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Subject: Response to the request by the Chair of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing regarding the member states' contribution on the work of the Group

With regard to your request for information concerning the Republic of Slovenia's view on the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing of March 6 2015, we would like to share with you the following contribution:

Demographic changes in the Republic of Slovenia are increasingly affecting its economic and social life, particularly due to the generation born during the demographic boom following the Second World War, who are beginning to retire.

Slovenia is responding to the effects of demographic changes in a number of ways, leaning on international and domestic documents and events such as the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid in 2002, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Berlin in 2002, the EU Green Paper Confronting Demographic Change: a New Solidarity between the Generations, a document issued by the European Commission titled Demographic Future of Europe – From Challenge to Opportunity, Conclusions of the Ministerial Conference on Ageing held in Vienna in 2012, etc.

As mentioned, the number of elderly individuals is expected to increase in the next few years. They often face physical, as well as personal and social decline. Given their growing vulnerability, the maintenance of their human dignity increasingly depends on those who take care of their everyday needs and on the general public's attitude towards old age. In a supportive, age-friendly society, with equal access to health and social services, individuals of advanced old age have the possibility of maintaining their dignity. This is of special importance during the economic crisis, which particularly affects the poor, many of whom are elderly people, particularly live-alone elderly women and cognitively or otherwise disabled individuals. Their dignity is threatened by all forms of discrimination, neglect, violence and abuse. Social ethics are linked to sensitive vigilance in the field of maintenance of the rights and dignity of all who are unable to do so themselves.

The dignity of physically and financially independent older people can be preserved by integrating their potentials in all social activities, which results in intergenerational equity. In order to maintain their potential and dignity, they must be included in the preparation of social, economic and cultural politics and programmes that concern them.

Numerous social and political challenges are linked to quickly ageing populations, and the maintenance of an active and healthy population until, and in, old age is thus exceptionally important in the modern society. A comprehensive social policy at national level and at European Union level is a prerequisite for the economic success of a society and the welfare of its people.

1. Concrete proposals for the work of the Working Group

- *Introduction of measures enabling a dignified life for older persons* (the rights and dignity of everyone, including the elderly, should be encouraged by the society through appropriate regulations).
- *Participation of older person in all spheres of society* (Older persons should be included in the preparation of social, economic and cultural politics and programmes that concern them).
- *Active and healthy life* (Active and healthy life in old age should be promoted, especially among those with chronic diseases, including the areas of proper nutrition and polypharmacy).
- *Special attention is to be given to elderly women and cognitively or otherwise disabled persons.*
- *Emphasis should also be put on the awareness-raising activities on the field of social ethics.*

2. Practical Measures

With a view to adequately preparing for demographic changes both now and in the future by taking a comprehensive and long-term inter-ministerial approach, the Government adopted in 2006 the Strategy for Protection of the Elderly; Solidarity, Co-existence and Quality Ageing of the Population. On this basis, the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Solidarity and Coexistence of Generations and Quality Aging was set up in 2007 to implement the Strategy and ensure continuous and coordinated cooperation between the state, experts and civil society in both planning and implementing policies governing this area. A new strategy ('Strategy for active and healthy ageing in Slovenia') is being drafted which is aimed at high-quality ageing, inter-generational solidarity, including the broadest aspects of active and healthy ageing.

The Resolution on the National Social Assistance Programme 2013–2020 was adopted in 2013. The new demographic developments have strongly underlined the issue of the elderly in the Programme, and the goals have been tailored to the needs of the increasing social and demographic distress of the population. These goals also include increased community care for the elderly at the expense of institutional care, which was the main form in the past.

The documents and legislation adopted on social security, which affect the quality of life of the elderly, resulted in a wider range of services and programmes for the elderly,

the development of new concepts of work with users (particularly persons suffering from dementia), the training of qualified professionals for work with the elderly and raising awareness among family members and the environment. The state carried out a number of activities to prevent violence against the elderly and to overcome the age stereotype.

Population ageing has had a strong impact on the labour market. According to analyses, demographic trends point to a future decrease in the active working population. It is important that everyone, particularly the elderly, has the possibility of working or returning to the labour market. Measures to motivate the elderly to work are aimed particularly at an active policy to increase their employability and competitiveness, more intensive investment in the human capital of the elderly, improving the working environment, which is to be adapted to the ageing work force, and at promoting and awareness-raising of the importance of the elderly in the labour market.

Slovenia guarantees extensive protection from discrimination on grounds of age or any other personal circumstance. In compliance with the Constitution and ratified treaties, such discrimination refers to actions and decisions by public authorities which could encroach on any human right or freedom or any other right provided for in national legislation. The Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment Act provides for such protection also in the actions of all subjects in the private sector, e.g. in accessing goods and services intended for the public, including housing, inclusion in associations under civil law, access to cultural goods, sport, recreation, etc. Anyone has the right to protection from discrimination, even legal entities (e.g. NGOs of the elderly).

3. Best practices in the Republic of Slovenia

(i) The 'Elderly for Elderly' project

The Slovenian Federation of Pensioners' Organizations started a project the 'Elderly for Elderly - Elderly people improving the quality of their lives and the lives of their peers with voluntary work' thus creating a system whereby older volunteers visit older citizens in their neighborhoods.

Volunteers participate in trainings that help them identify the needs of the elderly they visit. In addition they receive training on the necessary information for handling different situations and to direct the elderly they visit to assistance services.

The project targets specifically those older people who have no contact with others and stay at home. If volunteers become aware of cases of violence or abuse, they alert a relevant center for social services, which then takes over the case according to established practices. Volunteer who detected the case stays involved throughout the entire process, helping the expert-team to prepare an action programme.

The project covers 53% of people living in Slovenia aged 69 years and above who live at home. The 3,376 members of pensioners' organizations volunteering in the project have visited 133,137 elderly people at least once. Altogether, 436,960 visits were made and on 97,493 occasions assistance was provided or organized.

The project is co-financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Foundation for Funding Disability and Humanitarian Organizations of Slovenia, and the municipalities take part in the project.

(ii) AHA.SI PROJECT (Active and Healthy Ageing in Slovenia)

Slovenia is one of the countries with high life expectancy projections. The rapidity of population ageing is tightly linked to numerous challenges, including the issue of older persons' health. Preservation of as healthy society as possible including active and healthy ageing, is crucial for the functioning and prosperity of any society.

Due to the above-mentioned projections the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities has been drafting a comprehensive strategy for active and healthy ageing. Its aim is to contribute to health and well-being of people, as well as to augmenting individuals' independent and healthy years of living and working.

AHA.SI project is intended to prepare foundations for the inclusion of three substantive fields in the 'Strategy for active and healthy ageing in Slovenia', namely:

1. Extended employment and postponed retirement.
2. Active and healthy ageing for an active and healthy old age.
3. Supporting independent life in the home environment and long-term nursing and care.

The bases for drafting measures, indicators and recommendations for reforms will be built on a review of literature and national and international best practice. By engaging a large number of stakeholders, the different views of the aforementioned fields will be included, which will improve the chances of implementing proposed solutions in the Slovenian context.

The long-term objective of the project is to take different measures to ensure that all citizens of Slovenia enjoy a healthier and active old age.

A web page was also launched in the framework of the AHA.SI project. It is accessible on www.staranje.si and it contains useful information about active and healthy ageing in Slovenia, as well as information on the project progress and its thematic fields in Slovene language. One can follow the current events of the project and check out all the past and future events, articles, reports, and all the main findings. Everyone is invited to join the platform and post comments, opinions, initiatives and suggestions regarding different thematic fields of the project.

(iii) Trainings for family carers in Slovenia

NGOs (e.g. Anton Trstenjak Institute) offer different trainings for family carers. The goals of these trainings are: to provide family carers with knowledge and skills needed to care for their relatives; to enable family carers' mutual support; to create conditions for family carers' networking and thus reducing social exclusion.

The course for family carers consists of 10 weekly educational meetings. Each meeting lasts approximately 2 hours and consists of 2 parts. The first part is based on the method of social learning. It allows group members to share their own good experiences with caregiving, so other group members can learn from their experience as well. Caregivers are encouraged to talk about the problems they are facing while

caregiving. They are also encouraged to share their successful strategies in caregiving. Social learning method in particular highlights the positive aspects of care-giving, as it gives the carers an opportunity to learn from good experiences and to create ties among themselves.

The second part of training consists of a cognitive part, where people learn about new topics related to care-giving. External lecturers, professionals in their own sphere of work (community nurses, doctors, physiotherapists etc.) are regularly invited to trainings to present different topics related to care giving. In addition to the curative aspects of care-giving, lectures are also organized on psychological and sociological perspectives in dealing with care-giving. For example, trainings offered by the Anton Trstenjak Institute encompass lectures on the communication with older family members, on dealing with death and suffering and on tackling feelings of guilt.

Upon termination of the training the group members are invited to meet on a monthly basis for two hours in a family carers' club (a self-help support group) where they are encouraged to share good experiences with care giving, to solve the problems together and to support each other.

4. Lessons learnt and identified challenges

Numerous stakeholders identified several drawbacks and challenges in the field of older persons' rights and their general position in society. The majority of these is country-specific, but can nevertheless be of reference value to wider global or regional discussions on the topic.

Labor market: low level of employment of older persons (aged 55-64 years) presents a great problem; the status of older persons in the labor market would change with awareness-raising of the employers and public sector should be the main contributor to the change of status; it is essential to harmonize market changes and retirement system changes, as the retirement system has to adapt to trends on the market and to new forms of employment.

Retirement system: well-paid workplaces are needed for suitable social contributions; inclusion of young people into retirement system/schemes discussions and retirement reform; exists for early retirement should be closed; suitable working environment should be encouraged, as it is key to longer activity period.

Pre-retirement activities:¹ it is necessary to create appropriate conditions on the level of society for the implementation of pre-retirement activities and also to create conditions for successful transition into retirement and the adaptation of life after retirement; also important is the change of perception of ageing and the elderly in our society and these changes should be implemented through appropriate approaches (from kindergarten period onwards).

Prevention of falls:² systematic approach on national level is welcome, however, it should include all age groups and not just the elderly; physical activities should also be introduced on the local level and patients with dementia and incontinence should also join the physical activities; in fall prevention activities and in designing the proper

¹ Pre-retirement activities are the activities by which the worker (also unemployed) obtains appropriate knowledge for planning the third life career.

² Physical culture in Slovenia is well developed among the elderly what presents a good basis for its future development.

strategy, special attention is needed when assessing the patients with illnesses and geriatric syndromes in which falls are more common; also of great importance is to raise public awareness on the dangers of falls, to spread exercising areas, and to enable the exercise for all social classes; in addition, more attention should be given to polypharmacy, as it presents a great risk factor.

Long-term care: in terms of informal care it is important to develop people-friendly technological solutions and education and in this endeavor different activities should be carried out on the level of the needed knowledge and skills, networking of all services and ensuring social security for informal careers.

Having identified a number of gaps, Slovenia will continue with its national and international activities, as well as with the identification of possible measures, best practices, challenges and lessons learnt.

With Regards,

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