

3. Introduction by Dirk Jarré, Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna



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THE NGO COMMITTEE ON
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On September 30, 2024, the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna, held a conference to celebrate the annual “International Day of Older Persons” of the United Nations at the premises of the United Nations in Vienna. It was entitled:

“Marginalisation of Older Persons in Society – A Significant Health Risk”

The NGO Committee on Ageing was very proud to have international academics, experts and practitioners on board at this event who gave deep insight and new data on the social realities of older and marginalised persons living with specific health risks. This event was very well attended and supported by numerous international non-governmental organisations affiliated with the United Nations.

Ageing in the 21st century looked at from the demographic perspective, social and personal challenges for the older generation as well as changes in the welfare systems were Rainer Münz’ main focus in his opening speech. Rainer Münz, one of Europe’s leading experts on demography and international migration, emphasized the importance of recognising and addressing the ongoing epidemiological changes in chronic and degenerative diseases during the process of ageing, as this has a huge impact on the health and well-being of older persons and on the financing of healthcare systems. He pointed out two fundamental issues in our ageing society: the decreasing number of children born per family and the increasing life expectancy. He highlighted that the total

percentage of older persons over 65 is approximately 10% worldwide. In lower-middle- and low-income countries, the proportion of the elderly is much smaller than in upper-middle- and high-income countries and their social security based on savings or pension insurance is either small or even inexistent.

Angela Paparusso outlined that health systems and measures promoting well-being vary enormously around the world. She pointed out that older persons play a crucial role in facilitating the work-life balance of younger people by providing practical and emotional support to ease the burden on families and promote family cohesion in every society. In her presentation, she emphasized that it is not only the material dimension alone which guarantees a person's quality of life and well-being, but also his/her social status or personal life achievements as well as public provisions for social welfare.

Yael Zilbershlag provided an overview of the various effects of marginalisation on older persons who may suffer from chronic health diseases and often have difficult access to health care leading to inequalities in the treatment of marginalised persons. Particularly important is a holistic approach with its potential to bring together medically related issues with the social, economic, and psychological conditions of marginalised older persons.

Political challenges and policies in relation to marginalised groups were emphasized by Nicole Zündorf-Hinte from the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. She underlined that the main responsibilities in the area of social protection are in the competence of the local level in the 16 federated States. Interestingly, she mentioned that most older persons in Germany (96% of all aged 65+) are still living independently in their own homes. The German Federal Government is addressing the "epidemy" of loneliness and social isolation with more than 180 projects focusing on the specific needs of older persons.

Finally, practical examples illustrated possibilities to address the needs of older persons: one in Serbia and another one in the Philippines. In most parts of the world, a great number of older persons live under precarious conditions with insufficient food, medical, psychological and emotional support. Stefanie Eichhorn from the Diakonie ACT Austria and Myrna Tang-Yao from the Business and Professional Women Association (BPW) in the Philippines described their respective efforts in bringing older persons into a position where they can realise a more active and satisfactory ageing by own initiatives. This shows the importance of the role that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can play in providing effective solutions to those in need.