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**Active and healthy ageing as a societal challenge**

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In the face of demographical trends, which are going to influence development and economic prosperity of a society, the ageing of the population is a key challenge of 21. century. Lengthening of life expectancy is an important achievement of developed countries, including Slovenia. Slovenians are expected to live on average at least 2 years longer in the next 15 years. Simultaneously there is going to be 13 percentage point less of active population at 2050. (Source: Statistical Office Republic of Slovenia).

In Slovenia the main question regarding the economical aspect of ageing is a reform on social security, because of a pressure on public finance. In strategical documents we can see highlighted changes in the labor market, the decline of the working age population, the weakening the productivity of the labor force, saving rates, pressure on a public finance, pension and health funds. Slovenia has one of the lowest employment rates of older workers (55-64 years), which impact long term sustainability of public funds, especially pensions.

In the recent period, due to economic crisis, there are loud warnings on fiscal sustainability. As an example I quote the findings of the document *Demographic changes and their economic and social consequences, Umar, 2015,* which focuses on the demographic projection and the impact of aging in Slovenian labor market, education, public expenditure and also spatial and regional affairs. These estimates are based on the limiting factors for economic growth, such as reducing number of working capacity, lowering of productivity, lessening of funding sources and growth of social protection expenditure. Besides all that, Slovenian companies do not plan any measures on prolonging working activity of elders.

In the strategic development documents and in general there is relatively weak attention to the societal challenge, how in terms of demographic trends and the reduction of the active population identify opportunities to maintain and promote economic growth. With the growth in the number and proportion of older generation there are new opportunities for economic growth, that need to be recognized and highlighted to be intergenerational beneficial. In Europe we have approx. 25 % of retired population, in Slovenia almost the same, and they are important segment of consumer, despite their lower income. They influence on increase demand for services and goods related to specific needs of elders. Companies have to identify opportunities in “silver economy” and to focus on development of products that address the need of elderly consumers. It is essential to engage them at the phase of creating, developing and marketing of it.

The role of a state and its institutions are crucial, because they can introduce incentives for companies that are promoters of accelerated “silver economy”. Namely, main areas being:

* Incentives for information and communication literacy and e - skills for the elderly (Slovenia is behind in the area of internet use in older generation – 72 % lower than EU average);
* Job creation in the service sector in the face of de-institutionalization and the development of "community centers" (inter-generational, family and day care centers), mobile services and home services;
* Contributions to the development of specific products for the elderly and for the creation of a network of services;
* Promoting flexible forms of employment in which we could include elderly with incentives for employers to integrate them at projects for which they have knowledge and experience;
* Raising employers’ awareness about the forms of transmission of the experience of older to younger and incentives for positive practices by employers to the employment of older people.

Measures of active and healthy aging have a specific place in the Partnership Agreement between Slovenia and the European Commission 2015-2020. Their implementation will have an important social and economic influence. I want to highlight the transition from institutional to community forms of long-term care as well as measures for an active and healthy lifestyle. Through the actions of the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund for investment we get new opportunities for the creation of a network of high-quality community-based services, which include the creation and modernization of infrastructure in areas where the need is greatest and where it will be possible to install a new community services. With community long-term care it’s going to be able to better integrate and unify the health and social services and to update some of the existing network of social and health services, especially at the local level. These measures are going to be supported by the ESF and ERDF.

There are new opportunities for economic development in the medical and pharmaceutical industries, whole chain of services (health care, long-term care) but also services related to sports activities, recreation and health protection, services related to communication, tourism, catering etc.

We believe it is necessary to address the issue as whole – in all phases and with the forecasts of socio-economic impact of demographic trends on the increase in public expenditure, which might generate even intergenerational conflicts. With that in mind we could find positive effects of long lifespan of society on sustainable development. And here we can see a real challenge and important role of Slovenian Third Age University of Ljubljana. This promise harmonizing of different generations need and a better quality of life for all generations.

Sources:

1. Development Report 2015, UMAR, June 2015.

2. Partnership Agreement between Slovenia and the European Commission 2015-2020, Government of Republic of Slovenia, June 2014.

3. Demographic changes and their economic and social consequences, Umar, 2015

4. Statistical report 2015, Statistical office of RS