

SILVER GENERATION IN SLOVAKIA IN VIEW OF ACTIVE AGEING

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Abstract

One of the suggested public policy responses to the issue of population ageing has been promotion of active ageing. Active ageing is based on several principles and includes the areas such as pensions, employment, health and social care and citizenship. In our paper, we analyse survey data on paid and unpaid work of Slovak seniors and relate them to their responses regarding their life satisfaction. By doing so we verify the theoretical assumption that active ageing has a positive impact on seniors' wellbeing. In addition, we examine some other aspects of active ageing, such as political and social participation and the use of ICT to evaluate the potential areas of improvement with regard to active ageing policies. The analysis contributes to the knowledge base relevant for drafting sound policies to tackle the challenges of demographic change in Slovakia.

Key words: silver generation, active ageing, unpaid work.

1. Introduction

Due to low fertility rates and increased longevity, we witness a historic change in the age structure of world's populations. This fact drives changes and reassessments in pension systems and related policies across the board. Although Slovakia currently belongs to the European countries with the lowest old-age dependency ratio (based on EC – Eurostat, 2011), by 2060 it will have one of the oldest populations in Europe (Páleník et al., 2012). Aim of this paper is to analyse the data gathered through primary research in Slovakia and some international surveys to shed more light on the situation of Slovak silver generation and seniors¹ in view of the concept of active ageing. Policies promoting active ageing should encourage engagement with life in general and not limit themselves to economic activities or involvement in highly physical activities that are emphasised within “productive ageing” and “healthy ageing” concepts (Boudiny, 2013). The data we use concern seniors' productive activities, work and consumption patterns, citizenship, involvement in social activities and life satisfaction levels. We use several statistical methods to explore the relations between the age

¹ In the context of silver economy, the term „silver generation“ refers to the age group of its potential consumers aged 50+, whereas by seniors we mean people over 65 years of age.

and selected aspects of the active ageing concept. Results of the statistical analyses are used to suggest the policy outlines for supporting active ageing in Slovakia.

In the past, the term “productive ageing” promoted mostly economic contributions by older adults within the labour market (Boudiny, 2013). Recent research has established a broader range of activities that are regarded as productive. Common definition today views productive activities as those bringing value at both the individual and societal levels, so „any activity that produces goods or services, whether paid or not, is productive, and these activities cover three areas: paid work, unpaid work at home and unpaid assistance provided to others (informal help to friends, relatives, neighbours or formal volunteer work in an organisation) (Herzog et al 1989). Some authors criticise the fact that unpaid work such as caring for young, frail or disabled family members or volunteering in community activities is not counted in the gross domestic product (GDP), which leads to the assumption that older people do not perform any productive activities for the society (Barr and Russel, 2006). On the whole, the value of unpaid work has been estimated to account for 20 to 60% of the GDP, depending on a country (OECD, 2014). A common way of measuring unpaid work is through the expenditure of time spent on the unpaid activities, which was also the method in the primary research on unpaid work cited here. The results of this research are in line with the other findings on retirement and productive activity showing that people who stop going to work do not stop working and they substitute paid work for unpaid work activities to some extent (Dosman et al, 2006).

2. Active Ageing as a Response to the Population Ageing

Ageing of population means that more and more people will live in retirement, which could pose both an opportunity and threat. Active ageing strategies have been a major part of the response to the new demographic situation in most developed countries as well as on the part of supranational organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), World Health Organisation (WHO) or the European Union (EU), although the understanding of the concept varies across the regions and institutions. Within the EU, it has been the emphasis on employment in later life that has made the concept a political priority (Walker and Maltby, 2012). A widely accepted definition of active ageing was proposed by WHO in 2002 as “the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in older age to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental wellbeing throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance” (World Health Organisation, 2002, p. 12). In other words, active ageing should foster adaptability of the old, support the maintenance of emotionally close relationships and remove structural barriers related to age or dependency. The active ageing discourse means that we no longer think in terms of what older adults can no longer do but put emphasis on their competence and knowledge that enables them their ongoing participation in society (Boudiny, 2013). The EU’s commitment to this concept has resulted in many policy initiatives, one of them being the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012. One of its outcomes is a tool for monitoring and comparing the situation regarding active ageing called Active Ageing Index, developed with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). It is a composite index which focuses on the contribution older people make to society and hence on the sustainability of high welfare standards for older people in ageing societies. AAI uses data from sources such as Eurostat (Labour Force Survey, Statistics on Income and Living Conditions – EU-SILC) and the European Foundation (European Quality of Life Survey). The

AAI has four dimensions, which are composed of 22 indicators. These comprise the data on employment, participation in society (both formal and informal volunteering and political participation), independent, healthy and secure living and the capacity and enabling environment for active ageing (including mental wellbeing, use of ICT and social connectedness, among others). The second wave of the index was calculated in 2014 with the 2012 data, with Slovakia ranking as low as 25-th out of the 28 EU countries.²

The concept of active ageing emphasizes independence and participation in productive activities, both within and outside the labour market, as being good for the elder's physical and mental health. Socially isolated people are more prone to mental illnesses, such as psychosis, depression, dementia, and put strain on healthcare services. The relationship between productive ageing and health has been tested empirically in several studies. Findings of these studies show a strong relationship between productive activity, particularly volunteering, and health outcomes (Steinberg et al., 2007). In addition, within the research on social capital, considerable attention has been paid to "the important role that social networks play in later life, particularly in supporting older people to remain independent in their community, despite the onset of chronic disease and disability" (Barr and Russel, 2006, p. 211). Plagnol and Huppert (2010, p. 158) refer to the research that shows positive impact of volunteering on older adults, such as reduction of depressive symptoms, whereas positive effects are associated more with formal volunteering rather than informal help. The authors also suggest that older people benefit more from volunteering than younger people, which could be connected to their sense of purpose in life and social benefits in the form of making new contacts and friends. Authors also notice varied levels of participation in volunteering across European countries, with Slovakia ranking as the country with the seventh lowest rate of formal volunteering, being slightly ahead of other post-communist countries in the region. On the other hand, out of 23 countries, Slovakia came ninth in the informal volunteering, with almost 75% of people who helped others at least once in the past year. The authors suggest one reason for low volunteering rates in some countries might be the missing infrastructure for volunteering, so that only highly motivated individuals engage in such activities.

We analysed the data on unpaid work of Slovak seniors to see if we can confirm the results of other studies showing a positive impact of productive activities on seniors' life satisfaction and whether different types of productive activities have different impact on satisfaction levels of the seniors. In addition, we examined the data on the use of a computer, internet and internet shopping that indicate the level of ICT skills of Slovak seniors that is used to indicate the capacity for active ageing.

From the active ageing perspective, older people constitute a great resource when applying their skills, experience and time in the range of productive activities. Thus the primary data on unpaid work of the Slovak seniors, along the accompanying information on their use of some devices and services collected in the nationwide survey, provide an important insight into this dimension of active ageing.

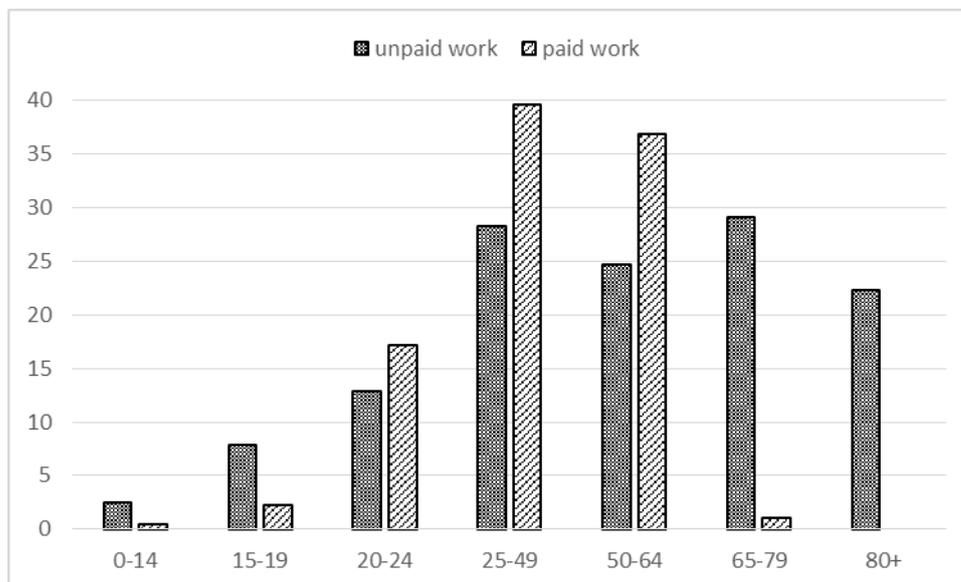
3. The Patterns of Paid/Unpaid Work in Silver Generation Cohorts

In Slovakia, the data on unpaid work had not been available until collected through a series of surveys conducted at the Faculty of Economics between 2011 and 2015 within the project VEGA 1/0935/13. The surveys were designed to find out how much time people spend on different type of activities during a week. As we can see in the Figure 1, the time spent both

² Based on the information of the UNCECE statistics published online at <http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/AAI/Active+Ageing+Index+Home>

on paid and unpaid work peaks at the ages between 25 – 49. It drops slightly in the following stage, where people tend to spend less time on childcare and house construction/repair within their unpaid work and retire mostly at the ages of 60 (women) and 62 (men). After the age of 65, unpaid work is a dominant part of people’s productive activity and we can say that at the age of 65 – 79, people do most unpaid work in the course of their life.

Figure 1: Distribution of paid and unpaid work activities by the age groups (hours/week)

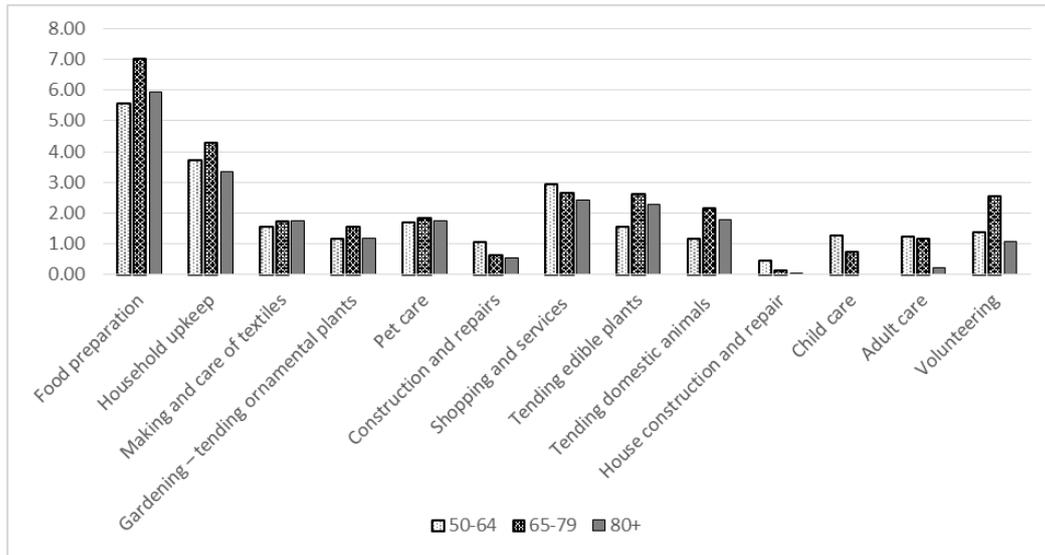


Source: the authors based on a VEGA survey 2015.

When we look more closely at the structure of unpaid productive activities of the three silver generation categories, we find that as people age, they change not only the scope but also the structure of their unpaid work activities. The increase in unpaid work among Slovak seniors of 65 – 79 is mainly due to the rise in the time spent on subsistence activities, like food preparation and tending edible plants and domestic animals, which contributes to their household output and may compensate for the loss of income from paid work. However, the largest rise occurs in the volume of volunteering, constituting a positive contribution to their communities or society at large. We assume that the largest part of the volunteering comprises informal help to the people outside the senior’s households, as the survey on unpaid work did not differentiate between the formal and informal volunteering, and from what we know from the other surveys that in Slovakia, people tend to provide help to the people they know rather than to the strangers.

The data show that even the seniors over the age of 80 do a considerable amount of unpaid work, not only for themselves, but also for other people outside their household. This confirms our assumption above that the seniors tend to engage in activities that contribute to the society’s welfare, especially after the age of 65, and that in this respect the low ranking within the AAI is in part due to the low levels of volunteering generally in Slovakia.

Figure 2: Unpaid work activities structure by the age groups of silver generation (hours/week)

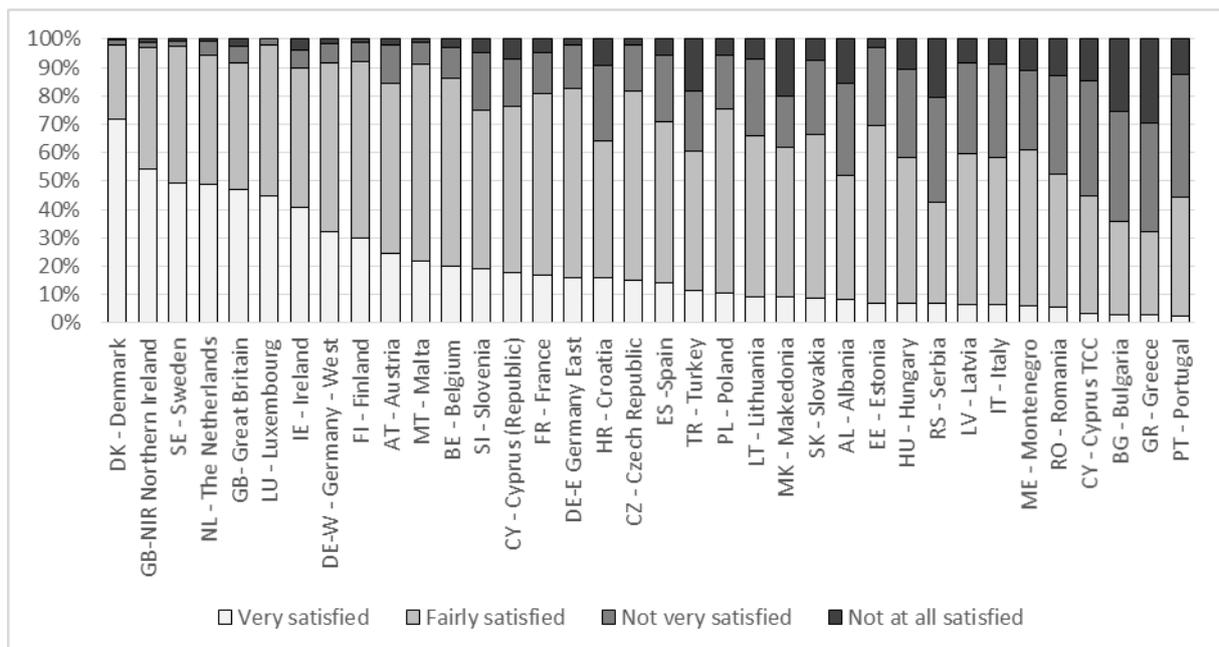


Source: the authors based on a VEGA survey 2015.

4. Productive Activities and Satisfaction of the Slovak Elderly

The empirical evidence suggests that there is a link between certain productive activities, like volunteering, and older people’s health or life satisfaction. When referring to the results of the Eurobarometer 2015, we can see that Slovak members of the silver generation are not very satisfied with their life. A very small portion of Slovaks aged over 50 would admit they are very satisfied with their life, whereas most of them are fairly satisfied (Fig 3).

Figure 3: Life satisfaction of silver generation in European countries



Source: the authors based on data from Eurobarometer 2015.

In line with the theoretical assumptions, we tried to establish whether there is a relation between productive activities (both paid and unpaid) and older people’s reported satisfaction with their family life, social life and fulfilment of their expectations and ambitions. We used ordinary logistic regression to determine which of the variables are related to the different types of satisfaction. Apart from productive activities (paid and unpaid work), we included independent variables of age, gender and education (Table 1).

Table 1: Output of ordinary logistic regression - satisfaction with family life

		Parameter estimates								
		Satisfaction with family life			Satisfaction with social life			Fulfilment of expectations and ambitions		
		Estimate	Std. error	Sig.	Estimate	Std. error	Sig.	Estimate	Std. error	Sig.
Threshold	Completely unsatisfied	-7.045	.873	.000	-5.660	.828	.000	-4.402	.851	.000
	Very unsatisfied	-5.341	.814	.000	-3.595	.793	.000	-2.611	.806	.001
	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	-3.492	.797	.000	-1.882	.785	.016	-.617	.798	.439
	Very satisfied	-1.755	.789	.026	-.407	.782	.603	1.309	.799	.101
	Age	-.035	.011	.001	-.018	.010	.082	.014	.011	.191
	Paid work	-.004	.005	.462	-.009	.005	.080	-.007	.005	.177
	Unpaid work	-.007	.003	.041	-.009	.003	.007	-.012	.003	.000
Location	Man	.258	.169	.125	.099	.164	.547	-.125	.167	.453
	Woman	0 ^a	.	.	0 ^a	.	.	0 ^a	.	.
	Basic education	-.389	.274	.155	-.212	.271	.433	-1.003	.280	.000
	Secondary education	.145	.178	.414	-.228	.173	.187	-.482	.177	.007
	University education	0 ^a	.	.	0 ^a	.	.	0 ^a	.	.

Note: a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

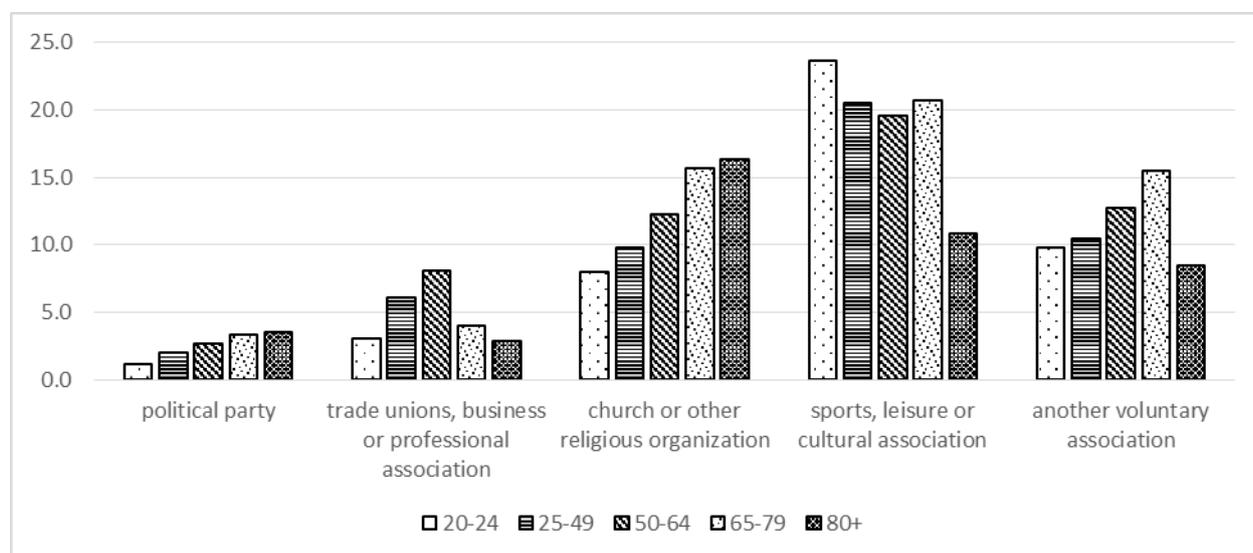
Source: the authors.

The results of the analysis show that as for the family satisfaction, the amounts of time spent on paid work, gender and education are not relevant, but the family satisfaction is related to age and time spent on unpaid work. In both cases, the satisfaction decreases with higher age and higher amount of unpaid work. The same applies to the fulfilment of expectations and ambitions, except that instead of age, there is a negative relation with education. In the case of satisfaction with social life, it is only the unpaid work that is negatively related to it, i. e. the more unpaid work people do, the less satisfied they are with their social life. This does not entirely correspond with the research findings cited above saying that unpaid work, namely volunteering, correlates with how satisfied people feel. We assume that our finding can be partly explained by the fact that the seniors’ unpaid work in Slovakia comprises mainly household chores and informal help to close friends and relatives, which does not provide for social interaction with people outside of ones’ family, and it is not a matter of volunteering but obligation to some extent.

5. Active Ageing and Citizenship

When monitoring the citizenship, we look at the political participation demonstrated by the membership in political parties, and the active participation in the activities of formal organisations, such as churches, sport and interest clubs and volunteering associations. We find that participation rates vary both with age and the types of organisations. In the age cohort of 50+, we observe drop in membership in organisations connected with paid work (trade unions and professional associations) and rise in membership in organisations not requiring physical involvement, such as political parties and church or other religious organisations. As we can expect, active involvement in sports, leisure and voluntary associations goes down considerably after the age of 80 (Fig 4).

Figure 4: Active participation in clubs/associations by the age groups (in %) – ISSP 2013 module National Identity



Source: the authors based on ISSP 2013, module National Identity.

In view of the low AAI ranking of the Slovak seniors in the area of “participation in the society”, we can see that it is not due to the age but the overall low rates of participation within the population, and that in some areas, participation rises with age. We can also observe that the areas of involvement of the different age cohorts correspond with their changing physical and mental abilities, which shows the adaptability of the seniors as one of the preconditions of the active ageing concept.

6. Use of ICT by the Slovak Seniors

One of the factors that may impede active ageing and reduce the options of older people in participation is low access to internet and lack of information and communication (ICT) skills. More and more information, resources, services and support provided by governments and businesses online increase the risk of social exclusion for people without the necessary ICT access and skills. Some authors (Helsper and van Deursen, 2015; Mordini et al., 2009) point out the fact that social exclusion of seniors is increasingly due to their digital (il)literacy. A new term, digital divide, has been used to refer to this situation. In our research on unpaid work, we also looked at the use of some household devices, including PC and internet, and selected services, e.g. internet shopping. Based on the results of the non-parametric tests, such as McNemar’s, Cochran’s, Friedman’s and Wilcoxon’s tests (Rublík,

2011), we can state that there are significant differences in the use of PC and internet between the three old-age groups, with a considerable drop in the frequency of their use compared to other household appliances (namely TV) in the age group of 65 – 79 (old-old) and 80+ (oldest-old) group. The same applies even more to the shopping on internet, which becomes one of the least used services in the age groups of 65+.

Table 2: Use of household devices in households by age category of a respondent (in %)

Use of	Age category			
	25 – 49	50 – 64	65 – 79	80 +
Computer	98.1	88.7	18.5	10.5
Internet	97.8	87.8	20.9	7.9
Mobile	99.6	98.4	86.9	65.8
Car	84.4	76.6	25.5	5.4
Washing machine	97.8	96.5	88.4	70.9
Dryer machine	15.8	8.9	0.0	0.0
Food processor	63.2	59.1	52.3	26.3
Dishwasher	45.2	31.6	3.8	5.2
Robotic vacuum cleaner	25.6	25.4	14.6	13.2
Induction cooker	42.6	33.0	22.3	18.5
TV	96.4	99.5	100.0	100.0

Source: the authors based on VEGA survey 2015.

As for using the household appliances, we can observe that their use decreases with age in general, although in case of the devices connected with ICT skills, namely computer and internet, the drop is considerably bigger than with others.

When determining the relations between age category of the silver generation and the use of services with the Spearman correlation coefficient (Šulc and Řezanková, 2014), we have observed a medium strong negative correlation between the age and the use of the following services: internet shopping, use of restaurant services and food delivery, gardening and childcare (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation between the use of services in households and age category of a respondent (in %)

	Use of internet shopping	Use of restaurant services and food delivery	Gardening and auxiliary work in the garden	Childcare
Correlation Coefficient	-.573**	-.418**	-.351**	-.254**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	1824	1830	1815	1795

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: the authors based on a VEGA survey 2015.

Whereas the drop in the use of most services can be explained by the lower purchase power or the life cycle stage (child care), one could expect an increase in internet shopping for its convenience and lower costs. The negative relation between the age and the use of this service can thus be attributed to the low level of ICT skills of the Slovak elderly population.

7. Conclusion

With respect to the concept of active ageing, Slovakia ranks very low among the European countries based on the Active Ageing Index. Some of the areas included in the composite index can be analysed with the use of the primary data on paid and unpaid work and use of certain goods and services. These analyses prove that in some areas, like volunteering and citizenship, the low levels of participating seniors correspond to the low levels of participation in the population and in fact increase in the older age. In view of these findings we suggest that the policies aimed at active ageing should target not only the seniors but also younger age cohorts. These should focus on promotion of volunteering and active lifestyles, including provision of the necessary infrastructure and opportunities, life long learning (use of ICT) and social involvement of the seniors with respect to their needs and preferences. There is some empirical evidence that seniors' engagement in meaningful activities contributes to their mental and physical health, and that the social dimension of such activities is very important. Successful engagement of senior citizens will require not only labour market opportunities tailored to their capacities, but also a sufficient range of other possibilities for the elderly to engage in meaningful undertakings with a social dimension. These could be offered by the third sector with the substantial encouragement and support from the government.

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