Years that count
Report on active ageing and intergenerational solidarity - June 2013
Strategy 2020 voices the collective determination of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to move forward in tackling the major challenges that confront humanity in the next decade. Informed by the needs and vulnerabilities of the diverse communities with whom we work, as well as the basic rights and freedoms to which all are entitled, this strategy seeks to benefit all who look to Red Cross Red Crescent to help to build a more humane, dignified and peaceful world.

Over the next ten years, the collective focus of the IFRC will be on achieving the following strategic aims:

1. **Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises**
2. **Enable healthy and safe living**
3. **Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace**
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFRC recommendations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Our Populations are Ageing</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The impact of our ageing populations on public services</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The different dimensions of ageing</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Risks and Vulnerabilities</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Opportunities in Ageing</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. The call to action</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Global and regional responses</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. The Red Cross Red Crescent response</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Creating a positive image of ageing</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Empowering older people through active ageing</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Advocating for quality in public care, adequate living conditions and combating elderly abuse</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Designing age-friendly programmes and promoting grassroots involvement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Promoting intergenerational dialogue and cooperation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Building the Framework: Older People as Beneficiaries and Volunteers</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. The way forward</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Advocacy</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Capacity building</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Social Mobilization</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Obstacles and Opportunities</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout Europe and around the world, the next 50 years will bring unprecedented changes to our demographics. More people will be over the age of 60 as a percentage of the population than ever before, and we must be prepared for the societal and humanitarian changes and opportunities that such a transformation brings, and what will require a change of mind-set.

Ageing populations present both opportunities and demands based upon every individual. People over 60 are as diverse as the rest of the population, and entering into a life working full- or part-time, or living a work-free life plays out different for each person. As we grow older knowledge, expertise and wisdom grow, and changes come about which many mean more time for participating in social, cultural and civic life as volunteers, mentors, opinion-leaders and decision-makers, however the need for support and special considerations might also grow. Being an active participant in society is important for all and we know that active living reduces vulnerability, improves well-being, and increases independence and resilience in all age groups. When older people are supported and empowered, and are living an active life as well-integrated citizens, it is of benefit for all.

This report looks at the impact of ageing populations at both individual and system-wide levels. Across the world, active working years are being increased as pensionable ages are pushed back, and healthier populations see advantages in a longer working life – leading to a growth in the percentage of people working beyond their 60th year.

However, matched with these demographic changes the total working population in the developed world has steadily decreased widening the gap between tax revenues and the provision of social and health care. When people get older, they become exposed to unique vulnerabilities biologically, socially and psychologically which may call for additional assistance. Our social systems must figure out how to cope, safeguarding and promoting the rights and well-being of older people, and ensuring access to health and social services even as these systems experience strain.

Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies, governments, partners and donors – as well as you, the reader – have a part to play in meeting one of the great changes facing humanity in the first half of this century. Active ageing and intergenerational solidarity can help ensure that as we age, our communities transform for the better, appreciating the contribution to active citizenship by all ages and all individuals.

Anitta Underlin
Director of Europe Zone
Executive summary

**Populations ageing is a worldwide trend,**
where the median age and percentage of older people in the society increases. Populations shift from being predominantly young, to having a greater proportion of older people. Coinciding with this is a reduction in birth rates. Population ageing is linked to socioeconomic improvements, as access to healthcare and better living conditions mean that people are living longer, while at the same time, women are having fewer children, due to greater control over their fertility.

**While population ageing is occurring all over the world,** developing countries will experience this shift most acutely. In more developed regions, the population of those aged 60 and over is projected to grow 2.4 per cent annually, from 274 million in 2011 to 418 million in 2050. Comparatively, developing countries will grow 3 per cent annually, from 510 million in 2011 to 1.6 billion in 2050. By this time, 80 per cent of the world’s older people will live in low- and middle-income countries.

**Ageing brings both,**
new humanitarian challenges and opportunities at individual and societal levels. For the individual, changes to biological, social and psychological life present new vulnerabilities, such as increased risk of disease or disability and might demand new ways of living. On a societal level increased pension age means people stay actively in the workforce however the demographic changes in the developed world is widening the gap between tax revenue from the working population and the provision of health and care for all, and with the demographic changes and improved health care the public system might be strained.

**People live longer today**
- and the active years are prolonged and so the ageing populations present opportunities. People over 60 – like rest of population – enhance their own quality of life, as well as the lives of others, by participating in social, cultural and civic life. They have innumerable skills, knowledge and experiences to share with the community and younger generations. In line with the strategic aims of Strategy 2020 and following through with the commitments made at the 2010 European Regional Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference in Vienna, the IFRC is calling upon governments, National Societies, partners, donors, as well as communities and individuals to promote active ageing in all facets of life, recognize and include people in all ages of life as an important resource in society, and strengthen solidarity between generations.

**A CALL TO ACTION**

The IFRC advocates with and on behalf of older populations, who are both at risk of increased vulnerability, as well as a potential source of strength and opportunity for our communities. The IFRC calls upon governments, National Societies, partners and donors to prepare for the societal transformation that ageing populations bring by recognizing older people as an important resource in society, promoting active ageing and strengthening solidarity between generations.

---
Introduction

Today, the population aged 60 years and over is the fastest growing of any age group, and is growing at a rate faster than any time in history. This great demographic shift is occurring all over the world, transforming our communities in dramatic ways. At the start of 2012, one quarter of the population in developed countries was over the age of 60, and in the European Union, the number of people over 60 years of age will rise by two million every year.\(^3\)

It is difficult to define exactly when a person becomes ‘old’. The WHO approaches ageing from a ‘life-course perspective, assuming that ageing begins from the moment we are born. However, populations must be divided into age groups for statistical purposes, and for analysis sake, an ‘older person’ is considered to be 60 years of age or older.\(^4\) In some contexts, such as less developed countries, older age is considered to be 50 years and above, to account for lower life expectancy in these regions. Irrespective of the age used in different scenarios, it must be recognized that chronological age is not a precise marker of ageing, as health status, levels of independence and employment status vary among older people of the same age.

Ageing is a heterogeneous process. As people age, they can become prone to a multitude of risks in their biological, social and psychological lives. Risks related to ageing are exacerbated by negative stereotypes and attitudes about getting older. As a society, we are all affected by the vulnerabilities that older people experience, at increasingly larger numbers: growing older populations strain our health and social systems, as the ratio of those dependent on it to those who contribute financially to it grows.

While presenting humanity with a unique challenge, ageing populations are also an opportunity: this age group is growing larger and living longer than any point in history. This means that now more than ever can the productive capacities of older people be utilized. Older people contribute financially to society, as taxpayers and consumers. Even after retirement, they can continue to play roles in social, cultural and civic life as volunteers, mentors, opinion leaders or decision-makers, extending well past their working years. Such activity can also reduce the vulnerabilities of older people, improving their own health and well-being.

While a seemingly gradual phenomenon, action on ageing populations could not start any sooner. To take advantage of the possibilities and positive opportunities our older populations present us requires the society as a whole to change the mind set and act. In this report, the IFRC calls upon governments, National Societies, partners and donors, as well as communities, families and individuals, to harness the potential of our ageing populations – today and in to the future.

---

\(^3\) See: European Commission, Demography report 2010: Older, more numerous and diverse Europeans, 2011.

IFRC recommendations

Governments:
take the lead in prioritizing equity

- **Secure access to health and care services and health promotion for older people**
  Governments should ensure universal access to public health services for all people, including those with progressive frailty or suffering from an acute or chronic illness, as well as promote healthy lifestyles.

- **Invest in a positive image of older people in society**
  Governments should ensure that policies and programmes project an image of older people that conveys empowerment and dignity.

- **Promote volunteering as a contribution to active ageing**
  Governments should foster environments that are conducive to older people volunteering, including within applicable legal and policy contexts in which volunteering occurs.

- **Foster social inclusion as a necessity for healthy ageing**
  Governments should address root causes of the social exclusion of older people, and ensure the proper enforcement of legislation that protects the rights of older people and combats discrimination.

- **Strengthen solidarity between generations and promote mutual respect**
  Governments should utilize intergenerational dialogue to promote respect among generations and create cross-generational initiatives for mutual benefit of younger and older people.

National Societies:
scale up efforts

- **Follow through on the commitments made at the 2010 European Regional Red Cross Red Crescent Conference in Vienna.**
  National Societies should use established strengths in existing programming to ensure Vienna commitments are met, or create new programming in line with the objectives.

- **Contribute to building a positive image of ageing and recognize older people as an important resource.**
  National Societies should recognize the meaningful role that older people play, and disseminate this message to the public through campaigns and education.

- **Encourage active ageing, promoting healthy lifestyles, life-long learning and volunteerism.**
  National Societies should empower older people to become volunteers, ensuring that volunteering strategies are reflective of the diversity of needs and skills of older people.

- **Ensure intergenerational cooperation in programming and services.**
  National Societies should promote the inclusion of, and bridging between, all age groups in all activities, fostering projects based on the common interests of younger and older people.

- **Promote social inclusion through the participation of older people in decision-making at all levels.**
  National Societies should ensure the participation of older people in decision-making bodies, particularly in programmes where older people are the beneficiaries.

- **Advocate for public provision and access to health and social care systems for older people.**
  National Societies should engage decision-makers using their status as auxiliaries to public authorities in the humanitarian field, as well as engage the public-at-large using campaigns and education on the issues relating to older people and access to health care.
Partners and donors: think long-term and use holistic approaches

- **Maintain and increase funding levels to ensure that programming and services can cope with a growing ageing population.**
  Older populations will only increase as time goes on, and partners and donors should ensure that funding matches the growing need for services.

- **Adapt funding to the diversity of needs of the ageing population, which include both service delivery as well as capacity building to engage older volunteers.**
  Partners and donors should recognize that a supportive environment for older people depends on both delivering services, as well as building the capacity to engage them in volunteering at all levels, in all programmes.

- **Recognize that ageing populations will take long-term investment and commitment.**
  Ageing populations is an on-going challenge and opportunity that will require partners and donors to think long-term about funding. Partners and donors should structure funding strategically, to ensure that programming can be sustained into the future.

- **Innovate funding mechanisms using comprehensive and integrated approaches.**
  Stand-alone projects will not address the complex humanitarian and societal challenges that an ageing population presents. Partners and donors should consider alternative funding approaches that integrate across different programmes and objective areas, such as youth and/or health.

**Strategy 2020:**
providing the basis for action

For the occasion of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, Red Cross Red Crescent Societies reaffirmed their mission to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. Strategy 2020 provides the framework and guides all action on ageing populations.

“Enable healthy and safe living” is the second strategic aim of Strategy 2020. Older people, like all people, have the right to a life of peace, good health and dignity. Good health – the state of physical, mental and social well-being – reduces both individual and community vulnerability. To this end, the IFRC calls for the promotion of active ageing in all facets of life. Active ageing promotes better health, reduces vulnerabilities and allows older people to maintain their independence and resilience.

The third strategic aim seeks to “promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace”. Building a culture of respect, inclusiveness and equity means recognizing the value of all people, including the elderly. The IFRC calls for the recognition of older people as an important resource in society, and promotes their involvement in voluntary work.

Younger generations have a pivotal role to play in strengthening the social inclusion of older people, and both generations have much to gain with their mutual integration. The IFRC calls for the strengthening of solidarity between generations through the inclusion of people from all age groups in all activities and decision-making bodies, as well as raising awareness of the contribution of older people to those of younger generations.

The IFRC calls on governments, National Societies, partners and donors, as well as communities and individuals, to take action on ageing populations – reducing their vulnerabilities as well as enhancing their capacity for independence and empowerment.
While the Red Cross Red Crescent is most famously known for its activities relating to emergencies, it also engages in development work that serves the community. In all areas of their programming, National Societies strive to engage volunteers from all backgrounds, including older people.

In Azerbaijan, the separation of families because of the crisis is a critical humanitarian concern. Tracing is one of the Red Cross Red Crescent’s leading activities, and an essential element to alleviating human suffering. The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan has undertaken tracing activities since 1987, made possible with financial and technical support by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the IFRC country delegation.

Tofic Bahramov was a beneficiary of the National Society’s tracing services before he became a volunteer. Tofic’s family members went missing after their labour migration, and he contacted the Red Crescent to help him locate his family. The support provided to him inspired him to volunteer and help others. At 70 years old, Tofic gathers the necessary information for the tracing process, delivers them to the tracing service department at the headquarters of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, and relays messages to family members.

In addition to this work, the National Society engages in smaller scale community activities that may be lesser known, but have a significant humanitarian impact. 65-year-old volunteer Taisiya Gordeyeva provides support to homeless people who were forced to leave their homes and have no relatives to live with. Taisiya provides hot meals with energy and enthusiasm, and applies this passion to advocating on behalf of the homeless population, actively lobbying decision-makers. Other volunteers her age provide medical and social aid to their elderly peers through the Binagadi and Sabunçu branches of Baku. Visiting ill persons in their homes, cleaning for them and providing them with meals, these energetic older volunteers demonstrate that that the drive to help others does not diminish with age.

The Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan strengthens intergenerational solidarity by engaging younger and older people with each other. In the Azizbekov branch, older volunteers aid children with disabilities by visiting them at home and helping with their education. Retired teachers and nurses participate in summer camps for orphaned children hosted by the National Society, organizing educational and leisure activities. They also promote HIV and AIDS awareness among younger students, hosting events that include people living with HIV and AIDS and their families.
“When I try to involve people in activities, the first answer is always no,” said Eva Zsigmond, a volunteer with the Romanian Red Cross who has been involved for over 20 years. “‘Come on, I’m way too old for that’, or ‘no, that’s not gonna work’, and so on. So what I do is put them in a row and sum their ages. I say: ‘You see, here you have 562 years of experience. That’s already more than enough.’”

Eva is describing the initial hesitation of older people when hearing about the Club of Generations, an initiative that she started in her local branch in Harghita county, central Romania. The club is a group of individuals working together to improve the image and welfare of older people in their communities. It provides training opportunities to help overcome the persistent stereotype of older people as a burden to society, which is sometimes believed by older people themselves. The aim is to empower the older generations, to allow them to think of themselves as active citizens with a meaningful role to play in their communities, and as such, improve their own welfare while changing the perception of others.

Participants are encouraged to draw on the skills and experiences that they have accumulated over the years, including knowledge that seems undervalued, such as family recipes or medicinal uses for herbs. Many participants find that they have much more wisdom and knowledge than they give themselves credit for. “They realize that younger people are interested in what they have to say,” Eva describes. “This is the inner change that we seek.”

On average, the Club of Generations gathers 48 to 60 people: young and elderly, volunteers and non-volunteers. Everyone is welcome to join. Many older people who do not usually volunteer decide to do so after joining the club, taking on additional roles and responsibilities. Eva describes the happiness that such empowerment give them: “It is impossible to describe the happiness on their faces when they’re wrapping gifts, when they receive greeting cards, the responsible attitude that they show when they are entrusted with a responsibility, like watering flowers and keeping the lawn green and healthy in the common garden. It gives them motivation, energy, life.”
Population ageing is a global phenomenon. In countries all over the world, the age structure is becoming older, as life expectancy increases while levels of fertility decrease. As a result, populations shift from being dominated by younger age groups to one that has a greater proportion of older people. This increase is occurring at a pace faster than any time in history. In more developed regions, the population of those aged 60 and over is projected to grow 2.4 per cent annually before 2050, and 3 per cent annually for developing countries. This means that this age group will increase from 274 million in 2011 to 418 million in 2050 for developed countries, and from 510 million in 2011 to 1.6 billion in 2050 for developing countries.

This phenomenon is a long-term trend, linked to the socioeconomic development of a country. Improvements in living conditions and access to health care reduce mortality during childbirth and childhood, leading to families having fewer babies as they become aware that their children are more likely to survive. Birth rates also decrease as women have greater control over their fertility. Better living and health conditions also mean that people start to live longer.

Europe and Japan were the first to experience population ageing. From 2012 onwards, approximately one-quarter of the population in developed countries will be over the age of 60. However at present, population ageing is occurring fastest in low- and middle-income countries. For instance, it took more than 100 years for the population 65 and over in France to increase from 7 to 14 per cent. It will take countries such as Brazil, China and Thailand, just over 20 years to experience the same demographic shift. By 2050, 80 per cent of the world’s older people will live in low- and middle-income countries.

---

5 See: UNDESA, 2011.
This worldwide shift is mirrored within Europe and Central Asia. In the European Union, the number of people 60 years of age and older is rising by two million every year, double the rate observed prior to 2008. In 2010, the median age in the European Union as a whole was 40.9 years and is expected to increase to 47.9 by 2060.\(^7\)

By comparison, population ageing is less advanced, however more accelerated, in eastern European and former Soviet countries. The number of those aged 65 and over will grow by more than 60 per cent between 2000 and 2025 in Albania, Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.\(^8\) Such dramatic demographic change is heightened by the comprehensive economic (and to some extent, political) transitions that are still underway in this region, as well as rapid population decline. Comparatively low levels of income and institutional development mean increased strain for this region’s social and welfare systems, in comparison to western European countries.

**The impact of our ageing populations on public services**

While some older people are still working after 65, continuing to contribute financially as taxpayers, many leave the workforce and retire. At the same time, the size of the population typically employed (aged 15 to 59 years) is decreasing. In developed countries, the population of working age has steadily decreased since 2005, dropping from 63 per cent to 61.4 per cent in 2011, and continuing its decline to 51.5 per cent by 2050.\(^9\) In Europe, the working age population is projected to fall by 20.8 million between 2005 and 2030 as the baby boomer generation retires.\(^10\)

As such, the old-age dependency ratio (the number of people aged 60 and over as a percentage of the labour force aged 15 to 59) increases. This results in a widening gap between what governments need to spend on public services for an ageing population, and the amount of tax revenue it is able to generate from its working population. Health and social services become strained, as those who need to rely on them increases as the revenue generated to pay for them decreases.

---

\(^7\) See: European Commission, 2011.


\(^9\) See: UNDESA, 2011.

As one ages, maintaining social well-being is just as important as physical health. Sustaining ties with family and friends, keeping engaged in your community, and allotting time for relaxation can greatly improve your emotional and mental health, reducing vulnerability to depression or loneliness. Meeting Place Kupan is one such place to achieve this, run by volunteers of the Swedish Red Cross.

‘Kupan’ means ‘beehive’ in Swedish – an appropriate name to describe the atmosphere that one can find at these meeting places, which number 274 throughout the country. Meeting Place Kupan began as small Red Cross-owned shops selling second-hand clothing, furniture and books, and has since grown into a community hub where people gather to meet friends, enjoy a cup of tea or listen to live music with others.

Barbro Merkell, a volunteer of the Swedish Red Cross, understands how important such places are for older people. At 78, Barbro has been volunteering with the Red Cross for 15 years, and started volunteering at the Meeting Place Kupan in Gotland in 1998. “There are many lonely people in Gotland, especially among elderly people and those who take on full-time care of their bedridden relatives at home,” Barbro says. “Sometimes, a simple pat on the shoulder or a ‘good to see you!’ gives them enough good vibrations and energy to recover from the stress of the whole week.”

Barbro, and many other older volunteers such as herself, provide support to their peers simply through providing opportunities for socialization and engagement. However, Meeting Place Kupan does not only provide benefits for those who visit it, but also for those who volunteer there. For Barbro, the meeting place offered her a chance to continue contributing to society, well after leaving the workforce. Now retired, Kupan benefits from Barbro’s skills, energy and hospitality, while helping to reduce the social exclusion and isolation of other older persons.
The different dimensions of ageing

Biological changes are most commonly associated with ageing. Noncommunicable diseases are the greatest health burden for older people, including heart disease, stroke, visual impairment and hearing loss. Risk factors, such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, harmful alcohol consumption and unhealthy diets, contribute to the incidence of non-communicable diseases. Weakening or failing health can mean increased reliance on family or health systems, and a loss of independence. While ageing can present some biological constraints, they are by no means inevitable nor do they affect every person in the same way. Health challenges are variable and dependent on a myriad of external factors, such as lifestyle and the surrounding environment.

Ageing biologically is only one facet of getting older. Ageing also transforms one’s social life, particularly in societies where social roles attached to age are well entrenched. Expectations, attitudes and social status may change, influencing the perceptions that older people may have about themselves. One’s sense of value and belonging may be different in older age. Family and community structures also change as living situations adapt to meet new needs (for example, moving in with family or to a retirement home). Older age can bring economic changes, and introduce issues of dependence and uncertainty.

Risks and vulnerabilities

Older people can experience a variety of risks that accompany the changes in their biological, social and psychological lives. Health risks increase, as the prevalence of illness and non-communicable disease rises. Older people may experience a loss of independence as their health issues mean that they require greater support. Changes in social life may lead to exclusion and isolation. These changes pose risks to their mental and emotional well-being: older people can experience anxiety, depression and, in many cases, increasing loneliness.

Older people can also be at risk with those on whom they depend. The WHO estimates that four to six per cent of older people in high-income countries experience some type of maltreatment at home, and 36 per cent of nursing-home staff surveyed reported witnessing at least one incident of physical abuse of an elderly patient. 40 per cent admitted that they themselves had psychologically abused patients.

These risks are inextricably tied to societal perceptions of older people. Older people can be overtly discriminated against because of their age, being actively prevented from participating in social, economic or civic life. However, discrimination can also be subtle. Being overprotective of older people is grounded in the belief that they are incompetent. In either case, such discrimination can enforce a type of self-ageism, where older people internalize that they are not worthy of equal opportunity or treatment, or where they begin to believe that they cannot be self-reliant and thus increase their dependence on others.

Opportunities in ageing

While ageing brings many changes in a person’s life, not all of them are risks or limitations. Older people today are living longer, and are healthier. Frailty (when a person develops a disabling condition that results in dependency and vulnerability) now occurs later in life. Health problems that were characteristic at 70, today appear when a person is 80, meaning that a healthy life expectancy is now increasing at the same rate as life expectancy itself.

---

13 See: European Commission, 2011.
Abuse is a devastating experience, particularly for older people, who can experience abuse at the hands of someone that they trust and rely upon. Elder abuse occurs all around the world, however is an underreported phenomenon. As our populations age, elder abuse becomes a pressing humanitarian issue that requires attention. The Red Cross of Serbia is taking steps to bring elder abuse out of the shadows through its Home Care programme training curriculum, which sensitizes and educates volunteers and the general public about elderly discrimination and abuse.

The Republic of Serbia has one of the oldest populations in Europe, with 20 per cent being 60 years of age and over. While this means that many older people are at risk of abuse, it also presents a unique opportunity: a larger pool of older volunteers who can be drawn upon to help address and prevent the abuse of their peers.

One such volunteer is Svetlana Atanasković. At 73 years old, Svetlana volunteers in the municipal branch of Kragujevac on a telephone helpline that assists older people with issues concerning health care, welfare, poverty and abuse. In one encounter, Svetlana assisted a retired 70-year-old teacher who had all of her possessions – including her apartment – sold by her relatives with the promise of using the money to take care of her. Unfortunately, she was left alone in a solitary room that was barely paid for by her meager pension, with her health and eyesight deteriorating quickly. In only a few months, she was 80 per cent blind.

When she finally contacted the Red Cross, Svetlana was able to inform her about her legal rights and helped her obtain a health insurance ID card. Eventually, she located a vacancy in a nursing home for the woman, which her relatives agreed to pay for, and where they now visit and take her home from during the religious holidays.

Svetlana, along with the 13 other volunteers at the Kragujevac branch, play a meaningful role in reducing the vulnerabilities of their peers who have been unfortunate to suffer abuse and maltreatment. The training and engagement provided by the Red Cross of Serbia enables older volunteers to reach out in their communities, providing help and hope to those who need it the most.

Svetlana Atanasković (73) is a senior volunteer in the Red Cross branch in Kragujevac, Serbia, where 13 older volunteers work on a telephone helpline to assist their vulnerable peers.

(Photo: Red Cross of Serbia).

Chapter 2: The Call to Action

Population ageing requires both global as well as community-level responses. Strategy 2020 outlines the collective determination of the IFRC to tackle the major challenges confronting humanity in the coming decade, chiefly among them our ageing populations. Inspired by the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality), the IFRC calls upon governments, civil society, communities and individuals to all play a part in capturing the potential of this unique, and growing, generation.

As stated at the 2010 European Regional Red Cross Red Crescent Conference in Vienna, the IFRC recognizes the common challenges and opportunities that ageing populations present throughout Europe. The IFRC commits to building a positive image of ageing and aims for self-empowerment and active ageing. The IFRC advocates for the public provision of, and access to, adequate services for older people, and will strengthen solidarity between generations.

Global and regional responses

While ageing brings many changes in a person’s life, not all of them are risks or limitations. Older people today are living longer, and are healthier. Frailty (when a person develops a disabling condition that results in dependency and vulnerability) now occurs later in life. Health problems that were characteristic at 70, today appear when a person is 80, meaning that a healthy life expectancy is now increasing at the same rate as life expectancy itself.

At the international level, action on ageing has been taking place for over thirty years. In 1982, the UN convened its first World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna, Austria, producing the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. This was the first time that the international community called for action on issues affecting older people, such as health and nutrition, consumer rights, environment and social welfare.\(^\text{14}\)

Several years later, the world finds itself on the brink of a great population change. Ageing, as the great demographic challenge of the first half of this century, requires a public health response. On 7 April, to celebrate the anniversary of the WHO’s founding, World Health Day focuses on Ageing and health as its priority area for 2012. Focusing on health data of this older generation, the WHO calls on governments and societies to promote good health, minimize disease through early detection and quality care, create age-friendly physical and social environments, and encourage the participation of older people, leading to a change in social attitudes.\(^\text{15}\)

The European Commission declared 2012 to be the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. The WHO defines active ageing as “optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.”\(^\text{16}\). The initiative aims to raise awareness of the contributions of older people, spread good practice, and encourage policymakers and stakeholders to support the older generation in policy areas that the EU has some influence, including employment, public health, information society, transport and social protection.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^\text{17}\) See: http://europa.eu/ey2012/ey2012main.jsp?catId=977&langId=en
Guiding older people through the jungle of bureaucracy
Case Study - Georgia

While many countries provide numerous public health care services and entitlements, they are not always easy to access. This is particularly true for older people, who are often unaware of the benefits afforded to them, or unsure of how to retrieve them. The Red Cross Society of Georgia (GRCS) aims to increase the access to services, resources and public decision-making processes for the most vulnerable populations, allowing them to have a say in the policies that affect them.

Since 2005, the GRCS, with the support of the IFRC and partners, has been working to enhance the well-being of older people through providing services, capacity building and advocacy. Throughout the ten regions of Georgia, programmes operate out of eleven social centres, delivering services to nearly 12,000 older people, 1,196 of whom are confined to their homes. Activities include the provision of information to older people on services and welfare, advocating for the needs of older populations in parliamentary and governmental structures, as well as creating social opportunities through discussion clubs and workshops. The Georgia Red Cross also provides skill training, such as craft and handiwork, to enable older people to establish their own small businesses.

Volunteers are at the heart of this initiative, and 200 individuals of all ages contribute their time and energy to support Georgia’s older generation. Nana Merchule, 63 years old, is a volunteer with an entitlement group located at a Red Cross social centre in Tbilisi. Formerly a refugee from the Abkhazia region, Nana leads a team of 14 volunteers who aid older people in accessing their entitlements and public benefits. In close cooperation with the government, Nana’s team helped 100 older people access funding for their medication, three older people with placement in a charity shelter, and two others with government-provided housing.

Nana’s engagement as a volunteer also improves her own well-being: “I’m happy, because at my age, after so many harsh experiences in my past, the GRCS gave me an opportunity to be in charge of a team.” Ten of those who volunteer with Nana are of similar age, however she also has the opportunity to work with younger volunteers as well. Nana says that they are not only her co-workers – they are also close friends.

The Red Cross Society of Georgia supports older people by promoting active ageing and intergenerational solidarity and cooperation. Nana finds her volunteer work challenging, but also gratifying: “Work is hard and I’m getting tired, but it’s a very pleasant feeling – a feeling of self-realization”.

Lamara Maisuradze – 78 years old, leading senior volunteer of the Tbilisi Social Center. Despite her age and health status, she is actively involved in organizing the Exhibition - sales of handmade goods from the beneficiaries of the social centres. The Red Cross Society of Georgia (GRCS) purchases materials for its older beneficiaries, who produce beautiful handmade products (knitting, sewing, embroidery, etc.). Beneficiaries have loyal clients, both locally and in other parts of the country. By supporting this Exhibition, the GRCS once again assists the elderly in active aging and ability enhancement.

(Photo: GRCS).
Helping others never gets old

Case Study - Portugal

Every day, hospitals throughout Lisbon provide primary health care services to thousands of people. Volunteers of the Portuguese Red Cross play an invaluable role in the provision of these services, by helping to reduce the suffering of patients undergoing care. Volunteers provide guidance to patients, assist with their meals and visit on a regular basis. These activities are particularly important for those who have no family support. Complementing the services provided by health care professionals, Red Cross volunteers help to improve the quality of care and reduce human suffering.

Maria José Santos Bicho began as a Red Cross volunteer when she was a young woman. During the Portuguese Colonial War from 1961 to 1975, Maria José volunteered in hospitals, providing emotional support to soldiers who came back from battle. She also supported the families who returned from the colonies at the end of the conflict.

Maria José continues to volunteer to this day. At 80 years old, she coordinates a group of hospital volunteers through the Red Cross Lisbon branch. With her leadership and experience, volunteers provide additional comfort and care to patients that otherwise would not be available.

Maria José’s role is illustrative of the important work that volunteers conduct throughout the world. She demonstrates that people have the enduring capacity to help others, irrespective of age. When asked how she remains motivated over the last 50 years, Maria José responds: “Volunteering is my way of life. I believe in a better world.”
The Red Cross Red Crescent seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering, contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world. The unique network of the 187 National Societies around the world form the backbone of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, representing nearly 100 million members, volunteers and supporters. Inspired by its Fundamental Principles and guided by its shared values – people, integrity, partnership, diversity, leadership and innovation – National Societies have an important role to play in both serving and engaging older people.

The 2010 European Regional Red Cross Red Crescent Conference in Vienna recognized the special challenges that ageing populations in Europe and Central Asia present to National Societies. In line with the strategic aims of Strategy 2020, the Vienna commitments reaffirm the role that Red Cross Red Crescent Societies play in helping improve the lives of older people in the Europe region. These commitments were reaffirmed at the 2012 Red Cross Red Crescent Riga Conference in Latvia, “Aligning the Red Cross Red Crescent Action with Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations”

**Vienna Commitments (excerpt):**

**Ageing in Europe**

*European Regional Red Cross Red Crescent Conference, 13 – 16 April 2010*

3. We will contribute to building a positive image of ageing, and will recognize older people as an important resource for society.

4. We aim for self-empowerment of older people and will encourage active ageing, strengthening their resilience and allowing them to remain autonomous. We will encourage active ageing, and will highlight to our governments the strong evidence that it reduces the vulnerability of older people. We will advocate for the inclusion of older people in economic, social and cultural life, and for life-long learning. We will promote their active participation as volunteers in our own activities and decision-making.

5. We will advocate at all levels for the public provision of, and access to, adequate services for older people, such as proper living and housing conditions, appropriate health and social care and nursing – in accordance with human dignity and relevant standards. We will actively tackle and prevent any mistreatment and abuse.

6. We will develop sustainable services and activities at grassroots level to promote the physical, social and mental well-being of older people. We will recruit and train volunteers to provide assistance and support to those most in need and their caregivers. We will consider the specific needs of older people in the design of all our programmes.

7. We will strengthen solidarity between younger and older people to mutual benefit, and will actively promote intergenerational dialogue and cooperation. We recognize the growing diversity of older people in our communities, and will adapt our services and communication tools accordingly.
Creating a positive image of ageing

Older people have a wealth of knowledge and experience accumulated over the span of a lifetime. Despite this, our current stereotypes view older people as incompetent, diminishing their social status. Red Cross Red Crescent Societies commit to building a positive image of ageing, and will recognize older people as an important resource for society.

The image of ageing is an important determinant of an older person’s health. In one respect, how society views older people affects employment, health and social policies, as well as services. In another, negative stereotypes of ageing influence the way older people see themselves. It creates a type of self-ageism, leading to increased dependence, isolation and marginalization. A positive image of ageing that recognizes older people’s wisdom, dignity and contribution to society, can help reduce risk and vulnerability.

To follow through on this commitment, National Societies can develop activities and projects that are strategically designed to improve the self-confidence and self-esteem of older people. Older generations should also have the possibility to contribute their time, expertise and knowledge as members and volunteers.

Within society-at-large, National Societies can work to improve the image of older people through strategic partnerships with politicians, decision-makers and representatives from health and social care systems. Mass media campaigns can also help to show the heterogeneous experiences of older people, and raise awareness of the different facets of ageing.

Empowering older people

Red Cross Red Crescent Societies commit to empower older people through active ageing, allowing them to strengthen their resilience and remain autonomous.

Active ageing involves life-long learning and the full range of formal and non-formal learning activities that older people can engage in throughout life. This includes learning and using information and communication technologies (ICT) to its full potential, in a way that supports independent living and participation in economic and social life. Healthy lifestyles are also an important aspect of active ageing, and health promotion enables people to increase control over their health and its determinants.

In line with this commitment, National Societies can support programmes, activities and initiatives that promote physical and mental well-being. While the beneficiaries of such programmes, older people should also actively participate as volunteers, opinion leaders and decision-makers. Having a voice within the programmes that serve them is the key to empowerment. National Societies can also encourage active ageing in the society-at-large, highlighting to governments the strong evidence that active ageing reduces the vulnerability of older people.
All people, at some point in their lives, will find themselves needing the support of others. Sometimes this can be a practical support, such as helping with daily activities that are made more difficult because of illness or injury, and other times, it can be emotional and moral support; giving guidance and advice.

The Hungarian Red Cross runs programs that address both the practical and emotional needs of vulnerable populations. The Volunteer Hospital Helper Teams of the Hungarian Red Cross – Jasz-Nagykun-Szolnok County Branch provides practical assistance, personal care, as well as emotional support to the elderly people who are hospitalized or live in sheltered accommodation.

With an average of 30 people per team, the members of the Volunteer Hospital Helpers (VHH) are mostly retired women. The VHH Team provides care in the areas of Szolnok and Karcag. All volunteer members received both theoretical and practical training, including classes on psychosocial and communication skills, as well as basic care skills for older people. The training addresses several closely-related aspects of ageing, including biological, social and emotional needs. Red Cross volunteers seek to reduce the vulnerability of the older people recognizing different aspects of their well-being.

Younger people may also need support, requiring the guidance and wisdom of someone who may have a little more life experience. Within the Civic Mentors Team, older volunteers are well-suited to counsel younger people, who may face challenges at school, or in their home life. Mentors regularly help youngsters with their homework and develop their skills enhancing the self-confidence and self-esteem of all these young people. They also provide moral and emotional support.

As a result, students who participated in the programme had higher grades, spent more time in school and had improved relationships with family and friends. The work of the this programme demonstrates the mutual benefits that can be achieved through intergenerational solidarity and cooperation.

Most of the 22 volunteers who participated in this programme are retired women. Agnes Nagy, Director of the County Branch, said it had made a significant difference in the loves of both volunteers and recipients. “Most civic mentors were happy to report that their charges achieved more success in their academic and personal lives. This meant a lot to the mentors,” she said. “Not only did they teach the children new skills but they learnt more about themselves, too.

Nagy said it wasn’t just those who were being mentored that saw the benefits of the programme. “As a result of the responsibilities and the successful performance of their mission, mentoring activities also enhanced the self-esteem of the mentors themselves,” she said.
Advocating for quality in public care, adequate living conditions and combating elderly abuse

Basic needs, such as housing, health and social care, are important factors for good health and well-being. The quality of these basic needs can drastically affect an older person’s susceptibility to illness, disease, or social isolation, increasing their vulnerability. Red Cross Red Crescent Societies advocate at all levels for the public provision of, and access to, adequate services for older people in accordance with human dignity and relevant standards.

While the aim is for people to age in a healthy and self-sufficient way, many individuals will find themselves dependent on some type of assistance and care by others. National health care systems must be accessible to all people in society, and older people with progressing frailty, or acute or chronic illness or disability, should have the same equality of access as others. Older people in need of care should have easy access to public systems, independent of their economic situation or access to informal help by friends and family.

Adhering with this commitment, National Societies can also advocate for the quality and coordination of all health care and nursing services, including long-term care, as well as the promotion of first-aid training for care providers, staff and volunteers. They can also advocate for the public provision of preventative measures and empowerment interventions (for example, counselling and training), particularly to informal caregivers. Programmes that support older people who wish to continue living on their own should be expanded, and ICT-based support for independent living should be promoted.

In some cases, older people are at risk of abuse by their caregivers. Abuse can also take the form of financial, psychological/mental or sexual abuse, or neglect and abandonment. National Societies commit to actively tackling and preventing mistreatment and abuse by way of awareness-raising campaigns, as well as providing support to formal and informal caregivers, preventing escalations of emotional stress that can lead to conflict or violent situations.

Designing age-friendly programmes and promoting grassroots involvement

Programmes that help those in need should also reflect the composition of the population they seek to serve. Older people should be involved in the design of all programmes, particularly those that serve them. Programmes should be designed in such a way that reflects the diversity of needs, economic resources, social status, educational level, age, and health of the older generation. Social inclusion means that older people are both beneficiaries of services, as well as contributors and volunteers who provide services to others.
Red Cross Red Crescent Societies commit to developing sustainable services and activities at the grassroots level to promote the physical, social and mental well-being of older people. National Societies can recruit and train volunteers to provide assistance and support to those most in need and their caregivers, and consider the specific needs of older people in the design of all programming. Older people will be encouraged to participate in volunteering and decision-making, and be recognized for their work.

Promoting intergenerational dialogue and cooperation

All generations have a vested interest in developing their communities. Despite this, families and communities face obstacles to keeping good relations with older people. This can lead to dissatisfaction and marginalization of older people, as well as a loss for younger generations of the resources that older people can provide, such as wisdom, talent and time. Red Cross Red Crescent Societies commit to strengthening solidarity between younger and older people to mutual benefit, and actively promote intergenerational dialogue and cooperation.

Intergenerational exchange is a two-way process, depending on mutual respect and the sharing of knowledge. Recognizing the growing diversity of older people, National Societies can adapt their services and communication tools accordingly. They also promote the inclusion of and bridging between all age groups in all activities and decision-making bodies. In line with the commitment, National Societies can foster projects that are based on the common interest of younger and older people.
Youth volunteers helping at home

Case Study - Montenegro

Living at home in older age has benefits over living in an institution, allowing people to maintain their independence and the comfort of being in their own home. However, maintaining a home and all the duties associated with living independently can be difficult as people age. Basic tasks, such as grocery shopping, paying bills, visiting the doctor and cleaning can be burdensome for older people to complete on their own.

The Red Cross of Montenegro, through their home care programme, provides social and medical services to older people who still live within their own homes. Since 2002, the home care programme has been operating in 14 local branches, using the support of 150 volunteers, and delivering services to 700 beneficiaries. Those who benefit from the programme are over 65 years of age, have little or no income, are living alone or with another person or spouse who is also in need of aid, and have trouble coping with everyday activities.

Volunteers help with basic services such as shopping and light household duties. In some cases, volunteers purchase food and hygienic items for those who cannot afford it.

The home care programme also seeks to enhance the social and emotional well-being of older people. Red Cross volunteers organize social evenings, such as knitting clubs and other activities, bringing younger volunteers and older beneficiaries together, and helping to promote active ageing.

Jovan Ljubojevic is a 67-year-old pensioner from Bar. Living in a trailer and lacking any family or relatives in the area, Red Cross volunteers are often the only company he has. Social evenings provide Jovan with the occasion to interact with his peers and other people, and allow him to also give back to volunteers, by teaching them chess as a show of appreciation for their assistance.

In reflection of a social event on Skadar Lake, organized by the local Red Cross branch of Bar, Jovan describes: “This was the most beautiful day of my life. I was with my young and old friends. We were laughing all day, playing chess and cards. I don’t have any relatives of my own around me, but I enjoyed this day as if I was surrounded by family.”
Building the framework: older people as beneficiaries and volunteers

The Red Cross Red Crescent delivers a range of services to older people. One such programme involves providing support to older people in community-based home care services. The aim is to increase the quality of life of older persons by supporting social integration, giving practical help in accordance with national law, promoting psychosocial well-being, and reducing the burden of informal caregivers. As a result, older people are encouraged to live more independently, helping to build a cohesive and more resilient community.

Voluntary service is one of the seven Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Worldwide, the Movement has over 13 million active volunteers from all backgrounds, ages and capabilities. As identified in the Strategy 2020 first enabling action, volunteering is at the heart of community building. A National Society’s capacity and effectiveness is directly related to its ability to mobilize, manage and empower volunteers from across the communities that it serves.

The Red Cross Red Crescent encourages older people to volunteer, contributing their skills, knowledge, experience and energy to helping others, and to participate in the services that serve their community. Volunteering is also a key element of active ageing, ensuring that older people participate in social and civic life, thereby improving their mental and emotional well-being.
Club of Generations in Harghita County, Romania. Older people celebrating carnival

(Photo: Romanian Red Cross)
National Societies can lead the way in supporting our older generations, ensuring that they lead healthy, active and independent lives. Inspired by the Fundamental Principles guided by common values, and informed by Strategy 2020, National Societies can “do more, do better, and reach further” in meeting the challenges and opportunities of our ageing populations. Three elements in particular should be considered as our populations prepare for this great demographic change:

**Advocacy**

As auxiliaries to government, National Societies are in a strong position to promote public policies that improve the well-being of older people. Advocacy activities include coordinating local and national campaigns, training key personnel and stakeholders (including older people) in the basics of advocacy principles, as well as devising a system for identifying and prioritizing the issues of concern for older people. Advocacy also involves developing strategic partnerships, linking with media, and involving older people in all aspects of advocacy work.

**Capacity building**

Opportunities can be created to give older people self-confidence and allow them to be integrated into wider society. Information on the rights and entitlements of older people should be provided, to enable access to services and resources that are afforded to them. Programmes should include intergenerational cooperation, including the joint and active participation of older people in management and decision-making. Partners and donors can also play an important role, by providing the resources that enable National Societies to develop their capacity.

**Social Mobilization**

Red Cross Red Crescent Societies can develop community mobilization strategies, including: promoting work at branch and national levels, designing and implementing recruitment programmes for volunteers (with special consideration to older people) and providing training for caregivers. National Societies are an important resource in providing support to older people, particularly in hospitals or retirement homes. However, National Societies should stress the importance of government in providing primary public health and social care services.

**Obstacles and Opportunities**

Adapting to our ageing populations requires an integrated and holistic approach, involving governments and civil society, as well as communities, families and individuals. Enabling active ageing and solidarity between generations requires not only innovative programmes and policies, but also a change in attitudes and mindsets. Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can lead this change to meet the challenges that face humanity, but they cannot do it alone; it requires everybody’s effort – together.
At a societal level, increasing dependency ratios mean that there are fewer individuals in the workforce that can support the number of older people who will come to depend on public services. Governments will have to cope with the strain on their health and social systems, as the need for innovative community- and volunteer-supported programmes will increase. Moreover, negative attitudes of ageing and harmful stereotypes can cause marginalization of older people, making them more vulnerable within their community.

Ultimately, ensuring that our older generations receive support requires both individual and system-wide action. Individuals must transform their attitudes and mind-set towards ageing, recognizing the unique and often positive contributions that older people bring to society. Older people themselves must also recognize this – that their participation in social and civic life is valuable, important and enduring.

However, individual action requires a supportive environment that sustains such transformation. Governments, National Societies and other civil society groups must promote system-wide changes in policies and programming, demonstrating that active ageing and solidarity between generations not only benefits older people, but benefits us all.
The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.