



Bundesministerium  
für Familie, Senioren, Frauen  
und Jugend

# Presse- mitteilung

Pressesprecherin: Beate Moser  
Dienstgebäude: Taubenstraße 42–43, 10117 Berlin

Telefon: 030-20655-1061, -1062  
Fax: 030-20655-1111

eMail: [presse@bmfsfj.bund.de](mailto:presse@bmfsfj.bund.de)  
Internet: [www.bmfsfj.de](http://www.bmfsfj.de)

Embargoed until delivery

Please check against delivery !

## **Opening address**

**Federal Minister for Family Affairs,  
Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**

**Dr. Christine Bergmann,**

**UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing  
on 11 September 2002 in Berlin**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Berlin. It is my privilege and pleasure to warmly welcome, on behalf of the Federal Government, all participants in the ECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing.

I welcome the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Under-Secretary-General Ms. Schmögnerová. I am delighted that so many government delegations, international governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations as well as many other guests have accepted the invitation to this Conference. Thank you also for electing me to the Chair.

Throughout the world, demographic change is among the central challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Population ageing concerns all our countries, albeit to different degrees. It is a phenomenon that calls for long-term political responses and intensified co-operation.

Adopted in Madrid last April, the Second International Plan of Action on Ageing provides the foundation for these endeavours. It reveals the current implications of population change and sets out our possibilities for action. At its heart is the aim to create a society for all ages.

This is what we will be doing - specifying these global recommendations for use in our region and adopting a joint strategy for their implementation. The Regional Implementation Strategy we are about to adopt will be the first world-wide to translate the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing into reality. In adopting it, we are sending a signal on how to deal with the challenges and opportunities inherent in demographic change.

At this point, I would like to thank all those who took part in preparing this Conference. May I express my special gratitude to the Secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Spanish Government as the hosts of the Second World Assembly on Ageing.

The decline in birth rates and the increasing life expectancy are changing the age structure of our societies.

The rise in longevity is a decisive step forward. Today, many seniors can enjoy their lives in good health and with independent means. Others, though, are threatened by social exclusion and isolation.

The problems of our region vary widely. In many countries, demographic changes are making themselves felt even now. In others, economic and social processes involved in "catching up" account for the biggest current challenge.

We all know: Demographic change leads to profound structural changes to which we must jointly respond. And in mounting this response, we need a sound basis for our co-operation and a policy that fully mainstreams this change. Only through this approach can we help to create a society in which all generations take an equal part and are completely integrated.

Allow me to highlight some fields of policy that are particularly affected by this transformation:

As a result of population ageing, the number of employable persons in our countries keeps falling while the number of persons who are not economically active is on the rise. This has implications for our social security systems.

Without fundamental reforms, the sustainability of our pensions systems, in particular, cannot be safeguarded. Specifically, these reforms must provide equitable burden-sharing among generations. In this area, it is imperative that reform efforts continue. We must uphold social protection schemes and secure all ageing persons a standard of living that allows them to grow old in dignity.

Another central aim is to promote the health and well-being of our citizens throughout the course of their lives. In this context, we confront the challenge of retaining universal access to health care while preventing the exclusion of socially disadvantaged groups. A high level of health care must be secured in the long term as must its long-term financial sustainability. This we have to do bearing in mind that the number of dependent persons is likely to rise even further over the coming years, which creates a need for robust framework conditions that are reliable in the long term.

Intensified international co-operation will significantly contribute to profit from comparing best practices in our countries.

Demographic change also impacts on the economy. Even today, many enterprises lament a shortage of properly qualified staff. Scientists forecast that this shortage is likely to worsen, jeopardising the corporate potential for innovation.

When birth rates fall and life expectancy rises, the labour market also suffers major repercussions:

first of all, the pool of economically active persons shrinks and second, the average age of the gainfully employed population rises.

In the face of this development, we must rethink our policies. For a long time, many of us have seen the relatively high unemployment rate among the elderly as a reason to increasingly remove the ageing from the labour market. This practice would, it was hoped, make more room for younger persons; a hope which, however, only bore out to a limited extent. While easy enough for policy-makers to push through, early retirement schemes showed little effectiveness in creating new employment opportunities and were expensive into the bargain.

For us to secure our economic power in the long run, we must, in the future, fall back more strongly on the experience, the specific know-how and the social skills of the elderly than we have done so far. We therefore must improve their employment prospects of older persons.

The working world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is increasingly knowledge- and information-based. Staff skills and proficiency have come to be the most important sources of corporate success. What is needed, therefore, are improved qualification schemes and more fluid transitions between education, training and employment.

This poses a challenge to our education systems and establishments. The conventional succession of education, training and work must be replaced by novel forms that are flexible and allow more time for education or family. People of all ages must be given the opportunity to acquire new skills. Lifelong learning ensures staff employability. This benefits not only the enterprise, but especially increases the quality of life and the social development of all age groups.

The rising economic activity rate of women is increasingly important in securing the efficiency of our national economies and consequently in coping with the impacts of demographic change. The prerequisite for their doing so is full gender equality in the world of work and the family. Many fathers and mothers today find it hard to reconcile the demands placed on them by both spheres of life. This is why we need a sufficient number of good child-care facilities, family-friendly working hours, and more flexible transitions between the job and family. Here, the enterprises are supposed to come forward. The world of work must be designed in such a way that it turns into a rewarding world to live in for women and men even if they have a family. This is an important prerequisite for promoting genuine gender partnership that also includes household chores, care and nursing.

We must also respond to the profound changes in family structures. We need a modern policy for families that is based on the principles of solidarity, partnership and equality.

Our image of older persons largely determines their integration into society. Old age may not be equated with illness or frailty. Today, many seniors continue to be healthy, materially secure and independent well into a high age. This late freedom is a major boon for us all. We want this to become the reality in all countries of the region.

Precisely the elderly contribute in manifold ways to the well-being of our families. They support the younger generation and help in giving care to other family members. Moreover, many ageing persons are socially involved. The work of many associations and initiatives would not be conceivable without their commitment. Frequently serving as volunteers, they contribute their know-how and share their knowledge.

This exchange boosts multigenerational solidarity and conserves the social capital of our societies. This is why I consider it so especially important that the social commitment of older persons be properly encouraged and acknowledged. We thereby enhance the possibilities of all generations to partake in and contribute to the social and economic development of our society.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once referred to population ageing as a "silent revolution". We can only cope with the enormous impacts of this revolution if we pursue a forward-looking and sustained policy. This is why we need a joint political strategy for our region. It will have to reflect the variety of situations obtaining in the individual countries and encourage the exchange of information, know-how and best practices. All actors must contribute their share and be aware of their responsibility. The exemplary participation of IGOs and NGOs in the negotiation process should continue when it comes to implementing our decisions.

This conference provides the opportunity to establish close co-operation between Member States.

I wish this Conference every success.

One year ago today, on September 11, 2001, thousands of innocent people lost their lives in the inferno of the World Trade Center, killed by a terrorist attack. In a wave of sympathy and solidarity with the victims and their families, people from all over the world expressed their feelings. The terrorist attack was launched not only on one nation, but on people from over 80 countries. This attack targeted all of us. Therefore, it will be in our common interest to avoid any repetition of such an atrocity and tragedy.

Today, we would like to commemorate the victims of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. All our sympathy goes out to them and their families. May I ask for a minute's silence in memory of the victims.

*Observance of a minute of silence*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Mme Under-Secretary-General Birgita Schmögerová, proceeds to hold her inaugural address, may I give the floor to the distinguished delegate of the U.S. who has asked to be given the opportunity to say a few words in this context.