

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Population ageing has a profound impact on societies. It affects educational institutions, labour markets, social security, health care, long-term care and the relationship between generations. Active ageing is a central political concept that takes in not only the challenges, but also the opportunities of long-living societies. This includes opportunities for older people to continue working, to stay healthy longer and to contribute to society, for example through volunteering. Policies on active ageing are intended to improve both societal welfare and individual quality of life. The current paper presents evidence on active ageing and quality of life and discusses policy implications. The following paragraphs summarize the main argument and policy recommendations of the paper.

## **(a) Use a broad definition of active ageing**

Active ageing embraces both individual processes and societal opportunity structures for health, participation and integration. The goal of interventions for active ageing is the enhancement of quality of life as people age. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UNECE use the term “active ageing” in such a way to include different ageing trajectories and diverse groups of older people. Moreover, it is emphasized that opportunities for health, participation and security have to be optimized in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Participation and security are understood in the broadest sense including social, economic and political participation, social inclusion and integration and intergenerational relationships.

## **(b) Start early in promoting active ageing**

Active ageing must begin with investments early in life (e.g. education, health behaviour, volunteering in childhood and adolescence). Early life experiences, especially education, yield positive effects which will be visible in old age. Policies on active ageing should rely on measures which foster successful development in earlier phases in life. Providing learning opportunities over the life span has long lasting positive effects on active ageing.

## **(c) Offer opportunities for active ageing also later in the life course**

Even in middle and late adulthood investments in active ageing are effective (e.g. changing health behaviour, vitalizing social integration, stimulating volunteer activities). Intervention studies demonstrate that changes in health, social integration, and participation are possible up to late adulthood. It should be emphasized, however, that the efficiency of interventions decreases with advancing age. The state and other stakeholders need to provide the basis for life-long health education and promotion, including also health promotion for older people. Relevant stakeholders should also provide adequate environment for people of all ages. The central arena for investments in active ageing is the local and regional context (e.g. age-friendly cities).

## **(d) Improve societal frameworks for active ageing**

Active ageing needs a secure base. Health, integration, and participation in late life can be fostered by societal frameworks. Results from comparative surveys show that the extent of welfare state support – through social security systems like unemployment protection, pension system, health care system, and long-term care system – seems to be connected to opportunities for active ageing. Although the instruments for building social security differ between societies, governments may provide regulation for the combined effects of different stakeholders. Highly relevant is the prevention of poverty, as poverty bears the high risk of social exclusion. Combating poverty will also help to reduce health inequalities and to increase the chances to take an active part in society.

## **(e) Include frail elders in old age policies**

Even with successful policies for active ageing, a substantial proportion of the “old old” will need support because of multi-morbidity and frailty. Policies for active ageing will be necessary for ageing societies, but

they should be complemented by policies on supporting frail and dependent older people to ensure their social inclusion and human dignity (see for instance the European Charter of the Rights and Responsibilities of Older People in Need of Long-term Care and Assistance).

**(f) Pay attention to images of ageing**

Societal and individual conceptions of ageing influence developmental trajectories over the life span. Using the potentials of active ageing – and coping with the restrictions of frailty and dependency in old age – is influenced by societal images of ageing. Bringing new “images of ageing” into the mass media and into the consciousness of the general public might show that older people are a potential societal resource. It should be noted, however, that purely positive images of ageing do not do justice to frail older people in need of care. Hence, images of ageing should be inclusive and embrace both potentials and risks of old age.

