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Promoting active ageing – capitalising on older people's working potential

Report¹

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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Summary

Against the backdrop of an ageing population in Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly discusses the role played by older people in contributing to society, workplace culture, employers' and older workers' attitudes, and the concept of active ageing from a human rights perspective.

Policies which are designed to promote active ageing require action in a variety of policy areas. In addition to labour-market policies, action is required in particular with regard to age discrimination, social protection measures, flexible working arrangements, life-long learning, health promotion and volunteering. Encouraging people to be more active and to lead healthier lifestyles is not a substitute for social security systems based on solidarity; an adequate safety net should be available for those for whom employment is an unrealistic option.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 11670](#), Reference 3479 of 29 September 2008.



A. Draft resolution²

1. Age discrimination is often unconscious, but it undermines older people's dignity, their human rights and self-esteem and is a huge waste of talent. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that, although ageism is less acknowledged than racism or sexism, it is a harmful prejudice that results in widespread mistreatment of older people, ranging from stereotypic and degrading images in the media to physical and financial abuse, unequal treatment in the workplace and denial of appropriate medical care and services.

2. The Assembly has recalled on several occasions that there is a pressing need to change the approach to population ageing and to adjust policies accordingly. Therefore, the Assembly welcomes the stance taken by the Committee of Ministers, in particular in its reply to [Recommendation 1796 \(2007\)](#) on the situation of elderly persons in Europe.

3. The Assembly notes that many working-age individuals who could work and actively contribute to society are either unemployed or "inactive", in particular in the 50 plus age group. Globalisation and increased competition are having an impact on the working environment and on the quality of work available to older workers, who face a number of obstacles to remaining in or re-entering employment, including pressures to balance their working lives with family and care responsibilities, a problem in particular for older women.

4. The Assembly believes that by increasing the number of healthy and active older persons, governments can provide more generous assistance to those in need of healthcare and long-term care and make public funding available for education, training and welfare services. However, it stresses that encouraging people to be more active and lead healthier lifestyles is not a substitute for social security systems based on solidarity, with an adequate safety net available for those for whom employment is an unrealistic option.

5. The Assembly also acknowledges that after retirement age, older people continue to contribute to society in a voluntary capacity, as citizens, carers and consumers. The lack of accurate information on their economic contribution to society contributes to their being stereotyped as unproductive and dependent.

6. The Assembly considers that policies which are designed to promote active ageing require action in a variety of policy areas, in addition to labour-market policies. To this end, the Assembly encourages the member states of the Council of Europe to give consideration, as appropriate, to the following policy guidelines:

6.1. regarding age discrimination:

6.1.1. adopting legislation to prohibit age discrimination and removing labour-market barriers, empowering older persons to enter, remain, or return to the labour market, in accordance with their capabilities and willingness to work;

6.1.2. implementing programmes that redirect both employees' and employers' attitudes towards a more positive assessment of active ageing and facilitating an efficient information and co-ordination process among employer organisations and trade unions, with regard to employment initiatives for an ageing workforce;

6.2. regarding social protection measures:

6.2.1. analysing the impact of globalisation and economic downturns and proposing ad hoc measures to prevent older workers who lose their jobs from falling into long-term unemployment;

6.2.2. supporting the provision of a social safety net for older people who have no pensions or meagre retirement incomes because they have worked all or most of their lives in the home or in an informal sector;

6.3. regarding flexible working arrangements:

6.3.1. promoting policies that aim at improving the quality of flexible work arrangements for older workers, enabling them to move to less demanding jobs and making use of part-time, teamwork, job-sharing, task rotation and redefinition of tasks between team members;

6.3.2. facilitating phased retirement and encouraging initiatives such as voluntary or community work to ease such transition;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 6 September 2010.

- 6.3.3. developing new approaches to care of the elderly and supporting informal carers, such as extending parental leave provisions to enable all informal carers responsible for dependent relatives to enjoy an adequate protection of their social rights, including pension rights;
- 6.4. regarding training, re-skilling and life-long learning:
 - 6.4.1. adopting a life-course approach and taking preventive measures aimed at enhancing the employability of the workforce over time, such as occupational healthcare measures, re-skilling programmes at mid-career and initiatives to minimise the risk of persons resorting to disability schemes;
 - 6.4.2. raising awareness among the younger generation of the importance of lifelong learning and encouraging young adults to prepare for old age in their health, training, and social and financial practices;
 - 6.4.3. tapping into the potential of information and communication technologies to open up employment and training possibilities for older people, including those with disabilities;
- 6.5. regarding health promotion:
 - 6.5.1. developing proactive health care policies by focusing on health promotion, disease prevention and the treatment of chronic diseases and promoting health literacy programmes targeted at older workers at the workplace;
 - 6.5.2. carrying out research on the changes needed to encourage older workers to remain active, shedding light on the best ways to foster life-long learning of older workers and working arrangements and financial incentives that are best suited to them;
- 6.6. regarding volunteering:
 - 6.6.1. encouraging the development of voluntary activities for all age groups by reinforcing inter-generational solidarity and removing legal and administrative obstacles which prevent older people from active participation and engagement;
- 6.7. regarding institutional commitments:
 - 6.7.1. encouraging ratification and full implementation of the European Social Charter and the Revised European Social Charter, whose provisions would improve the protection of older people and older workers;
 - 6.7.2. encouraging ratification of the European Code of Social Security and its Protocol, as well as the Revised European Code of Social Security, which set standards in the social security field on the basis of minimum harmonisation of the level of social security.

B. B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Jacquat, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The ageing of Europe's population is not a new phenomenon. Over the past decade, there have been heated debates on the socio-economic consequences of population ageing and the Parliamentary Assembly has already considered the matter in [Recommendation 1796 \(2007\)](#) on the situation of elderly persons in Europe. In line with this recommendation, the Committee of Ministers, in its reply of 6 February 2008, was particularly aware of the importance of helping older people to remain active with a view to continuing to bring to society the wealth of their private and professional experience.
2. Building on this shared vision, the rapporteur would now like to discuss the role played by senior citizens in contributing to society, as well as workplace culture, older workers' attitudes and the concept of active ageing from a human rights perspective. He would like to thank the representatives of the International Longevity Institute – France for the fruitful discussion that took place in Paris on 7 May 2009, which was a source of inspiration for this report. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee also organised a hearing on 14 September 2009 in Paris, with the participation of Professor Françoise Forette from the International Longevity Institute.
3. According to United Nations and European Union estimates and projections, the trends are clear. The proportion of older people has been rising steadily, from 8% in 1950, to 11% in 2007 – and it is expected to reach 22% by 2050. People are living longer, especially in Europe; on average, eight to nine years longer than in 1960, and longevity will continue to improve in coming decades. On the other hand, fertility has declined and, in the predictable future, is likely to remain below the reproduction rates required to assure generational replacement.
4. The rapporteur holds the firm belief that population ageing is a societal achievement and reflects improvements in living conditions, education, socio-medical prevention policies and public health systems and care.³ However, the challenges it presents to us can also be seen as daunting. As pointed out clearly by many international and European organisations, unless policies change, lower growth or absolute falls in the size of the labour force can be expected. The rapid increase in dependency ratios means that it will become harder to maintain continued increases in living standards, unless available labour resources are better mobilised.⁴
5. Social protection systems in the Council of Europe member states are under serious threat and issues like prolonging working life and the situation of older people are rising up the policy agendas in many European countries, although at different speeds. A policy shift is generally recommended to reduce barriers to employment and work, to promote more effective lifelong learning and thus increase the resources available to society.
6. One would have thought that a long and healthy old age was a cause for celebration, but there is a tendency to see the older population, even older workers, as a 'burden on society'. The rapporteur believes that speaking of the 'burden' will only be valid if we fail to change approaches and stereotypes or to restructure society and its institutions to reflect the new realities of an ageing population and of longer life expectancy.
7. Policymakers, employers, workers, social actors and civil society organisations all have the responsibility to make work and society more attractive for older women and men and to shape a more favourable environment for families and individuals of all ages.
8. When discussing reforms, one should bear in mind that work alone is not an effective indicator of older people's economic contribution to society. Vast numbers, women in particular, already care, unpaid, for their grandchildren or their own elderly relatives – a factor that is difficult to include in Gross Domestic Product calculations. The crucial contribution to economic prosperity and social cohesion performed in the household, informal care and volunteer sectors goes entirely unnoticed.

3. It has to be said that vast health inequalities persist, as is clear from differences in life expectancy at birth. For example, while Japan has the highest life expectancy in the world at 82.2 years, in several countries in Africa the figure is as much as 40 years lower. In addition, although it is unusual for a nation to reverse a longevity trend, several nations of the former Soviet Union have indeed lost life expectancy, largely resulting from the AIDS epidemic, and an increase in the incidence of alcoholism (source: World Health Organisation and United Nations Population Division).

4. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD, Population ageing: high time for action, 2005.

9. One should interpret active ageing as an active process based on strong and shared ideas of social participation and citizenship. Policy makers need to shape institutions and adjust policies to the new demographic scenarios of longer life spans, to incorporate the needs of older persons in social policy design and to make efforts to mobilise the human capital that exists to the benefit of women, men and children.

2. Recent trends of older workers' participation in the labour market

10. Today's older people have lived through more change than any preceding generations. The first wave of 'baby boomers' (born 1946 to 1955) witnessed the boundless promise of technology, social change and new freedoms. This generation broke more sharply in values, attitudes, and habits from their parents and grandparents than any before or since.

11. Market researchers predict that the 'baby boom' generation will revolutionise what it means to be 'old' because their attitudes are so different to those of their parents. Lingering stereotypes of the average senior citizen as a frail and passive creature are already out of date.⁵ Even being labelled as 'older workers' can make them feel ill at ease.

12. However, official data tells us a different story about the 'baby boom' generation. In OECD countries in 2007, on average less than 60% of the population aged 50-64 had a job, compared with 76% for the age group 24-49, although the situation has improved in the last ten years. Employment rates for the oldest age group vary considerably between countries, with more than 60% of this age group in employment in 2007 in Iceland, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden, but less than 40% employed in many other Council of Europe countries, in particular Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Slovak Republic, Italy and France.⁶

13. The main pathways for exiting early from the labour market differ from country to country. In some countries, this occurs mainly through provisions in the pension system or through formal early retirement schemes. In other countries, it is through disability and other welfare benefits. According to data from the OECD, in all countries, early exit from the labour market tends to be a one-way street, with very few older workers returning to employment – in general, fewer than 5% of those inactive aged 50-64 are in jobs one year later. Furthermore, the effective age of retirement is well below the official age for receiving a full old-age pension in many European countries.⁷

14. The decline in labour-force participation among those over 50 has resulted from various economic, political and social factors. Older workers have been overrepresented in declining industries and underrepresented in growth areas, and have been affected by reduced demand for unskilled workers. In periods of economic expansion and contraction, when labour demands have grown and receded, the labour-force participation of older workers has fluctuated accordingly.

15. During recessions, older workers have been targeted in early retirement schemes, often to tackle youth unemployment in the mistaken belief that it would free up jobs for the young. The equally heavy use of disability insurance schemes contributed to reducing the numbers of older workers. Investment in training and further education for anyone over the age of 55 was often regarded as a waste of resources.

16. However, there is evidence that the decline in labour-force participation among older workers has recently reversed, notably so in some European countries and in particular among older women. The International Longevity Centre France put forward a "healthy working life expectancy" indicator at age 50 in Europe, which offers a model of successful ageing combining two essential dimensions: the absence of disease and the employment of older people.

17. On average in Europe, between the ages of 50 and 70, men spend 14.1 years in good health, of which about one half at work, and women 13.5 years in good health, of which about one third at work. Therefore, it should in theory be possible to increase healthy working life expectancy between the ages of 50 and 70, especially for women, by reallocating years in good health from retirement to work.⁸

5. Strategy + business, 50-plus: a market that marketers still miss, 2009.

6. OECD, Live longer, work longer, 2006.

7. OECD, Ageing and Employment Policies – Statistics on average effective age of retirement, 2006.

8. Lievre A., Jusot F., Barnay T., Sermet C., Brouard N., Robine J.M. et al., *Healthy working life expectancies at age 50 in Europe: a new indicator*, J Nutr Health Aging 2007.

3. Emergence of policies towards older workers

18. The rapporteur notes that while companies are watching their workforce age, policymakers are struggling to keep financial and health support and social security systems in place. Older workers' employment patterns and their relationship to population ageing and pension systems are of increasing concern to policymakers.

19. In recent years, there has been a marked shift towards proactive labour-market programmes in many countries, and a decline in early retirement schemes. Governments seem keen to increase the supply of older workers and to stimulate demand by lowering the costs of employing them.

20. The European Commission and the OECD both recommend an integrated, comprehensive policy approach to tackle issues arising from the ageing labour force. The 2001 Stockholm European Council set a new target of raising the average European Union employment rate for older men and women (aged 55–64) to 50% by 2010. In 2008, the target was met in 12 member states, but for 10 others, including the large member states, France, Italy and Poland, the shortfall was more than 10 percentage points.⁹

21. A range of policies, measures and instruments have been developed in order to reconstruct the social system, so that retirement and social security systems encourage people to keep working up to the age of 65 years and beyond; there is, however, often discrimination between men and women.

22. Several European countries have implemented policies targeting older workers, including:

- removing previous incentives to early retirement;
- encouraging later retirement and flexible retirement and introducing incentives to remain in the labour force and tax incentives for companies employing older workers;
- adopting legislation to counter age discrimination;
- levelling the retirement age for men and women;
- engaging in awareness-raising campaigns among employers;
- offering guidance and training programmes targeting older workers;
- providing advice and guidance for employers;
- providing support to labour-market intermediaries.

23. In this regard, the rapporteur would like to speak in favour of these measures, in particular those that give workers the choice to continue working in later years. As also stated at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, "older persons should have the opportunity to work as long as they wish and are able to, in satisfying and productive work". France, the rapporteur's country, passed a law in 2008 allowing workers to voluntarily work up to the age of 70, beyond the official retirement age of 65.

24. However, the effective retirement age and the willingness to work longer depends on a number of objective and subjective factors such as state of health, individuals' work-leisure preferences, family and care responsibilities, companies' employment policies, working conditions and work organisation, motivation, work satisfaction and sense of purpose.

25. The case of Finland is often mentioned for having considered the relationship between employment, pensions and learning when formulating policies, and for having succeeded in significantly raising employment rates of older workers.

26. Finnish active ageing policies, based on the 'work ability' concept, had three main objectives: allowing older people to continue working; facilitating social acceptance of working longer by the mobilisation of social partners and firms and by improving well-being at the workplace; improving social inclusion of older workers and pensioners.¹⁰

27. However, it has to be noted that the successful approaches experienced in Nordic countries are firmly rooted in consensus across political parties and the population and benefit from full co-operation from the social partners. This might limit the transferability of this model to other countries with very different social and political contexts, labour markets and social dialogue traditions.¹¹

9. European Commission, *Employment in Europe 2008 report*, 2008.

10. For an analysis of the Finnish 'work ability' concept, see Ilmarinen J. and Lehtinen S., *Past, Present and Future of Work Ability. People and Work – Research Reports 65*, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, 2004.

28. The reality in many European countries is that early retirement is still popular among older workers. Although the percentage of older adults who are working longer is growing in some countries, most would still prefer to leave the workforce as early as their financial situation allows. And although there is ample evidence that a large proportion of the older population is still capable of working and contributing, most are not doing so.

29. On the other hand, many employers are still reluctant to keep older workers in their jobs and in particular to hire them. Outdated ideas about the capacities of older workers are still rooted in the workplace, but incentives and disincentives embedded in government tax and benefit programmes also play an important role in employers' decisions.

30. The rapporteur stresses that social protection systems need to be adapted to enable older workers to remain at work longer, but this should not be done by cutting pension rights or limiting unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed.

31. A serious risk to be considered is the widening of inequalities and how to account for differences in job arduousness in view of working conditions. The rapporteur believes that early retirement may have to be maintained for some categories of blue-collar workers in physically demanding jobs.

32. The reforms aiming to postpone the retirement age should take into account that the age at which people entered the labour market, the total number of years worked and the nature of their work strongly influence their capacity and willingness to continue to work.

33. What is needed to raise the employment rate of older workers is a more attractive workplace, the introduction of more work flexibility, high quality working conditions which help workers to maintain their physical and mental health, skills development through life-long learning and the promotion of a positive approach among employers to older workers. However, there are still many obstacles embedded in national legislation, as well as lingering prejudices and outdated ideas about the capacities of older workers.

4. Age discrimination and workplace culture

34. If we are to reap the benefits of longevity, we will have to break down the barriers that prevent us from making the most of it. Since the Council of Europe member states have all signed the European Convention on Human Rights, their legislation should rightfully reflect its conditions. Human rights include equality, which also means equal access to the labour market and to services.

35. Although ageism is less acknowledged than racism or sexism, it is a harmful prejudice that results in widespread mistreatment, ranging from stereotypic and degrading media images to physical and financial abuse, unequal treatment in the workforce, and denial of appropriate medical care and services.

36. Differences of treatment between individuals or groups on the grounds of age are often based on generalised assumptions or casual stereotypes. When individuals are subject to discrimination as a result of these demeaning stereotypes, their fundamental right to respect for their human dignity is violated, as they are denied equality of treatment and respect. Such discrimination also prevents disadvantaged age groups from participating fully in the labour market.¹²

37. Even though direct discrimination may be forbidden by law in many member states, negative attitudes towards older workers are still deeply rooted in our contemporary work culture. One of the symptoms is that an unemployed person aged 50 and older has limited chances of finding a new job. Other symptoms are low job mobility and low participation in education and training. Moreover, in many national employment policies, the use of age as a proxy for health or competence is still widespread.

38. We also have to question the way in which the legitimate 'right to retirement' has become perverted into a 'duty to retire', sometimes forcing people to give up work against their will.

39. In the workplace itself, age discrimination and age-related harassment demean older people's dignity and damage their self esteem, leading in turn to low work morale and reduced productivity. This runs counter to the positive images of older workers as being reliable, loyal and hard working workers and is due to the prevalence of negative stereotypes about them, for example that they are more expensive and less adaptable, ambitious, creative, alert or capable than younger workers.

11. Finland 2007, Active Ageing Strategies to Strengthen Social Inclusion, Synthesis report, Henri Sterdyniak, OFCE-Paris.

12. European Commission, Age discrimination and European law, 2005.

40. The creation of a more positive approach among employers to older workers is a necessary component to facilitating this and the many positive aspects of employing older workers – such as lower staff turnover, more flexible workplace attitudes, greater dependability and their accumulated experience – need to be emphasised and more widely acknowledged.

41. Evidence shows that worker productivity does not decrease with age as declining physical capacity is compensated for by qualities and skills acquired through experience.

42. Besides prejudice and discrimination, other factors have worked against the reintegration of older workers, notably relatively high unemployment, high levels of work intensity, and a culture of early exit from the labour market, resulting in pressure for early retirement.

5. Reasons for early retirement and workers' attitudes

43. Most people leaving the workforce now are doing so neither at the statutory age of retirement, nor at the onset of 'old age'. Many workers leave their jobs before the standard retirement age because they have taken early retirement (voluntarily or involuntarily), because they have been made redundant, or because they suffer from some form of incapacity.

44. The OECD has identified several "pull" or "push" factors that influence work and retirement decisions of older workers.

45. Among the most common factors that pull workers into retirement are financial incentives provided by pension schemes and other formal or informal early retirement schemes. Push factors include both firm and individual circumstances that restrict suitable job opportunities. At the firm level, these include negative perceptions about the capacities of old workers and difficulties firms face in adjusting employment as a result of employment protection rules. At the individual level, these include skills mismatch in the face of technological and structural changes in labour demand, perceptions on low returns from further training, work related stress, poor health and inflexibility to change working hours.¹³

46. Tradition also plays a role, as it dictates the "natural" time to retire, even though people now live longer and are healthier than before.

47. Poor working conditions are an important reason for early exit from employment. Accidents, stress at work and ill health can lead to negative feelings about work; low job satisfaction can result in absenteeism and early retirement from work.

48. Occupational changes or a slowdown in the economy may result in a sector going into decline, with consequent increased stress upon workers. According to recent surveys, the intention to retire earlier is greater among workers who perform physical work, which seems logical.

49. Financial and personal motivations are also very important. Social security systems can encourage a person to stay in or to leave the labour market; more generous social insurance and pensions (or other monetary rewards) may persuade an individual to retire early. Workers are also likely to retire if their spouse is already retired, or if they have care responsibilities for grandchildren or frail older parents or relatives.

50. However, if a person is getting sufficient stimulus and rewards from work, that is a key motivation for remaining longer in employment, as well as being an important determinant of good health. To encourage people to remain in employment for longer, it is important to begin valuing the skills of older workers, and respecting the experience, knowledge and competence which they have gained through a long working life. To feel that they have been 'set aside' and that their skills are not valued will not encourage workers to remain in employment.¹⁴

51. There are growing concerns about the working environment, the quality of work available to older workers and the obstacles that they face to remaining in or re-entering employment, including pressures to balance their working lives with care duties for family members.

13. OECD, *Live Longer, Work Longer*, 2006.

14. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions – Foundation focus, *Age and employment*, September 2006.

52. This is particularly true for older women, who face additional discrimination in employment for various reasons, including gender inequalities in income, which exist at all life stages and which are particularly pronounced for older women. This impacts not only on their immediate earnings but on their income in retirement and is due largely to the cumulative effect of time taken out of the workplace to meet caring responsibilities for dependent family members.

53. The rapporteur believes that the particularly vulnerable situation of older women resulting from the gender pay gap and the fewer opportunities that exist for career progression, weaker job tenure and the specific difficulties faced by those who care for dependent elderly relatives need to be addressed as a priority.¹⁵

54. One of the key reasons why employers are not doing more to try and recruit or retain older workers as part of their management strategy is also that they do not yet understand how to do so effectively. While employers are becoming more aware of the importance to provide better work-life balance for working parents, they might have not yet gained a full understanding of what reconciliation of work and family life means to the older worker.¹⁶

6. Work as an attractive and fulfilling option for workers of all ages

55. In the rapporteur's view, there are apparent tensions arising from the clash between economic policies that promote flexible workforce, de-regulation and competitiveness in global economy, and the need to adapt the labour market, in particular, to the realities of demographic change and longevity. We need to reconcile the idea of a competitive economy and labour markets with the right to dignity at work, the value of inter-generational solidarity and the needs of the families.

56. In their attempt to 'make work pay', governments may be tempted to indiscriminately cut long-term unemployment benefits and force people into low paid, poor quality jobs rather than address the many barriers that prevent older workers from remaining active. Forcing older workers to remain in employment by reducing their social protection rights is only going to increase social exclusion and poverty.¹⁷

57. One has to bear in mind that ill-conceived reforms of pension systems may create an influx of the number of people on disability pensions. Governments should pay special attention to the most vulnerable when reforming their pensions systems. The vast majority of older people with insufficient income have just not had the opportunity to build an adequate pension due to illness, career breaks for caring duties, long-term unemployment, discrimination and social exclusion.

58. There is a danger that pension reforms aiming to extend working life may disadvantage the less well off, forcing them to remain economically active, while the better off will continue to retire early. To be successful, policies have to be capable of meeting the needs of different groups, with an adequate safety net available for those for whom employment is an unrealistic option.

59. By increasing the number of healthy and active older persons, governments will be able to provide more generous assistance to those in need of health care and long-term care and to make public funding available for education, training and welfare services. Encouraging people to take more personal responsibility is not a substitute for social security systems based on solidarity. On the contrary, these measures can ensure that social security systems survive and thrive for the benefit of those who need them most.

60. Resources have to be allocated effectively by refraining from classifying older people categorically as vulnerable and by allowing them to maintain independence and control over their lives. It is possible to motivate workers to work longer if they are provided with suitable incentives, if they are offered attractive and flexible working arrangements and if they are in good health.

61. The rapporteur believes that the idea of flexible work generally and continued working until and beyond 'normal' retirement age requires a policy adaptation to the following issues:

15. AGE – The European Older People's Platform, *How can the European Union lessen the impact of the recession on older workers: an assessment and recommendations from AGE*, March 2009.

16. Manpower, *The new agenda for an older workforce*, 2007.

17. AGE – The European Older People's Platform, *Ageing in Europe: realising and promoting the contributions of older people*, 2004.

6.1. Improving transition between work and retirement, paying attention to the most vulnerable

62. An important incentive to work longer is clearly provided by the financial benefit of staying active. One of the key ways of keeping older people employed longer will be the introduction into national pension schemes of a flexible mix between work and retirement.

63. Giving older people the possibility to switch from paid to unpaid work and vice versa and using part time retirement schemes could give them a more meaningful, purposeful and healthier life, while expanding their community involvement and tackling serious problems of society. This facilitates a gradual step down and avoids the abruptness of cliff-edge retirement.

6.2. Promotion of health and physical and mental well-being

64. Improved health and safety conditions and ergonomic job designs are key to improving working conditions and productivity for workers of all ages. Action targeted at promoting the health status of individuals, their quality of life and functional abilities as they age can also be a powerful retaining factor.

65. From the employer's point of view, these policies and investments in workers' health offer clear benefits, in terms of reduced absenteeism, improved productivity and retention of experienced and knowledgeable workers.

66. In recent years, work intensity has increased across Europe as a result of increased competition and changes in the organisation of work. It is possible to limit exposure to more demanding working conditions, through the use of teamwork, job-sharing, task rotation, redefinition of tasks between team members.

6.3. Fitting jobs to older workers: making work arrangements more flexible

67. If work is designed in appropriate ways, with flexible work schedules (including part-time, more paid time off, telecommuting or job sharing) both younger and older workers can better juggle their priorities, such as looking after children, elderly parents, grandchildren, education, volunteering, or simply more leisure time, especially after several decades of a full-time job.

68. This holds true for workers of all ages and policies need to provide them with a degree of choice. Flexible working time is an important instrument for 'humanising' working life, particularly in demanding activities such as night shift work.¹⁸

6.4. Fitting older workers to jobs: life-long learning and 'work ability'

69. Longevity societies will increasingly be knowledge societies. As skills tend to become outdated more quickly as longevity increases, there is a pressing need for ongoing training, re-training and changing career direction, including learning towards the end of the work career.

70. There should be increased investment in lifelong learning at mid-career. The attractiveness of training and its potential returns for older workers can be improved by adapting teaching methods and content to their needs, by the provision of short, modular courses and through the recognition of prior learning and experience.¹⁹

7. Active ageing is more than just "employment"

71. The role of activity in longevity is now an accepted fact in evidence-based medicine. The decrease in heavy manual labour that once led to premature mortality has played its part in lengthening life expectancy. A sedentary and passive lifestyle is one of the main factors in morbidity and mortality at all ages, especially in old age. Research clearly shows that actively engaged individuals are more likely to remain mentally and physically stimulated and, as a result, enjoy a better quality of life.²⁰

72. Furthermore, there are more existential reasons that can keep older people working and/or staying active in society: the desire to feel useful, be around people, do meaningful tasks, and continue learning.

18. Naegele Gerhard, Walker Alan, *A guide to good practices in age management*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006.

19. OECD, *Live longer, work longer*, 2006.

20. Les cahiers de la FIAPA (*Fédération internationale des associations des personnes âgées*), research-action on ageing, *Longevity: a challenge for science and society*, 2007.

73. We must also acknowledge that active aging is about much more than employment. After retirement age, older people continue to contribute to society in a voluntary capacity, as consumers, carers, citizens, etc. The lack of accurate information on the economic contribution of older people to society contributes to stereotyping older people as unproductive and dependent.

74. The World Health Organisation adopted the term 'active ageing' as the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.²¹

75. The rapporteur believes that opening up the cities and the local communities to people of all ages and encouraging volunteer work groups is one of the social innovations that must be developed in the 21st century. Skilled and experienced older people act as volunteers in schools, communities, religious institutions, businesses and health and political organisations. Voluntary work benefits older people by increasing social contacts and psychological well-being while making a significant contribution to their communities.

76. In addition, shortages of labour will put pressure on the voluntary sector and the informal care sector. There are numerous possibilities to tap into the potential of older workers' talents. Governments should identify barriers and introduce incentives for older unemployed people to become active in voluntary work and be trained for new tasks and new networks.

77. In this regard, the rapporteur welcomes the initiative of the European Union to declare 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering and hopes that special attention will be given to the contribution of older people to society through unpaid work.

8. Conclusions

78. In the past century, life spans have been divided into three periods: youth which is devoted to learning, maturity to working and raising a family and old age which means retirement and age-related illnesses. This distinction has already become blurred, as many Europeans have the potential to live 'several lives', which questions traditional family structures and often entails a change in career directions, adding several additional years in good health after retirement.

79. The rapporteur is of the opinion that increased longevity forces us to take a new look at age structures in our societies. Life-course patterns should be structured in a way that simultaneously allows young and older people more options and more freedom of choice, while ensuring income or social security, within a framework of integrated pathways.

80. Active ageing policies need to ascertain the extent to which there is potential for redesigning life-course patterns in such a way that they permit new combinations of work, private and family life, training and continuous learning, personal development, sport, leisure time and volunteering at all ages.

81. Ageing takes place within the context of others – friends, co-workers, neighbours and family members. This is why interdependence as well as inter-generational solidarity are important tenets of active ageing policies both inside and outside the workplace.

82. While a high fertility rate is obviously important for a country's future, the true wealth of a society can also be measured by its ability to embrace all the different age groups and enable them to live together in harmony.

83. Finally, the rapporteur welcomes the recent proposal by the European Commission that 2012 be designated as the "European Year for Active Ageing", which aims to help create better job opportunities and working conditions for the growing numbers of older people in Europe, help them take an active role in society and encourage healthy ageing. He very much hopes that the European Parliament and Council will endorse the initiative and encourages the Council of Europe to also play an active role in 2012, in close co-operation with the European Union.

21. World Health Organisation, *Active Ageing – A Policy Framework*, 2002.