

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Katalin Bogyay
at the panel discussion on
Intergenerational Relations in an Ageing World
4 April 2017
Conference Room 7, UN Headquarters, New York

Distinguished Panellists and Participants,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to our side event, entitled “Intergenerational Relations in an Ageing World”, co-organised with the International Federation for Family Development. I would like to thank Mr Ignacio Socias, Director of IFFD for partnering with us on this very timely and relevant topic on the occasion of the 50th session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Today, we are going to talk about generations: the older generation, who have the wisdom and knowledge to share, but whom are often left behind; the young generation, who aim for achieving their full potential, but often do not have the background to do so; and finally parents, the middle-aged generation, who have double responsibilities in making sure that both the old and young generation are cared for.

These generations are held together by the family. The family is the smallest, most basic and strongest social community and, as such, it is the founding unit of the society. It is the most important source of solidarity for its members. The importance of family, and more generally, intergenerational support and solidarity lies in its ability to assist, care for and empower its members, as well as provide them protection against social exclusion and marginalisation.

Previously, generations living together provided for this support and solidarity for each other. Generations were sharing knowledge and experience, and rely on each other for care responsibilities and other forms of support, thus creating reciprocal, circular relations between generations. Nowadays, as the double-income, nuclear family model becomes more and more widespread, parents, and especially women face an increased double responsibility to provide care for their children and older members of the family, often living separately, even in considerable distances from each other. In order to fill this gap, the State and private actors have an increased responsibility in providing for these forms of assistance, and also in facilitating inter-generational transfers on a macro level.

I will talk about two main actors, with different needs within this system: mothers and the elderly.

In order to enable parents, and especially women, to balance their multiple responsibilities of work and unpaid care for their children and the elderly at the same time, the Hungarian government introduced different fiscal or other family-friendly measures.

Different childcare allowances are designed to financially support parents throughout the early childhood of their children. Until the child reaches 6 months of age, the child care fee provides 70% of last year's daily average gross earnings of the mother. In addition, if the mother decides to go back to the labour market when her child reaches 6 months old, she will continue to receive an allowance, called Child Care Fee Extra, besides her salary. There is another child care allowance designed for the caretaker parent between the child's 6 months to 2 years of age, and another, up to the child's third birthday. For parents raising three or more underage children, a child raising support is available until the youngest child becomes 8 years old.

Also, a new, demand-driven daycare nursery system is being developed, giving families an opportunity to choose among the different new forms of daycare services which are nursery, mini-nursery, workplace nursery and family nursery.

It is equally important to facilitate access to the labor market for the most vulnerable groups throughout generations. The Job Protection Action Plan offers allowances to employers recruiting and employing the most vulnerable worker groups, including workers below 25 and above 55 years old, as well as parents with young children.

Now, let me turn to another constituency of intergenerational relationships: the elderly.

Today, most developed countries face the phenomenon of demographic ageing. In Hungary, during the last 25 years, the proportion of the population of and above the age of 60 increased from one fifth to one fourth, and will reach one third of the population by 2060.

There are multiple challenges that the elderly have to face: financial insecurity, health problems, marginalisation and isolation. Elderly women are especially endangered in this regard. Women's life expectancy is 4-7 years higher than that of men; above the age of 70, the majority of women live alone, and the gender pay gap is also reflected in pensions. In consequence, older women are more exposed to the risk of poverty and isolation than men. On a macro level, an ageing population puts increased pressure on pension and health care systems, as well as employment.

The Hungarian Government considers older persons as valuable members of the society and important sources of knowledge and experience. Our programmes and initiatives aim to ensure a meaningful and healthy ageing in dignity, and to enable families as well as the society as a whole to benefit from the active presence of the elderly. With a view to the above, the Government, in line with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, determined the following objectives concerning older persons.

The first task is to enhance the financial security of older persons. In this regard, a reform of the pension system was undertaken in order to ensure the stability of the system, and preservation of the purchasing power of pensions. The Hungarian pension system has a compensatory effect on incomes: the 15% gender pension gap is lower than the 18% wage gap, and way lower than the average 40% difference recorded in the EU. In addition, the so-called widow's pension amounts to 30% of the deceased spouse's pension, thus slightly compensating for the financial disadvantages deriving from the departure of the spouse.

The second task is to support the preservation of senior citizens' physical-mental health and well-being. In this regard, special home nursing care and home hospice have been introduced two years ago, defined as population-focused basic healthcare activities. Appropriate screening, awareness-raising and the promotion of older persons' active participation in prevention are also key.

Besides financial security and health, another key area is promoting active ageing and inter-generational connectedness. Due to changes in demographic patterns, the elderly, on the other hand, has less exposure to intergenerational interactions, although it is still an important aspect of the life of retired persons: around 40% of men and 55% of women of retirement age play a significant role in looking after their grandchildren. Recognising these tendencies, the Government introduced the Women 40 Program, the so-called "grandmothers' pension", allowing women with at least 40 years of eligibility period, including gainful activity or childraising, to retire. This enables them to assist in caring for their grandchildren, thus providing parents the opportunity to re-integrate into the world of work and continue the professional career. Hitherto, a total of 186,000 women have used this option.

In Hungary, intergenerational relationships and active ageing is also supported on the societal level, by local authorities and civil organisations. These programs aim to provide information, reduce discrimination, preserve independence, and help maintain the sense of usefulness in the society. Let me share some best practices with you in this regard.

Providing for opportunities for voluntary work for older persons enables them to remain socially and mentally active as well as becoming involved in community life. In 2014, 35% of people of the age group between 55-74 was involved in voluntary work.

The Senior-Friendly Municipality Award is given by the Government, on the International Day of Older Persons, to local authorities actively engaging with elderly citizens to improve their quality of life or community life, or promote collaboration between generations. Between 2004 and 2015, the prize was awarded to 75 local authorities. The Prize for the Elderly is awarded to professional experts doing outstanding work for older persons.

In the scope of the memoir writing projects (2011-2013), 315 memoir writers were awarded a prize, and the winning works were collected in 3 anthologies, and the authors had the opportunity to meet the public at events organised all over the country. Between 2013 and 2015, cultural meetings were organised on two occasions for people above the age of 60

(Cross-border cultural and art contest for older persons), activating about 10 thousand people, and enabling the national finalists to perform all around the country.

Moreover, the “Family-friendly Country” project supported 94 value-creating activities jointly carried out by older and younger generations, side by side, such as cultural, leisure and educational activities and workshops. Concerning life-long learning, an increasing number of senior training centres are being established, offering training courses for older persons. Senior training forums, linked to major institutes of higher education, are becoming increasingly more wide-spread and more popular: it takes place at 26 further locations outside the institute, with the participation of 3 600 retired students, free of charge.

Recognising the role of the media in changing attitudes of the society, the Media for the Generations Award in 2016 is focused on the theme of “the irreplaceable role of the older generation in small communities”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All these policies contribute to the establishment of a family-oriented society, in which different generations live together in respect and consideration for each other, raising social awareness with a view to ensuring a better quality of life for older persons.

I really hope that this short presentation gave a useful insight into what states can do to promote intergenerational relations and support, and I look forward to hearing from all my fellow panellists about their ideas and points of view.

Thank you for your attention.