage points for health and long-term care. Increases of such magnitudes give serious cause for concern over the sustainability of pension systems and public finances and present major challenges for social policies. On present trends, the EU working age population will fall by approximately 40 million people from 2000 until 2050 and the old age dependency ratio will double from 24% to 49%¹³. In other words the EU is projected to move from 2000 to 2050 from having 4 to only 2 persons of working age (15-64) for every person 65 and above.

The economic challenges are addressed in the context of the stability and convergence programmes and the Broad Economic Policy Coordination. The Broad Economic Policy Guidelines state that the need for sound macroeconomic policies and comprehensive economic reforms is amplified by the challenges posed by ageing populations and call for Member States to develop comprehensive strategies for dealing with these. Moreover, in accordance with the stability and growth pact and in line with a report endorsed by the

¹² The ideas of active ageing and life course approach inform the bulk of innovative policy responses to ageing in Europe and are generally perceived as the way of the future.

¹³ These trends are calculated on the EU-15. Possible future enlargements of the Union are not considered.

Stockholm European Council¹⁴ EU Member States must sustain sound budgetary positions, while at the same time improve the quality and sustainability of public finances. The aim is to ensure that public finances maximise their contribution to growth and employment and the achievement of the objectives agreed in Lisbon and Stockholm, including better social cohesion.

The Stockholm European Council endorsed a three-pronged strategy¹⁵, further incorporated in the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, to anticipate and manage the budgetary challenges of ageing. The first prong is to increase the revenue base and reduce the cost of transfers by raising the employment rates. The second prong is to run down public debt at a fast pace so that lower interest payments can offset some of the projected increase in spending on pensions and health care. The third prong is to reform pensions systems in order to maintain them on a sound financial footing.

3.2.2. *Responding to the challenge of an ageing and shrinking workforce*

Over the next two decades the number of Europeans in the 20-29 age band will fall by 20%, while the number in the 50-64 age group will increase by 25%. At the same time the cohorts reaching pension age will be substantially bigger than their predecessors. The timing and magnitude of these demographic changes will vary between EU Member States, but Europe is faced with the prospect of an ageing and shrinking workforce.

Yet, the impact on the work force is not given merely by the demographics. The effect may be substantially influenced by measures aimed at raising the employment rates of all of working age and of women and older workers in particular¹⁶. Hence, ageing reinforces the importance of general efforts to raise participation and employment rates in Europe. In relation to the employment rates of women it furthermore underlines the crucial pertinence of policies aimed at securing gender equality in the world of work and at reconciling the demands of family and work life.

As for older workers ageing points to the need for **changes in the present practices of age management** in work places and labour markets. With the drop in the supply of young and prime-age workers older workers, which represent a valuable labour supply that for years has been under utilised, should see their labour market prospects substantially improved. It is important that policies and practices, which enable and motivate older workers to fully seize these new opportunities, be put in place.

A number of changes are important. First, a shift towards maintaining the working capacity and employability of older workers, men and women, through measures such as training, health and safety measures, adjustments to workplace and job design, introduction of work facilitating technology, and new working time arrangements. Secondly, the extension of active employment policies to older workers. Possibilities for generating job opportunities for older workers and raising their employment rate through measures of reinsertion and retention should be exploited. As a result the effective retirement ages of both women and men would be raised, thus avoiding that the negative impact of ageing on labour supply is exacerbated

¹⁴ Council of the European Union (2001), "The Contribution of Public Finances to Growth and Employment: Improving Quality and Sustainability", Report from the Commission and the (ECOFIN) Council to the European Council (Stockholm 23-24 March 2001), 6997/01.

¹⁵ Presidency Conclusions, Stockholm European Council 23 and 24 March 2001, point 7 last sentence.

¹⁶ As an effect of various policies and practices resulting in early retirement present European activity and employment rates of older workers (55-64) are less than half that of prime-age workers (25-49) and considerably lower than in the US and Japan.

through a continuation of current practices leading to early retirement. Promoting such active ageing policies in employment is central to the European Employment Strategy. It is also essential for the realisation of the EU goal of moving towards full employment.

Following the EU-level targets for the employment rates¹⁷ set by the Stockholm European Council, Member States have been invited to set national employment rate targets in order to focus national strategies on promoting higher labour market participation, including for older workers. The strategies would define action needed for raising quality in work and, therefore, its attractiveness; correcting the balance of financial incentives to work, especially the net effect of tax and benefit systems; tackling gender gaps in pay and labour market access promoting participation of persons - especially women - with care responsibilities in the household; reviewing measures to reduce school drop-out rates; and last but not least, setting up a joint government-social partners initiative to retain workers longer in employment by focusing on the provision of company training to promote adaptability and longer-term employability of workers and on improving quality in work. Such an initiative must be based on the understanding that these efforts are of wider interest and benefit to society as a whole and thus may entail a redirection of public funding in favour of this area. In the European Employment strategy older workers are thus increasingly perceived as one of the core elements in future labour supply and as crucial contributors to the sustainable development of an ageing Europe.

Instruments by which to drive back negative attitudes towards older workers have furthermore been secured through new European legislation. In November 2000 the Council adopted a directive outlawing discrimination in employment¹⁸ including on the grounds of age as part of the Union's right-based approach to these issues. It also agreed an action programme, which will target discrimination in all spheres of life including that directed against older persons¹⁹.

3.2.3. *Ensuring adequate, sustainable and adaptable pensions*

An increasingly older population creates considerable pressures on pensions. Despite the substantial differences in pension systems design across Europe Member States have recognised that deeper co-operation on common problems is required in the domain of pension policy. At the Göteborg European Council Member States endorsed three broad principles for securing the social and economic sustainability of pension systems: Safeguarding the capacity of systems to meet their social objectives; maintaining their financial sustainability; and adapting them to changing societal needs. At the Laeken European Council they subsequently agreed a set of common objectives, which are to guide their policy efforts. The purpose of EU level co-ordination is to help Member States develop their national strategies to meet these objectives, i.e. securing pensions which are adequate, financially sustainable and able to adapt to changing conditions.²⁰

¹⁷ The employment rate targets for 2010 were set as 70% in general, 60% for women and 50% for older workers.

¹⁸ Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (27/11/00)

¹⁹ Council Decision 2000/750/EC establishing a Community action programme to combat discrimination (2001 to 2006) (27/11/00). Another contribution to the rights based approach is the establishment of an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights which widens the prohibition of discrimination including on grounds of age and recognises "the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life" (article 25).

²⁰ The process that led to the Laeken agreement on a process of co-operation on adequate and sustainable pensions in the EU was supported by two Commission Communications: "The Future Evolution of Social Protection from a Long-Term Point of View: Safe and Sustainable Pensions" (COM(2000) 622),

At EU level challenges to pension systems are addressed both in the context of the economic policy coordination and in the framework of the recently launched open method of coordination²¹ on pensions. Beyond that they are also indirectly addressed in the employment process. Both in the sense that higher employment rates improve the revenue base and in the sense that working to higher ages eases the pressure on pension systems.

As set out in the objectives, which fully recognise the diversity of pension schemes, Member State strategies should aim to secure adequacy of provisions, with a particular view to ensuring that older men and women are not placed at risk of poverty, and promote inter as well as intra-generational equity.

Pension reform is addressed as well within the overall context of promoting employment-friendly policies. Pensions systems and adjacent tax structures should offer sound incentives to continue working until pensionable age and avoid penalising people who continue beyond that. Moreover pensions should be adjusted to cover people, who work in non-standard jobs, and to facilitate flexibility and mobility in labour markets. Importantly pensions should offer the same incentives to men and women and gender distinctions based on outdated perceptions of the man as the sole or main breadwinner of the family should be phased out.

Member States also agreed that their strategies should aim to make pension systems more transparent, and to develop reliable and easy-to-understand information on the likely long-term evolution of benefit levels and contribution rates, so that citizens can continue to have confidence in them.

Finally, Member States found it important to promote the broadest possible consensus regarding pension policies and reforms and to improve the methodological basis for efficient monitoring of pension reforms and policies.

3.2.4. Securing access to high quality health and long term care while ensuring the financial sustainability of services

In the context of increasing life expectancy and a growing proportion of older people the central challenge of health and long-term care policies is to provide full access to high-quality services for all while ensuring the financial sustainability of these services. Policies should strive to secure an adequate and cost-effective response to the needs and demands of women and men of all ages. Differences in life expectancy and the traditional patterns of care provisions of men and women make it particularly pertinent to pay attention to gender issues in this respect.

Preparing for healthy ageing starts with public health policies and practices, which support well-being throughout the life course. To promote a policy environment to enhance social participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people is conducive to healthy ageing

"Supporting national strategies for safe and sustainable pensions through an integrated approach" (com362/2001), and a SPC report "Adequate and sustainable pensions: A report by the Social Protection Committee to the Göteborg European Council on the future evolution of social protection" (June 2001)

²¹ This new form of EU co-operation was named the "open method of coordination" by the European Council in Lisbon and defined as a means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards EU goals and to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies in accordance with these goals. It involves setting broad common objectives, agreeing realistic targets, translating these into national policies by means of national plans and, finally, as part of a mutual learning process, periodic monitoring on the basis of commonly agreed and defined indicators.

for women and men. The promotion of active ageing practices could also contribute to it. Meeting the growing demand for health and care services, related to the significant growth of people aged 80 years and over, requires cost-efficient ways to support the supply of informal care and expand formal health and care provisions as well as progress in aids and assistive technologies. Efforts in these areas have to maintain the equity principles, which are inherent to the European Social Model (equal access to quality health care).

EU co-operation on these issues is starting within the framework of the EU works on Social Protection²² and on Public Finances. The fifth EU framework programme for research (1998-2002) contributes to promote research that enhances the quality of life, autonomy and social integration of older people (with particular emphasis on healthy ageing over the life course and well being in old age) and that improves the quality, efficiency and user friendliness of care and welfare provisions.

4. AGEING IN THE WORLD

As we move through the 21st century more and more countries including those of the developing world will experience the implications of substantial ageing processes. In fact, many developing countries are now in the early stages of adapting to the changing age structure of the population.

Current and prospective policy responses are likely to differ among countries. The realities of ageing depend on the socio-economic and cultural context in which people live. These dimensions also play an important role for how countries form their priority responses to the challenges raised by ageing. Despite such differences, countries can learn and profit from each other's experience. To take advantage of this opportunity international mechanisms that can best inform public policies around the world should be strengthened.

Three key challenges in relation to ageing would require particular attention. Firstly, the challenge of securing a *sufficient labour force* to provide for a growing population of retired people. This would include providing conditions that would enable people to be economically active as they age for as long as they can manage. Secondly, managing the cost *implications for public sector finances* and the *economy at large* including particular risks for fiscal stability and overall economic sustainability. Thirdly, tackling the issue of *poverty in old age*, which remains a serious problem in many countries of the world, where many older people, especially women, have insufficient access to basic income, health and social welfare provision.

Though the particular expressions will vary across the world, ageing is everywhere a phenomenon marked by significant gender differences. The Suriname resolution on the situation of Older Women, adopted at the 56th session of the UN General Assembly is a positive contribution to mainstreaming the gender dimension in ageing issues.

Policy responses are first and foremost the responsibility of each State, However, co-operation within the framework of the UN is crucial to share experience and encourage best practices throughout the world, keeping in mind the diversity of national situations.

²² Following a request from the Gothenburg European Council a new process of deliberation has been initiated by the adoption of the communication "The future of health care and care for the elderly: guaranteeing accessibility, quality and financial viability" (COM (2001) 723).

4.1. Important issues in relation to an International Plan of Action on Ageing

The European Commission supports the UN efforts to develop a global framework for action on ageing. A long term world strategy must set out a vision of what is to be achieved within a time horizon, which is manageable both to citizens and governments. Given the reliability of the demographic projections we dispose of today, there are good arguments for setting this time horizon to 20 years (i.e. 2002-2022).

The focus should reflect the kind of socio-economic set up which would enable people around the world as they age to continue to participate in the achievement of a society for all. A holistic view of ageing, as life-long and society-wide is called for.

The European Commission considers that the plan should consist of specific objectives, indicate the outcomes that are required to achieve the objectives and spell out the kinds of activities that are needed to generate the outcomes. Furthermore, it should identify a set of indicators, which will allow for progress to be monitored and assessed.

The International Action Plan should take account of the different levels of social, economic and political development among countries, which affect the capacity to respond to the ageing challenge. Consequently, it may be useful to distinguish between objectives applicable to all countries and those that may be specific to particular regions of the world. Likewise differences should be reflected in the spelling out of appropriate actions and responsible actors.

On the basis of these considerations, the Commission suggests that the following points merit particular attention:

- The European Commission agrees with the United Nations that a greater global awareness will be necessary in order to meet the future challenges for all our societies raised by the ageing process. The process of ageing must be addressed within the larger process of development in a global context. International co-operation can improve the ability of countries to respond to these challenges. Policies that take due account of the ageing challenges in the future have to be prepared now.
- While conditions and opportunities for the presently old people are an important part of our concern, adjusting well to population ageing should be seen as a life-cycle process involving people of all ages. All generations will have to contribute to solutions and find ways to adjust. Moreover, population ageing can better be tackled if the different domains affecting the quality of life are taken into account in the process of policy making.
- Appropriate responses to ageing aim at promoting a society for all ages and encourage age integration in all spheres of economic and social life. Existing policies should be evaluated on the extent to which they promote age segregation or integration strategies.
- The long-term objective of national policies should be to ensure that good health and wellbeing accompany the extended longevity. Healthy longevity requires a life long process of maximising opportunities for economic, physical, social and mental well being. A life long approach to health and a new balance with health promotion and disease prevention is also required to cope with the challenge of an ageing society.
- Education from an early age to promote awareness of the multifaceted aspects of longevity is an essential and cost effective measure to enhance healthy lifestyles and reduce disability in old age. While it is up to governments to create supportive environments for

advancing health and wellbeing into old age, individuals themselves are responsible for maintaining healthy life styles.

- Dependence and disability is an important issue in relation to old age. It is determined to a large extent by contextual factors. Countries should integrate into their priorities the need to maintain the quality of life and social integration of older persons, and especially that of the 'oldest old', the definition of which may vary between countries. Safe and adequate housing, transportation and communication systems are especially important for the well being of older people. Minimising hazards in the physical environment is important for avoiding debilitation and painful injuries for older people.
- Family and household structures are undergoing profound changes in many countries. Families tend to become less able to manage all the caring responsibilities and to provide alone the support required by dependent and frail members. Structures of formal care provision may therefore have to be erected. Current generations of older people play significant care-giving roles and provide important financial support to younger generations. It is important to note that across all generations, women bear the greatest burden in terms of providing care.
- Considerations about the end of life should have their place in the debate of ageing societies. In accordance with the UN Principles for Older Persons, all people should have a right to a death that is as dignified as possible and one which respects their cultural values. Policies must strive to enable people to die in a caring environment with adequate professional support but also giving high priority to social interaction with the patient and their relatives.
- There is a need for developing a better information base for public policy in the field of ageing. The universal trend of population ageing amid great diversity raises the need for more international co-operation and pooling of efforts for providing an effective knowledge base and analytical framework in relation to the wide variety of challenges posed. Basic information is needed about trends and differentials within the trends, in mortality, morbidity, migration as well as in the socio-economic circumstances of older persons as related to gender, regional, and country differences. Particular emphasis should be given to cross national collaboration in the areas of standardisation and comparability of instruments and scientific methodologies.

5. CONCLUSION

The Commission agrees that the 2nd World Summit on ageing represents an opportunity for adopting common approaches to the challenge of ageing at the global level and supports the UN efforts aimed at developing a global framework for action. This global framework should include the results and commitments at the Copenhagen World Social Summit (1995) as well as subsequent UN Conferences on women and communicable diseases.

Within this context, the European Commission pledges its willingness to share with countries in other parts of the world, and particularly with developing countries, its experience in the search for responses to ageing, and invites all UN Member States to reflect on the policy ideas, innovative forms of co-operation and policy progress achieved in the European Union.

ANNEX

“Adequate and sustainable pensions: A report by the Social Protection Committee to the Göteborg European Council on the future evolution of social protection” (June 2001)

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