United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe

# *Policy* brief

## Advancing intergenerational solidarity

**Commitment 9 of the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing:**

**To support families that provide care for older persons and promote intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity among their members.**

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## Challenging context

Demographic transition in Europe has led to changing household structure with a potential impact on the dynamic between generations. As a consequence of living longer and later childbearing, most adults in Europe belong to a family network of three generations with which they share several decades together in a complex web of ties. The solidarity among generations is a key feature of the economic, financial and social systems in Europe. However, the rapidly changing demographic context, particularly in combination with the demands of the recent economic crisis, could create tensions among generations and represent a challenge to the existing solidarity and cooperation among people of different age groups.

## Suggested strategies

An age-friendly living environment with public places accessible to people of all ages; comfortable, safe and integrated housing where older persons can maintain their autonomy; an active role for older persons in the community through a lively participation in sociocultural activities, including as volunteers; a recognition of the crucial role of older persons as informal care providers; an understanding of the health conditions and specific needs of older persons — all of these facilitate the integration of older persons into a society for all ages and, consequently, promote intergenerational solidarity.

## Expected results

Promoting a fruitful dialogue and cooperation across generations can enforce the social connections among people of different ages and acknowledge the role of older persons in contemporary societies, as well as capitalize on the potential contribution that older people are able to offer to benefit all members of a society.

## Introduction

The major focus of this policy brief is on intergenerational solidarity at the family and community level, following commitment 9 of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, as quoted on the first page of this publication. This brief considers various dimensions of intergenerational solidarity ranging from family networks to care and volunteering.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing emphasizes that solidarity between generations at all levels — in families, communities and nations — is fundamental for the achievement of a society for all ages. Solidarity is also a major prerequisite for social cohesion and a foundation of formal public welfare and informal care systems.[1] Welfare systems rely strongly on intergenerational solidarity as younger generations support older ones. Economic crises, high unemployment rates or changes in the rules of the game or the terms of intergenerational contracts can all create tensions among generations. Those tensions can be further accentuated when older persons and pensioners are wrongly portrayed by policymakers as a burden to society.[2]

Intergenerational relations take place in all social contexts of everyday life and can be expressed at different levels: among family members living under the same roof or living separately; within the social network of friends, acquaintances, neighbours and colleagues; and in the society as a whole. However, it is within families and communities that older people interact with members of the younger generations and that the foundations of solidarity are laid.

At the family and community level, intergenerational ties can be valuable for everyone.[3] The relationships among family members can be in both directions, as older people often provide significant financial support, care and education of grandchildren and other kin while, later in their life-course and as the prevalence of disability rises with age, they are more likely to become recipients of care.

Policies should be targeted to the strengthening of solidarity through equity and reciprocity between generations.[4]

The ageing of the population is occurring in a rapidly evolving social context where the size of families is decreasing, the role of extended families is diminishing and perceptions in respect of intergenerational support and caring for older persons are changing.[5] This process tends to unsettle traditional relationships between the generations. In particular, it affects the relationship between parent and child, which is, and historically has been, the most powerful and durable of bonds between human beings in all countries.[6] For instance, traditional lifelong co-residence as a basic means of providing mutual support of younger and older adults has been replaced by "intimacy at a distance"[7] with frequent contacts and exchanges between generations and sustained provision of long-term care. Thus, even when living separately, parents and children maintain strong ties of affection and feelings of mutual obligation.[8]

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[1] United Nations (2002), Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 42, reproduced in the Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4).

[2] Walker A. (2001), "Intergenerational solidarity. The foundation of a society for all ages", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Population Ageing and Development: Social, Heath and Gender Issues with a Focus on the Poor in Old Age, Valletta, Malta, 29–31 October 2001.

[3] United Nations (2002), Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 43.

[4] Ibid., para. 44.

[5] World Economic and Social Survey 2007: Devolopment in an Ageing World. (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.II.C.1), pp. viii and 31.

[6] Walker, A. (2001), "Intergenerational solidarity".

[7] Rosenmayr, L. (1977) "The family: a source of hope for the elderly" in Family, Bureaucracy, and the Elderly, E. Shanas and M. B. Sussman, eds. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, pp. 132-157.

[8] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2005). Living Arrangements of Older Persons around the World (ST/ESA/SER.A/240), p. 9. Available at: http://unclef.com/esa/population/publications/livingarrangement/report.htm.

The trend towards separate residence of older persons is widespread. In fact, there is a global trend towards independent forms of living arrangements among older persons — mainly alone or with a spouse or partner only — and a corresponding decline in co residential arrangements.[9] Although less frequent, skipped generations households, i.e., households where grandparents look after their grandchildren in the absence of their own children, are increasing over time. Policy approaches should respond to the consequences of changes in the structure of families and the role of its individual members.[10]

Institutionalization is an option for those who have difficulty managing on their own or who need specialized medical services. Among older people, a higher proportion of women than men and of "older old" (over 75 years old) than "younger old" live in institutions.[11] To better respond to the preference of people in need of assistance and to face the increasing costs of institutionalization, in many countries long-term care policies have devoted more and more attention to the possibility of remaining at home, promoting "ageing in place" in the community,[12] in opposition to the trend towards increasing institutionalization. However, it is acknowledged that, when not adequately assisted, family caregivers can be overburdened.[13] Moreover, due to the increase in female labour-force participation, a contraction in "female caregiving potential" is possible.

The interplay between family members and community members is affected by the existing legal and policy frameworks. Institutional frameworks can be oriented to support the choice and desire of family members to care for frail old parents and other family members in need and/or to support individual autonomy, thereby partially lightening intergenerational dependencies and the gender division of labour.[15]

## Consequences of demographic change for household structure

*Changing household structure*

The changes in family structures have had a significant effect on patterns of intergenerational provision of care and reciprocity.[15] In the past, co-residence of older and younger family members allowed lifelong reciprocity arrangements: adult children provided care for their aged parents in exchange for parental support at earlier stages of their lives.

Demographic change in Europe has led to a decrease in the average household size and a diminishing role of the extended family. The number of one-person households, couples-only and one-parent households have been growing, whereas those of couples with children have been decreasing. Overall, older people are living in a social environment that is rapidly changing.[16]

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[9] Ibid., p. 107.

[10] UNECE (2002), Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (ECE/AC.23/2002/2/Rev.6), para. 88.

[11] United Nations (2005), Living Arrangements of Older Persons around the World, p. 49.

[12] United Nations (2002), Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 98.

[13] Ibid., para. 104.

[14] Dykstra, P. A. (2009), "Intergenerational family relationships in ageing societies", paper prepared for UNECE Working Group on Ageing, presented at the Second Meeting, 23–24 November 2009, Geneva, Switzerland.

[15] World Economic and Social Survey 2007, p. 39.

[16] Ibid., pp. viii and 31.

Several economic, sociodemographic, historical and cultural factors influence household structure and lead to its regional variation (figure 1). For instance, the percentage of one-person households depends on the age of those leaving the parental home, preference for independent living, accessibility and affordability of housing and on the structure of the labour market. Among older persons, the largest proportion of people living alone is observed in countries with a relatively old population and where economic and housing independency is feasible in old age (figure 2). In old age, more women than men live alone because of their higher survival chances and the usual age gap between partners. In Denmark, Slovakia and Sweden, for example, one out of two women over 64 years old lives alone, while only one in four men of that age do.

**Figure 1**
**Percentage of households by type, 2000-2008, latest available year, selected countries**
(100% = all households.)
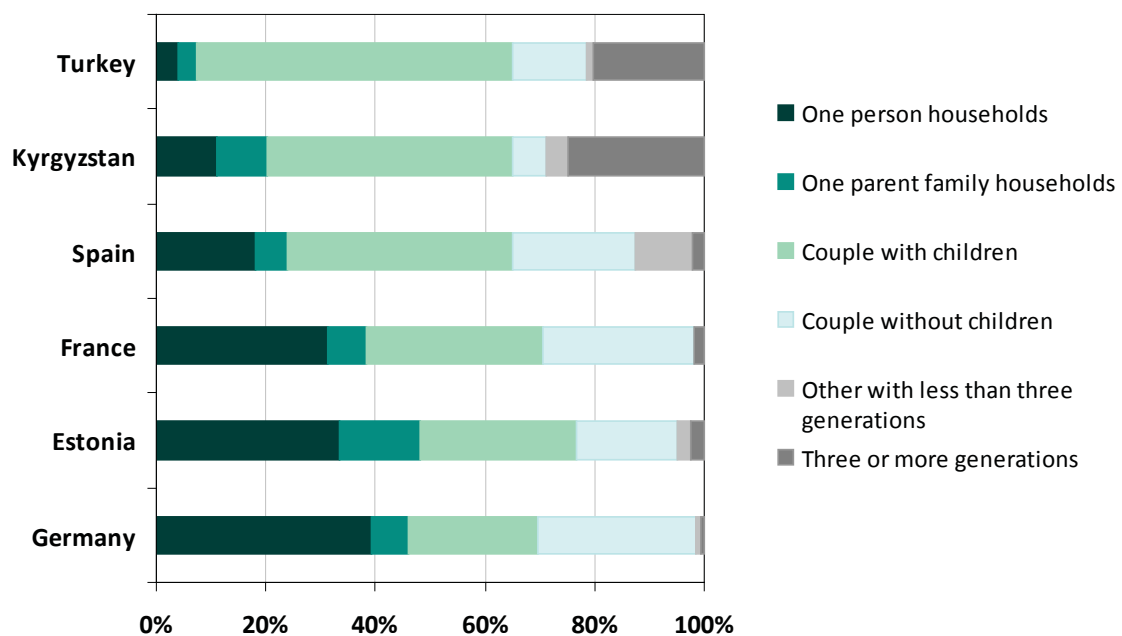


Source: UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 30 April 2010. Latest year for which data on three-generation households are available.

In most countries, the proportion of households consisting of one parent ranges at or below 10 per cent of households with only a few exceptions (Latvia 20 per cent, Belgium 15 per cent). This household typology is usually a consequence of union dissolution, widowhood and migration. Especially when a one-parent household has emerged owing to union dissolution, the number of supporting relatives is generally lower than before the interruption of the relation. The

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[17] UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 30 April 2010.

number of couples with children is affected by childbearing age and the age at which children leave the parental home. Over the last 30 years, the share of this household type has steadily decreased, in total by up to 10 percentage points in most UNECE countries, with the exceptions of the United States of America, where it has remained constant, and a few other countries where the decrease has been even greater (Albania 18 per cent, Ireland 15 per cent). The decline in couples with children has been accompanied by a parallel increase in the number of couple-only households. In the Nordic countries, Germany and Switzerland they exceed the number of couples with children. In these countries, the most common living arrangement for people older than 60 years old is a couple-only household. Due to gender differences in life expectancy, this living arrangement is the most prevalent for men even after age 80, while for women living alone becomes common after age 70.  Older women's living arrangements typically differ from those of older men: older men are more likely than older women to live in couple-only households or with children, while older women tend to be more likely to live alone, with a relative, or with an unrelated person.

**Figure 2**
**Percentage of men and women 65 or older who live alone, 2001–2008, latest available year**
(100% = all people 65 or older.)
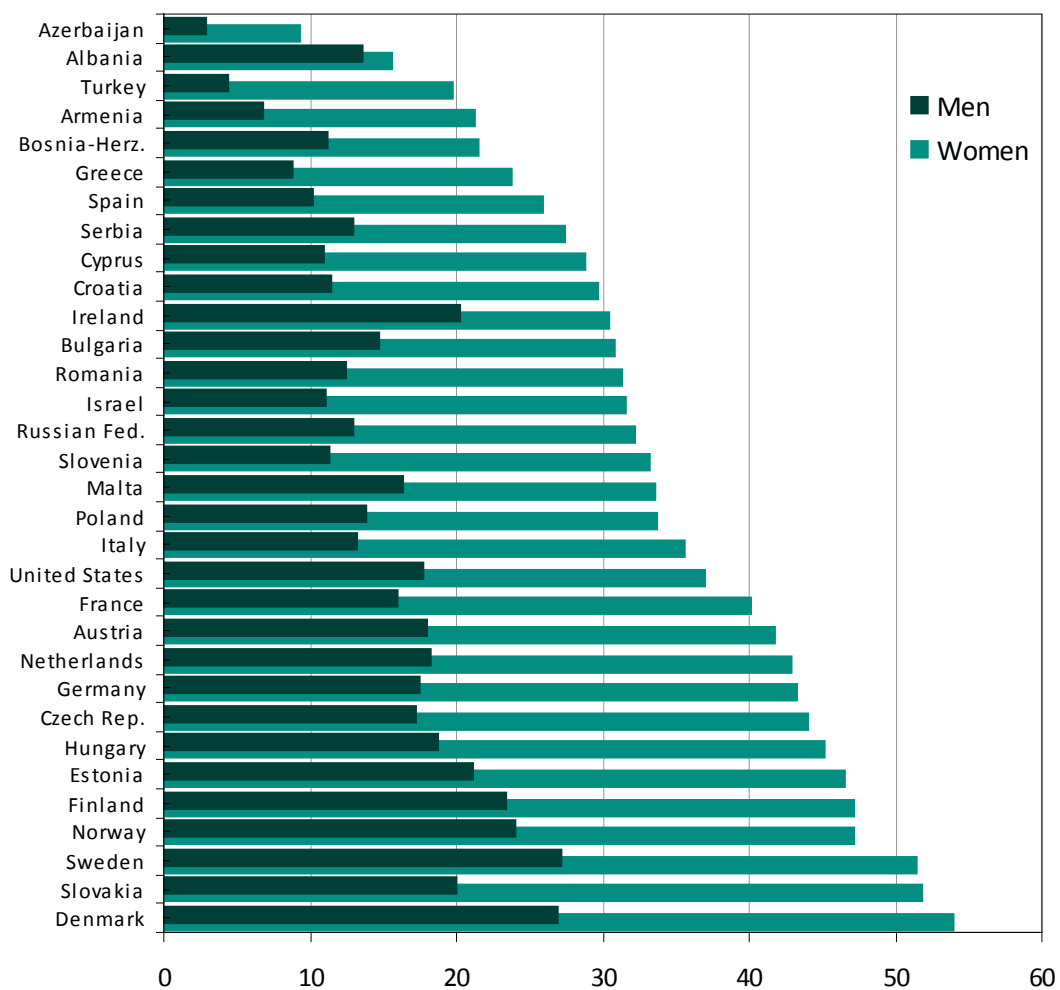


Source: Calculations from the UNECE Statistical Database, accessed on 30 April 2010.

[18] Huber, M.; Rodrigues, R.; Hoffmann, F.; et al. (2009), Facts and Figures on Long-Term Care. Europe and North America. Vienna: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, p. 40. Available from: http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml_id=1601.

[19] United Nations (2005), Living Arrangements of Older Persons around the World, pp. 38–39.

Households consisting of more than two generations are rare and their proportion varies largely. South-East European countries have the highest prevalence of co-residence of older parents with their children (ranging from 5 per cent in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 12 per cent in Albania) while the lowest levels are in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands (around 1 per cent). Intermediate levels are reported for Central Europe. Among the UNECE countries where corresponding data exist, the highest percentages of households with more than two generations are in Kyrgyzstan (24.9 per cent) and Turkey (20.3 per cent) (figure 1).

As for older people, in most countries there is a slow but increasing tendency towards solitary living. The majority of older persons in all countries continue to live in their own homes and communities ("ageing in place") and a small proportion is also likely to live in non-familial residential settings (institutional care centres).[20]

## Family and social network

Although the number of three-generation households is low, most adults in Europe belong to a family network of three generations, which is a consequence of two opposing effects on generational structure of families: longer lives and later childbearing.[21] Members of multiple generations share several decades together and are embedded in a complex web of ties.

Demographic change has an impact on the family relations and the role of its members within this network. For instance, people born during the fertility decline period will also have a lower number of siblings available in their family network than past generations had. The absence of descendants for people who never had children during their life may lead to their strengthening ties with other relatives. Union dissolution may represent an abrupt interruption of not only the union itself, but also entail a reduction in the number of supporting in-laws and relatives. Finally, migration also creates imbalances in the family network.

The major risks of relational isolation pertain to an older age when people live alone, especially if they never had children or are separated or divorced. Solitary living is the arrangement with highest risk of social isolation and needs going unmet when serious diseases and disability appear. However, their relationship with their children is a key resource for elderly couples and for widowers, in particular when their health conditions worsen.

The subjective perception of loneliness, as opposed to feeling socially integrated, has been found to correspond to the living arrangements of older people and it has emerged that living alone is associated with more intense feelings of loneliness, followed by older people living without a partner (i.e.. widowed, divorced, or never married) but sharing the household with adult children. Finally, older adults living with a spouse and adult children are characterized by the lowest levels of loneliness. Nevertheless, the composition and functioning of the network of close family members in both Western and Eastern European countries continues to be an important factor in guaranteeing that older people are included and socially integrated.

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[20] World Economic and Social Survey 2007, p. 33.
[21] Dykstra, P. A. (2009), "Intergenerational family relationships.

Countries differ significantly in the mechanisms that guarantee social integration and alleviate loneliness among older adults. In Eastern European countries (like Georgia and Bulgaria) social integration is highly associated with the presence of a spouse and a co-resident child, while in Western European countries (like France and Germany) social integration is associated with the presence of a spouse and frequent (weekly) contacts with adult children living separately.[22]

*Exchanges: transfers, emotional support*

The content of intergenerational exchange in families varies in different European countries: transfers of time and money are more frequent in the Southern European countries and less frequent in the Nordic countries, while Central European countries are in between. The emotional support provided by adults to their parents is on average around 11 per cent without significant differences among the eight countries for which data is available.[23]

*Family contacts*

While in the past younger and older adults used to live together under the same roof providing reciprocal support for the entire life-course, recently, especially in the more developed countries, co-residence has been replaced by "intimacy at a distance".[24] Even when living separately, parents and children have frequent contacts and mutual exchanges and provide long-term care when necessary. Intergenerational solidarity is strongly based on ties of affection and a feeling of mutual obligation.[25]

An indicator of intergenerational relations is the frequency of contacts between parents and adult children living separately from them (figure 3). In countries with available data, at least a third of people aged 60–79 years meet one of their children more than once a week.

**Figure 3**
**Percentage of people aged 60-79, living separately from their children, who meet at least one of their children more than once a week. Selected countries**
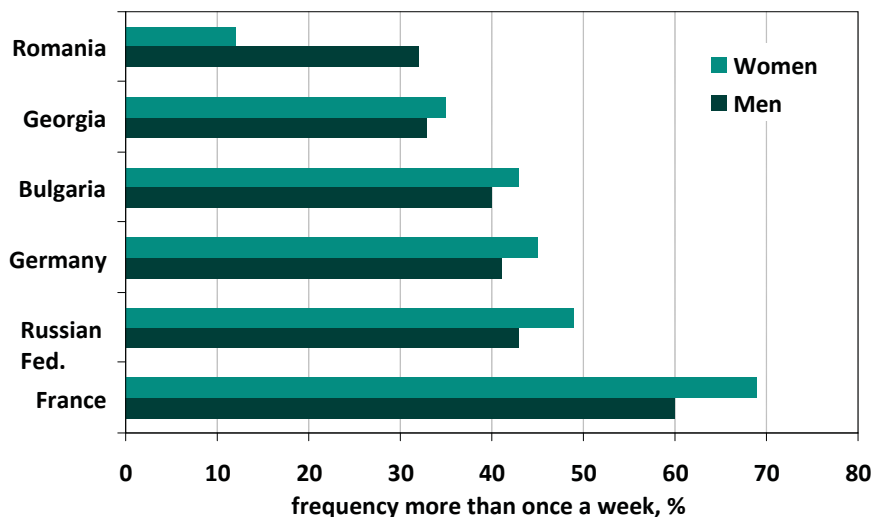


Source: Calculations based on data from Generations and Gender Surveys.

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[22]  De Jong Gierveld, J. (2008), "Living arrangements, family bonds and the regional context affecting social integration of older adults in Europe", in "How generations and gender shape demographic change: towards policies based on better knowledge", chap. 5, pp. 107–126.

[23]  Dykstra, P. A. (2009), "Intergenerational family relationships", p. 4.

[24]  Rosenmayr L. (1977), "The family".

[25]  United Nations (2005), Living Arrangements of Older Persons around the World, p. 9.

## Support network

As for intergenerational support, it has been highlighted that the direction of the transfer of help is downward most of the time during the life-course, and only at an advanced age do parents receive help.[26] Previous studies on Western welfare systems have shown that generous provisions enable families to redistribute their resources and do not crowd out private transfers.

The need for personal care in daily activities such as eating, getting up, dressing, bathing, or using the toilet increases with a person's age in all countries (figure 4). Among people aged 70–79, 12 per cent in Georgia report needing regular help with personal care, 9 per cent in Bulgaria and in the Russian Federation and 6 per cent in Hungary and Romania. In France and Germany, the levels are lower (4 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively).

The existing legal and policy frameworks affect the interaction between family members and the collectivity when some family member (children and frail older people) is in need of care or financial support. Legal norms and social policies may impose dependencies, which limit the autonomy of individuals, or on the contrary, they may support the choice to assume intergenerational obligations.[27, 28]

**Figure 4**
**People aged 50-79 years that need regular help with personal care by age-group and country**
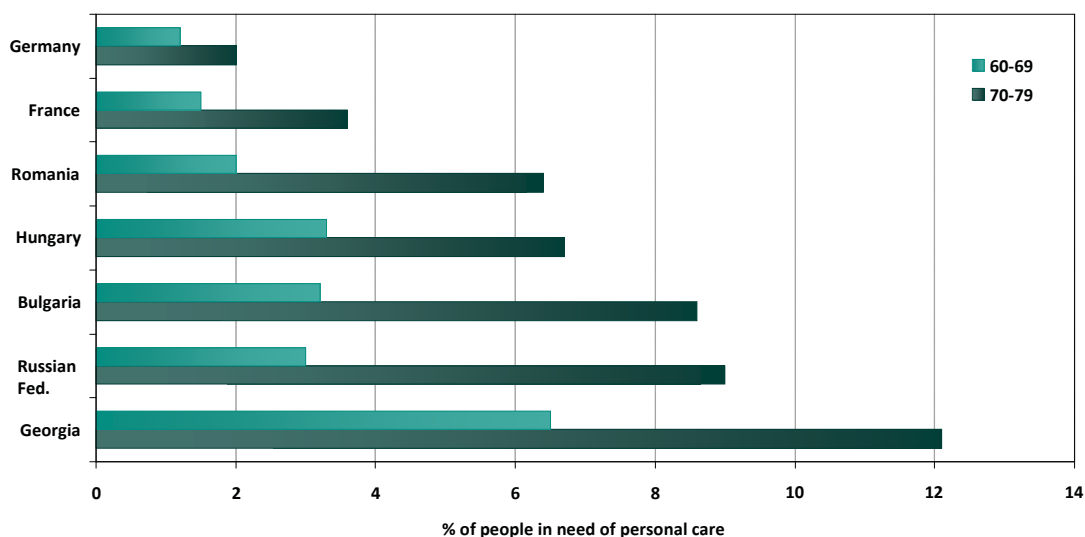


Source: Calculations based on data from Generations and Gender Surveys. Self-reported personal care such as eating, getting up, dressing, bathing, or using the toilet.

With regard to taking care of the needs of everyday life, older people may receive support from professional services and/or informally from people around him/her. Although much has been done in countries where welfare systems provided support for people in need, there still is a gap in personal care that needs to be filled in and this represents one of the main policy issues to be addressed in the future. [29]

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[26] Dykstra, P. A. (2009), "Intergenerational family relationships", p. 4.

[27] Dykstra, P. A. (2009), "Intergenerational family relationships".

[28] Saraceno, C. and Keck, W. (2009), "The institutional framework of intergenerational family obligations in Europe: a conceptual and methodological overview", WB für Sozialforschung - MULTILINKS project report.

[29] See also "Towards community long-term care" UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing, No.7, July (2010).

## Infrastructure

Living in an age-friendly environment makes it easier to integrate the older people in the society at all levels and therefore contributes to advancing intergenerational solidarity. This goal can be pursued through the implementation of infrastructure that takes into account the needs of older persons, especially in urban settings. In addition, the features of the housing can increase the perception of safety and facilitate ageing in place.

*Urban planning*

Urban settings are sometimes unsuitable for the most vulnerable citizens, such as disabled persons, parents with pushchairs, children, pregnant women and the elderly who have to contend with many obstacles. Promoting an age-friendly living environment entails designing for diversity not just for a person of average age. However, people of all ages are involved in the process of promoting active ageing. Thus, an age-friendly city encourages active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance people's quality of life as they age.[31]

A key feature of an age-friendly city is that it should foster solidarity between generations and within communities.[32] An age-friendly city should facilitate social relationships at any level (family, friends, neighbours and service providers) and minimize economic, linguistic or cultural barriers in order to help older people to feel integrated and safe.

The city's landscape, buildings, transportation system and housing contribute to confident mobility, healthy behaviour, social participation and self-determination or, conversely, to fearful isolation, inactivity and social exclusion.

Public buildings should be planned and conceived for people of all ages, providing technological support understandable and accessible to everybody. Accessibility for pedestrians should also be strengthened.

Public parks should be designed to allow people of different generations to gather and enjoy green spaces.

Urban planning policies should be oriented to create public spaces accessible for people of all ages, so as to facilitate occasions for contact and mutual support among them.[33] Moreover, urban spaces should help people maintain their independence as long as possible and strengthen their relationships with neighbours, colleagues and the community as a whole. Familiar surroundings, where people feel part of the local community, contribute to increasing the integration of older people. Moreover, enabling people to express their needs and desires related to their environment and letting them participate in urban planning enforces their feeling of integration within their cities or towns.

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[31] World Health Organization (2007) "Global age-friendly cities: a guide" p. 72. Available from: http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf.

[32] Ibid., p. 73.

[33] AGE (The European Older People's Platform) (2009), "A plea for greater intergenerational solidarity", p. 9. Available from: http://www.centreforip.org.uk/Libraries/Local/949/Docs/A%20plea%20for%20greater%20Intergenerational%20Solidarity.pdf.

## Vienna, a "local city" open to all in Austria

The city of Vienna has launched a large-scale 200-hectare urban development project, called "Aspern Vienna's Urban Lakeside" in the Flugfeld Aspern zone. The aim of the project is to integrate many generations and lifestyles in one spot and to create an active, modern environment for "the full life", which means reconciling housing and work, city and nature, community and leisure.

Half of the total project area is reserved for public open spaces with roads, squares, green zones and recreational areas; the other half will be used as a business district with science, research and training centres. In the project, public spaces are designed to be accessible to the entire community. Several issues, such as accessibility for pedestrians, the need for social infrastructure and the possibility of improving park layouts so that people of all ages can enjoy them (e.g., park benches installed in places requested by older persons), are explicitly addressed. In Aspern, distances to train stations and airports are rather short. It allows for travelling to be reduced to a minimum by the creation of a "local city" in which everybody can access their essential everyday goods and services in the immediate neighbourhood.

Source: http://www.aspern-seestadt.at.

*Housing*

After the departure of children from the parental home, parents rarely look for new accommodations. As time goes by, the home where children were raised may become unsuitable for them, yet economic circumstances often prevent "empty nesters" from looking for an accommodation better tailored to their demands. In many cities, older people feel insecure and scared by living alone.

Worsening health or critical economic conditions may hamper the search for a new residence or the adaptation of the present one to a new family status, or even its simple maintenance, thus affecting the perception of safety and comfort at home.

Housing has to be considered as well in connection with outdoor spaces and the rest of the built environment such that older people's homes are located in areas where integration in the community is possible.

Living close to services and facilities is seen as an age-friendly feature of the surroundings. The provision of home services is also considered an important issue by older people, while difficulties in obtaining such services and their cost represent a disadvantage.

## "One roof, two generations" in France

The association "Le PariSolidaire" has been active since April 2004. It serves as a meeting point for seniors living alone who have a vacant room and are in search of company and/or extra income and students looking for affordable housing in Paris or other French towns. The mission of the association is to bridge different generations by offering a service where meeting complementary needs can be an occasion for the creation of social benefits. Among such benefits are a decrease in loneliness among older and lonely persons, an increase in security of seniors, a supplement of pension incomes for retirees and the provision of cheap housing for students. The latter is offered for the entire duration of the academic year and the economic return is agreed in a spirit of solidarity exchange: the more time spent by the student in attendance and care services, the lower the rental cost, all the way down to free lodging in return for services.

Once the needs of the two parties match, the association arranges a meeting at the senior's home for the young person selected, without any intermediate adviser being present. When both are satisfied, the association writes down a contract to establish rules of conduct and to list the various proposed arrangements between the parties; moreover, the two contractors are asked to sign a chart of friendliness as well as an occupancy agreement. The activity of the Association is not limited to matching up older persons and students and drafting the agreement between them, but runs throughout the duration of the contract.

Website: http://www.leparisolidaire.fr/
Email: contact@leparisolidaire.fr

Policies should ensure that older persons have access to decent housing: public investment in social housing should aim at adapting it to the needs of an ageing population and ensuring that housing conditions are adequate for living longer at home.[34] Moreover, measures have to be taken in order to improve the security and safety of older people's homes.

## Integration and participation

After addressing the welfare and care needs of older people, it is most important to provide them with opportunities to participate in different areas of societal life: economic, social and cultural activities.

### Social activities

Besides the family network, the community plays an important role in meeting the needs of older persons. Friends, acquaintances, neighbours, colleagues, associations, organizations or companies are the main actors of the social network with which bonds are built within several social contexts of everyday life: in the workplace, during leisure time and in the neighbourhood.

Social integration in the context where older people live is a crucial aspect enforcing intergenerational solidarity and increasing the feeling of belonging to a community. Engagements with friends, neighbours and acquaintances in pursuing elderly interests and wishes should be facilitated, where possible. In addition, facilitating and stimulating social participation in activities that involve different age groups helps overcome the barriers to integration and to enlarge the social network. Local institutions and organizations should act to strengthen the bonds between social groups and foster exchanges of experiences between older and younger generations. Older persons, as repositories of the society's history and values, can offer their knowledge and experience while young people, thanks to their better developed technological skills, can contribute by selecting the most appropriate and current tools to put in place a common project. The cooperation of younger and older persons has numerous positives impacts, e.g., learning new technologies, handing down traditions and local history and better communication and understanding. In addition, to support a smooth transition from the labour market to the retirement period, a more effective exploitation of the leisure-time of older people should be promoted, especially during the later stage of their working life.

### Volunteering

The transition out of the labour market by older persons should not be equated with the loss of productive roles for them in society. The involvement of older persons in activities in which they have experience can be encouraged. Moreover, older people who wish to take part in volunteering should be supported in doing so according to their needs and interests. The possibility of providing voluntary services involving groups of different ages greatly enhances and promotes intergenerational solidarity.

Social engagement of older people positively contributes to increasing their esteem in the community, to building a positive image of the elderly and to breaking down communication barriers and cultural stigmatization.

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[34] AGE General Assembly Declaration, 8 May 2009, p. 3. Available at: http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2009/declaration.pdf.

## Seniors in Action in Poland

The Polish National grant competition "Seniors in Action" was launched in March 2008 by the Association of the Creative Initiatives "ę".

The aim of the programme is to take on the challenge of low social activity of older persons in Poland by involving seniors in activities to benefit their neighbourhoods, launching initiatives based on intergenerational cooperation and favouring the development of seniors' volunteer work.

The initiatives mobilize older persons to use their free time and their knowledge, as well as valuable life and work experiences, in activities for others. Intergenerational cooperation is also promoted at the project management level, where intergenerational pairs of leaders (a person aged 55 years or more and a person aged up to 30 years) work together to implement the project. Whereas the older person acts as a leader since he/she has a better knowledge of older persons' needs, the younger person selects the form of classes and methods of reaching children or youth in a more accurate way. The older leader very often seeks the younger person's help with activities requiring the use of computers, the Internet or other technical novelties.

With the support of a local non-profit institution or organization (third age universities, foundations, associations, libraries, community centres, housing associations, etc.) older persons participate in a workshop that lasts for several days that aims at refining the project and preparing the grant application.

So far, 67 successful projects have been undertaken. These included the revitalization of the courtyard on a housing estate in Lublin with a graffiti-style mural; a puppet theatre run by seniors, recorded on camera by young people to create an instruction film and performed for children from the Town Integrative Kindergarten; and a school which supports grandmothers in raising their grandchildren (Super Grandma School); as well as the volunteer work of older persons engaged in cooking, preparing art and photography workshops for children or presenting fairytales to children in hospitals and care facilities, etc.

Source: www.seniorzywakcji.pl or www.e.org.pl.

## "Pedibus" in Italy: Promotion of sustainable school mobility in Udine

In 2009 the city of Udine, Italy, launched the initiative "Pedibus", a service designed to accompany children on their way to school in the morning.

After the first experimental year on a single school, the programme has been extended to other schools by activating three "walking buses", which run daily until the end of the school day as if they were ordinary school buses with stops and traffic signs. The walking bus is attended by a group of volunteer carers of different ages, hence the subtitle of the project — "three generations are mobilizing". Carers may be parents; university students of educational sciences; teachers; seniors of the Third Age University; and elderly persons from the local association "Salotto d'Argento". Indeed, one of the objectives is to create a context for socialization and exchange of knowledge, not only among children but also among adults and the elderly, with a view to increasing intergenerational interaction.

All children who are enrolled in the walking bus and all the escorts were provided with a badge and reflective vests so as to be more visible to motorists.

The initiative was welcomed with great enthusiasm by children. Moreover, the walking-to-school programme "Pedibus" encourages sustainable mobility and reduces the use of private vehicles around the school areas, with consequent benefits for traffic circulation, road safety in the vicinity of the schools, quality of air and opportunities for socialization of children and adults.

Source: http://www.comune.udine.it/opencms/opencms/release/ComuneUdine/cittavicina/cittasane/Pedibus.

### Care

The provision of care and its reciprocity across generations is a very important element of intergenerational solidarity. Older generations represent a significant source of support and help for young families, especially caring for young children when their mothers are involved in the labour market. At the same time, young adults should not be considered as dependents only, but also as caregivers to their parents and grandparents in need.

*Kinship care: grandparenting*

Older people are often involved in caring activities throughout their life for their family members within or outside the household. This occurs even more frequently when grandchildren cannot be cared for by their parents because the latter are unable or unwilling to do so as a consequence of migration, death, incarceration, abandonment, neglect, abuse, illness, etc. It is mainly women who act as primary caregivers for children and other family members. Even if temporary, such a situation requires prompt readjustment of many aspects of grandparents' lives. Grandparents may have difficulty accommodating children in their current residences and need technical and financial assistance. Many grandparents do not pursue legal custody or guardianship because litigation is costly and because they fear of angering the parent(s) and losing the relationship with their child(ren). As a consequence, the absence of legal guardianship poses several obstacles such as enrolling the child to school, obtaining medical information or treatment, accessing benefits for the child. The stress of caring for grandchildren can be overwhelming, especially if the caregivers are older or dealing with personal health problems. Moreover, many children suffer from severe physical, emotional and behavioural problems, which make caregiving difficult. Grandparents provide stability and permanence for children, often without extended family or community support.

Policies should support caring grandparents in raising children, strengthening social cohesion. Pursuing the well-being of the child is the main objective of caring grandparents. This has to be acknowledged and, as such, supported by policymakers, as grandparents' health conditions are often frail and their economic circumstances, as retired people, are often limited.

## United States of America: Kinship Care Programmes

Across the United States, 6.2 million children — approximately 1 in 12 children — are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives.[35] The phenomenon of grandparents and other relatives raising children is not new, but it has increased dramatically over the last 25 years (in 1998 it involved only just over 3.9 million children under the age of 18).[36]

In Illinois, over 200,000 children under the age of 18 are living in a grandparent-headed home. The Illinois Department on Aging, in cooperation with the Illinois Task Force on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, works to locate, assist and promote awareness of older caregivers who are currently raising their family's children. The "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program" began in 1996 with a grant from the Brookdale Foundation. Additional legislative support allowed the Department on Aging to expand the programme, by establishing support groups and providing them with financial and technical assistance; providing grandparents with information and referral assistance; and training professionals and facilitators to meet grandparents' needs.

Not only grandparents, but also older relatives over the age of 60 raising grandchildren or children are eligible for services under the "Illinois Family Caregiver Support Program". These services include assistance to caregivers in gaining access to services; individual counselling, support groups and caregiver training; respite care to enable caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities; and supplemental services such as assistive devices, home modification, legal assistance, transportation, school supplies and any other gap-filling service which attempts to address a short-term caregiver emergency.

The Older American Act, by its Title III E, established the "National Family Caregiver Support Program" (NFCSP). Operational since 2000, the NFCSP provides grants to states and territories based on their share of the population aged 70 and over, to fund a range of supports that assist grandparents and other relatives 55 years of age and older providing care to children under the age of 18 years.

Source: Illinois Department on Aging (2009). Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program. http://www.state.il.us/aging/1intergen/grg.htm (accessed 23 April 2010)..

[35] These data are taken from the United States Census Bureau Table DP-2. Profile Selected Social Characteristics: 2000. The U.S. Census website is http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet.
[36] U.S. Census 1998 Current Population Survey. www.census.gov/population/pop-profile/1999/chap06.pdf.

*Care received*

Intergenerational solidarity should also be pursued when health conditions worsen and the elderly need care. Understanding the health problems related to an individual's ageing helps increase awareness about the circumstances and needs of older persons. Bringing younger persons into contact with older frail people helps pull down the barriers to contact created by disabling diseases that may occur at older ages. Moreover, since a large part of care received by older people comes from informal providers — mainly families and relatives — young people also represent a support for caregivers, as they can provide relief to them and can help keep them from feeling abandoned.

### Student contest: "Alzheimer's & you" in Germany

The student contest "Alzheimer's & you" fostered young peoples' readiness for civil societal engagement and promoted intergenerational solidarity at the same time. As part of the project, young people ages 14 to 21 were engaged in socializing with people with Alzheimer's disease and their relatives in order to abolish fears concerning contact with Alzheimer's victims, to change their ideas and to generate empathy.

The project was launched in June 2007 under the patronage of the former German Federal Minister of the Family. Overall, 600 participants handed in 110 creative contributions such as reports, photo-documentaries, pictures and films. The winners received a prize from the jury — made up of members of the German Alzheimer's organization — in September 2008 in Berlin. Among the winners was a school whose pupils had visited a nursing home once a week and spent time with dementia patients by giving them assistance and showing support. The schoolchildren supplemented their reports on those visits with numerous pictures. The jury praised especially the regularity of the visits, as well as the continuing cooperation between the school and the residential home for older persons, even after the end of the contest.

In a further project that impressed the jury, dogs were brought along during visits to dementia patients. The award-winning video shows the positive impact contact with dogs has on Alzheimer's sufferers, and it was subsequently decided that such contact should become an integral part of the ambulant nursing service.

Currently, study materials for schools is prepared using the prize-winning projects, in order to increase social participation by the younger generations.

All prize-winning contributions, especially the videos, can be found on the website www.alzheimerandyou.de. The website also provides numerous interesting links regarding contacts with dementia patients, including tips and how and where schools or individuals can volunteer and provide neighbourly help. Additionally, visitors of the website can join in a memory quiz, in which powers of concentration, logical and analytical skills, as well as memory, are tested.

Source: www.alzheimerandyou.de.

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| Checklist : Advancing intergenerational solidarity | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Main areas** | **Areas of implementation** | **Key elements** |
| **Intergenerational relations** | Social participation | Proximity to services |
| | | Facilitate contacts with family and friends |
| | | Facilitate staying at home |
| **Support and care** | Old people support younger generations | Support grandparents raising granchildren |
| | | Child-care policies |
| | Family members in working ages support old people | Provide long-term care services |
| | | Work flexibility |
| | | Support caring families |
| **Infrastructure** | Urban planning | Participation in urban planning |
| | | Sharing of green areas |
| | | Accessibility of facilities |
| | | Home-services to facilitate independent living |
| | Housing | Subsidies |
| | | Ensuring access to decent housing |
| | | Remodelling to new needs |
| | | Improvement of security and safety |
| **Integration and participation** | Social activities | Facilitate contacts with neighbours, colleagues |
| | | Empowerment to pursue personal interests |
| | | Fostering exchanges of experiences between generations |
| | Volunteering | Involvement in areas of past experience |
| | | Involvement in areas of interests |
| | | Meeting groups of different ages |
| | | Promoting positive image of ageing |

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