

INCLUSION:

Enhancing 65+ Access to Improved job opportunities via education and social support

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Summary

Recent years have shown an increase awareness among policy makers to the benefits of social participation among 65+ either in a range of social activities within and outside the labour market. At the same time, access to such activities has not been equally distributed. According to Principi and Jensen (2014) such access depends on governmental policies operating to enhance such access. Following their analysis, we define inclusion as access to social activities within and outside the labour market and we aim at putting forward a policy brief that would enhance inclusion in the sense of job opportunities as well as voluntary work against diversity of life course events shaping the material, cultural and social resources available to those 65+. We propose two foci for inclusionary policies aiming at 65+ participation: social support and adult education. The policies we propose follow earlier projects which have made communities more significant in the life of 65+ improving options to acquire knowledge about opportunities as well as instrumental and emotional support.

State of the Art – key findings

Older people often identify social inclusion as important to their quality of life and independence. They want to have good relationships with family and friends, to have a role, to feel useful and to be treated with respect. Opportunities to participate and make a positive contribution to community and society are integral to autonomy and therefore dignity. According to Community Care Website¹, risk factors that may lead to social exclusion include bereavement, loss of work and poor health. Age discrimination, sometimes alongside other forms of discrimination, can also contribute to the social isolation of older people. The very elderly are particularly likely to experience isolation. Some practical recommendations are also presented:

- Promote access to social networks for older people.
- Address transport issues that act as barriers to community participation.
- Interlink community projects, community centres and schools to increase levels of intergenerational social contact.

¹ <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2007/12/12/research-social-isolation-in-older-people/>

- Identify and respect the skills of older people, including those gained in previous employment.
- Ensure people are given ordinary opportunities to participate in the wider community through person-centred care planning.

Regardless of this existing knowledge, in many countries the issue of active and healthy ageing was not yet established as a priority in the state policy for the coming decades. Despite accumulating knowledge on the significance of poverty, isolation and broken access to services for 65+ who have retired with a work history of non-standard employment and/or small retirement allowance, projects directed at inclusion are still scarce.

Higher education increases labor market survival rates when aged 60+ by about 5% (Stenberg A. et al, 2013). The OECD and the EU have encouraged governments to stimulate retraining of older workers (OECD 1998, 2001, EU 2007, 2008), reflecting a widespread view that inadequate educations constitute an important reason for early retirement. However, drawing upon the results of the country reports carried out in the MoPAct project for two main categories of learning: formal higher education and employer-based training, it was found that in none of the 11 countries examined is there an ‘older student’ policy (Beblavý M. et al., 2015).

Even though public policies have sought to reduce this generational digital divide through a number of media literacy and e-learning projects, there has been little success due to their poor methodological approach. We need to tackle the design of digital literacy programs for older people based on criteria such as degree of autonomy and the possibilities for enjoying everyday life rather than just their economic situation or existing educational level. (Abad, L., 2014). Any project design, therefore, ought to take the individual differences and needs of older people into consideration, and such programmes are very hard to find.

Two major knowledge accumulation comparative projects took place in 2010 resulting in two thorough reports. The first one compared *Active Ageing and Gender Equality Policies: the employment and social inclusion of women and men of late working and early retirement age* across 30 European countries (Corsi et al., 2010). Indicating various labour market initiatives, this report, as well as more recent reports (such as the WG1 comparative framing reports), show how limited programmes directed at 65+ remain when focused on inclusion as related to the labour market alone. The second report compared 10 countries outside Europe (IFA, 2010)

indicating again a range of programmes supporting 65+ with inclusion remaining limited. To avoid this limitation and introduce a more comprehensive notion of inclusion, this preliminary draft paper seeks to identify operating policies in the Global North aiming at the promotion of social inclusion through improvement in four areas:

Innovative practices in the field: European, state and Local/community levels

- 1) The project of “Strength Centers” currently operate in 10 towns in Israel. Following Krumer-Nevo (2015) model of ‘poverty aware social work’, this project operates to enable isolated and excluded individuals dialogical support from specifically trained social workers. The project facilitates social workers’ skills in three areas: (1) Listening and learning from the 65+ which they approach about their needs and possibilities; (2) Supporting 65+ individuals’ access to material resources and additional services by accompanying their negotiation with communities’ organizations and authorities; (3) Connecting 65+ individuals to job opportunities, volunteering, among other social activities.
- 2) The project “Critical literacy, e-competence and later life” at Had-Dingli (Malta): a project which lasted five months, between July and November 2012, with e-literacy and e-competence sessions being coordinated by a graduate teacher in ICT. Sessions took place once a week and lasted two hours. This stemmed from commitment to utilise programmes in late-life learning as catalysts for improved levels of active citizenship amongst older adults in the community. The rationale for such a programme emerged from the fact that whilst pedagogies of adult learning are often divorced from issues of community participation, those that do explicitly link learning, community participation and social cohesion rarely focus on older adults (Etienne & Jackson, 2011). A significant objective of the learning programme was to increase the e-competence of older adults as a means to engage in political activism in their community. On the basis of Borg’s and Formosa’s ongoing volunteering work with the Had-Dingli Local Council, setting the late-life learning programme in this locality was from the outset the preferred option. This learning project provides further evidence that older adults can benefit substantially from non-formal learning as part of a fulfilling and active retirement. This means that the

education process is meant to empower and transform all those involved in the teaching-learning process. (Borg, C. et al., 2013)

Recommendation

In our policy recommendation we rely on Small's (2009) theory on the importance of neighborhoods for 'unanticipated gains', namely, the possibility that neighborhoods' residents who can be encouraged to attend community institutions, would benefit of the institutions' organizational network.

To enhance chances for 65+ to benefit of these unanticipated gains we focus on two main types of policies:

- 1) Policies related to aspects of adult education including digital literacy, general knowledge/interests/leisure; as well as more formal occupational training. Where adult education is available, the design of materials ought to address the special needs of older people and their individual differences.
- 2) Policies related to three aspects of social support: Instrumental assistance; Emotional/psychological support; help by access to information and rights utilization.

By our recommendations we believe the following can be achieved:

Reducing intersectionality effects where discrimination in the form of ageism collides with gender and or stigmatized race/ethnicity/nationality/religion affiliations; and/or disability; and/or citizenship status.

Enhanced opportunity structures offering quality jobs and training suitable for local 65+ residents, ensuring a living wage (income).

Facilitation the formation of social support networks for those 65+ whose life course events disconnected them from families and communities.

Ensuring access to services including sustainable housing, adult education, healthcare services, emergency services, cultural heritage preservation.

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