



The Government of Republic of Serbia
Council of Ageing and Intergenerational Cooperation

OVERVIEW
OF THE MADRID INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING AND THE
REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR AGEING FROM 2002, WITH
SUGGESTIONS FOR THEIR FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OR UPDATING

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted at the International Conference on April 8th 2002 as a general framework for United Nations member states in terms of planning and engagement for the enhancement of the quality of life of older persons and in support of the process of active ageing. This universal document was followed by the Regional Implementation Strategy on Ageing (hereinafter: RIS), adopted in September of the same year at the Ministerial Conference in Berlin, which outlined commitments for countries in the scope of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) for the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

At the UNECE area, the follow up of both international documents has been in the focus of the Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA) last several years. By the Point 47 of *The Rome Ministerial Declaration*, adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Rome in June 2022 – the SWGA was entrusted with the task of updating Regional Implementation Strategy and exploring the possibility of also updating Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing to adapt ageing-related policy responses to economic, social, and digital transitions and emerging challenges, and developing further instruments to support them.

In response to the above mentioned and over the past two years, the SWGA has worked on the assigned task through the established Task Force in which Republic of Serbia actively

participates with the representative of the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography. Within this process, the SWGA has recognized the potential of the Council for Ageing and Intergenerational Cooperation of the Government of Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: Council) as a good practice example outlined in the *Guidance for National Stakeholder Engagement on Future Ageing Policy Priorities (ECE/WG.1/2024/INF.3)*. Therefore, it has been expected that the Council should contribute effectively to the SWGA's taken efforts in assessing the level of achieved objectives of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the RIS as well as in proposing new measures or continuation of the provision of existing activities from two documents from 2027.

In 2024, the Council convened twice, discussing, among other topics, effects and achievements of the Madrid Plan and the RIS and taking initiatives for further elaboration of active ageing policies in Republic of Serbia and also at the international level. Additionally, the Council's expert members held three meetings in 2024 dedicated exclusively to reviewing these two global and regional documents in order to facilitate the participation of the Council members from the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography at the December Conference of the Serbian Pensioners' Association, which gathered 230 participants and included discussions on themes within the domain of the RIS.

As a result of this process, the Council hereby submits suggestions for consideration and analysis within the framework of the SWGA's assigned mandate, based on the guiding questions outlined in the *Guidance for National Stakeholder Engagement on Future Ageing Policy Priorities (ECE/WG.1/2024/INF.3)*:

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I. *What key changes have societies experienced in the last 20 years?*

The Council has grouped its findings and conclusions regarding the implementation of the Madrid Plan and the RIS as follows:

1) Main Outcomes:

- **Global/Regional perspective and orientation** – A universal/regional and comprehensive framework has been established for understanding and addressing ageing issues;
- **Support for active ageing** – The concept of active ageing has been promoted, emphasizing health services, participation in public and political life and contributions to the community;
- **Raised awareness and knowledge about ageing** – Global/Regional awareness has been increased addressed to ageing-related challenges as well as the need for public policies that provide adequate responses;
- **Enhancement of political strategies** – Guidelines have been defined for the implementation of measures aligned with the needs of older persons;
- **Promotion of international cooperation** – Experience sharing and the best practice exchanges among countries and regions have been encouraged;
- **Support for human rights of older persons** – Measures to prevent and combat discrimination based on age (ageism) have been strengthened;

- **Focus on integration and social inclusion** – The idea that older persons should be involved in all aspects of social life has been promoted contributing to social cohesion;
- **Healthcare provision** – The importance of adequate healthcare (including mental health) and long-term care for older persons has been recognized;
- **Training for professionals and caregivers working with older persons** – Training for professionals and volunteers working with older persons have been proposed to ensure higher quality and more adequate care.

2) Critical Points:

- **Excessive generalization** – Broad guidelines for understanding and addressing ageing issues were established but did not sufficiently consider specific national and especially local contexts, where real challenges and needs may differ significantly;
- **Assumption of equal readiness of all countries** – The RIS assumed that all countries would be equally capable to fully implement its the recommendations;
- **Insufficient funding across the Region** – Many countries lacked the necessary financial resources to implement the recommended measures and activities;
- **Lack of adaptability to rapid demographic changes** – Some elements of the RIS were not flexible enough to accommodate emerging challenges and needs, particularly the increasing trend of population ageing;
- **Lack of adequate participation of older persons** – Older persons were not sufficiently involved in the planning and decision-making processes directly affecting them;
- **Ambitious objectives without clear indicators on success (inadequate evaluation and monitoring)** – The ambitious objectives set forth lacked clear indicators for measuring success or guidelines for evaluating progress, making monitoring and assessment difficult.

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II. *Given these changes, what new challenges have emerged for creating societies for all ages?*

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What do you see as the primary challenges in the next 20 years in relation to demographic change and ageing?

Based on the aforementioned, the Council considers that the further preparation of the regional/UNECE document on active ageing must retain or be based on the following key assumptions:

1) Active ageing:

The concept of active ageing must remain a key component of the (future) regional strategy as a response to demographic ageing; active ageing emphasizes the significance of the older population as a valuable resource, whose rich experience can contribute to overall societal well-being.

2) The importance of personal responsibility and individual planning for older age:

Derived from the concept of active ageing, the principle of personal responsibility emphasizes the need for self-care in the ageing process and later stages of life; since ageing does not occur suddenly, it is crucial to take early measures such as adopting healthy lifestyles and preventing health risks.

3) Ageing as a lifelong process:

Ageing should be viewed as a lifelong process that begins at birth; a lifelong approach to ageing highlights the importance of early preparation for old age and personal responsibility, through the development of healthy habits, lifelong learning, and ensuring financial security throughout one's life.

4) Redefining the intergenerational agreement:

The Madrid Plan and the RIS have already stressed the relevance of an intergenerational approach to policy, advocating fairness and social inclusion for all age groups; this approach is based on the inseparable principles of reciprocity and equity, which have been challenged by demographic ageing and increasing generational pressure; redefining the intergenerational agreement based on the principles of fairness, reciprocity and responsibility can reduce generational tensions, create a sustainable social protection system for older persons and encourage individual responsibility for well-being in older age.

5) The family as a caregiver for its older members (family solidarity – between voluntarism and legal obligation):

Family solidarity is crucial in social and demographic policies; however, due to population ageing, a new strategic approach is needed to restore the essential role of the family in supporting its older members, alongside with an enhanced role for the broader community, particularly in fostering intergenerational solidarity; while family structures are evolving, the family remains the primary support system in old age, and reinforcing its role is essential for effective demographic policies on ageing.

6) Social cohesion:

Social cohesion, among other issues represents the ability of society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimize inequalities, and prevent social divisions; equality does not mean uniformity, but rather equal opportunities for all social groups to meet their needs; this concept requires the transformation of society into an open and inclusive system for all, including older persons.

7) The usefulness and socioeconomic contribution of older persons:

The knowledge and skills of older persons contribute to their well-being and financial security while also benefiting society as a whole.

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III. *What are the priority actions for policymakers for the future to create societies in which ageing is a positive experience?*

a n d

In your opinion, what are the five (or more) priority areas for achieving a society for all ages?

In order to achieve the above points in the coming period, the Council submits the following **proposals and recommendations:**

- **Improving the quality of life for older persons** – Strengthening programs related to transport, digital literacy, and access to services for those living in areas remote from administrative centers;
- **Strengthening institutional care services (both public and private)** – As a positive framework for active ageing;

- **Ensuring financial security in old age** – General measures for preventing and combating poverty through the ability and promotion of personal savings for retirement and increasing employment opportunities for older persons;
- **Encouraging local authorities to implement measures supporting older persons** – Recognizing and addressing the specific needs of older persons and providing supportive measures accordingly;
- **Reducing disparities in the quality and accessibility of services between urban and rural areas** – Ensuring the improvement of older persons' lives across all territories and societal segments without discrimination;
- **Adapting the living environment for the ageing process** – In correlation with persons with disabilities, adjusting the living environment to the needs of older persons through habitual planning and the removal of architectural barriers;
- **Special protection of older persons in emergency situations** – Including natural disasters, epidemics and periods of social instability;
- **(Re)Affirmation of the family's role and support for families in caring for their ageing members** – Strengthening families to ensure that they actively care for their older members;
- **Prevention and combating violence against all generations** – Preventing and addressing violence, including recognition of abuse and adoption of the prevention of neglect programs;
- **Set up of permanent database (national and international) for monitoring ageing-related public policies** – Clearly defining data collection and evaluation parameters to assess progress in implementing adopted measures.

What will come next?

Introducing robotics and artificial intelligence based on innovative principles to support the ageing process from early to late life, ensuring mobility of services towards users rather than requiring users to go to institutions for support.

A clear vision for development – From Ageing Policy to Longevity Policy.

Pursuant to Article 22 of *The Rules of Procedure of the Government of Republic of Serbia* ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 61/06 – consolidated text, 69/08, 88/09, 33/10, 69/10, 20/11, 37/11, 30/13, 76/14, and 8/19 – other regulation), the Government of Republic of Serbia adopted a *Decision to Establish the Council for Ageing and Intergenerational Cooperation* ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 52/24) in June 2024 with the task of: 1) Examining issues related to the ageing process, 2) Promoting intergenerational cooperation and the practice of healthy and active ageing throughout the entire life cycle, 3) Initiating cooperation between state authorities, professional and sectoral organizations, and civil society organizations in the field of the enhancement of the quality of life of all age groups. One of the Council's tasks is to support the participation of Republic of Serbia, specifically the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography, in activities of the SWGA of the UNECE in the preparation of a new regional

document on ageing, planned for adoption in 2027. The Council's members include representatives of relevant ministries and institutions, civil society organizations, academia. In addition to sessions, the Council also organizes events and dialogues with general public and specific groups on matters within its mandate.

1. *Description of exercise(s)*

At the initial session of the Council (July 4th 2024), its members adopted a conclusion that for the effective proceeding of the Council's discussions and decision-making about the review of the RIS, the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography would be responsible for organizing preparatory meetings with expert members of the Council and present the outcomes of this meetings at the Council sessions for further consideration. In this regard, members of the Council from academia held three meetings and issued proposals for decision-making on Council session on October 1st 2024. After it, the proposals were presented to the representatives of the Serbian Pensioners' Association at the two-day Conference.¹ As said, the Pensioners' Association organized a Conference of its branches on December 10th and 11th 2024, attended by representatives of the Council and the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography also. Relevant topics were discussed and measures were suggested to strengthen the status of older persons and support the ageing process. After debate and few adjustments of the Council proposals as result of requests from present older persons, the overview of the RIS was finalized by the national focal point in order to submit it to the SWGA.

a. *When was the exercise(s) held?*

The Council's sessions were held on July 4th and October 1st 2024 (on International Day of Older Persons); meetings of expert members of the Council took place on July 12th, September 5th and November 5th 2024; the central event/Conference was organized on December 10th and 11th 2024.

b. *Where was the exercise(s) held?*

With the exception of the central event/Conference, held in Vrnjačka Banja (spa in Central Serbia), all other meetings and sessions took place in Belgrade.

c. *What type of exercise was held? Please describe the method of stakeholder engagement (survey, focus groups, etc.)*

The Council, as an advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, carries out its work through formal sessions. The central event in Vrnjačka Banja lasted two days, during which participants engaged in group discussions followed by a plenary

¹ The Serbian Pensioners' Association is civil society organization of older persons in the Republic of Serbia with over 900 thousand membership. It has branches across the whole country and it is actively engaged in (from Association's Statute): 1) The protection of rights and interests of pensioners/older persons, 2) Improving their material, social, and overall societal status, 3) Enhancing the pension, disability, health, and social insurance systems, 4) Developing humanitarian and volunteer work, as well as fostering social, cultural and sports activities for its members. A representative of the Serbian Pensioners' Association is a permanent member of the Council for Ageing and Intergenerational Cooperation of the Government of Republic of Serbia. (For more information: www.sapens.rs).

session analyzing key topics based on questions and suggestions prepared by the Council (please see section d).



First/Initial Session of the Council on July 4th 2024, chaired by H. E. Milica Djurdjević Stamenkovski, Minister for Family Welfare and Demography of Republic of Serbia



Second/Formal Session of the Council on the International Day of Older Persons, Oct. 1st 2024

d. *What guiding questions were used and which topics were discussed?*

For the Conference on December 10th and 11th 2024, the Council prepared a comprehensive list of questions and suggestions. While not all were addressed in group discussions, the organizer was required to distribute them to all attendees for their further deliberation:

1. **Status quo:**

- Consideration of:
 - The UN 2030 Agenda,
 - The ageing of European population,
 - Economic progress, which has led to increased prosperity and opportunities for a more comfortable lifestyle,
 - The inevitability of population decline;

- Situation in Republic of Serbia:
 - A continuous decline in population numbers over several decades,
 - A large number of small/remote settlements with no long-term viability, while urban areas lack the capacity to integrate rural areas in terms of healthcare and social support;
- 2. **Proposals:**
 - Develop programs for:
 - Palliative care (conditions, criteria, expertise),
 - Strengthening mental health services, with a focus on dementia (not only in older persons but across the general population and from both healthcare and social perspectives),
 - Prevention as the dominant approach in preserving (mental) health;
 - Strengthen:
 - Quality of life (programs related to transportation, digital literacy, and access to services in remote areas),
 - Prevention and suppression of violence (identifying violence, its specifics, and developing neglect-prevention programs);
 - Introduce:
 - Robotics and artificial intelligence based on innovative principles to support the ageing process from early to late life,
 - Service mobility (bringing services to users, rather than requiring users to go to institutions);
- 3. **Principles and Methodology:**
 - Maintain, as before:
 - Gender equality (especially women in rural areas and those with special needs) and human rights,
 - Intergenerational cooperation and solidarity (elevating them as key priorities for the future UNECE ageing strategy),
 - Lifelong learning,
 - Employment accessibility (adapting workplaces to the health and physical condition of ageing workers);
 - Consider:
 - Heterogeneous principles (circumstances today are different from 25 years ago),
 - The second demographic dividend – saving should be a lifelong practice, critical for individuals (and their families) as well as for the authorities,
 - Educational and gender dividends.

2. *Participant details*

a. *List of organizations represented*

At the central event/Conference, aside from the Serbian Pensioners' Association, participants included representatives from: Association of Pensioners' Trade Unions of Serbia and Pensioners' Trade Union "Nezavisnost/Independence" (www.nezavisnost.org),

Amity – “Snaga prijateljstva/the Power of Friendship” (www.amity-yu.org) and “Pokret treće doba/Movement for Third Epoch” (www.trece-doba.rs).

- b. *Number of total participants*
230
- c. *Number of male participants*
168
- d. *Number of female participants*
62
- e. *Number of participants by following age groups: under age 18, 18-24, 25-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, 85+*

The organizer of the event in Vrnjačka Banja, namely Serbian Pensioners' Association did not collect information disaggregated by age, but it could confirm that out of 17 administrative districts in Central Serbia, the Conference was attended by the representatives of all 17 districts plus those from Belgrade and Province of Vojvodina.



Conference on December 11th and 12th 2024 of the associations of older persons with participation of the representatives from the Council and the Ministry of Family Welfare and Demography of Republic of Serbia

3. *Substantive results*

- a. *Please describe the key themes that emerged from the discussion*
and

b. *Please identify five priorities for the future based on the engagement exercise(s)*
On the initial pages of this Overview (with conclusions and recommendations being the result of previously prepared positions of the Council and debated by representatives of the older persons associations in Republic of Serbia – priorities and key themes were

presented. It is planned that these suggestions would be submitted to the SWGA for further consideration and drafting of new UNECE document addressed to empowerment of older persons and a provision and support to the process of active and healthy ageing.

Finally, the Council points out that the European Union (EU) began the work of adopting its strategy for older persons few years ago. The European Economic and Social Committee publicized *Exploratory Opinion on EU Strategy for Older Persons* in 2023. Given that EU member states make up about half of the UNECE member states, and that, together with the candidate countries for EU membership, they make up almost two-thirds of the UNECE member states – this fact should be taken into account when preparing the new RIS in order to review so far accomplished by the EU and consider it accordingly in order to spare some resources.

Belgrade, March 31st 2025