

Guiding questions for the twelfth session of the OEWGA '22

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Focus area 1: Contribution of older persons to sustainable development

The Scope:

Older persons have the right to contribute to sustainable development. The right to participate in, and contribute to, development is affirmed in the Declaration on the Right to Development. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes the right to participate in public affairs. Effective and meaningful participation enables the advancement of all human rights. On the other hand, when older persons are denied the ability or opportunity to contribute, or when their contribution is unrecognized or devalued, their dignity is denied. Understanding the contribution of older persons to sustainable development as a right enables States to identify steps that can be taken to uphold their dignity.

Substantive guiding questions:

National Legal and Policy Framework

- 1. What are the legal provisions, policy frameworks in your country that recognize older persons' right to participate in and contribute to sustainable development? This could include, but is not limited to:**

Austrian development policy aims to promote life prospects in an environment of social and political stability and sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Politics for older persons is therefore not understood in Austria as welfare politics, but as politics together with the seniors. In Austria, the so-called "Federal Senior Citizens' Advisory Board" has been set up at the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMSGPK). It serves the institutionalized, sustainable dialogue between political decision-makers and representatives of senior citizens' organizations on senior-specific issues that are of general Austrian, integration and generational policy importance. In addition to the national senior citizens' advisory council, there are senior citizens' advisory councils in all federal states and in numerous municipalities.

Building on the International Action Plan on Aging 2002 in Madrid and the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy, the Federal Plan for Senior Citizens "Aging and Future" was developed on a scientific basis on behalf of the Federal Senior Citizens Advisory Board. It covers 14 SDG-relevant fields of action at federal, state, city, municipal and NPO level.

The "Health Goals Austria" are another important process for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Austria. This includes both the 2030 Agenda and the aging or long-lived society as focal

points. Since January 2013, cross-political working groups have been developing concrete strategy and action concepts for the individual health goals.

This process includes the "cross-policy dialogue on the common strategy for active aging". To support this and to support the WHO Decade of Healthy and Active Aging 2020 – 2030, the "Healthy & Active Aging Dialogue" was launched. It is a cooperation of the BMSGPK, the umbrella organization of the Austrian social security institutions and the Healthy Austria Fund for an active, self-determined and healthy aging of people in Austria.

a. ensuring that relevant human rights (in particular the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right of access to information, and the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association) are protected and implemented;

In the above-introduced "Healthy & Active Aging Dialogue", the first common topic to be dealt with extensively is the social participation of older persons. The dialogue connects organizations and actors in order to make activities visible, create synergies and spread knowledge. In addition, models of good practice are presented and a broad implementation is initiated. In dialogue, tools are also developed that are intended to change the images of aging in our society for the better.

In 2018, the second Adult Protection Act came into force in Austria after many years of intensive legislation and led to a significant paradigm shift towards self-employment. The most important innovations concern a modern terminology, the expansion of alternatives to legal representation and adult protection associations as a counseling center and hub of legal care with obligatory involvement. With the second adult protection law, the autonomy of the persons represented was strengthened in the long term, since there is no automatic loss of the ability to act within the representative's sphere of activity. In addition, the new Adult Protection Act was accompanied by standardization of the standards for the establishment of alternative forms of representation and greater transparency. In addition, the principle of subsidiarity was expanded, according to which representation should only ever be the last step.

b. protecting and enhancing civic space and collaboration with civil society that represents the voices of older persons in sustainable development;

From 2015-2021, workshops for initiatives, associations and projects were held on the Internet with the aim of supporting organizations that are active in voluntary work and adult education in the post-professional phase of life. In addition, information appropriate to the target group was published with the most important security tips for using digital media on various topics (*Internet access, online shopping, apps, searching for and finding information, information on the Internet*). In order to ensure the quality of the offers in the area of IT training for seniors, the BMSGPK also promoted the professionalization of adult educators at the interface of digital competence and education in old age with the "Digital Fit" course.

Securing the participation of older people in all areas of society is a social necessity that also includes participation in technical progress in the field of digital media.

For many years, Austria has been taking a variety of measures with a focus on older people and digital media. Today, digital competence is one of the essential basic competences, which goes far beyond the operation of PCs and tablets and also the knowledge about the safe handling of the diverse possibilities of the Internet, the knowledge of the dangers and the protection against them and the critical questioning of information and messages included.

In addition to the development of quality criteria for senior-friendly teaching and learning with digital technologies and the exchange of good practice examples, the BMSGPK relied above all on the publication of information materials such as free documents on current digital topics for practitioners for their own further education or for use as training materials, webinars and workshops. In addition, extensive working documents for tablet and smartphone courses for beginners and advanced users were developed on behalf of the BMSGPK and made available to trainers and participants free of charge.

An important area for promoting individual potential is voluntary work, which is very common in Austria. Volunteering has been proven to contribute to social participation, leads to greater life satisfaction, improves the quality of life and promotes health. The highest participation rate (57%) in voluntary commitment can be measured in Austria in the 60 to 69 age group.

c. good practices to ensure older persons' participation in, and contribution to sustainable development.

The BMSGPK took various measures to strengthen social participation and solidarity. In order to implement the SDGs, the BMSGPK has been promoting dialogue with civil society since the beginning of 2019 as part of the “Leaving no one behind” dialogue forum. More than 400 stakeholders discussed the challenges and requirements for implementing the SDGs by 2030 in five workshops across Austria. In November 2019, a workshop on “A society for all ages. Implementation of the SDGs in the area of aging” was held, focusing on education and digitization, healthy and active aging through social participation, sustainable cities and communities for older people, work, age and gender (*SDG 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11*).

2. What are the challenges faced by older persons for the realization of their right to contribute to sustainable development at national and international levels?

One of the biggest challenges is still ensuring that offers for participation can be seen, understood and ultimately also used. The digital area in particular continues to be a hurdle here. Although successes have been achieved in the digitization of older people in recent years, the increasing speed at which changes and new technologies are being implemented presents a new hurdle.

The corona pandemic and "social distancing" have also slowed down important developments, as there was also a noticeable decline in the participation offers.

3. What data, statistics and research are available regarding older persons' contribution to sustainable development?

The following studies and fact sheets have been commissioned and published by the BMSGPK since 2015:

- Mobility and participation in old age
- Cultural participation and cultural education in old age
- Images of old age - backgrounds and effects
- New culture of aging - research results, concepts and critical outlook

Equality and non-discrimination

4. What measures are being taken to eliminate ageism, ageist stereotypes, prejudices and behaviors that devalue older persons' contribution to sustainable development?

The BMSGPK works very closely with the civil society to plan, organize and execute different projects and campaigns to raise awareness about ageism and to actively support social and economic inclusion of older persons in all aspects and areas.

With regard to age discrimination, the Equal Treatment Ombudsman sees the lack of protection against discrimination based on age when accessing goods and services (*lack of leveling up*) as a violation of the system and thus discrimination within the Equal Treatment Act, since there is a ban on discrimination with regard to gender and ethnicity.

Several cases in this context have been brought to the "Ombudsmann" (*for Equal Treatment*) and concern services such as lending, renting a car, allocation of housing, medical care, private health insurance, etc.. The consequence of refusing services to certain age groups is that they are thereby excluded from equal participation in society. This discrimination is often based on one-sided, deficient images of age. In the case of discrimination based on advanced age, there is often intersectional discrimination with a disability/chronic illness, e.g. insufficient access to barrier-free housing. In addition, the problem of indirect discrimination resulting from the increasing

digitization of services, such as different ticket prices at the counter or on the Internet, at machines or if the use of smartphones is absolutely necessary for the service, is aggravated.

Against the background of necessary future measures, the Austrian Senior Citizens' Council also refers to numerous cases of age discrimination in the banking and insurance sector that occur in Austria. In the opinion of the Austrian Council for Senior Citizens, the discriminatory provisions should be repealed as a matter of urgency via corresponding legal changes.

Remedies and Redress

5. What mechanisms are necessary, or already in place, for older persons to lodge complaints and seek redress for denial of their right to participate in and contribute to sustainable development?

Anti-discrimination agencies have been set up at federal and state level, which also deal with concerns and complaints about age discrimination, among other things. In addition, concerns can be brought to the Federal Senior Citizens Advisory Board and the senior organizations contained therein and the Ombudsman Board.

Focus area 2: Economic security

National legal and policy framework

1. What are the legal provisions and policy frameworks in your country that guarantees the minimum essential level of the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, in particular the right to an adequate standard of living?

An essential prerequisite for the participation of older people in all areas of society and the possibility of being able to realize their potential is, of course, securing the material basis. The commission established in 2017 on the long-term financing of pension systems (“Retirement Security Commission”) regularly analyzes the long-term development and affordability of statutory pension insurance, the most important instrument of economic security in old age in Austria, with the involvement of the affected target group by members of pensioner organizations.

2. How is poverty defined in the national policy framework?

The definition of poverty measured in terms of money should be viewed critically because it neglects aspects such as social or cultural poverty and the exclusion from social participation.

In 2020, around 1,529,000 persons in Austria were at risk of poverty or exclusion, which corresponds to 17.5% of the Austrian population. Of these, 233,000 people or 2.7% of the population cannot afford certain things, such as adequate heating, unexpected expenses or paying the rent on time.

The current risk of poverty threshold (*60% of the median income*) is €1,328 per month for a one-person household. The value increases by a factor of 0.5 for each additional adult in the household and by a factor of 0.3 for each child (*under the age of 14*) in the household.

3. What are challenges faced by older persons living in poverty, including the impact of intersectional discrimination and inequality based on age, gender and other grounds?

People in need of care, especially people in need of long-term care, are increasingly affected by poverty. 80% of those in need of care are cared for at home by their relatives, more than 70% by women. About half of all caregiving relatives give up gainful employment, only a third pursues a paid job. Family caregivers who reduce their work or give it up entirely have lower pensions as a result and are themselves at risk of slipping into poverty in old age. While illness is mostly covered by society as a whole, the need for care is still an individual risk. Existing gaps are currently being closed with the care reform decided in 2020. Nevertheless, there is currently still the challenge of providing sufficiently affordable care offers, which is why those in need of care either do

without the necessary help and risk further deterioration of their health or finance the costs for assistance services by saving on food, heating, clothing, etc.

The link between poverty and health is well known. People at risk of poverty need care two years earlier on average. Those with low income and low education die earlier than those with higher income and higher education. According to the Poverty Conference, there are around 200,000 people of retirement age at risk of poverty in Austria, 80,000 of whom are women living alone. People with disabilities are among the groups most affected by poverty, with a 19% at-risk-of-poverty rate.

4. What data, statistics and research are available regarding older persons living in poverty?

The BMSGPK supports the work of the Austrian Anti-Poverty Network, which offers a broad spectrum of Studies, Reports, Factsheets and Recommendations concerning poverty in Austria. <https://www.armutskonferenz.at/textdatenbank/neueste-dokumente.html>

Progressive realization and the use of maximum available resources

5. What steps have been taken to address economic insecurity and poverty in older age and to ensure the right to an adequate standard of living for older persons?

With a view to providing incentives for longer working life, Austria is pursuing the strategy of gradually bringing the de facto retirement age closer to the statutory retirement age without forcing people into unemployment in old age.

In addition to increasing the actual retirement age, the focus is on improving the economic and social living conditions of pensioners and on fighting poverty in old age. An important contribution will be made with the increase in the compensatory allowance and the smaller pensions in the pension insurance system from 2021. Since women of retirement age in particular (and especially those who live alone) are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion due to incomplete employment and/or part-time employment, various measures are being taken to increase women's labor market participation. However, poverty in old age cannot be prevented alone in the working phase or in old age. Austria is therefore focusing on combating child and youth poverty as an important contribution to preventing poverty in old age. The earliest possible guarantee of equal opportunities and the promotion of social mobility from childhood have been proven to increase personal development opportunities over the entire course of life and thus also prevent poverty in old age. Furthermore, projects to support and advise women as well as projects to combat poverty among women are funded at federal level.

6. What is the impact of macroeconomic policies on economic insecurity and poverty among older persons and vice versa? What policy options are available and/or implemented in order to expand fiscal space and maximize available resources to ensure economic security and the right to an adequate standard of living for older persons?

Older workers, often women, are often involved in home care and looking after close relatives in addition to their gainful employment. Since January 2014, employees have had the option of agreeing on care leave or part-time care for a limited period (one to three months). There is an entitlement to (proportionate) care leave allowance and social security protection in health and pension insurance. There is also a motive termination protection. Since January 2020, there has been a legal entitlement to two weeks of care leave or part-time care under certain conditions. Corresponding provisions exist for the case of accompanying dying relatives (family hospice leave and family hospice part-time work).

As part of the investment priority "Active and healthy aging" of the Austrian ESF program "Employment", "Demography advice" is offered to support companies in the implementation of measures to promote an age(ing)-appropriate working environment.

7. What good practices are available in terms of ensuring older persons' economic security, including through a life-course approach?

With the partial retirement allowance as a benefit from unemployment insurance, employees have been able to reduce their working hours for a maximum of five years with partial wage compensation since the year 2000 - without any negative effects on their later pension. In order to keep workers who are already entitled to a corridor pension longer in working life, since January 2016 there has been the possibility of partial retirement as a special form of partial retirement.

In addition to the classic services of the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS), such as qualification and employment promotion, Austria is implementing innovative prevention, awareness-raising and support approaches with a view to older workers:

With the "Impulse advice for companies", the labor market service supports companies, among other things, in coping with the requirements of an aging workforce and in making effective use of changing age structures ("productive aging", cross-generational work, knowledge management).

Equality and non-discrimination

8. What measures are being taken to eliminate ageism and discrimination based on age that prevent older persons to access economic and other productive resources, including financial services, land, adequate housing and the right to inheritance?

Special counseling and care facilities are available to support older people affected by unemployment to reintegrate into the labor market. Age advisors provide information and put you in touch with companies that are interested in employees aged 50+. Workshops provide information on topics such as healthy aging or advantages and barriers for older people on the labor market, dealing with new media, etc.

Remedies and redress

9. What mechanisms are necessary, or already in place, for older persons to lodge complaints and seek redress for denial of their economic security and enjoyment of the right to an adequate standard of living?

Anti-discrimination agencies have been set up at federal and state level, which also deal with concerns and complaints about age discrimination, among other things. In addition, concerns can be brought to the Federal Senior Citizens Advisory Board and the senior organizations contained therein and the Ombudsman Board.

In addition, older workers can also contact in the “Chamber of Labour” in order to address and report ageism at work.