AGE/inc
PROJECT
GIVE A VOICE TO OLDER PEOPLE IN POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION!

SEPTEMBER 2007

The European Older People’s Platform
La Plate-forme européenne des Personnes âgées
FOREWORD

Promoting the social inclusion of older people, including the very old and most vulnerable, has always been at the heart of AGE’s work whose mission is to voice and advance the interests of the 50+, the fastest growing section of our societies.

When looking for solutions to address older people’s needs and expectations, AGE is asking policymakers to deal not only with the strictly income-related risks they face, but also to address the overall social exclusion threat including the issues of social isolation, lack of civic participation, barriers to accessing basic social and health services and cultural activities, gender inequalities, weak neighbourhood support etc.

The AGE/inc project provided a unique opportunity to understand better the different national contexts and experiences of poverty and social exclusion. It also allowed AGE and its partners to exchange knowledge and experiences of best practice on how to give a voice in policy debate to older people confronted with social exclusion.

Most importantly, with the help of the AGE/inc workshop tool-kit, the project partners organised a series of participatory meetings for older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and by doing so they have succeeded in involving them in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the 2006 National Action Plans on social inclusion.

Now that the project is over, AGE members are committed to pursuing their efforts to reinforce the role of older people in influencing social inclusion policy. We hope that with the support of the AGE/inc tool-kit and our newly established expert group we will be able to help all our members organise similar meetings to enable older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to explain directly to national and European policy makers what it means to be old and socially excluded and what can be done to help them live in dignity in old age.

Anne-Sophie Parent
AGE Director

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**MAIN ACTIVITIES**

The AGE/inc project examined the role of older people confronted with poverty and social exclusion in the implementation and further improvement of the National Action Plans on social inclusion (NAPs). In order to facilitate the participation of older people in this process, AGE/inc developed a workshop tool-kit as a methodology for organising participatory meetings with older people. The underlying concept in producing this instrument was that older people experiencing poverty and exclusion should be given the chance to be heard and most of all to be listened to – with their voice and concerns being reflected in political planning and decision-making at all levels.

Taking the opportunity of the project’s transnational dimension, the participants also exchanged experiences and good practices with regard to participation in the NAPs consultation process at national level. Equally important, the participants examined the way that the European social inclusion process has a mutually reinforcing relationship with two additional strands (i.e. pensions and health and long-term care) in the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion (OMC/SPSI), as well as with other relevant processes such as the United Nations’ Action Plan on Ageing.

**OUTCOMES**

Apart from the participatory workshop tool-kit, a range of recommendations aimed at all actors and at all levels of policy-making were produced by the project, looking at further improvements in both the mechanism of the European social inclusion process and the work of AGE in strengthening the direct involvement of older people.

In order to maximise the existing potential of the OMC/SPSI and its further development, the European Commission should consider:

> Adopting a ‘life course’ approach to poverty and social inclusion in both planning and implementation;
> Encouraging national governments to consult regularly with people affected by policy-making especially at local level;
> Promoting methods and best practices across the EU regarding regional and local strategies on social inclusion and drawing lessons from these different participatory models.

AGE Platform will structure its future work on the fight against poverty and social exclusion by:

> Broadening the scope of AGE’s social inclusion agenda to include issues such as social and civic participation, informal healthcare, education, transport, new technologies, consumer protection, culture and tourism, the role of the media etc.
> Calling for the realignment of the boundaries between national and EU competences for social policies, as the project provided an extensive list of issues on which older people would like the EU to take the initiative and propose policy solutions;
> Emphasising repeatedly the notion of the dignity of older people because the lack of due acknowledgement of this concept fosters social exclusion.

“The experience of listening to groups of older people in social policy matters was described by the project participants as a political process and consequently one of AGE’s main priorities will be to structure its own work in this way. Ultimately, the participation of older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion will include the most vulnerable groups such as older migrant women, isolated older persons or any older people unable to take full part in society without specific support.”

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

> “I still have my wants and needs it’s just that my body is getting frail.”

Participant, Ireland

The experience of listening to groups of older people in social policy matters was described by the project participants as a political process and consequently one of AGE’s main priorities will be to structure its own work in this way. Ultimately, the participation of older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion will include the most vulnerable groups such as older migrant women, isolated older persons or any older people unable to take full part in society without specific support.
AGE/INC IN THE EU CONTEXT

The AGE/inc project was funded under a special call for proposals of the Transnational Exchange Programme issued by the European Commission to encourage transnational analysis and debate about policy measures in relation to the OMC/SPSI and in particular for the development and implementation of the NAPs on social inclusion. The execution of AGE/inc project coincided with the period of preparation by the Member States of the 2006 NAPs in the context of the streamlined OMC framework covering social protection and social inclusion processes together. All different activities of the project were therefore focused on the consecutive stages of the 2006 NAPs round: consultation, drafting, implementation and monitoring.

AGE/INC MAJOR FEATURES

Objectives

> Strengthening participation of older people
It is widely recognised as a fundamental principle of the European social inclusion process that all stakeholders need to participate in the development of solutions to combat poverty and social exclusion in order to create and implement policies the most successfully. While this principle is expounded, the reality is that there is still a gulf between those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, together with those working directly with these people at grass roots level and with policy makers. Consequently the project looked for solutions on how to:
> Improve the participation of OPEP and those working with them on the ground within the political debate and the policy-making processes at all levels of the social inclusion process;
> Improve and develop the effectiveness of this twofold participation, ensuring that the voice of OPEP is not simply heard but is listened to, taken into account and reflected in policy responses to poverty and social exclusion, e.g. NAPs.

> Further policy development in the social inclusion process
AGE/inc’s two years of work closely followed the national drafting processes of the NAPs and facilitated the development of policy responses to the realities being faced on the ground. However, the project did not restrict itself to the drafting process. As the social inclusion process progressed during the course of the project, consultation by governments with older people’s associations, the effectiveness of consultations and implementation of the NAPs commitments and the role of older people’s groups in monitoring and implementing these commitments were assessed.

> Enhancing relations with other processes related to social inclusion
The project also brought together political experts and older people’s associations to critically assess the generally overlooked interaction and possible positive synergies between the European social inclusion process and other related procedures such as the United Nations’ International Plan on Ageing or the two other OMC’s strands (pensions and health and long-term care) in the context of the streamlining of social protection and social inclusion work.

Timing

The overall timing of the project, from July 2005 to July 2007, gave an opportunity for some participants to engage in the development and monitoring of the 2006 NAPs implementation at national level.

> 2006
As the process of setting objectives, drafting and publishing the 2006 NAPs took place in early 2006, the project partners monitored: 1) the extent to which national objectives recognised the seriousness of the reality facing older people; 2) whether older people’s groups were effectively consulted by governments; 3) whether the resulting NAPs set out appropriate policies, targets and resources in tackling poverty among older people; and 4) the extent to which these commitments were met in reality.

> 2007
When national governments began implementing the commitments made in the 2006 NAPs, it was still too early to be able to identify significant progress in policy development i.e. analyse whether policy commitments could be linked to the output of the workshops with OPEP which were held at the beginning of the project. This time constraint meant that the project looked instead at ways in which governments were approaching the task of implementing commitments and to what extent they were including older people’s groups and their organisa-
tions at all stages of this process including the monitoring phase.

Methodology

> Local workshops to identify older people’s needs and requests
The project in the first year used test workshops in the seven participating countries to develop a final workshop tool-kit. The test workshops also identified some of the most urgent needs and requirements raised by OPEP (see section II), which were then discussed at national meetings held in seven partner countries. Where possible, these meetings formulated final key policy messages to be forwarded by older people’s organisations to the consultation on the 2006 NAPs.

> Transnational exchanges of older people organisations’ best practices
The key policy messages were taken from many of the older people’s associations and fed into the drafting process of the 2006 NAPs. At each stage of the 2006 NAPs consultation, a transnational AGE/inc meeting was held (see section III) to assess to what extent the voice of older people experiencing poverty and those working with them had been taken into account by national policy-makers and how to improve the NAPs process for its subsequent rounds.

> Training on the use of the project’s outcomes in future
A period of in-depth analysis followed during the second year of the project. This involved an additional transnational meeting bringing together older people’s organisations from all the eligible countries in order to present the results and outcomes of the project and provide training on how to take forward these results, especially the workshop tool-kit, and use them to help their work beyond the duration of the AGE/inc project. In the meantime a new series of national meetings took place in each of the partner country to bring the results of the project back to the older people who participated in the workshops in the first year.

> Dissemination of the project outcomes to policy-makers
A closing meeting in Brussels took place in order to present the project results to a political audience. This meeting, organised in cooperation with the European Parliament’s Intergroup on Ageing, also gave voice and visibility to older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, i.e. representatives of this group made testimonies to illustrate the different challenges and problems that a growing number of older people face.

Project participants

> Partners
The project partners were selected on the basis of their experiences in working on issues of social exclusion and specifically the European social inclusion process from the point of view of older people, as well as their willingness to further develop the process from the grass roots perspective. Nine partner organisations represented seven EU Member States:

> Zivot 90 (Czech Republic)
> Fondation Nationale de Gérontologie – FNG (France)
> Les petits frères des Pauvres (France)
> BAGSO (Germany)
> 50+ Hellas (Greece)
> Irish Senior Citizens’ Parliament (Ireland)
> Gabija Network (Lithuania)
> Age Concern England (UK)
> Help the Aged (UK)

The above partnership ensured a good geographical spread among organisations that are known and trusted by the AGE network, as this was crucial to test the transferability of the workshop tool-kit in different cultures and varying situations. It was also important in finding differences in the culture of consultation and to provide interesting exchanges of experience in the development of the social inclusion process at national level. It was equally important that the partnership ensured a representation of a variety of specialisations such as: older women (Gabija), volunteering (Les petits frères des Pauvres), gerontology and research (La FNG and 50+ Hellas), self-advocacy (Irish Seniors Parliament) and discrimination (Help the Aged).

> Other eligible participation countries
The participation in the AGE/inc transnational meetings was open to all AGE’s associations from the other EU, EFTA and accession countries. Their active involvement in the debate enriched the final project results and recommendations and ensured their wider dissemination across Europe.

> Other participants
Other actors involved in the project included:
> The UK Coalition Against Poverty provided a tool-
kit expert in order to contribute their experience of developing a tool-kit and for their knowledge of workshop design to be combined with the partners’ awareness of older people’s concerns;

> National governments, particularly in the countries hosting the international project events on poverty and social exclusion among older people, notably in the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and the UK;

> Other stakeholders including regional and local authorities as well as other NGOs working against social exclusion and poverty attended the international events (e.g. EAPN, EURAG, Irish Combat Poverty Agency etc.).

‘All the politicians, managers and NGO leaders must speak in simple language so all people can understand them. When you want to make us believe in something, remember that we don’t all speak in political jargon! Some people use plain words.’

Female participant, 81, Lithuania
The final tool-kit produced during the first year of the project marked a major output of AGE/inc.

**CONTEXT: EUROPEAN SOCIAL INCLUSION PROCESS**

One of the three main objectives of the streamlined OMC for social protection and social inclusion is ‘good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy’. With regard to eradicating poverty and social exclusion, EU action should ensure ‘that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty and social exclusion ...’

Policy-making in the field of poverty remains the responsibility of each EU Member State, but progress can be achieved faster and more effectively by sharing ideas, experiences and learning between countries. The OMC/SPSI provides opportunities for older people confronted with poverty and social exclusion to be included within policy debates at national level.

**WHY THIS TOOL-KIT?**

The AGE/inc tool-kit was designed to promote the participation of OPEP, together with relevant organisations, in the development and implementation of national strategies against poverty and social exclusion.

The content and principles of the AGE/inc tool-kit were largely based on work carried out by the UK Coalition Against Poverty in 2004 in the context of the “Get Heard” campaign, ‘a participatory process designed to enable people with experience of social exclusion to express their views on government anti-poverty initiatives and policies’. (See: www.ukcap.org/getheard)

The tool-kit was tested and used by project partners to organise a series of 47 local workshops in seven countries bringing together the voices of around 1,000 older people. Two national meetings followed in every partner country to develop key recommendations for the future use of the AGE/inc tool-kit and to formulate policy messages to feed in to the drafting of the 2006 NAPs.

After having translated the final version of the tool-kit into 19 EU languages, the tool-kit was forwarded to AGE’s members in all eligible countries within the project, providing a basis for the participation of OPEP and their organisations in the social inclusion process during the project and beyond.

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF PARTICIPATION**

Successful policies that bring people out of situations of poverty/social exclusion and prevent others from falling into such situations require policy-makers to understand the complexities of such situations and the experiences of the individuals directly affected. Individuals living in poverty/social exclusion have direct experience and thus expertise on the issues impacting on their situation. This needs to be heard as part of the policy debate both to avoid policy mistakes and to encourage an emphasis on human dignity and human rights. Thus the objectives of such meetings are:

> To enable older people, and those working with them, to think about their understanding of their poverty and social exclusion;
> To identify and explore the impact of policies, programmes and initiatives on socially excluded older people;
> To explore the different ways in which poverty specifically affects older people;
> To identify how government policy could be more effective in tackling poverty experienced by older people;
> To suggest ways in which national action plans on social inclusion could be more effective in dealing with the poverty experienced by older people.

**THE MOTIVATION FOR ORGANISING PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS**

While the principle of participation is supported by many Member States, the reality is often disappointing. NGOs are often critical of the way that governments engage with groups at risk of poverty and exclusion. Even within NGOs, however, it is not always straightforward to access people experiencing poverty and to bring their voices into the political debate.

“We cannot easily get to the shops. You should see what it’s like - there are no banisters anywhere and everybody runs, so I go to the shops outside of the rush hours when they are less crowded.”

Mr Abdallah, 55, with reduced mobility, Moroccan origin, Paris, France
For organisations keen to do so, the AGE/inc tool-kit provides a wealth of advice and guidance on how to go about doing so successfully. Participatory meetings are aimed at giving a voice to older people most at-risk, with the ultimate aim that this voice be heard and listened to by decision-makers at local, national and European levels.

**TOOL-KIT CONTENT**

The AGE/inc tool-kit is a guide to planning, organising and running participatory workshops of older people experiencing poverty or exclusion. It is not an instruction manual. It provides guidance on the philosophy behind these meetings and the reasons for holding them, as well as concrete organisational advice and suggestions for follow-up and the monitoring of outcomes.

There also seem to be very good reasons to believe that the AGE/inc tool-kit could be used to advise those seeking to work with groups experiencing poverty other than older people. The project partnership recommends that the tool-kit is read by all those interested in being active in this field.

The full version of the AGE/inc tool-kit is available at: [www.age-platform.org/EN/article.php3?id_article=353](http://www.age-platform.org/EN/article.php3?id_article=353)

“I have never said this to anyone but people don’t see me anymore as an individual.”

*Participant, Ireland*
National meetings held in every partner country brought together and provided an opportunity for a series of exchanges of experiences, opinions and requests that emerged during the local workshops comprising older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

The following policy requests formulated by older people – often reflecting specific national social, economic and cultural contexts – cannot claim to be scientific and can only supplement academic research. They present instead the voice of real people on the ground and help develop an understanding of the complex realities that they face in their daily lives. This voice cannot dictate policy decisions but listening to it can improve the way in which policies are formulated and implemented so that they can deliver better results.

A selection of issues in the partner countries that have been perceived to either work or not work are listed below.

**TRANSPORT – CZECH EXPERIENCE**

**Working**

> Extensive transport network with interconnections between different means of transport in many bigger cities.
> Accessible buses make travelling much easier in many towns and cities.
> Free public transport for people over a certain age makes a valuable difference to people on low incomes.

**Not working**

> It is often difficult to move between cities, especially where free transport does not extend beyond the city limits.
> Some people find themselves too old to work, but not old enough to benefit from free transport.
> Transport services in rural areas are often not regular enough to be useful – fare reductions are useless if there are no services.
> Bus timetables often only operate with work in mind and services stop in the evening.
> There is a lack of respect given to older people’s needs in society, e.g. young people no longer give up their seats for vulnerable people.

**What is needed?**

Free transport should be extended to all people of pensionable age as well as geographically to allow people to move freely within a country.

**HEALTHCARE – FRENCH EXPERIENCE**

**Working**

> The CMU (universal sickness cover) provides access to healthcare for many vulnerable people living on low incomes.
> The complementary CMUC, which gives tax credits for access to care, also helps many people on low income.

**Not working**

> Since transport costs are not taken into account as part of the healthcare package, many individuals can find it hard to access care services when these are far from their home.
> Not enough costs are covered by the universal sickness cover.
> Sometimes medical practitioners do not give appointments to people receiving the universal sickness cover because of the administration

“**It hurts when nobody cares about you. It’s just too hard to cope with that. I have no goal in life and with no goal there is no life.**”

Mrs Siam, 61, Lebanese origin, Marseille, France
involved in receiving costs from the health authorities.

> There are problems with accessing and maintaining good quality aids e.g. expensive dentures, correct glasses, hearing aids, walking sticks, walking frames and wheelchairs.

What is needed?

Access to universal sickness cover should be based on an individual’s resources and not on their financial status.

Good social relationships can help keep people in good health.

Preventative and early intervention services are crucial to ensure people’s health and well being.

Better education for the public in terms of how to live healthily and how to ensure healthy ageing.

Volunteering is necessary to support the work of professionals.

One must “care for the carers”, i.e. couples and children where one person is alone in caring for a dependant relative e.g. in Alzheimer cases.

Financial support should be provided for non-professional carers but it should also be recognised that they cannot do everything and it is not enough just to support them with money.

The time of care workers needs to be taken into greater account as more consideration is currently given to how many people they can deal with (quantity) than to how well they can deal with people (quality).

Policies, care and treatment should be based on the individual and not focused on groups or sub-groups.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVATION OF OLDER PEOPLE OVER 50 – GERMAN EXPERIENCE

Working

> Länder programmes and local projects on social integration and professional activation e.g. regional and local networks addressing the issue of unemployed older people such as ZWAR (Zwischen Arbeit und Ruhestand) and the “Cologne Senior Citizens’ Networks”.

> Initiatives encouraging self and mutual empowerment of older people such as the Land Programme “Growing old in Mecklenburg-Western Pommerania”, Senior Citizens’ Parliament, the Advisory Council for Unemployed Persons and the Land Senior Citizens’ Representational Office.

Not working

> Pension reform measures with regard to the over-50 generation e.g. inadequacy of pension benefits offered to people previously affected by long-term unemployment.

> ‘Inter-generational agreement’ exercising pressure on early retirement without or with insufficient information on the eventual impact on future pension benefits, etc.

> Lack of support to fight psychological stress in connection with poverty and unemployment i.e. deterioration in an individual’s health and well-being.

> Lack of support to family carers facing excessive material and psychological demands, e.g. looking after people in the early stages of dementia.

> Professional reintegration measures lack a long-term perspective given their minor impact in increasing future pension benefits and in providing access to decent and stable jobs.

> Rigidity of government measures to fight unemployment among people over 50, e.g. the threat of a 25% cut in basic security benefits when people refuse to accept a “one euro job” (Hartz IV arrangement); application of the so-called “unemployment benefits II” requiring the use of saving accounts or a cash contribution in life insurance policies etc.

What is needed?

Tailor-made pension measures to address the specific situation of today’s over-50 year old people, in particular from the Eastern Länder, i.e. take into consideration the unemployment periods when calculating pension benefits, promote tax relief on savings made for old-age retirement.

Develop innovative concepts to cope with professional activity for older workers such as
promotion of voluntary work activities instead of forcing older employees to accept a ‘one euro’ job without any real mid- and long-term prospects for decent and adequate pension income, support alternative employment measures such as business start-ups.

Pay particular attention to structural differences and the levels of development in the labour market between the old and new Länder. Resolving problems of massive unemployment and the related increase in the extent of risk-of-poverty among people over 50 in eastern Germany requires a comprehensive and long-term policy-mix including measures on employment, social security benefits, healthcare, civil participation, etc.

RACE AND ETHNICITY – GREEK EXPERIENCE

Working

> Housing loans and minimum pensions helping Roma individuals.
> Social security benefits, old-age pensions, disability allowances and allowances and benefits for public utilities can make a positive contribution to the lives of several people from the Greek Muslim community.

Not working

> Low pensions make independent living for elderly people an impossible task. Rising prices in the market limit older people’s purchasing power.
> Low pensions limit elderly people’s social life. They start to feel isolated and discriminated against and as if they cannot fulfil their role as grandparents and that their life is ending.
> Elderly parents seek help from their children especially when health issues arise as, despite the National Health Service, high costs are involved.
> Access to health services is limited when people live far away from a city.
> Many Greek Muslims lack access to services such as home help or from the Institutions for the Support of Elderly People (KAPIs).
> Many Roma who lack legal papers are illiterate and are not part of the tax or social security systems. As such, they cannot access basic services or support.
> Most Muslims in Athens have lived in multigenerational households for the last 60 years. In most cases the houses are old and derelict with no electricity, water supply or heating. They cannot afford to pay for them or these utilities cannot necessarily be provided. In most cases their situation exceeds simple poverty.

> Within Roma communities there are differences depending on their country of ‘origin’. In some cases, where older people receive a pension, the whole extended family may be dependent on this income.

What is needed?

Integration policy for migrants over 60 years of age in the NAPs as is the case for the younger population.

Information on access to social services should be available in different languages so that older migrant and ethnic minority people are reached. Campaigns could also be used to target migrants and ethnic minorities.

Professionals need to judge when culturally sensitive care may be needed, for example with older migrant Muslim women.

Long-term structural co-funding is needed (in addition to project-based funding) to carry on continuous work on age and race issues.

Look for ‘entry points’ in older people’s organisations intending to work with migrants.

Include an information session on working with older migrants in the overall training curricula.

Take into account the issue of economic class in addition to age, gender or ethnicity aspects when analysing the situation of older migrants or ethnic minorities.

Consider cultural and linguistic barriers to participation when organising local workshops, e.g. ensuring suitable days, at appropriate times, in accessible places and with the necessary translators etc.
LONG-TERM CARE AND HEALTH FOR THE VERY OLD AND VULNERABLE – IRISH EXPERIENCE

Working

> A free medical card is provided at the age of 70 to all older people giving the right to free medical services such as doctor’s visits, drugs, chiropody and other provisions including free inpatient care at hospitals.

Not working

> Most people stop working earlier than the age of 70. A sharp fall in their income consequently follows as the average state pension is 34% of the average wage. Moreover, older women face a high risk of poverty due to the lack of recognition of their atypical career paths.

> Because of a huge income drop in the period between stopping full time paid employment and the age of 70, visits to a doctor and the purchase of medicinal drugs may stop altogether. The result can often be that many health issues which arise are not treated in time.

> While people have entitlements to long-term care and health services, their ability to access these is hampered by an insufficient number of providers of key services such as chiropody, prostrate and breast screening.

> Although more vulnerable older people can access emergency hospital services, there is a lack of adequate provision of long-term care facilities such as sheltered accommodation, day care centres or full residential care provision. Access to these facilities is further compounded by the lack of clarity as to what entitlements people have. Furthermore, concern about these matters may aggravate the health of those older people affected.

What is needed?

Provision of a medical card to all those aged 65-69 so that their health will be looked after in the critical 5 year period prior to the age of 70.

Documentation showing clearly defined rights and entitlements for all older people to health services and long-term care.

Provision of sufficient long-term care places to ensure that the needs of all older people are met within their own local areas.

Increase the level of respite care facilities as well as the number of day care beds available in local areas.

Better resources and pay for carers especially home carers.

 Guarantee that those people (less than 5%) who need long-term care for two years or less receive this as and when they need it.

Make it a right for older people to receive the care they and their families require for them as they get frailer and more in need of assistance as a consequence of the ageing process.

HOUSING AND HEATING – LITHUANIAN EXPERIENCE

Working

> Heating allowances can make a big difference to older people on low incomes. These should be awarded automatically to all older people.

> Where ‘cool rooms’ have been introduced to care homes this can make a considerable difference to the well-being of individuals during the hot summer months.

Not working

> There is a lack of accessible flats or houses. This means people can find it difficult to bring home shopping and when mobility becomes severely reduced an individual can become isolated in their home.

> Where heating allowances require the making of periodic claims, the administration involved can become a burden obstructing individuals from accessing their rights.

> It can become too expensive to heat their housing yet older people can find moving to more suitable accommodation too much of a challenge.

> Living standards do not meet essential requirements, i.e. older people often live without fairly ‘basic’ commodities such as proper heating systems, indoor lavatories and clean running water.

> Little attention is paid to neighbourhood environment to guarantee a sense of security to older citizens.

“Don’t our elderly need medicine or medical exams? What should they do?”

Mrs Sofia, 59, Roma in Athens, Greece
II. OLDER PEOPLE’S VIEWS: WHAT MATTERS?

What is needed?

Issues are not limited to heating in winter as there are equally crucial issues surrounding keeping cool in the summer.

Increased security measures, particularly in isolated communities, such as panic buttons can be useful in improving a sense of security which can be crucial to an individual’s well-being.

Raise awareness of people in their 40s and 50s of what their future needs will be so that they can prepare better for their old age.

More affordable, small and accessible housing to better suit the changing accommodation needs of older people.

Increased home care services are necessary to allow those who wish to stay in their own homes to do so for longer.

Involve older people in community planning to ensure that local environments remain accessible for older people.

More funds should be allocated to regional development including decent housing in rural areas.

INCOME – UK EXPERIENCE

Working

> Women tend to find that career breaks and part-time work are detrimental to their pension entitlements.

What is needed?

Guarantee a strong basic pension payable to everyone. Alternatively, a strong pension should be automatically paid to the less well off in order to help the most impoverished older people while maintaining their sense of dignity and self-respect.

Explain to people that they are justified in claiming their rights under social security systems.

Assess adequate income on the basis of what people need to spend – including on healthcare, heating and transport costs – as poverty cannot simply be measured in terms of monetary income.

Consider career breaks taken for caring responsibilities – notably for children or older relatives – in the calculation of pension entitlements.

Provide clear and exhaustive information for older people about their rights i.e. although NGOs and community groups play a role in helping people access information, it is the state’s responsibility to ensure that people receive the necessary information.

Not working

> Where means testing requires individuals to take active steps to demonstrate that they meet the criteria to claim benefits, the take up rate is low among those who most need such assistance. It seems that this is to do with access to information, ability to pursue individual rights, issues of self-respect, and continuing perceptions of stigma and unease attached to asking for help.

> People with mobility problems often lose their right to disability allowance when they reach pensionable age and yet they still require the financial support provided by this in order to remain active and independent.

> The value of pensions is eroded quickly as monetary increases do not keep up with inflation or the cost of living.

‘The young, handsome and rich today will one day became pensioners. That’s why the government and ourselves must take care of older people.’

Female participant, 72, Lithuania
“The lack of money causes problems in all areas health, nutrition, culture and education. [Older] People have to cut down expenses on food, on heating etc. I noticed that they buy food with expired best-by dates that they put the heating on only in one room.”

Mrs Dalou, 70, Cologne, Germany
Following the consecutive stages of the 2006 NAPs process, the project looked at different aspects of the work that older people and their organisations have to do in order to develop their role in the process and to promote the voice of vulnerable older people to the maximum in policy-making. All the project participants, including national policymakers, met at five AGE/inc transnational conferences held during the project and developed the following recommendations:

HOW TO JOIN TOGETHER EU AND UN SOCIAL INCLUSION PROCESSES? (COLOGNE CONFERENCE)

The EU and UN programmes and work regarding ageing offer a clear potential to develop the fight against poverty and exclusion at national, regional and local levels. Older people’s associations need to further develop the way they share information and learning at an international level in order to make the most effective use of these processes and to promote real policy change on the ground.

European social inclusion process versus the United Nations International Plan on Ageing

The EU social inclusion process
> It provides great opportunities for NGOs to engage with governments since the clear, open structure means that they can be aware when governments are preparing relevant documents. It is positive that governments are respecting the common timetable set out for the process.
> It supports the participation of all actors and particularly those at risk of poverty and exclusion. This can be used to push for positive policy outcomes.
> Clear objectives are set out in terms of fighting poverty and social exclusion in general and older people have a unique place in this process.

The UN International Plan on Ageing
> It sets out objectives which are more specifically related to older people and has concrete aims in the field of social inclusion.
> Clear references to developing cooperation with NGOs are welcomed and offer opportunities to have a positive impact on policies, including the establishment of recognised NGO contacts to work in parallel with government-level ‘Focal Points on Ageing’.
> It develops ageing mainstreaming efforts.

> The process is less clear and it is not apparent that governments are following-up their commitments.

To develop synergies between both processes the following are needed:
> An Open structure and a common timetable enabling NGOs to engage closely with governments;
> More explicit objectives to fight poverty and social exclusion;
> Targets supporting the participation of all stakeholders and, in particular, those most at risk of poverty and exclusion;
> Development of indicators to monitor implementation; and
> Strengthened mutual learning and international exchange of information and best practice among older people’s organisations.

Positive synergies between the strands of the streamlined OMC on social protection and social inclusion

Streamlining the social protection and social inclusion processes should serve to reinforce the social inclusion objectives within the social protection reforms.

The streamlined, integrated process will provide greater opportunities to highlight inconsistencies within government policy-making i.e. if policy promises are made in the context of social inclusion work which are then being undermined by contrary policy commitments in the field of social protection reforms, it should be easier to draw political attention to this.

Streamlining should be used by governments to reinforce the participation of older people and their associations in these policy areas.

‘My pension is far too low! My quality of life is reduced dramatically. I’ve tried for jobs – but the answer is always that I am too old! Part-time jobs are not worth my while as state help to pay the rent is then taken away. I’m treated as a second-class idiot with no brain. I am not in my dotage yet!’

Participant, UK
Streamlining should also be used to increase the political visibility of social protection and social inclusion policy issues at national level.

The subject of ageing (of both individuals and society) is a crucial area that relates to all aspects of the social protection and social inclusion agenda – it would therefore be worthwhile for the Commission and the Member States to devote some time and energy to developing their understanding of these issues during the so-called ‘light years’ in between the submission of national strategies on social inclusion.

WHAT COMMON POLICY MESSAGES BEST DEFEND OPEP’S RIGHTS? (LONDON CONFERENCE)

Some key themes and messages were identified which reflect common topics and concerns for all the partner countries and can thus be addressed in social inclusion strategies at both EU and national levels.

Participatory Government

Direct consultations with older people, such as through informal meetings, reinforce participative democracy and should be promoted as a way to involve citizens in policy-making. However, in order to ensure that this dialogue with older people is honest and effective, this process must take place within a defined framework where the aims, objectives and expectations on both sides are clarified.

NGOs have to facilitate older people’s involvement in community planning decision-making processes in countries where such practice exists. Older people’s boards and councils should be established and developed across the EU, including in small towns and villages at local level, as a method of engaging with older people in crucial issues that concern their daily lives. Older people’s associations should also try to ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable older people is more accurately conveyed to governments and decision-makers.

Groups from the grass roots level, including the most vulnerable people, must be actively included in policy-making.

Administration and Public Services

It is often not possible for older people to access their rights without assistance. It is the state’s responsibility to provide all the information and support necessary to allow people to claim their rights – in some cases this will mean individualised support, sometimes outside the normal administrative structures.

Access to information should be simplified by providing one contact point for the public. Much more information on benefits and rights should be given to people automatically without requiring them to request this. Much more support should be provided to help vulnerable older people access their rights. Although local groups and NGOs can help with this, the state should take responsibility for ensuring that the support structures are in place.

Older people should be given all necessary assistance to access their rights.

Institutional Care

There is a general lack of homes for people with specific needs and minimum standards can be low and not properly enforced in the existing ones. More importantly, care is not sufficiently individualised e.g. all residents are often offered only one choice of activity. In some extreme cases the individual ends up with no choice as to their routine as home care service providers often lack time and staff. Nurses and other care professionals are typically underpaid and overworked. This leads to high levels of stress which can further reduce the quality of care provided.

Families of older people need to have the opportunity to be able to complain to local authorities who will then enter residential homes to ensure that standards are being met. They should not have to complain directly to staff as this can affect relationships and the quality of care their elderly relations receive. An independent body such as an NGO should have the authority to visit homes without warning to monitor standards and check for signs of negligence or abuse. Finally, there should be a gen-

“It seems to me that our deputies in local and national parliaments should be more interested about the real problems of their voters. There is a political centralisation at the expense of lower authorities and the problems which are arising are usually underestimated. I think that the voice of older people should be reinforced by seniors’ councils in the main cities throughout the Czech Republic.”

Male participant, 77, Jihlava, Czech Republic
uine evaluation of the needs and preferences of individuals using such services and provision should be made for individualised care and activities.

**Minimum standards help set benchmarks for requirements in care provision.**

**Lifelong Learning**

Where learning opportunities are provided, these can open up new opportunities for participation and inclusion of older people. However, there is a danger that such opportunities are only made available for those older people who are financially comfortable. Efforts need to be made to reach the most vulnerable and to provide them with the skills they really need.

More efforts are also needed to demonstrate to older people themselves the benefits of learning new skills in later life. It is equally important to develop links with education ministries as well as with social affairs ministries. Lifelong learning opportunities can be crucial in both preventing older people from falling into a situation of exclusion and also to bring them out of such circumstances.

**Access to education is an issue of basic rights and not merely a detail.**

**Culture and Tourism**

While aspects such as holidays and leisure activities may appear to be unnecessary luxuries, these should in fact be seen as basic rights and an equal access to these should be guaranteed to all citizens regardless of their age or social status.

Governments should actively promote access to culture in their policies e.g. provide a culture card for certain societal groups including older people that guarantees discounted access to cultural activities and events and encourages health tourism. Particular attention needs to be paid to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged older people as they are often not able to take advantage of discounts and holidays because their needs are insufficiently supported to allow their participation.

**Personal fulfilment through leisure and social activities helps to combat social exclusion.**

**Attitudes, the Media and Discrimination**

Public attitudes towards older people need to be improved, although it is not clear how this can be done. Growing numbers of older people are starting to drive change in attitudes towards their age group, particularly as their ‘market value’ is becoming increasingly apparent. It is clear that older people themselves need to be active in protesting against negative stereotypes.

Anti-discrimination action needs to be developed to cover negative discrimination in access to goods, facilities and services and this needs to be implemented in a way that protects older people from such discrimination while protecting age-based benefits and advantages they currently enjoy.

**Media, governments and authorities are responsible for improving the way that older people are portrayed.**

**III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OLDER PEOPLE’S ORGANISATIONS**

“We are forced to stay at home or come here (social club-KAPI). We would like to go to the movies or to a theatre. We live in a city with so many challenges and ‘stimulations’...”

Mrs Mara, Athens, Greece

**Gender**

The transmission of traditional roles between men and women through education has a negative impact on the way women and men deal with various aspects of life in old age, such as social integration, coping with financial difficulties, etc. A shift from family-linked pension rights to individualised rights is necessary to guarantee adequate incomes in retirement for women. Education should teach key life skills to both genders equally throughout life so that domestic responsibilities can be shared more equally within the family.

There is a need to educate older people, in particular men, as regards their health. Greater self-responsibility in maintaining good physical health and an increased awareness of health promoting lifestyles are needed to allow individuals to deal better with ageing problems.

**Divergence in women’s and men’s perception of and experience of poverty and social exclusion needs to be addressed through policy measures.**

**The very old and vulnerable older people**

Active efforts to reach out, find, inform and help vulnerable older people are required.

Policies that target the most vulnerable should not require these people to take the lead in demanding...
their rights. Policy measures have to foresee greater provision for accommodation for people with reduced mobility and increase efforts to improve security and the sense of security in neighbourhoods. This includes efforts to keep localities clean and attractive.

Older people’s associations themselves need to ensure that they include the voice of the most vulnerable in their work. In the context of consultation with governments, they should ensure that they take forward the messages they receive to these decision makers.

*Policies targeting the worst off should reach those who are unable to claim their rights.*

**HOW TO PARTICIPATE MOST EFFECTIVELY IN PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS? (PRAGUE CONFERENCE)**

Using the partners’ experiences and involvement in the 2006 NAPs, participants analysed various consultation mechanisms from the perspective of governments and NGOs. They also examined the role of older people in participatory democracy with a particular focus on their empowerment and the role of organisations of such groups.

**What can be improved with regard to governments’ approaches in implementing consultation on social inclusion?**

> Policy measures on older people should be placed within a comprehensive framework, in consultation with NGOs, with expected outcomes, deadlines and budget allocation in order to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of such measures.
> Improve older people’s access to local authorities (openness and transparency of public authorities) so that OPEP become important players in the local policy-making process.
> Power sharing between local and national authorities is required. From the NGO perspective, it is vital that local authorities can address older people’s demands from the grass roots level right up to the regional, federal and national levels.
> Reinforce dialogue and debate on the social inclusion process by assigning civil servants as contact persons for civil society, such as the Minister for older people in Sweden, the Ombudsman in Finland etc.
> Given the complexity of issues related to the ageing population (i.e. pension reforms, social services), these civil servants could facilitate the exchange of experiences and good practices on how to better address the interests of older people who are affected by reforms such as on health care services, pension systems, etc.
> Bring together the civil servants who coordinate the NAPs with those who draft them and those who implement the policies.
> Ensure information exchange about ongoing initiatives and the implementation of social inclusion policies, so that local and regional politicians, together with NGO networks, can share knowledge and experience to find the right solutions.

**What can be improved with regard to NGO approaches to participation in consultation on social inclusion?**

> Play a role not only in drafting but also in the monitoring and implementation of policies. A full recognition of their active involvement at these stages is indispensable.
> Promote lifelong education and training to build older people’s self-confidence and to encourage their creativity, pride and visibility, as well as improving their communication skills.
> When organisations representing OPEP decide to speak on their behalf to politicians, it is crucial to remain a neutral mediator in conveying the voice from the grass roots level.
> Reinforce NGO participation in policy planning locally, as this is the level which is closest to people confronted with social exclusion. Policy makers and civil servants at national level are less aware of local problems. For NGOs, this raises the issue of where executive power is situated and consequently where to put their efforts to influence the content of the NAPs on social inclusion.
> Strengthen co-operation and co-ordination of positions and actions with other networks, e.g. representing youth, family, women. Change the negative image of older people and of ageing through the development of an intergenerational perspective and an interdisciplinary approach.
> Increase older people organisations’ visibility and bring greater attention to age discrimination related issues as, in comparison to other NGO networks, age NGOs tend to be less vocal in some Member States.
> Older people’s associations themselves need to ensure that they include the voice of the most vulnerable in their work, i.e. make efforts to reach the most vulnerable and to provide the necessary support to allow them to participate in local workshops.

**How to empower vulnerable older people?**

> Include OPEP in NGO activities – attempt to involve older people in the daily work of networks,
III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OLDER PEOPLE’S ORGANISATIONS

i.e. practice active inclusion within their own structures in order to provide an example to society and to local authorities.

> Provide practical experience – get OPEP involved in local committees, working groups, research projects etc. across all themes and at both local and national level.
> Make OPEP visible – by including them in panels, juries etc.
> Inform systematically – provide updated and relevant information to OPEP to facilitate their participation in society.
> Develop social activities – in order to reinforce self confidence among OPEP and to develop their pride in being old.
> Ensure feedback – develop reporting mechanisms i.e. contributions to research reports, telephone interviews.
> Offer training – to develop skills e.g. in public speaking, debating, presenting cases, working with new technologies.
> Promote gender equality – ensure better involvement of older women who are disproportionately excluded from the decision-making process.
> Promote mutual support – develop a sense of solidarity within OPEP communities.

How to ensure older people’s voices are heard?

> Use the media – especially local radio and television i.e. morning programmes to raise awareness about older people’s issues.
> ‘Spotlight’ messages – focus on communication to make messages short and to-the-point.
> Share experiences and ideas – disseminate examples of good practices outside of older people networks.
> Act politically – develop a list of demands and send it out to candidates prior to elections.
> Innovate – in order to increase understanding about OPEP initiate stunts i.e. get a politician to live on an average pension for a week or month and to report back on their experience of this.
> Tell people’s stories – use concrete examples of age discrimination i.e. present real cases from every day life.
> Mobilise older voters – involve them directly in lobbying activities i.e. before local elections.
> Work systematically – repeat the same actions in both the mid and long-term to ensure a better visibility and understanding of these initiatives i.e. repeated campaigns every year, and keep in touch and reinforce contact with the same civil servants and/or politicians.

HOW TO MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY? (DUBLIN CONFERENCE)

Participants analysed the role of older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their organisations, in the monitoring and evaluation of the NAPs on social inclusion. The discussions also looked at the definition and measurement of poverty and social exclusion of older people.

How to involve older people and their organisations in monitoring and evaluating policies on poverty and social exclusion at all levels?

> Form alliances with the social partners, other civil society representatives or political parties in order to make the voice of older people heard as widely as possible.
> Seek exchanges of practices and knowledge with other NGOs and the social partners, researcher institutes and the private sector at local, regional, national and international levels.
> Develop contacts with other organisations not specifically related to age and ageing (e.g. unemployed, disabled, migrant, etc.) with a view to achieving a broad consensus on how to deal with social inclusion policy.
> Educate and train people over 50 to make better use of communication tools in order to express their demands and reinforce their right to participate in decision-making processes.
> Use well-known national public personalities to increase the visibility of poverty and social inclusion issues by involving them in charity events, campaigns and debates on older people; their celebrity can help to make more visible issues of poverty and social exclusion.
> Create lobbying organisations such as senior citizens parliaments, which can empower older people and facilitate their participation in policy debate.

“It is very important to improve the image of older people in society and I think that the media play a very important role in this. Sometimes you can find only a derogatory image of older people who are shown in the media mainly as incapable, dependant, and with no importance for society.”

Female participant, 81, Prague, Czech Republic
> Create neighbourhood networks of people to evaluate the needs of the most excluded and bring their assessments to the attention of local and national governments.
> Negotiate special budget lines at the local and national levels to support organisations representing OPEP.
> Set up formal frameworks or partnerships between governments, local authorities, services providers and NGOs representing older people in order to facilitate the actual delivery of services and a common monitoring of processes.
> Carry out qualitative and quantitative research within NGOs on social exclusion and poverty, drawing on the direct experience of individual older people in order to reinforce their advocacy work and improve service delivery.
> Raise awareness of older people’s situations among local authorities via reports, presentations and workshops, with the direct participation of excluded older people.
> Involve the media to the largest possible extent to help to raise public awareness about OPEP, including their specific and highest priority needs.

How to measure poverty and social exclusion of older people?

There are commonly understood and accepted measures to define poverty and/or social exclusion. However, one has to bear in mind that poverty and social exclusion can mean different things to different people as self perception also defines one’s sense of social exclusion.

The broad approach to understanding social exclusion among older people should incorporate the following aspects:
> Social relationships (such as contact with family and friends);
> Cultural activities (such as going to the cinema or theatre);
> Civic activities (such as being a member of a local interest group, doing voluntary work, voting);
> Access to basic services (such as social and health services, postal services, transport, local shops, etc.);
> Basic living amenities (such as decent housing, space to receive guests, availability of a bathroom/shower, an equipped kitchen); these standards should be guaranteed to everybody;
> Access to information and training, including access to professional retraining and new technologies;
> Neighbourhood inclusion (feeling safe in the local area);
> Financial products (such as a bank account or long-term savings);
> Material consumption capacity (such as being able to afford household utilities and an annual holiday).

What aspects of quality of life should be taken into account when measuring the impact of social inclusion policy?

A monetary-based definition of social inclusion does not take into account the factors that measure the quality of life. The notion of quality of life, which has an indisputably positive meaning, helps those people confronted with social exclusion and poverty to be certain that their concerns are taken into account in the policy-making process without risk of stigmatisation.

It is therefore necessary to assess social inclusion policy from a broader perspective and to reflect on a broader definition and understanding of the notion of ‘quality of life’. Quality of life is a concept that guarantees that people confronted with all types of life handicaps receive a real recognition of their individual and often very specific, problems, such as:
> Sufficient income;
> Social networks;
> Adequate and easily accessible services;
> Good quality and affordable, if not free, health, social services and long-term care;
> Right to dignity;
> Societal image, etc.

What sub-groups or categories of older people need special attention by policy-makers?

When designing and implementing social inclusion actions and measures, it is crucial to mainstream needs, particularly for the most vulnerable groups of older people whose perspectives on social inclusion policy are often missing:
> People with disabilities;
> Older women and widows living on a husband’s pension;
> People with dementia;
> Abused and neglected people;
> Homeless older people;
> Migrants;
> Those for whom literacy is a barrier;
> Partners of people who have committed criminal offences;
> People living in rural areas;
> Enhancement of the mobility of older people;
> Family members who look after vulnerable elderly relatives.

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES FOR AGE’S WORK ON SOCIAL INCLUSION? (VILNIUS CONFERENCE)

AGE intends to develop its future work on social inclusion, and will:

> Push forward the project findings and key messages at the EU level in order to influence the national policy-making level which eventually filters down to local government and municipalities etc;
> Broaden the scope of AGE’s social inclusion agenda to include issues such as consumer protection, new technologies, transport, social participation, health, education etc;
> Call for the realignment of boundaries between the national and EU competences for social policies; the project provided an extensive list of issues on which older people would like the EU to take the initiative and propose policy solutions;
> Guide AGE member organisations as to which are the strongest levers for policy change;
> Promote the role of older people within the social partnerships at EU level, i.e. older people must be considered as full stakeholders;
> Promote policy priorities related to social inclusion within AGE and transfer skills and knowledge among AGE members;
> Recognise contextual differences among AGE member organisations i.e. different stages of development in the social field across Member States with diverse barriers in policy-making, and accommodate these in AGE policy positions or statements;
> Liaise between the EU social inclusion policy agenda and national developments or openings and opportunities in the social field e.g. legislative initiatives. The AGE Social Inclusion expert Group (SIEG) should draw on political discussions that take place in Member States and transform this knowledge into AGE actions;
> Alter the issue of the social exclusion of older people into a positive discourse on about the prevention and promotion of social inclusion;
> Continue pressurising national governments to prioritise work on the potential exclusion of older people in order to initiate policy and legislative changes to prevent these people from falling below the poverty line and/or becoming socially excluded;

> Focus on the development of new indicators for social inclusion such as non-monetary ones i.e. take a ‘quality of life’ approach to measure the effectiveness of social inclusion policies;
> Take full advantage of the involvement of all relevant bodies dealing with older people’s issues, including health service executives as they often have a role that is equal in important to that of local government in defining policy measures;
> Promote a recording or evaluation system for the everyday practice of social services providers. Service delivery can also be a means of recording the concerns and interests of older people. The conclusions and requests from such measures will enrich workshop discussions and reinforce key policy messages.

Mainstreaming of poverty and social exclusion issues into the work of the AGE Secretariat in Brussels and its national member organisations:

> Concentrate AGE’s efforts on the most disadvantaged older people as issues of poverty and social exclusion have already become central to AGE’s policy work;
> Reinforce the capacity building of its members through their participation in AGE’s Social Inclusion Expert Group (SIEG) and to ultimately seek to influence policy change;
> Take up the issues raised in the project workshops within the work of SIEG and other AGE expert groups and link these to an overall analysis of AGE’s priority issues such as pension adequacy and poverty impact, means testing, the connections between poor health and social exclusion, institutional care, e-inclusion etc;
> Further develop cooperation among AGE members to share and use their expertise as widely as possible, e.g. widely disperse Help the Aged’s recommendations from the Eastern and Central European Network project partners regarding the work of AGE expert groups;
> Repeat the project’s key messages ‘again and again’ at both EU and national levels in order to influence programmes and actions from the grass roots perspective;

‘I’d feel really unsafe in this area at night. Of course, the area then feels even worse because no one goes out at night.’

Participant, Aylesbury Estate UK
Consider more innovative ways or channels of communicating these messages, e.g. through universities, academic research centres, intergenerational initiatives etc;

Disseminate the results of AGE’s work to other NGOs in view of potential alliances in social inclusion processes;

While a common method for dissemination is necessary, this should be adapted to each country’s specific context; national AGE member organisations will be responsible for making these adaptations;

Help members in the new EU Member States to gain confidence and to learn about the social inclusion process, as well as to show them how they can affect policy change;

AGE member organisations should seek to improve the conditions of the older people they work with and for and to speak effectively with representatives from NGOs and ministries in all relevant fields such as transport, housing and education etc.

“I live alone, I am sick. I am afraid of loneliness. But the most difficult problem I have to contend with is the minimum income I have to live on which is only, 600 euros. I cry a lot but try to look calm and collected when I go out... Retirement should be about rest and relaxation but I find it a desperate struggle instead”

Mrs Siam, 61, Lebanese origin, Marseille, France
AGE’s ultimate objective is to improve the quality of life for older people by changing the perception of them and improving the resources that are allocated to older people. This project demonstrated that older people can and want to record and assess their own needs. While policy-makers have to provide older people with opportunities to be trained and empowered them through such means, a participatory approach in the assessment of their direct needs must become a critical element in policy planning at all levels. The direct involvement of older people confronted with poverty and/or social exclusion in policy-making should eventually ensure that the realities that older people face on the ground are truly reflected in social inclusion policy development and implementation, including in processes such as the OMC/SPSI and the Member States NAPs on social inclusion.

With regard to the EU social inclusion process, although the streamlined OMC/SPSI provides a useful framework for debate and bring national policy agendas closer together, it is not the only framework and is not necessarily the most effective structure to secure and shape policy changes across the European Union. The effectiveness of the method chosen seems indeed to be very much dependent on the attitude of national governments with regard to the principle of the direct participation of citizens, and on the extent to which policy-making is coordinated between local, regional, national and European levels. Further strengthening of all the existing initiatives and structures dealing with social inclusion at all levels will therefore be necessary to fully exploit their mutual potential and added value.

The AGE/inc workshop tool-kit will remain a key instrument for the AGE national networks to consult older people confronted with poverty and social exclusion and, eventually, to strengthen their role in the implementation and further development of social inclusion strategies, such as the NAPs. It is equally important that the very old and most excluded older people are at the heart of this work to develop policy-makers’ broader sensitiveness and understanding of the feelings and issues affecting this invisible group in today’s societies.
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