

Ministry of Social Affairs

ESTONIAN NATIONAL WORK PROGRAMME
FOR THE YEAR FOR ACTIVE AGEING AND
SOLIDARITY BETWEEN GENERATIONS
2012

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Forward by the Minister for Social Affairs, Hanno Pevkur

Recent decades have seen the average life expectancy of Estonian citizens increase. There have been advances in medicine, our diet is better and more varied, people have become more knowledgeable and we take better and better care of our health. All this has contributed to people living longer, being more healthy and more active.

Reaching retirement by no means implies that one stays at home, removed from community life. Often the opposite is true – retired people often don't have enough time to do everything that interests them. The elderly in Estonia are among the most hardworking in Europe. In addition to being better off financially, work means stronger links with the community, contact with colleagues and the ability to stand on your own two feet.

Older people have a huge contribution to make to Estonian life and the country's economic development. The time is past when employers only recruited young people; rather they set increasing store by the experience and expertise of older employees. Society is a whole which can be developed only if we recognise and value the importance of each of its members. The focus in 2012 is on the older members of society and active ageing. Active ageing means a longer working life and participation in society. Of course, we must not forget that if someone works during retirement they do so of their own free will and if their health and strength allow. Ageing citizens and employees are not a problem but an opportunity which we must take full advantage of. If we are able to understand and take account of the needs and wishes of older people we will be able to achieve great things. This is evidenced by the changes that several employers have initiated to take account of the views and capabilities of older people – work effectiveness and output improved considerably.

The year of active ageing will help us understand and take account of the needs and wishes of the older members of our society, share knowledge of best practices and, most importantly of all, encourage politicians and others to promote active ageing at all levels. Throughout this year we will raise the profile of and implement the ideas of active ageing and solidarity between generations. The better we understand the needs and potential of members of our society, the stronger Estonian society will be and the more our economy will prosper.

Active ageing – the situation and challenges in Estonia

Heterogeneity of older people

Over the last century the population has been ageing thanks to medical advances and a better standard of living. As a result of a relatively low birth rate and an increase in the average life expectancy Estonia, like many other developed countries, is facing in the long term an ageing society¹. The demographic development of a constantly and rapidly ageing population is an acute problem in Estonia.

Ageing is the most predominant and clearest aspect of population dynamics in the 21st century. Although there is a very high number of older people in Estonia - those over 65 accounted for at least 17% of the population on 1 January 2010 – they are not a homogenous group. They differ in terms of income, financial security (coping capacity), social status, place of residence and type of household. One special feature in Estonia is the large proportion of women among older people. Although 63% of those aged 65-74 are women, this proportion rises to 72% among those aged 75 and over. The main reason for this is the considerable disparity in the life expectancy of women and men – women live on average over 10 years longer than men. Since many men do not live to their retirement, women run an increasingly great risk of growing old alone and slipping into poverty. The risk of poverty among older women is further exacerbated by gender-based salary differences during their career and having a shorter career than men, as a result of which their income may also remain lower in retirement².

In Estonia, the main source of income for older people is their pension. However, it is not very high compared with the average wage (in 2009 the average retirement pension was 47% of the average net salary). This means the income of pensioners is near the poverty line and it is a change in the level of pension as compared with the general level of income in society which will determine whether or not older people descend into poverty. Compared with the year 2000, the situation of pensioners has improved. There have been major changes in particular in recent years (2008-2009) during which the financial crisis limited wage increases and made pensioners more competitive compared with salaried employees. It should here be noted that improving coping capacity does not necessarily mean a change in pensioners' actual situation. However, if the increase in the average pension in recent years is compared with the rise in consumer prices it is clear that pensions have risen more quickly than prices³.

The factors which have the most impact on coping capacity are jobs and a steady income. When determining effects at individual level, a key indicator is a person's own assessment of their economic coping capacity, which is also a subjective assessment of their economic situation. This has been measured in labour force analyses. In 2009, 83% of working pensioners could cope, 15% coped but had some difficulties and only 2% coped but had major difficulties. These indicators were better even compared with prime-age people in work⁴.

¹ Ainsaar, M., Maripuu, L. (2009). *Eakate heaolu Eestis 2007 – võrdlus lastega perede ning mitte-eestlaste rühmaga* [The wellbeing of older people in Estonia 2007 – comparing families with children and non-Estonian groups]. Office of the Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, Tallinn.

² Tasuja, M. (2010). Material welfare and economic coping capacity of older people. *Social Trends 5*. Statistics Estonia: Tallinn.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Krusell, S. (2010). Older people on the labour market. *Social Trends 5*. Statistics Estonia: Tallinn.

According to the findings of Estonia's 2006 health survey, 14% of those in the 50-54 age group considered their health bad or very bad. Of those aged 65-69 the proportion of people whose health was bad or very bad was approximately 25%, and 15% of people deemed their health to be good or very good. From then on the number of people who considered their health to be bad increased rapidly. Almost half of people in the 80-84 age bracket considered their health to be bad, while fewer than one in ten considered their health to be good. According to data from this survey, it is clear there is inadequate help primarily after 80 years of age both in terms of self-care and as regards difficulties hearing and seeing⁵.

There are four times as many single people among those aged 65 and over compared with younger people. A longer life expectancy means there is a risk of being left alone, especially for women, and the gender gap only increases with age. Over 50% of women aged 75 and over live alone, while among men of the same age this percentage is almost twice as low⁶.

Active Ageing Strategy

Trends in Estonian population policy are dealt with in the forthcoming Active Ageing Strategy. We should welcome the fact that the population is ageing because human capital is improved through experienced people who are healthier and more active than 100 years ago. This has been achieved thanks to medical progress and changes in people's quality of life.

The trend of an ageing population is most visible among the over-60s in the over-75 and over-85 age groups. Despite the fact that nowadays older people are more healthy and more active, it is precisely after 70 years of age that health problems and permanent functional impairments tend to appear. At the same time, a functional impairment does not require greater intervention than the individual actually needs. The number of elderly women living alone is also growing. Estonia's active ageing strategy takes account of the different needs of groups of older people.

Demographic indicators are linked to political decisions and the social and economic context. Ageing in societal terms means re-allocating resources and a greater need for resources in the long term. At the same time, to talk of the lack of pension funds and the constant increase in the number of users of care and health services is to focus only on the negative aspects of the growing proportion of older people in society and not recognise all the citizens aged 55 and over who participate in society, live active lives and contribute to society. The fact that we can have longer relationships with our families and bring up great-grandchildren is valuable in itself and is something which cannot be measured using economic indicators. The Active Ageing Strategy addresses all the challenges of an ageing society, from employment to care issues.

Estonia has made various preparations by taking socio-political decisions concerning ageing. It has been made possible for the elderly to live at home for as long as possible, and they have the right to work even when retired. At individual level, however, ageing poses challenges to and opens up possibilities for families. Often costs have been overstated and created prejudices against older people. There is widespread negativity in society towards the elderly, which leads to age discrimination and the spread of ageist values in society. Not enough is done to encourage connections between generations, and older people's potential for

⁵ Altmets, K., Karelson, K. (2010). Health of older people. Social Trends 5. Statistics Estonia: Tallinn.

⁶ Tasuja, M., Kommel, K., Linno, T. (2010). Cohesion of older people. Social Trends 5. Statistics Estonia: Tallinn.

developing society goes unseen. Estonia's Active Ageing Strategy focuses on a society in which all age groups have an important contribution to make.

The aim of the European year for active ageing and solidarity between generations is to raise awareness of the importance of and opportunities in active ageing and to improve the links between generations. It is important for the advancement of society to take account of the process of an ageing population. For this reason the themes of the European Year 2012 are highly relevant both in Estonia and in other European countries.

Estonia's action plan for 2012

The actions planned for the European Year 2012 aim first and foremost to create opportunities to make society more tolerant, more responsible, more caring and more coherent. The social capital of older people is often completely unexploited, the role of older people in the family and the community is often not fully appreciated or goes unrecognised. In order to reduce exclusion and thereby boost quality of life it is important to foster understanding and communication both within and between generations. It is important to draw attention to ageing and the challenges and possibilities this brings both for the individual and for society.

Cooperation between organisations, associations and societies should be fostered when planning and implementing activities. We also wish to strengthen cooperation between authorities, because the themes of active ageing include areas as varied as health, the economy, the labour market, social protection and education.

The keywords of the European Year are optimising employment, an active and independent lifestyle, health and a healthy lifestyle, lifelong learning and social services.

Activities of the European Year 2012

The activities undertaken in Estonia as part of the European Year fall into three broad categories – activities at national level, activities carried out by partners and awareness-raising measures. The activities planned as part of the European Year are described briefly below.

Activities at national level

At national level, opening and closing events for the European Year are being organised, regional seminars, thematic surveys and studies are being carried out and the Active Ageing Strategy is being drawn up.

The opening event of the European Year will raise awareness of the actions and events of the Year. The event is targeted at the representatives of the various stakeholders (NGOs, local authorities, regional governments, etc.).

In order to support the entry of older people into the labour market and to make them competitive, a study is being carried out to ascertain employers' reservations as regards older employees. In addition, the labour market services on offer in other Member States of the European Union to people of pensionable age and to those receiving an old age pension are being mapped, and where possible the practices of other countries will be applied in Estonia. An awareness-raising campaign aimed at employers to be carried out in 2013 is also being prepared as part of the Year.

The closing event at the end of the Year will take stock of all the activities carried out under the European Year and assess what they have achieved. The findings of the studies will be published. There will also be discussion on how to continue to foster active ageing and improve solidarity between generations both at political level and in society as a whole. It is also important to continue to raise awareness. All partners in the European Year and other interested parties are expected at the closing event.

We must go over and beyond the interests of the current ageing generations in determining an effective approach to our ageing population. It is important to develop an active ageing strategy that covers the economic, social and labour-related effects of ageing. The conferences and seminars which take place during the European Year present an opportunity to involve stakeholders in developing the strategy and to familiarise them better with the general objectives of the strategy.

Activities carried out by the partners

Since the European Year aims to raise awareness, several thematic actions – seminars, conferences, discussions and campaigns – on the subject of active ageing and solidarity between generations are being carried out during the year. These events will mainly be organised by the various partners. A selection of these events is set out below.

The **international conference of the Estonian Association of Pensioners' Societies** will be held in April 2012 in conjunction with the organisation's foreign partners from Finland and Sweden. The theme of the conference is cohesion between generations.

The **Estonian Association of Social Workers' conference** on social work will also be held as part of the European Year and will focus on the topics of active ageing and solidarity between generations.

In September 2012 the NGO Inkotuba will for the third time organise a **festival for older people**. The aim of the festival is to raise the profile of the value of older people in society and stress the possibilities of an active and healthy lifestyle. The festival will showcase the themes and ideas of the European Year and will be an opportunity for partners, interest groups and stakeholders across Estonia to meet.

OÜ Taveco Disain's **trade fair "Seniors - living the good years"** will be held for the first time in September 2012. The aim of the team organising this event is to highlight the topics of Estonian demographic developments, populations indicators – the initial findings of the 2012 census, employment and the ability to work, social care, further education and regional and international cooperation.

In December 2012 the **Estonian Chamber of Disabled People** will hold a **conference** with people with disabilities.

There are also events organised by the NGO Estonian Carers and the Elderly Policy Committee and a conference targeting carers. The International Day of Older Persons will also be celebrated.

There is also cooperation between the SHARE study group, the European Commission's Representation in Estonia and higher education institutions.

Awareness-raising measures

The main source of information on the activities carried out as part of the European Year is the dedicated webpage of the Ministry of Social Affairs, on which information on the activities, events, key findings, etc. of the European Year will be published. Information on the topics of active ageing and solidarity between generations (such as examples of best practice in Estonia and other countries) will also be published on the website.

The logo of the European Year will be published on the start page of the Ministry's website www.sm.ee and on the websites of the Ministry of Social Affairs' partners (where possible with a link to the thematic website). All material published as part of the Year will also bear the logos of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the European Year.

The European Year will also see cooperation with public media channels and the written press. It will also feature in weekly thematic radio and television broadcasts. The first edition this year of the newsletter of the European Commission's Representation in Estonia, *Eurokratt*, will open with an article on the European Year.

An article on the Year will be published in the first edition of the specialist magazine, *Sotsiaaltöö* [Social Work] as part of the European Year, and the August edition of the magazine will focus on the topics of active ageing and solidarity between generations. The magazine will also include information on activities carried out as part of the European Year both in Europe and in Estonia.

The goodwill ambassadors for the European Year of active ageing and solidarity between generations will spread the word and raise awareness and thereby raise the profile of the activities.

Mainstreaming gender equality

The issue of gender is taken into account when planning and carrying out activities. The Ministry of Social Affairs has a Gender Equality Department which can give opinions and assessments where necessary.

Accessibility of the actions

Information on putting the European Year into practice will be published on the Ministry of Social Affairs' website, www.sm.ee. Information will also be disseminated through the partner organisations. The activities carried out under the umbrella of the Year will also be described in the specialist magazine *Sotsiaaltöö*.