

UN launches initiative to help member nations respond to the challenges of global ageing

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During the 1999 International Year of Older Persons, the United Nations is embarking on an exercise to provide nations with guidelines for formulating effective policies and programmes on ageing. The need to undertake this exercise is driven by the extraordinary demographic changes that are occurring. Major adjustments must be made in society to accommodate these dramatic shifts in demography.

To begin the exercise of critically reviewing the present situation and responding creatively to the prospects for the future, the United Nations is hosting an inter-regional meeting of experts to develop a policy framework to support a society for all ages. The meeting and subsequent report will be sponsored by Swiss Re, one of the world's leading reinsurance companies.

The event, which will be held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea in June, will bring together 15 experts from various disciplines and from the developed and developing world. Their brief will be to examine changing family and societal population structures; the situation of older persons - in particular the issues of care provision and active ageing; increasing longevity and the integration of ageing into the developmental process. In addition, they will explore the need for new policies in education, work, retirement and income maintenance, as well as new visions in providing the built environment, recreation and leisure across the life course. The findings, scheduled to be published in August, will help governments to prepare and respond effectively to individual and population ageing.

The project will be led by the UN's special adviser on ageing, Professor Gary Andrews, who said, "There is no need to be afraid of the 'doom, gloom and catastrophe' predictions that abound about the ageing of populations and the overwhelming potential costs of pensions, health service and care needs. Timely and considered action by governments now can avoid economic and social disasters."

"However this issue and particularly that of ageing populations, is not solely a matter for politicians - we intend that the outcome of our work will also influence the strategies of wider society including commercial organisations. This will, in all probability mean highlighting the special needs of the growing number of both older consumers and an older workforce, as well as promoting private/public partnerships to meeting financial and welfare needs."

Outlining Swiss Re's involvement in the project, Carol Randall said, "We are pleased to be supporting the UN in this important initiative. World ageing is one of the key challenges facing social policy makers, businesses and individuals as we move into the next millennium. All businesses need to develop a better understanding of what population ageing means for their own markets. We and many of our clients operate on a global basis; this demands that we take a proactive interest in the potential impact of global trends on our business."

[Top of page](#)