

Ageing is a challenge, yet an opportunity for the society!

Population aging is a global phenomenon that, as in the developed world is becoming a growing issue in the developing countries alike; promoting good health of the elderly has a central role in the global response to the ageing population. Poor health, negative stereotypes and barriers to participation all currently marginalize this population group, undermine their contribution to society and increase the costs of population ageing. Investing in people's health and of elderly in particular, decreases the overall burden of disease, positively impacts their socio-economic position and encourages their independence and productivity, thus indirectly enabling huge benefits for the society as a whole. The fact that population

“Healthy ageing is a process of optimising opportunities for physical, social and mental health to enable older people to take an active part in society without discrimination and to enjoy an independent and good quality of life.”

*“Health Ageing - A Challenge for Europe”
Swedish National Institute of Public Health 2006:29*

ageing means increased need for health services and social benefits is incontestable, but at the same time it is also undeniable that the elderly are an important societal link and a significant societal and economic resource, contributing to the society as family members and active volunteers in the community.

Facts about Macedonia:

The United Nations estimate that in the coming period the percentage of elderly in the total population in Macedonia will increase; the age group of 60+ years will increase from 16.5% in 2009 to 33% in 2050, and the age group of 80+ years from 2.0% in 2009 to 6.8% in 2050.

In Macedonia the percentage of 60+ years population has increased from 13% in 1994, to 15% in 2002, and 16.6% in 2008. Such situation requires appropriate activities as a response to the growing needs of the increasing elderly population in the country.

As part of their mission and strategic determination towards healthy and active aging in Macedonia, the **Union of Associations of Retired Persons of the Republic of Macedonia (UARPM)** and **Centre for Regional Policy Research and Cooperation ‘Studiorum’**, in partnership with the Business Academy Smilevski and Project HOPE conducted a pilot research on the current situation and opportunities for active and healthy ageing in Macedonia and retired persons' opinions on how to improve them.

One of the main conclusions of the research is that the retired persons in the City of Skopje live an urban life, experiencing all its benefits and disadvantages. However, bearing in mind their specific societal position, as well as their particular needs for enhancing the quality and good health in their retired life, it is necessary to create additional benefits that would improve the healthy life-expectancy of this age group.

With regard to the conditions for active and healthy ageing, the retired persons are generally satisfied, but do consider that the issue is not appropriately addressed on the political agenda, and that the national and local authorities need to find more resources and solutions towards improving not just the conditions for the older population, but also their social status.

Table: Kinship of retired persons with cohabitants in their home

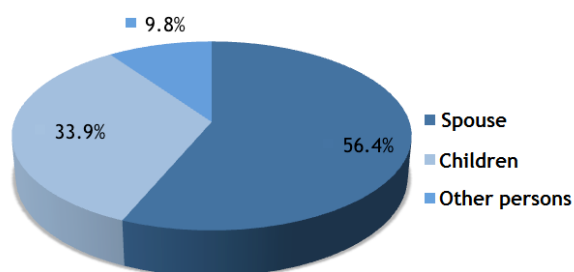
| | Spouse | Children | Children and their families | Other family | Other persons |
|-----------------------|--------|----------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Gjorche Petrov | 54.3% | 21.8% | 21.3% | 0.5% | 2.1% |
| Kisela Voda | 52.9% | 18.4% | 27.2% | 1.5% | 0.0% |
| Aerodrom | 65.3% | 15.9% | 17.6% | 0.0% | 1.2% |
| Saraj | 29.1% | 16.5% | 53.4% | 1.0% | 0.0% |
| Total | 50.4% | 18.2% | 29.9% | 0.8% | 0.8% |

According to the research, 50.4% of the respondents live in a household with their spouse, while 48.1% live with their children or with the children and their families.

Figure 1. Persons supported by the respondents

The research shows that a large number of the retired persons support other person(s) with their incomes.

Of those who responded to have dependents, 56.4% support the spouse, while 33.9% support their children.



Recommendations and Next Steps:

While aging presents a challenge to the society, still the longer life expectancy with enhanced quality and good health means extending the possibility for new and creative ways of contributing to the society, to its sustainable values, and furthermore to its future.

In this light, the following recommendations for future actions can be made:

- Retired persons represent over 15% of the total population in Macedonia; they have their opinions, wishes and attitudes, which they are ready to share with a view to improve the quality of their deserved retirement living. Reproducing this research on the total retired population in Macedonia will enable an in-depth identification of needs and problems, as well as of attitudes and ideas for addressing them.
- Advancing the conditions for healthy and active aging inevitably presupposes revision of the existing or adoption of new evidence-based policies. Lack of data, as a general problem in the country, is relevant for this area too, resulting in inability to conduct an appropriate evaluation/revision of policies that will lead to purposeful implementation. Creating a dynamic database of all retired persons in Macedonia that besides demographic data will provide insight into the socio-economic and health status and needs, would enable analyses based on realistic indicators and subsequently, preparation and adoption of research and evidence-based policies.
- Active aging is a proven model for good health, vitality and longevity. Developing mechanisms for active participation of the older population in the society will undoubtedly create many societal and economic benefits.