

**UNECE Input to the Thirteenth Session of the
United Nations General Assembly Open-ended Working Group on Ageing**

Focus area 1: Right to health and access to health services

UNECE member States committed in the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration¹ to the goal of “promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life”. UNECE member States in the Declaration acknowledge that it is necessary to further develop sustainable, accessible, and adequate social protection systems covering social security and universal health care. Furthermore, member States also acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic had made it clear that difficult public health decisions affecting older persons need to be guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to quality health and social services. Based on these premises, UNECE member States committed to:

- focus on health promotion, including raising awareness of and access to sports, physical activity, healthy nutrition, and other preventive health measures over the life course;
- continue to promote sustainable investments in all health and care services;
- prioritising and investing in skills and competence development and continuous training of health and social care workers in geriatric, gerontological, and digital skills;
- investing in research and innovation to provide knowledge-based training and practices in health and social care, including awareness-raising and training on ageism, and older persons' right to privacy and individual autonomy;
- ensure the high quality of health, social, and long-term care services based on quality management, monitoring, auditing, and continuous improvement;
- develop, regularly update, and implement national and subnational plans to address dementia and the provision of quality health, social, and long-term care services to ensure participation, dignity, and quality of life for persons with cognitive and mental impairments, as well as support for their family and informal carers.

¹ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Rome_Ministerial_Declaration.pdf

Policy progress in the UNECE relevant to the focus area of the right to health and access to health services – fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action and its Regional Implementation Strategy in 2022

The regional synthesis report² based on 40 national reports submitted for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action and its Regional Implementation Strategy in the UNECE region, provides information on progress relevant to the focus area of the right to health and access to health service during the period 2018 to 2022 on pages 20 – 22 of the report. The Statistical Annex provides data on unmet need for medical and dental examination or treatment among individuals aged 55 years or above on page 73 (Table A8a). The national reports provide many specific policy examples aimed at guaranteeing older individuals right to health and access to healthcare services.³

As highlighted in the synthesis report, health promotion and prevention efforts across the life course received prominent attention in the health strategies of several countries. Older persons received specific focus in national health promotion programmes in several countries and awareness raising and training was conducted on detecting age-related non-communicable diseases.

A couple of countries reported on measures to ensure the safety of older persons in their home environments and in transport. Also, the housing and living conditions of older persons were preventively inspected to ensure their safety in several countries; and specific measures and trainings to prevent seniors from suffering injuries from falls and traffic-related accidents were reported by several countries in the region.

Most frequently, health promotion in the region has focused on healthy behaviours, primarily physical exercise and a healthy diet. As described in the synthesis report in more detail, several countries developed guidelines and launched initiatives and campaigns to promote sports and physical activity among older persons.

² https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Synthesis-report_0.pdf

³ <https://unece.org/mipaa20-country-reports>

Focus area 2: Right to social inclusion

UNECE member States committed in the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration to the goal of “recognizing the potential of older persons”. Specifically, member States committed to:

- involve older persons and their organizations in a constructive and meaningful way in the law- and policymaking processes at all levels to ensure that their rights, needs, and interests are taken into account in policies, programmes, and laws that affect them;
- to facilitate older persons' participation in social, cultural, and civic life, and promoting lifelong learning;
- to adopt concrete measures to combat loneliness and social isolation among older persons, including by supporting initiatives in local communities and by civil society, stimulating increased social engagement, participation, and intergenerational solidarity, encouraging volunteering and social innovation, and enhancing digital skills;
- to promote user-friendly digitalisation, enhancing digital skills and literacy to enable older persons to participate in an increasingly digital world, while also ensuring the right to access to information, participation, and services through access to digital devices and the Internet, and to suitable offline or other secure alternatives in user-friendly and accessible formats.

Policy progress in the UNECE relevant to the focus area of the right to social inclusion – fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action and its Regional Implementation Strategy in 2022

The regional synthesis report⁴ based on 40 national reports submitted for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action and its Regional Implementation Strategy in the UNECE region, provides information on progress relevant to the focus area of the right to health and access to health service during the period 2018 to 2022 on pages 16 – 18 of the report. The national reports provide many specific policy examples aimed at meeting older individuals right to social participation.⁵

As documented in the synthesis report, many member States have implemented initiatives to involve and engage older people in diverse realms of societal life, aimed at reducing the risk of social isolation and loneliness. Many member States also report on concrete initiatives to

⁴ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Synthesis-report_0.pdf

⁵ <https://unece.org/mipaa20-country-reports>

promote the social participation of older persons through lifelong learning, physical activity, volunteering, intergenerational activities, and arts.

Several countries reported on initiatives to promote cultural participation, including subsidizing cultural activities to make cultural participation more affordable to older people. A number of countries highlighted the active political and civic participation of older age groups, especially at the community level. Countries facilitate social participation for older people also through community centres and senior clubs.

Volunteering, as a means of social participation and contribution to society by older persons, has also been increasingly promoted in UNECE member States. Volunteering by older persons has taken many forms and involved both peer-to-peer support (such as hospital visits, neighbourly support, or teaching digital skills to other seniors, and intergenerational support and intergenerational support (such as support for school meals or mentoring to youth.

Across the various initiatives to foster social participation among older persons, UNECE member States have acknowledged the crucial role of civil society organizations. Moreover, a number of countries highlighted the significant increase in the number and importance of NGOs targeting older persons, in line with the growing awareness of the pertinence of population ageing.

To increase older individuals' representation in political decision-making many ECE countries, governments have set up advisory bodies on ageing and older persons' issues, through which older people, their representatives, as well as social partners and experts from related fields are given voice and a place at the table. In addition, several countries reported on the important role of older persons' organisations, veteran organisations or trade unions, and their active engagement in various advisory and decision-making bodies. The creation of representative and advisory bodies at the local level has been particularly remarkable. In several countries, legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms have been established obligating the regular and systematic consultation and involvement of older persons in decision-making affecting them.

The Statistical Annex provides data on volunteering and political participation among older individuals on page 69 (Table A7a).

UNECE publications

Several issues of the UNECE Policy Briefs on Ageing series are addressing issues related to older individuals' right health and to social inclusion. <https://unece.org/policy-briefs>

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