

# A generation in transition:

Older people's situation and civil society's response  
in East and Central Europe



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## Foreword

This booklet was published to accompany the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid in April 2002, and in advance of the Inter-Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Berlin the following September. It draws on HelpAge International's ten years' experience of engagement with the East and Central European Network (ECEN) of civil society organisations working with and for older people.

The book was compiled by the Network's Working Group. Its contents were finalised in March 2002 in Prague, Czech Republic, at the ECEN's Regional Meeting, an event attended by 30 representatives of civil society organisations from East and Central Europe. (For details of ECEN's member organisations, activities and publications, see Appendices two-six). It draws on a series of consultations carried out by HelpAge International staff and ECEN members in 2001 with older people's groups within several countries in East and Central Europe, most of which are seeing the emergence of national networking processes.

**HelpAge International** is a global network of not-for-profit organisations with a mission to work with and for disadvantaged older people worldwide to achieve a lasting improvement in the quality of their lives.

**A generation in transition: Older people's situation and civil society's response in East and Central Europe**

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## Introduction

The current generation of people over 50 years of age in East and Central Europe has been cruelly disappointed and disempowered. Basic services are no longer adequate and the culture is unsupportive of older people's needs. What is needed is an innovative approach. Part of this approach requires that the state recognise and support the analyses and responses of older people themselves to the situation, as well as civil society initiatives.

There have been few studies examining the role of civil society organisations in supporting older people in East and Central Europe and how their position relates to the public sector, and there is little documentation about older people's own role in identifying and addressing these issues. Both these questions need answering. But it is also necessary to look to the future and discuss how to raise the considerable funds required by many countries in the region to raise services and pensions to the appropriate level.

The situation requires an informed dialogue between state and citizens about the role of the state, the role of older people's own 'human capital' and the role of civil society. Even in this debate about their current situation, older people feel excluded. Their sense of a lack of power and involvement is one of the subjects of this book. Another is how older people can be - and in some cases, are - involved in addressing the new challenges they face in societies in transition.

This booklet aims to provide decision-makers within government, local and national civil society organisations, regional agencies and older people themselves with the following:

- **A snapshot** of the real issues, as identified by older people themselves
- **A brief description** of the response to these issues by civil society organisations and older people themselves
- **Practical advice** for service providers on starting to put older people at the centre of services
- **Views** of older people's groups on how the state can complement - or take into account - their work
- **Insight** into the reality of life for older people, told in their own words
- **Details** of activities in which older people and those working with them in civil society are involved
- **A declaration** by members of the East and Central European Network to governments.

Most national governments and international bodies have paid little attention to older people's needs and concerns

## The background

The dissolution of socialist state planning systems across East and Central Europe from 1989 onwards was a catalyst for far-reaching changes affecting almost every aspect of ordinary people's lives. The transition to market-led economies brought financial instability, unemployment and crises in public funding. Old models of provision collapsed, triggering new kinds of activity in the non-government sector.

At the same time, countries across the region experienced an increase in the proportion of older people in their populations. This demographic shift put further pressures on social provision already under strain in critical areas, such as pensions and healthcare. Fresh ways of thinking and new kinds of collaboration were needed to protect older people's welfare and reduce their vulnerability in the post-Soviet era.

As is always the case, the vulnerable sections of the community have been hardest hit by the crisis. In East and Central Europe, older people have faced particular difficulties. The falling value of pensions has led to economic hardship. Services that used to be provided by governments are being reduced or withdrawn. Older people feel insecure and disillusioned by the changes that have made their lives so much harder and more unpredictable. In addition, conflict in the region has left many older people without families, homes or any means of supporting themselves.

At the 'Older people's experience of care II' seminar in Warsaw in 2001 (see Appendix five), civil society organisations (CSOs) described this situation in terms of 'powerlessness', and chose to respond to it as a challenge to regain power over their lives.

Evidence received from East and Central European Network (ECEN) consultations with older people undertaken in 2001 (see Appendix seven) has shown clearly that transition has affected older people's wellbeing on many fronts - economically, socially, psychologically and physically. But most national governments and international bodies have paid little attention to older people's needs and concerns when implementing economic and social reforms. For example, older people have not been consulted or involved in programmes dealing with the side effects of transition, even though they have been disproportionately affected by measures such as reduced subsidies.

Older people are frequently seen as the cause of the problems facing the region. It is commonly believed that they hung on to political power in countries such as the former Soviet Union for far too long. In reality, as with most stereotypes of older people, this impression is far from the truth, particularly in view of the highly centralised nature of power in the former regimes. Oligarchy rather than gerontocracy was the norm, with most people now in their fifties and above not belonging to the party nomenclature in any case. The vast majority of today's older generation never had much power; but what little they had has mostly been taken from them - along with security in old age, which was perhaps the highest good of the former regime.

## Chapter 1

### Key issues identified by older people

There are huge differences between the respective histories of the former Soviet Union, the Balkans countries and Central Europe, and even within these rather arbitrary regional sub-divisions, there are significant variations from country to country. However, despite the diversity within the region, there is one common issue that affects all citizens to a greater or lesser degree, and that affects the current older generation more than any other: all have gone through the shock of a rapid and unprecedented collapse of a social and political system.

In 2001, HelpAge International and the ECEN carried out a series of interviews with older people in the region (for details, see Appendix seven). The results of the consultations demonstrated the profound effect that the transition has had on these people's lives, leading to feelings of disillusionment, exclusion, deprivation and loss, and offering little scope for them to participate in society in a fulfilling way.<sup>1</sup>

#### Disillusionment

For most older people consulted by HelpAge International, planning for retirement was based on the assumption that a small but adequate pension would be complemented by continuing access to free healthcare and housing. A Moldovan older woman explained: 'Ten years ago, we had a period when we lived well and looked forward to a bright future. There was a health system, free education and good services. Now, we have to pay for everything and our pensions are too low. When we were younger and working, we did not expect the current situation - we did not plan for it.'<sup>2</sup>

These expectations of the state were justifiable - no one predicted the dramatic collapse of social systems in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There is not one country in the region in which older people's income security has not declined, and in most countries it has dropped significantly.

Even in countries where older people welcome the changes in society and the political economy in general, their most common feeling is one of disillusionment and insecurity. One older person in Romania said: 'We now have permission to say our ideas anywhere, any time.' However, according to a Czech older woman: 'Inflation is a big problem. We don't know about the future, how much prices will rise, what will happen tomorrow.' Another older person, this time from Latvia, related: 'I live below a minimum income level and have no savings, even though I have worked for over 40 years.'

Older people feel that they are entitled to the 'bright future' which they themselves played a part in constructing - but it is tarnished. For all its faults, the former system did provide a measure of guaranteed social solidarity - at least at the level of official rhetoric. At the same time, a lifetime of coping with the shortcomings of the centrally planned system has meant that older people tend to be very resilient in their private lives. In addition, anyone who lived through World War II and the immediate post-war period - which includes anyone over 70 - often suffered extreme privation, so this generation has learned to be particularly resourceful.

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1. This chapter is based on a chapter from *State of the World's Older People 2002*, launched at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid.

2. The quotations from older people in this book were obtained through a series of interviews carried out by HelpAge International staff and ECEN members throughout the region in 2001 (see Appendix seven).

In most discussions about their situation, older people point to disillusionment as a major aspect of their lives. This feeling is connected to a general sense of powerlessness and bewilderment at their loss and deprivation. In some countries, there are older people who feel that their current situation is even worse than the times they experienced during World War II, as this time their very position within society is called into question, and their legitimate expectation of security in old age is now in ruins.

On the other hand, in some countries of the former Soviet Union, the political changes have re-opened half-closed wounds caused by the mass deportations that affected the current older generation 50 years ago. Some of the victims of this type of repression feel disillusioned when, ten years after the fall of the former regimes, they see many of the same faces in government.

Many people due compensation have still not been paid, and some returned deportees are still waiting for long-overdue rehabilitation. An older man from Moldova related: 'I was sent to Siberia with my father in 1952, and after the death of Stalin, we were sent home and told we would be compensated, but we received nothing. Compensation for forced deportation from Russia is a priority.'

Some of these nations had been painstakingly held together over many years by creaking but functional systems. To the generation that saw them develop, their abrupt and unexpected disintegration has been keenly felt as a spiritual loss. This is particularly the case among Russians in the former Soviet Union, but the break-up of Yugoslavia represents a similar dramatic dislocation of frames of reference for older people.

#### Older people's views: Disillusionment

'Although I worked for 44 years, my pension is very low.' *Ukraine*

'People with long work records can't even pay for their health services when they fall ill.'  
*Bulgaria*

'We have lived through war, fascism, Stalin's gulag, and famine. People who gave their health and lives to the country, and spent up to 50 years working for it, are now forgotten and poor.'  
*Moldova*

'Earlier, the government was different. They looked after us, but now we get nothing.'  
*Lithuania*

#### Exclusion

All sections of the population are facing economic and social problems, but a crucial difference is that older people have not had access to the new opportunities that social and political change has provided younger people. This is most obvious in the difficulties older people are experiencing in developing new forms of work. According to an older man in the Czech Republic: 'It is very serious for the older generation that society is not able to use our experience. Instead, an employer will tend to hire a younger person with no experience at all. It is a very bad situation for us.'

Where they exist, retraining and redeployment schemes have generally favoured younger people, and older people themselves have often withdrawn in favour of their children and grandchildren. In Romania, training and education are only available for a small proportion of older people, and in Lithuania, an older woman admits: 'I left my job so that my daughter could have it. I am not the only one who has done this.'

Older people feel they lack access to information, and feel they have been forgotten by society and ignored by government. 'Pensioners are uninformed and neglected. They do not even have money to buy a single newspaper,' an older man from Bosnia and Herzegovina objected. An older Lithuanian man said: 'It doesn't matter what we say, we are not important. Nobody will listen to us. They don't care about us.' Intergenerational solidarity, once fostered (perhaps artificially) by the state, is declining, with fewer contacts between older and younger people.

#### Older people's views: Employment

'I would like to still be working.' *Poland*

'A good thing in my life is that I work as part of a young team [as a pharmacy clerk]. I am earning my own livelihood.' *Romania*

'When we reach retirement age, we are forced to leave our jobs. We should be allowed to work if we want to work.' *Lithuania*

'I cannot continue to work because no one will hire pensioners.' *Ukraine*

'Retired people are not allowed to earn more than US\$90 per month and to have a full pension at the same time.' *Latvia*

Despite very high levels of literacy and a good standard of general education among their generation, older people, especially the most vulnerable, tend to be badly informed about their rights. This means that many do not receive their full entitlements to benefits. There are also many disturbing reports of older people being forced into selling their main valuable asset - their property - to unscrupulous middlemen (or relatives) in exchange for very low annuities.

An older woman from Bulgaria recalled: 'My niece took advantage of me and I signed away my flat. I went to the lawyer who had drawn up the agreement, and he expressed surprise at my not having included a clause to enable me to stay in the flat.'

In Russia, structures that supported older people after retirement tended to relate to the workplace. State enterprises provided an environment and identity for former workers - often with comprehensive services. But today, with the workplace no longer binding older people into society, and state support for social and cultural opportunities significantly weakened, the older generation is becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of society.

**'Older people do not have the means to go anywhere,' said an older woman from Russia. 'The factories have no money, so we have nowhere to go.' This is particularly the case for single older people who cannot rely on their families to provide an essential link to the outside world, and to those with restricted mobility. These individuals are at risk of alcoholism as they turn to drink to escape their distressing realities.**

#### **Older people's views: Exclusion**

'People should be more sensitive to older people's problems. The public media needs to raise awareness of older people.' *Poland*

'There is insufficient protection of older people's rights and older people lack the means for counsel to protect themselves.' *Slovakia*

'Older people are neglected and destroyed.' *Romania*

'While a man is younger and can support himself, it is OK. But when he becomes older, he is forgotten.' *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

'Society does not care about older people. Even neighbours are unconcerned about older people who live nearby.' *Slovakia*

'I feel neglected by society. No one pays attention to me.' *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

'We need to tell government that there is a problem. Nobody knows about the situation of older people.' *Moldova*

#### **Deprivation and loss**

**In discussions and interviews with HelpAge International and the ECEN, many older people, particularly in the former Soviet Union, talk in terms of a general sense of loss, deprivation and bereavement, at several levels.**

Events have affected men and women in different ways. Many older men have witnessed the shocking rise in morbidity and mortality among their peers, as well as coping with the loss of status and support systems they had expected their workplace to continue to provide. 'I am 81 years old,' said a man from the Czech Republic. 'The other men of my age [in the village] have died. We spent most of our lives in the First and Second World Wars. We gave our lives and our health to the wars.'

Women are in the majority within this age group - as they are in most countries - but in some countries such as Latvia, the gender gap in life expectancy is one of the highest in the world. For this reason, the position of widows is of key concern, particularly those who live in isolated rural areas or in population centres around state enterprises or collective farms that are now closed or moribund. 'I live alone,' a Moldovan widow reported. 'I am no longer in exile, but now I have no help.'

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, huge numbers of ethnic Russians - many of them older people - have felt forced to return from their now-foreign birthplaces or homes of 50 years (where they or their parents were often forcibly

settled in the 1940s and 1950s), to a surprisingly unfamiliar 'Mother Russia'. If they remain where they are, they feel the loss of statehood keenly, and older people feel that some newly independent states seem to hold them individually responsible for all the previous regime's policies.

In post-conflict societies, many older people are displaced and face difficulties in obtaining entitlements such as pensions. Some older Bosnian people explained: 'People who worked all of their lives in Croatia or Serbia but who now live in Bosnia receive nothing. Their work is not recognised because there are no agreements between governments.'

Other forms of deprivation include the late payment of pensions and the high cost of medicines, as well as poor state provision for health and social care for older people, particularly in rural areas. In many countries, older people talk about experiencing poverty, with many universal pension schemes being chronically under-funded. Their most pressing concern was the lack of access to healthcare and health protection. Few countries have individualised, non-institutional care systems for older people, despite the rise in need for these as a result of the emigration of many middle-generation potential carers.

In most countries, pensions are related to the official cost of living, or, more often, to official salary levels. While ratios in East and Central Europe appear quite high to Western pension providers, salary levels in the region are so low that the indexation of pensions on both systems generally leads to a deprivation of basic human rights among many older people. 'My pension is 90 lei [about US\$7]. How can I pay for my services?' asked a Moldovan older woman. 'I have nothing to eat. I just look at the ceiling.'

Where the previous system allowed most people to supplement their income, pensioners' earnings are now usually deducted from their pensions. 'If you still work when you have a pension, either your pension is reduced or your salary is reduced,' commented an older person in Lithuania.

Despite the problems, a pension is still a lifeline for pensioners and their families. Older people in Macedonia explained: 'Our children have no chances to find employment, so we have to support them with our modest pensions.'

Essential items such as medicines and winter heating are often very expensive. A Lithuanian older man said: 'When our children grow up, we live alone. We have to pay rent, utilities, and we cannot afford it.' Older people in Poland stressed that 'medicine and medical services are too expensive.'

A Bosnian older woman added: 'Older people do not have the means to cook or eat food. Their incomes are extremely low. Older people have to pay all costs - rent, food, electricity. They cannot manage.' A group of Russian older people described their main problems as 'expensive healthcare and low level of pension payments. Though the government raises pensions every three months, inflation is rising at a faster rate and our pensions are increasingly worthless.'

In addition to the cost of medicine, health and social services are seldom available in appropriate forms for older people, who require specialised and often long-term care. There is evidence in some countries of de facto rationing of services. Older people claim that doctors concentrate their limited resources on younger

Few countries have individualised, non-institutional care systems for older people, despite the rise in need

people. In the past, institutional arrangements, including flagship sanatoria, relied on a relatively low take-up, as families often provided care. But once younger family members began migrating for work and the large enterprises providing the services closed down, this system became inadequate.

#### Older people's views: Poverty, cost of living and pensions

'Poverty is the worst thing about my life.' *Romania*

'A lack of water and electricity creates difficulties in my life.' *Albania*

'I cannot afford food.' *Latvia*

'We have to pay a lot for medicine and it is difficult to live. I spend at least half my pension on medicine.' *Lithuania*

'We cannot be ill because we have no money to pay for the treatment.' *Russia*

'My pension goes entirely on medicine. Prices are not controlled, they are too expensive.' *Moldova*

'Pensions do not increase with the rate of inflation.' *Romania*

'When I retired, I received a pension. Now prices are five to ten times higher, but my pension is only three times higher.' *Czech Republic*

'Many older people have no money, no pension. If you don't have a pension, it is almost impossible to live.' *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

'My pension is not enough to survive, but I am too weak to work.' *Ukraine*

A Hungarian older person said: 'It would be better if older people did not have to wait years for admission to a home.' A greater concentration of older people in rural areas, particularly in depopulated villages across the region and holding centres in post-conflict areas, has not been matched by a rise in specialisation or re-allocation of scarce medical resources. Doctors and nurses, along with all state employees, are themselves chronically underpaid, and institutions are generally understaffed.

Specific issues differ according to the circumstances of the individual country. In Moldova, older people do not pay for the first five days of hospitalisation, but due to a lack of funds, all patients have to pay for medicines and tests. Thus, the cost of treatment is prohibitive to older people. A Moldovan man explained: 'I had to sell everything in my house in order to pay for my eye surgery. Now I am in debt. I spend all of my pension on medication.'

Another key issue for many older people is income security and, in some countries, lack of access to rural livelihoods. A Lithuanian older man told his story: 'I worked on a farm, but when the USSR collapsed and we gained independence, the farms were ruined and I lost my work.' In Bosnia, lack of access to agricultural inputs is a problem too. An older person explained: 'In villages, older farmers are very poor. They cannot work because they need seeds and equipment. Agricultural producers have no income or protection.'

### Older people's views: Health and social services

'I need more care from social services.' *Poland*

'A big problem is that when we go to hospital, the doctor does not have time for consultations. He just has time to write prescriptions, but not to talk to us about our health.' *Lithuania*

'The healthcare system does not consider the interests of older people. We have to wait a long time for state-financed operations because we do not have enough money to pay for operations ourselves.' *Latvia*

'Homes are crowded and we do not have personal space. Staff in nursing homes do not treat us as humans.' *Hungary*

'We need better healthcare services, especially in small villages.' *Bulgaria*

'I would like a doctor to come and visit me, but I cannot pay for a doctor to come.' *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

'I am over 80 years old. The best help I could have from the government is to have someone to help me care for my husband. My daughters work during the day and cannot come.' *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

'There are not enough services for older people, and we cannot afford to have any choice.' *Slovakia*

'In order to be admitted to hospital, it is necessary to fill in a form. But we have to pay for the form, and charges are arbitrary and prohibitive for older people.' *Moldova*

'I have a neighbour who cannot walk and has no help. She has had many medical interventions, but there is no on-going medical or social support. We cook and carry water for her. There is no money for medicines. How else can we help if we ourselves are in a bad situation?' *Moldova*

'We need transport to go to the local hospital. We cannot afford bus fares, and there is no other transport available.' *Serbia, Yugoslavia*

'There is a lack of services to help older people, such as home-visiting services.' *Macedonia*

**Older people in the region are accustomed to working to supplement their income. But in the current situation, most traditional forms of income generation are immeasurably more difficult to come by than they were previously. Some older people are resorting to begging or marginal work such as private bottle collecting - almost unheard of in the previous regime. 'Street elderly' are now a common sight in most large cities in the region, and are usually forced to pay a percentage of their meagre earnings to local gangs for protection. A Bosnian woman said: 'You often see people begging in the street... people who have nothing.'**

**At the same time, the 'younger old' (55-64) are in a very difficult situation. Many have been made redundant, and the severance pay has not been enough to start a small business. They are in danger of becoming the next generation of street elderly.**

Another form of loss is that of personal security. Most older people agree that day-to-day security was taken for granted under the earlier regime, with strict policing. Crime did exist, but it was mainly against the state rather than towards private individuals. There has been a rapid rise in muggings and street violence since the transition, and older people in Poland said: 'We feel unsafe in our streets.' There have been several reports of extremely violent attacks on older people (particularly older women living alone in rural areas), often for very small amounts of money.

In Russia, researchers were told: 'Older people who live alone are often robbed in their flats. Thieves and drug abusers find out information about lonely older people in the district and rob them when they receive their pensions.' This type of attack is almost wholly unprecedented in the region. As a result, some older people have managed to adopt wholly new approaches to basic living, such as 'buddying up' when walking in the streets, but they remain very vulnerable.

#### Older people's views: Personal security

'One problem is that younger generations are increasingly violent and hostile to older people.' *Czech Republic*

'I feel insecure when I walk alone.' *Poland*

'It is not safe in the street. Twice when I have gone out, I have been robbed.' *Lithuania*

'We feel more vulnerable and insecure. The number of victims of crime is increasing.' *Bulgaria*

'My spouse is an alcoholic and is violent.' *Latvia*

'We fear the armed conflicts in our country.' *Macedonia*

## Chapter 2

### Older people's response within civil society

In Chapter 1 we have seen that older people define the key issues affecting them as disillusionment, deprivation and loss. This chapter examines the response of older people within civil society as a whole, and within those civil society organisations (CSOs) providing services for older people. It also looks at how older people are being empowered within these civil society structures, and asks what lessons can be gleaned from these initiatives, both for civil society and for the state.

### The contribution of older people to society

Older people do not want to be defined exclusively by reference to their age. However, this is precisely how they have been viewed by successive governments around the world. This form of discrimination can cause older people to function in some ways as a 'target group', although in fact they counter these common perceptions in many ways. By taking a stereotypical view of this 'group', societies overlook older people's contribution to society - which is significant and vastly under-recognised. An older person in Poland perhaps sums up the situation, saying: 'The younger generation has an unfriendly attitude.'

Many younger people retain negative stereotypes of older people as passive, even though this does not accord with their actual experience of their parents or grandparents. In fact, their older relations often provide them with some cash security through pensions within the household (an area inadequately researched and understood to date). They also help younger generations with childcare (once frequently provided by the workplace or heavily subsidised) and often share or transfer their accommodation during periods when housing is scarce. An older person from Russia related: 'Since perestroika, many families have had to live on the pension of the older person. This supports entire families who don't have any other support.'

The wide gap between society's perceptions of older people and the reality of their essential contribution to society adds to their sense of having been forgotten. This atmosphere is not helped by the state, which often appears to view older people as a separate section of society made up of passive recipients of services and benefits.

Despite their ability to contribute, older people feel undervalued. 'I'm sad that people think I am useless,' said a Polish older person. A group of older people in Slovenia remarked: 'We could still participate in solving the problems of our society if they would accept our opinion.' In fact, many older people would like to be active members of society. An older person in Moldova agreed: 'People need to be active in old age, and they need a role, something to do. Older people would like to work and not just sit around and do nothing. They would like to contribute and continue to be active in society.'

Many younger people retain negative stereotypes of older people as passive, even though this does not accord with their actual experience

### Older people's views: Their contribution to society

'Our children have no chances to find employment, so we have to support them on our modest pensions.' *Macedonia*

'No one needs our abilities or skills.' *Moldova*

'No one appreciates older people.' *Slovenia*

'I don't want to be idle. I have found new activities which I enjoy.' *Poland*

'There is a lack of possibilities for older people to realise themselves in public life.' *Slovakia*

'I am old, but I don't want to just lie in bed.' *Lithuania*

'I am writing my memoirs. Older people's memories are important: old age is the basis for young life.' *Bulgaria*

'I take part in different activities of my civil society organisation, write articles, and keep a good daily regime.' *Albania*

'Older people can help each other.' *Romania*

Self-help: what older people are doing for themselves

**Older people can play an integral role in society when they are not prevented from doing so. However, when society does exclude them, they develop strategies of self-help.**

Older people interviewed by HelpAge International and the ECEN (see Appendix seven) see the family as a very important source of extra financial support and, at times, as a source of food. Family visits are crucial for socialisation. Where no family links exist, older people turn to friends and colleagues for support, though in many areas older people are isolated. Older people feel most fulfilled when they are able to look after their children and grandchildren in some way.

In Russia, many older people referred to their *dachas* (summerhouses) as a source of food, as they can grow fruit and vegetables on the surrounding land in the summer. 'We rely on our *dachas*,' said a group of older people from Russia. Other activities, typically carried out by older men, including going fishing and picking mushrooms and berries, which can be sold to make money.

These solutions are not economical, as the growing season is very short and the huge increases in the cost of public transport mean that fewer and fewer older people can afford the journey out of town. In addition, the goods produced in *dachas* are often very cheap to buy at the markets. But these activities do seem to be important. Their true value may lie in promoting self-reliance and providing a pleasant pastime, rather than purely in terms of nutrition. 'I have a lot of time to work in my garden. It helps to solve financial problems and it is a relaxing activity at the same time,' explained an older person in Latvia. In Estonia, an older man said: 'Growing food in my own garden helps me to cope.'

In some countries, many older people husband their goods and savings and rely on second-hand shops. In others, particularly the European Union accession countries,<sup>3</sup> a small number of older people received restitution payments for property they owned in former times that was taken by the government. Generally, however, pensioners are poor: 'People who only have a pension must really count their money and be careful,' explains an older woman in Czech Republic.

For many older people, the main sources of social contact used to be the state enterprise and the workplace. They provided much more than the equivalent in a typical West European firm, with social and leisure services. With these gone, the activities formerly carried out by these organisations need to be kept alive. Older people value contact with former colleagues, and these relationships form the basis of some support systems.

In the HelpAge International and ECEN consultations, older people involved in groups and CSOs identified a number of things they were doing to improve their own situation, including basic healthy living (exercising and eating a healthy diet). Many found that their involvement in a CSO was crucial in keeping them active. An older person in Croatia related: 'I am active in a humanitarian organisation and I feel good because of this.'

Some of these groups focus on activities such dance therapy, or form singing clubs. Others enable older people to help each other with repairs to their apartments and dachas, and to exchange used clothing and shoes. Retired professionals (such as doctors, nurses, lawyers or former state officials) help other older people in their specialities. Sometimes, even a small gesture can be extremely important. An older person in Moldova explained: 'We cannot help each other materially, but if someone dies, we try to help the widow or widower by giving them a basket of potatoes.' These activities generate a feeling of self-worth.

An older man in the Czech Republic spoke eloquently about the older people in his community: 'We are unusual. We are all striving for something. We know that a great danger in old age is inactivity, a lack of interest in life. We would all like to do something for ourselves. Our seniors are doing something. It is not typical for older people to gather, [but] here, older people are an exception to the rule.'

CSOs can play a role in sensitising public opinion about older people, as well as in developing activities, and many older people see this as a key role. Some provide humanitarian aid, but CSOs consider moral support to be just as important, as are knowledge, information and social contacts. Some CSOs are taking an important step by reviving free-time activities for older people that were previously organised by the state. Another innovation to emerge is the number of support groups for older carers of 'older old' (65-plus) relatives. These provide a level of support not seen before.

Many older people found that their involvement in a CSO was crucial in keeping them active

<sup>3</sup> Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

The older people felt that the state remained an important factor in their affairs

### Older people and civil society

Where does civil society 'sit' in the context of the new political and economic environment? This question was discussed at a network meeting of older people and older people's groups that had previously been organised by the state, in Russia.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the older people saw family and friends as key actors in their lives, but they also reported feeling a strong relationship with the various state structures. Indeed, the older people felt that the state remained an important factor in their affairs - not only as the provider of pensions, but also as the main provider of services.

Most of the older people who were active within the groups and CSOs appeared to be well aware of the quality and number of services available to them, but all identified a lack of clear information about rights and benefits, and considered tackling this to be a priority. To address the paucity of information, some CSOs give free legal and benefits advice. Providing this type of service is also a key activity for the third sector in other parts of Europe. Wherever they operate, CSOs providing these services are unclear about the relationship of their activities to state activities. Many feel that they should not provide a substitute for state support, while others feel that in some respects this is unavoidable.

There is some middle ground, in which CSOs contribute to society and combat the problems that older people have consistently identified as being beyond the remit of the state, such as social isolation, solidarity between the generations, and a lack of feeling of belonging. At the same time, there is a feeling among older people that the state should address these issues as part of its service delivery. The implication is that older people's groups and CSOs could usefully and effectively change policy and make service delivery more 'human'.

The role of the state was emphasised by many groups, and some considered it one of the most critical partners in their work. In contrast to the situation in Central Europe, in Russia the influence of the state on day-to-day activities seemed to be of some concern, with one service provider commenting: 'State structures... to a certain extent, can activate or slow down the activities of charitable organisations.'

ECEN experience has revealed that there are two ways in which civil society 'adds value'. First, through its activities, it addresses the issues closest to older people. In regional seminars in Zagreb and Warsaw in 2000 and 2001 (see Appendix five for details of these meetings), ECEN members identified a range of activities that they were undertaking, detailed in the section entitled 'Activities', below. Second, civil society is often free to empower older people through a process approach. The ECEN's findings on this aspect can be found later in this chapter, in a section entitled 'Process within civil society organisations'.

<sup>4</sup> HelpAge International and Russian partners Desnitsa Mira held a conference in Samara, Russia, in September 2001 entitled 'The first year of the network of NGOs and groups working with older people in Samara and Moscow oblasts: experience and results.' A report on this meeting is available in Russian from HelpAge International.

## Activities

At the network seminar in Warsaw (2001) and its predecessor in Zagreb (2000), ECEN members compiled a general catalogue of the types of activities their CSOs cover in the region. (For details of the wide range of CSO members within the East and Central Europe Network, see Appendix two.)

### Tackling disillusionment

The disillusionment felt by many older people is the most difficult area for CSOs to address. Many organisations in the region attempt to assist older people in overcoming their disappointment, through social integration and by addressing their material needs. These types of activities are listed under the sections on tackling exclusion and deprivation, below. However, some organisations recognise the primacy of the dashed expectations of older people. An organisation called Older People's Hope, based in Edinet, Moldova, addresses this issue through social activities and medical support, in an attempt to restore in older people some hope for a better future.

### Tackling exclusion

Addressing issues of exclusion is one of the main areas of work of CSOs in the region. These forms of exclusion can include neglect, exclusion from employment or participation in social life, and a lack of access to rights and information.

Specific activities undertaken by CSOs include:

- Raising awareness through media
- Volunteer programmes
- Providing information
- Advice on rights and legal issues
- Intergenerational social activities
- Health and fitness classes
- Courses in bee-keeping, mushroom-growing and sewing
- Hobby groups
- Employment services
- Self-help groups
- Training in lobbying
- Cultural activities, such as concerts and excursions.

Many organisations in the region provide social and cultural groups that support older people in making handicrafts (such as the Veteran's House in Samara, Russia), learning languages (ZIVOT90 in the Czech Republic), learning how to use computers (Raavis Hobby Club, Estonia), training as nurses (EWAC, Lithuania), or attending adult education courses (University of the Third Age, Macedonia). One older person in Macedonia describes a major role of CSOs as to 'contribute to improving our social life in terms of social contacts, mutual help, and organise free-time activities'.

### **Tackling deprivation**

In addressing deprivation, CSOs in the region are engaged in providing:

- Services at home, such as Meals on Wheels or visiting services
- Health services
- Hospice care
- Transport services
- Training for care workers
- Social services, through care homes, social service centres and canteens
- Psychological support and respite holidays for older carers
- Material support for home carers
- Material assistance, such as accommodation and food
- Alarm services for older people at home
- Post-war reconstruction and support for agricultural production
- Cemetery services, such as burial co-operatives
- Self-defence classes
- Humanitarian aid
- Counselling and reminiscence therapy
- Medical services at day centres
- Relaxation and occupational therapy at day centres.

Specific examples include the Romanian Alzheimer's Society day-care centre programme, which supports people with dementia and their families, and an older person's home for vulnerable, lonely, older people run by Filia Foundation in Hungary. An older beneficiary of the Romanian Alzheimer's Society describes the day centre as 'a place where we can spend our time. We receive healthcare, food and material and moral aid.'

A Russian older woman from Samara describes the kind of services she receives: 'I live alone and could not walk. I went to the Council of Veterans. They gave me two people to help me walk with sticks, and help me with housework and healthcare.'

## Process within civil society organisations

All the issues raised in Chapter 1 relate in some way to the issues of power and powerlessness, involvement and control over one's life. At the 2001 meeting in Warsaw (see Appendix five), network members analysed the situation of older people explicitly in these terms. Powerlessness included inward-oriented feelings such as hopelessness, unproductiveness, loss of control and dignity, depression and dissatisfaction.

ECEN members felt that the types of activity described in the previous section could encourage older people to look beyond their own situations and become integrated into society. They also felt that CSOs had the potential to counter older people's exclusion and powerlessness within the structures of the organisations themselves. They believed that organisations should first empower older people within their structure, and then challenge government to empower older people within society.

For many CSOs, this was an aspiration rather than a reality. However, ECEN members identified a number of principles and processes from within their own practice that could help empower older people and 'put older people at the centre of our work' - the main theme of the meeting.

At the meeting, the ECEN found that some CSOs had started from the assumption that older people are essentially passive and in need. Too often, for example, the focus of a CSO is more on the volunteers and their motivation than on the older beneficiaries. This is mirrored by a similar orientation in state services. Older people themselves often feel that they have little influence over the design of services.

Volunteering plays an important part in the way in which CSOs can contribute to policy development. It shows the government what can be done without money, allowing innovations to develop based on genuine interest and need. It also encourages older people to participate in society.

In the Ukraine, older people have developed a new volunteer movement. It began with older people helping each other with domestic tasks and legal and medical consultations, but has now developed into a Ukraine-wide network of volunteer organisations called Pensioner for Pensioner. Volunteering can help older people achieve dignity and fulfilment. Increasingly, governments in the region, such as that of Bosnia-Herzegovina, are recognising this and encouraging volunteering, based on examples from the voluntary sector.

Across the region, many older people are turning to self-help groups and CSOs to find self-fulfilment through a more active, independent lifestyle. Within these groups, individuals are able to use their skills and experience to positive effect. They are able to use their abilities for self-organisation and survival and their adaptability is invaluable for assisting themselves and other more vulnerable members of society. They can also find challenges and rewards as they organise essential services, and arrange and participate in leisure activities and social meetings.

Organisations should first empower older people within their structure, and then challenge government to empower older people within society

Across the region, many older people are turning to self-help groups and CSOs to find self-fulfilment

Self-help organisations can also play a role in bridging the gap between young and old by drawing young people into their activities, thus reconnecting the generations. By reaching out to those in need, they break down the barriers that have left many older people isolated, thus re-linking them to society. Their collective activities generate a sense of solidarity between older people, creating a feeling of belonging and a sense of purpose, rebuilding their self-confidence and optimism for the future. As one older woman who leads Club Travinka in Ufa, Russia, said, 'Old age isn't frightening when you feel needed by others, when you can fight your adversaries, when you can lead an active life.'

The tendency towards a passive old age remains relatively strong in many countries. But, as one member of a CSO from Bulgaria commented: 'The main problem is not that we are poor, it is that we wait for someone to do something for us.' The positive examples of self-help and CSO activities demonstrates the enormous value and potential of older people to help themselves, along with others more vulnerable than themselves, and society as a whole.

## Chapter 3

### Involving older people within civil society organisations

The ECEN has identified a number of services that have successfully involved older people in self-help and CSO activities, and has worked on ways of increasing their power within the sector.

At the network meetings in Zagreb and Warsaw (see Appendix five), member organisations working with and for older people discussed various aspects of the integration of older people into CSO work. They included:

- Methods of involving older people in CSOs
- Barriers to involving older people in CSO work, and how to overcome these constraints
- Ideas as how older people can be more involved.

This chapter presents the results of those discussions.

The ECEN found that older people had been empowered within CSOs by being involved in the activities shown in Table 1, below.

**Table 1: CSO activities suitable for inclusion of older people**

#### Planning

- Determining priorities (at meetings)
- Generating ideas and presenting them
- Choosing activities
- Deciding what happens in the group
- Giving feedback

#### Management

- Contributing leadership skills, where identified
- Acting as mentors
- Acting as group leaders
- Participating in self-management or governance
- Reporting on projects to donors
- Monitoring and evaluating activities

#### Volunteering

- Acting as volunteers
- Rewarding the contributions of others (for example, with praise or flowers)
- Recruiting new volunteers, acting as role models and explaining that by helping others, people help themselves
- Encouraging able-bodied older people to help disabled older people

#### CSO activities

- Identifying new clients
- Delivering services
- Fundraising
- Running income-generating activities
- Organising social events

#### Advocacy

- Acting as advocates for the organisation and for themselves
- Being involved in promotion and publicity
- Disseminating information about the organisation
- Being represented in any PR or media work
- Using their image (if they are well known) or contacts in society to improve the image of the organisation

The ECEN found that CSOs had discovered a number of means of overcoming common barriers that they had experienced in involving older people, as shown in Table 2, below.

Barriers	How to overcome them
<p><b>1. Attitudes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Narrow-minded people</li> <li>▪ Negative mentality</li> <li>▪ The approach of governments</li> <li>▪ Unwillingness or apathy</li> <li>▪ Poor intergenerational communication</li> <li>▪ Older people being seen as passive recipients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lobbying</li> <li>▪ Overcoming negative mentality by showing the positive sides of projects and services</li> <li>▪ Showing people they can give time and gain experience</li> <li>▪ Showing old age as something positive</li> <li>▪ Offering psychological and psychiatric knowledge to carers and service providers</li> <li>▪ Attracting older people with small presents</li> <li>▪ Making older people see that their views have already been incorporated</li> <li>▪ Showing them that someone cares about them</li> <li>▪ Organising round tables on problematic issues with other groups (such as donors, staff, stakeholders, local government, church and community)</li> <li>▪ Asking older people how to run a consultation process</li> <li>▪ Understanding what is possible to change, and what is not</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Lack of skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Older people learn new things more slowly</li> <li>▪ Learning problems</li> <li>▪ Lack of education, training or skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not expecting things to be perfect</li> <li>▪ Providing training</li> <li>▪ Not forcing things</li> <li>▪ Finding out if any older people have connections or networks</li> <li>▪ Giving clear information and instructions to avoid misunderstanding</li> <li>▪ Trying to resolve and predict any problems that may arise</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Lack of resources</b></p> <p>A lack of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transport</li> <li>▪ Money</li> <li>▪ Personnel</li> <li>▪ Personal contacts</li> <li>▪ Health and mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involving older people in fundraising</li> <li>▪ Moving older people out of isolation in their apartments to initiate social contacts</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Tradition/culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Traditional gender roles</li> <li>▪ Fear of big changes</li> <li>▪ Families stopping older people from getting involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Changing things little by little</li> <li>▪ Being sensitive to older people's fears and resistance</li> <li>▪ Taking things one step at a time</li> <li>▪ Respecting people's customs</li> </ul>

## Practical ways of involving older people

ECEN members at the 2001 network meeting in Warsaw (see Appendix five) compiled a list of ways to include older people in CSO activities.

Suggestions included:

- Asking older people to share experiences and write articles for a newsletter
- Involving older people in campaigns
- Involving older people in mentoring orphaned children and providing role models
- Talking to older people and their families and carers
- Designing and conducting a survey, asking older people for help
- Asking older people to be consultants on projects and services
- Providing introduction and training courses for older people
- Asking and engaging older people to provide services, such as home visits
- Asking older people to be on management boards
- Asking older people to participate in planning at the early stage of projects so they can give immediate feedback
- Asking older people about their lives, expectations and problems, through interviews, questionnaires, home visits, and meetings
- Offering older people educational programmes to improve their knowledge
- Showing older people examples of how problems have been solved in similar cases to their own in the past, so that they start to believe in themselves
- Giving older people the chance to organise an event or activity themselves
- Showing older people the strengths of their personality so that they believe they are powerful
- Involving older people in all stages of the project (generating ideas, planning, controlling, evaluating)
- Offering information services, especially telephone services.

## Principles for empowering older people

In addition to the practical ways of involving older people in their activities, CSOs at the meeting identified five principles for empowering older people within their organisations:

### **Principle 1: Listen to older people**

- **Make an effort to actively listen and understand.**
- **Be sensitive to culture and community.**
- **Ensure consultation is ongoing, and don't start it in a crisis.**
- **Start the consultation process early.**
- **Include everyone in the consultation.**

Carrying out consultation with older people about their situations and needs is critical to their being empowered within civil society structures, and in society at large. Many CSOs in the ECEN include consultations in their planning, monitoring and evaluation processes. The Association of Pensioners of Estonia has built on the Estonian custom of coffee-morning meetings to gather older people to discuss key issues of interest to them, on a regular basis. EWAC in Kaunas, Lithuania (see case study on page 27), holds 'Saturday meetings' to encourage older women to share their views.

#### **Case study: Osmijeh-Gracanica, Bosnia-Herzegovina**

Osmijeh-Gracanica is an association for psychosocial support and the development of volunteer work. Founded in Gracanica in June 1996, its main aim is to find the best ways to facilitate and encourage the volunteer and non-profit sectors to develop, concentrating on social activities.

The association works to promote volunteer activities and self-help in the community, with a particular emphasis on interaction between the different generations. Osmijeh began its work helping disabled children, disadvantaged young people and refugees. In 1998, the organisation developed a programme with and for older people, called Local Community Development through the Volunteer Work of Older People. According to co-founder Hamdija Kujundzic, 'It is the only programme of its kind in Bosnia, and [is] Osmijeh's most popular and dynamic programme.'

Older people themselves initiated the programme, gathering and forming self-help groups in their communities. Today, 52 groups of older people, each with a leader, operate in towns and villages near Gracanica. The groups are advised by mentors - older community leaders - each guiding between five and eight groups. The leaders recruit group members from their communities. There are now more than 600 older volunteers involved in self-help groups, working with children and young people, and providing humanitarian aid for older people who live alone or are housebound.

All of the group leaders and mentors have been on numerous training courses in working with volunteers, and they share their expertise with group members.

This programme has given older people the opportunity to be active in the local community, and to contribute to its development. Activities include road building, environmental protection, education for young people, and a range of local cultural events. Hamdija believes the programme is a great success: 'The older people were forgotten. But when we gave them the chance to volunteer and be active in their community, they all wanted to take part. Now the older volunteers are our most active volunteers. They have overtaken our younger volunteers by far in their enthusiasm.'

**Principle 2: Build on older people's capacity**

- Acknowledge older people's capacity.
- Delegate obligations and responsibilities to older people.
- Encourage active participation.
- Facilitate older people in taking the initiative.
- Learn from the expertise and experience of others.
- Use the capacity of the organisation.
- Build on willingness to help and work.

**Case study: Grandpas' Club, Estonia**

The Grandpas' Club at the Raavis Hobby Club in Tallinn is the first of its kind in Estonia. Founded in 1995, the club aims to involve older men in social life, away from the isolation of their homes. Gennadi Vihman, President of the Grandpas' Club and a grandfather himself, explains: 'Women are more active; it is far more difficult to get men to take part in joint efforts, to activate them.'

The Grandpas' Club involves older men in a variety of social activities, including lectures, newspaper readings, trips and excursions, holiday and birthday celebrations, Grandpas' Club evenings, and 'Grandpa and Grandma Days' at the Estonian Open Air Museum. In 2001, 27 'grandpas' between the ages of 56 and 92 were active members of the club. 'The club is a good example of bringing older men back into public life, away from their comfortable televisions, newspapers and sofas,' says Gennadi.

According to Gennadi, the key to the success of the club and involving older men is motivation. The club has found the main motivations of older men to be:

- Seeing the example of others involved
- Joy in doing something oneself
- Desire to help and give to others
- Satisfaction in using one's experience
- Interest in meeting new people

The Grandpas' Club takes these motivations into consideration when devising its action plan and attracting volunteers. A participant in the club says: 'I feel good that my knowledge and experience are used quite often.' Another key attraction is the idea of self help embodied in the slogan: 'I help you, you [help] me - let's help each other.'

Older men are not generally encouraged to contribute to society, but the club has found that they are a tremendous untapped resource and 'are more willing to do everything themselves.' The idea has caught on in Estonia, and there are now ten Grandpas' Clubs across the country.

Older people have many years of professional and personal experience that can be put to good use. Using their skills and capacity not only empowers the older people themselves - society also benefits from the rich human resource they offer.

The network has identified a number of examples in which older people's capacities are being used in innovative ways. At the Ukrainian Fund for Charity and Health, older professionals, such as former lawyers and doctors, offer their expertise to other older people. In Moldova, an organisation called Second Breath involves volunteers in its home-visiting programme, using the skills of enthusiastic older people to support other older people confined to their homes (see case study on page 26).

### **Principle 3: Create a partnership based on honesty and reality**

- Be honest about the organisation's limitations.
- Accept people's limitations.
- Meet basic needs first, where appropriate.
- Pay attention to psycho-social needs.
- Foster collaboration.

Older people and CSOs have limitations that must be recognised. In order to set realistic expectations, ECEN members believe it is important to tell older people at the outset what is being offered to them and what they can expect to get out of their involvement with the organisation. In Romania, an organisation called Happy Old Age (see case study opposite) has recognised that some older people desire - and are able to be involved in - volunteering activities, while others (usually the less physically able) need more support. However, even older people who are ill or immobile can be empowered through consultation and being involved in designing their own care strategies.

### **Principle 4: Place older people at the centre of the service**

- Respect human rights.
- Respect differences.
- Show respect.
- Allow older people choice and the freedom to take risks if they want to.
- Be fair and transparent with older people.
- Value older people.
- Don't view older people as all belonging to the same homogenous group.

Older people must be treated with dignity if they are to be empowered in civil society. In the ECEN, many CSOs are putting older people at the centre of their services. One example is an organisation in Bosnia called Osmijeh (See case study on page 22) has encouraged older people to be involved in all aspects of their volunteer programme. This has ensured that the programme is genuinely older person-focused and that it meets the specific cultural needs of Muslim, Serb and Croat Bosnian men and women.

### Case study: Happy Old Age, Romania

Happy Old Age, based in Iasi, Romania, works with two categories of older people: vulnerable older people (with health problems), who are assisted through home care services and activities of their day centres, and younger pensioners with social reintegration needs. The organisation aims to involve both categories of older people in planning their own care and addressing their needs as much as possible.

Vulnerable older people receiving home care and day-care services are involved in their own care from the outset, assisting in an evaluation of their needs and building a care strategy based on their individual situations.

Happy Old Age has also included younger pensioners in its planning structure. Younger pensioners are now involved in addressing their own needs and helping others in the following ways:

#### Volunteering

- Supporting vulnerable older people through home visits or help with shopping/chores
- Organising events, such as parties at Christmas and Easter, and small excursions for vulnerable and younger older people
- Providing transport to vulnerable older people
- Providing administrative support
- Participating as lecturers in Happy Old Age courses to train women as carers

#### Sharing knowledge and experience

- Gathering details of doctors wishing to work on a voluntary basis to the benefit of vulnerable older people
- Co-operating with students who gain practical experience at Happy Old Age by completing various questionnaires that they prepare

#### Establishing contacts with older people

- Contacting older people who are not involved in social reintegration activities
- Identifying vulnerable older people and documenting their needs

#### Initiating activities

- Establishing a deposit point for items donated by the local population, sold to help vulnerable sections of the population
- Starting a dress-making course for vulnerable women
- Compiling a file with articles on natural medicine for older people in search of alternative therapies
- Initiating correspondence with an older person's group from a care home in France
- Setting up a literary and musical circle named Mihai Eminescu, after the Romanian national poet
- Organising cultural hours in schools

#### Lobbying

- Talking about the activities of Happy Old Age with other older people, attracting more people to become involved in the organisation
- Presenting the activities of Happy Old Age to the mass media, leading to an increased awareness of older people
- Contacting potential sponsors

**Another example is the Bulgarian Association Dryanova, which translated the United Nations Principles for Older Persons into Bulgarian, and disseminated them widely, to raise awareness of the need to respect the rights of older people.**

#### **Case study: Second Breath, Moldova**

Second Breath, in Balti, Moldova, recruits older people from its rehabilitation programme to visit other older people at home. It was set up to support older people who were feeling overwhelmed by financial and practical difficulties. The cornerstone of the work of Second Breath is to change public opinion in Moldova about the care of older people.

The organisation is developing home and community-based services to improve medical care and social support for older people in the city of Balti. It has a rehabilitation programme at its day-care centre and a home-visiting programme caring for around 40 older people at home. A doctor, nurse and volunteer visit each person.

Second Breath encourages active older people who have been to its day-care centre to volunteer as home visitors. Ten volunteers have been recruited this way. Each volunteer visits three or four clients under the supervision of a nurse, providing practical services and companionship. The organisation works hard to ensure a high-quality service, and staff visit the clients to check that everything is all right.

The organisation also runs a 'warm house' project, in which a group of volunteers get together to take food to an older person's flat, and have a party. Everyone gets to know each other a little better, and the housebound older person is included in a social group.

Older people find it very hard to live on their pension, so Second Breath tries to provide meals and other items. It also tries to give its volunteers a bag of basic groceries each week, as a modest 'thank you'.

Tatyana Timfeevna Ryabova and her husband work as Second Breath volunteers. She says: 'Our life experience and profession as teachers help us in our new activity. We try to be kind-hearted and helpful. We shop, clean, do laundry and take care of the older person's personal hygiene. We also keep in contact with the doctor and nurse.

She continues: 'Our visits are awaited with eagerness. We, too, are always happy to see the older people we visit. Before, nobody cared for us in society, but now, our capabilities, knowledge and experience are being put to good use. We really feel that we have become younger.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From an article in *Ageways* 58, HelpAge International, 2001

## Principle 5: Include older people in society

- Network.
- Build support in the community.
- Integrate older people into society.

### Case study: Elderly Women's Activity Centre, Lithuania

The Elderly Women's Activity Centre (EWAC) in Kaunas, Lithuania, was set up in 1994 to address some of the problems facing older women. EWAC aims to promote active ageing and build older women's self-esteem, provide social support, and create models of care for older people in the region.

EWAC's wide range of activities includes organising women's self-defence classes and activity clubs, running training courses for nurses, and training volunteers to care for ill and dying people and their families. It also holds 'Saturday talks' (lectures and discussions on ageing) and events to mark occasions such as the International Day for Older People. It also produces literature and works with local government, the media and other CSOs to promote better services for older people.

'At the heart of EWAC's active ageing programme is a conviction that older people improve their situation by getting involved, developing voluntary action, and making sure they stay in touch with younger people,' says Nijole Arbaciauskiene, Chairperson of EWAC. 'Stronger relationships between the generations can greatly improve self-esteem.'

The Saturday meetings are a particular success, she says. 'They are like our laboratory. We talk about the activities we want to develop, exchange information between members and challenge how we and others look at things.'

Training and education has increased members' confidence. Ellen, a company manager and widow in her 50s, is involved in EWAC as a project manager. She cares for her parents and has found particular support in understanding their needs from the lectures EWAC has hosted on the psychology of ageing, and from the training courses on nursing older people. Now she herself feels that she is 'not afraid to retire'.

EWAC is one of a growing number of voluntary organisations in the country, and is a founding member of 'Gabija', the Lithuanian network of NGOs working with and for older people, launched in 2000. Network members are gathering information about older people in their areas, and have identified support to isolated older people in rural areas as a priority.

EWAC's advocacy activities focus on building links with local government, rather than lobbying at national level. Nijole says: 'The challenge now is to persuade local authorities that if they make life better for older people, they will also improve the situation of everyone.'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> From an article in *Ageing and Development 8*, HelpAge International, 2001

Like people of any age, older people feel empowered when they are included as valuable members of their wider communities. A number of CSOs in the ECEN encourage older people to participate in their media campaigns to raise awareness of older people in local communities.

Older people's groups in Samara, Russia, are beginning to network among themselves, and this is increasing their visibility locally. In Kaunas, Lithuania, EWAC (see case study on the previous page) is preparing a local history of the area, based on older people's knowledge and experience, to be shared with the general public. In Croatia, some local authorities have been encouraged to support older people's clubs as part of a programme to integrate older people in the local community.

#### Lessons for the wider civil society and the state

The examples and practical suggestions presented in this chapter through the experience of the ECEN demonstrate the numerous opportunities for involving older people in responses to their situation. While CSO activities are important to help older people address their needs, the very process of empowering older people by giving them a chance to participate in improving their own lives is imperative if older people are to have any power over their situation.

Only by addressing the powerlessness of older people can civil society and government have a positive impact on their disillusionment, exclusion and deprivation and pave the way for an actively ageing and fulfilled older generation. An older person from Poland summed this point up: 'Being with and helping others, I can manage my life better.'

## Chapter 4

### Towards the future: Prague, 2002

At the March 2002 annual regional meeting of ECEN, participants from 17 countries discussed the situation of older people in the region, and underlined their special needs and the potential of non-governmental organisations to improve their situation. On the basis of consultations with older people in the various countries represented, the participants produced the following message, known as the Prague Declaration:

#### The Prague Declaration

After the political and economic changes, life became very expensive, unemployment grew, and pensions stayed very low. This put additional pressure on older people to support their children and children's families, which ran counter to the tradition in which young people supported their parents and grandparents. In many countries, those who had saved lost their savings.

Older people now feel socially excluded. Their skills and experience are not valued in the new employment market.

The contribution and experience of older people should be recognised and used for the benefit of society. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have an important part to play in the process of re-integrating older people, and the government should therefore support them in their efforts to fight against all discrimination on grounds of age.

#### Economic security

To ensure economic security, governments should work with NGOs, communities and older people:

- To increase minimum pensions to the level of the actual cost of living
- To increase the budget allocated for social needs, and ensure that older people receive a fair proportion
- To create better social security systems for older people with the introduction of national standards
- To encourage employers to hire older people who wish to work.

#### Health and wellbeing

To improve older people's health and wellbeing, governments should work with NGOs, communities and older people:

- To design, finance and implement a comprehensive health system according to the needs of older people, allowing them to stay at home for as long as possible, while also catering for those who need care in residential facilities
- To ensure that older people have access to affordable or free healthcare services and medicines

The contribution and experience of older people should be recognised and used for the benefit of society

- To improve and develop the legal system so that it protects older people from violence and discrimination
- To create appropriate surroundings in which to meet the needs of older people and encourage the involvement of families in the care of their members.

### **Social integration**

To help older people become re-integrated in society, governments should work with NGOs, communities and older people:

- To promote open discussions in the mass media with older people and CSOs about the problems of older people
- To promote the participation of older people in social activities
- To ensure adequate financial support and legal frameworks for CSOs working with and for older people, and to encourage volunteering among all generations
- To incorporate teaching about ageing into educational programmes at schools and other educational institutions and to promote life-long learning.

## Appendices

### Appendix one: About HelpAge International and ECEN

Founded in 1983, HelpAge International has three key objectives:

- To support the development of organisations working with older people
- To provide a voice for older people, especially the most disadvantaged
- To develop grassroots project activity.

HelpAge International has worked with older people's groups and civil society organisations in East and Central Europe since 1991. In 1994 it established a support and information network, the East and Central European Network (ECEN), which now has more than 40 member organisations in 16 countries.

Through its East and Central Europe Network, HelpAge International aims to:

- Build the capacity of organisations working with older people across the region by providing training in fundraising, organisational development, agecare, and participatory methods
- Promote exchange visits and the dissemination of research, information and good practice
- Assist the development national networks and joint advocacy platforms.

## Appendix two: ECEN members directory

Contact details are available from HelpAge International.

### **Albania**

Albanian Association of Gerontology-  
Geriatrics

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

'Osmijeh' Association for Psychosocial Help

### **Bulgaria**

Hospice Miloserdie  
Association for Social Assistance Dryanova

### **Croatia**

'SVIMA' Association for Social Rights  
Protection  
Association 'Mi'

### **Czech Republic**

ZIVOT90

### **Estonia**

Association of Pensioners of Estonia  
Haabersti Social Centre  
Raavis Hobby Club Grandpas' Club

### **Hungary**

Filia Foundation  
Roman Catholic Diaconal Service

### **Latvia**

Latvian Pensioners' Federation  
Seniors' Club Day Centre for the Elderly  
Livani Pensioners' Association

### **Lithuania**

'Gabija' Network of organisations working  
with and for older people  
Elderly Women's Activity Centre (EWAC)  
Vilnius Community Centre Charity Fund

### **Macedonia**

University of the Third Age

### **Moldova**

Gerontological Association 'Second  
Breath'

### **Poland**

Polish Alzheimers Association  
Samaritanus Foundation

### **Romania**

Alzheimers Society of Romania  
Happy Old Age  
Geron Foundation

### **Russia**

Soprachastnost  
Desnitsa Mira  
Veterans' House Krasnaya Glinka

### **Slovakia**

Pro-Life Forum  
'Beneficium' Charitable Humanitarian  
Society

### **Slovenia**

Slovene Philanthropy

### **Ukraine**

Ukrainian Fund for Charity and  
Health

## Appendix three: ECEN international research and seminars

**Between 1991 and 1992, HelpAge International ran five joint seminars and studies with the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Commission and individual government ministries.**

**In 1994, HelpAge International held a seminar with the United Nations on the 'Empowerment of Older People in East and Central Europe'. This event led to the formation of ECEN.**

## Appendix four: ECEN publications and translations

*Older people in Eastern and Central Europe - The price of transition to a market economy*, HelpAge International, 1994. Details the ways in which older people have been affected by the changes in East and Central Europe.

Romanian and Polish versions of *Adding health to years*, HelpAge International's health handbook for older people, were produced in 1994.

A Ukrainian and Russian version of HelpAge International's journal *Ageways* was produced by HelpAge International's Ukrainian partner between 1998 and 2002.

Partners produced Lithuanian, Slovenian and Russian versions of HelpAge International's training booklet on counselling, *Learning to listen* in 1998 and 1999.

The ECEN newsletter *Network news* has been produced in Russian and English since 1997.

In 2000-01, 15 local-language booklets were produced on the relationship between NGOs and local/national government in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

*Nothing about us without us: Older people and decision-making in East and Central Europe*, HelpAge International, 2000. An English summary of seven of the local-language booklets on the relationship between NGOs and local/national government (see above).

*Making our voices heard: Older people and decision-making in East and Central Europe*, HelpAge International, 2001. An English summary of a further eight of the local language booklets on the relationship between NGOs and local/national government (see above).

*Older people and decision-making in East and Central Europe*, HelpAge International, 2001. A Russian-language summary of the 15 booklets on the relationship between NGOs and local/national government (see above). Includes an extra chapter on Russia.

## Appendix five: ECEN training and seminars

- 1992 Conference entitled 'Volunteering for Older People in East and Central Europe' held in Warsaw for CSOs working with older people.
- 1993 Training programme held on the foot-care problems of older people, held in Katowice, Poland, for Caritas community workers.
- 1996 Planning meeting held in Prague with the ECEN working group. Training programme planned.
- Workshop on advocacy and lobbying skills held in Sinaia, Romania, for representatives of ECEN member organisations.
- 1997 Seminar on planning and organisational development held in Kaunas, Lithuania.
- 1998 Conference entitled 'Ageing into the 21st Century' held to launch the International Year of Older People, in Bled, Slovenia. Attendees included ECEN members and selected CSOs from 20 countries. Discussions identified CSO relations with municipalities as a key question.
- 1999 Workshop held in Tallinn, Estonia, on organisational development and local fundraising for ECEN members and selected CSOs from Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic States.
- Workshop held in Sofia, Bulgaria. Topics included organisational development, local fundraising, and strategies for involving older people in planning. Attendees included ECEN members and selected CSOs from Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- Conference entitled 'Towards a Sustainable Network' held in Budapest, Hungary, hosted by the Filia Foundation.
- 2000 Training of trainers' workshop held in Budapest, Hungary, providing seven experienced trainers from the region with additional training for working with older people's organisations.
- Seminar entitled 'Older People's Experience of Care I' held in Zagreb, hosted by CERANEO.
- 2000- Local HelpAge International-trained trainers held a series of local training  
2001 workshops in Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland and Romania. Topics included fundraising, organisational development, working with local government, working with volunteers and working with media.
- 2001 'Older People's Experience of Care II' in Warsaw, Poland, hosted by the Polish Alzheimers Association as a follow up to the 2000 seminar.
- 2002 Annual regional ECEN meeting 'Towards the Future' held in Prague, Czech Republic, in March, hosted by ZIVOT90.

## Appendix six: ECEN projects

### **1995-1997**

HelpAge International and the Alzheimers Society of Romania ran a joint project to develop a home-care programme for older people. From 1998 to 2000, they ran a further project to develop a nationally accredited curriculum for professional and non-professional carers of older people.

### **1998-2000**

HelpAge International worked with Russian CSO Desnitsa Mira on two projects. The first was designed to develop the quality of life of older people through social activities and volunteering. The second was to develop a pilot network of older people's groups in Moscow and Samara oblasts.

### **1997-2002**

In 1997, a five-year programme for the development of the ECEN was agreed and funding was obtained within the UK. After this period, it is expected that the network will sustain itself, focusing mainly on national lobbying and national networking.

## Appendix seven: Consultations with older people

This briefing draws on a series of consultations with older people undertaken by HelpAge International and ECEN members between June and December 2001. Interviewers used a list of standard questions, developed by the HelpAge International and the ECEN working group, as follows:

### Consultation questions

- What are the main issues you face as an older person in your country?
- What are the good things about the way you live at the moment?
- What are the bad things about the way you live at the moment?
- What are the main government policies that impact on your life, positively and negatively?
- What are the main practices of CSOs that impact on your life, positively and negatively?
- What do you feel can be done to improve your own life?
- What do you feel could be done, and by whom?
- How do you address the issues you face yourself?

### Consultations took place in various countries across the region as follows:

8-9 June	Yugoslavia (Belgrade) Host: Yugoslavian Red Cross and Lastavica
11-15 July	Moldova (Chisinau, Orhei, Balti, Ciniseuti, Edinet) Host: Second Breath
9-13 Sept	Russia (Togliatti, Samara) Host: Club Ivolga and Veterans' House Krasnaya Glinka
24-27 Sept	Bosnia-Herzegovina (Gracanica) Host: Osmijeh
6-9 Nov	Czech Republic (Prague, Zruc nad Sazavou) Host: ZIVOT90
22-25 Nov	Lithuania and Russia (Kaunas, Vievis, Kaliningrad) Host: Elderly Women's Activities Centre (EWAC)
28 Nov-5 Dec	Bulgaria (Sofia, Dryanova) Host: Hospice Miloserdie and Association for Social Assistance

### ECEN member consultations

Between October and December 2001, members of all ECEN organisations undertook additional consultations with older people, using the same list of questions. See Appendix two for a full list of ECEN member organisations.

## Appendix eight: Funding

HelpAge International's work in East and Central Europe is sponsored by:

- American Association for Retired Persons (AARP, United States)
- PHARE/TACIS (European Union)
- Community Fund (formerly National Lottery Charities Board, UK)
- The Open Society Fund (Soros Foundation, UK)
- British Government Department for International Development (DFID, UK)
- Allavida (formerly Charity Know How)

## HelpAge International resources

***Making our voices heard: Older people and decision-making in East and Central Europe*** is the second in a series of two publications produced by HelpAge International's East and Central Europe Network. The complementary publication, ***Nothing about us without us: Older people and decision-making in East and Central Europe***, focuses on the situation of older people in Albania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and includes a directory of NGOs working with and for older people in each country.

Free

### Briefing papers

***The mark of a noble society: Human rights and older people***

***Capacity building and ageing: a position paper***

***Emergencies and ageing: a position paper***

***Gender and ageing: a position paper***

***Participation and ageing: a position paper***

***Poverty and ageing: a position paper***

Free

### Other publications

***The ageing and development report: Poverty, independence and the world's older people***

(Editors: Judith Randel and Tony German, 1999)

A HelpAge International report on the circumstances of older people in developing countries and countries in transition, with chapters on economic security, health, family and community life, poverty, gender and emergencies; and information on demographic trends and ageing in specific countries and regions.

Price: £14.95. Available from Earthscan Tel: +44 (0)20 7278 0433 Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk

Website: [www.earthscan.co.uk](http://www.earthscan.co.uk)

***The ageing and development report: A summary*** (1999)

A summary of the full report is available in English, French and Spanish.

Free. Available at [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org) in English, French and Spanish

### Regular publications

#### ***Ageways***

A journal exchanging practical information on ageing and agecare issues, particularly good practice developed in the HelpAge International network. Free to carers, health workers, members of older people's groups and project staff working with or for older people in developing countries and East and Central Europe.

Published three times a year in English and Spanish (*Horizontes*). Free

Also published in Ukrainian and Russian. Contact: Viktor Mishchenko, Ukrainian Fund for Charity and Health, Artyoma Street 55 'b, Kiev 252053, Ukraine. Tel: +380 44 219 1 418

#### ***Ageing and Development***

A regular briefing which aims to raise awareness of the contribution, needs and rights of older people and to promote the development of laws and policies that will bring a lasting improvement to the quality of life of disadvantaged older people. Free to policy makers, programme planners and researchers concerned with development and poverty eradication.

Published three times a year in English and Spanish (*Tercera Edad y Desarrollo*). Free

**Unless otherwise stated, all the above can be ordered from: Publications orders, HelpAge International, PO Box 32832, London N1 9ZN, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7278 7778. Email: [cdobbing@helpage.org](mailto:cdobbing@helpage.org) or order at [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)**

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